Designing Display in the Department Store: Techniques, Technologies, and Professionalization, 1880–1920

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One quarter of chapters two and three will be published in "'The Age of Show Windows' in the American Department Store: Techniques and Technologies of Attraction at the Turn of the Twentieth Century." In *Architectures of Display: Department Stores and Modern Retail*, edited by Anca Lasc, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Margaret Maile Petty. London: Routledge, fall 2016.

Abstract
Designing Display in the Department Store: Techniques, Technologies, and Professionalization, 1880–1920

Between 1880 and 1920 displays in leading department stores reached an unprecedented level of artistic and commercial ambition that required professional skill, engaged with technology, earned consumer attention, and provided distinction between stores. Merchandise arrangements conveyed technical proficiency and innovation specific to the retail setting while their form and content were also in conversation with current events, art, urban life, and popular culture. This thesis explores the making, viewing, and meanings of display. Discussion will be framed around the following questions: What role did display design play in the development of department stores in Chicago, New York and London at the turn of the twentieth century and how can the impact and significance of display be identified in the stores' material and visual cultures?

Drawing from a diverse range of unexplored primary resources and archives, this thesis reveals a set of previously underrepresented design roles, tools, and techniques of display production in the practice of architects, window dressers, shopfitters, and interior decorators who employed manual and mechanical methods to create displays that were on constant view and in continual flux. In this newly changeable retail environment, display's alignment with fin-de-siècle modernity is explored through the themes of speed, variation, fragmentation, rationalization, and theatricality. Overall this thesis analyzes how display achieved an agency to transform everyday objects into commodities and to make consumers out of passersby.

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Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Emily Marshall Orr
September 2016

Abbreviations

The full titles of the following periodicals are given on their first appearance in the thesis. On all subsequent references only the acronym is employed.

MRSW	*Merchant's Record and Show Window*
WDGTR	*The Window Dressing and General Trade Review*

Introduction
The Design of Department Store Display: An Overview of Key Topics and Research Approaches

At Christmastime in about 1894 Mrs. Vernon Baker received an oversized envelope in the mail addressed to her in Ballston Spa, Saratoga, New York, sent from the well-regarded department store Abraham & Straus in Brooklyn, New York.[1] The envelope contained "The Model Department Store," a collapsible three-dimensional paper model that reproduced exterior and interior views of the store's new location on Fulton Street **(**fig. 1).[2] The façade aimed to impress with its rows of windows that offered enticing merchandise on the ground floor while communicating order and spreading light evenly to the interior on the upper tiers. The scale was exaggerated such that the structure loomed over passersby and exerted a powerful impact in its monumentality. The gridded frontality of the building conveyed the segmentation that drove the store's architectural design as well as the fragmentation of the store's interior experience; each window offered a preview and signified the variety and number of wares that the store sold.

[1] Mrs. Vernon Baker was likely Nettie Baker, a house servant and wife of Vernon Baker, who served as liveryman and chauffeur for the McCrossen family of 226 Milton Avenue in Ballston Spa, Saratoga, New York. United States Census Bureau New York, State Census, 1905." Accessed November 1, 2014. http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8940

[2] There is a tradition of these cutaway models that dates back at least to the mid-nineteenth century. For example, see Bailey Rawlins, *Bailey Rawlins' Expanding View of the Great Exhibition*, color lithography with watercolor, 1851, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 1. Abraham and Straus, *The Model Department Store* (exterior), ca. 1894.
Source: Hagley Museum and Library.

The format of the mailing duplicated the architectural program of the store itself: its flat front represented the plane of the building's façade and the perspectival fold-out design of the body of the model mimicked the layered effect of the department store sales floor (fig. 2).

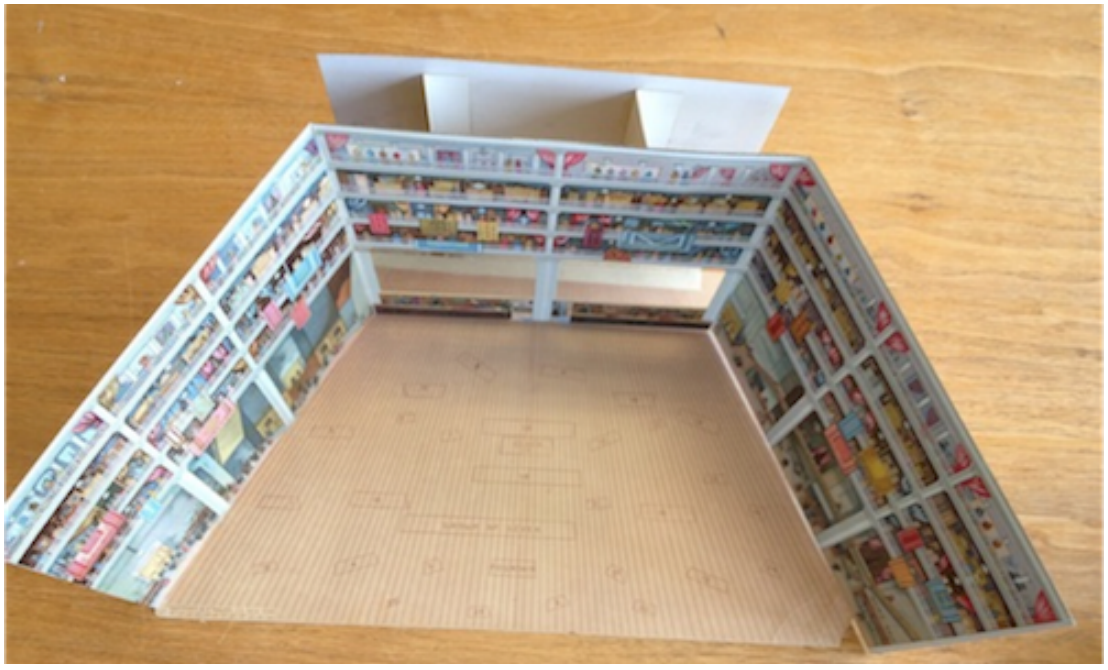


Figure 2. Abraham and Straus, *The Model Department Store* (upright), ca. 1894.
Source: Hagley Museum and Library.

The title “The Model Department Store” held dual meaning; the mailing itself was indeed a model, a facsimile of the existing store, which promoted the particularly impressive façade and panoramic presentation of goods that distinguished this store’s shopping experience (fig. 3).

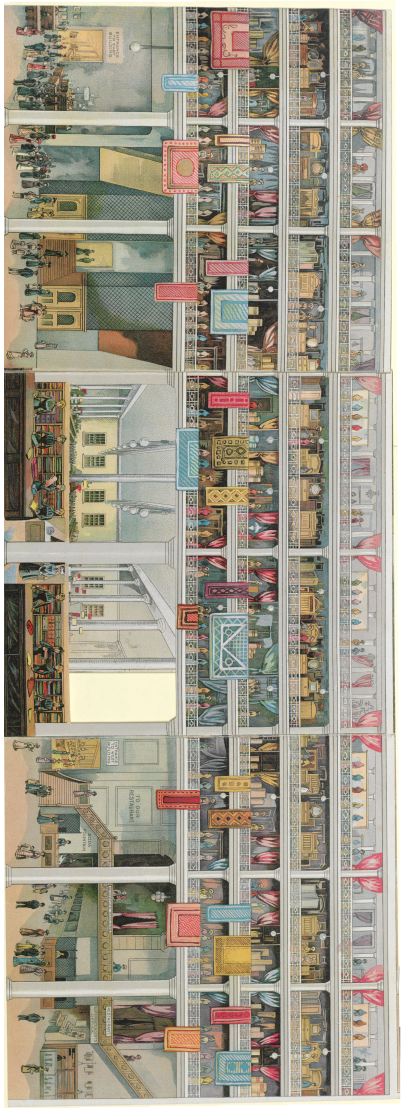


Figure 3. Abraham and Straus, *The Model Department Store* (interior, flattened), ca. 1894. Source: Hagley Museum and Library.

At the same time Abraham & Straus was being objective in its self-nomination as the model, or the paragon, of the department store as a location of modern experience. “The Model

Department Store" metaphorically transported its recipient, a potential patron, into the space of the store and positioned them as a consumer. The model offered optical engagement with the architectural details and commodities on display and encouraged the consumer to employ their powers of imagination to mentally transport themselves into an interior that they could have later visited firsthand. The representation of striking sightlines indicated that the store considered the visual impression of its façade and the layout of its interior to be strong selling points.

The sophistication of the mailing and the architectural views that it represents are symbolic of the financial and creative strength of the department store. With this model, Abraham & Straus showed off the investment that the store had made in their original program of display as well as the high quality of its advertisement to consumers. Both the production of merchandise arrangements and the ways in which stores communicated the power of this visual presentation to consumers, through imagery and text, will be explored as essential concerns of the business of display. As this model demonstrates, this business of display was built on a fusion of art and commerce that strove for financial rewards by impressing the consumer with a creative design.

This thesis investigates the roles and influences of the stores' primary design professionals -- architects, window dressers, shopfitters, and interior designers -- in the development and production of a new system of commercial aesthetics. The following chapters, one centering on each persona, will investigate the ways that these individuals dramatically altered the presentation and meaning of goods in the department store. How commodity presentation transitioned from a static stockpile stressing accumulation and function into a dynamic assemblage communicating variability and fashionability over the period of 1880 to 1920 will be a central pathway of interrogation. This history of the

department store will explore how this evolution, guided by the displaymen, cultivated new curiosity, expectations, and attention towards the construction and style of merchandise displays and therefore defined a crucial turn in retail history and marketing approach. An investigation of the retail environment as a locus of design production, innovation, and professionalization will reveal the department store displayman's connections to a larger trajectory of designers and design in this turn of the twentieth century period.

The displayman, the name given to an individual engaged in the art and commerce of display in the retail environment from the late nineteenth century, is the protagonist of this narrative. The gendered nature of the term points to the profession's male majority. While many women worked in other paid positions within the department store, most notably in sales, and increasingly took up remunerative work within other art industries, display was for the most part not an available pursuit for a female at the turn of the twentieth century.[3] In the words of historian Cheryl Buckley, this is an example of a "patriarchal definition of women's roles" in design professions.[4] As chapter two will elaborate, men defined window dressing as too physically demanding for women.

Department stores considered their consumer base to be primarily female although window displays had the power to attract as diverse an audience as the city's pedestrian population. In 1883 upon the May opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, "the eighth wonder of the world," Abraham & Straus decorated his show window with "a symbolic group of eight electric lights, a novel attraction which must have been made possible by a private generator

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[3] For analysis of the range of literary and artistic professions pursued by women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Patricia Zakreski, *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteeth Century: Artistry and Industry in Britain* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

[4] Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design" in *Design History: An Anthology*, ed. Dennis P. Doordan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 257.

as the first power station in Brooklyn was not opened until 1889."[5] With this window, the department store, one great triumph of industrial advancement, was celebrating another. The Brooklyn Bridge often featured as the central figure in show windows around the time of its construction and completion. Many merchants feared that the bridge would funnel business out of the city of Brooklyn, but Mr. Abraham foresaw that, on the contrary, easy transportation over the bridge would bring more people to live and therefore shop in the borough. He purchased a 125 foot frontage on Fulton Street with a 200 foot depth and six floors that all together gave 145,000 square feet of space, nearly five times as much as his previous store on lower Fulton.[6]

Mr. Abraham "remodeled the building sumptuously, adding a five-storey gallery around a central court which received daylight from a handsome glass dome. Columns were silver-leafed."[7] These interior details were given prominence on this model that exploits architectural grandeur as marketing strategy. The model stands open and upright to show layers of seemingly endless aisles that extended back from the front set of casework, with three bays of merchandise wrapped around each side to form a trapezoidal sales floor. In the foreground, salesgirls unroll textiles at the haberdashery counter and to the left and right handkerchiefs and gloves hang from case-top fixtures. The eye can travel upwards to catch glimpses of the departments of women's fashions, rugs, upholstery, and furniture, with carpets spilling over the railings to add color and imply profusion of stock (figs. 2, 3). The

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[5] "Press Release: The First Century of Abraham & Straus, Recording its 100-year Love Affair with Its Community, February 14, 1865–February 14 1965," 4, ARC.223, Box 1, Folder 2, Abraham & Straus Collection, Brooklyn Historical Society.

[6] "Press Release: Moments of Courage: The A&S Moves Towards Greatness, Feb. 16, 1965," 2, ARC.223, Box 1, Folder 2, Abraham & Straus Collection, Brooklyn Historical Society.

[7] "Press Release: The First Century," 4, Abraham & Straus Collection.

displays are impressive in their richness and organization, thereby promoting abundance as well as sound business practices.

"The Model Department Store" came with a sheet of cutout elements including salesgirls behind counters, shoppers strolling hand-in-hand, a water fountain, and a "notable clock on a stem" that "stood supported by palms and flowers," an element particularly noted in a centenary celebration press release discussing the 1883 renovation (fig. 4).[8]

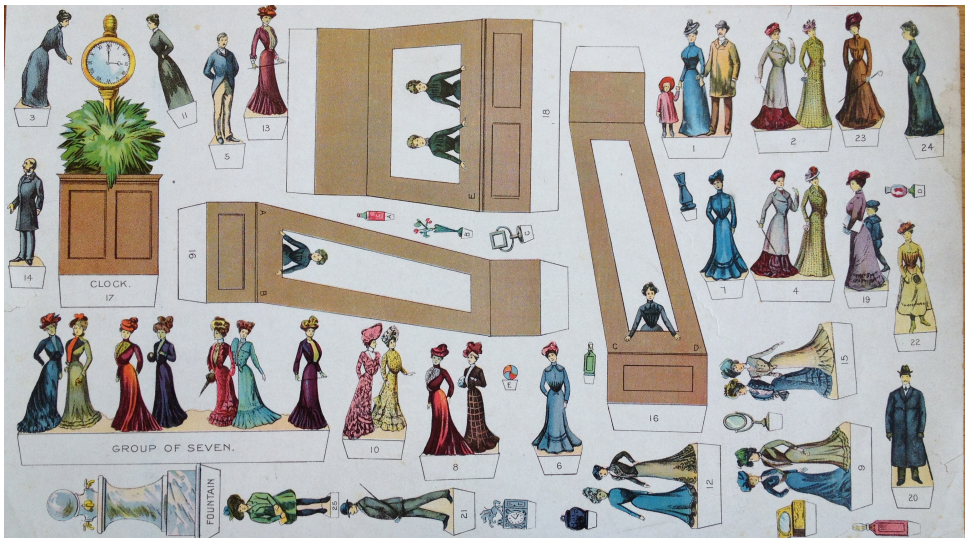


Figure 4. Abraham and Straus, Paper Dolls of *The Model Department Store*, ca. 1894. Source: Hagley Museum and Library.

These individuals and architectural elements were reproduced because they were essential to the success of the "model" department store, implying that the store's superiority rested on both human and non-human factors. The recipient could construct the store by arranging the pieces on the sales floor according to numbered markings that completed a visual scheme devised by Abraham & Straus itself (fig. 2). Thus the store was represented and publicized as an assemblage of parts that must be placed accurately to achieve the "model" appearance and performance.

[8] "Press Release: Moments of Courage," 2, Abraham & Straus Collection.

This store model is an exemplary survival of the artistic and immersive qualities of department store advertising as well as evidence of Abraham & Straus's pride in their exterior and interior presentation. Its imagery conveys the power of visual merchandising to steer consumer vision and to entice the public to explore the store. In its breaking down of the shopping space into many elements, this model is emblematic of the research process and organizational structure of this thesis. "The Model Department Store" promotes the idea that the department store can and should be understood as an ever-expanding network involving infrastructure, material goods, technologies, staff, consumers, and interior design components. The cooperation and friction among these elements shaped the experience of the department store at the turn of the twentieth century. This model also represents some of the central issues of this research: the introduction of new ways of interacting with and viewing merchandise, the art and logic of display, the design and construction of a new space for shopping, and the promotion of this visual information to the public. Four essential constituents of the department store experience – architecture, window displays, shopfittings, and interior arrangement – take prominence and these topics form this thesis's four chapters.

The active nature of the thesis's title, "Designing Display in the Department Store," emphasizes the underlying themes of motion and vitality. The term "design" is useful and significant here because it covers the life of the object from its conception as an idea to a final product and every stage in between. As historian Tony Fry has written, "A history of design should, therefore, be a history of formations and processes, as well as objects and form."[9] Architects, window dressers, shopfitters, and interior designers all developed "techniques" and skills specifically related to the advancement of large-scale retail. These "techniques" combined with new "technologies" to optimize the economic and artistic success of the

[9] Tony Fry, *Design History Australia* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988), 43.

department store. Between 1880 and 1920, the display field developed and organized as a profession that was publicly recognized, valued, and promoted by merchants. The title brings together the central topics of design production and professionalization that guide interrogation of the significance and impact of display design in the department store.

The Department Store and Modernity

The department store's rise to prominence in major global shopping cities of the late nineteenth century has come to be understood as fostering a great range of financial, social, and cultural achievements including economic and industrial growth, the increasing independence of women, technological advancement, material abundance, and the establishment of shopping as a leisure activity.[10] By focusing specifically on architecture, window displays, shopfittings, and interior decoration, all falling under the department store's larger program of the production, business, and culture of display, this thesis aims to expand our understanding of the ways the department store, as an institution that was self-critical and self-renewing, strove to offer an essentially modern shopping experience.[11]

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[10] Joseph H. Appel, *The Business Biography of John Wanamaker: Founder and Builder, America's Merchant Pioneer from 1861 to 1922, with Glimpses of Rodman Wanamaker and Thomas B. Wanamaker* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930); Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-thieving: Middle-class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Simon J. Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America 1880–1920* (New York: Norton, 1989); David Chaney, "The Department Store as a Cultural Form," *Theory, Culture and Society* 1 (1983): 22–31; Rudi Laermans, "Learning to Consume: Early Department Stores and the Shaping of the Modern Consumer Culture (1860–1914)," *Theory, Culture and Society* 10 (1993): 79–102; Erica D. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Alan Trachtenberg and Eric Foner, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[11] Perpetual self-critique and self-renewal are two capacities that Marshall Berman has assigned to "modern life and art and thought." Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 9.

A pamphlet distributed by Field's in 1920 described how the store's cultivation of an appealing environment turned the "merchandising house" into "a world of romance – a permanent yet ever-changing exposition, a show-place for visitors..."[12] Field's sophisticated setting therefore elevated their interior beyond just a mundane place of business to a "show-place" worthy of close observation. The phrase "permanent yet ever-changing exposition" perfectly articulates the tensions that arose in the construction, representation, and experience of displays that were on temporary view yet in permanent flux. Major department stores in Chicago, London, and New York at the turn of the twentieth century were incubators for a number of seemingly antagonistic factors as they related to principles of modernity: art and commerce, speed, variation and fragmentation, theatricality and rationalization, and the vitality of impermanence and the security of permanence.

This thesis will build upon the work of Claire Walsh who has identified shop design as an active concern for retailers from the beginning of the eighteenth century and explored the ways in which consumers engaged with merchandise displays primarily in luxury shops. Walsh analyzes how new apparatuses for selling including the show window, glass casework, an orderly interior, and calculated merchandise arrangement sent visual cues of modernity to visitors.[13] She also distinguishes that while in the eighteenth century customers relied on the owner to choose stock and needed guidance, that by the nineteenth century, capital provided the wealth of stock, and it was the department store professionals' role to arrange rather than to advise. Therefore Walsh's work sets up this thesis's assessment of the influential roles of

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[12] Marshall Field & Co., *The Store of Service: Marshall Field & Co.* (Chicago: Marshall Field & Co., ca. 1920), 4.

[13] Claire Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century" (M.A. Thesis, V&A/Royal College of Art, 1993), primarily 46–138 and "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-century London," *Journal of Design History* 8 (1995): 160–69.

display professionals and the agency of shopfittings in shaping the shopping experience. This thesis will draw an additional and important distinction between the eighteenth-century retail interior as a primarily visually fixed space and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century department store interior as a space that maximized on interior variation.

Diversification in design and an impulse for change surfaced in all aspects of the business of display. One history of London's Marshall and Snelgrove explained how continual alteration was central to the store's maintenance of a strong reputation,

> The firm of Marshall and Snelgrove has never rested upon its laurels. Stagnation is the beginning of degeneration. Thus every efforts have been made to introduce something new – a structural alteration, a new development in selling, new fashions, or improvement in the furnishing or decoration of a part or the whole of the shop.[14]

The "wide-awake" philosophy of the field of window dressing drove a rapid rotation rate of the show windows' contents in particular. Therefore in addition to variation, another key aspect to the modernity of display was speed. Refurbishment within the display program's architecture and shopfittings was also ongoing. In contrast to the "wide awake" work of the window dresser whose practice was based around ostentation and regeneration of merchandise in order to stay up-to-date, the shopfitter, designed a series of background frameworks for display, primarily casework and stands, that acted as "silent salesmen" whose tacit functionality gave increased visual access to the wares. In addition to change and speed, fragmentation of the interior environment also marked it as modern; the displayman created a fractured experience for the consumer with themed interior arrangements and facilitated

[14]Alison Settle, *A Family of Shops*, 1950, 2250/26, Westminster City Archives.

virtual travel through exotic commodities, both of which offered geographical and sometimes temporal detachment from the consumers' urban surroundings.

In order to interpret the complexity of the department store experience and its developments, historians, critics, and theorists have devised many metaphors for the department store, likening it to a cathedral, a theatre, an art gallery, a machine, a home, and a civic landmark. The multi-faceted nature of the world of the department store has also been compelling to visitors from the beginning; in 1886 the *New York World* reported that the Macy's building "spread itself out along Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue until one is at a loss to tell where it begins or where it ends. It is a bazaar, a museum, a hotel, and a great fancy store all combined."[15] Offering more than these metaphorical connections, this thesis will draw out the material, visual, and theoretical links between the department store and these other urban sites within the culture of display.

The intent of this study is to highlight display design's crucial role as a channel and projection of these disparate measures of advancement and expressive metaphors, and to prove how the displayman absorbed variable artistic and cultural influences to draw attention to his practice and the store at large. For instance display's abundance celebrated industrial proficiency, its gendered themes directly addressed the independent female consumer, and its styling exhibited an alignment with modern art. The displayman's ability to apply his skills and harness new tools and technologies in order to constantly and expertly communicate these new meanings made him a valuable financial and creative asset to the department store.

While there is a sizeable literature on the business history of the department store, display design features only minimally within these sources, which instead point to

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[15] *New York World*, December 19, 1886, cited in Ralph M. Hower, *History of Macy's of New York, 1858-1919: Chapters in the Evolution of the Department Store* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), 164.

achievements in industrial manufacture and transportation, scientific management, large-scale marketing and distribution, and the overseeing of both quality and variety in material goods. However the development of the science of retailing and an ideology of rationalization do feature in this literature and both of these concepts came to bear on display's modernization. A number of these studies, such as Hrant Pasdermadjian's *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution, and Economics* (1954) and James B. Jefferys's *Retail Trading in Britain* (1954) were written to elucidate the history of the department store for the benefit of merchants active in the field at the time.[16] In these sources, mention of display is minimal and positioned as a successful offshoot of advertising. Paul Nystrom's *Economics of Retailing* (1915), similar to many other mercantile guidebooks of the time, alerted readers that retailers who have paid attention to new trends in "fixtures, lighting, decorations" and "display of goods…have reaped large rewards, while those who have not observed these changing conditions have passed out in failure."[17] Nystrom warned how display's power, or lack thereof, could wield significant financial consequences. In this study design history will be used to illuminate economic history in a number of ways: display staff, materials, and technologies required significant financial backing, display styles were promoted for their selling potential, and most importantly, during the 1880 to 1920 period, financial rewards were presented as increasingly contingent on creative display.

Descriptions of architectural details, floor plans, and window and interior displays figure more prominently in monographic histories of department store businesses and

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[16] Louisa Iarocci, *The Urban Department Store in America, 1850-1930* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 2. See Hrant Pasdermadjian, *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution, and Economics* (London: Newman Books, 1954), viii and James B. Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950* (Cambridge: University Press, 1954).

[17] Paul H. Nystrom, *Economics of Retailing* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1915), 45.

business leaders. For instance business historian Ralph M. Hower's *History of Macy's New York, 1858-1919* notes the prize-winning caliber of the store's window and interior displays.[18] Department stores were great publishers and promoters of their own histories, producing a vast amount of text and imagery, and in some cases, assembling their own archives.[19] Such material has in turn served as the basis for the writing of this history, as will be elaborated on below, and the work of other scholars, both within the 1880 to 1920 period and ever since.[20] Monographic studies of stores and their leaders including Marshall Field and Company, Whiteley's, Selfridge's, A.T. Stewart and Company, Wanamaker's, and Marshall and Snelgrove are particularly rich in their information on growth of stock, budget, interior layout, and architectural expansion and renovation.[21] With the exception of Arthur Fraser of Marshall Field's, displaymen are rarely mentioned by name and in these sources discussion of display is still largely subsumed under general accounts of advertising strategy. My research brings these independent histories together, in conjunction with empirical

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[18] Hower, *History of Macy's of New York,* 335 and 470-71. Hower notes the "numerous times" which the *Dry Goods Economist* mentioned Macy displays and window decorations after 1909: *Dry Goods Economist* December 11, 1909, February 26, 1910, and March 25, May 20, June 17, July 1, and September 2, 1911.

[19] In 1902 Marshall Field spent $58,500 on ephemera to go along with their opening that year, totaling almost three times the amount spent the previous year. See Robert W. Twyman, *History of Marshall Field & Co., 1852-1906* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 151.

[20] Ferry writes that he "amassed a collection of Jubilee and centenary literature" that provided the research materials for his book. See John William Ferry, *A History of the Department Store* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), vi.

[21] See Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, *Give the Lady What She Wants!: ... the Story of Marshall Field & Company* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1952); Twyman, *History of Marshall Field & Co.*; R. S. Lambert, *The Universal Provider: A Study of William Whiteley and the Rise of the London Department Store* (London: G.G. Harrap & Co., 1938); Harry Gordon Selfridge, *The Romance of Commerce* (London: John Lane, 1918); Stephen N. Elias, *Alexander T. Stewart: The Forgotten Merchant Prince* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992); Herbert Adams Gibbons, *John Wanamaker* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926); John Wanamaker, Joseph H. Appel, and Leigh Mitchell Hodges, *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores: Jubilee Year, 1861–1911* (Philadelphia?: John Wanamaker, 1911); Settle, *A Family of Shops*.

evidence, in order to determine how stylistic patterns of display and merchandising methods developed internationally across stores.

The department store is reliably present in architectural histories, retroactively recognized as a precursor of modernism particularly in terms of its abundant use of glass and its steel-frame technology that prefigured the skyscraper. Key architectural historians including Sigfried Giedion, Nikolaus Pevsner, and Bruno Taut have recognized the department store as a distinct architectural type that exemplified the materials, structures, and attitudes of modernism.22 John Siry's architectural history of Carson Pirie Scott is particularly strong in its unveiling of the building's inner workings as they connect to systems of display.[23] Kathryn Morrison's work *English Shops and Shopping: An Architectural History* and its associated archive of research materials provides a rich understanding of the planning and interior layout of the major London department stores as well as a grounding of their relationship to urban geography.[24] These architectural histories have informed my understanding of the department store as a complex and variable building project that involved the input and cooperation of architects, contractors for specific construction technologies, as well as local government officials, and department store leadership.

Architectural historian Richard Longstreth's work has established an important foundational understanding of commercial retail architecture as its own distinct type with a

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[22] Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 271; Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 234–39; Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete*, trans. J. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 116–19; Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (London: The Studio, 1929), 46–47.

[23] John Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott: Louis Sullivan and the Chicago Department Store* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[24] Kathryn Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping: An Architectural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

particular set of considerations in terms of style, the need to generate revenue, and its relationship to urban growth. Longstreth has also written on the movement of the American department store from the cities to the suburbs in the first half of the twentieth century.[25] While no definitive architectural history of the nineteenth-century American department store exists, Louisa Iarocci's recent important work positions the department store as a "culturally produced space" and suggests an understanding of the department store as both "physical object" and "lived event," ideas that have been key to expanding this thesis's exploration of the cultural and social parameters of architecture. In addition, my line of thinking follows Iarocci's identification of the department store as "the building type that consolidated the spatial practices of modernity."[26] While Iarocci's discussions of floor plans and particular points of consumer interaction at the show window and over the counter hint at the building as a framework for the viewing of commodities in the department store, this thesis will take a closer look at how architecture specifically supported and adapted to display needs.

Therefore, this thesis will suggest that the ways that the building evolved and reconfigured itself were just as important as its characteristics when it was first built. Architectural historian Robert Proctor, after surveying the viewpoints of many different people and institutions involved in the process of building the late-nineteenth-century Parisian department store, determined, "an important consequence is that the building no longer appears situated within a linear chronological frame, or as evolving across time, but as

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[25] Richard W. Longstreth, "Compositional Types in American Commercial Architecture," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2 (1986): 12–23; Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed, 1920–1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[26] Iarocci, *The Urban Department Store in America,* 8.

continuously present in different manifestations."[27] This distinctly modern, diachronic quality of the department store will carry as a theme throughout the thesis and feature alongside discussions of variation and division in the interior.

Scholars have considered how the department store has been shaped by its urban context and at the same time how the leisure activity of the shopping changed the experience and composition of the late-nineteenth century city. Allison Adburgham has identified the geographical movement of fashionable shopping centers across London from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.[28] Adburgham provides some of the earliest analysis of shopfittings and mannequins within the field of retail history. Meanwhile scholars including Erika Rappaport and Mica Nava have given attention to the feminization of the retail landscape in London, and Mona Domosh in America, and their discussions importantly analyze women's shopping in the department store as a "skilled, knowledge-based activity" that was "un-Taylorized and self-regulated."[29] Claire Walsh argues that once the department store is seen as "part of a continuing history of display," which she traces to the beginning of the eighteenth century, the department store consumer "emerges less as a passive victim and more as an active, negotiating individual" who has learned to be an adept shopper over

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[27] Robert Proctor, "A Cubist History: The Department Store in Late Nineteenth Century Paris," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003): 235.

[28] Allison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping, 1800-1914: Where, and in What Manner the Well-dressed Englishwoman Bought Her Clothes* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964); Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: London from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).

[29] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 128–9*;* Mica Nava, "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, The City and the Department Store" in *The Shopping Experience*, eds. Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 74; Mona Domosh, "The Feminized Retail Landscape: Gender, Ideology and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-century New York" in *Retailing, Consumption, and Capital: Towards the New Retail Geography*, eds. Neil Wrigley and Michelle Lowe (Essex, England: Longman Group Limited, 1996), 226.

time.[30] My research will add to this gendered investigation of the consumer/retailer relationship with a distinct focus on the ways in which displaymen targeted the material knowledge and visual savvy of female shoppers.

Gender-conscious display is one way in which this thesis will explore the deliberate nature of the design decisions of displaymen. Yet the dramatic, ever-evolving, and visually overwhelming nature of the department store interior has led to historians' frequent alignment of this space with notions of fantasy rather than rationality. As historian Kevin Hetherington has pointed out, the interpretation of the "department store as phantasmagoric space is pervasive."[31] For example, Rosalind Williams has written on the "great increase of the varieties of dreams appealed to by commerce" in the late nineteenth century and William Leach has emphasized the department store as fostering a "democratization of desire" and a "separate world of consumer fantasy."[32] The richly illustrated publications of Jan Whittaker and Alexandra Artley among others have brought to light an impressive amount of historical imagery of the department store interior that furthers this interpretation of the retail environment as overwhelming spectacle since such works often neglect to give critical attention to the labor and thought process behind the visual effects.[33] Rather than using

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[30] Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century," 138.

[31] Kevin Hetherington, *Capitalism's Eye: Cultural Spaces of the Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 111.

[32] Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds*: *Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 109; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) 3, 5, 8, 9, and 149. For further discussion of these sources see Hetherington, *Capitalism's Eye*, 111.

[33] Jan Whitaker, *The Department Store: History, Design, Display* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011); Jan Whitaker, *The World of Department Stores* (New York: Vendome Press, 2011); Alexandra Artley, *The Golden Age of Shop Design: European Shop Interiors, 1880-1939* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976); Leonard Marcus, *The American Store Window* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1979). Jan Whitaker's book *Service and Style: How the American Department Store*

images as pure illustrations, this study will take into account images' purpose (the differing agendas of a postcard and an architectural drawing, for example) as well as the importance of their survival as a visual and material record of the department store, and what the images give access to as well as what they might lack.[34]

This thesis does not deny the significance of these spectacular interpretations and in fact it maintains that the ability of the display of commodities to invoke fantasy was a powerful invention of department store merchandising culture. However, this research does complicate this narrative of fantasy by overlaying it with the department store's scientific program of retailing and emphasis on rationalization. Analysis of how the field of display underwent a deliberate process of professionalization also grounds this narrative. While Rosalind Williams has described the "dream world of the consumer" as concerning a "non-material dimension" tied to imagination, this thesis will look precisely at the material dimensions of the department store found in commodity pictures, fixtures, lighting devices, and more.[35] It will illuminate the network of people, tools, and ideas that fashioned display or what Daniel Miller has described as the "'reality' of commodity worlds."[36]

The Department Store and the History of Design

Focusing on the design of display opens up lines of inquiry around conception, production,

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Fashioned the Middle Class (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) does give attention to techniques and styles of display more than the author's more recent work.

[34] See Walsh's methodology of using images as "complex forms of documentation." Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century," 13.

[35] Williams, *Dream Worlds,* 65, 72.

[36] Daniel Miller, *Capitalism: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 272.

style, materials, impact, agency, and display's relationships with other objects, people and environment. The display profession developed due to the merging of existing professional domains including fine art, advertising, and theater design and was therefore as multidisciplinary as the aspects of design for which it was responsible. In turn, the history of the design, in its attempts to analyze and bring meaning to the making and viewing of display, takes a collaborative approach and combines material and visual culture, urban studies, cultural history, economics, marketing, psychology, and consumer studies. Design history encourages the intersection of all of these fields around the object.

As D.J. Huppatz and Grace Lees-Maffei have written, the role of design history is "the study of designed artefacts, practices and behaviours, and the discourses surrounding these, in order to understand the past…"[37] Therefore this thesis constitutes a work of design historical scholarship in that it takes objects as starting points, whether they be commodities, architectural and mechanical elements, or decorations, and then interrogates how these objects interacted in the retail environment and gave rise to their own culture of professionalism, technological advancement, and encouraged new shopping behaviors while shaping a new look for the department store. Primary research has uncovered previously overlooked material and visual aspects of display as valuable repositories of historical, socio-cultural, and technical information.

An investigation of the displayman's role reveals his engagement with the design of objects and how they operated within a set of contexts, which is one of the fundamental inquiries of the field of design history itself. The successful displayman scrutinized issues of

[37] D.J. Huppatz and Grace Lees-Maffei, "Why Design History? A Multi-National Perspective on the State and Purpose of the Field," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 12 (2/3): 311.

production, circulation, and consumption and amassed sophisticated knowledge of the products with which he worked. One guidebook advised,

> Before attempting to design the Window Display, the merchandising man thoroughly analyzes the product or article to be displayed. Not only does he analyze the product itself, the process of manufacture, where possible, the various uses of the product, the class of users, and the type of dealer who must handle it, but he also studies the method of packing, the convenience of the package, if packed in package form, for shipping, the artistic and display power of the labels, cartons, and trade-mark and numerous other merchandising details which are to be carefully considered before an attempt is made to design the Window Display.[38]

The displayman therefore performed his own visual and material analysis on individual objects before amassing them into a display presentation.

A history of design approach encourages analysis of display beyond its existence as a finished product, a potentially misleading focus that largely locates objects in a space of fantastical consumption. Instead, by beginning earlier, this narrative locates objects in a "reality," considered here as the displayman's spaces of design and production. Following from Louisa Iarocci's work on visual merchandising, this thesis seeks "to challenge that scholarly ambivalence that often celebrates the spectacle but denies the agenda of consumerism."[39] An examination of guidebooks, trade literature, and archival documents will uncover this agenda; an analysis of the built components, materials, technologies, and professions of display will determine how this agenda was carried out.

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[38] Warren Olmstead Woodward and George. A. Fredericks, *Selling Service with the Goods* (New York: James A. McCann Co., 1921), 17.

[39] Louisa Iarocci, *Visual Merchandising: The Image of Selling* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 1. Penny Sparke similarly critiques that "While the modern urban experience has been described in terms of the high level of spectacle visible to city dwellers, most accounts have privileged its reception rather than its production or its designed components." Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture: 1900 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2004), 14.

While there has been little scholarship on the making of display, William Bird's exhibition *Holidays on Display* and the accompanying publication centered on the technical innovations and stylistic considerations of primarily Christmas display whose role Bird identifies as facilitator of an emotional bond between retailer and consumer.[40] Bird's emphasis on production marks an important shift in department store scholarship and this thesis will build upon his work to redress the imbalance in the historiography that presents the department store primarily as a site of consumption.[41] While William Leach's *Land of Desire*: *Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* was pioneering in its research on the theatricality and technologies of merchandise display, Leach's emphasis lay primarily in social, political, and economic concerns and interpreted display as celebrating a new way of life driven by consumerism. This research will extend this existing scholarship by tracing the behind-the-scenes construction process of display and will add a new layer of interpretation by asking how consumers recognized and perceived its production value. Consumer attention to display and curiosity about the design process behind it encouraged the field's creative and professional advancement.

A new angle on the history of design professions considers the retail environment as a significant training ground for the interior and industrial designer. Within the professional

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[40] William L. Bird, *Holidays on Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, 2007).

[41] The department store has been widely recognized as popularizing or even introducing a number of progressive merchandising practices including fixed prices, free return of goods, home delivery, and the launch of cultural and artistic entertainment in the retail sphere, all of which primarily concern the establishment of the department store as a pioneering site of material consumption. While these features were important innovations, by 1880 they were no longer novel in the retail sphere. Also a number of these amenities have in fact been linked to other earlier proto-department store establishments and fairs. For instance Adam Gimbel set fixed prices at his country store in Vincennes, Indiana in 1842. The Paris Fair of 1855 showcased merchandise with price tags attached. For discussion of these firsts see Robert Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 19; Williams, *Dream Worlds*, 59.

culture of the department store, saleswomen have been given the most attention in the existing literature.[42] Susan Porter Benson's *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* was particularly valuable in its examination of how staff, shopfittings, and the layout of the store worked together to increase productivity and efficiency. However a focus on the important achievements of the non-selling staff will explore an alternative orientation to the department store. The second chapter in particular will trace the display staff's professionalization, a process that historians have primarily charted with regards to the economic and social domination of the "white collar professions" and most of these studies isolate these professions in their analysis.[43]

Design historical scholarship has charted the founding of many professional societies in Europe and America that promoted design as a significant activity beginning in the late nineteenth century.[44] Penny Sparke, Grace Lees-Maffei, Pat Kirkham, Jill Seddon, and Suzette Worden have highlighted the achievements of women in the early years of the fields of architecture, industrial design, and interior decoration.[45] This thesis will explore an inter-

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[42] Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986); William Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); Lise Shapiro Sanders, *Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure, and the London Shopgirl, 1880-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

[43] Andrew Delano Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

[44] For an overview, see Jonathan M. Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Design* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 165–81.

[45] Grace Lees-Maffei, "Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History," *Journal of Design History* 21 (2008): 1–18; Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke, *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860-1960* (London: Routledge, 2010); Penny Sparke, Elsie De Wolfe, and Mitchell Owens, *Elsie De Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2005); Pat Kirkham, *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference (*New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Suzette Worden & Jill Seddon, "Women Designers in

professional angle and will trace how the display profession came together as representing a combination of existing skill sets and design vocations that led to future developments in related fields. As Penny Sparke has explained, industrial designers of the late 1920s and 1930s "demonstrated the way in which the commercial design profession was dependent on earlier visualizing work undertaken in the contexts of commerce and spectacle" including that of window and retail display.[46] Via crossovers in training, lexicon, and attitudes towards the marriage of art and commerce, links will be forged between display and the burgeoning fields of industrial design, interior design, and the rise of commercial art in the early twentieth century that have so far been insufficiently explored. The fourth chapter will elaborate on how the realm of the department store as an extra-domestic context helped to upgrade perceptions of interior decoration from an amateur practice to a professional one.

Therefore the display field's development was in line with a larger culture of professionalization that took hold in the nineteenth century. Criteria and values of professional identity and institutions developed in this period across disciplines as designers chose to practice as professionals partly to ensure survival in opposition to the increasing mechanization and mass production of material goods and services. Friction occurred between notions of "individual artistic personality" and the "economic and technical realities of manufacturing industry." [47] Hybrid terms such as "commercial artist" and "industrial designer" reflected an attempt to reconcile compatibilities between art and commerce and design and industry, which the figure of the displayman demonstrated were possible.

Britain in the 1920s and 1930s: Defining the Professional and Redefining Design," *Journal of Design History* 8 (1995): 177–93.

[46] Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture: 1900 to the Present*, 59.

[47] Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Design*, 165.

Within the art of window display, definitive distinctions were made between the work of amateurs, seen often in smaller stores, and the work of professionals, who could be afforded by large department stores with ample display budgets. Stephen Knott's recent study of amateur craft practice calls attention to the "notional competition between the newly equipped amateur and the professional" in the nineteenth century when "expertise, skill and excellence were tied to monetary remuneration within a 'profession.'"[48] In the case of the department store, the displayman identified himself as a professional, one with particular training and knowledge as well as specific hand and eye skills, in order to differentiate himself from the hundreds of other more easily replaceable store employees, earn a greater salary, and advance up the ranks within the stores' internal framework. Guidebooks and articles made clear distinctions between the work of amateurs and the work of professionals, citing technical expertise, the use of new tools and supplies, and the amount of energy and time put towards the display as distinguishing factors.[49]

Similar to the work of historian Mary N. Woods on the practice of architecture in the nineteenth century, this thesis scrutinizes the practice of display as "work and business" in addition to its more frequent portrayals as art and advertising.[50] The settings in which the display profession developed – basement and attic workshops, the factory floor of manufacturers, and the annual conventions of organizations – are primary sites of study. Professional organizations, schooling, and literature gave designers a footing to establish

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[48] Stephen Knott, *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), xiv.

[49] "The I.A.D.M. Convention." *MRSW*, August 1920, 31.

[50] Mary N. Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

their reputation and as a result, increase their desirability, call attention to their positive influence on business, and justify their expense.

In the department store, the display professional was heavily engaged in the styling of the domestic interior, which was newly on display for public consumption. Penny Sparke has identified that this ability to "facilitate both private interiority and public mass behavior" was a particular quality of the modern interior.[51] Through the department store's use of the ensemble and the model room, "the domestic interior was itself transformed into an object of mass consumption."[52] The mercantile interior decorator thus negotiated between the public and the private and moderated between catering to a consumer's individual point of view and appealing to the masses. The display staff's liminality also drew from their occupation of the space between production and consumption, making up one of the first generations of individuals whom historian Regina Blaszcyck has called "fashion intermediaries" or networks of business professionals who "studied the marketplace, collected data about consumer taste, created products to meet public expectations and promoted them."[53]

In addition to advancing the study of design professions within the department store, new facets of the design of the department store will be deciphered in the materials and objects not-for-sale that constituted the modern experience of the department store. Plate glass windows, cast iron storefronts, arc lighting, casework, elevators, mannequins, rotating stands, and more are some of the many components that came together to make, and re-make, the department store interior. As represented in The Model Department Store's sheet of paper

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[51] Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 10.

[52] Sparke, *The Modern Interior*, 55.

[53] Regina Blaszcyck, *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 6.

cutouts, the department store was made up of a network of human and non-human factors that can be understood as acting upon one another in a Latourian framework. The retail environment and its successful operation was the result of a joint effort between designers, or humans, and their calculated knowledge and operation of non-human factors such as display tools, shopfittings, architectural elements and interior layouts that made possible particular patterns of vision and movement. As Peter-Paul Veerbeck has interpreted Latour's principles, "The nonhuman parts of such compositions should not be understood as passive and neutral instruments. They actively co-shape the action that is performed, that is, they co-act."[54] The objects and the technical possibilities of the materials of department store display can be interpreted as exerting an agency in their ability to shape and constrain the actions of humans and condition the public to shop in new ways.[55] As Penny Sparke has recently explained, design history understands that "design is itself an 'actor,' driving all kinds of change – human and non-human – and that it is transforming itself in the process."[56] This process of change is central to the narrative of the department store as an endlessly evolving and complex system that involved the actions of designers, objects, and their users.

Shopfittings were some of the most influential non-human factors in the department store and these objects will be analyzed in terms of their style, form, and function. Shopfittings have featured in the work of William Lancaster, William Leach, and Allison

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[54] Peter-Paul Verbeek, "Artifacts and Attachment: A Post-Script Philosophy of Mediation," in *Inside the Politics of Technology: Agency and Normativity in the Co-Production of Technology and Society*, ed. Hans Harbers (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 129.

[55] Bruno Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?" in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 225–258.

[56] Penny Sparke and Fiona Fisher, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Design Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 5.

Adburgham but primary research in store and manufacturer archives and guidebooks will reveal new insight into this industry. The mannequin has received significant scholarly attention particularly in the field of fashion studies and more recently in art history.[57] Meanwhile Sarah Schneider has written on the store window as a theatrical performance in which mannequins, display directors, and passersby simultaneously act on one another.[58] An examination of the making and materials of the mannequin will reveal how the shopfitting industry aimed to engage this audience of consumers.

Beyond metaphorical analogies, the shared uses of technologies, attitudes and approaches to display connect the department store to the theatre and other sites of show in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century at which time modern cultural phenomena fed off of one another in what historian Susan Tenneriello calls the "spectacle culture" in America. This research will follow her approach and "investigate the emerging industries of spectacle as a permeable tradition, one that admits and yields interdisciplinary methods."[59] Historians have drawn parallels between the department store, world's fairs, and museums in terms of their entertainment value, classification system and management of a great crowd and a vast array of worldly goods.[60] The addition of a material dimension to these

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[57] Nicole Parrot, *Mannequins* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Jane Munro, *Silent Partners: Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); Ralph Pucci et. al., *Ralph Pucci: The Art of the Mannequin* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2015); Gayle Strege, "The Store Mannequin: An Evolving Ideal of Beauty" in Louisa Iarocci, ed. *Visual Merchandising: The Image of Selling* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 95−116.

[58] Sarah K. Schneider, *Vital Mummies: Performance Design for the Show-window Mannequin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

[59] Susan Tenneriello, *Spectacle Culture and American Identity 1815–1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

[60] For a cultural history of an exhibition with a display emphasis see Giberti Bruno, *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002). For more on the relationship between the World's Fair and the department

considerations will illuminate how the use of the same or similar shopfittings, strategies, and layouts makes it possible to identify a continuum of approaches to display; major shopfitting firms worked for clients in museums, trade exhibitions, and department stores at the same time. The third chapter will investigate how the increasing use of vitrines in museums and trade fairs, and by extension casework in department stores, set up new "regimes of visuality to which objects were subject."[61]

The field of museum studies offers an important historical perspective on display as a mediator between the institution and its audience as well as architecture's role in controlling the vision and movement of a large visiting public.[62] Parallels can be broadly identified between the museum and the retail sphere in terms of visual presentation; historian Julia Noordegraaf has identified that the script of the nineteenth century museum required that everything be shown, similar to the philosophy that drove the department stores' "stocky" window approach in which the window was packed top to bottom with goods.[63] Thus specific design concepts were shared across these exhibition spaces. For instance, a British Lace Display at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London employed framing devices and draping effects that resemble the shop window layouts that would become popular at the turn of the century (fig. 5). Such images that permanently capture an ephemeral artistic effect of display are central to the visual analysis of this thesis.

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store see Robert D. Tamilia, "World's Fairs and the Department Store, 1850s to 1930s" in *Marketing History at the Center*, ed. Blaine Branchik, CHARM Association, Proceedings of the 13th Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM), Durham, NC, 2007, 228–40.

[61] Jonathan C. Welchman and Kate Nichols, *Sculpture and the Vitrine* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2013).

[62] See for example, Carla Yanni, *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[63] Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2004), 40.

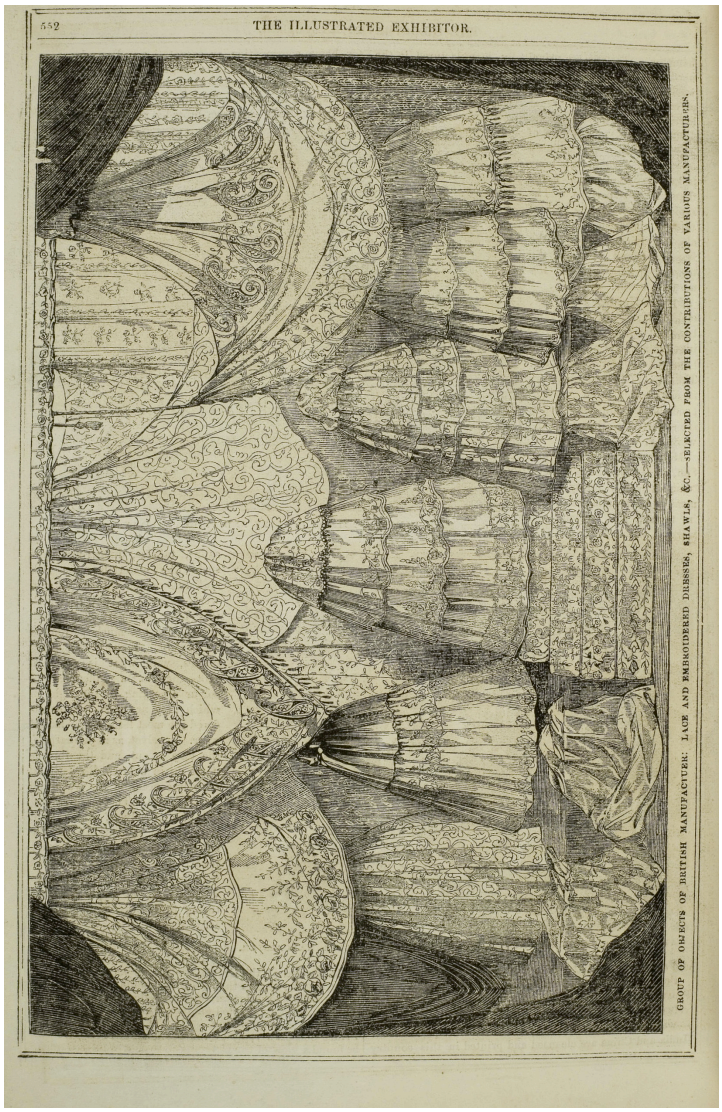


Figure 5. Group of Objects of British Manufacture: Lace and Embroidered Dresses, Shawls, etc - Selected from the Contributions of Various Manufacturers, *The Illustrated Exhibitor: A Tribute to the World's Industrial Jubilee* (London: John Cassell, 1851), 552.
Source: Heidelberg University Library, http://digi.ub.uniheidelberg.de/diglit/weltausstellung1851d/0606

Visual culture considerations also open up the department store's associations with the realms of film and the fine arts, particularly through the show window. Anne Friedberg and Rachel Bowlby both identify how the show window is similar to film in its commodification of "just looking" while Friedberg importantly distinguishes the show window as needing to attract the

"mobile gaze."[64] The show window taught consumers that it was possible to shop by "just looking" and as such turned consumer attention into an asset that displaymen worked to acquire. Displaymen's self-conscious concerns with the management and arrangement of a meaningful public presentation have encouraged associations with art practice in the late nineteenth century. Art historian Sarah Burns identifies how the promotional motivations behind the accumulation of art wares and props in the artist's studio paralleled the commodity assemblages in the department store.[65] This link between the display profession and fine art practice prefigures alliances between displaymen and commercial artists and industrial designers in the early twentieth century.

A history of design approach thus encourages a comprehensive understanding of how the department store's architecture, shopfittings, show windows, and interior design can not only be seen in conversation with one another but also connected to other professions, events, and cultural developments. Questions of production, agenda, and agency will carry throughout all four chapters to bring a new critical angle to the design of the department store. In addition analysis of how concepts about display were developed, communicated, and shared within the field and across cross-Atlantic borders will elucidate a determined program of professional development. Retail trade literature, guidebooks, and the international press conveyed reports of new construction and outlined fresh strategies and technologies, meanwhile the displaymen themselves moved from store to store bringing their knowledge with them.

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[64] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985) and Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[65] Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 47.

A New Cross-Atlantic Focus

A number of scholars have contributed to the creation of a history of visual merchandising, but none has attempted a cross-Atlantic comprehensive review of department store display of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from conception all the way through to presentation and promotion.

This thesis will position the department store as paramount to a particular and new culture of display that was at its height in the cities of Chicago, London, and New York. While it has been well established that these three cities were the homes of leading department stores, this thesis will more specifically examine how these three cities, and the interactions between them, led the way in terms of display design education, experimentation, and professionalization. While Chicago and New York were at the forefront of window display, London's shopfitting industry was unparalleled in its centralization and strength as it benefitted from existing industries that had relevant skills in manufacturing. These three cities were home to seminal events in the history of the display profession: The Retail Dry Goods Association formed in New York in 1895, The National Association of Window Trimmers held its first annual meeting at Chicago in August 1898, and the British Association of Display Men was founded in London in 1919.

Department stores in the cities of Chicago, New York, and London attracted shoppers not only for the quantity of their wares but also the quality of their presentation. Between 1880 and 1920, all three cities developed concentrated shopping neighborhoods: State Street in Chicago, Broadway in New York, and Westbourne Grove and Oxford Street in London, among others. One British female journalist observed upon visiting New York in 1906, "The city of New York, built on a long and very narrow island, suggests the tube of a thermometer,

and the population can well be likened to mercury: they fluctuate in a mass, now up, now down, moved by the impelling atmosphere of the shopping centres."[66] She describes how the agency of display held the power to draw crowds of window shoppers moving en masse along major shopping avenues.

The medium of the show window grew to prominence due to the skills of the display staff as well as the participation of the public who eagerly engaged in the skilled performance of consumerism. Well-dressed men and women in Chicago and New York worked as "window gazers" paid two dollars a day to window shop from ten in the morning until nine at night in order to attract crowds.[67] From 1888 in London, women were hired to lead shopping trips through the Lady Guide Association.[68] Females also authored trusted shopping guides.[69] Therefore designing as well as critiquing merchandise display became recognized as professional activities in Chicago, New York, and London.

The history of the Parisian department store has been well documented in terms of its business accomplishments of price-fixing and distribution of goods as well as its stylistic achievements of palatial architecture and sumptuous shopping environments.[70] This thesis positions Paris's major contribution as it relates to the history of the department store display as the mastery of glass and steel architecture. The physicality, as well as metaphysicality, of this transparent architecture was critical to the experience of the department store. The Bon

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[66] Mrs. John Van Vorst, "The Nation that Shops," *The Pall Mall Magazine*, June 1906, 744.

[67] "Window Gazers Earn Money," *The Show Window*, August 1899, 107.

[68] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 132–41.

[69] Florence Waxman, *A Shopping Guide to Paris and London* (New York: McBride, Nast & Company, 1912); Olivia, *Olivia's Shopping and How She Does It: A Prejudiced Guide*, 1906, Reprint (Stroud: Gunpowder, 2009).

[70] Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché, the Department Store 1869–1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Marché's glass ceiling designed by Gustave Eiffel expanded the parameters of the consumer gaze by making the building vertically permeable.[71] Some of the earliest American and British department stores looked to Parisian stores as architectural models.[72] London businessman James Smith imported the Bon Marché name for its glamorous connotations and studied the departmental layout of Parisian stores, when he founded the first London department store in the neighborhood of Brixton. In 1877 *The Builder* reported in an article on the opening of the Bon Marché Brixton, "The buildings have been erected and internally arranged on the principle of some similar establishments in Paris, and when opened they will form a novelty in market accommodation in the metropolis…"[73]

In terms of display techniques and styles, however, Parisian department stores did not achieve the balance of orderly as well as artistic effects on view in American and British stores in this 1880 to 1920 period. In 1912, Francis Waxman relayed in her *Shopping Guide to London and Paris* that "The Paris department stores are, like the small shops of London, a bit disorderly to an American eye, and the desired article is not always easy to find. Many a disgusted American lady, after her first visit to the Bon Marché, will declare it 'a much overrated place.'"[74] When earlier in 1898 *The Show Window* sent journalists to review the Parisian retail scene, the periodical published the following letter from the foreign

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[71] Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 99.

[72] References to and photos of the early department stores of Paris are present in the archives of stores based in Britain and America. This evidence points to Paris's influence in terms of architecture. For instance some early twentieth-century photos of Parisian stores including Au Printemps and Galeries Lafayette are present in the archive of the London department store D.H. Evans that was looking to Paris as a model when they remodeled in 1909. See D.H. Evans, Oxford Street, London, English Heritage Shops Project Report, BF101754/1, The Architecture of Shopping Project, English Heritage.

[73] "Bon Marche Brixton," *The Builder*, March 24, 1877, 289–90.

[74] Waxman, *A Shopping Guide to Paris and London*, 57.

correspondent: "Such large stores as the Au Bon Marché, Louvre, Printemps, etc., make no attempt at window dressing and even go as far as to copy the London idea of hanging certain things outside the store, and even have salesmen there to look after customers or would-be customers."[75] Profusion, rather than artistry, largely drove display tactics in the Parisian department store well into the twentieth century.

Paris will however feature in this history of department store display design in terms of the city's abstract associations with luxury and fashionability and as the cultural and creative capital for women's fashion itself. Many British and American stores eagerly adopted Parisian-style interior decoration for their most elegant departments such as lingerie and millinery where at the Bon Marché, Brixton for instance, "The tone, grace, delicacy, and chic of the Parisian style are admirably and faithfully illustrated in this department for milliners of the highest attainments and skill and employed on the premises."[76] The millinery department not only evoked Parisian luxury and imported Parisian wares, but also employed the city's milliners, making their presentation as authentic as possible. Department stores boasted that through their close trade ties to Paris they kept fashionable pace with the city:

> The fashion exhibits that are held at this store each season are looked forward to by New York women as sounding the authoritative note from Paris. So close is the connection of Wanamaker's (through its permanent Paris staff) with the great artists and designers of Paris, that new things keep coming by

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[75] David H. Eisner, "Our European Letter – London, Feb 7, 1898," *The Show Window*, March 1898, 113. Thérèse Bonney and her sister Louise reviewed the Parisian department stores with similar criticism even thirty years later: "The French department store is an amorphous thing, extending over lots of floor space instead of rising neatly into the air as American ones do, hiding annexes here and there, and oozing out on to the sidewalks." See Thérèse Bonney and Louise Bonney. *A Shopping Guide to Paris* (New York: R.M. McBride & Company, 1929), 116, partially quoted in Tag Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 57.

[76] "Bon Marché Brixton," *The Builder*, March 24, 1877, 289–90.

> every steamer, and students of fashion say that the new things are shown at Wanamaker's almost (if not altogether) simultaneously with the Paris shops.[77]

While historians have often called attention to the widening gap between the places of production and sites of consumption by the late nineteenth century, display symbolically closed this gap via strategies that mimicked the sites of the goods' origins.[78]

The department store has historically been lauded as a distribution center of an international array of goods and stores eagerly publicized their prowess in global trade. For instance in the souvenir program for the laying of the foundation stone of the new Whiteley's in London in 1910, the store promoted, "It will collect everything worth collecting in the world. Furs from the poles, fabrics from every country, foods from every land, the finished products of every art, craft, and industry, jewels and gold and silver ware, silks, satins, laces and tapestries, fruits, flowers, and spices – the riches of the world can give."[79] Beyond surveying such a range, this thesis will consider how variety encouraged the development of new strategies of display.

At the same time, it is important to recognize how the department stores' global presence manifested in factories and buying offices that encouraged international crosscurrents of not only goods but also people and ideas central to the furthering of retail expansion in this period.[80] As historian John Ferry wrote, the "overseas buying offices and

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[77] John Wanamaker, *What To See in New York* (New York: John Wanamaker, 1912), 22–23.

[78] On the widening gap between production and consumption see Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 234; Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America,* 132.

[79] Souvenir Programme for the Laying of the Foundation Stone of Whiteley's New Store, October 28 1910, 7, 726/248, Records of William Whiteley Department Store, Westminster City Archives.

[80] The introduction to an 1880 illustrated catalogue of R.H. Macy and Co. enumerated at least ten products and factory locations. See *Catalogue of R.H. Macy and Co.,* 1880, np., 8B, Box 10, Macy's Archive, Macy's, Brooklyn.

periodic excursions of a store's buyers into the world's markets are the links in the system."[81] In order to commemorate the formal opening of their new store, which took place over the course of the week of September 30th to October 5th, 1907, Marshall Field produced hundreds of thousands of souvenirs, including a booklet of reproductions of celebratory announcements issued in newspapers "in response to the request of many of our patrons who have expressed a desire to retain the series as a souvenir of the event."[82] One advertisement symbolized the store's global reach with a border comprised of the exteriors of the business's retail and manufacturing buildings in such far-flung locations as Chicago, Lyons and Manchester (fig. 6). In the center of the page floats a globe that is rotated to show a stretch of sea, perhaps emphasizing the impressive yet invisible passage of goods and ideas across the Atlantic.[83] Employees visited their competition on surveillance missions to marvel at merchandise, observe inner workings, and note successful methods. For instance in July of 1914 *MRSW* reported, "Merchants and merchandise men from all over the country and abroad are continually visiting Lord & Taylor's, one of the latest visitors being the merchandise manager of Selfridge & Co, of London."[84] These merchandise men were in fact following the paths of their wealthiest patrons, who shopped between department stores all over the globe and keenly compared them.

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[81] Ferry, *A History of the Department Store*, 13.

[82] State Street Store Grand Opening Booklet, 1907, np., 03052 (26), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company, Chicago History Museum; "Publicity: The Marshall Field Ads," *Apparel Gazette*, October 1902, 62, 03052 (21), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

[83] Thanks to Sarah Cheang for her insightful suggestion on the interpretation of this image.

[84] "Where Ideas Come From," *MRSW*, July 1914, 28.



Figure 6. Announcement Issued for the Formal Opening of Marshall Field & Company Department Store, October 3, 1907 in *State Street Store Grand Opening Booklet*, n.p., 03052 (26), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.
Source: Chicago History Museum, ICHi-79030.

In addition to merchandise and merchandisers moving globally between department stores, this research will reveal new findings on how displaymen, display concepts, and the tools of display were also circulating internationally. Much like the department stores themselves, major shopfitters established international offices that opened up a wide range of business partnerships. Frederick Sage and Company established a Paris branch, manned by an English staff, from which contracts were carried out in Los Angeles, California, Algeria, Egypt, Romania and Turkey. From an office in Berlin, contracts were extended as far as Vienna and Budapest, Belgrade and Serbia, and Helsinki.[85] Sage even opened a branch in

[85] Deryck Abel, *The House of Sage, 1860–1960* (London: W.P. Griffith, 1960), n.p.

Cape Town, South Africa where demand justified the establishment of a factory there by 1902. From their Paris branch, Sage designed the storefronts and casework for major department stores in Paris, including at least Galeries Lafayette, Printemps and the Louvre in the late nineteenth century, suggesting that in fact the great possibilities for display that the Parisian glass and steel architecture made possible were further augmented by the prowess of British shopfitting techniques.[86] Meanwhile the British firm Harris & Sheldon secured a major contract with the Wertheim department store in Berlin by 1899.[87] Pollard, another British leader in the shopfitting industry, held offices in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, Dublin, Belfast, Brussels, Johannesburg, Melbourne, Sydney, Wellington, and Calcutta by 1920.[88] Also from 1895 to 1908, Harris & Sheldon shipped products to the United States through a company called J.R. Palmenberg and Sons who acted as their agent and retailer.[89] These examples show how considering the tools and techniques of display, and shopfittings in particular, as commodities and concepts participating in a global marketplace, adds a new layer to the business history of the department store. By analyzing the design, production, and consumption of the objects that facilitated the sale, or the shopfittings, in

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[86] Ibid. But by 1914, Le Printemps and Au Bon Marche had contracted the Parisian firm Siégel & Hommey. See Siégel & Hommey, *Illustrated Priced Catalogue of Étalages Vitrines et Accessoires pour Tous Commerces, Paris*, ink on paper, 1914–15, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

[87] For two interior views of Harris & Sheldon's work in Wertheim see *Red White and Blue Catalogue*, 1899, xxii, Harris & Sheldon Archive, Harris & Sheldon Group Ltd.

[88] E. Pollard & Co. Ltd. *General Display Equipment by Pollards* (London: E. Pollard & Company Ltd, 1920), 1.

[89] Harris & Sheldon Limited History, Harris & Sheldon Archive. Extant Palmenberg catalogues exist but make no mention of this Harris & Sheldon connection on which further research has proven so far inconclusive. See for example, J.R. Palmenberg and Sons, *Display Fixtures and Forms*, bound book with printed paper, 1896, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

addition to the merchandise itself, this thesis will propose a new way to examine the international nature of the material culture of the department store.

It is important to expand beyond the well-established narrative of the American Harry Selfridge bringing his American style-store to London's Oxford Street in 1909 and moreover to reveal how the growth of the display profession specific to the department store was cross Atlantic in scope. Leaders in the window display field including Frank L. Carr embarked on traveling lecture series. In 1901, the *Brisbane Courier* reported the "American decorator" Frank L. Carr "comes from America and the land of new ideas and he is at present engaged on a tour of the world…He has earned some glowing tributes in all parts of the United States and Europe, besides the principle cities of Australia."[90] The author of several publications, Carr's most influential work *The Wide-Awake Window Dresser* (1894) sold 6,000 copies in the United States, 1200 in England, and a few thousand in different parts of the Continent.[91] American and British periodicals covered the global development of display styles and techniques, giving preference to show windows. For instance in February of 1898, *The Show Window* sent a correspondent "to photograph the window decorations of all the European capitals."[92] An illustrated monthly column reported on his findings. As the major organ of the profession, *The Show Window* facilitated international conversation that became even more visible when in 1914, the National Association of Window Trimmers became the International Association of Display Men.

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[90] "An American Decorator," *The Brisbane Courier*, May 15 1901, 7.

[91] Ibid.

[92] "Our European Correspondent," *The Show Window*, February 1898, 85.

The Display Moment in the Life of the Commodity

Historians have primarily interpreted the department store as a site of consumption and as a producer of desire. Grace Lees-Maffei has recently drawn attention to mediation, the third element in a paradigm with production and consumption, as its own stream within design history. Following this stream leads to analysis of the display moment in the life of the commodity as a largely overlooked channel of mediation in the department store. Lees-Maffei writes, "…the mediation emphasis examines the extent to which mediating channels are themselves designed and therefore open to design historical analysis."[93] This research accordingly analyzes the conception, design, and construction of display. While other media outlets communicated via images and representations of objects, it is important to note that display distinguished itself by its physical objecthood, which had its own particularity. Print advertisements typically specified the intended use and user, while department store display was not always so practical and in fact often presented an entirely unique message specific to the stores' environment. This role of display was reserved for the space of the shop and its form and style were ultimately various. Display also constituted its own context, anchored neither in the production nor the use of the product itself. Moreover the significance of a display was not based in the value of its individual items but instead the overall visual effect and physical presence of their arrangement.

This concept of arrangement, the presentation of commodities in a pattern or artistically-devised format, constituted a significant new direction in nineteenth-century exhibition culture and was analyzed by important figures including Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel who located commodity fetishism in the display of objects. Upon a visit to the

[93] Grace Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," 351.

Berlin Trade Exhibition in 1896 Simmel observed "Commodity production…must lead to a situation of giving things an enticing external appearance over and above their usefulness…one must attempt to excite the interest of the buyer by means of the external attraction of the object, even indeed by the means of the form of its arrangement."[94] Here Simmel identifies the active process of display as a key component of "commodity production." Since mass production supplied department stores with great quantities of many of the same items, displaymen were thus charged with turning these everyday items into commodities by way of clever arrangements in order to convince consumers to purchase them at one store over another. Individually, such arrangements improved the "external attraction of the object" and when considered all together, in the show window and on the sales floor, these arrangements made up the overall "enticing external appearance" of the department store itself.

Therefore this "form of arrangement" became an increasingly important priority of department store culture in which consumers learned to view objects as a part of a larger retail environment and judge them in relationship to their surroundings, whether that be at the scale of the shelf that they were sitting on or the building in which they were housed. As retail expert Nathaniel Fowler advised in 1893, "In buying nowadays, appearance is not necessarily everything, but it has a great deal to do with the consummation of trade. A customer looking for a chair, or anything else, and finding that chair in an uninviting position, surrounded by nothing of eye-pleasing character, may buy the chair, but he is more likely to

[94] David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 95.

purchase it somewhere else, where the chair has a proper setting."[95] One of the department store's major contributions to retailing practice was, as Baudrillard described, the "creation of associations between objects through physical proximities and display techniques."[96] As such the displayman's work not only turned individual objects into commodities but also assigned new meaning to entire sets of goods depending on how they were grouped together. In extreme cases of imaginative transformation, the signification of the object could change entirely, for instance as toothbrushes became the hands of a clock in a commodity picture in a show window.

The agency of these commodity arrangements affected a crucial turn in the purchasing process as the major exchange was no longer a personal one between the customer and the salesperson but instead an elaborately mediated one between the customer and the goods themselves. Casework and stands allowed visual access to goods, whereby, similar to the show window, consumers could shop without touching. These fixtures simplified and streamlined the work of the selling staff, lessening the need for as many assistants behind the counter, while setting up opportunities for self-service.

While Rosalind Williams describes that in this transitional period "Active verbal interchange between customer and retailer was replaced by the passive, mute response of customer to things," this thesis will instead make the case for an active exchange between the customer and things, animated by the intermediary of display and its attendant tools and

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[95] Nathaniel C. Fowler, *Building Business: An Illustrated Manual for Aggressive Business Men* (Boston: The Trade Co., 1893), 43.

[96] Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society Myths and Structures* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 1998), 27. Baudrillard's points out how this concept of display has changed the "consumer's relation to the object" since in a display scenario, the consumer no longer relates to an object in its "specific utility, but to a set of objects in its total signification."

strategies.[97] A silent salesman was not necessarily a passive one and as Latour has theorized, objects, such as casework, can be considered as non-human actants.[98] Display was also a reactive medium and will be explored as a key conduit for myriad messages of modernity and cultural symbolism that embraced change and oftentimes contradiction.

Display staff fashioned objects into commodities by making them conspicuous. As American industrial designer George Nelson wrote in his book *Display* in 1956, "The word 'display' comes from a Latin root which means to unfold or to spread out. As used by us, in a variety of situations, it always conveys the idea of calling someone's attention to something by showing it in a conspicuous way."[99] Displaymen performed objects' transformation into commodities through acts as simple as elevating hats on a well-lit stand or acts as complex as incorporating hundreds of handkerchiefs into a sculptural arrangement. Consideration will be given to how this new "dramatic treatment" on the sales floor altered the meaning of the goods and facilitated new types of interactions between the public and the merchandise.[100] A focus on the labor of display will ask how displaymen encouraged consumers to consider the strategy and timing behind the design of the retail space.

A biographical approach towards the study of things, such as that established by Igor Kopytoff, is constructive in order to isolate and interrogate this shift from thing to commodity

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[97] Williams, *Dream Worlds,* 67.

[98] Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?", 239.

[99] George Nelson, *Display* (New York: Whitney Publications, 1953), 6.

[100] Leach, *Land of Desire,* 66.

that the department store facilitated and then exhibited.[101] Marx famously recognized "a form of magic in the material transformations that capitalism performed," such as wood worked to make a table, which "so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head…"[102] Marx highlights the transformative moment when an object moves from a "common every-day thing" to "something transcendent" as it enters the marketplace and assumes a new relevance "in relation to all other commodities." This thesis will uncover the displayman's role in designing and executing this transformation of the everyday object into a commodity and illuminate the tools and techniques involved in the "magic." While Marx does not account for the labor involved with this commodification process he does call attention to the particular stage in the life of an object when it is placed "in relation to all other commodities" that pinpoints the choreography involved in the creation of the department store display.[103] This creation process contributes to an understanding of the department store as a significant place of design production.

This study offers new readings of the commercial display moment in the life of the commodity as a distinct and professionally styled phase of mediation between production and consumption. At a time when there was felt both anxiety and attraction over the disconnection between goods' places of production and their places of distribution and consumption, the lifespan of the object was increasing in length and its pathway to

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[101] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–73.

[102] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 163f.

[103] Christoph Grunenberg and Max Hollein, *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 27–30.

production grew more complex. Marshall Field marketed this complexity as a captivating asset,

> A million articles of merchandise, each having a long history of development from a raw material to the finished product, involving in some degree almost every process of manufacture known to human ingenuity, each article having its definite place in the complexity of civilization, each the object of some one's effort to produce, and each the desire of some one's heart to possess – what a wealth of interesting suggestions these things might call up, if we but had the ability t to trace the history and associations of even a small part of them![104]

Marshall Field's narrative conjured up the awe that surrounded the complications and intricacies of mass production and demonstrated a fascination with tracing an object's pathway from raw material to finished product. This thesis will add another layer of inquiry that centers and expands on the life of the object solely within the four walls of the department store. In a final twist of interpretation, the displayman will be analyzed as one who uses goods, or these "finished products," as the raw material and for him, display becomes the final, yet ephemeral, product.

Theatrical Metaphors and Staging for Attraction

This practice of choreography, or creatively grouping objects on the sales floor and in the show window, has been aligned with the theatre both by displaymen and journalists at the time of its development as well as in its histories since. Selfridge observed, "The dressing out of the departments and the windows is done by specialized artists, men who study a window with the same care that the stage manager or scenic artist studies his stage effects."[105] Light,

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[104] *Marshall Field and Company Brochure*, 1913, 16023 (2), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

[105] Selfridge, *Romance of Commerce*, 337.

color, props, sight lines, and overall composition were concerns shared by the stage and the sales floor and show window. The metaphor can also be productively extended to understand how the displaymen provided objects with scripts, or roles, within the department store setting.

Madeline Akrich's concept of scripting is helpful in understanding the displayman's command over the form, use, and impact of objects in the visual merchandising sphere.[106] Akrich defines the concept of the script as the object's intended role and uses this notion to analyze an object's capabilities and the preconceived interactions between humans and objects. This study will present the display professional as one who superimposed the "script" of individual commodities, often intended for personal or domestic use, with his larger "script" of visual presentation as a grouping of objects intended for public commercial enticement.

At the same time, the script, as assigned by the displaymen, was vulnerable to alteration and even subversion. As the displaymen and the public interacted with the merchandise on the sales floor, displays could be damaged, misinterpreted, or altered from their preconceived appearance. Even though the arrangement of a layout or the orientation of a display attempted to direct consumer circulation and vision, these factors could be unpredictable. New analysis, particularly in the third chapter, will uncover how sophisticated shopfitting tools, whose script was to display, prescribed merchandise arrangements. Consideration will also be given to how casework not only generated fresh and renewable appearances for the shopping space but also increased efficiency in the department store.

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[106] Madeleine Akrich, "The De-Scription of Technical Objects," in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change,* ed. W.E. Bijker and J. Law (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1995), 205–24.

While theatrical metaphors were often used to describe and promote the work of the display staff, the theatre and the department store increasingly crossed over more literally in terms of their professionalization of display in the early twentieth century. In November of 1920, for instance, *MRSW* reported on the masterful displays by window dresser Louis Weisgerber for Lord & Taylor, "These windows have been attracting wide attention of late, not only from merchants and displaymen, but from specialists in interior decoration, theatrical producers and artists in general…Mr. Weisgerber is constantly being consulted by artists and experts in various branches of decoration and design."[107] This journalist reported on the demand for Weisgerber's talents in the theater, "David Belasco, perhaps the most skilled of modern theatrical producers, has conferred with Mr. Weisgerber at various times as to stage settings for forthcoming plays."[108] This sharing of staff between the department store and the theatre was positioned as a legitimization for the profession of display, "This evident appreciation must be gratifying, not only to Mr. Weisgerber and his employer, but to every display man who takes his calling seriously and is working to bring his art to a wider recognition of its true value."[109] Skill sets, tools, techniques and goals of professionalization all connected the department store in the theatre within a larger culture of show.

Ervin Goffman's theatrical metaphor of front stage and back stage action comes to life in the department store.[110] Whether in conspicuous view of the consumers or more often hidden from them, the planning and execution of the exhibition of commodities was of

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[107] "The Display at Lord and Taylor," *MRSW*, November 1920, 21.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ervin Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 75.

increasing consumer intrigue beginning in the late nineteenth century. Some stores practiced "open dressing" that made the process of the window display into a show of its own, meanwhile others executed the displays during off-hours or behind a curtain to dramatize the anticipation for the new show. The department store's capitalization on what Neil Harris has described as the "operational aesthetic" encouraged consumers to engage with the making of the display therefore forging a link between the production and the consumption of the retail environment. In his biography of P.T. Barnum, the ultimate master of showmanship, Neil Harris describes this "operational aesthetic" as "an approach to experience that equated beauty with information and technique."[111]

This thesis will explore how a central component of consumers' appreciation of the aesthetic impact of the retail environment was their curiosity and awe at how it had been created. Department stores actively promoted the behind the scenes aspects of their stores, affording the public a peek at the methods and mechanics of its function. As a 1913 Marshall Field's pamphlet described, a visitor may come to the store "to select articles one may need from its world-wide collections, or to view as a lover of the beautiful the many exquisite creations of art and handicraft" or "to study the mental mechanism of an organization which makes possible the harmonious operation of so vast an enterprise…"[112] This "mental mechanism" was discernible in the division of space and wares that was in line with a striving towards precise, rational thinking tied to scientific management.

This expression of control and efficiency was balanced by the creativity and experimentation of display that gave the department store its individual character. Display

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[111] Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 57.

[112] Marshall Field and Company Brochure, 1913, 16023 (2), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

tactics, broadly considered in this study from the building's monumental façade to the rotating novelty tabletop stand, were all central to the store's contemporaneity and altered in response to the influx of novel products and materials, advances in technology, and new approaches in business theory and design philosophy. The perception of display as "wide-awake" to trends, a phrase used often in reference to fashionable window display, communicated the store's upstanding reputation, instilled confidence in consumers, and encouraged repeat visitors.[113]

The department store environment, constructed of changeable commodity arrangements that aimed to repeatedly capture a sense of the present, was subject to the threat of its own ephemerality. As British retail expert Samson Clark advised,

> The fashion goods have to be the very last word, got speedily, advertised speedily, shown speedily, and sold speedily... It is swift work, and demands whole-hearted sympathy and cooperation, but the results are worth it. Things get tuned up to the proper hum, the assistants know they have the right stuff to handle, the house gets the reputation for up-to-the-minute vivacity.[114]

This ephemerality was at once an attractor for consumers and a provocative challenge for the displaymen, who developed innovative styles and systems of merchandise presentation to keep pace. By 1900, on average, Marshall Field's was selling one article of fur apparel every seven minutes.[115] The consumers' shopping experiences were irregular and the goods' lifespan within the store were discontinuous; display moments were fleeting and also detached from the rest of the objects' lifecycle. As historian Christoph Asendorf has

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[113] The term "wide-awake" comes from the title of Frederick Carr's manual *The Wide-Awake Window Dresser: A Treatise on the Art and Science of Show Window…* (New York: Dry Goods Economist, 1894). The term was widely used in articles and manuals on display as well as in advertisements by shopfitters. For instance the American periodical the *Dry Goods Economist* ran a regular column entitled "Wide-Awake Retailing" in the 1890s and early 1900s.

[114] Samson Clark, *Short Talks with Drapers* (London: Trade Press Association, 1916), 144–45.

[115] Twyman, *History of Marshall Field & Co.,* 103.

explained, in the late nineteenth century "things no longer inhabit a spatiotemporal continuum but exist only momentarily and in isolation."[116] To add another level of complexity, the states of commodities themselves became fractured and mutable as they assumed different design roles within the display structure and then were often physically transformed via folding and manipulation. The continual upgrading and redevelopment of the interior infrastructure further created a diachronic experience for the shopper. Not only was the store different from one visit to the next but this multiplicity was also contained with the store itself; the upper floors were often presented as a series of distinct interiors, or stage sets, through which the visitors could virtually travel around the world. The department store was a permanent edifice for the public to view ever changing spaces of display.

While stressing reliability in prices and sound business practices, the department store cultivated change and diversity in order to create a shopping environment in which nothing was fixed long enough to appear out of date. Goods were divided into an increasing number of departments, fracturing the shopping experience into more and more individual spaces and moments. As Pevsner observed the department store's "definition offers no problem. A department store is a store which consists of a multitude of departments – selling, as William Whiteley is alleged to have said, everything from pins to elephants."[117] Therefore at the core of the retail business was the amassing as well as the tactful splitting up of goods: "The term "retail," deriving from the French term "retaillier" means "to cut off, clip and divide" in terms of tailoring.[118] As a metaphor for their numerous departments, Siegel Cooper sold a box of wooden toothpicks, each printed with a laudatory name or catchphrase for a

[116] Asendorf, *Batteries of Life,* 5.

[117] Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, 267.

[118] Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums,* 13.

department such as "Fine Pianos," "Good Groceries," and "Stick to Siegel Cooper."[119] The box was stamped "75 Complete Stores Under One Roof," quantifying this store's experience while also encouraging the prospective consumer to imagine the possibilities of the contents within each of those seventy-five interiors contained by the department store. This program of division was driven by efficiency but articulated through differently styled displays that formed the transitions from one space to the next.

The department store therefore embodies modernity via a broad conception of display and the tensions that arose in the construction and composition of its design. Marshall Berman has written that nineteenth-century modernity was "capable of everything except solidity and stability."[120] Even though the department store aimed for a secure business reputation, this security relied on the stores' ability to embrace instability and multiplicity and take risks with regards to creative display practice. This thesis explores the department store within the context of these inconsistencies, offering a new model that embraces both pragmatism and paradox, and complicates the more familiar interpretation of the department store as a utopia and a dream world.

The leading figure of this thesis, the displayman, embraced the dual pursuits of art and commerce and was emblematic of the marriage of rationalization and theatricality. His position appeared listed in great organizational charts that had been systematized under the influences of scientific management. For example, in his memoir *The Romance of Commerce* (1918) Harry Gordon Selfridge included an "Organisation Chart of a 20th Century

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[119] Siegel Cooper Co., *Box of Toothpicks*, wooden toothpicks with printed ink, cardboard box, 1880–1920**,** New York Historical Society, New York.

[120] Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 19.

Department Store."[121] Under the "Manager of Sales" appears a category "Displays and Trims" that contains "Windows, Outlying Windows, Interior Displays, Merchandise Displays, Flowers and Palms, Electricity, Flags, and Scenic Work." This various list evinces the wide range of activities and areas that demanded the displayman's business savvy and imagination. While operating as an integral member of the optimally managed department store staff, these creative tasks also separated the displayman from the "mechanical, routine workers," as the *New York Times* pointed out in 1902.[122] The displayman prevailed by taking advantage of the department store's embrace of both rationalization and theatricality while relying on his creativity to turn heads and raise profits. As Selfridge advised "…this faculty of imagination is one of the most useful that the real man of Commerce can posses."[123]

The Ephemeral Record of the Department Store

This thesis mines a range of ephemera, much of which is presented and referenced here for the first time, in order to gain access to the world of department store display and expand the story of its historical impact. The department store produced an array of commemorative and promotional materials ranging from pamphlets and calendars to postcards and catalogues. While primarily advertisements, photographs, and catalogues, have been used for illustration or analysis in existing histories of the department store, this research looks specifically at this material for images and language around the store's attitude and approaches to display. Images of department store exteriors and interiors decorated fans, served as the subjects for postcards, illustrated catalogues and pamphlets, improved advertisements, and validated

[121] Selfridge, *The Romance of Commerce*, 366–67.

[122] "New School for Store Workers," *New York Times*, October 5, 1902, 29.

[123] Selfridge, *The Romance of Commerce*, 16.

success in manufacturers' catalogues. There are in fact cases of doubled mediation; this printed and photographic material promotes the store's promotional techniques.

As a concept and category of archival information, ephemera is ideal for capturing the various and fleeting appearances of the department stores' interior configurations. Yet the conceit and survival of ephemera is in itself yet another contradiction of department store culture. As Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O. Driscoll have recently pointed out there is irony in the fact that ephemera as it survives today was printed "to make an immediate intervention" but has been saved "to exemplify a type of discourse that is seen to have long-lasting worth."[124] This material was produced to meet an immediate need often tied to a one-time event. Marshall Field's for instance printed elaborate pamphlets and engraved invitations on the occasion of their reopening in Chicago in 1907 when the merchant spent $100,000 on a decoration scheme called the "Feast of Seasons" which was publicized as the "most elaborate artistic conception ever made use of for temporary purposes."[125] Photographs, drawings, and descriptions permanently captured these exact moments in time. Yet transience was the display's driving force. This research analyzes the perspective, content, and message of images of department store display while more broadly also considering how their content coincides or clashes with the visual culture of the period. Images of the department store rarely survive as stand alone works of art. Except for photographs of architectural record, with an agenda of documentation, images are more often embedded in a larger promotional agenda: included in a booklet, printed on an object or incorporated into a souvenir. Illustrated pamphlets were frequently arranged as a tour through the store in order to provide a preview

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[124] Kevin Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll, *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 3.

[125] "A Great Decoration Event," *Dry Goods Review*, Spring 1908, 52.

of the interiors, capitalizing on rationalization in the communication of these abstract spaces while also encouraging the recipient to engage their powers of imagination.[126]

This research also scrutinizes ephemera for the data that it contains. Eager to publicize their many achievements, modern features, latest merchandise and more, department store promotional materials tended to be verbose and full of facts and description. Product catalogues and advertisements are some of the most often cited evidential data of the department store. Whiteley's archive holds *Whiteley's General Catalogue* of 1885 that is 1251 pages in length, leather-bound, and contains black and white as well as color illustrations. The impressive scale of the catalogue itself is indicative of the magnitude of the store's offerings and the high quality of its production speaks to a robust advertising budget. Harrods took great pride in their "Harrods Illustrated." The store described "its encyclopedia of personal and household requirements" as "a massive volume, bound in cloth, and comprising upwards of 1,400 illustrated pages." A promotional book detailed, "nearly 100 tons of paper are used in printing it; and copies are forwarded to clients in every part of the world."[127] But more than solely a record of the articles on offer, the catalogue was interspersed with full-page views of the selling environments for the goods, similar to the illustrated pamphlets discussed above. Such catalogues therefore depicted two stages in the life of an object, first as a static, sole commodity in the form of a line drawing and then as a part of a larger dynamic merchandise arrangement on the sales floor.

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[126] For more on illustrated guides see Paul Dobraszczyk, "City Reading: The Design and Use of Nineteenth-Century London Guidebooks," *Journal of Design History* 25 (2012): 123–44.

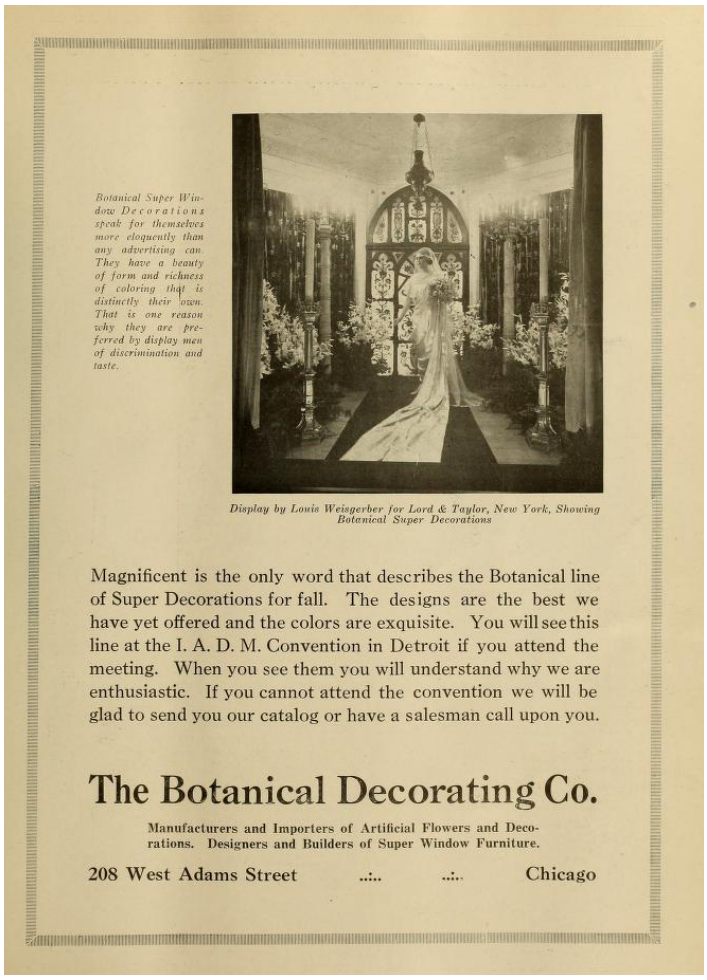
[127] Harrod's Ltd., *The House That Every Woman Knows* (London: Harrods, Ltd., 1909), np. The totality of the catalogue was represented by Harrod's trademarked symbol embossed on the front cover: a female figure, the Greek Goddess Nike sitting atop the earth, holding a cornucopia with the phrase "Harrods Serves the World." The department store's slogan "Omnia Omnibus Ubique" (All Things for All People Everywhere) further reinforces the message. See *Harrod's Illustrated General Catalogue*, 1902, Harrod's Archive, Harrod's Corporate Affairs.

Images and ephemera will be analyzed for evidence of the material culture of display with a particular focus on the shopfittings that facilitated the sale. Kenneth Ames has written on the value of the trade catalogue in locating information relating to "the supply side of the profusion and proliferation" of the late nineteenth century consumer market. [128] The department store involves a network of manufacturers and technologies including shopfitting firms, mannequin makers, electrical companies, showcard producers, and backboard manufacturers, each of which produced their own set of ephemera, primarily in the form of catalogues. Following in Ames's steps, this thesis will "demonstrate documentary and interpretive potential" of these trade catalogues.[129] Similar to the merchandise catalogues of the department stores themselves, these manufacturers were eager to show their goods in context and thus photographs and drawings of the department store interior feature to animate the stock lists.

Fixtures companies also advertised their products at work in the department store interior so as to give a lifelike effect as well as to promote the endorsement of a well-known establishment. For instance, in a 1920 advertisement in *MRSW* the Botanical Decorating Company showed their flowers in position in a Lord & Taylor show window (fig. 7).

[128] Kenneth L. Ames, "Trade Catalogues and the Study of History," in *Accumulation & Display: Mass Marketing Household Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simmon J. Bronner (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1986), 7.

[129] Ibid.



Botanical Super Window Decorations speak for themselves more eloquently than any advertising can. They have a beauty of form and richness of coloring that is distinctly their own. That is one reason why they are preferred by display men of discrimination and taste.

Display by Louis Weisgerber for Lord & Taylor, New York, Showing Botanical Super Decorations

Magnificent is the only word that describes the Botanical line of Super Decorations for fall. The designs are the best we have yet offered and the colors are exquisite. You will see this line at the I. A. D. M. Convention in Detroit if you attend the meeting. When you see them you will understand why we are enthusiastic. If you cannot attend the convention we will be glad to send you our catalog or have a salesman call upon you.

The Botanical Decorating Co.

Manufacturers and Importers of Artificial Flowers and Decorations. Designers and Builders of Super Window Furniture.

208 West Adams Street ..:.. ..:.. Chicago

Figure 7. The Botanical Decorating Co., Advertisement, *MRSW*, July 1920, 73. Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Smithsonian Libraries.

In addition to being valuable for its documentation of the faux flower product, this advertisement also records the architecture of the Lord & Taylor show window, lighting technologies, the use of a mannequin, as well as gives the rare name of the window display designer, Louis Weisgerber. Retail trade periodicals contain many such advertisements as well as articles that extol the value of a particular product or approach to display, showing the interconnectedness of display design with its network of manufactures that supplied the tools and decorations.

The specialized trade press played an important role in the professionalization of the display field, providing a platform for the sharing of knowledge among displaymen, creating a readership of attentive consumers, and serving as the means to encourage a global dialogue about the advancements in display work.[130] The London periodical *The Draper's Record* and the American equivalent the *Dry Goods Economist* began to regularly report on window novelties in the late 1880s. In 1897 L. Frank Baum founded *Show Window*, the first American magazine entirely devoted to merchandise display. Clippings from these periodicals are reliably present in department store archives often stored in scrapbooks kept by the businesses themselves. Guidebooks were also central to the publicity and validation of the profession. While advice literature can often be idealistic (and therefore misleading), the majority of the advice literature for the display field is instead practical and sometimes even illustrated in ways that prove its implementation in well-known department stores. This research will draw a direct link between prescription and practice by charting the impact of advice literature onto realized displays, particularly in the show window, to prove that displaymen were paying close attention to the design literature of the field and following its suggestions. Guidebooks help us to understand how designers as authors represented their skills and laid claim to techniques. Leaders' desire to document the profession and their contributions to it produced a plentiful body of advice literature.

Sources and Chapter Structure

Ephemera provides access to how display was created, promoted, and presented as well as to the network of people, objects, and ideas involved in its development. Ephemera is itself a

[130] For more on retail trade periodicals see Chris Hosgood, "The Shopkeeper's 'Friend': The Retail Trade Press in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 25 (1992): 164–72.

form of mediation, used here to explore the complexity of display as a mediator. Grace Lees-Maffei has written that "The mediation focus enables recognition of the fact that design is much more than the object; it is a complex web of surrounding practices and discourses."[131] Architects, shopfitters, and displaymen are at the center of this web and their historical record can be traced through sources held by a range of repositories; this research has been conducted at company archives, libraries (local and national), historical societies, print rooms, and in the stores that still stand.

Distinct department store archives are for the most part housed at city historical societies and local libraries, which speaks to the department store's legacy as a landmark and source of pride for its town or city. In Chicago, the Marshall Field and Company archive is at the Chicago History Museum; in New York, B. Altman material is at the New York Historical Society and the Abraham and Straus archive is held by the Brooklyn Historical Society; in London the Bon Marché Brixton archive is at the Lambeth Library and the records of William Whiteley are at the Westminster City Archive. The John Lewis archive celebrates its own regional history by occupying a site in the town of Cookham that includes an original pottery used to make items for John Lewis stores during World War II. Few department store archives (relating to this 1880 to 1920 period) remain in the hands of the businesses themselves. Macy's is one important exception; the archive is held at Macy's in Brooklyn, New York that occupies the former building of Abraham and Straus on Fulton Street (fig.1). This archive is fittingly housed within the Macy's Parade department, the store's Thanksgiving Day parade being one of its proudest and longest-standing traditions. The House of Fraser collection at the University of Glasgow is rich and rare in the depth of

[131] Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," 372.

its holdings, ranging from ledger books to photographs, of five leading department stores: D.H. Evans, Derry & Tom's, Dickins and Jones, John Barker and Co, and Ponting Brothers.

The interconnectedness of these leading department stores is evident through the cross-referencing of stores across the archives; articles often pitted department stores against one another, presidents corresponded with one another particularly at the time of openings and renovations, and key individuals shifted stores (such as Harry Gordon Selfridge's tenure at Marshall Field's).[132] The contents of the archives overall reveal the great range of promotional material, business records, and correspondence that was involved in the upkeep and the promotion of these immense institutions. Scrapbooks, primarily of clippings and advertisements, featured in a number of archives and this format reveals the stores' self-consciousness of the historical value of such records.

The maintenance of these archives in the first place implies the stores' awareness and confidence in their own role in the shaping of modern retail. The majority of the material contained in these store archives was presumably assembled by the businesses themselves; there is little within these archives that reveals the history of their assembly. One notable exception is a letter from a Miss de Choiseul to the President of Messrs. H.R. Macy & Co., dating to 1929, in the Macy's archive that references the archival practice of department stores at large at that time. Miss de Choiseul writes that she has in her possession a "small colored Christmas advertisement" of Macy's from 1874. She continues, "As all the more important stores in New York seem to be trying to obtain anything that makes reference to

[132] See for instance, congratulatory notes to E.H. Macy on the occasion of his new store in 1902: Letter from B. Altman, November 8, 1902, and Telegraph from Saks & Co., November 8, 1902, Box 10, Macy's Archive.

their former business, I think that this might possibly interest you."[133] This letter suggests that department stores' practice of cataloging their own histories was made public knowledge. Due to their continual reinvention, stores' need and desire to record the history of a "former business" was imminent before the next stage brought total renewal. Urging further for her advertisement's inclusion in the Macy's archive, Miss de Choiseul indicated that the advertisement was "framed and in perfect condition," reflecting on her reverential attitude towards department store ephemera, an outlook presumably shared by her fellow consumers since an ample amount of such material survives today.[134]

This thesis draws display evidence out of these archives from account books, calendars, catalogues, invitations, telegrams, correspondence, advertisements, photographs, postcards and more. While no archives for professional display groups survive in America, the British Association of Displaymen has an extensive archive at the Victoria & Albert Museum's Archive of Art and Design although the majority of the material is outside of the scope of this thesis since the organization was founded in 1919.

One of this thesis's major contributions to scholarship is a closer examination of the role, products, and influence of the shopfitting industry made possible through archival research and examination of underrepresented primary materials. The British shopfitting firm Harris & Sheldon holds a never-before-published collection of material including a few internally written histories, merchandise catalogues, press clippings, and a set of documentary photographs that all shed new light on the design profession. A sizable number of shopfitter catalogues can be found in libraries, both public and within museums, historical societies and ephemera collections although these sources have barely been given any scholarly

[133] Letter, Miss de Choiseul to the President of Messrs. H.R. Macy & Co., January 16, 1929, Macy's Archive.

[134] Ibid.

attention.[135] The Hagley Library, the library and archives at the National Museum of American History, and the Winterthur Library - all resources with a particular interest and focus on the history of American industry and material culture - were particularly useful for their ephemera holdings. The institutional archive of the Natural History Museum in London contains correspondence with the British shopfitting firm Harris & Sheldon, proof that considering the department store within a larger culture of show can lead to new sources of information. Shopfitters' catalogues, as well as department store advertisements and pamphlets are also present in the print departments of major museums, suggesting their artistic merit as well as their potential perceived status as material culture at their time of acquisition.[136]

While acknowledging the biased agendas behind the promotional sources within these archives, this thesis also "celebrates the suggestive connections to be made" between this ephemera and the other aspects of the department store's historical record.[137] The motivations of the biased agendas are worth considering in their own right. As historian Robert Proctor has written, images of the department store were produced to serve distinct purposes; perspectives in renderings for advertisements tend to be exaggerated in order to dramatize, interior photographs often lack people to give a clear view and therefore afford little sense of scale, meanwhile the technical nature of architectural drawings can obscure stylistic or

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[135] See the holdings of the Hagley Museum and Library, the National Museum of American History, the Winterthur Library, the New York Historical Society and the British Library.

[136] See the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

[137] Christopher Breward discusses his approach to "reading the male fashion subject through an ephemeral record" in his PhD thesis. See Christopher John Breward, "Manliness and the Pleasures of Consumption: Masculinities, Fashion and London Life, 1860–1914" (PhD thesis, Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum, 1998), 18–20.

cultural interpretation. As Proctor concludes, "there are no objective sources…the department store is only visible to us through the many prismatic facets of its contemporaries' minds."[138] The multifaceted nature of this thesis's source material, taking into consideration a wide range of perspectives, from consumers and designers to business owners and manufacturers, contributes to an understanding of the department store as, in the words of Proctor, a "cubist" or complex and fractured experience that marked it as modern.

My archival and primary research yielded of a wealth of new empirical evidence that puts facts, figures, and recorded experience and events behind the department store's impressionistic reputation as a vast and influential institution of the modern city. For instance while scholars repeatedly tell of the bountiful and beautiful qualities of department store show windows, chapter two specifies the material, technological, and visual qualities and techniques that shopfitters and window dressers used in tandem to make such an impression.

The original conception for this research project was to work on the material culture of the department store, which I had initially hoped would be a history built around the surviving objects that these institutions sold. After some initial research I did find a number of objects in museum collections, but I also faced the difficulty that the retailers of objects, in general, are neither often known nor recorded. As the department store of this 1880 to 1920 period did not sell much branded merchandise, the attachment between retailer and object was often difficult to decipher. Even when I did discover department store receipts in various archives, as evidence of shopping practices, the marriage of the receipt and a surviving object was for the most part unfeasible.[139] In my search for physical objects, I found instead images

[138] Proctor, "A Cubist History," 229.

[139] In the course of my research there has been one notable exception. The Sambourne Family Archive contains receipts of purchases by Linley and Marion Sambourne from London department stores Maple & Co., John Barker, Derry and Toms, and Liberty's. A number of these receipts list objects

and descriptions of objects on display. I discovered that the story of the material culture of the department store was not best told through the isolated objects that these stores sold but instead through the ephemeral record of the overall design of the store itself that involved many objects, those for sale and those that supported the sale, in relationship with one another.

The narrative of this thesis follows two primary pathways of movement -- that of the consumer and that of the merchandise. In general, the narrative moves from the sidewalk, through the ground floor, and ascends to the upper tiers of the store. Chapters are organized around environments in which the two pathways converge and the consumer and the merchandise meet and interact visually and physically. Each chapter uncovers the design considerations of these meeting points, such as the façade, the show window, the merchandise counter, and the showroom, and their interplay of art and commerce, use of technology, and messages of modernity.

The first chapter centers on how the department store was an important center of pioneering architectural thought and practice as merchandising problems and possibilities became the responsibilities of the architectural profession. It will argue that the department store actively pursued, executed, and advertised renovation in order to communicate to their customers that their business exemplified the materials, structures, and attitudes of modernity. Whether remodeling an existing building or constructing a purpose-built structure, architects aimed for the creation of a shopping space that would attract visitors in its communication of honesty and soundness in business as well as versatility and adaptability to technology and modern marketing practices. The communication of the store as a series of departments and

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that survive in their London home at 18 Stafford Terrace. See Maple & Co. receipts, ST/1/6/102, 1883–89; John Barker receipts, ST/1/6/133, 1890–97; Derry and Tom's receipts ST/1/6/134, 1894–97; Liberty's receipts 1890-94; Derry and Tom's receipts, ST/2/4/5/1/1, 1890–91; Sambourne Family Archive, 18 Stafford Terrace, London.

as a segmented shopping space, demarcated floor by floor, will be explored through architecture whose structure importantly laid the foundation for the fragmentation and multiplicity that defined the shopping experience.

From the late nineteenth century, show windows in leading American department stores became progressively sophisticated due to the imaginative techniques of their designers, the organizational framework of supportive fixtures, and the dynamism of modern technologies. The second chapter explores how in addition to revealing new products to the public, these window displays also showcased the skills and tools of the developing window dressing profession. Consumers first actively assessed a store's quality and personality based on an evaluation of the window dresser's work from the sidewalk. This chapter will trace the behind-the-scenes construction process of the window arrangement and establish the department store as a site of design production.

The third chapter will highlight the role of the shopfitter in facilitating provocative interactions between people, both employees and the public, and the merchandise. Shopfittings such as glass casework and sculptural stands presented consumers with new ways of viewing and interacting with merchandise that favored organization and efficiency while still allowing for the creativity of the displaymen. These fixtures exhibited agency as "silent salesmen" and signaled a new approach and attitude towards retail in which the primary exchange was often no longer between the customer and the salesperson, but the customer and the merchandise, as mediated by display. This chapter will look closely at shopfittings as design objects subject to shifts in principles of scientific retailing as well as stylistic movements.

The final chapter will trace how the mercantile interior decorators devised a modern format for the large-scale commercial retail environment that balanced the authenticity of the

merchandise with fanciful atmospheric effect. Displaymen combined disparate objects and assigned them new and shifting meanings and associations as commodities on display. Department stores effectively used interior styling to enhance the identity of their business and their products while often detaching consumers from their urban surroundings. By staging the department store as an interior of interiors, the displaymen activated multiple shopping experiences at once filled with time-travel by way of historical settings, foreign trips made "real" by imported commodities, and a peek into the private domestic sphere through the use of the model room. This chapter will also point to the department store's role as a training ground for the profession of interior design.

All four chapters will explore how the business goals of rationalization and optimization converged with the creative goals of theatricality and variation to produce ambitious displays on permanent view and yet in continual flux. These dualities along with the speed at which they operated and the fragmented experience that they created will be explored as signals of the department store's alignment with modernity. Investigation of these themes will reveal what informed and motivated the design decisions of architects, window dresssers, shopfitters, and interior decorators. A new orientation towards display design as a process and as a completed visual presentation will bring to the fore issues of materials and technologies and reveal how elements of infrastructure, shopfittings, decorations, and the merchandise itself came together under the direction of display professionals. Evaluation of display's production strengthened with first-hand descriptions and representations will together compose a new picture of the department store with display as a driving force behind the stores' creative and economic success, urban appeal, and cultural impact. This thesis will proceed from the exterior to the interior and the first chapter will explore how department stores' architectural framework facilitated the staging of merchandise and suggest how

architecture can be interpreted as an element of the department stores' changeable display program itself.

Chapter One
Department Store Architecture: Building as Display

This chapter will explore how the architecture of the department store was consciously intended to facilitate a modern shopping experience via visual and stylistic language, industrial and technical ingenuity, and most importantly, a nearly constant and visible exercise of renovation and refashioning. The department store was an active site of design production and regeneration not only in terms of its displays but also in terms of its overall architectural scheme. Therefore it is necessary to consider the architecture of the store as a set of designed elements whose ideal composition was constantly undergoing transformation rather than settled as a finished building. As Lewis Mumford has written, "if the vitality of an institution may be gauged by its architecture, the department store was one of the most vital institutions of the era…"[1] The impetus behind this continual architectural change was indeed the drive to build a better environment for the display of merchandise. While display ascended in the department store's business model, architects conceived of strategies to prioritize the best space and conditions for commodity presentation.

At the turn of the twentieth century, architects developed an ambitious form of large-scale architecture that considered its inhabitants specifically as prospective purchasers and directly responded to their needs and desires to view and buy merchandise. Windows grew, aisles widened, vistas expanded, lighting intensified, and the movement of goods and people quickened. This new form of architecture, interpreted here as a crucial element of the overall display scheme of the department store, was susceptible to and in fact emblematic of a number of the contradictory challenges that department store display faced at large. While the

[1] Lewis Mumford quoted in Pasdermadjian, *The Department Store*, 24.

department store promoted a message of reliability in terms of sound business practice, it was also necessary for the store's architecture to be receptive to change in response to the influx of novel products and materials, advancements in technology, and shifts in business theory and design philosophy. Retail architecture was not a neutral container for goods but instead a space built with an agenda of symbolism, promotion, and urbanism.

The built environment of the department store, in terms of its external and internal architecture, sent alternative messages of permanence and impermanence, at both great and small scales. For instance the civic and permanent language of the classical style, seen through the use of dramatic friezes and colossal columns, contrasted with the temporary nature inherent in the fashionable and often feminized interior displays. Architectural historian Richard Longstreth has identified commercial buildings as "vessels, efficient containers of flexible space, their form determined by one set of demands and their internal organization dictated by others."[2] This friction between exterior and interior configured a changeable experience for the visitor. As a result of this opposition, the resulting spatial order, as Longstreth described could be "quite loose or very particularized and, in either instance, often modified or soon outmoded."[3] No matter the particulars of the finished scheme, changeability was an underlying factor. Yet while acknowledging this exterior/interior binary that Longstreth highlights, this thesis will also point to how demands and desires of display as a unifying factor shaped both the form of retail architecture and stores' interior organization.

Contrasting regulations in building codes determined a number of notable divergences in the development of department store architecture between America and Britain, but

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[2] Longstreth, "Compositional Types in American Commercial Architecture," 14.

[3] Ibid.

architects, for the most part, aimed to achieve a similarly symbolic yet highly functional and enticing type of building, with like-minded goals of light, circulation, organization, and modernization. Architects did not confine their work to a single city and instead were eager to exert their influence in multiple locations. For instance Daniel Burnham, famous for his work on the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, also worked in Chicago on the Marshall Field and Company building (1902); in New York he had a hand in John Wanamaker's (1906) and Gimbel's (1909) and in London he was involved with Selfridge's (1908–09). Department store executives travelled internationally to evaluate and experience the buildings of their competitors and brought back ideas to implement in their home cities. In 1909, Mr. John Lawrie, the managing director of Whiteley's in London embarked on a five weeks' trip to America "with the express purpose of studying the buildings of the great stores of the States, as in all probability Messrs. Whiteley will shortly be making considerable extensions to their Queen's-road premises, and the directorate are desirous of erecting a new building which will be second to none in London."[4] Upon his return Mr. Lawrie surmised, "For a big store, I hardly think it would be possible to improve upon the Marshall Field building in Chicago."[5] The light-filled dome at the new Whiteley's was no doubt inspired by the remarkable mosaic dome designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany for Marshall Field's in Chicago.[6] Through the travel of practitioners and the spread of ideas and images via the trade press, overarching goals of retail architecture developed outside of the confines of national borders.

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[4] "Mr. John Lawrie's Visit to the States: The Style of Building Most Suitable for a Large Store," *The Drapers' Record*, September 11 1909, 637–38.

[5] Ibid.," 637.

[6] In 1902, Louis Comfort Tiffany's glass dome for Marshall Field's became the largest glass mosaic in the world. Composed of 1,600,000 pieces of iridescent glass, the dome was compared by a local art critic to the nave of St. Peter's in Rome. See Marjorie Rosenberg, "A Sad Heart at the Department Store," *American Scholar*, 54 (Spring 1985): 183.

Stores advocated for their architecture's persuasive style and efficiency; consumers accordingly perceived that the building itself enhanced the currency of the store's visual identity as well as the presentation and value of the merchandise it sold. Postcards, photographs, and illustrated advertisements promoted architectural imagery and the new narrative of consumption that it offered. These sources have been chosen here for visual analysis due to their often-immersive imagery and their positioning of the viewer as consumer. The American picture postcard was born during the World's Columbian Exposition and its true growth came after July 1 1898 when Congress granted privately printed postcards the same one-cent mailing privileges given government cards.[7] Historian Neil Harris explains, "Most significant is that the postcard ordered the urban landscape unlike anything that had preceded it – a landscape filled with commercial structures and human transactions."[8] The department store heavily utilized the postcard to reinforce their leading role in their home cities.

Each major alteration to the department store's architectural structure affected the cityscape and importantly provided an occasion to advertise, celebrate with new displays, invite the public for appraisal, and compare the creative and technical advancements of the most recent generation of store against the earlier ones. An advertisement published October 10th 1903 for the opening of the new Schlesinger and Mayer store in the *Chicago Tribune* invited the public to take the role of architectural spectators (fig. 8).

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[7] Neil Harris, "Urban Tourism and the Commercial City," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William Robert Taylor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 72.

[8] Ibid.

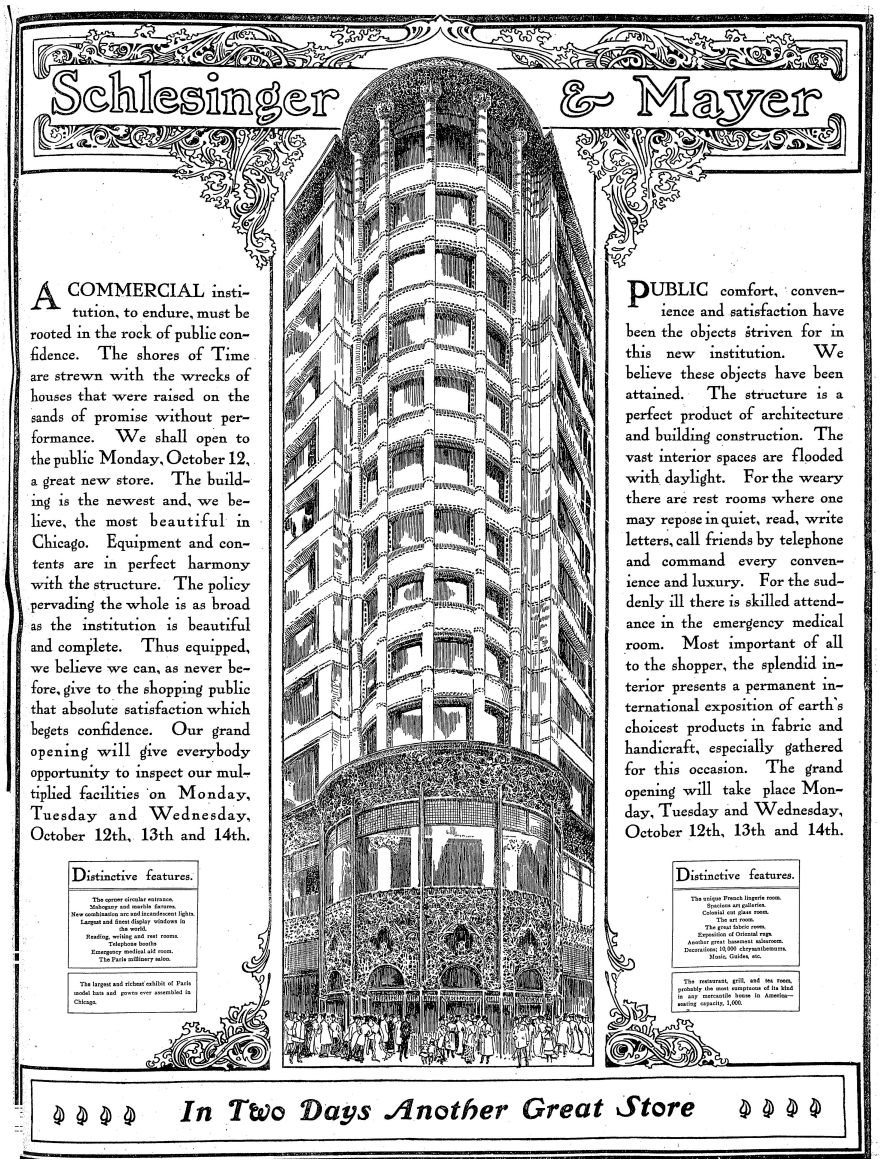


Figure 8. Schlesinger & Mayer, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1903, 5. Source: *Chicago Tribune* Archive.

The advertisement positioned the building, a "perfect product of architecture and building construction," as central to the earning of "public confidence" and the enabling of the optimal shopping experience:

> A commercial institution, to endure, must be rooted in the rock of public confidence…We shall open to the public on Monday October 12, a great new store. The building is the newest and, we believe, the most beautiful in

> Chicago. Equipment and contents are in perfect harmony with the structure. The policy pervading the whole is as broad as the institution is beautiful and complete. Thus equipped, we believe we can, as never before, give to the shopping public that absolute satisfaction which begets confidence.[9]

The advertisement featured the rounded façade of the building's corner, characterized by Louis Sullivan's cast iron ornament at its entrance, second-floor show windows, and towering twelve stories. A group of customers at ground level appear overshadowed by the building's magnitude, designed to impress. The advertisement also invited the reader "to inspect our multiplied facilities" and included a list of "distinctive features" including, and listed foremost, "The corner circular entrance, mahogany and marble fixtures, new combination arc and incandescent lights" and the "largest and finest display windows in the world." This list of technological and luxurious stylistic attributes enumerated Schlesinger and Mayer's commitment to a modern retail environment. Such focused advertising attention on the experience of the building encouraged the public to consider the style and structure of the building itself as embodying the store's superiority. Meanwhile the advertisement's tag line, "In Two Days Another Great New Store," promised a new retail experience and was embedded with a message of reinvention. Continual alterations and renovations in infrastructure concurrent with cycles of change in merchandise display together created a perpetually changeable shopping environment.

First the façade will be evaluated as a historically changeable architectural element that took on new potential as a messenger of fashionability once it became dominated and animated by the show window. Following sections will address how the department store fashioned and advertised itself alternatively as a classical monument, a civic structure, and a mechanical and technological feat. All of these seemingly discordant styles and meanings

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[9] Schlesinger & Mayer, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1903, 5.

combined to create a modern architectural expression that was the ideal setting for the display of goods.

Retail Architecture and the Visibility of Construction

Upon the opening of Lord & Taylor's new building at 20th and Broadway in 1871, a New York newspaper reported, "It has been said that no one could have the best house in New York for more than a day; for, by the time it was done, somebody would be putting up a better one."[10] From the late nineteenth century, the construction sites of commerce were the grounds for real estate battles and stores were in constant competition to expand as rapidly, efficiently, and impressively as possible. When Abraham and Straus first opened as a small dry-goods shop in Brooklyn in 1865 its dimensions were twenty-five by ninety feet, the same size as the food shop alone within the larger department store in 1965.[11] The store underwent twenty-eight expansions in its first one hundred years, from 1865 to 1965.[12]

The construction process of the department store was instrumental to the visual impression of the modern shopping city and buildings in the process of rising and expanding were prominent on the sidewalk. As the *Dry Goods Economist* reported in 1902, "Probably the majority of ECONOMIST readers are familiar with the exterior plans of the new Macy store, having seen it in its unfinished condition on their visits to New York."[13] Similarly, in

[10] "The New Building of Lord and Taylor," *Christian Union*, October 1, 1870, 2.

[11] Press Release: The Pioneering in Abraham and Straus' First Century, Feb 14 1865–Feb 14 1965, 1, ARC.223, Box 1, Folder 2, Abraham & Straus Collection.

[12] Press Release: The First Century of Abraham & Straus, 1, Abraham & Straus Collection.

[13] "Macy & Co.'s New Store," *Dry Goods Economist*, November 15, 1902, 19, 8B Box 10, Macy's Archive.

an article on the opening of the new Siegel Cooper "shopping resort" in 1896, a journalist remarked on the store's construction as of careful public notice: "Some of the features of the vast establishment have been for weeks familiar to the public. Architecturally, the building is a distinct gain to the shopping district."[14] The visibility of stores' construction processes publicly indicated improvement and signaled the promise of new display possibilities and amenities. An advertising trope developed whereby stores illustrated their architectural genealogy to exhibit their financial prowess and stylistic evolution.[15] Therefore the act of the building's construction, considered here more broadly as a form of design production, was an important element of the department store's advertising scheme as well as essential to the vital qualities of the department store experience.

At times of expansion, stores aimed to keep as much of their selling space accessible and active as possible while construction on other areas of the store was underway. For instance during the building of Mandel's department store in Chicago, "each section of the old building was used by the owner for merchandising, while the caissons were being installed. The south section was in continuous use until the new north section could be used."[16] (fig. 9)

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[14] "Big Store Thrown Open: A Dress Rehearsal at the New Shopping Resort," *New York Times*, September 13, 1896, 16.

[15] See for instance "The Progress of Harrods" illustration that shows the genealogy of the department store's architectural history through its six buildings, up to the current building in Knightsbridge. "The Progress of Harrods," *The Harrodian Gazette*, April 4, 1913, 21, Harrod's Archive.

[16] Hope Edwin Reum, "Methods Used in Erecting a Modern Department Store in Chicago" (B.S. thesis, University of Illinois, 1913), 1.



Figure 9. Mandel's Department Store, Corner of State and Madison Streets, Chicago, May 12, 1911 in Hope Edwin Reum, "Methods Used in Erecting a Modern Department Store in Chicago." B.S. thesis, University of Illinois, 1913.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

In 1913 this building project served as the focus for a thesis in the College of Engineering at the University of Illinois. The student explained that this Mandel's building, a "modern, fireproof eighteen-story department store," was built in Chicago under these "rather unusual conditions," in which the building remained as an active place of business while it was also a

building site.[17] Shopping and construction occurred side by side, making the building's renovation a highly visible and likely audible element of the store's experience.

These circumstances put new demands on the architectural and engineering professions, further complicating the existing technological challenges of erecting a tall, fireproof steel-framed structure. The paper continued, "The construction of such a building presents problems of great interest to the architect, the engineer, and the contractor, because of new ideas, modern methods and advanced theories involved."[18] The use of a temporary retaining-wall and cribbing supports during excavation were two technological solutions in the case of the Mandel's expansion. With every new department store came new challenges of fitting the store into its allotted footprint, choosing the appropriate format and style for the building itself, and most importantly, encouraging its growth and alteration to better suit the needs of display.

Constructing the Department Store: Classical Style and New Materials for the Façade

According to historians Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried, "Storefronts have always been directly associated with myths about progress and change, especially about the need to change appearance in order to stay competitive."[19] The storefront was an adaptable field and valued as a stylistic statement that could be read at first glance by consumers for evidence of the quality and personality of the business that it advertised. In January of 1916 *MRSW*

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 2.

[19] Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried, *American Vernacular Interior Architecture, 1870-1940* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1988), 369.

reported, “Someone has truthfully said that he could tell how progressive a merchant was by the appearance of his store front and how well his windows were trimmed.”[20]

From the eighteenth century, classical styles of architecture were ideally suited to the shop front as the entablature provided a place for the shop name and the cornice provided weather protection for the windows below.[21] Doorposts took the form of pilasters and fanlights were frequent over doors. Retail architecture’s roots lay in the neo-classical, in part due to these practical implications and undoubtedly also due to the style’s associations with permanence and reliability, which persisted well into the twentieth century. In addition, retail architecture’s embrace of the neoclassical in both the eighteenth century as well as the early nineteenth century secured it in direct alignment with the fashion system.

New choices in building materials also served as outright visual signals of modernity as well as of revision. Pioneer department store owner A.T. Stewart identified his stores based on their building material as in the cases of the Marble Palace (1846) and the Cast Iron Palace (1862). A.T. Stewart produced an effect of “palatial magnificence” when on September 10, 1846, his Marble Palace opened on Broadway between Chambers and Reade Streets (fig. 10).[22] Amidst the dull brick buildings on Broadway, Stewart’s establishment, in the Anglo-Italian palazzo style, rose four stories high with walls clad in brilliant Tuckahoe

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[20] “Model Fronts,” *MRSW*, February 1916, 62.

[21] For a classical storefront see *Outlines of Designs for Shop-fronts and Door-cases with the Mouldings at Large, and Enrichments to Each Design* (London: I & J Taylor’s Architectural Library, 1792), plate 8. For a description of the classically styled Harvey and Sons in Ludgate Hill, one of the first London area stores to have double height show windows, see “Shops of London,” *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, October 16 1841, 249.

[22] In 1853 *Putnam’s Monthly* regretted in reference to Stewart’s Marble Palace that "There is no warehouse in London, nor in any other European city approaching some of the large and splendid establishments in Broadway, nor is there any shop in the world to rival the palatial magnificence of that on the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street." See “New York Daguerotyped,” *Putnam’s Monthly*, February 1853, 139 quoted in Winston Weisman, “Commercial Palaces of New York: 1845–1875,” *The Art Bulletin* 36 (December 1954): 286.

marble. Columns announced the building as elegant as well as substantial and a row of fifteen large plate glass windows lined the street level.

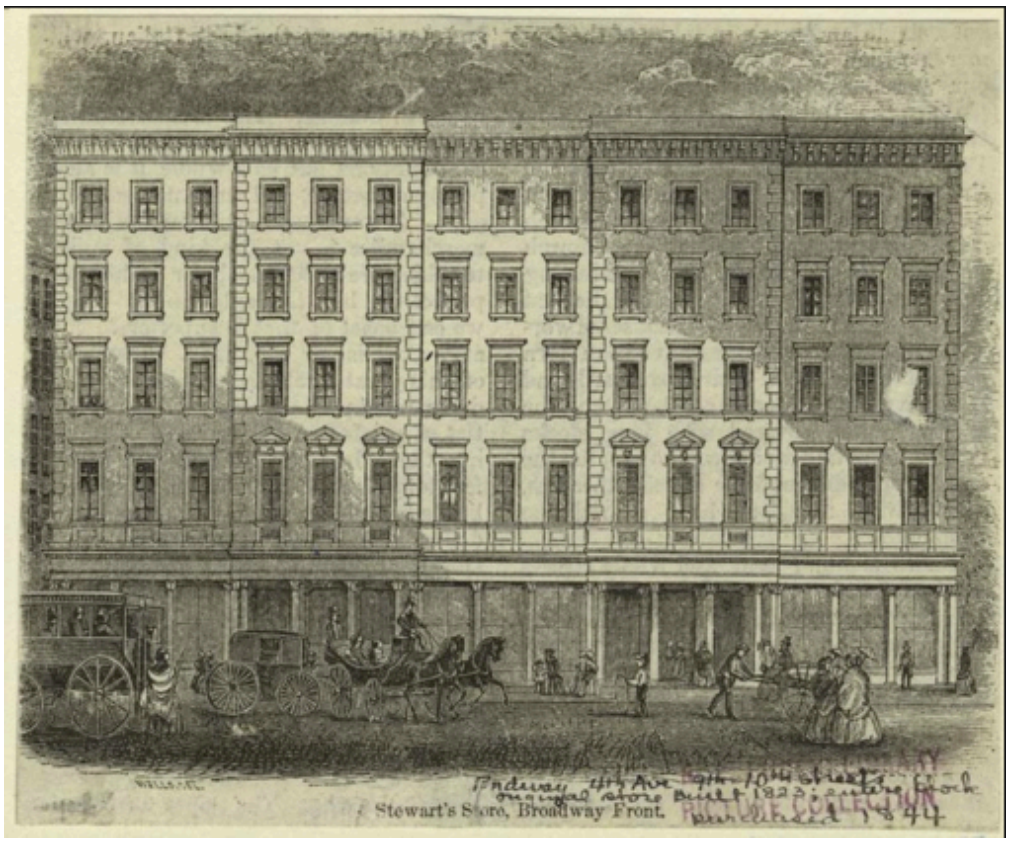


Figure 10. "Stewart's Store, Broadway Front," n.d.
Source: Art and Picture Collection, The New York Public Library Digital Collections, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-05ca-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

Classicism was not only an influence in terms of style but also determined the Marble Palace's structure as a modular unit so that it could easily expand down the block, which occurred later in 1850, evidence of adaptation being intrinsic to retail architecture even from the point of the first American purpose-built department store. City Hall, located south of the Marble Palace, served as the store's formal model with its marble construction and defining features of a dome and rotunda, common to public civic buildings but never used before for a retail outlet. As historian Mona Domosh has observed "An appeal to civic notions would

provide his store with cultural legitimacy…"[23] In adopting architectural features and a style previously reserved for significant municipal structures, the department store was signaling its status as an urban monument and its interconnectedness to its surrounding city. The department store gained prominence at a time when civic values and commercial intentions began to merge and the sharing of an architectural style visually communicated this conflation.

The classicism embedded in and communicated through the style and material of the architecture of the Marble Palace sent contradictory messages of democracy and luxury, aspects of which would have lasting effects on the trajectory of retail architecture. The conception of the department store as a civic structure suggested democratic notions such as access to a world of goods that the department store promoted as an asset. At the same time, the store's name, Marble Palace, used frequently in the press, lent connotations of exclusivity. The use of the columns, while majestic in style, also had important practical implications for display as they opened up the façade for the placement of larger show windows, which many merchants following Stewart would take advantage of more than he did.[24] Stewart's use of marble was imitated but rarely again replicated in solid, authentic, material form meanwhile the cohesive classical style of the building was also rare as opposed to the melding of historical styles that followed as the primary template for commercial retail structures.

By the time that large-scale commercial retail architecture took hold in America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century cast-iron was the material of choice for the façade and

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[23] Mona Domosh, "Shaping the Commercial City: Retail Districts in Nineteenth-Century New York and Boston," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80 (June 1990): 264.

[24] William Addison Clarke, "A. T. Stewart, Merchant Prince: A Story of His Business Career," *The Counter*, October 1901, 22–23.

the building framework.[25] The material presented another series of paradoxes within the display scheme of the department store; cast iron's industrial nature was at odds with the role it played in achieving the store façade's guise of classical architecture. Meanwhile the material's appearance of solidity belied its ability to be cast in reproducible and various architectural elements. Cast iron made possible bold new advances in architectural designs and building technology, while providing richness in ornamentation. The material's use also had a direct impact on display. Similar to the marble columns of A.T. Stewart's Marble Palace, cast iron columns opened up the ground floor, creating a flexible and customizable space that supported large show windows while also allowing natural light to flood store interiors. In an age of major urban fires, the material was also popular due to its fire-resistant qualities. Cast iron fell to its lowest price in 1880 and in New York and along the eastern coast of the United States the cast-iron façade visually defined office buildings and department stores.[26]

A.T. Stewart's architectural program, while predating 1880, is crucial to present because Stewart set significant precedents for the trajectory of retail architecture. With his choice of the robust classicism in the Marble Palace, and his groundbreaking large-scale use of cast iron, discussed below, Stewart demonstrated how retail architecture could alter in response to new materials and technology. In identifying his stores by their building materials, Stewart encouraged consumers to closely examine the aesthetic impression of the façade and consider a building as changeable.

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[25] Among the earliest examples of a complete cast-iron façade in New York was the Haughwout Store, purveyor of elegant goods for the home, built by John Gaynor in 1857 at the northeast corner of Broadway and Broome Street. Modeled on the Sansovino Library in Venice, the building has Corinthian columns and large arched windows.

[26] C. G. Powell, *An Economic History of the British Building Industry, 1815–1979* (London: Architectural Press, 1980), 83.

In 1859 architect John Kellum commenced construction on the Cast Iron Palace, A.T. Stewart's new downtown New York location (fig. 11), a building that *The Independent* called "the first and only one of its kind in the world constructed wholly of iron, standing alone, unsupported by any surrounding walls. It is an enduring monument to the mind that conceived it, and to the architect who executed it."[27]

The use of cast iron opened up the ground floor for large show windows on the exterior and sweeping vista views of merchandise on the interior, free from any visual interruptions of dividing walls. On the exterior, by utilizing molded iron panels painted to simulate stone or marble, the architect was able to dispense with the traditional masonry, which required a considerable thickness at the ground level to support the weight of the upper walls.[28] When it was completed in 1863, the Cast Iron Palace was the largest building in New York.[29] This building is additionally noteworthy because it plays a crucial role in the legacy of retail architecture that carries the narrative into the turn of the century period; in 1896, John Wanamaker inherited the cast iron building along with Stewart's leasehold and stables. At that time he reflected on the quality of the building's construction, "A.T. Stewart built it thirty years ago, but he built it so wisely and so well that it is to-day in every respect a model store. A generation of architects has been able to suggest no material improvements."[30]

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[27] "A.T. Stewart & Co's Marble Stores," *The Independent*, January 6, 1870, 22 and 110.

[28] Ferry, *A History of the Department Store*, 42.

[29] Gibbons, *John Wanamaker*, 9.

[30] John Wanamaker, *A Story and Some Pictures* (New York: Chasmar-Winchell Press, 1898), n.p. Ferry points out the enduring effects of these architectural advances, "Indeed this type of construction was so reliable and successful that it was one of the first examples of the type of construction used in building the modern skyscraper, with each floor taking the weight of its own outer wall." Ferry, *A History of the Department Store*, 42.



Figure 11. A.T. Stewart's Cast Iron Palace, New York, 1900.
Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection, LC-D4-33238.

The vitality that Stewart brought to retail architecture had been encouraged by the availability of storefront pattern books since the late eighteenth century.[31] Before artistic window dressing, the wooden storefront itself was recognized as a single stand-alone segment that could be removed and replaced to provide variety. Windows, doors, trim, stucco moldings, cast-iron elements, terra-cotta details, patent bricks and even complete façades for shops could be ordered from manufacturers catalogs, making it possible to construct elaborate buildings relatively cheaply.[32] The availability and affordability of cast iron facilitated the increased supply of pre-fabricated storefronts.

[31] Julia Scalzo, "All a Matter of Taste: The Problem of Victorian and Edwardian Shopfronts," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68 (March 2009): 54.

[32] Julian Barnard, *The Decorative Tradition* (London: Architectural Press, 1973), 23–25. For a catalogue of building materials, see for instance *Spanjer Brothers, Manufacturers of Advertising & Decorative Woodwork…* (Chicago, IL: Spanjer Brothers, 1916).

As early as the mid-1820s, one-storey storefronts were being advertised in New York City. The production of cast-iron façades became an important branch of the shopfitting business in both America and Britain. The Birmingham-based manufacturer Harris & Sheldon illustrated a selection of prefabricated storefronts in their catalogue of 1890, including the ornamental "Handsome Shop front" that they deemed "suitable for Jewelers and Fancy Trades." It boasted a variety of ornament that could be readily customized to fit the shop's desired aesthetic (fig. 12). Since one of cast iron's greatest advantages was its ability to take a variety of replicable forms, shopfitting and metalwork firms hired patternmakers to create series of cast iron elements in stock decorations, such as the door moldings and the window surrounds. Replete with robust ornament, the overall impression of such a façade was visually overwhelming and even indecipherable.

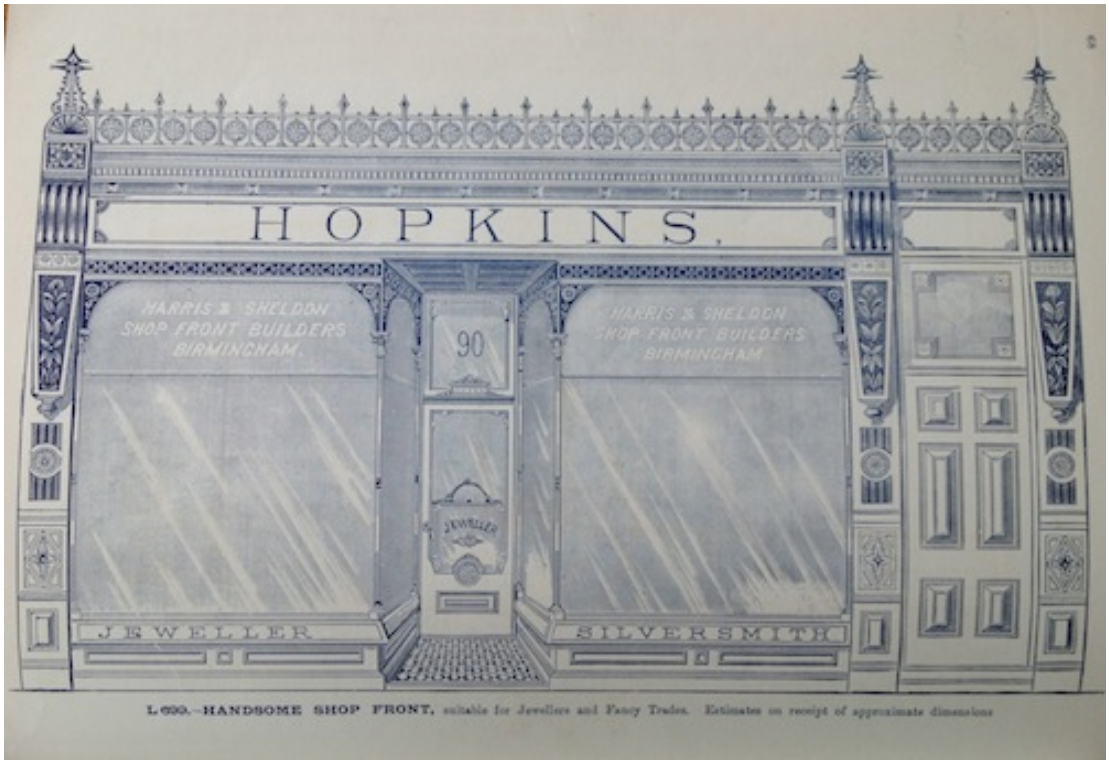


Figure 12. Harris & Sheldon, L699: Handsome Shop Front, Suitable for Jewelers and Fancy Trades, *Illustrated Price List*, August 1890, 69.
Source: Harris & Sheldon Limited.

The geometrical rustication at top, the stylized floral carving along the columns, and the classical baseboards all combine into a mannerist pastiche of design, rather than a strong cohesive visual statement. While Stewart's Cast Iron Palace is a much more unified design concept in comparison, it is important to show the extremes to which this material could be manipulated.

A.T. Stewart favored cast iron due to its ability to provide quick customization and swift expansion of an architectural framework. He identified that the cast iron material "had in its favor unequalled advantages of lightness, durability, economy, incombustability [sic]" and most importantly that it made for "ready renovation."[33] Even while stressing cast iron's "ready renovation," similar to many other merchants, Stewart painted his cast iron so that it appeared like marble and gave an impression of solidity.[34] Therefore the use of cast iron as a building material was at the crux of the department store's challenge of attaining both permanence and impermanence at once.

While in this turn of the century period, architects most often used cast iron in a classical format, Louis Sullivan employed the material to take on the organic curves of Art Nouveau. Shunning the repeatable historicist forms of classicism, Sullivan's cast iron façade of a dense patterning of vines and leaves for Schlesinger and Mayer (later Carson, Pirie, Scott

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[33] John B. Cornell, "Men Who Have Assisted in the Development of Architectural Resources," *Architectural Record* 1 (December 1891), 245 quoted in Deborah S. Gardener, "A Paradise of Fashion: A.T. Stewart's Department Store, 1862–1875" in *A Needle, a Bobbin, A Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*, ed. Joan M. Jensen and Sue Davidson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 63.

[34] The employment of trompe l'oeil styling allowed for low-cost effect and frequent alteration. Nathaniel Whittock, author of the early guidebook *On the Construction and Decoration of the Shop Fronts of London* (1840), observed that as of the 1790s, "the painter's aid was called in" and "the columns, pilasters, frieze, and cornice, produced by the carpenter, were painted to imitate various sorts of marble, and the doors and shutters to imitate various sorts of wood." See Nathaniel Whittock, *On the Construction and Decoration of the Shop Fronts of London* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1840), 2.

and Company) in Chicago (1899) introduced a whole new design vocabulary for the medium (fig. 13). Aiming to distance Schlesinger and Mayer from the prefabricated elements used by the competition discussed above, Sullivan instead celebrated the material of cast iron in an entirely new way. The architect devised a site-specific design that was, as architectural critic Louis Mumford described, "a conscious orientation of architecture towards new forms of expression."[35] Sullivan harnessed the "automatic developments of the mechanical age" through his use of the material cast iron, but developed a wholly new decoration scheme, one that would grow organically over the surface of the building.[36]



Figure 13. Carson Pirie Scott and Company Store, Chicago, IL. Louis H. Sullivan, architect. Source: Sullivaniana Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago, Digital File # 193101.081110-03.

[35] Louis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865–1895* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 167.

[36] Mumford, *The Brown Decades,* 166.

In Sullivan's own words, he aimed to "vitalize building materials, to animate them with a thoughts, a state of feeling..."[37] In addition to designing an entirely new ornamental pattern for the Schlesinger and Mayer store, Sullivan also devised a fresh color palette. Far from the staid creams and yellows that other architects chose, Sullivan produced a vibrant polychrome. Over a coat of bright vermilion, lay a translucent green, with flecks and spots of red. Architectural historian John Siry has suggested that the color scheme may have been intended to "recall the seasonal colors of nature in passage from summer to fall."[38] In this image of the façade the repetition of the commodities in the window is echoed in the repetition of the orderly circular patterning of cast iron above. This rhythmic sequencing of commodities and ornament speaks to the profusion and replication made possible by mechanical industrialization across media. The scrolling ironwork became a symbol of the department store itself and its design contributed to the store's graphic identity (fig. 8). In the 1903 advertisement, scrolling vines grow out of the building and encircle the department store's name, suggesting the vital characteristics of this organic architecture.

With the façade for Schlesinger and Mayer, Sullivan used architecture to visually set the store apart from its competitors. When Selfridge's opened in London in 1909, many major stores invested heavily in the power of architecture to compete as well. The "west block" of the London department store D.H. Evans, on a site occupying Nos. 308–320 Oxford Street, overseen by architect John Murray and completed just two months following the opening of Selfridges in 1909, had a highly ornamental Edwardian Baroque façade (fig. 14). The building had been constructed in four sections, the first opening in May 1907. *The*

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[37] Louis H. Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 140-41 quoted in Mumford, *The Brown Decades*, 123.

[38] Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*, 178.

Builder reported that the new building was designed "after careful study of numerous large trade buildings in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin."[39] The façade was completed in a striking color scheme of white Pentelikon marble with green Cipollino marble columns and pilasters along with lavish carvings.[40]



Figure 14. D H Evans Department Store Viewed Across Oxford Street, June 1917.
Photograph by Adolphe Augustus Boucher, Bedford Lemere and Company
Source: Historic England, BL23859.

The first floor had cartouches above and between the windows with ionic columns flanking each window. The simpler second floor windows had heavily molded lintels and wrought

[39] *The Builder,* December 18 1909, 670–71 quoted in Shops Project Report: D.H. Evans Oxford Street London, BF 101754/1, The Architecture of Shopping Project, English Heritage.

[40] Carvings by Charles Henry Mabey Junior. For more see: "Charles Henry Mabey Junior," Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851–1951, University of Glasgow History of Art and HATII, accessed October 26, 2014, http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=ann_1277210485; For more on the construction process of this building including decisions on materials and contractors hired, see Minutes of Meetings of Board of Directors, 1894–1968, FRAS 362/1, Records of D.H. Evans & Co. Ltd., House of Fraser Archive, University of Glasgow.

iron balconettes while the third floor was lit by large oculi with elaborate frames and prominent keystones.[41] The whole building cost over £131,000 to build.[42] The *Draper's Record* reported, "As a building, in both design and material it will be unique. As a work of art, it stands out as preeminently beautiful, a noble addition to the commercial architecture of London."[43]

Contradictions and complexity are again present in the department store's architectural scheme. The architect John Murray designed a façade of lavish materials that portray their colors and properties with honesty, in contrast with painted cast iron. At the same time, the historical pastiche of architectural elements and materials in the D.H. Evans building varies greatly from the harmonious style and cohesive use of materials in Stewart's structures that would form the model for New York's retail architecture from the mid-nineteenth century forward. D.H. Evans presents its passersby with a host of symbols and designs open for their visual digestion and interpretation.[44] The building's message was one of luxury and historical complexity that differs from the order and rationality that more often dictated the visual program of stores in America. A multi-styled façade, also seen in the American anomalies of Schlesinger & Mayer and Lord & Taylor (fig. 10), was an architectural expression that foretold the multi-layered experience of shopping inside the

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[41] Kathryn Morrison, Shops Project Report: D.H. Evans Oxford Street London, BF 101754/1, Architecture of Shopping Project. Morrison notes that the D.H. Evans Collection contains photographs of Au Printemps and Galeries Lafayette.

[42] *Builder*, December 18, 1909, 670–71 quoted in Morrison, Shops Project Report: D.H. Evans, Architecture of Shopping Project.

[43] "D.H. Evans and Co., Ltd.: The New Premises in Oxford-street, W.," *The Drapers' Record*, May 18 1907, 411.

[44] Rich symbolism continued on the interior in a "rather luxurious" restaurant located on the second floor that was "paneled in oak with low relief panels by Mr. Brook Hitch, finished in old ivory representing Harvest, Commerce, Industry, Science, and Trade." "D.H. Evans and Co., Ltd.: The New Premises," *The Drapers' Record*, 411.

structure.[45] In these eclectic façades historian Alan Trachtenberg has identified a "new cultural imperialism" and "a confidence of appropriation" of styles, a message that was mirrored in the stock of the department store as a world of goods and the themed environments in which they were sold. [46]

While the D.H. Evans façade contained no allusion to the building's ties with the retail industry, from a distance, the "industry" most prominently displayed was the trade of architecture itself in its combination of materials skillfully crafted into architectural elements. Majestic stonework on the upper tiers rivaled for attention over the more typically commercial "gold-coloured metal fronts" along the ground floor, designed to hold large plate glass windows, executed by Messrs. Samuel Haskins and Bros. of Old-Street.[47] The metalwork received praise as complementing the building's color scheme and for providing a continuous sleek surface through which to view commodities.[48] The use of an overhang shielding the sidewalk would have facilitated visibility and cut out glare, as well as cultivated a sense of intimacy between the public and the merchandise behind glass.

This set of examples, ranging from A.T. Stewart's technologically and stylistically sophisticated work in marble and cast iron to the D.H. Evans store as emblematic of the historicist luxury of London stores, aimed to show the importance of the façade as a

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[45] About the Lord and Taylor store, built in 1871, one journalist remarked, "The building is of the composite order of architecture, approaching, perhaps, more nearly to the style of the Renaissance than any other distinct school. The marked peculiarity of the structure is its varied and profuse ornamentation, which forms a strong contrast with the rigid simplicity of many of the great iron buildings of New York." See "The New Building of Lord and Taylor," *Christian Union*, October 1, 1870, 2, 13.

[46] Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 117.

[47] For more on shopfitting estimates and contracts see Minutes of Meetings of Board of Directors, Records of D.H. Evans, House of Fraser Archive.

[48] "D.H. Evans and Co., Ltd.," 411.

communicator of luxury, financial strength, and modernization and at the same time point to the storefront's role as an active and highly visible element of the streetscape.

The Show Window: Transparency and Natural Light

While marble and cast iron were chosen by architects for their strong material and visual impact, the primary function of plate glass was one of invisibility, allowing passersby a clear view to the goods contained behind the glass. The desire for more plate glass show windows to fill the department store façade was one of the leading motivators for renovation. In 1898, an architectural journal reported on the rejuvenating architectural landscape in Chicago: "Chicago streets are undergoing a change. The tall drums of the house-mover are constantly seen in the business district. In place of crude stone carvings of 'after the fire' architecture appears a style of architecture entirely American and of commercial origin."[49] The journalist further explains, "This style was invented by necessity. The demand of the window dresser – an artist of recent development – was constantly for a more showy place in which to exhibit his goods; and the buyers demanded more light."[50] Advancements and alterations in department store architecture were driven by the importance of the show window.

In 1892 Walt Whitman wrote on one of the great paradoxes of the department store show window, its visible invisibility, when in *Song of Myself* he recalled, "Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flatting the flesh of my nose on the thick

[49] "Modernizing Commercial Buildings," *Inland Architect and News Record*, September 1898, 18.

[50] Ibid. The article elaborates, "three entire buildings on State Street were made over" and the largest, most successful of these alterations was for Mandel Brothers who "owing to their increasing trade, required a larger and better-lighted place of business."

plate glass…"[51] Whitman struggled for a physical, rather than solely visual, experience of the show window, flattening his noise against the plate glass in order to gain access to the goods. The show window proclaimed an insistent invisibility and yet its transparent nature was what made it so strikingly visible as an element of the design of the façade. Historian Isobel Armstrong has called the nineteenth century the "era of public glass" and she elaborates that, "…the transparency of glass becomes a third term – something between you and the world. It makes itself known as a constitutive element of experience that organizes work on the world as medium and barrier."[52] Cut off from using the sense of touch, Whitman's encounter with the window reinforces that its impact relied on sight.

Due to the show window's rise as an absolute priority in the building program of the department store, a transparent wall of glass at the ground level became a trope and a primary design consideration of modern retail architecture. A refreshing display of wares behind the glass provided constant redesign of the building's first impressions for the consumer as well as established a link between the sidewalk and the interior. Glazing reached its literal height as stores experimented with double height windows and aimed for a solid glass façade on at least their first two stories, while also prioritizing window placement and frequency on the upper tiers. The department store façade, whose design was driven by the necessities and desires of display, can therefore be interpreted as a precedent to the use of the curtain wall in the 1920s and 1930s; the glazed façade was a technical need of display long before it was a stylistic requirement of modernism. German architect Bruno Taut made such a connection

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[51] Walt Whitman, Sculley Bradley, Gay Wilson Allen, and Edward F. Grier, *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 48.

[52] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.

when in *Modern Architecture* he reproduced Karl Friedrich Schinkel's designs for a shop (1820) in which the façades consisted of large areas of glass divided by masonry piers.[53]

In order to establish how the significance of the show window altered the built framework of the department store, it is useful to take a historical perspective. The roots of retail architecture can be traced to the "simple movable trading booth" that populated the fair and the bazaar where, as German art collector and patron Karl Ernst Osthaus described in the 1913 Werkbund Yearbook, "the entire shop is, as it were, the shop window."[54] At the fair or the bazaar, there was no glass partition or designation of display space and instead the tradesman's whole stall served to entice shoppers and the making of the wares was included in their exposition. Even when merchants began to occupy interior spaces on the first floors of domestic dwellings, many still had open fronts, similar to the stalls of the bazaars from which they separated. Glazed shop fronts gradually took over from the open ones in the eighteenth century and the addition of the glass front, designating a barrier between shopping space and city space, therefore marked an important transition in the history of retail architecture. The window offered containment but also began serving as a medium through which the store connected with the public.

As the visual identity of shops developed in the late eighteenth century in London and New York, most retail outlets existed on the ground floor below a residential apartment on the second floor. Therefore the shop was limited in width by the typical dimensions of domestic building. In London, a fourteen to twenty-four foot frontage was the maximum

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[53] Taut, *Modern Architecture*, 35 referenced in Artley, *The Golden Age of Shop Design*, 6.

[54] Karl Ernst Osthaus, "The Display Window" (Das Schaufenster), trans. Lauren Kogod, in Lauren Kogod, "The Display Window as Educator: The German Werkbund and Cultural Economy," in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*, ed. Peggy Deamer (New York: Routledge, 2014), 63.

physical condition of a running shop front design from about 1750 to 1840. Although these shops were not "purpose built in their entirety," historian Claire Walsh explains "they were very purposefully designed and constructed."[55] In New York, most early to mid-nineteenth century storefronts assumed a distinctive post-and-lintel construction with one-piece granite posts supporting a granite lintel.[56]

From about 1730 until the 1790s, windows of luxury shops drew out onto the pavement in curves in the form of the bow front (fig. 15).[57] The curved glass front was intended to let in light and allow the goods to be seen on three sides, but this glass was expensive and available only to the best shops, such as the silk shops along Artillery Lane in Spitalfields, seen below.



Figure 15. 56 Artillery Lane, London.
Source: Patrick Baty.

[55] Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century," 16.

[56] Morrison H. Heckscher, "Building the Empire City: Architects and Architecture," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*, eds. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat (New Haven and London: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/Yale University Press, 2000), 183.

[57] The London Building Act of 1774 limited the projection of the bow front to no more than ten inches.

Most eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century storefronts were divided into a grid of panes as the Artillery Lane storefront shows and windows could be fitted with shelves that extended horizontally off the back of the mullions.[58] This structure then dictated a window display that allowed for, on average, one item per windowpane, an orderly method used for most types of goods except textiles well into nineteenth century (fig. 16).[59] The view from the street often resembled the flat two-dimensional effect of a trading card or advertisement that the customer may have been familiar with before arriving at the shop.



Figure 16. Shop in Brewer Street, Soho, 1880 (built early 18th century). Photo by Henry Dixon.
Source: British Library Board, Tab.700.b.3

[58] See for instance the shelving that survives in the windows of the eighteenth-century shop at 34 Haymarket, London SW1Y.

[59] Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century," 83. However due to the difficulty and expense of lighting the interior, some retailers packed the window with wares to increase their visibility. In these cases, the pane-by-pane organization was not followed. For descriptions see William O'Daniel, *Ins and Outs of London* (Philadelphia: S. C. Lamb, 1859), 47–48.

C.P. Moritz, a German visitor to London in 1782, noted, "In London care is taken to show…all works of art and industry to the public…Such a street often resembles a well-organized show cabinet."[60] This columned layout communicated order and variety, which were both qualities that reflected well on the character of the store's owner.[61] Even at the time of the department store's rise to prominence in the late nineteenth century, the gridded layout still populated the windows of many small shops, as seen above, therefore making the large plate glass windows of the department store that much more impressive by comparison.

Improvements in the glass manufacturing process led to the development of increasingly larger and more durable sheets of plate glass, which allowed windows to be divided into fewer components. By the late nineteenth century, plate glass was produced through a rolled plate process whereby glass was poured onto an inclined metal plane and then passed between rollers, ground, and polished. The result was a flat surface that was free of distortions. In London, with the repeal of the glass tax in 1845 and the window tax in 1851, store windows grew in width and height.[62] As of 1849, merchants such as Edward P. Dickie, at 144 Chambers Street in New York, were selling imported window glass. Dickie's broadside advertised "Single Thick," "Thick," and "Double Thick" thicknesses (at up to

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[60] C.P. Moritz quoted in Sean Rothery, *The Shops of Ireland* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2009), 24.

[61] An orderly layout is well documented in the storefronts of print shops whose flat works of regular dimensions fully papered show windows. See for instance, John Raphael Smith, *Spectators at a Print-Shop in St. Paul's Church Yard*, hand-colored mezzotint, 1744, British Museum, London.

[62] In London, patent plate was introduced in 1839 and the maximum size achieved was 8 by 4 feet. Larger sizes of cast plate glass were available from 1826 but rarely used until 1845. See Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century," appendix.

32x50 and 30x60 inch sheets) at prices "that will defy competition!"[63] Dickie claimed to be the "sole receiver" of a number of notable types that exhibited the most desirable "uniform quality." In 1868, plate glass was first manufactured in the United States.

Businesses were eager to grow the size of their windows in order to let light into their selling spaces and to feature more merchandise. The introduction of plate glass with its uninhibited sleek surface prompted a distinct shift in approaches to window display. Goods became more acrobatic, climbing at angles and curves, as in an early twentieth century window at Macy's department store in New York (fig. 17).



Figure 17. Children Look at a Christmas Window Display at Macy's New York, ca. 1908–17. Source: © Corbis.

[63] Brower Brothers, *Map of the City of New York: Advertisement for Edward P. Dickie, Importer of French Window Glass*, hand-colored lithograph, 1861, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Here children watch dolls dance diagonally across the span of the window uninhibited by any visual interruptions of dividing panes. As the standard form of the store window advanced from a contained grid layout to a span of glass across a city block, windows held the potential to carry a compositional theme that could be played out in a series of variations.

With plate glass imported in large quantities, as well as domestically manufactured, and therefore costing less, the large glass window became not only a feature but also a determining factor in the department store's construction. When Lord & Taylor built a new "business palace" of iron and glass on the corner of Broadway and 20th Streets in 1871, the *New York Tribune* reported that "Among the first things which attract attention, are the plate glass windows on Broadway, eight in number, each one 7 feet wide and 16 feet in height."[64] (fig. 18)

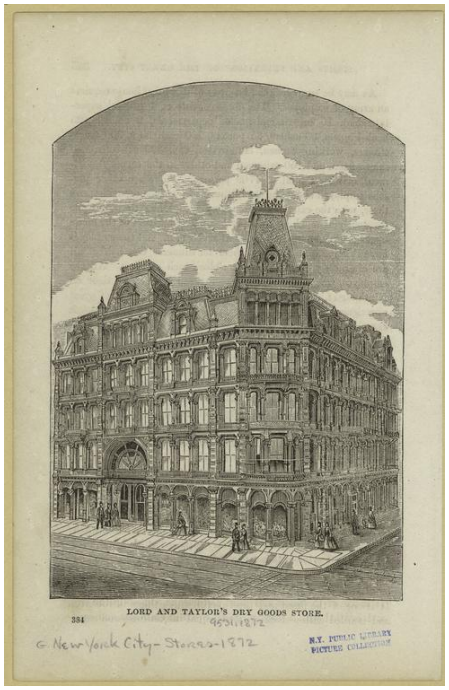


Figure 18. Lord and Taylor's Dry Goods Store, 1872.
Source: Art and Picture Collection, The New York Public Library Digital Collections, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-05c9-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

[64] "The New Building of Lord and Taylor," 2.

By the late nineteenth century, many department stores gave over as much of their façades as possible to windows and architects aimed for the minimization of structural support. An 1898 article in the American periodical *The Inland Architect and News Record* gave an overview of how the show window came to dominate the department store façade and the construction process involved in the installation:

> First, the glass was moved to the outside of the deep reveals. The muntins began to disappear and the pieces of glass became larger. The woodwork was next removed and the glass placed close to the stone or brick, with only a stop to hold it in place. Some of the piers and columns were then removed and their places spanned by rolled iron beams, which took the place of the cast-iron lintels. Finally, the old work was removed complete and new steel columns, with steel lintels of long span, formed a frame for immense pieces of glass.[65]

From woodwork, to stone or brick, and finally to steel, the materials chosen for the storefront gradually grew in strength to hold the weight of the plate glass window. Steel allowed for the least mass and therefore the most show window along the façade. A storefront taken over by show windows lent an appearance at street level that visually echoed Osthaus's phrase that "the entire shop is, as it were, the shop window."[66] In 1898, Hermann Tietz built a department store in the Leipziger Strasse in Berlin so dominated by glass that Pevsner recollected, "So here was the fully mature curtain wall."[67] (fig. 19) Tietz's building shows a façade that appears as a single sleek surface of glass.

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[65] "Modernizing Commercial Buildings" *Inland Architect and News Record*, September 1898, 18.

[66] Karl Ernst Osthaus, "The Display Window," (Das Schaufenster), trans. Lauren Kogod, in Lauren Kogod, "The Display Window as Educator: The German Werkbund and Cultural Economy," in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*, ed. Peggy Deamer (New York: Routledge, 2014), 63.

[67] Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, 271.

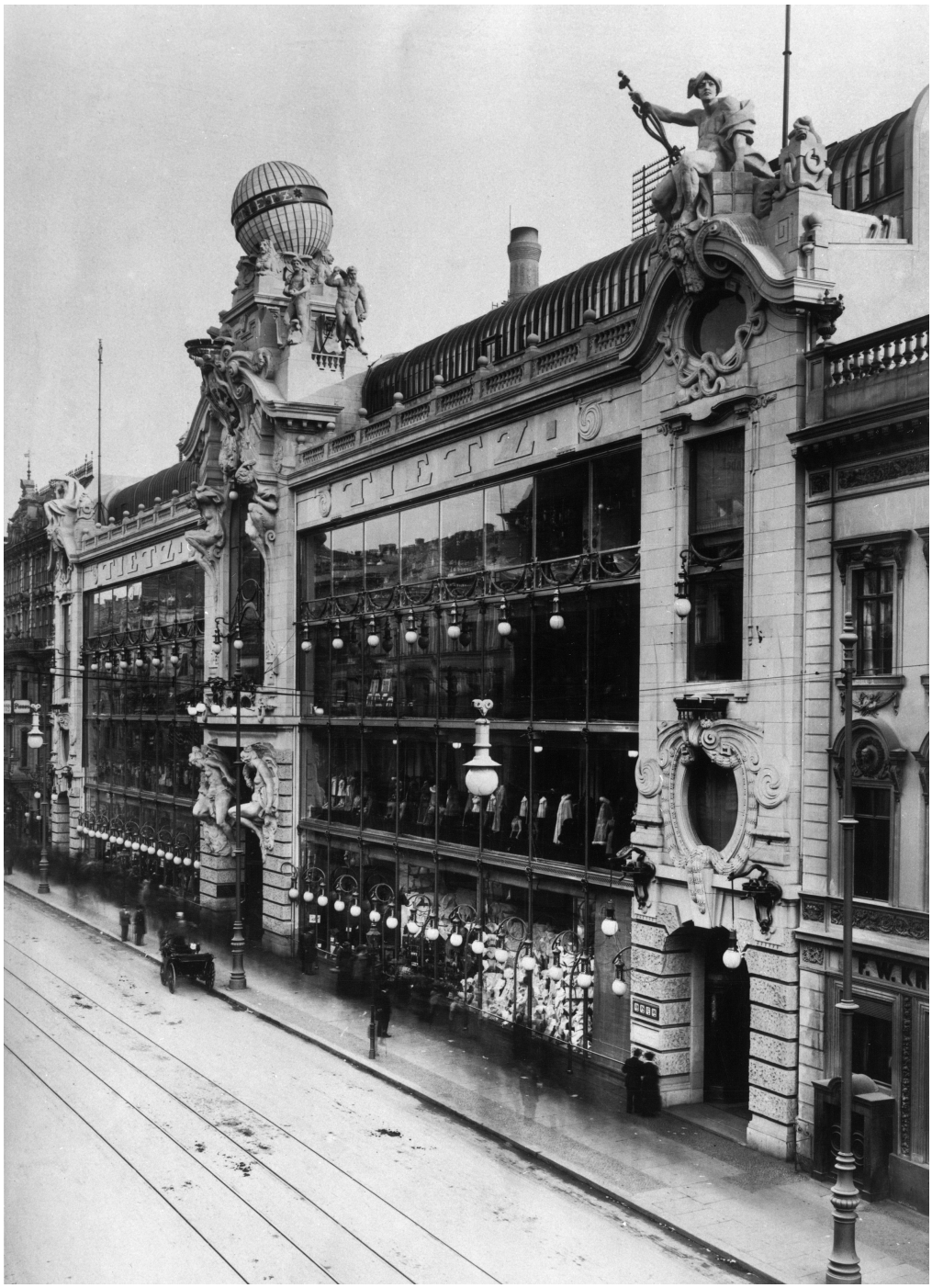


Figure 19. Department Store Tietz, Leipziger Strasse, 46/49, Berlin, 1900. Architects Lachmann & Zauber, façade by Bernhard Sehring.
Source: bpk Berlin/Art Resource, ART303267.

While no store in Chicago, London or New York achieved such a stunning effect in the 1880 to 1920 time frame, stores did aim for nearly solid glazing on the first and even second tiers if

possible so as to extend their sophisticated show window displays for two stories. In London second-floor windows were geared for the eyes of passengers on double-decker busses. [68] In New York Siegel Cooper installed oversized windows on its second floor that allowed passengers on the Sixth Avenue elevated train to window shop. A ramp enabled those same passengers to enter directly into the store on the second floor. Advancements such as the horizontal elongation of the "Chicago window" with its thin frame and homogenous treatment to coincide with the structure of the building, added a sleeker visual effect to the upper floors, first and best seen in buildings such as Schlesinger and Mayer in Chicago (fig. 8).

If left open at the back, windows let natural light into the store's interior and facilitated accurate viewing of the merchandise on the sales floor. [69] Good light quality was essential to the modern shopping experience. Beginning in the 18th century, retailing by natural light was a mark of honest dealing. Accurate lighting was necessary for the selection of merchandise. One American guidebook pointed out additional financial advantages, "Natural light costs nothing beyond the construction of the premises to admit it as freely as circumstances will allow – and every additional beam is henceforth saving money off the gas and electric account."[70] While artificial lighting systems signaled modernization, they were

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[68] Samson Clark, *Retail Drapery Advertising: A Handbook on Drapery Publicity and Kindred Matters* (London: Trade Press Association, 1916), 102.

[69] Victor Horta recalled, "this glazing [show windows] meets requirements for the maximal exploitation of daylight, in other words of natural light, under which the public prefers to inspect the merchandise, believing the colour of electric light to be misleading." Victor Horta quoted in Grunenberg, *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture*, 71.

[70] Samson Clark, *Short Talks with Drapers* (London: Trade Press Association, 1916), 181.

not always sufficient for accurate viewing of the merchandise and considered by some to be deceitful.[71]

The determination of the best technologies and techniques to achieve accurate and effective lighting in the show window and on the sales floor was a continual topic of debate in retail periodicals and the press. Luxfer prismatic glass, developed by the Luxfer Prism Company of Chicago in the early 1890s, offered a new solution. A thickened glass of many plates, Luxfer's serrated surface performed like prisms to bend rays of sunlight from the sky and refract them to diffuse light horizontally through the depth of the standard commercial space.[72] Originally an American manufacturer, The Luxfer Prism Company established its first international subsidiary, the London-based British Luxfer Prism Syndicate, in 1898. The prisms appeared in major department stores worldwide and offered the practical benefits of distributing daylight in the interior and cutting costs on electrical lighting.[73]

The prismatic glass also significantly altered the appearance of the department store façade, whether installed above windows or along awnings. In the case of Mandel Brother's new store, built in 1898 (fig. 20), one journalist remarked that in answer to a "call for more light" that "Luxfer prisms, filling the upper portion and sending the surface rays to the rear of the store, seem to complete the development of a new style in commercial architecture."[74]

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[71] Arc lights could cast a blue violet glow meanwhile incandescent light could cast a red yellow glow. For more on electrical lighting see Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott,* 198.

[72] Ibid, 141.

[73] Stern Bros. and B. Altman were two other New York stores who embraced the Luxfer technology. "Daylight vs. Artificial Light," *The World's Work Advertiser*, 6 (1903): 4085–92.

[74] "Modernizing Commercial Buildings" 19.



Figure 20. Madison Street Entrance, Mandel Brothers, Chicago, Detail View of Luxfer Prisms, Canopy, and Ornamental Iron.
Source: "Modernizing Commercial Buildings," *Inland Architect and News Record*, September 1898, 19.

The textured small-scale pattern of this glass stood out in contrast to the sleek aesthetic of the steel and glass façade. The prominent placement of the panels above the windows offered visual interest in texture and pattern and was even a site for advertising possibilities. This prismatic glass serves as an important example of how demands of display prompted new material technologies that continually altered the appearance and form of retail architecture.

Classicism, Theatricality, and the Storefront

Historian Robert Proctor has noted, "Sigfried Giedion would later praise the department store as a model of positive engagement with modernity in its bold use of exposed iron and glass, and therefore was a precursor to the structural and functional aesthetic of Modernism."[75] Giedeon compares the department store with other large iron and glass structures: "The department store has no equally large forerunner in the past. In this respect it is like the market halls, railway stations, and exhibition buildings of the nineteenth century, and the object it serves is the same: the rapid handling of business activities involving huge crowds of pedestrians."[76] The use of glass and steel here, Gideon argues, places the department store in a continuum of large, public, functional structures.

In this 1880 to 1920 period stores remodeled in order to attain that desirable glass and steel combination whose monumentality signaled commercial success and an investment in the latest materials. A focus on building materials, technologies, or in Gideon's words "the functional aesthetic" of the department store, frequently featured in the press and in department store advertisements therefore suggesting that the technical scope of these stores was a point of public intrigue.

Stores advertised statistics on their use of glass and journalists and prospective shoppers calculated a store's worth by the quantity and quality of their show windows. Department stores used statistics promotionally in order to supply the public with hard facts which they could use to compare one store against the other and to emphasize that their business was quantitatively as well as qualitatively innovative. These figures also reveal a cultural fascination with quantification and as Neil Harris has described this "language of

[75] Proctor, "A Cubist History," 230.

[76] Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture*, 234.

technical explanation and scientific description" had been present in recreational literature by the 1840s.[77] A booklet for Barker's department store in London for instance bragged that "the Barker windows are a mile long! If we stay to think, shop windows are an index of the wonders of modern merchandising…A mile of shop windows! This is evidence, eloquent enough, of the amazing growth of that business which we know as Barkers."[78] This booklet positions a department store's show windows, in number and sophistication, as indicative of the success of the business. The materials of the show window were on their own representative of the greatest building technologies; striking display further asserted the power of this merchandising space.

The dramatic transformation of William Whiteley's, one of London's earliest and largest department stores, around the turn of the century speaks to the magnitude and stylistic progression of a major department store renovation project. Between 1863 and 1873, Whiteley's took over ten consecutive storefronts in Bayswater, London and after twenty years of business had expanded to eighteen shops all together forming one of the largest expanses of glass that the London public had ever seen (fig. 21). Selling took place on two out of the four stories. This image shows an orderly row of identical shop fronts whose repetitive appearance suggests that the department store was expandable and even reproducible, just like the stock that it contained. One can imagine that with such a static and redundant façade that the window display would have been important in providing energy and visual interest.

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[77] Harris, *The Art of P.T. Barnum*, 75.

[78] A Brief Narrative of the House of Barker, 1870–1930, 11, FRAS 955/1, Records of the House of Barker, House of Fraser Archive. The guide to the Great Exhibition also listed quantities of glass used in the building's construction to impress readers. See Samuel Philips and F.K.J. Shenton, *Guide to the Crystal Palace and Its Park and Gardens* (Sydenham: Crystal Palace Library, 1860), 15.



Figure 21. William Whiteley, Limited, Westbourne Grove Premises, view ca. 1873 in *William Whiteley Limited Illustrated Furnishing Catalogue,* 1900, endpaper.
Source: 726/57, Records of William Whiteley Department Store, Westminster City Archives.

Despite the impressiveness of this expanse, the segmentation of the façade was still stylistically and functionally unsatisfactory. On his first visit to London from Chicago, Selfridge was still able to describe the premises of some of his future competitors as "an agglomeration of small shops."[79]

Selfridge's observation on the scale of London department stores was in part due to the effects of municipal regulations that restricted the height of new buildings, unlike in America where stores rose without limits. Selfridge made a further comment on the grand scale of American retail architecture in *Romance of Commerce* when he wrote that, Parisian stores were "limited to five or six storeys, in America stores tower up to fifteen storeys, or

[79] Selfridge quoted in A.S. Gray, J. Breach and N. Breach, *Edwardian Architecture: A Biographical Dictionary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), 67.

more with rapid smooth running lifts. These buildings measure their floor area by the acre and twenty thirty or even forty acres of floor space."[80]

When American architect Frank Swales drafted a design for Selfridge's, building issues arose with London's building height restrictions capped at 80 feet. Plans were taken over by British architects Frank Atkinson and Sir John Burnet who were more familiar with London building regulations.[81] In the years of Selfridge's construction there were important changes in legislation; the LCC (General Powers) Act of 1908 allowed greater cubical extent and dealt with the uniting of buildings by openings in internal and external walls and in 1909 the LCC (General Powers) Act (known as the Steel Frame Act), officially recognized steel frame construction.[82] These regulations limited London's large-scale building until 1908, but following that year, London's greatest department stores were built and the introduction of the steel frame altered architectural possibilities as seen in the transition of Whiteley's. The steel frame eliminated the need for weight bearing masonry walls that broke up the view on the interior. On the sales floor inside the entrance, columns provided a stately magnificence and allowed for the maximum flow of light and amount of open space for the display of wares.

In 1909 Whiteley's began to build the latest, most impressive iteration of their retail structure that still stands today. On the 28th of October the foundation was laid for "the ideal

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[80] Selfridge, *The Romance of Commerce*, 365.

[81] London's Building Acts of 1894 and 1905 impeded the construction of the Selfridge building through their regulations for fire prevention (restrictions placed on cubic footage between party walls) and structural stability since the 1894 Building Act prescribed the required thickness of external walls. See J.C. Lawrence, "Steel Frame Architecture versus the London Building Regulations: Selfridges, the Ritz, and American Technology," *Construction History* 6 (1990): 25.

[82] John Stow, *The Survey of London* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1912), 22.

store – destined to become the greatest shopping center in the world."[83] A great improvement on the earlier series of shop fronts (fig. 21), the new Whiteley's was a purpose-built steel frame structure of the latest technology and design. The "Grecian Corinthian style" of this building and its monumental front of plate glass windows dramatically set it apart from Whiteley's previous premises (fig. 22).



Figure 22. Whiteley's New Premises, Façade to Queen's Road, Looking South, 1912 in John Belcher and J.J. Joass, "Current Architecture, Whiteley's New Premises," *The Architectural Review*, March 1912, 165.
Source: 726/251, Records of William Whiteley Department Store, Westminster City Archives.

The *Architectural Review* reported on how the building met structural requirements and stylistic desires for window display space:

[83] Souvenir Programme for the Laying of the Foundation Stone, 3, Records of William Whiteley Department Store.

> On the exterior the architects have had to face the old problem of endeavoring to achieve an imposing architectural effect while at the same time complying with the commercial requirements of large window display. With this dual object in view, a big Order has been used. The main entrance, with its three doorways, is marked by a series of coupled columns, superposed and crowned by a pyramidal tower and the corner is emphasized by a small dome. The exterior, thus treated, makes a very effective composition, and if in certain points it does not satisfy the architectural sense, we must not forget that it is a case of making architectural design fit in as best may with the exorbitant demands of window space.[84]

Columns punctuated the façade setting a tone of stately magnificence and demarcating expanses of window display while a set of "coupled columns" served as a way finding device to mark the main entrance. Whiteley's again awed visitors in their presentation of "an uninterrupted mass of glass from the ceiling to the ground" this time without horizontal sash bars, only vertical ones made of brass.[85]

Columns added visual and physical weight and stability to the structure while countering the transparency of the plate glass. [86] To further complicate these dualities of glass and steel and transparency and durability, concerns with honesty in materials and appropriateness of style emerged in architectural discourse. Critics pointed to the contradiction in the stately, aggressive style of classical architecture as overpowering and inappropriate for the feminine nature of the goods that the department store contained. In the London *Evening News* on April 10, 1907, a journalist expressed that "dainty feminine finery would look hopelessly silly and frivolous in a severe, not to say forbidding, classical

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[84] "Current Architecture - Whiteley's New Premises," *The Architectural Review*, March 1912, 165, 726/251, Records of William Whiteley Department Store.

[85] Lambert, *The Universal Provider*, 42–43.

[86] A similar contrast between "aerial lightness" and "endurance" was highlighted in respect to the Crystal Palace. See Welchman, *Sculpture and the Vitrine*, 23.

frame."[87] The application of classicism to the structure of department store was looked down upon by some critics for the style's ability to aggrandize the shopping experience and even inflate the value of merchandise.

While historians have previously called attention to how the department store's particularly robust strain of classicism expressed a reverent attitude towards commodities, this chapter will explore how the department store's classical architecture, both exterior and interior, was also pointedly theatrical. The *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* wrote that Marshall Field's entrance (fig. 23) was "modeled on the lines of the Grecian-Doric and throughout the entire store the famous Greek 'line of beauty' is preserved."[88]



Figure 23. Marshall Field Entrance 1907–1910.
Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection, LC-D4-34697.

[87] *Evening News*, April 10, 1907, 2.

[88] *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 11, 1902, 03052 (24), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company, Chicago History Museum.

The entire building was steel construction faced with gray granite to resemble marble. As in the case of A.T. Stewart's Cast Iron Palace, orders and classical details were often transposed directly in metal and then painted to mimic stone. Meanwhile at Harrods, the dome was purely symbolic and reflected no interior rotunda but instead stands on steel girders spanning a flat roof.[89] This deception and manipulation of public perception suggests a reading of this form of classical architecture as an impressive stage set for the display of merchandise whose elements were often exaggerated for dramatic effect, such as the columns that marked the entrance of Marshall Field's.

The *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* reported on the Marshall Field building in 1902 and described the classical façade as functioning as the "background" for the show windows, "Architecturally the new building is of the most chaste simplicity. Built of white granite, it is almost severe in outline, though classic and imposing in size and structure. The outer walls are seemingly designed only as a background for the enormous plate glass windows, so numerous that the building seems a veritable palace of glass."[90] The grand scale and immense visual weight of the columns contrasted with the transparency of the plate glass. Columns demarcated each show window as its own stage to be set with merchandise.

Debates around classicism as an appropriate backdrop for shopping also arose in London when in 1902 Regent Street's shops were under need of redevelopment. Historian Erica Rappaport has described that "the Crown and tenants could not agree upon a style of

[89] Gray et al., *Edwardian Architecture*, 68.

[90] *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 11, 1902, 16, 03052 (24), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

architecture that would reflect their divergent visions of the street."[91] The Crown's architects wanted Regent Street to display London's status as an aristocratic capital city, meanwhile retailers wanted to create a commercial avenue accentuated with plate glass. Shopkeepers rejected Richard Norman Shaw's design of heavy stone arches and pillars with minimal use of plate glass. In a letter to the editor of the *Times*, Roger Fry, in defense of the shopkeepers, presented the plea: "Let Messrs. Swan and Edgar and the rest be as vigorous in their demands for plate glass as ever they like, and then let a really good engineer solve the problem. If the engineer has studied proportion he will suffice, if not, let an artist (perhaps even an architect) without altering the essential features give just proportions to the building."[92] Here Fry calls attention to the need for a new form of architecture to visually resolve the material tension between the windows and their framework. The merchants won their case and a report in the *London Standard* attests to the results, "Regent Street is not a business street, but a shopping centre."[93] While the department store was at its core a commercial enterprise, its visual identity, communicated through the display of architecture, was crucial to its reputation and financial success. Regent Street winds in a row of columns and windows, the ideal set decoration for London's shopping public to populate.

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[91] Erica Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 152.

[92] Roger Fry, "The Regent-Street Quadrant, To the Editor of Times," *Times*, October 3, 1912, 7, quoted in Julia Scalzo, "All a Matter of Taste," 66.

[93] *London Standard*, 1912 quoted in Hermione Hobhouse, *A History of Regent Street: A Mile of Style* (Chichester, West Sussex: Phillimore, 2008), x.

Architecture and Sculpture as Display at the World's Fair and the Department Store

The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 popularized the historicist mode in architecture in America and promoted the power of a classical setting to make a dramatic impact upon visitors. The architect Daniel Burnham was in part responsible for the widespread execution of classical revival styling through his work in department stores, most famously Marshall Field's and Selfridge's. This style preference grew directly from his development of the grounds of the World's Columbian Exposition where the endurance of the Beaux Arts style was at odds with the exhibition's limited existence, a dialectic with which the department store also grappled.[94] Both the world's fair and the department store shaped a new understanding of architecture as temporary, theatrical, and as a feature of display.

Following the world's fair, historian Neil Harris observes, "American cities could then turn to the serious business of beautification and create a permanent analogue to the exposition in their own civic structures, museums, and public squares."[95] In its loose appropriation of a range of classical styles and symbols, the department store embodied this new architecture of display, which connected it to other prominent building projects that together contributed to the beautification of the city and symbolized its strength. In describing the predilection for the Beaux Arts style following the World's Columbian Exposition, Lewis Mumford likened architectural style to the mass-produced commodities that the department

[94] In 1904, an article in *Craftsman* magazine reflected on the exposition, "the great enterprise will be remembered, perhaps, chiefly for its indication of architectural possibilities. The buildings, erected for temporary purposes, were necessarily shams; but they were frank, and, in spire of their structure, educative to the majority of the visitors." See E.M. Bangs, "The Revival of Handicraft," *The Craftsman*, May 1904, 190.

[95] Harris, "Urban Tourism and the Commercial City," 68–69.

store offered for sale. Mumford reflected that in the years following the civil war, architects "fell into the easy mechanical duplication of other modes of architecture, frigidly predicted by the Chicago Exposition of 1893…turning out a rapid succession of Roman temples and baths, Florentine villas and French palaces and Gothic churches and universities."[96] This phenomenon is illustrated well in the duplication of the statue of the *Great Republic* in the entrance to New York's Siegel Cooper (fig. 24). Henry Siegel imported the statuary and overall vocabulary of the American Beaux Arts from World's Columbian Exposition in order to align his store with the grandeur and impressiveness of consumers' experiences at the popular world's fair.



Figure 24. The Interior of Siegel Cooper, New York, ca. 1910.
Source: © Schenectady Museum; Hall of Electrical History Foundation/CORBIS.

In the store's 1898 guide to New York, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York and Its Most Magnificent Store*, Siegel Cooper equated the visual experience of its entrance hall with that

[96] Mumford, *The Brown Decades,* 141.

of the recent spectacle, "On entering the Big Store by the imposing main entrance in the center of the 6th avenue frontage, the effect is again similar to that produced by the first view of one of the great industrial buildings of the late Chicago exhibition."[97] The statue provided a clear visual and material link between the world's fair and the department store. However, in the department store the statue was given a new treatment. Its surrounding pool was "hedged with palms, flowers, and ferns" and four fountains that "throw water far above the central wall of the second floor." *New York Times* noted "By an arrangement of electric lights and color devices, the tint of the water is changed constantly."[98] Electrical effects turned the staid statue into a variable visual attraction and enhanced the theatricality of the presentation.

In installing this statue at its entrance, Siegel Cooper aimed to create a landmark for his store and the greater city of New York. As one guidebook proclaimed, "Here all are invited to make their common meeting-place for their own profit and convenience. So thoroughly has the populace of Greater New York accepted this invitation that 'Meet Me at the Fountain' has become a familiar household expression."[99] As a landmark, the statue became a recognizable symbol for the store that was used in promotional material and pictured on souvenirs, including ladies fans.[100] Siegel Cooper also sold a coin purse with a metal plate at the clasp bearing the image of the *Great Republic* accompanied by the catchphrase "Meet Me at the Fountain" (fig. 25).

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[97] Wade, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York*, 127.

[98] "Big Store Thrown Open: A Dress Rehearsal at the New Shopping Resort," 16. By calling the opening of the department store a "dress rehearsal," this journalist is positioning the department store as a theatrical experience.

[99] Wade, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York,* 127.

[100] See Siegel Cooper Co., *Fan*, New York, 1890–1920, wood and printed paper, New York Historical Society, New York.



Figure 25. Siegel Cooper Co., *Purse*, paper, metal, leather, celluloid, 1890–1920. Source: New York Historical Society.

This purse captures one of the consumer's first impressions of the store as permanent decoration. This purse fits within the larger history in material culture of transforming ephemeral objects or experiences into a more permanent form of commodity.[101] Here the store has commodified its emblem in an object that is ironically a facilitator for future spending. The purse's opposite metal plate includes the phrase "Put Money In Thy Purse By Dealing At The Big Store." This message of cost saving lessened the overt commercialism of the object while the catchphrases and imagery included on this purse and similar souvenirs show how the department store was actively working its way into consumer consciousness.

Siegel Cooper was not alone in its deliberate insertion of sculpture as attraction. Abraham & Straus exhibited a nine-foot-tall solid silver version of *Justice*, which had also been on display at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Wanamaker's placed an immense eagle, a relic of the 1903 St Louis World's Fair, in their Grand Court in

[101] Printed representations of contemporary events, monuments, and political figures served as the bases for transfer printed decorations on ceramic objects of every day use and fabrics for clothing and household furnishings. Murphy and O'Driscoll, *Studies in Ephemera,*10.

Philadelphia and "Meet me at the Eagle" soon became a catch phrase.[102] Alfred Messel's Wertheim Department store exhibited a new work commissioned for the space; the sculptor Ludwig Manzel designed *Labor*, a large-scale sculpture of a female industrial worker leaning on machine parts and holding a shopping basket. [103]

Classical set pieces were also favored in the stores' salesrooms where sculpture was installed amidst commodities, a tradition that dates to the Crystal Palace where one reviewer remarked, plaster casts in the Greek Court "lure us into realms of poetry and imagination" and "…give us themes for speculation apart from the money-getting passion of the present day."[104] Statuary dotted sales floors and encouraged consumers to approach merchandise with the same awe with which they scrutinized sculpture while blurring the department stores' commercial goals with art appreciation (fig. 26). Brooklyn's Abraham and Straus also included "marble figures among the 43 departments."[105] This statuary lent a luxurious atmosphere to the shopping floor and encouraged consumers to pay attention to their surroundings. Also seating areas were often placed sympathetically with sightlines of statuary and architectural details and positioned consumers to take in the view. *The New York Times* reported that Siegel Cooper determined that their arrangement of benches surrounding the *Great Republic* statue was "a scheme that will operate without any aid."[106] The store's

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[102] By 1897 the London tailor Henry Poole displayed bronze ornaments from the Great Exhibition that amongst other features aimed to emulate the "magnificence of the department store." See Breward, "Manliness and the Pleasures of Consumption," 105–7.

[103] For analysis of this sculpture *Labor* see Helen Shiner, "Embodying the Spirit of the Metropolis: the Warenhaus Wetheim, Berlin, 1896–1904" in *Modernism and the Spirit of the City*, Iain Boyd Whyte, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 108.

[104]Charles Knight, *The Pictorial Gallery of Arts* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1845), xxxii quoted in Nichols, *The Sculpture and the Vitrine*, 32.

[105] Press Release: "Moments of Courage," 3, Abraham and Straus Collection.

[106] "Big Store Thrown Open," 16.

guidebook described that here "the visitor sits down to watch the hurrying crowds to wonder at the vast proportions of the building."[107] Architects designed such spaces for visitors to marvel at the merchandise and the scale and the speed of the operations of the store itself.



Figure 26. 4th Floor Exhibition Parlor. Reserved for the display of Imported Novelties in Dresses, Wraps and Millinery" in Hilton, Hughes & Co. *A Visit to Hilton, Hughes & Co., Broadway, New York: Leaves from An Artist's Sketch Book*. New York: The Giles Company, lith., ca. 1895.
Source: Baker Old Class Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

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[107] Wade, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York,* 96.

The Department Store and Its Interconnectedness with the City

In promotional materials the department store was often described in urban terms in order to emphasize its magnitude, while also emphasizing a connection to urban context. Marshall Field's offered a view "one block long" that was punctuated by columns meanwhile Siegel Cooper similarly referred to its main aisle as a "broad central avenue," both using design and terminology to position their stores within the gridded layout of the city's thoroughfares. In boasting of the scale of their operation, Siegel Cooper advertised, "Truly, it is a city in itself, for daily within its walls, 3,100 earn their bread and minister to the wants of 120,000 visitors."[108] Such descriptions architecturally and metaphorically extended the city experience inside the store. Frances Waxman referred to examples of this new purpose-built retail type as "store cities " in *A Shopping Guide to Paris and London* in 1912.[109] In the totality of their contents and their symbolic representation of urban modernity, the store embodied the city itself. One critic equated A.T. Stewart with the city of New York so closely that he wrote "Mr. Stewart, indeed, cannot be 'advertised' in the ordinary meaning of the word; you might as well advertise the city of New York."[110]

In asserting this landmark status the department store thus positioned itself as integral to its home city. The façades and show windows that lined the buildings became "part of an expanded urban consciousness," as Elaine Abelson has described .[111] As a prominent yet

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[108] Ibid., 127.

[109] Waxman, *A Shopping Guide to Paris and London*, 57.

[110] Jay E. Cantor, "A Monument of Trade: A. T. Stewart and the Rise of the Millionaire's Mansion in New York," *Winterthur Portfolio* 10 (1975): 195. For similar discussion regarding Wertheim see Helen Shiner, "Embodying the Spirit of the Metropolis: The Warenhaus Wertheim, Berlin, 1896-1904," 100.

[111] Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-thieving,* 70.

transparent architectural element at street level, banks of show windows reshaped the built environment of those thoroughfares that they occupied. When in 1891 the Chicago City Council sought to force Marshall Field to scale down their new show windows, which encroached on the sidewalk beyond the building line, the outraged editor of the *Dry Goods Economist* responded that far from being an impediment "the windows are an ornament to the street."[112] The show window's persistent frontality confronted and enticed city goers while expanding the physical and creative parameters of the retail advertisement. A bulletin produced by the Chicago Association of Commerce in 1907 called attention to the individuality of the stores along State Street, while stressing their combined impression: "The world has no panorama of show windows on a single street approximating in interest the displays this month along the extended fronts of Siegel Cooper & Co., Rothschild's, the Hub, the Fair, Mandel Bros., Carson, Pirie Scott & Co., the Boston Store, Hillman's, Charles A. Stevens & Bros., Marshall Field & Co., and others whose individuality also contributes to the spectacular ensemble."[113] This major shopping street was defined by its lineup of show windows.

Promotional imagery reinforced the leading department stores' power to dominate the cityscape. In 1906, Marshall Field's printed a postcard that advertised the store's command of an entire city block (fig. 27). The postcard advertised the business's hold on valuable urban real estate and the size of the building sent a message of stable and impressive commercial power. A three-quarter exterior view of the building flattered and exaggerated its dominance of the cityscape. This perspective afforded a visual scan of a block-long storefront, a sightline

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[112] *Dry Goods Economist*, January 10, 1891, 28 quoted in Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving,* 70.

[113] Chicago Association of Commerce, "The Bulletin: State Street in Festal Garb," 1907, 10, 03052 (27), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

of the store's depth, and conveyed its many storeys high reach. The notation at the side of this postcard communicates the building's monumental impression. The sender wrote, "How would you like to do your Spring shopping in this store – all you see in this picture is Marshall Fields store except the dark strip at left."



Figure 27. V.O. Hammon Publishing Company, Postcard, "Marshall Field & Co's Store," postmarked May 1, 1906.
Source: Author's collection.

Here the store's dignified stone-clad façade visually sets it apart from the ordinary brick buildings surrounding it and the building's mass is so large that it takes up the vast majority of the image frame.

Stores actively promoted their buildings as a destination in their home cities. A Selfridge's postcard of 1918 shows the store towering over West London and rising above the skyline as if it were the single dominant public attraction worthy of attention and the sole defining structure for that region of the city (fig. 28).

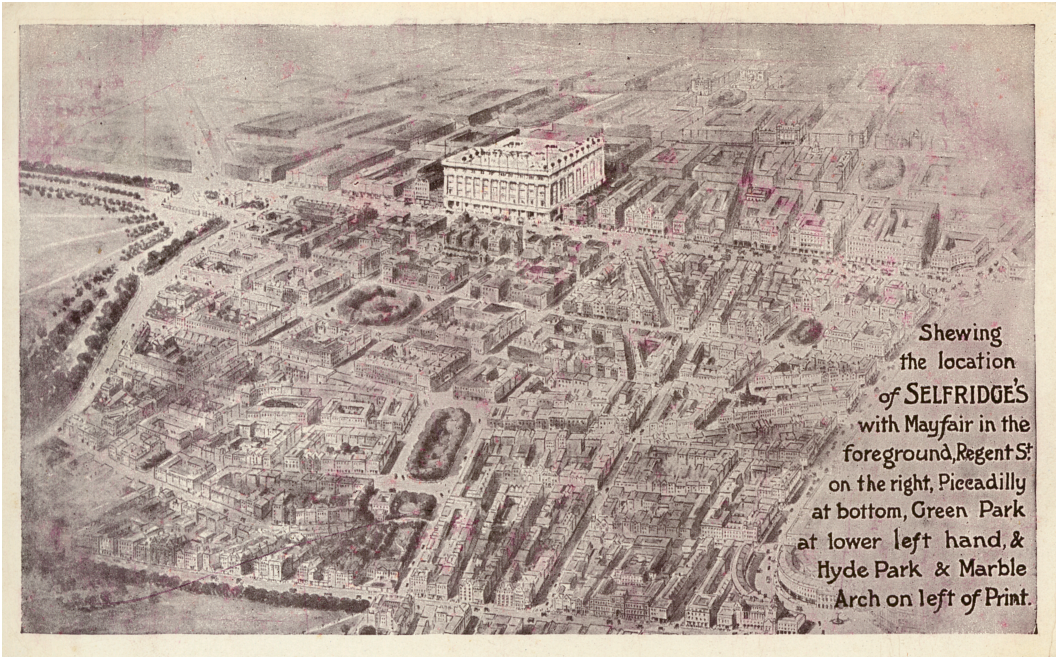


Figure 28. Selfridge's, Postcard, ca. 1918.
Source: Mary Evans / Pharcide.

This postcard features the department store's classical styling and, implicitly, its steel frame structure that allowed it to reach such a height. Almost like the Acropolis on the hillside, Selfridge's stands on top of all of London as a monument to cultural ideals.

The department store actively infiltrated everyday life above and below ground. Stores built windows, and when possible entrances, into subway stations, facilitating another direct connection to the consumer via display on another plane of the cityscape. In Chicago underground windows were built in 1905 for Field's, Mandel's, and Carson, Pirie, Scott. Also in London, architect Charles Holden incorporated three showcases for the merchandise of local retailers such as Swan and Edgar in his design for the Piccadilly Circus underground station. In New York the Astor Place and 59th street subway stations have their underground show windows to this day and above both stations are active stores (A.T. Stewart and Wanamaker's, now K-Mart at Astor Place, and Bloomingdales at 59th Street). At Astor Place

Wanamaker installed six elevators at two subway exits/store entrances that conveyed passengers immediately to the floor that they desired to visit in the building, offering a new convenience of being able to step immediately from the train into the store.[114] In March of 1914 *Technical World Magazine* reported, "Subway shopping is all the rage. Vast throngs of shoppers come and go from morning until evening. So great is the lure of the underground life to them…"[115] The department store maximized possibilities even below ground to capture consumer attention and the stores' placement of underground windows aligned the displays with the speed and excitement associated with the subway itself.

One postcard printed by Marshall Field's (fig. 29) visually demonstrates, with a rare cross section view, how the sub-structure of the department store was built into the city's understructure. Here the metaphorical interconnectedness between the city and the store amplified in advertisements becomes a physical reality. Just as the show windows absorbed the energy of the city streets, the activity in the machinery, shipping room, and sales basement paralleled the activity of the motorcars and carriages on the street above. Goods, people, and industrial elements are shown in layers, all components of the overall machine of the department store. Materials in Chicago's stratigraphy are labeled on the right as are the departments on the left. This layout emphasizes that the floor-by-floor demarcation that was a key aspect of the department store's architectural design was paralleled in the city's underground layers. The postcard communicates the mechanical nature of the store's underground activity as well as its physical and visual connections to the city's larger industrial systems.

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[114] H.C. Brown, *The New Subway in Manhattan* (New York: Brown, Henry Collins, 1904), 29.

[115] Bailey Millard, "Millions of the Cellar," *Technical World Magazine*, March 1914, 69.

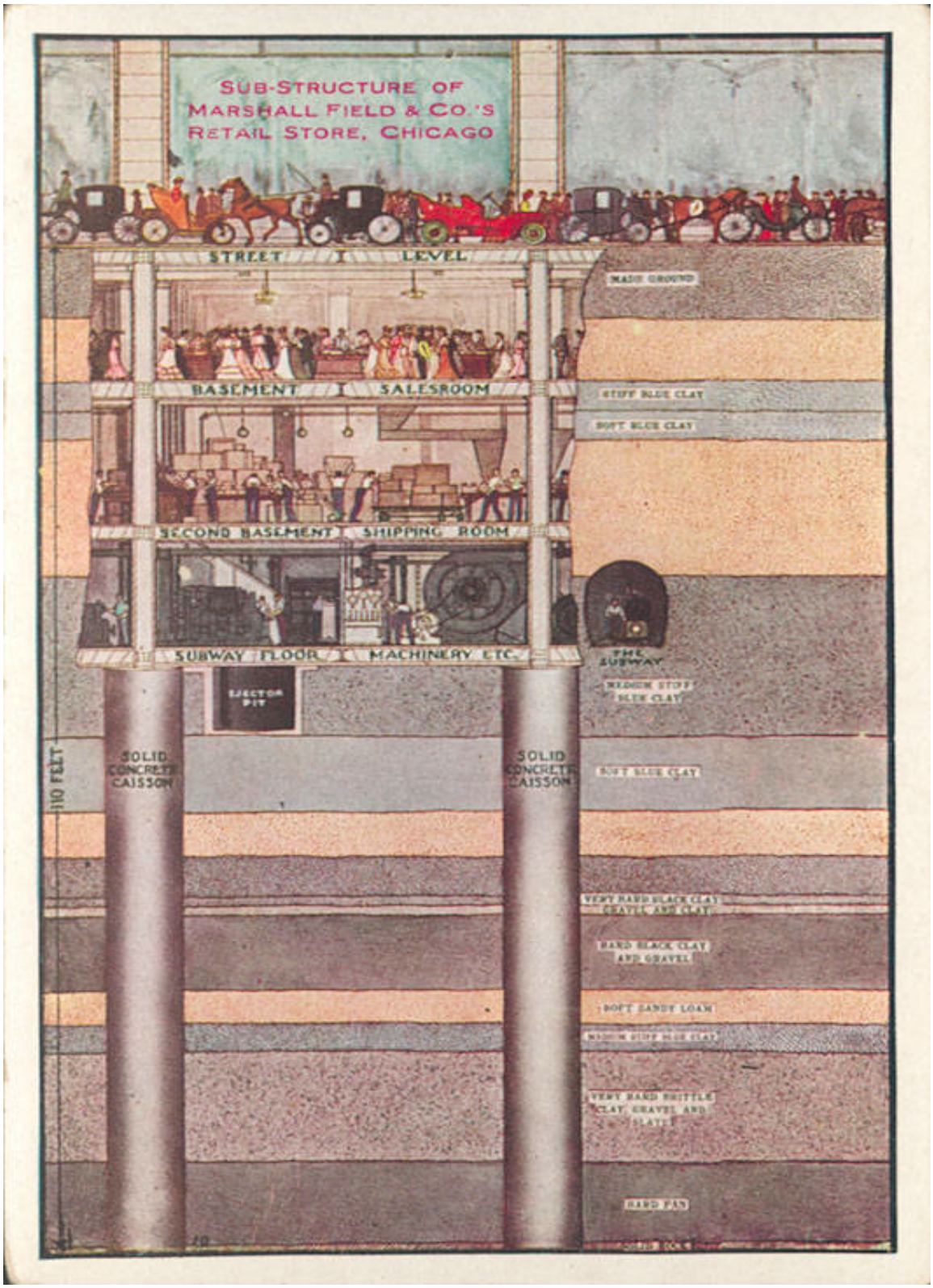


Figure 29. V.O. Hammon Publishing Company, Postcard, "Substructure of Marshall Field & Co.'s Retail Store, Chicago," ca. 1910.
Source: Illinois Digital Archives.

The Department Store as a Machine

The mechanical nature of the department store's architecture as well as its scale, complexity, and technological strength, its many workers, and the application of strategies of scientific retailing, all encourage a comparison between the department store and the factory as sites of optimal production. The popular three quarter exterior view of the building that appeared on postcards (fig. 27) and other ephemera was the very same view used to depict factories in many manufacturers' catalogues. Welch Wilmarth, a leading American showcase manufacturer, included a three-quarter view of their "New Factory" in their product catalogue (fig. 30).



Figure 30. Some Facts About Our New Factory, *Wilmarth Showcase Company Catalogue*, ca. 1907, 3.
Source: Smithsonian Libraries, Washington D.C.

Similar to the department store, the Welch Wilmarth factory advertised their fireproof structure, electric power, shipping facilities, and quantified their floor space. Historian

Kenneth Ames's description of this standard factory imagery could just as well apply to the department store:

> …an artifact, as a machine of sorts, notable for its scale, multiplicity or complexity of parts, and orderliness. Although the interior was not usually visible, the exterior generated the sense that what took place inside was efficient, well-organized, business-like, and prosperous, representing the freshest approaches and techniques in that line of business.[116]

The exterior appearance of the factory, similar to the façade of the department store, functioned as an element of display and communicated the strength and well ordered nature of the business.

First established in relationship to factories in the early twentieth century, the metaphor of the building as machine further encourages interpretation of the department store as a site of production as well as emphasizes the application of science and rationalization to the design of the stores' inner workings.[117] Behind-the-scenes machinery and technology were emphasized in promotional literature. An article on John Barker's in London elaborated that "A little known, but very important side of Store life, is that concerning mechanical equipment."[118] By calling attention to and even opening up these aspects of the store to the public, the department store pictured the machine as a part of the department store experience.

With regards to Sullivan's design for Schlesinger and Meyer, historian John Siry has written, "The sense of the vitality of mechanical systems as central to the nature of a modern

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[116] Ames, "*Trade Catalogues* and the Study of History," 12.

[117] Joseph Bizup, *Manufacturing Culture: Vindications of Early Victorian Industry* (Charlottesville, Virginia and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 18–50.

[118] Article on Mechanical Equipment in the Stores of John Barker & Co Ltd, 4, FRAS 965, Records of John Barker, House of Fraser Archive, University of Glasgow.

building made them objects of wonder worthy of architectural expression."[119] When Louis Sullivan conceived of the show windows for Schlesinger and Mayer department store in Chicago, he considered the popularity of the use of electric motors and allowed for wiring within the raised base of the window and allotted a depth of six to eight feet to leave room for the mechanical elements.[120] Herein the "vitality of mechanical systems" was both inherent in the building itself and central to the store's modern displays.

The department store was one of the first spaces in which the public experienced the glow of industrial electrical lighting, the speed of an elevator, and the comfort of ventilation systems. All of these technological qualities amplified the desirability of the shopping experience as well as the merchandise itself. Often in the same breath with quantities of show windows, the press enumerated aspects of the department store's infrastructure. Macy's boasted "42 miles of electric wiring, 15,000 incandescent lamps, together with 1400 arc lamps, 80 electric motors and 30 parcel conveyers."[121]

On the opening night of the new Siegel Cooper in 1896, the *New York Times* reported that "Everything was in gear here, and there was neither jar nor friction anywhere last night."[122] Meanwhile a 1914 brochure for the opening of B. Altman & Co.'s enlarged store described that "there is everywhere apparent a certain poise, which conveys to the keen observer the mental impression of a great organization kept under perfect control – a gigantic piece of well-constructed, well-cared-for machinery of which every infinitesimal part is

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[119] Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*, 205.

[120] Ibid, 141.

[121] "Macy & Co.'s New Store," 19, Macy's Archive.

[122] "Big Store Thrown Open," 16.

accurately placed and keyed."[123] Such mechanistic analogies amplified the public's awe for the efficiency as well as complexity of the department store's mechanical systems.

In plain view at Siegel Cooper store was a "revolving screw turned by electric power for sending packages from the upper floors to the delivery department."[124] This piece of machinery brought dynamism to the sales floor while advertising how quickly and efficiently the store managed the movement of goods. By making this revolving screw visible, Siegel Cooper made machinery an active aesthetic element of the department store experience and emphasized their store as a space of production. Many stores had ceilings of pneumatic tubing that served as visible evidence of the store's ability to circulate money efficiently. Such technical apparatuses also symbolized speed. In 1901 Macy's promoted that their new store contained "over eighteen miles of pipes and tubes, covering the entire building are used to make the system absolutely perfect."[125] Two tube offices were located in the basement and on the fourth floor. Although hidden from the view, these communication hubs featured proudly in department store promotional materials. The combination of cash registers and these pneumatic tube systems displaced the work of the cash boys, thus a triumph of machine power over human power. The Bon Marché Brixton described pneumatic tubing's advantages, "One of the many noteworthy methods observable in the organization…is the 'cash railway' which quite dispenses with the mistakes, delay, and almost unavoidable

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[123] *B. Altman & Co's Enlarged Store: Fifth Avenue- Madison Avenue, Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Streets, New York* (New York: B. Altman & Co., 1914), 22.

[124] "Will Be a Great Store," *New York Times*, March 23, 1895.

[125] "1901: Macy's New Store – Biggest Department House in Country Planned," 8B Box 10, Macy's Archive.

confusion attendant upon the employment of cash boys. Noise and bustle, too, are reduced to a minimum, and a customer never has to wait longer than half-a-minute for change…"[126]

Therefore a central element in this metaphor of the store as a machine is the quick and efficient movement of goods and people throughout the space that extends above and below ground. Strawbridge and Clothier was the first American department store to install a lift in 1865 and Harrods was the first British department store with a moving staircase in 1898.[127] Siegel Cooper operated ten main passenger elevators that made an average of 2500 round trips a day, or a total of 95 car miles."[128] Barker's in London operated 80 lifts in its complex of buildings and each made the journey from the top to bottom of the building in two and a half minutes.[129] The elevator was a prominently designed element of the department store in which art and machinery came together to create a new interior and a distinct experience for the mobile consumer.

Siegel Cooper housed all of its equipment within its boundary walls, except its water supply, and a vast plant for power, light, heating, and ventilation was established under the Eighteenth Street sidewalk. The *New York Times* reported that it was the largest extant in any establishment in America, except for in a few factories.[130] Here the scale of the store's mechanical underpinnings not only invites comparison to a large machine but also reinforces the store's capacity at the scale of a factory. In their internal newspaper, the *Harrodian*

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[126] *Modern London: The World's Metropolis, An Epitome of Results, Business Men and Commercial Interests, Wealth and Growth, Etc.* (London: Historical Publishing Co, 1887), 141.

[127] Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 34.

[128] Wade, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York,* 133.

[129] Article on Mechanical Equipment, 1, FRAS 965, Records of John Barker, House of Fraser Archive.

[130] "Big Store Thrown Open," 16.

Gazette, Harrods included an article on "Our Power Supply" offering that "It may be of interest to our staff to learn that in the basement of our building there is installed a plant for providing power, light, heat, air, and water, for most of which services the House is independent of outside supplies."[131] The sharing of this information with the staff implies that it was a source of pride and suggests the need for the staff to be able to accurately pass the information along to curious customers.

Stores offered tours to give their visitors a behind-the-scenes view and raise their appreciation of the mechanical prowess of the given store. Marshall Field reported that "Visitors to the store who so desire can be taken by a guide on a comprehensive tour of the store (106,000 took it last summer), starting from the Visitors' Bureau on the third floor, and including particularly those parts of the store which are usually not seen by the public."[132] Schlesinger and Mayer in Chicago offered tours of its mechanical system from subbasement to rooftop on its opening days.[133] An examination of the floor plan for the basement level of Siegel Cooper in New York reveals that the Engine Room was designed to be on permanent display adjacent to the department for House Furnishing Goods (fig. 31). The engine room was visible through plate glass, much in the same way that the store presented their merchandise through windows and casework,

> The electrical plant…will be one the most interesting sights in the city. The firm intends to make it a show feature. Along the side of the basement, which will be devoted to the sale of heavy goods and hardware, are immense sheets of plate glass, affording an unobstructed view of the entire engine room, where

[131] The Engineer, "Our Power Supply," *Harrodian Gazette* August 1, 1913, 8, Harrod's Archive, Harrod's Corporate Affairs.

[132] Marshall Field & Company Pamphlet, 1913, 16023 (2), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

[133] Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott,* 205

passers may look upon the largest installation in the world of electric motors for commercial use.[134]

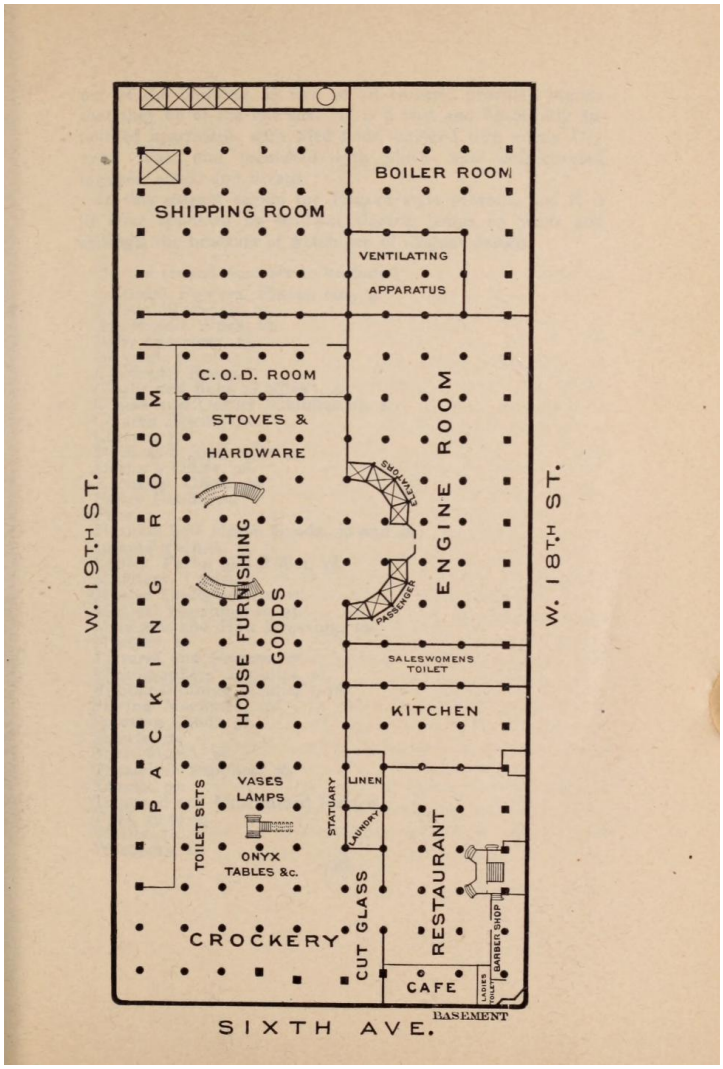


Figure 31. Floor Plan of Basement Level, Siegel Cooper, New York, 1898 in Stuart C. Wade, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York and Its Most Magnificent Store* (New York, Siegel-Cooper Co., 1898), 134.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by New York Public Library.

Intended to be a "show feature," this engine room was conveniently located nearby to the restaurant, another more familiar attraction. The store also made a monument out of their switchboard, "nearly 50 feet long, constructed of white Italian marble and raised six feet

[134] "Largest Light Ever Made," *New York Times*, September 6, 1896, 10.

above the floor level on an iron framework, which also supports a platform for the operators, with massive brass rails, the whole thing being very handsome."[135] The opening up of these mechanical spaces to public eye suggests that the larger technical scope of the department store was a point of public intrigue. Siegel Cooper aestheticized their mechanical features with the use of the luxury materials such as marble and plate glass and the construction of a purpose-built display area.

Stores explicitly pointed out how machine power replaced manpower in their operating systems. Siegel Cooper proudly described in a guidebook that all of the varied tasks of the "Engine-Room and Machinery" were possible while manned by only sixty men.[136] The guidebook goes on to explain,

> Not only is all of the lighting and elevating power generated here, but the coffee in the grocery department is ground, the churns for making butter are whirled around, the carpenter's shop is furnished with motive power, the sewing machines are run, the dental apparatus, delicate to a degree, is set in motion, the hair-dyeing in the manicuring department is effected, and the burnishing in the photograph-gallery is done by power furnished by this engine-room.[137]

This description emphasizes the interconnected nature of the mechanical systems of the department store and at the same time calls attention to the numerous and vast array of automated components, all reliant on the same internal power source. This range of activities, all powered by the engine room, further reinforced the department store as a place of production.

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[135] Ibid.

[136] It is curious to note that "each dynamo in the engine-room is named after an illustrious man in electrical science." Wade*, A Birds-eye View of Greater New York,* 133.

[137] Ibid.*,* 132.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced how at the turn of the twentieth century, materials, style, and technology came together to create a total environment and optimal building type for the large urban department store. As a focus of civic pride and a technological and mechanical marvel, the architecture of the department store was a leading component in the store's promotional agenda. Presaging the skyscraper's alignment with city life, in the period of 1880 to 1920, the department store was recognized as a new building type that defined and decorated the shopping city. In its embrace of the latest materials and technologies, its evocation of urban expansion and its rigorous program of stylistic updating, the department store's architecture was an ultimately modern expression.

Architecture, however, should not be read in isolation but instead as one element in the department store's program of display along with the show window display and interior and exterior decorations. The professional name, "window dresser" or "window trimmer" implies the putting on, taking off, and fitting of a fashionable surface, suggesting an alignment between the display profession and the fashion system. In the name of display, architecture was routinely "dressed" (fig. 32). In this image the classical pediment of Marshall Field's serves as the ideal armature to hold flags and decorations in celebration of Lincoln's 100th birthday in 1902. The classicism of the architecture enhances the bold nationalism of the holiday's message. Earlier that year, Marshall Field & Company, employed this fashion metaphor in an advertisement announcing the extension of their opening celebrations. The advertisement reported, "Very many out-of-town people are taking advantage of the reduced railroad rates to Chicago this week, and great numbers will still

make the excursion from distant as well as neighboring cities for the express purpose of seeing this great 'institution' in its gala dress."[138]



Figure 32. Lincoln Decorations, Exterior View of Marshall Field & Co., 1909.
Source: Chicago History Museum, DN-0054039; Chicago Daily News.

This use of dress as a metaphor for decoration not only implied ostentation and stylishness but also a temporary nature. Connections to the fashion system, a robust promotional agenda, symbolism, and a veiling of ephemerality were all characteristics that display and decoration were bringing to retail architecture. This set of themes will continue in the next chapter where discussion will shift from architecture to the show window.

[138] "Publicity" *Apparel Gazette,* October 1902, 64, 03052 (21), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

Chapter Two
The Show Window: The Rise of the Display Profession

The storage and showcasing of new products had been the program of the show window since its first appearance as a grid of panes in the eighteenth century. Therefore what most notably separated the show window displays of the late nineteenth century from the show window presentations that preceded them were their professional makers and their complex processes of creation, carried out in order to achieve a unique and preconceived result. An emphasis on the makers and the making of show windows is therefore essential in understanding this advertising space's significance at the turn of the twentieth century and will be the primary topic of this chapter.

At the turn of the twentieth century in Chicago, New York and London, the display staff choreographed a creative and continually evolving presentation of goods in the show window to earn consumers' attention, praise, trust, and investment. The varied work of the window dresser developed as a new professional skill set dedicated to conditioning the public's curiosity for display and establishing the show window as a site of focused merchandise presentation and artistic and cultural expression. Frequent and tactfully timed reconfiguration of the window display's contents built a continually responsive consumer market that was alert to the window dressers' method of presentation as well as to the new merchandise on offer.

Having established the architectural framework of the show window, this chapter will now consider the formation, design, and influence of the displays that the building contained and exhibited. The window dresser devised displays that articulated particular messages of modernity communicated through materials, technique, style, subject matter, and the use of technology. For instance, consumers

perceived the execution of an ambitious layout, the presence of mechanization, the effects of colored lighting, or a display that celebrated a contemporary event as evidence of an up-to-date store that was accordingly worthy of their patronage. Retail trade and advice literature made frequent use of the terms "up-to-date" and "wide awake" to enforce the show window's mission to showcase designs that were utterly of the present. These terms also foregrounded a message of speed as in the need to keep awake so as not to miss any new merchandising opportunities.

George S. Cole, author of one of the earliest American texts on window dressing contained within his tome *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods* (1892), advised, "The show window was architecturally created for the sole purpose that it might be appropriately trimmed, and if it be not properly arranged it is simply useless – a waste of space which cannot be filled or used for any other purpose."[1] More pronounced than a modest window, the *show* window held the power to make its contents prominent. The Latin root of the verb "to display" is "displicare" meaning an act of unfolding, spreading out, in the sense of constantly calling attention to itself. The show window succeeded by making its contents conspicuous. It was built for the sole purpose of promotion and the displays created for the show window were unique to it. The assemblages' stylistic relatives can be found in other exhibition contexts such as world's fairs (fig. 5), trade expositions, and the theatre. However the window dresser's manipulation of textiles, building and combining of goods, and implementation of dramatic treatment were for merchandising purposes only. This distinction makes it possible to therefore isolate the display moment in the life of the commodity and study it as a discrete phase. By defining the show window ensemble

[1] George S. Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Co., 1892), 470.

as an artistic entity in its own right, the window dresser created a new space and identity for the commodity on display that was held in suspension between production and consumption.

The first section of this chapter will put forward the historical conditions that enabled and encouraged the blossoming of the "age of show windows." The second will center on how the window dresser advanced to occupy an authoritative role in the marketplace. The third will uncover the calculated layouts, architectural knowledge, and attentive artistic aims that governed the work of the window dresser as he grouped objects into elaborate themes, narratives, and configurations. The overall aim of this chapter will be to establish how the department store show window became a significant expression of modernity in the cities of Chicago, London and New York at the turn of the twentieth century. The narrative will draw attention to how a new professional culture around display affected consumer perceptions and business priorities.

The Development of the Display Profession and the Ascension of the Show Window

During the 1880 to 1920 period the emerging display profession promoted an understanding of the show window as both a feature that visually enhanced the cityscape and as a factor of direct profitability within the department store's business model. Through trade literature, education systems, and advertising, displaymen also shaped a narrative of advancement and importance around their profession both internally and publicly.

The process of professionalization aimed to secure recognition for the practice of display as a skilled and authoritative vocation and involved a number of discrete steps. Grace Lees-Maffei has defined professionalization as the "setting up of

professional organizations, the articulation and monitoring of standards and codes of conduct, the institution of clear educational routes and means of assessment, networking and gate keeping."[2] Displaymen deliberately navigated this process in keeping with scientific management's drive to rationalize even the creative industries. The achievement of the status of professional was one desired internally by practitioners and also increasingly expected by department store managers.

Frank L. Baum took the position in *The Show Window* that the public interpreted the show window as a site for competition among the specialists skilled in the promotion of goods. One article explained, "The remark, 'Brown has a pretty window,' is usually followed by the sentence, 'Brown has a good window trimmer.'" The journalist continued that "competition in selling goods to-day is largely directed and influenced by the competition of window trimmers. These men are usually intensely interested in the success of their employers. They want to excel the efforts of all other trimmers and establish their own reputations as clever designers."[3] The window dressers' personal commitment to and competition within the development of their field crucially helped to propel it forward.

As a result of the new techniques and tools on offer and the rise of display as a primary element of distinction between stores, arrangements became increasingly sophisticated. In *The Show Window*'s November 1897 issue L. Frank Baum boldly described how this new emphasis on the show window ushered in a new age:

> This is the age of show windows. The up-to-date merchant realizes that his window is his best advertisement, and therefore persistently strives to make it as beautiful and attractive as possible…and in this age of sharp competition, the contention is who shall be able to present the

[2] Lees-Maffei, "Professionalization as a Focus," 1.

[3] "Up-To-Date Ideas," *The Show Window*, April 1898, 143.

> brightest and most attractive display of goods that may wile the passer-by into his store.[4]

Literature of the display profession advocated for the show window's ability to harness visual power to make a commercial impact

This visual power found in the celebration of the surface of objects also connected more broadly to a culture of spectacularization that was prominent by the late nineteenth century. The exterior appearance of objects, often augmented or altered by the window dresser, was more important in the display context than objects' functional assets. Upon a visit to the Berlin Trade Exhibition in 1896, Georg Simmel identified the celebration of surface in the window display as representative of a greater attitude in commodity culture of the period that he termed the "shop-window effect." He wrote that "The production of goods under the regime of free competition and the normal predominance of supply over demand leads to goods having to show a tempting exterior as well as utility."[5] Due to the need for differentiation in this era of mass production Simmel proposed that an object's exhibition value had become a priority in its commercial success, just as the show window had become a priority in the commercial success of retail architecture.

One of the window dresser's primary techniques to maximize on the impact of the display moment in the life of the commodity was to be unconventional. Everyday commodities such as handkerchiefs and spools of thread became building blocks for commodity pictures of geometric patterns, flowers, bridges, and more. Wares appeared against decorated backdrops and in washes of colored light. George Cole offers the salient advice that the consumer's "attention must be secured first by some

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[4] "The Show Window," *The Show Window*, November 1897, 17.

[5] Georg Simmel, David Frisby, and Mike Featherstone, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 257.

feature with which he is *unfamiliar*."[6] In this attraction process, as historian William Leach has described, the window display "amplified the visual, transforming the already watching city person into a potentially compulsive viewer."[7] The window display crucially trained consumers that it was possible to shop via observation alone and without engaging with a merchant.

By the late nineteenth century the show window was considered a professionally devised selling force that was directly responsible for sales. In July of 1920, the *MRSW* called the show window "the greatest selling factor."[8] Empowered in a position of agency, the persuasive show window played a pivotal role in the success of the department store as a whole. As will be echoed in the following chapter with regards to the clever use of shopfittings, the American author George S. Cole assured his readership in 1892 that "The storekeeper, when he has handsomely dressed his window, has half made a sale."[9] Department stores internally cultivated display talent, invested in the maintenance of the profession, advertised their prowess, and participated in global conversations about new directions in design strategy.

In the smaller shops of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the reputation of a store largely rested on the shop owner's taste for choosing and displaying the wares.[10] The public relied on the merchant to choose the best quality stock and then consumers required guidance in their navigation of a selection. Later in the nineteenth century with the department store's expansion of stock and vast physical layout, a

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[6] Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods,* 473.

[7] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 63.

[8] "The Greatest Selling Factor," *MRSW*, July 1920, 19.

[9] Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*, 469.

[10] For descriptions of these one-man shops see Charles Manby Smith, "London Shops, Old and New" in *The Little World of London* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1857), 325.

dedicated display staff became responsible for managing the presentation of these wares.

Thus the window dresser advanced as a distinct identity within the late nineteenth century marketplace. In America in 1880 and in England in 1881 the term "window dresser" first appeared in the profession box in national censuses. The June 1880 New York census included six window dressers.[11] In the 1881 Chelsea District of London Census one man is listed as a "window dresser mantle."[12] One American journalist claimed in 1902, "Of the 150 expert window dressers who exercise their calling in the United States today over three-fourths are foreign born, being mostly natives of England and Scotland." Given this approximation of only 150 active window dressers, the journalist also identified window dressing as "one of the few occupations that are not overcrowded."[13]

The biographies of named displaymen at the leading department stores of Chicago, London and New York are relatively unknown. However the occasional profile of a displayman does shed light on a professional pathway in the display field. For instance in 1922 the *Dry Goods Economist* identified W.F. Larkin, then chief of the decoration department at Wanamaker's, New York, as an "interesting figure in department store life."[14] When he was a little boy Larkin had planned to go into the

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[11] Bernhardt Harviss (born in Mecklenburg), John Jones (born in Wales) Joseph Nassauer (born in England), H. John Powell (born in New York), Charles Willis (born in England), and James Woods (born in England). United States Census Bureau, "1880 United States Federal Census," accessed February 1, 2015. http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=6742

[12] William J. Allen (born in England). Census Returns of England and Wales, "1881 British Isles Census," accessed February 1, 2015. http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=7572

[13] "Art of Window Dressing: Artistic Trimmers are Born, Not Made – Experts Well Paid," *Saint Paul Globe*, May 12, 1902, 14.

[14] "Love of Work the Real Secret of Larkin's Climb," *Dry Goods Economist*, February 4, 1922, 39.

circus. As a teenager he "painted portraits and did landscapes in oil and became a scenic artist for musical comedy stock."[15] He dabbled in "illustration and designing" before becoming employed at the National Cash Register Company as a designer and builder of window attractions of "mechanical, electrical figures, tricks etc." which were fitted with shipping cases and sent around the world.[16] He also did similar "show work" at the Jamestown Exposition, the Yukon-Pacific Exposition, and in Canada and Mexico before landing at Wanamaker's where his displays for the toy department earned him the utmost praise. Larkin's biography reveals the overlaps in skill sets between approaches to display for retail, the theatre, and the exposition.

Within the realm of retail, the profession of window dressing had its roots in the dry goods houses that serviced the textile trade.[17] Many of the first prescriptive texts on window dressing centered on textiles and were geared towards dealers in the material.[18] The manipulability of yard goods and smaller individual wares, most notably handkerchiefs, made the execution of ambitious arrangements possible. Textiles' function after all relied on their ability to drape on the body or in the home. Therefore the weight and fold of fabrics, as well as texture and color, were essential features to communicate effectively in a window display. As early as the Great Exhibition in London, one can identify artistic attempts at draping swaths of fabric and displaying textiles over forms to give them shape (fig. 5). These approaches formed the foundational techniques of the display profession and the finished goods

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] In 1857, Abraham Abraham of Abraham & Straus worked as a teenager at the dry goods store Hart & Dettlebach in Newark, along with Simon Bloomingdale and Benjamin Altman. See "Press Release: The First Century of Abraham & Straus," Records of Abraham & Straus, Brooklyn Historical Society.

[18] See for instance Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*, 1892.

of the textile trade provided the fundamental artistic medium for the creation of the window display.

While the terms window dresser and window trimmer applied well to a field at first tied closely to textile displays in the window, by the second decade of the twentieth century the public's expectation for dramatic presentation grew and retail manuals and trade periodicals encouraged a theatrical setup of wares beyond the window space; the window dressers' role expanded accordingly to encompass the interior. The terminology that these men chose to describe their expanding responsibilities and to reflect the importance of their profession underwent revision on both sides of the Atlantic. At the convention of the National Association of Window Trimmers, held in New York in 1915 and attended by between 1,500 and 2,000 members, it was decided that window trimmer was no longer an appropriate title and that Display Man should become the operative term for the vocation. The organization's name change to the International Association of Display Men reflected group's increasingly global reach. The *New York Times* reported, "Among display men it is termed a 'wake' over the death and burial of the term 'window trimmer' which has been discarded."[19] In 1922 in London it was similarly reported, "The name, 'Window Dresser' is gradually being less used, and the more dignified and fitting name of 'Display Man' is being more generally adopted."[20]

While the term "dresser" had connotations of femininity, the term "Display Man" was definitively male. It is important to note that while females were able to hold very successful careers as top saleswomen in department stores, few advanced in

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[19] "No More 'Window Trimmers,'" *New York Times*, August 1, 1915, 27.

[20] G. L. Timmins, *Window Dressing: The Principles of Display* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1922), xiii.

this period in Britain or America to make names for themselves as window dressers. In 1899 *The Show Window* identified through a survey that there were about eighty women in America working as window dressers, mostly in small towns.[21] While women's goods were primarily featured in the space of the show window, the task of the display's arrangement in the large department store largely fell to males. In the professional literature, the female more often played the role of consumer rather than producer.[22] Due to the physical demands of the profession and the unconventional hours, men were said to be more practically suited for the role. Although the final visual effect may have been feminine, the rigorous work involved to produce that result was judged to be more fitting for males.

The work of creating the window display was potentially dangerous and fires in the windows were not uncommon.[23] Men were working in cramped conditions and in high heat due to the gas lighting that could easily catch the goods on fire. There was therefore some truth in the *New York Times* report in 1902 that "Women have not yet broken into this field of activity. One reason is that her skirts would be in the way."[24] Therefore the show window operated around a gendered dichotomy of male producer and female consumer.

With the leadership of a few essential men, window dressers actively organized and promoted themselves as a professional group. This formalization

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[21] L. Frank Baum, "Some Statistics," *The Show Window*, September 1899, 197.

[22] In 1921, one guidebook reported, "It is generally agreed that women buy ninety per cent of the necessities and luxuries used in the American home." See Warren and Fredericks, *Selling Service with the Goods*, 14.

[23] For the story of a fire in a Siegel Cooper window, see "Miscellaneous City News: A Heavy Fire in Sixth-Avenue," *New York Times*, April 13, 1880, 2.

[24] "Window Dressing in Big Stores: An Art Which Enlists Services of Men of Taste," *New York Times*, October 19, 1902, 27. For a similar mention of skirts as a deterrent for females' window work see "Art of Window Dressing," *Saint Paul Globe,* May 12, 1902.

occurred in the late nineteenth century in America and not until the second decade of the twentieth century in Britain. In 1898, L. Frank Baum founded the National Association of Window Trimmers. The organization's first annual meeting was held in Chicago in August 1898 and by 1900 the organization had members in almost every state.[25] In 1919, the British Association of Display Men came together under the leadership of window dresser E.N. Goldsman, who for twelve years was the Display Manager at Selfridge's, and the organization launched its own journal *Display* in the same year. The groups devised conventions that included lectures, workshops, display demonstrations, and booths where manufacturers showed off the latest tools of the trade.

News of the field spread in part via a retail-specific trade press. Articles on window display first appeared in literature for the dry goods trade. Competition, new business strategy, as well as educational and nationalistic motivations contributed to the founding of journals solely devoted to retail display in both Britain and America. Although better known as the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) L. Frank Baum is central to the history of the profession of window dressing. Following work in the newspaper business in Aberdeen, South Dakota and Chicago, and a job as a china buyer at Siegel Cooper in Chicago, Baum began work as a traveling salesman for the china and glassware manufacturer Pitkin and Brooks. For this work Baum travelled widely to rural hardware stores for whom he helped to create window displays in order to boost their sales of his company's products. Aiming to teach people outside of the city centers about the advantages of window display, L. Frank Baum founded *The Show Window* in 1897.

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[25] Sidney A. Sherman, "Advertising in the United States," *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 7 (1900): 10.

The Show Window endeavored to teach an estimated 498,500 merchants "the best and latest modes of window decoration."[26] Photographs and diagrams brought high style display of the major urban stores within reach of the rural shopkeeper who might want to emulate them. Schematics of display designs as well as images and drawings of displays in situ presented these schemes as reproducible and customizable. Photographs captured the display in real time, recording it for use in future learning as well as extending the life of the otherwise ephemeral installation.

The British publication *The Window Dressing and General Trade Review* was founded in a similar spirit of sharing information as well as bolstering the nation's support for this new profession. The first page of the first issue proclaimed, "We propose to give shopkeepers the advantage of other people's experience. It will be a medium for the mutual exchange of ideas; an Agency for obtaining information on every subject of interest to every and any shop or store-keeper."[27] At the same time language in the inaugural issue suggests that the *WDGTR* was also founded with a competitive impetus in order to maintain Britain's proud reputation as a "nation of shopkeepers": The journal pledged to be of "real assistance in increasing the business and wealth of those subscribers, who are 'real live' men…anxious to keep up the reputation for enterprise and progress that we still believe is the character of those who are the mainstay and backbone of our nation – the British Tradesman."[28] The editorial angles of these publications point to tensions between the show window as a

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[26] *The Show Window*, October 1898, 181. Baum wrote in November of 1897 "By reproducing in its pages the most practical and artistic display windows that appear each month in the great cities, *The Show Window* believes it will be offering a privilege of inestimable value to those who are unable to see and study them in person. Moreover, each window will be so intelligently described that any clerk of average ability may be able to successfully duplicate it at home." See *The Show Window* November 1897, 19.

[27] *WDGTR*, November 1905, 1.

[28] Ibid.

promoter of national identity and the show window as an international development within department store culture. These two periodicals, perpetuated the message that a well-dressed window constituted a central element of modern business, persisted as the primary professional organs for the field, generated international conversation around the art and science of window display, and advocated for the skills of the displaymen who were their subject and audience.[29]

Guidebooks also provided a platform for the sharing and publishing of display formulas and philosophies that greatly contributed to the consolidation of window display techniques. Baum authored *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors* in 1900, the first American publication entirely devoted to the subject. Baum's guidebook included grand displays attainable only through access to money, resources, and a professional display staff, side by side with schemes for effective displays that catered to the regional shopkeeper who aimed to keep up sophisticated standards at minimal expense. These two categories reinforce the distinction that could be made between the work of amateurs and the work of professionals. A parallel binary was also at work within the developing profession of interior design in which, as Lees-Maffei has described, the field needed to "shift its emphasis from taste to skill." [30]

Also similar to the field of interior design, leaders adopted a voice of authority in the publication of advice literature. Texts such as the *Butler Way Window Trimmer* were aimed at "the busy retailer who has to do his own window dressing." The author stressed the importance of resourcefulness: "One thing that will impress you is the absence of elaborate and expensive fixtures. Most of the units are constructed of such

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[29] "What We Advocate," *WDGTR*, November 1905, 31.

[30] Lees-Maffei, "Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus," 1.

old waste materials as boxes, barrels and the like."[31] For many men interested in entering the window dressing field, these journals and guidebooks provided the basis for a self-education system meanwhile other aspiring window dressers gained access to training via a course with The International Correspondence School that produced a series of four textbooks on "mercantile decoration."[32] These volumes contain detailed photographs, diagrams, and descriptions that increased access to practical information on window display assembly and styling. Although it is unknown how many men took part in this training, the notoriety of the school's manager, E.N. Goldsman, a British leader in the display field, speaks to the prominence of the program. Goldsman managed this school from Scranton, Pennsylvania, the home of International Correspondence Schools, before taking over as Selfridge's display manager in London in 1908. Goldsman lectured widely, opened his own school of window dressing in London following World War I, and later served as founding president of the British Association of Displaymen in 1919.

This series of International Correspondence School textbooks demonstrates how display was taught as a system that outlined required techniques and areas of specialization. Display classes were also incorporated into some existing college programs on salesmanship. In 1917, the *New York Times* reported "New York University will offer a course in department store training…especially designed to fit teachers for the rapidly growing profession of department store instructors to

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[31] Butler Brothers, *The Butler Way Window Trimmer: Designed to Help Our Customers Sell More Goods Through Displaying Them Properly* (New York: Butler Brothers, 1919), 6.

[32] International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, 4 vols. (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1903). First volume on *Backgrounds*; second volume on *Dress Goods, White Goods, Clothing*; third volume on *Foot, Hand, and Head Covering, Men and Women's Furnishings, Handkerchiefs, Linens, House Furnishings*; and fourth volume on *Miscellaneous Merchandise, Decorations, Collection of Artistic Displays, Illuminations and Motion in Displays, Fixtures and Useful Information, Ideas for Window Decorations*.

saleswomen."[33] In New York, under the influence of John Dewey, Pratt Institute and the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts (later Parsons) taught commercial art after 1900 and these courses trained men in advertising and color theory, two skills applicable to the window display field.

Advertisements in retail periodicals reveal a number of private schools run by industry "experts" which in the United States included the Koester School founded in Chicago with a branch also in New York.[34] In 1902 the *New York Times* reported that for the cost of fifty dollars, workers could now earn college credentials in four or six weeks to advance in the visual merchandising field.[35] City employers paid for the tuition of promising candidates and supplied merchandise for the use of the pupils in learning window decoration.[36] New York's investment in the field suggests the city's support of the window dressers' abilities to increase revenue and tourism.

In London as early as 1887, the *Drapers Record* called for a national system of technical education for display in Britain. Smaller private schools centered on display were also operating in London including the Arundell Display School of Window Decoration, the Bond Institute of Mercantile Trading and the Premier School of Window Dressing in London, founded in 1925, and the London School of Modern

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[33] "Department Store Course at NYU," *New York Times*, June 10, 1917, 7.

[34] The Koester School advertised heavily in periodicals, see for instance: *Popular Mechanics*, May 1914, 43; *Dry Goods Reporter*, April 22, 1916, 36; *MRSW*, July 1920, 53. Albert Koester founded his window trimming school in Germany and published a series of books "Die Kunst of Schaufenster Dekoration." Noted American window dresser George Cowan, a graduate of the school, became the president of the American branch of the Koester school and published the school's textbook, thereby attaching Koester's name to a method, in 1913.

[35] "New School for Store Workers," 29.

[36] Ibid.

Window Display, which opened later in 1934.[37] The British Association of Displaymen offered classes in display to its members. Photographs dating to the 1920s show a class taking a written examination as well as scenes of hands-on learning sessions with mockups of window displays. These photographs document a few women in the classroom, pointing towards the field's greater inclusion of females by the late 1920s.[38]

Department stores in America and Britain ran substantial internal education programs that included classes on the principles of display.[39] In 1902, when Harry Gordon Selfridge was employed as the retail manager at Marshall Field's in Chicago, he called the retail section managers together and developed a plan for individual department education. The store established a three day-long period of training with pay for all new employees that taught principles of display among other basics such as store rules, how to make out sales checks, and how to approach customers.[40] In such classes selling staff probably learned how to complete smaller arrangements for on

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[37] The charter for the Premier School of Window Dressing in London survives in the National Archives. It reads: "The objects for which the company is established were to carry on the business of teaching and contracting for window display, show case and shop dressing, salesmanship, and to act as consultant specialists to all trades." See Premier School of Window Display Ltd Inc. 1925, April 22, 1925, BT 31/29037/205481, Records of the Companies Registration Office, National Archives, London.

[38] Photographs, AAD 1993/13/4, British Display Society Records, Archive of Art and Design, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

[39] By 1898 Debenham and Freebody had its own education department and offered three evening classes a week; In 1919 Lord & Taylor hired the New York photographers Byron Company to document their premises and there are images of an employee's classroom and photographs of a group of graduates who had likely completed an employee training program: See Byron Company, *An Employee's Classroom at Lord & Taylor Department Store*, gelatin silver print, 1919, Museum of the City of New York and Byron Company, *Group Portrait of Graduates of An Employee Training (?) Program at Lord and Taylor Department Store*, gelatin silver print, 1921 and 1923, Museum of the City of New York.

[40] See Marshall Field's Training Manuals, 1881-1920, Box 18002, Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

top of and inside casework that would have been in line with the large-scale displays in the windows and interiors managed by the dedicated display staff.

The principles learned in the classroom were directly incorporated into the daily operations of the department store and implemented and evaluated on site. [41] In line with policies driven by scientific management, department stores documented employee performance and promoted that it was possible to advance up the ranks. By the turn of the century the *New York Times* publicized the window dresser as being "at the top" of the department store structure: "That there is always room at the top is nowhere more fully demonstrated than in the great department stores of this country, from which there comes an incessant demand for men with energy and ideas. [42] The show window became an integral component of the business of display in part due to the window dresser's promotion within the professional structure of the store.

The Power of the Visual: The Show Window Impacts the City

The importance of the show window as an attraction device reshaped market relationships as the window dresser inserted himself between the manufacturer and the consumer and the show window inserted itself between the retailer and the consumer. An American guidebook described how the influence and power of the well-designed window display marked a shift in merchandising strategy: "An old retailer has said that all he asked was to get consumers inside his door. Give him a chance to show his goods and he could sell them. If he makes good use of his window, all the modern storekeeper needs to ask is, that the people shall pass his

[41] Wanamaker called the store "a university of business with a daily practical opportunity to practice what is being taught." John Wanamaker, *Annals of the Wanamaker System: Its Origin, Its Principles, Its Methods, and Its Development in This & Other Cities* (Philadelphia: The Company, 1899), n.p.

[42] "New School for Store Workers," *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1902, 29.

door. The window will bring them in."[43] Rather than relying on the persuasive personality of the sales staff to sell wares, by the late nineteenth it was believed that the show window could woo the public through its compelling visual effects. This heightened power of visual seduction was articulated well on March 16, 1909 when in response to the opening week window displays at Selfridges a journalist for the London *Daily Chronicle* wrote, "The Modern Shop is run on the principle that the public buys not what it wants but what it sees."[44]

Thomas A. Bird, editor of *MRSW*, distinguished the show window from other contemporaneous promotional methods due to its visual directness: "The newspaper advertisement, the circular, the letter, the catalogue, the bill-board or street-car ad, all say 'Come to the store and see the goods.' The show window says, 'Here they are.' The show window is absolutely direct – it catches the possible customer at the psychological moment. He is on the spot and it is but a step inside the store and the sale is made."[45] The show window took on an agency in the marketplace and was not only endowed with the power to catch consumer attention from the sidewalk but also to encourage them to step inside. The show window's visual pull thus had significant physical repercussions on city life by reconfiguring patterns of public circulation and altering pedestrians' speed and rhythms of movement. Windows registered the energy on the streets and advertised contemporary events while at the same time focused the attention of the crowd inward and onto the store's merchandise.

On December 9th 1909, London's Metropolitan Police received an application for a summons against Mr. Wallace Morford, Managing Director of the department

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[43] Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods,* 469.

[44] *Daily Chronicle*, March 16, 1909, quoted in Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 159.

[45] Thomas A. Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display" in *Library of Advertising: Show Window Display and Specialty Advertising,* vol. *4*, ed. A. P. Johnson (Chicago: Cree Publishing Company, 1911), 11.

store Swan and Edgar, for "willfully causing obstruction to the footway" from 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM on the 8th of December at Piccadilly Circus. The report detailed that "the attraction was in the window nearest Regent St." and was:

> …found to be caused by a moving platform above four feet from shop level, which [had] about three divisions or scenes" and "on each scene were two models of well dressed women…Each scene was exhibited for about three minutes and the whole was revolved by some means, not visible…Around the platform which appeared like a miniature stage, were about 25 electric lights, and these were lowered as the scenes were changed.[46]

This kinetic display was a celebration of the most advanced technology of the day at the service of commerce. The presentation of dresses, already exceptional in their fashionability, was made even more captivating when activated in the window by the powers of modern machinery. Revolving platforms with mannequins were designed to catch the eyes of the passersby and the cyclical illumination would have held the public in front of the window for three minutes at a time, therefore causing a blockage in the sidewalk.

When reports of this window display appeared in the London press, journalists devoted more copy to description of the mechanics of the display than to the details of the merchandise. Along the prominent curve of Piccadilly Circus, on the western side between Piccadilly and Regent Streets, Swan and Edgar's mechanical display drew up to a few hundred viewers at a time according to one newspaper article.[47] The blockade

[46] Application for a Summons Against Messrs Swan and Edgar Ltd., Mr Wallace Morford, Managing Director, December 9, 1909, Mepo 2/910, Records of the Metropolitan Police, National Archives.

[47] "Shop Window Dressing Regent-Street Obstruction," *The Daily Telegraph*, December 18 1919, Mepo 2/910, Records of the Metropolitan Police, National Archives.

made the sidewalk impassable, therefore causing foot passengers to step into the roadway and omnibuses to alter their stopping point (fig. 33).[48]



Figure 33. Swan and Edgar, Piccadilly Circus, 1912.
Source: London Metropolitan Archives, Image 135408.

Despite a few police summons, Mr. Morford at first declined to extinguish the lights and discontinue the exhibition. When told that he would be reported to the police as responsible for the obstruction, he replied, "What would you do if your firm had spent 100 pounds in preparing the window."[49] The Managing Director's defensive retort revealed the expense and effort connected with the display that also included the professional creativity and labor in its development. With such money and effort put towards a temporary arrangement, the department store aimed for maximum

[48] Ibid.

[49] Application for a Summons, Mepo 2/910, Records of the Metropolitan Police, National Archives.

exposure, meaning that a discontinuation of the display, as the police demanded, would lead to a defeat of their advertising mission.

The introduction of electrical light maximized the show window's exposure by extending its capacity for show and gave the department store building a new nighttime identity.[50] As Reyner Banham has described, "The sheer abundance of light effectively reversed all established viewing habits by which buildings were seen. For the first time it was possible to conceive of buildings whose true nature could only be perceived after dark, when artificial light blazed out through their structures."[51] Marshall Field produced a postcard that showed their buildings alive with electricity at night (fig. 34).

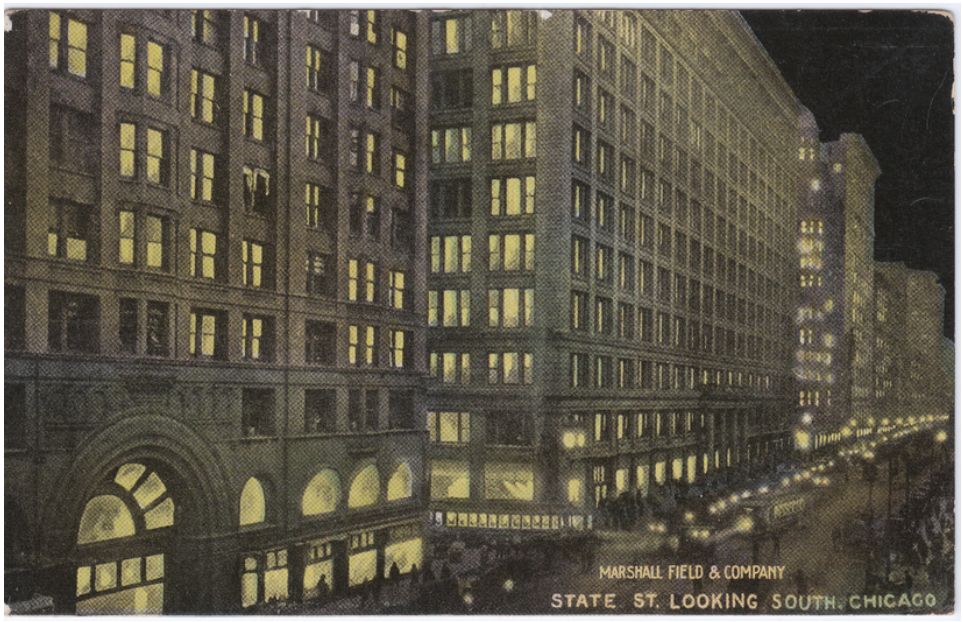


Figure 34. Postcard, Marshall Field & Company, State St. Looking South, Chicago, ca. 1915.
Source: Chicago History Postcard Museum (chicagopostcardmuseum.org).

[50] As Gronberg has written with respect to the boutiques of Paris in this period, "electricity put the object 'to work' by night as well as by day – the work of making itself noticed and desired." Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 91.

[51] Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969), 70.

In an advertisement for its show windows, Marshall Field's, echoing Banham's words, promoted, "Beautiful as the windows are by day they are perhaps even more beautiful at night when seen by artificial light only, and will amply repay those who make it a point to see them in the evening."[52] Selfridges similarly advertised "By Night as well as Day Selfridge's will be a centre of attraction. The usual custom after closing time, our windows will not be obscured by blinds, but brilliantly lit up every Evening until Midnight." [53] Due to electrification, the façades of department stores took on a new afterlife and window-shopping was incorporated into the nighttime leisure schedules of the urban public; the bright enticement in the show windows paralleled the seductive visual effect of lit marquees in theatre districts.

George Rooney, Display Manager at Abraham and Straus in the 1920s, timed the unveiling of new show windows with the concentration of evening sidewalk traffic when the public was out enjoying other city amusements. As author William Nelson Taft described in *The Handbook of Window Display*:

> Mr. Rooney and his staff begin to change their windows about 4:30 in the afternoon, an hour before the store closes. The work continued until possibly 6 or 6:30 PM. In this way, Mr. Rooney believes that, while the changes are being made, he strikes the masses as they are hurrying home with little thought of a window display on their mind and, later in the evening when the change has been completed, the crowds leaving their homes to go to the theatres, moving pictures or other amusements are attracted to the beautiful and fresh window settings.[54]

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[52] Advertisement, "At Night" by Frank Turner Godfrey in State Street Store Grand Opening Booklet, 1907, 03052 (26), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

[53] See Advertisement, "Selfridges by Night" by T. Friedleson in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, eds. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Pryblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004), 198.

[54] William Nelson Taft, *The Handbook of Window Display* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1926), 39.

The impact of the show window contributed to an alignment between urban space and time with the circulation of commodities. The show window's schedule and electrical lighting created and extended patterns of looking and moving while crowds built around the show window at times of unveiling.

The frequent reconfiguration of the window's contents built a continually responsive consumer market that was alert not only to the goods on offer but also to their style of presentation often enhanced by lighting and other theatrical effects. Taft suggested, "The majority of people who pass a store window do so every day and, if they are brought to realize that there is something new to be seen, it would not be long before they formed the habit of stopping to look at the window regularly, instead of waiting until they had a special item in mind."[55] The diverse work of the window dresser conditioned the public's curiosity and set up the window as an urban site deserving of repeated focus. Further to this point, as George Cowan, Vice President of the Koester School of Window Trimming, advised, "The store can advertise itself very effectively through its show windows, not only to secure an immediate sale of merchandise, but also to derive permanent publicity…Convey through your show windows the impression that your store is thoroughly up-to-date." [56] Cowan's advice points to the show window's position at the crux of a crucial contradiction: the window displays individually maintained a short lifespan and yet as an advertising outlet overall, performed as a space of continual change that aimed to make a permanent impression on its audience.

Displays not only served to decorate but also to demarcate one business from the next; they aided in shoppers' navigation of the city. One New York guidebook,

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[55] Ibid, 36.

[56] George J. Cowan, *Window Backgrounds: A Collection of Drawings and Description of Store Window Backgrounds* (Chicago: The Dry Goods Reporter, 1912), 71.

Selling Service with the Goods offered advice on a prudent display construction schedule:

> Never change the window display on Monday or Tuesday. Experience has shown that many people who see show windows Saturday evening and Sundays very often go out on Monday or Tuesday to buy something that attracted them when seen. If the windows are changed, they may be unable to locate the store, and hence a sale is lost. Thursday or Friday is a better day to change the windows.[57]

This advice detects not only consumers' close attention to window arrangements but also to their use of display style as a memory aid to organize their shopping experience. The window dresser was wise to prepare new windows for heavily trafficked times.

The window display was one element in a network of advertisements that created and directed city crowds on a regular basis. As historian Lynda Nead has described, amidst the motion of the sandwich boards and delivery cart signage, the show window created "an alternative mapping of the city, tracing the contours of commodity capitalism."[58] The speed of the introduction of new commodities was in synch with the motion of the surrounding city, which offered various forms of mobile and highly visible advertisement. The public moved in response to these advertisements; as American author George Cole recounted in 1892, a well-dressed window "indicates progressive ideas, which win the masses – the crowd ever following where life, activity and push are prominent."[59]

Window dressers capitalized on the reflective quality of the show window, often augmented with mirrors, catching the attention of passersby with their own

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[57] Woodward and Fredericks, *Selling Service with the Goods*, 128.

[58] Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-century London* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000), 58.

[59] Cole, *A Complete Dictionary*, 470.

image.[60] "Windows are eyes to meet eyes," wrote John Wanamaker.[61] The window's reflective surface not only captured the passersby but also the surrounding city and street, as is recorded in the photographs of the Parisian photographer Atget.[62] The image of the city thus became superimposed on the window, visually representing a meaningful alignment between the retail outlet and its urban surroundings. *MRSW* called the show window the "merchant's magic mirror" whose reflective surface was irresistible to the eyes of the curious public and whose particular stylistic presentation mirrored and communicated the store's attitude towards commodities.[63] The window dresser specialized in the management of such reflections whose variety and character will be outlined below.

Art and Commerce in the Show Window

While the window dresser aspired to the status of an artist and an innovator, his work was tempered by commercial needs. Show windows and interior displays were likened to fine art and sculpture in order to inflate their importance; Wanamaker claimed that his store showed "exhibitions of fashions and fabrics as beautiful to look upon as a gallery of paintings."[64] Historian Nancy Troy writes that Wanamaker, like

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[60] Ibid., 482.

[61] Wanamaker anthropomorphized the department store in a nineteenth-century advertisement: "The Store is a living Personage! The Gray Clothes it wears express the everyday usefulness of our business system. The Show Windows are eyes to meet eyes. The Front Doors are arms swinging a welcome." See Advertisement, late 19th century, Volume 20-48: Large Black Scrapbook Series, John Wanamaker Collection, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

[62] See for instance Jean-Eugène August Atget, *Window Display – Mannequins (Avenue des Gobelins)*, gelatin silver print, 1925, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

[63] O. Wallace Davis, "The Merchant's Magic Mirrors," *MRSW*, August 1920, 82.

[64] Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges, *Golden Book of Wanamaker Stores*, 248.

many other department store magnates, "proudly proclaimed the union of art and commerce, and worked to make it visible in the physical environment and operating practices of his stores."[65] Display facilitated encounters with commodities and art objects side by side, encouraging a reading of them as equal partners (fig. 26).

The show window's position was however more complex as an outward-facing advertising surface. The show window was physically caught between the interior of the store and the exterior of the city, and theoretically in the middle of a debate between art and commerce. The consequences of these combinations are illustrated in the conclusion of the story of the Swan and Edgar incident. When ten days following that first summons in 1909, the Swan and Edgar window was still causing a disturbance, *The Daily Telegraph* featured a follow-up story in which a Swan and Edgar employee, Mr. Bodkin, gave a defense for the window that called attention to its practicality instead of its entertainment value: "Mr. Bodkin contended that the exhibition did not go beyond the fair limits of attraction allowed to a shopkeeper, especially as the dresses shown on the moving models were actually for sale to anyone who chose to buy them."[66] Bodkin pointed out that the window was not purely sensationalistic but instead an artistic product underpinned by commercial goals.

Following negotiations with the police and a public forum to discuss the incident, Swan and Edgar agreed to make their moving figures stationary and to showcase simply one scene per day rather than offering the public their original conception of a series of changeable scenes that would be signaled by the turning on

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[65] Nancy J. Troy, *Couture Culture A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 229.

[66] "Shop Window Dressing Regent-Street Obstruction," *The Daily Telegraph*, December 18 1919, Mepo 2/910, Records of the Metropolitan Police Office.

and off of spotlights as in the theatre. Complying with these modifications that in essence froze the window display as a single view, the store surmised, would aid in "reducing the crowd round their window."[67] These changes therefore suggest that the mechanical and changeable nature of the window was its most popular yet most problematic feature. The agreement placated the police and may have in fact also benefitted business as it allowed more people clear access to the door to step inside and purchase what they had stopped to see.[68] The police required Swan and Edgar to lessen the artistic impact of their window so that patterns of commerce and circulation in the city could proceed. The show window was required to balance a sense of theatricality while still remaining rooted in reality and the medium offered an informative message about the merchandise yet in an artistic format. It was advised that the window dresser carefully balance his "artistic feeling" with his "business sense" so as not to upset such limits.[69]

The pairing of art and commerce in the show window can be traced in the backgrounds of the displaymen themselves. In September of 1899 *The Show Window* administered a poll based on 380 reports of "existing professional trimmers in the field" and determined that twenty-four percent had come from a strictly commercial background and had been "clerks and floor walkers" and seventeen percent had been "unsuccessful merchants." Another twenty-eight percent of the group had come from artistic professions or those that mixed art and commerce: seven percent were carpenters and cabinet makers, six percent were theatrical men, six percent were newspaper men, five percent were artists and four percent were sign and scenic

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display," 16.

painters. [70]

Some of the earliest descriptions of window dressing evoke an impression of the window dresser as an artist, employing his painterly skill, such as this 1848 poetic description of a window dresser at work in a London drapery shop:

> The artist, warm from his bed, unshaven, with yesterday's cravat on, disposing his piles of silk and velvet in the ample window; arranging his mantillas, his cloaks, and all his finery, upon long poles, standing upright for the better display of these inviting articles; festooning his cashmere shawls, to give unity to his composition; then, having effectually baited his lady-trap, rushing out of the shop, and, with his hand over his eyes, criticizing the general effect of the picture, has often struck us as irresistibly amusing.[71]

The author observes physical labor in the construction of the grouping, the window dresser's artistic abilities to judge color, light and shade, and his specialized knowledge of the material properties of textiles. This passage calls attention to the physicality of the building of the window display, the artistic technique and manual skills involved, as well as the gendering of the presentation as a "lady trap." This window dresser has emplyed his understanding of textile properties to bait his female customers.

While in this description, dressing the shop-window is portrayed as an "art-one of the fine arts" and the window dresser is depicted as being valued for his artistry and individuality, these principles were challenged throughout the 1880 to 1920 period as financial gain became an increasing requirement of display. While the following sections on various styles of window display will trace the negotiation

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[70] Other professions included: Traveling salesmen 9 %; Bookkeepers 4 %; Upholsterers 4%; Ad. Writers 3 %; Paper hangers 3%; Lawyers and clergymen 2%; Miscellaneous 6%. Other notable findings included: American trimmers are descendants of the following nations: Scandinavians 26%; English (including Yankees) 35%; Germans 22%; Scotch 9%; Irish 7%; French 5%; All Others 6%. See Baum, "Some Statistics," 195–97.

[71] John Fisher Murray, "The Physiology of London Life," in *Bentley's Miscellany*, vol. 16, ed. Richard Bentley (London: Richard Bentley, 1844), 286.

between art and commerce, a leap forward to 1919 will showcase another extreme by which time manufacturers minimized manipulation of the merchandise that could potentially obscure an advertising message. Instead, the goods for sale were shown as finished products just as they left the factory floor. In 1919, The *Printer's Ink* reflected in an editorial, "No other profession has changed so materially as that of the display man…[ten years ago] a man who could build a house of skirts or soap was considered a genius…in those days, the main idea was to secure a decorative effect. To-day, the merchandise is the first consideration, the decorative background construction being secondary."[72] The author goes onto describe the advantages of providing stores with pre-made showcards and advertising backdrops. With the introduction of branded packaging, the advertising message took visual prominence. By the 1910s, it became increasingly common for manufacturers to supply point-of-purchase and window display elements. Display thus became a standardized element in the promotion of the brand (fig. 35).

[72] C.J. Potter, "How to Get Stores to Advertise Your Goods," *Printer's Ink*, April 3, 1919, 86.

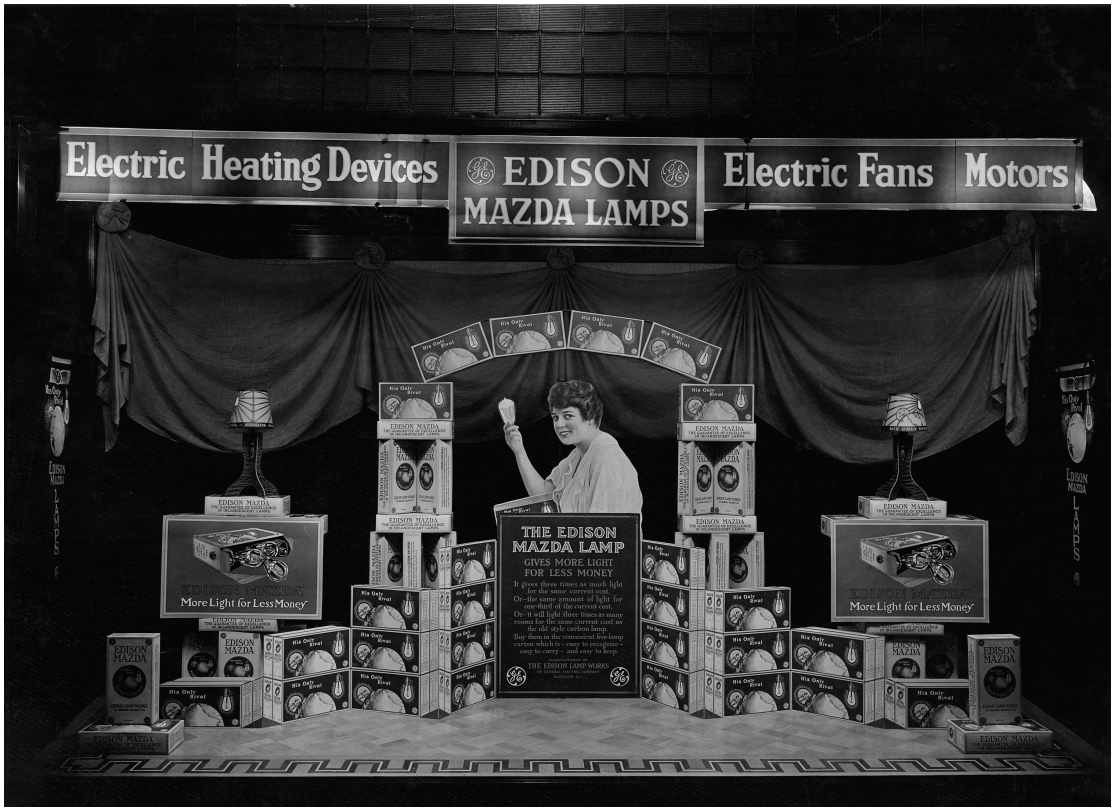


Figure 35. General Electric Edison Mazda Lamp Display, 1916.
Source: © Schenectady Museum; Hall of Electrical History Foundation/CORBIS.

In the case of such branded supplies, display itself had become a product, available to be ordered by mail for ready and easy use in the window or counter top. Thus display had been developed, styled, analyzed and professionalized to such an extreme that it had become a commodity in its own right. These paper cut-outs commodified display by offering a branded visual scheme for sale. While the General Electric window shown above may not have involved any manipulation of the final product, it is important to note that the packaged goods were being used as an artistic medium to build a sculptural arrangement that harkens back to the assemblages of the late nineteenth century.

Staging the Show Window: The Labor of Display

No matter the message or style of the show window display, the final result was always an assemblage built from scratch by the window dresser. *The Show Window* advised "To be worthy of the splendid title, 'professional window trimmer,' I think one ought to master the following trades: architect, carpenter, electrician, plumber, sign writer and scenic painter."[73] These trades were the various forms of labor associated with the practice. While many of the goods that consumers encountered on the sales floor had been alienated from their often far-away place of manufacture, the wares' reconfiguration into commodities on display occurred on site. A new form of labor, human and machine-powered, thus emerged around the need and desire to create a compelling display for commodities in the retail context.

One journalist cited the active making of window display in America as being an element that made American windows of a superior quality: "Other countries may dress windows, but Americans make Window Displays. America, without question is the Utopia of the profession.[74] American window dressers took pride in the labor and effort they supplied to reshape commodities and build entirely fresh and frequent arrangements at an impressive scale, rather than simply arranging commodities in their given state.

The sophisticated window display can be defined as an assemblage in constant flux created and recreated by a professional figure. Properties of assemblages emerge from interactions between parts, allowing for movement and change, and the generation of new results and in this case, commercial messages. In this composite

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[73] John G. Rompel, "The Trimmer of Today," August 1899, *The Show Window*, 87.

[74] Davis, "The Merchant's Magic Mirrors," 82.

scheme, parts were implicated in each other and at the same time could be extracted from one whole and inserted into another; a commodity could have a role in multiple displays within a department store or a recurring, yet various role, in displays week after week. A study of the show window is thus a study in the importance of context and relies on an overall interpretation of how the commodities, lighting, fixtures, and architectural framework all contributed to a final product.

In this mode of presentation, every factor worked to enhance the final appearance of commodities.[75] Fixtures were employed to elevate, highlight, and cradle an object. Lighting amplified the form and altered the color of the objects. The commodity was generally not enough on its own to attract adequate attention. Window dressers worked to develop strategies for the multiplication, movement, and enhancement of the commodity. Harry Selfridge confirmed, "Displays are created not from the goods alone, no matter how attractive they may be, for such aids as electricity, flags of all nations, emblems of all undertakings and buntings are also used freely…in fact the whole world of colour and of art are considered by the artistic window dresser as his field of supply."[76]

The perpetual narrative of the show window within the historiography of the department store is one of jumbled material excess and sensory overload. However the language used to describe the act of dressing a window by the designers themselves is technically precise. An examination of guidebooks and manufacturers catalogues reveals the particular steps and elements of merchandising strategy. Consumers' curiosity about the mechanics of the production of the window display

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[75] Sarah Burns writes about the artist's studio in this period in similar terms. See Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 53.

[76] Selfridge, *Romance of Commerce*, 377.

arrangement added to its value as an advertising medium. While previous scholarship has discussed and pictured the show window largely in its stage of completion, the following section will trace the behind-the-scenes construction process of the window display and draw attention to a set of design practices and decisions in the department store that have often been overlooked.

To invoke sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of "front stage" and "back stage" behaviors, the production of the display, for the most part, took place backstage while the show window took front stage. In addition to the production of the show window, the department store staged many other activities backstage where Wanamaker expressed that the true innovation in the department store was taking place: "There is an outer life of the store with which the public is made familiar by daily contact, and there is an inner life of which the public has scarcely any conception, yet which deserves to be noted as indicating the higher plane to which modern merchandising is advancing."[77] The inner life of the store included the window dressers' workshops as well as the finishing of goods, mailing, shipping, accounting and more.

While the previous chapter revealed the theatrical qualities of the department store's often classically styled façade, a focus on the show window itself perpetuates theatrical metaphors and analogies, particularly around the revealing of a new display. In 1909 on the night before Selfridge's grand opening one British journalist remarked on how the public was teased with hints of the show windows' assembly: "Most impressive of all were the lights and shadows behind the drawn curtains of the great range of windows suggesting that a wonderful play was being arranged."[78] The show

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[77] Wanamaker, *Annals of the Wanamaker System*, n.p.

[78] *Daily Chronicle* March 15, 1909, quoted in Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 155.

window's comparison with the stage of a theatre was made even more literal through the frequent use of curtains that were raised in the morning for the viewing of the commodity performance of display and then lowered at night.

The use of a stylized background for the merchandise also leant itself to comparisons with the furniture of a stage set. Due to the introduction of electrical lighting in the interior, windows no longer needed to be open at the top to allow natural light to flood the floor. Therefore, temporary backdrops could extend across the back of the window, from floor to ceiling, much like the backdrop of a play. George Cowan, president of the Koester School of Window Trimming, wrote the first American publication on the topic called *Window Backgrounds* in 1912. New building materials facilitated this temporary architectural framework. Walls were often made of composition board, "the display man's best friend" due to "its qualities which allow practically any style or character of finish."[79] Advocating for the use of composition board, *MRSW* explained that "While there are hundreds of stores maintaining permanent backgrounds of mahogany, walnut, and other hardwoods, and frequently mirrors, there is always that emergency or quick change to consider." [80] Similar to a stage set, the window display was an adaptable design.

Guidebooks weighed in on how to best optimize performance by building future displays in workshops behind the scenes since many stores aimed to keep their current window displays viewable for as much of the shopping day as possible. An International Correspondence School textbook pictured two images of the "Property Room and Work Room." (figs. 36 and 37)

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[79] J.L. Cameron, "The Ability to Create, *MRSW*, July 1920, 33.

[80] Ibid.

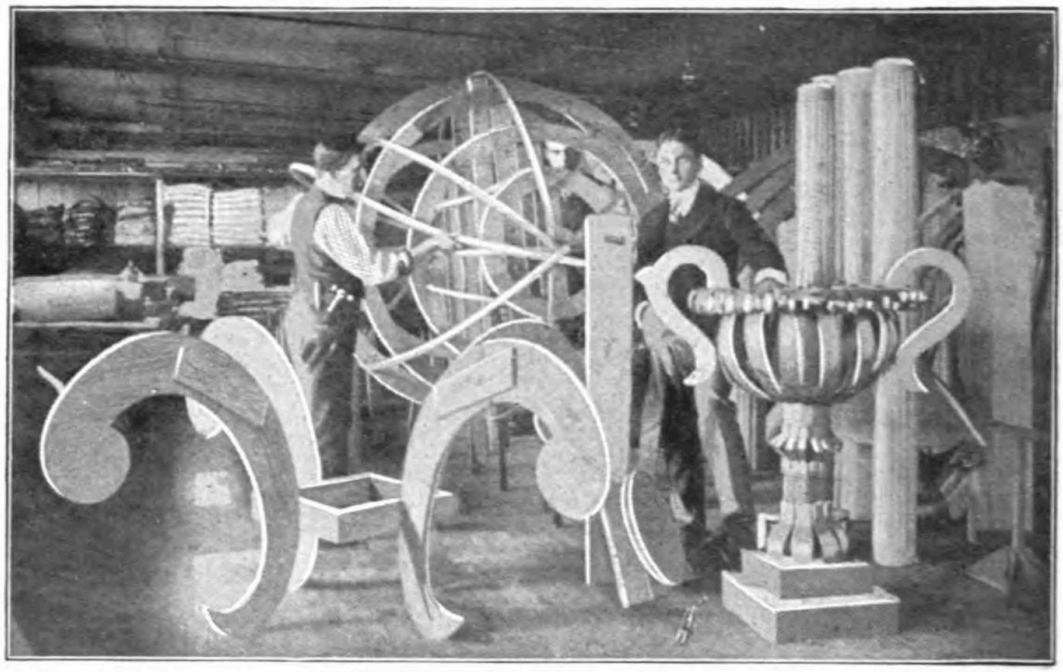


Figure 36. Property Room or Workroom in International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 4 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1905), section 41, 18.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by University of Wisconsin.

The writer advises,

> As much of the work as possible should be done in sections, which are fitted and trimmed in the shop and then put together at the place of display, thus minimizing the amount of work that must be done where the business of selling is being carried on…By this method elaborate decorations appear and disappear in a night, much to the bewilderment and interest of the general public, thus adding considerable impressiveness and consequent advertising value to the decorations.[81]

This manual posits that the agility of the display staff to turn over the merchandise quickly allowed the window to function at its full potential in order to attract consumers.

[81] International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 4 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1905), section 41, 18–20.



Figure 37. Property Room or Workroom in International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 4 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1905), section 41, 19.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by University of Wisconsin.

Holidays in addition to sales and store openings offered many possible pretexts for changeover in display that cultivated a reliable consumer market. Guidebooks and periodicals recommended weekly holidays to fill window dressers' calendars.[82] The constant invention and reinvention of the window display was its greatest attraction and at the same time its greatest logistical challenge. Leading department stores such as Macy's changed their most important windows up to twice a week.[83] Patented systems of pulleys and platforms were invented to move the assembled displays from the basement upwards to their positions in the window at

[82] For window dressers' calendars see *The Show Window*, January 1899, 52; "Notes for a Year's Displays: Window Dresser's Diary" in *Publicity: A Practical Guide for the Retail Clothier and Outfitter, etc.* (London: The Outfitter, 1910), 34.

[83] In 1916, a *New York Times* reporter went behind the scenes with W.F. Allert, display manager for R.H. Macy & Co. "The Art of the Display Manager: Inducing of Purchases by Means of Special Designs in Store," *New York Times*, February 20, 1916, S8.

ground level. H. Hunter's "Show Window Construction" (fig. 38) was one such advanced system.

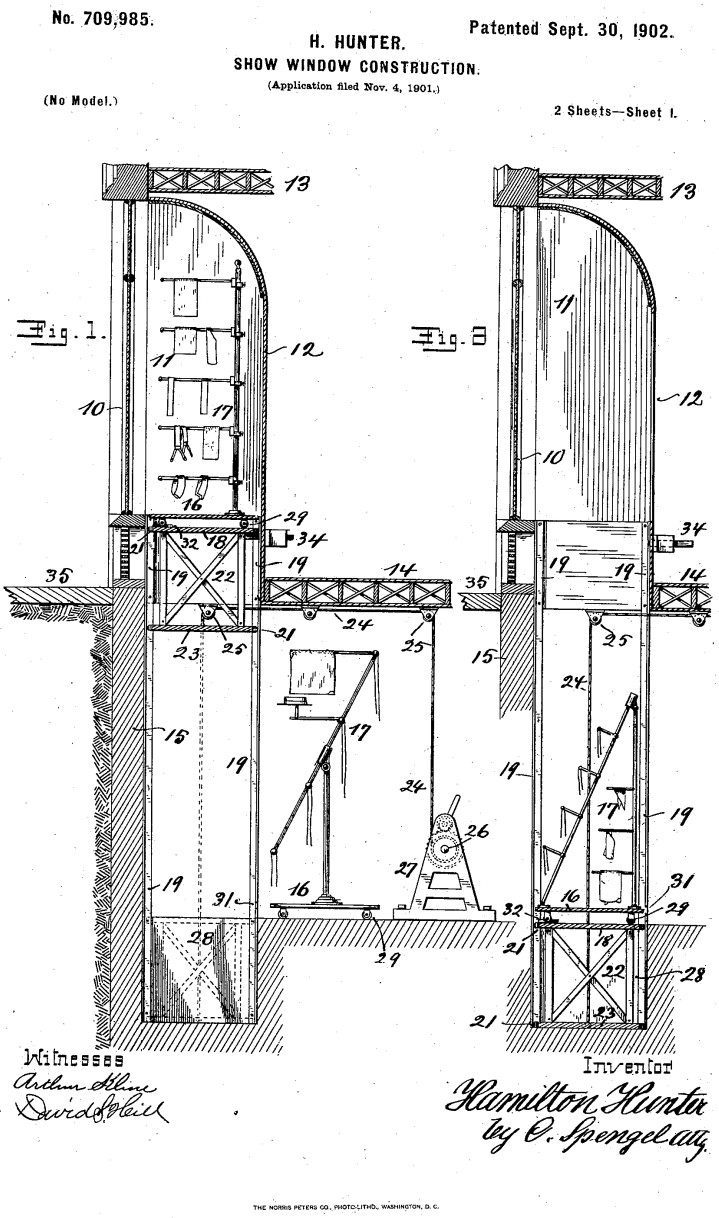


Figure 38. Hamilton Hunter, Show Window Construction, U.S. Patent 709, 985, filed November 4, 1901, issued September 30, 1902.
Source: United States Patent and Trademark Office.

In his patent description, Hunter explained that the current challenges faced by the window dresser included "limited space" to do the assembly work at storefront level and "loss of the window" if the dressing was done during the day behind blinds or curtains.[84] In order to overcome these issues, Hunter's invention moved the entire contents of the show window via a "fixture-carrying floor" that rested on a platform that could be raised and lowered from the basement. A description of the 1914 opening of Lord & Taylor in New York included mention of such show windows "constructed with movable floors" that "can be lowered to the mezzanine basement and rolled off on tracks."[85]

The window display can therefore be compared to a stage set, assembled in the wings and brought out in between acts in the evenings to greet its new audience in the morning. The construction of the show window was aligned with contemporary mechanics of stagecraft. In the Victorian theater, the scenic design method of fixed flats and grooves was under modification in favor of a more varied system of settings to allow for quicker and more ambitious changes. Both the department store and the theater were working on developments in flexible staging that aimed at awing the audience with frequent restyling. The changeable scenery of the theater was a draw in the spectacle, just as the technical dexterity and mystery of the window display's construction and presentation contributed to its popularity.

When it was necessary to assemble the window display during the day, "open window dressing" could also serve as good advertisement for business. Back stage

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[84] Hamilton Hunter, Show Window Construction, U.S. Patent 709, 985, filed November 4, 1901, issued September 30, 1902.

[85] "Lord and Taylor Opening," *New York Times*, February 25, 1914, 6. Lord and Taylor's decorating window platforms attracted the attention of "merchandise men from all over the country and abroad." See "Where Ideas Come From," *MRSW*, July 1914, 28.

and front stage action were then reversed. Window dresser A.W. Jungblut described this "open window dressing" method in *The Show Window* in 1899:

> As soon as I have the construction plans laid and the window looking neat and clean, I remove the curtains and begin the work of arranging the goods. All passers by are interested, and it not infrequently happens that the very goods I am using are in demand...there is a natural curiosity as to what will be done next, and goods unfolded and artistically arranged in view of the passers by, attract more than ordinary attention.[86]

In this case, the show window's formation became public entertainment. Passersby gained an appreciation for the manual skills of the window dresser as well as the time, creativity, and specialist tools necessary to compose the final display product. The displayman also became an actor in the show himself.

Conventionally located in the basement or in the upper tiers, window dressing workshops shared space with many of the stores' other support systems such as the shipping of packages, the bookkeeping department, and mail-order managing. The mechanicals for the show window often drew from the same energy supply that powered the inner workings of the entire building, further emphasizing the metaphor of the department store as an integrated machine. One New York newspaper's description of the basement of a prominent dry goods store could easily apply to the basement space of a department store:

> There is a work-room in the depths of the sub-cellar, where the carpenters build all sorts of devices – mechanical, automatic, and otherwise. There are forms, frames, pedestals, racks, lattices, arbors, wire work, wheels, balls, cones, cubes, hexagons, and what not; and here the 'bottom idea' of the window artist begins to take form. The machinist rigs all sorts of pulleys, cogs, belts, wheels and the like to connect with the engines that raise the elevators, run the cash railway system and propel the dynamos.[87]

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[86] A.W. Jungblut, "Open Window Trimming A Good Advertisement for Your Firm," *The Show Window*, August 1899, 77.

[87] "Art In Window-Dressing: How the Famous Displays in Show Windows are Designed: Talks with Men at the Head of the Profession," *The Evening World*, December 13, 1889, 5.

This "bottom idea" of the department store was the structural and technical foundation upon which the window dresser built with commodities to complete a display. Frank L. Carr's publication *The Wide-Awake Window Dresser* provides a rare interior view of a window dresser's studio that contains all of these tools involved with the "bottom idea" (fig. 39).



Figure 39. "The Window Trimmer's Department" in Frank L. Carr, *The Wide-Awake Window Dresser* (New York: Dry Goods Economist, 1894), 36.
Source: The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

The idealized nature of this image presents this workshop as a stage set and the tools as props in an orderly row. Rather than a dark and crude basement studio, this space appears like a salesfloor of one of the store's major departments. It has plenty of natural and electric light, the swagged curtains offer decoration, and casework

contributes smart display surfaces. Labels, similar to signage in the ground floor salesroom, identify the tools that populate the window trimmer's studio. Along the right-hand wall are curtain poles, nickel fixtures, and wax figures and along the left-hand wall are drapery stands, mirrors, and a tool chest. These tools, normally the support system for the goods, are presented as commodities. In order to be Wide-Awake in terms of display design, access to a wide range of tools such as mannequins, display blocks, lighting systems and more, was necessary and a dedicated workroom allowed the window dresser to work efficiently and keep up a momentum of continuous production of display arrangements.

The Wide-Awake Window Dresser also illustrated a mock show window that exhibited a range of wares by the American shopfitting firm Norwich Nickel and Brass (fig. 40). The firm's strength lay in its offering of bespoke shopfittings for specific categories of wares. Stands and supports as those illustrated by the Norwich Nickel and Brass Works made the window display more readable for the consumer while also offering the opportunity for more complex, but still organized arrangements. In a July 1920 advertisement the Hugh Lyons Co. boasted: "Make your windows business builders…Concentrate the attention of shoppers on particular groups. Hugh Lyons fixtures will help to make your windows more profitable – make buyers out of passersby."[88] This phrase, "make buyers out of passersby" was a popular one used globally, often by fixtures companies, to emphasize the active role that their products could play in the effectiveness of the window display.[89]

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[88] *MRSW*, July 1920, 2.

[89] The cover for the French shopfitting firm Siegel and Hommey pictures a huge hand reaching out to grab a man passing by a show window and bears the phrase "Une belle vitrine, un bel atalage arretent le passant et l'engagent a acheter." Siégel & Hommey, *Illustrated Priced Catalogue of Étalages Vitrines et Accessoires pour Tous Commerces, Paris*, bound book with printed paper, 1914–15, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

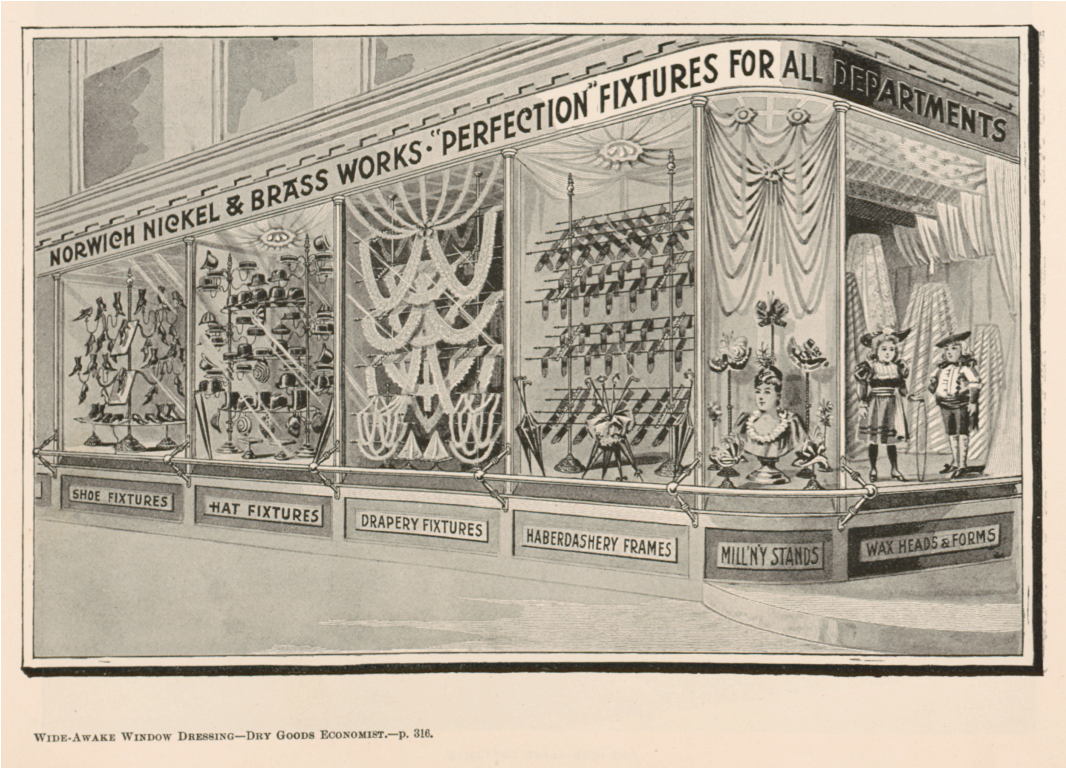


Figure 40. Norwich Nickel and Brass Works 'Perfection' Fixtures for All Departments in Frank L. Carr, *The Wide-Awake Window Dresser* (New York: Dry Goods Economist, 1894), 316.
Source: The Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

The window dresser often began the design process with a sketch or the making of a model. Sketches for windows were shared and published in retail-specific trade literature, prompting their replication. Once a plan had been developed, fixtures helped to secure the layout and assisted window dressers to fill the window's entire dimensions. Stands and brackets were key to the dynamism and height achieved in the window display. For instance tall stands helped handkerchiefs achieve a tree-like formation in a Marshall Field's window display of 1910 (fig. 41). Such presentations that climbed the windows were a boon to the fixtures industry that created flexible forms that allowed goods to suspend in air and connect to one another across the great expanses of glass.



Figure 41. Pedestrians Viewing a Marshall Field & Co. Window Display, 1910. Source: Chicago History Museum, DN-0008625; Chicago Daily News.

Once the understructure had been determined, window dressers arranged goods in a wide variety of display styles. Period guidebooks and textbooks as well as surviving photographs and accounts in the popular press and periodicals point to a canon of window display types that were presented to the public from the late nineteenth century onwards. Varying and often competing approaches to display included the "stocky" window, the sculptural window, and the unit principle, all of which conveyed vastly different attitudes and approaches.

Stocky Windows: A Message of Variety and Profusion

Early methods of merchandise presentation first introduced in the early to mid-nineteenth century often overwhelmed passersby with material variety and profusion. This style persisted even into the twentieth century, particularly in Britain, as seen in a

windowdisplay of 1900 at the Bon Marché Liverpool (fig. 42).



Figure 42. Bon Marché Christmas Window, Liverpool, 1900.
Source: John Lewis Partnership Archives, Ref: 2872/h.

Having invested in costly glazing, some retailers displayed as much of the inventory as possible in order to optimize profit return. These window display styles aimed to fill the entire window with products therefore placing the emphasis on the amount, quality, and variety of goods over their artful presentation. Sometimes the show window was even considered as a storage space and as a means of keeping stock that was seldom wanted inside the store.[90] For this reason, this style of window display may have earned the name the "stocky" window. This window display style was also referred to as "massed" and wares were often placed directly up against the glass. In this format, the window was, as Cole described "an object lesson which conveys at

[90] Timmins, *Window Dressing,* xiii.

one glance more ideas than many columns of a newspaper description."[91] The stocky window was executed under the belief that the quantity of the merchandise was the most important factor to communicate.[92]

The massed window persisted in department stores in London longer than in Chicago or New York. Some shopkeepers including the British John Lewis believed that the stocky window served as an honest advertisement for the establishment: "My own belief has always been that a shop can safely afford to be shoppy and that it need not pretend to be a drawing room display in the house of a wealthy connoisseur of rather austere taste."[93] Lewis did not feel the need to dramatize his everyday wares or give them a more sophisticated presentation that he considered better suited for luxury goods.[94] In Chicago and New York this stocky style was present more often in five and dime stores such as Woolworths and drugstores, where the message was quantity and affordability. In America rather than sending a message about honest merchandising, this massed method of presentation appeared out of date and static. One journalist observed that the stocky window was "in every way" like the "old-time tradesman": "His shop was in every way like him, a picture of unyielding solidity, with the window stacked with goods one on top of another, but not one thing marked. It all looked very fresh and imposing, and reflected some such sentiment as 'We are a

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[91] Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods,* 469.

[92] Cowan, *Window Backgrounds*, 71.

[93] Pamphlet on display, John Lewis Partnership Archives quoted in Susan Lomax, "The View from the Shop: Window Display, the Shopper and the Formulation of Theory," in *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society Since 1700*, ed. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 285.

[94] For a similar class-oriented viewpoint see J.W. Hayes, *Hints on Haberdashery & Drapery etc.* (London: Clements and Newling, 1875), 13.

happy, contented lot, and do not care whether customers come or not.'"[95] The lack of styling in the stocky window sent an indifferent message to the public meanwhile more rhetorical windows were more manipulative both in their message to the public and their physical transformation of the goods.

In a configuration where goods filled the window top to bottom, the consumer could decipher neither the window dresser's skill nor the store's character in the arrangement.[96] As one retail expert pointed out, "the old fashioned outfitter's window was often a matter for reproach, feebly dressed invariably in the same stodgy manner, a hopeless jumble of many kinds of merchandise which the weary foot passenger had laboriously to sort out for himself."[97] However increasing sophistication of the window display expanded consumer attention beyond just the commodities, which were the primary subject of the stocky window, to the manual expertise, props and new technologies at work that made possible a range of new window display arrangements.

Draping Techniques to Attract the Female Gaze

While massed display strategy made no concerted attempt to personally engage the passersby, in more advanced styles, window dressers used textiles in specific ways to attract the female consumer. The clever use of blocks, mannequins, and dress-like draping to simulate the female body was one of the primary tactics used to garner female attention (fig. 43).

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[95] W.B. Dingley, "The Value of the Shop Window," *The Imprint*, April 1913, 257.

[96] One American journalist warned in 1920 that the "heavily trimmed window…merely dazzles, and bewilders the observer leaving no definite idea." See Davis, "Merchant's Magic Mirror," 86.

[97] Hayes, *Hints on Haberdashery*, 31.



Figure 43. Back and Front Overdrapes in International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 2 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1905), section 15, 24.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by University of Wisconsin.

The window dresser's manual skills of draping and shaping over a form resembled those of a tailor around the body.[98] Many female shoppers arrived at the show window with a personal knowledge of textile properties and clothing construction and therefore would have admired the display staff's adept handing of fabric. Window display guidebooks were often organized by textile type implying that textiles should be handled and arranged appropriately to suit their properties which window dressers were required to master and partner with the appropriate lighting techniques.[99]
In such displays the show window functioned as a doubly reflective surface; its materiality leant it a reflective quality and the female consumer saw her likeness

[98] As early as the eighteenth century a female shopper observed "a cunning desire" in the show windows to show fabrics "as it would be in the ordinary folds of a woman's dress." Sophie von la Roche, *Sophie in London, 1786; Being the Diary of Sophie v. la Roche*, trans. and intro. Clare Williams, fwd. George Trevelyan (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), 87; also quoted in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 79.

[99] "Color Lighting for Windows," *MRSW*, October 1920, 64.

represented. The quality of the fixtures therefore had a strong bearing on the impact of the window. From a length of fabric cascading over a wooden block to a ready-to-wear garment on a flexible full-size mannequin, shop fittings witnessed great advancement in lifelike representations of the female figure over this 1880 to 1920 period. The mannequin making industry also worked more closely with the shapes dictated by the fashion industry.[100] The British shopfitting firm Harris & Sheldon employed Jackie Lamb, a man with an "intimate knowledge of the bust trade and future trends of shapes."[101] An 1899 catalogue featured an image of the Wire Working Shops above an image of their latest product, a "New Shaped Jersey or Short Jacket Stand" that they advertised had been introduced "…to meet the requirements of the present fashion. It is of an improved shape and has been submitted and approved by the London Mantle Houses"[102] (fig. 44) Some stands were offered with "adjustable improvers," an extension whose distance from the rear could be modified according to the silhouette of the dress to be displayed. An up-to-date mannequin was necessary in order to give an accurate impression of a garment's fit on the body.

By using mannequins and sophisticated manual techniques with textiles, window dressers invited the female shopper to take on a more active role as she stood in front of the window. Rather than "demanding nothing from the pedestrian," as historian Elaine Abelson has claimed, thoughtful displays with textiles specifically

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[100] Between 1869 and 1900 Stockman, a leading French manufacturer, developed more than twenty different dressmaker forms mirroring body shapes dictated by the best couture houses. See Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 31.

[101] Harris & Sheldon Limited History, n.d., Harris & Sheldon Archive.

[102] Harris & Sheldon, *Red White & Blue Catalogue*, 1899, 100, Harris & Sheldon Archive.

made demands on female shoppers and forged connections with their desires for self-fashioning.[103]



Figure 44. Wire Working Shops in Harris & Sheldon, *Red White & Blue Catalogue*, 1899, 100.
Source: Harris & Sheldon, Limited.

For instance, an article published in *Lady Magazine* on "Shopping in London" reported that while window shopping, "Monsieur only sees what is before him in the window," but "Madame's more comprehensive feminine gaze has at once adapted the

[103] Abelson, *When Ladies Go-A-Thieving*, 68. On self-fashioning and window display see Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 143.

draperies and folds to her own requirements."[104] This evidence positions window-shopping as an active engagement between the consumer and the merchandise mediated by the display. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century the process of achieving a fashionable female ensemble reached a new stage of complexity. A cunning window display exhibited to the female consumer how various textiles could be manipulated and combined to achieve a desirable effect.[105] Just as the female selected and pieced together an attractive ensemble, the window dresser combined elements to present his store's best front.

Care was taken that those goods shown in the window were still saleable following their display use. The material, borrowed from the textile departments, was required to be returned unharmed. In some stores the window dresser opened an account and every item that he borrowed for the window was charged against him. Upon the item's safe return he received credit for the stock.[106] One window dresser elaborated on his textile "trials" for the *New York Tribune* in 1910: "Then there is the draping. The saleswoman hands me a roll of silk and tells me she wants a princess dress, a seven-gored skirt, or any old thing, and I must produce the desired effect without even cutting the goods."[107] This trial illustrates how the window dresser had to possess excellent manual skills with textiles, handle the fabric carefully, as well as operate with an awareness of the fashion system. It was not financially viable to sacrifice the goods for sole use in the window. Patented formulas were developed to

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[104] "Shopping in London," *Lady Magazine*, June 28, 1888, 578–80.

[105] For pre-1880 evidence of these techniques in America see Andrew Wynter, *Our Social Bees; or, Pictures of Town & Country Life, and Other Papers* (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1861), 125.

[106] "Art of Window Dressing," 14.

[107] E. Donehower, "A Window Dresser's Trials," *New York Tribune*, January 23, 1910, 14.

aid the draper in producing a pleasing visual effect while simultaneously preserving the dry goods stock.[108] This patented technique is an example of the original technical methods that the display profession was developing in order to bolster their official recognition in the design field.

Puffing and Picture-Building: Manipulating Textiles by Hand

The stocky window fell out of favor in part because it was not a flexible enough system to allow for quick changeover and variety. Alteration and transformation rather than simple representation of commodities became the driving force of the most forward-thinking display strategy from the late nineteenth century. Hand skills with textiles facilitated visual variety in the show window. Cole warned that the "over-stocked windows allow of very little change, consequently the effect is soon minimized" and that rather "the object should be to introduce variety by puffing or folding."[109] (fig. 45) This page from the Handkerchief section of an International Correspondence School textbook instructed on how to make a handkerchief into an intricate quatrefoil. When simply piled up in the window via the stocky method, all textiles would look the same. Puffing them or folding them showed off their pattern, weight, sheen, and pliability while also advertising the skill of the window dresser and forming a strong mental impression on the consumer.[110]

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[108] R.F. Downey, Method and Apparatus for Draping Dummies from an Uncut Length of Cloth, U.S. Patent 1,024, 297, filed February 16, 1912, issued April 30, 1912. The patent instructed the window dresser in how to drape an uncut length of cloth upon a dummy to produce the effect of a completed garment or suit.

[109] Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*, 487.

[110] *The Show Window*, August 1898, 67.

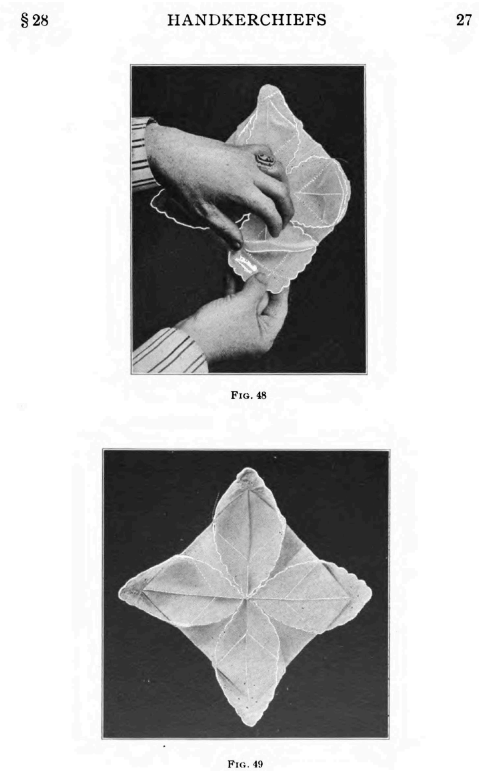


Figure 45. Handkerchief Folding Instructions for a "Cups Fold" in International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 3 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1905), sec. 28, 27.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by Columbia University.

Cotton goods, the most pliable but still sturdy of textiles, could be folded, shaped and layered into assemblages easily. Here the finished good, the handkerchief, is used as the raw material in the creation of the artistic product of the overall window display. The manipulability of these white goods made them a desirable medium with which to work. This textbook advised, "Perhaps no other article of merchandise is capable of a greater variety of decorative folds, forms, or designs than the handkerchief."[111] While Cole was referring to the physical puffing of the material, fashioning it into a sculptural arrangement, the term "puffing" had been

[111] International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 3 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1905), sec. 28, 1.

used to describe the often-sensationalistic exaggeration that fueled the advertising industry since the mid-nineteenth century.[112]

The artistic trajectory of the window carried this puffing to an extreme in a more sculptural mode of window dressing that conveyed a similar excess of the stocky window, but in a more artful and labor-intensive fashion that involved the manual manipulation of goods. Rather than advertising a range of the stock, the sculptural window stressed profusion in a particular category. Since dry goods were one of the most lucrative and largest departments, this pliable medium continued to provide the base for the majority of these sculptural window displays.

Sophisticated work with white goods was also some of the most challenging work in the window dresser's repertoire. In about 1895 Mr. E. Katz, "the accomplished decorative artist of Messrs. Abraham & Straus, Brooklyn" won a prize for the best linen display offered by *The Dry Goods Chronicle*. The Brooklyn Historical Society holds a photograph of Katz standing proudly in front of this prize-winning window that exhibits immense technical skill (fig. 46). This display's ambitious design won it a reproduction in L. Frank Baum's *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors* in 1900.[113] The illustration appears to be a drawing made after this photograph. Here Katz's window is presented as a professional product and as the best example of this type of window display in the field.

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[112] James Dawson Burn, *The Language of the Walls, and a Voice from the Shop Windows. Or, The Mirror of Commercial Roguery* (Manchester: Abel Heywood, 1855), 1. Burn identifies the shop windows as "regular puffing establishments."

[113] L. Frank Baum, *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors* (Chicago: Show Window Pub. Co., 1900), 87.

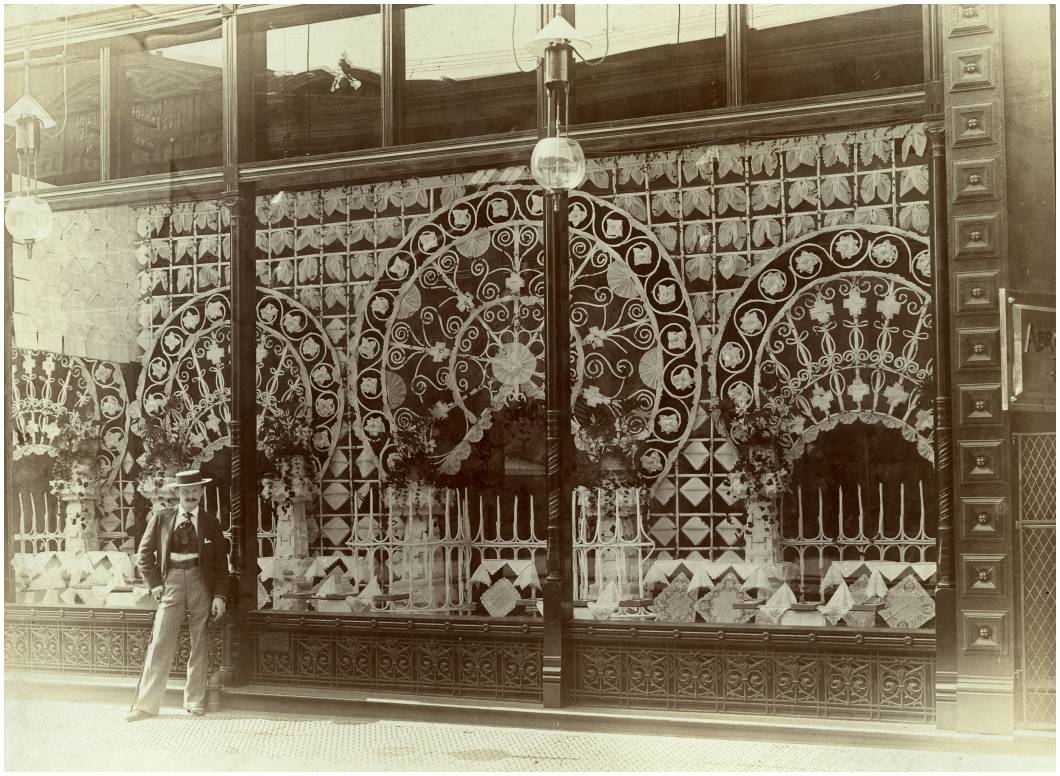


Figure 46. Abraham & Straus Storefront, ca. 1895.
Source: Image v1972.1.611; Early Brooklyn and Long Island Photograph Collection, ARC.201, Brooklyn Historical Society.

The article entitled "A Prize Linen Display: Details for Constructing it and Similar Windows," that accompanies the drawing includes step by step illustrated instructions on various folding elements contained within the window as well as this warning to the reader: "If properly arranged, linens make a beautiful window display, but in unskilled hands they are disappointing and unattractive."[114]

In addition to acting as an overt show of the window dresser's manual technique, these white goods windows impressed with a profusion of stock. Unlike the stocky window, however, goods moved beyond a static format. Author of multiple books on salesmanship, Nathaniel C. Fowler, Jr., suggested that "Handkerchiefs…can be built into pillars, arranged in cones, or an immense heap of handkerchiefs can be

[114] Ibid, 77.

shown…to represent bulk, as characteristic of the size of the handkerchief business"[115] (fig. 47). The multitude of handkerchiefs communicated the strength of the textile industry and the department store's command of global trade as many of the handkerchiefs were imported.[116]

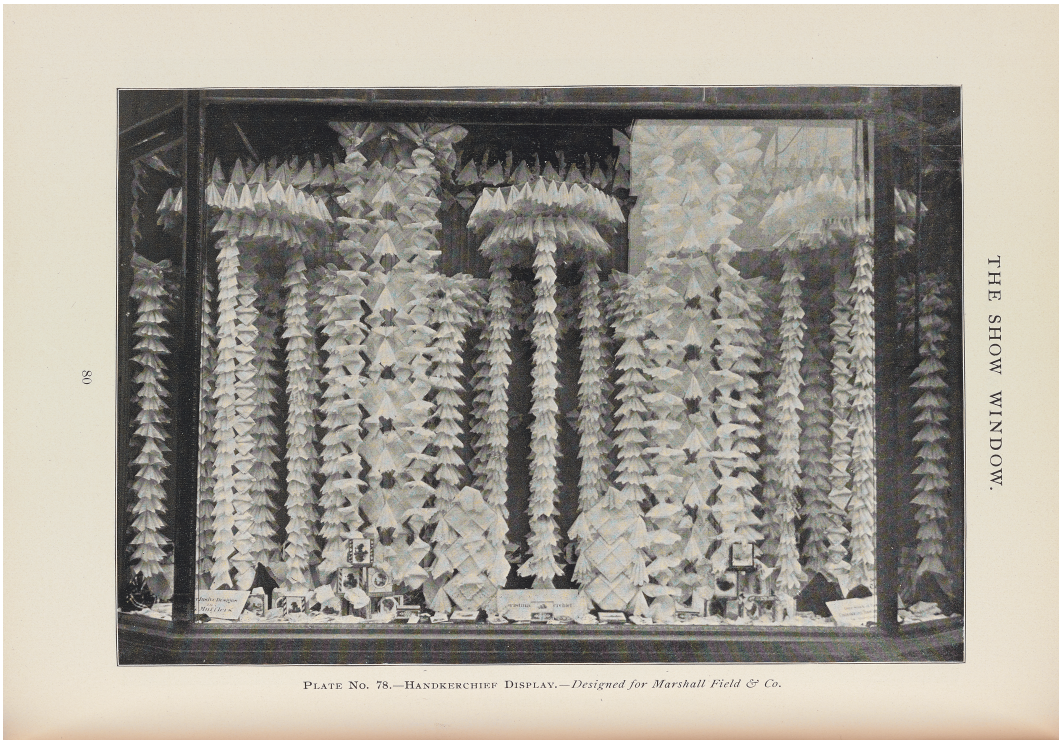


Figure 47. Handkerchief Display - Designed for Marshall Field & Co., ca. 1898 in *The Show Window*, February 1898, 80.
Source: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Thus the serial imagery of the show window communicated the strength of industrial production that made the profusion and low cost of goods possible. [117] The handkerchief itself represented the result of an immense amount of labor and trade,

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[115] Nathaniel C. Fowler, *Building Business: An Illustrated Manual for Aggressive Business Men* (Boston: The Trade Co., 1893), 430.

[116] "Even So Simple a Thing as a Handkerchief," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 11, 1927, Scrapbook, 1852–1928, Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

[117] Sherwin Simmons, "August Macke's Shoppers: Commodity Aesthetics, Modernist Autonomy, and the Inexhaustible Wall of Kitsch," Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 63 (2000): 56.

the details of which the public was largely ignorant.[118] However, the displayman's labor in the presentation of these commodities was communicated to the public and appreciated by them due to the complexity of the display in the show window.

The repetitive nature of such arrangements, the same commodity shaped and piled on top of one another, brings to mind Siegfried Kracauer's concept of the mass ornament as it relates to capitalist production.[119] These show window displays prefigured in material form what Kracauer later identified, in relationship to factory hands and the Tiller Girls in the United States, as "the mass ornament" or "the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires."[120] Kracauer observed that the logic and power of Taylorism had driven the similar appearance and actions of these contemporary forms. Similarly, the window dresser was driven by the demands of increased production to secure increased consumption by way of displaying goods in great number and repeated forms. As *WDGTR* pointed out in December of 1905: "The good window dresser must practically 'think' in arches, scrolls, and curves, for everybody recognizes the beauty of a well-shaped curve composed or made up in any material or substance."[121] Thus commodities became building blocks for impressive visual statements that were made, destroyed, and remade again under the cycle of capitalism's creative destruction.

Humble objects such as spools of thread and handkerchiefs combined to create imagery that carried symbolic weight. Out of this standard stock the window dresser

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[118] For public ignorance of department stores' procurement process of stock see "A.T. Stewart & Co's Marble Stores," 22 and 110.

[119] Thank you to Glenn Adamson for your suggestion of this interpretation.

[120] Siegfried Kracauer and Thomas Y. Levin, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 79.

[121] "The Window Artist: Attainments To Be Aimed At By a Good Window Dresser," *WDGTR* December 1905, 37.

built plants and flowers, gothic arches, the Brooklyn Bridge, Washington's Capital building and more. This mode of window dressing, requiring a great amount of labor and preparation, took hold in America much more than in Britain. In 1913, the British author W.B. Dingley lamented, "There still appear to be many tradesmen who cannot be made to see the value and importance of the shop window: who just go on using it as a store cupboard, a place in which to deposit a load of goods when not wanted at the moment."[122] One American journalist identified that the British merchant's persistence was tied to the fact that this dense approach to the window, one that relied on the "easy handling of goods and blending of colors and massing of objects" had been at the core of the long-established apprenticeship program in window display in Britain "where the recognized calling was first practiced."[123] This approach of "picture-making" in Britain was pitted against "picture-building" as in the more sculptural mode practiced in America and "the legitimate aim of artistic window dressing in Chicago" that was not even encouraged in England.

American window dressers prided and differentiated themselves on the amount and quality of the labor that contributed to the production of their displays, making goods assume new and various forms rather than just presenting them as stock. The time and effort required for window displays was frequently emphasized in the American press and periodicals.[124] Meanwhile the journalists for the British organ *WDGTR* often pointed out that the ease of their windows set them apart from American display production "whose labour in the arrangement of large shows is

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[122] Dingley, "The Value of the Shop Window," 257.

[123] "The Art of Window Dressing,"14. No evidence of this apprenticeship program has been properly identified.

[124] See remarks on a stationery display in the shape of the Capital at Washington at Marshall Field's in Chicago in *The Show Window*, January 1898, 33.

enormously apparent." [125] The British public did not appreciate the showy, time-consuming and seemingly wasteful style of American displays that put the stock at risk.

In December of 1889, the New York newspaper *The Evening World* ran a window display contest that featured many of these ostentatious American display designs.[126] The descriptions prove a direct link between prescription and practice in window dressing since many of the winners chose display designs prominently featured in contemporary guidebooks. Such competitions also showcased the hand skills of the window dressers and their clever use of fixtures, thus feeding consumer interest for how the displays were fabricated. Meanwhile, the British audience, not attuned to the production value of display as early and as intensely as American consumers, did not support similar contests. Author George Sims wrote in 1904, "…occasionally there are window-dressing contests among with West-End shop assistants, but these do not appeal to the general public."[127]

The first winner of the *Evening World*'s contest was Sam J. Besthoff, who was responsible at the establishment of J. Lichtenstein & Sons, with its "fourteen plate-glass windows, with more than one hundred and fifty feet frontage" where "the goods [handkerchiefs] are deftly arranged into the form of plants and flowers.[128] The use of floral imagery belied the industrial nature of the products.[129] Textiles that grew from the ground of the show window aligned the commodity world with nature, implying

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[125] *WDGTR*, January 1906, 68 and "A Few Words to Drapers," *WDGTR*, December 1905, 57.

[126] "Art In Window-Dressing," 5.

[127] George R. Sims, *Living London: Its Work and Its Play, Its Humour and Its Pathos, Its Sights and Its Scenes* vol. 3 (London: Cassell & Co, 1904), 264.

[128] For a template of a "Lily Window" see Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*, 334.

[129] Asendorf, *Batteries of Life,* 101.

abundance while impressing a message of seasonality. One British journalist advised that due to its rapid changeover, "Nature is the greatest of all commercial artists" and urged his readership to "Take Nature as your example."[130] Another contest winner, Patrick H. McMahon at Simpson, Crawford, & Simpson was planning a handkerchief arrangement of "over one thousand dozen fine handkerchiefs… The handkerchiefs were arranged in gothic arches." The article goes on to describe how "Mr. McMahon's forte is in producing artistic effects with merchandise along, unaided by lay figures or mechanical devices. His 'Brooklyn Bridge,' composed of spool and knitting, silks, and his 'Capitol at Washington,' built out of linens and towelings…were famous last winter."[131] The Brooklyn Bridge, as discussed in the introduction, was a particularly popular design around the time of its completion, representing democratization, specialization, and technological achievement, all concepts central to the dept store itself.

Cole's example (fig. 48) is fashioned from rolls of cloth, undershirts, ties, buttons, and spools of thread. Frank L. Carr, author of *The Wide-Awake Window Dresser* designed a Brooklyn Bridge window out of wheel cotton that exhibited noteworthy technical prowess.[132] An Australian newspaper reported in 1901 that his model had been "inspected by the chief engineer of the bridge, and he pronounced it an exact reproduction in every detail."[133]

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[130] "A First Lesson in Window Dressing," *Commercial Art*, October 1922, 15.

[131] For a photograph of a Capital at Washington display at Marshall Field's see *The Show Window* January 1898, 33. For a related template see Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*, 522.

[132] See a photograph of a Brooklyn Bridge Window display made of spool cotton, designed by Mr. Edward S. Smith in *The Show Window*, March 1898, plate no. 102.

[133] "Frank L. Carr, An American Decorator," 7.

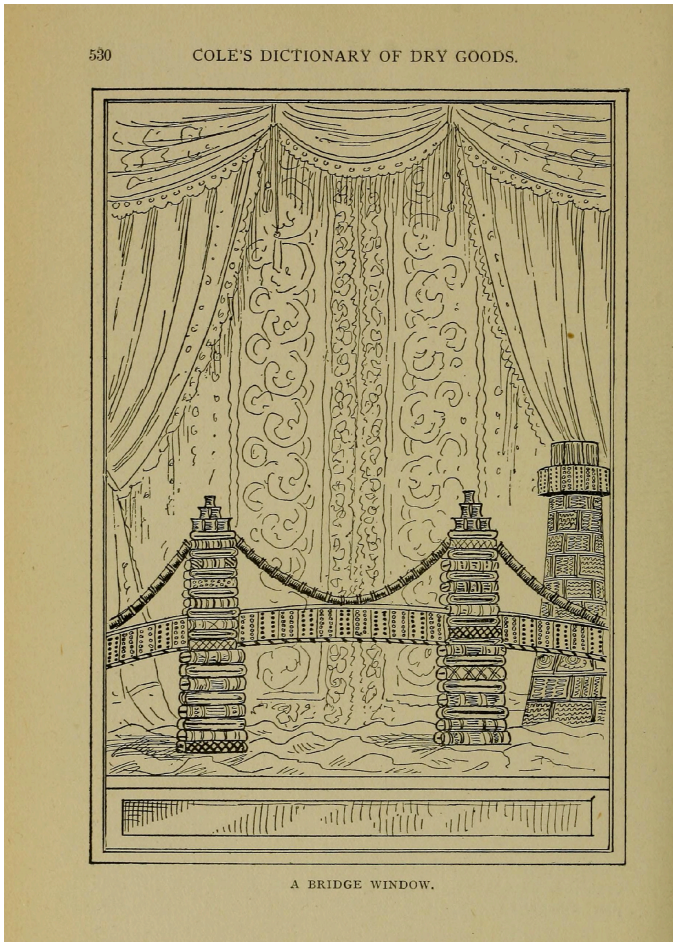


Figure 48. A Bridge Window in George S. Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*... (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1892), 530.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by the Library of Congress.

While these figural arrangements of commodities might at first appear exotic or bizarre, it is important to point out that the displayman was contributing to a broader aesthetic convention of building with commodities that took hold in the nineteenth century. While the department store is often discussed alongside the world's fair in reference to great spectacle and size, specific connections can also be found in display tools and methods. As the next chapter will elaborate, shopfittings were shared between the store and the exhibition booths. In addition, both the department store and the world's fair favored this sculptural, or mass ornament, approach, to the arrangement of wares. Crop art and "food art constructions" at the world's fairs expressed a symbolism of abundance much like the handkerchief

windows.[134] For instance at the World's Columbian Exposition, the state of California presented the "Old Liberty Bell" containing 6,500 oranges in the Agricultural Hall (fig. 49).[135]

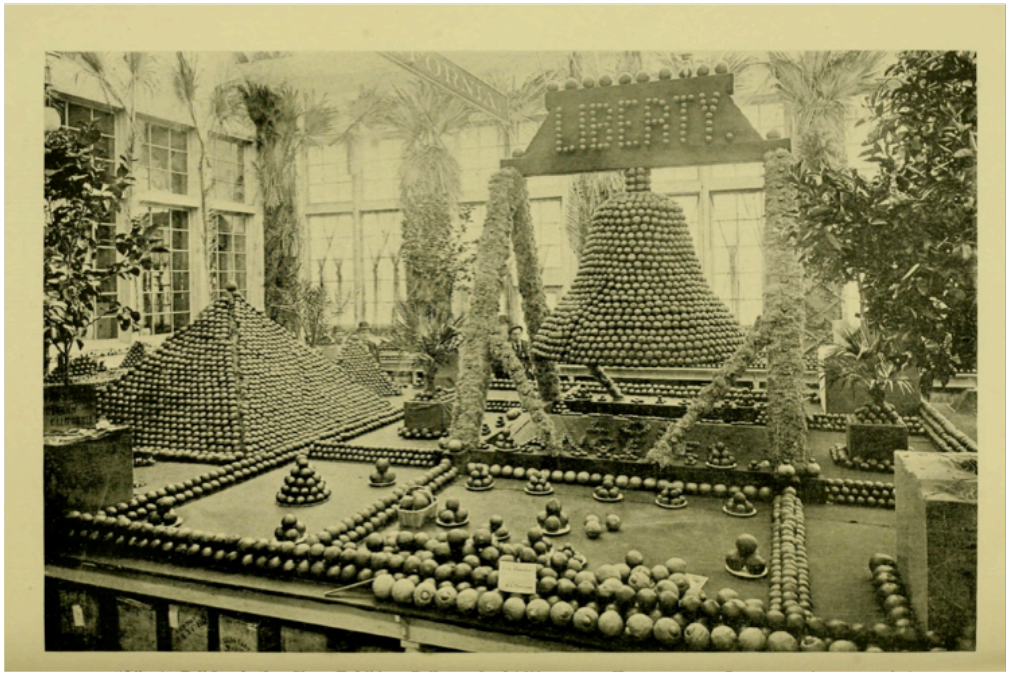


Figure 49. Liberty Bell Constructed from Southern California Citrus, Inside the California Building at the World's Columbian Exposition in *Final Report of the California World's Fair Commission…* (Sacramento: State Office, A.J. Johnston, 1894), 90.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by Library of Congress.

Meanwhile many towns in Victorian Britain constructed arches to mark special occasions, often with objects that symbolized the town's strength in manufacturing. This artistic concept likely originated when London's Marble Arch was moved from Buckingham Palace to Hyde Park Corner in 1850 or 1851. High Wycombe was notable for its tradition of arches of chairs begun in 1877 to celebrate the visit of

[134] See Pamela H. Simpson, *Corn Palaces and Butter Queens: A History of Crop Art and Dairy Sculpture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 85–111.

[135] *Final Report of the California World's Fair Commission…* (Sacramento: State Office, A.J. Johnston, 1894), 75. For a nearly identical design in handkerchiefs see Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods*, 342.

Queen Victoria, a custom that continued for years to follow (fig. 50).[136]



Figure 50. Chair Arch for Visit of Prince and Princess of Wales, High Wycombe, 1884.
Source: Wycombe Museum.

Therefore the department store displayman contributed to a larger nineteenth century aesthetic tradition that favored the massed commodity as a form of visual communication and produced design templates that were used across exhibition contexts.

Motion, Machinery, and Light: Dynamism in the Show Window

The show window was a champion for the power of the hand as well as the machine. The use of up-to-date technology earned a store a position of prominence in public

[136] "Chair Arches," Wycombe District Council, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/council-services/leisure-and-culture/local-and-family-history/chair-arches.aspx

opinion and garnered attention. As *WDGTR* reported, "The important point of a mechanical fitting is its irresistible attraction to the majority of men, women, and children whose eyes are instantly caught by the spectacle of anything moving in the window. 'Machinery in motion' is always put on the list of attractions of a popular exhibition."[137] In London, the use of mechanics in the department store was in line with the concurrent popularity of shops devoted to automatic shows popular in "Blackwall, Kentish Town, and Lambeth, as in Oxford Street and the more select ways of the West."[138] Unlike these automatic shows whose mechanical enticements were hidden inside, the department store showcased its mechanical entertainment and sometimes even exposed its inner workings to passersby on the sidewalk. Ehrich Brothers' presentation of a three-ring Dolls' Circus in 1881 was probably the earliest use of an animated window by a New York City department store.[139] As early as 1883, Macy's added mechanical fascination to its Christmas shows, turning dolls and toys through steam power.[140] By 1925, Macy's mechanical experiments had advanced to a "fantastical animated spectacle" made up of "twenty-six stirring scenes with hundreds of marionette actors in a continuous performance" that played on a six-minute loop.[141]

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[137] "Mechanical Fittings," *WDGTR*, December 1905, 55.

[138] A. St. John Adcock, "Slideshow London" in Sims, *Living London,* 84.

[139] Bird, *Holidays on Display*, 23.

[140] Leigh E. Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying & Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995), 161. See "Macy's Holiday Window," *Saratoga Eagle*, December 22, 1883, 8B Box 8, Macy's Archive.

[141] "Macy's Big Christmas Parade" Advertisement, *New York Evening Journal*, November 25, 1925, Box 6, Folder 4, Messmore & Damon Company Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

In 1899, The Window Motor Co. advertised that "by the occasional use of something that is full of life and motion, the particular window where it is seen will be well fixed in the minds of the people and the ordinary display will receive their attention because they are constantly looking for something new."[142] The use of a motor impressed upon a consumer that the window was up-to-date and therefore worth returning to again. Fixtures incorporated the use of motors that both sparked the consumer imagination as well as offered some practical benefits such as rotation that allowed objects to be seen in the round.[143] For instance in 1876, Albert Fischer patented such a "Revolving Show Stand" with a rotating bottom tier "partly for steadying the rotation of the stand, and partly to attract the attention of passers-by to the mechanism and to the contents of the show-window."[144] The patent copy reveals an awareness of the public fascination with visible mechanics and movement. The motor was not encased in the device, but instead left exposed so that the public could watch it at work as the merchandise spun.

In addition to mechanization, lighting was another important technology that could manipulate the appearance of commodities and was employed in the show window to enhance the display's success. Over the course of the 1880 to 1920 period, lighting technology advanced from problematic and cumbersome gas lamps to electrified systems that attracted the attention of passersby with the quality of their

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[142] "The Trimmer's Calendar," *The Show Window*, January 1899, 56.

[143] In 1930 architect Frederick Kiesler published his "Dream of a Kinetic Window" that opened and closed, rotated, added light, and brought the merchandise closer at the consumers' command. See Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (New York: Brentano's, 1930), 10.

[144] Albert Fischer, Revolving Show Stands, U.S. Patent 184, 362, filed July 25, 1876, issued November 14, 1876.

light rather than the view of their armature.[145] As the technology matured, the electrical apparatus's invisibility provoked curiosity for the source of the still visible lighting effect. The 1914 manual *Display Window Lighting*, explained that if lighting fixtures are hidden, the prospective purchaser "would enter the store to satisfy his curiosity."[146] Then, if he did not purchase it would be the fault of the inside salesmanship, for artificial light would have performed its function as an "auxiliary outside salesman" which the author Godinez described as "a function which every display window can be made to perform if the lighting is original and different."[147] Godinez identified the active role of lighting technologies in making consumers out of passersby. Lighting also served as another tool to amplify the rate and impact of change; washes of colored light required a simple switch of a colored lens on the light's apparatus.[148] The use of such lighting technology enabled displays to become simpler as the color or pattern of the light added visual interest to even basic forms.

The Unit Principle: A New Artistic Approach to Window Display

In the first decades of the twentieth century an increasing number of merchants began to strive for a sparser effect in their show windows. This paring down mirrored a larger shift in art and design trends involving the clearing of nineteenth-century visual

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[145] Francisco Laurent Godinez, *Display Window Lighting and The City Beautiful: Facts, and New Ideas For Progressive Merchants* (New York: The Wm. T. Comstock Company, 1914), 33. When Marshall Field's opened a new building in 1907, the *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* detailed that there were "no lights are in sight." See *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 11, 1902*,* 03052 (24), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.

[146] Godinez, *Display Window Lighting,* 44.

[147] Ibid.

[148] For suggestions on weekly changes of colored light see "A Few Words to Drapers," *WDGTR*, January 1906, 70.

clutter and offering clean lines and geometries. Colored light was frequently employed to bring out formal qualities of objects. In complete contrast to the piled high arrangements of textiles discussed earlier, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, there emerged what practitioners called "the unit principle." Reversing the logic of the stocky window, in this case "the unit principle" promoted the philosophy that taking products out of the window helped the few left to sell more quickly. As Mr. R. W. Shorter, Window Dresser to London tailor Austin Reed, wrote in 1910, "Everything must be fresh, nothing too bright or startling, the dressing must be light and 'spacy,' giving plenty of room to show each individual article off to perfection, for without doubt, in nearly every case, one thing put directly against another spoils the look of both."[149]

The trend became to use fewer goods, clearly shown in outline and silhouetted against a decorative backdrop. The small amount of wares did not mean that there was less time or skill required for the completion of the arrangement. Instead, this new type of window display, aligned with concepts and theories of modern art, demanded that knowledge of contemporary artistic production form a part of the displayman's skill set. In 1906 *WDGTR* reported, "Far more art and judgment are required in the modern, simpler displays, than did the older affairs that depended entirely upon elaborate construction and scene painting, quite disconnected with the articles to be sold."[150] While a model of the Brooklyn Bridge made out of spools of thread may have been visually impressive, the overall effect did not communicate anything directly related to the form or function of the goods themselves.

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[149] *Publicity: A Practical Guide,* 31.

[150] *WDGTR*, May 1906, 201.

The display profession capitalized on their alignment with the modern art world as evidence of their "wide-awake" practice. Just weeks following the Armory Show, New York's Economist Training School used a "Cubist Drape" to advertise its training program, advocating that "Current Tendencies in Art Find First Expression Here."[151] (fig. 51).

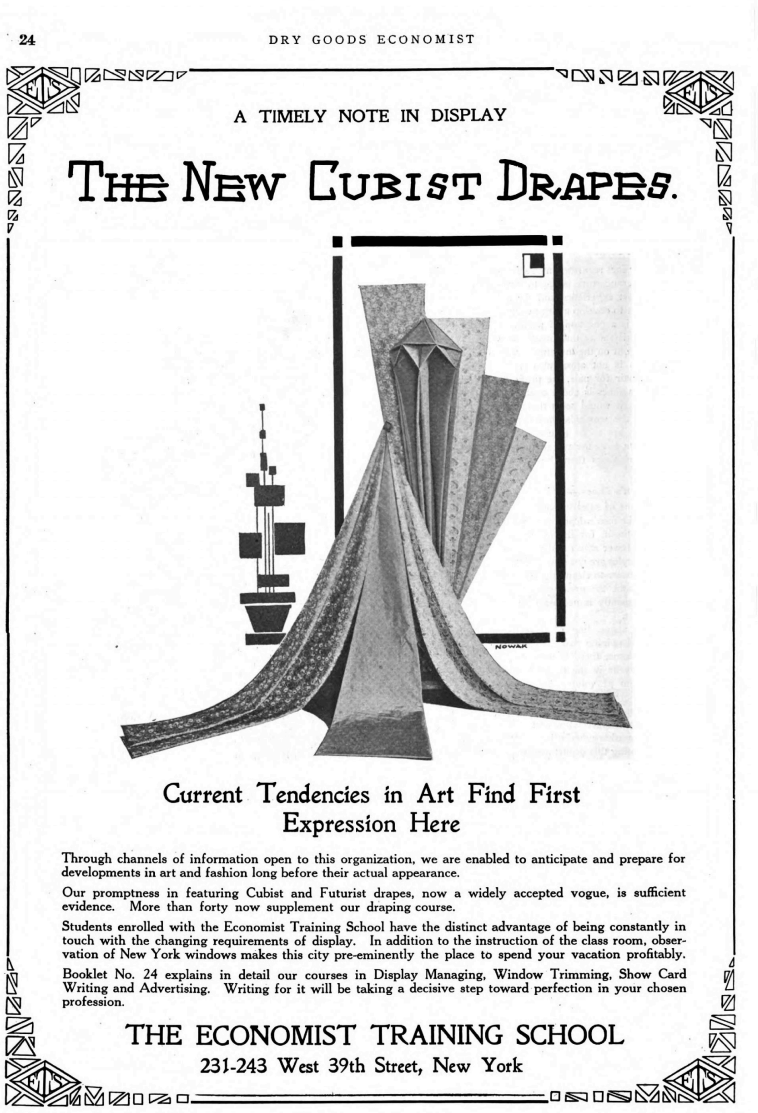


Figure 51. The Economist Training School, Advertisement, *Dry Goods Economist*, April 12, 1913, 24.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

[151] See The Economist Training School, Advertisement, *Dry Goods Economist*, April 12, 1913, 24. Illustrated in Elizabeth Carlson, "Cubist Fashion: Mainstreaming Modernism after the Armory," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 48 (Spring 2014): 14.

This drape no longer imitated the female form but instead embraced the non-figural and took the shape of a cubist sculpture. These displays communicated their fashionability through their minimalism whose pared-down aesthetics also had the practical effect of centering the focus of the consumer and minimizing distraction.

Published in 1911, one American guidebook reported on the success of the unit principle: "department store window men have mastered the art of simplicity and concentration, for they can, if they so desire cleverly stage the display so as to throw or force attention upon a single article in the window…that its message will be instantly 'picked up' by the passerby."[152] This author positions minimalism as translating to readability. While it is difficult to determine from the historical record the financial success of these striking windows that marked a major shift in window dressing style, it is certain that their visual disjunction from the past marked them as "sufficiently new and novel" and the *Dry Goods Economist* encouraged displaymen, in April of 1913, to execute these new Cubist and Futurist drapes now, "when the particular fad or fancy is just beginning to gain the attention of the general public" so that "the display, therefore, will prove most timely."[153]

In addition to the novelty and theatricality of their styling, these cubist and futurist drapes also embodied a number of other principles that secured this new direction in window dressing's alignment with modernity. These arrangements, dependent on fewer goods, allowed for greater flexibility and rapid response to the change of season or a contemporary event therefore achieving the distinctions of speed and variation as well as rationalization in the better management of staff

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[152] Woodward and Fredericks, *Selling Service with the Goods*, 86.

[153] "Making Use of the New Art Sensation," *Dry Goods Economist*, April 5, 1913, 93.

time.[154] Frequent and easier alteration of the show window's contents also gave the displayman more practice, which the *WDGTR* emphasized as an asset to placing fewer goods in the window.[155] The form of these drapes, the *Dry Goods Economist* claimed, was not only eye-catching but "easy to execute" since "Cubist and Futurist types of art" were "largely developed along straight lines [making] the work of draping a comparatively simple matter."[156] The artistic and the commercial concerns of the show window had herein found a new sense of balance.

Conclusion

No matter what the style, the window display's changeability was an absolutely central element of its success. Thomas A. Bird, editor of *MRSW* observed, "Some of the opening displays that have been designed by decorators for the big department stores are works of art as perfect as any to be found in art galleries; yet they are built to last but two or three weeks, and are then torn out to make room for something else. That is one of the unsatisfactory features of the window dresser's work – his achievements leave behind no lasting record."[157] While this ephemerality, indeed thankfully captured through photographs, drawings and text analyzed in this thesis, may have starved the window dresser of some satisfaction, at the same time the relentless pace of window display alteration increased consumer curiosity and therefore the rate of retail business. The window's ability to train and condition consumer expectation for variation and fragmentation in the style and lifespan of

[154] Lomax, "The View From the Shop," 274.

[155] "A Few Words to Drapers," 70.

[156] "Making Use of the New Art Sensation," 93.

[157] Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display," 22.

display was one of this advertising medium's greatest strengths. The show window therefore emerged as a predictable site of changeability whose expressions of modernity exceeded consumer expectations and produced profits. The professional window dresser established a new visual language for the commodity that stressed diversity, variability, and revision. At times communicating the strength of manufacture through material goods and at other times abstracting those material goods into artful pictures, the window display designer freely combined, shaped, and built with commodities.

This chapter has outlined how professional window dressers relentlessly experimented to fashion their windows into the best artistic statement and selling devices possible. The marketing and business potential of advertising as an active force and the window space as a strategic business enabler peaked at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1920, *MRSW* reported, "frequently do merchants estimate window sales, or sales influenced by displays in show windows, at better than 60 percent, as many merchants have no hesitancy in crediting 75 or 80 percent of total business to the influence of goods displays."[158]

Large windows became a recognizable element of the city experience, a priority in the building program of the department store, and set up a new public exhibition space for the viewing and reconfiguring of material goods endowing them with new meanings. The public became trained to read the show window's surface for more than options in consumer goods. Well beyond the confines of the retail realm did the show window's message reach into other aesthetic influences that were shaping the modern city and contemporaneous artistic production. Window display design registered the style of the period in which it was produced; one can observe

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[158] "The Greatest Selling Factor," *MRSW*, July 1920, 19.

how the density of the Victorian era, as exemplified in the “stocky window” mode was refined and dramatically pared down in the early twentieth century with the dissemination of the “unit principle” and further abstracted under the influences of modern art by 1920. This great variation, technical innovation, and reinvention at constant work in the show window established it as an active and explicit space of the department store and earned window dressing its often-evoked description as a “wide awake” profession.

Chapter Three
The Shopfitting Industry: Tools and Technologies of Display

While the previous chapter outlined how window dressers promoted the department store at street level, this chapter will investigate how the shopfitters introduced new technologies in order to distinguish merchandise presentation in the stores' interiors. Shopfitters produced the fixtures and technologies so that familiar merchandise could be viewed in fresh formats. Due to the increasing use of shopfittings, consumers became progressively attuned to not only what the stores were selling but also how they were selling it.

While "wide-awake" was the catchphrase often used to describe a striking and up-to-date show window display, shopfitters referred to their latest products for merchandise presentation as "silent salesmen." Whereas the show window was explicit in its aim to actively catch the eye of the passerby, sophisticated casework and stands exhibited a silent functionality that was more passive and implicit. Within this framework, these technical apparatuses will be explored as "non-human actants."[1] Shopfittings served as a structure to facilitate visual access to the merchandise via the use of plate glass or configurations that gained surface area or height for display while dictating how and where consumers should interact with the merchandise.

Earlier in the nineteenth century the term "Silent Salesman" was used to describe the catalogue for a mail-order service. Like a printed catalogue, a showcase presented the merchandise for the consumers' selection. The Detroit Show Case Company aptly named a line of casework the "Silent Salesman" (fig. 52).

[1] Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?", 239.

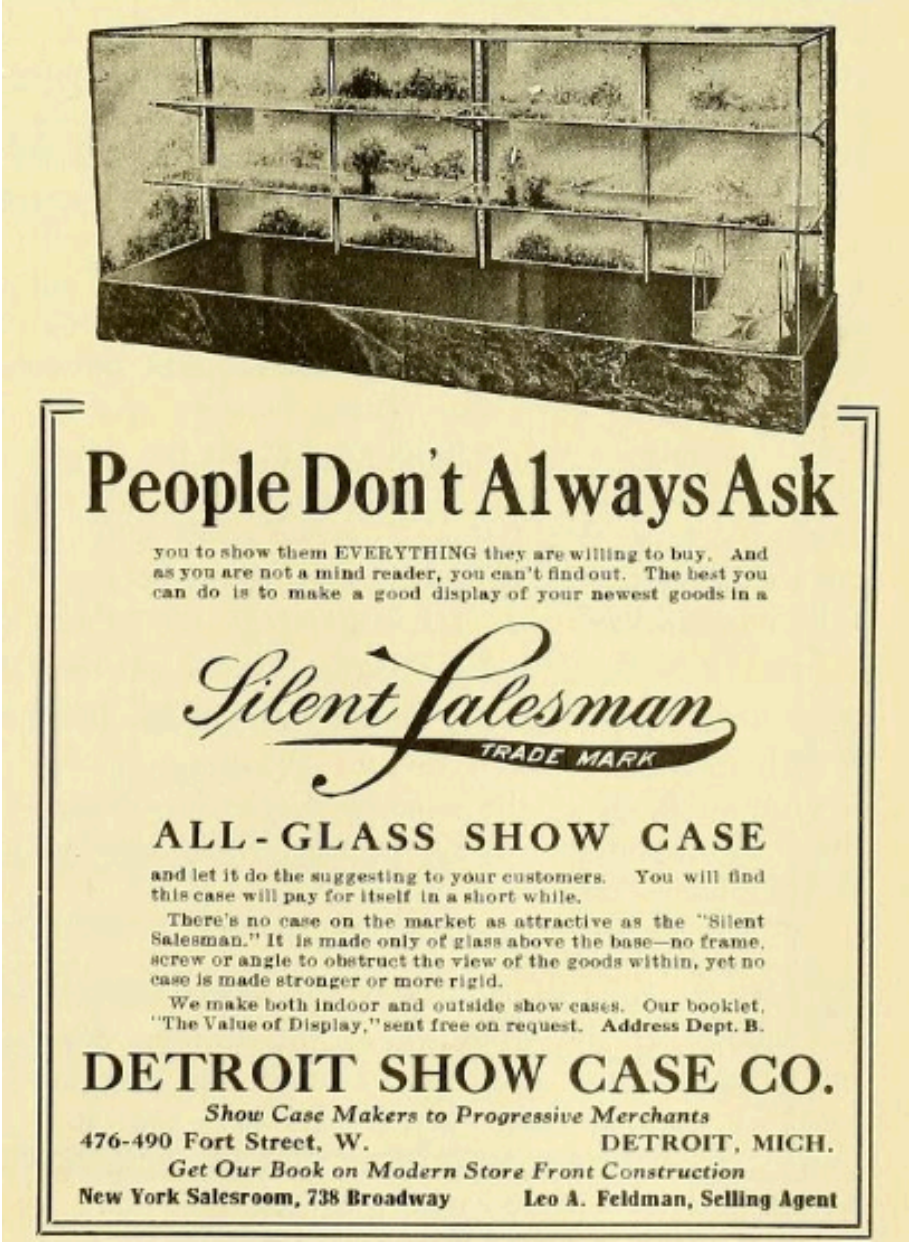


Figure 52. Detroit Show Case Co., Advertisement, *MRSW*, February 1913, 63.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Smithsonian Libraries.

In February of 1913, the Detroit Show Case Company advertised their "Silent Salesman" cases with the tagline "People Don't Always Ask," openly referring to older methods of retail design, wherein consumers were prompted to engage with the salesperson often by a hanging

sign that read "If you don't see what you want, ask for it."[2] The Detroit Show Case Company was implying that their "Silent Salesman" case did the work of the salesperson and showed the merchandise so the customers did not have to ask at all in order to view an item. The glass construction allowed for clear three-sided, and even four-sided viewing when mirrored along the back. Within a Latourian framework, this casework can be interpreted as one of the most influential non-human factors that constituted department store display. These "Silent Salesman" cases encouraged consumers to look but not touch, which was a prescription of behavior "encoded in the mechanism" of its plate glass material, similar to the plate glass window.[3] As Latour suggests, these mechanisms utter directions "silently and continuously" such as "do this, do that, behave this way."[4] These instructions of permitted shopping behaviors can be analyzed as both a messenger and replacement for the recently unspoken and unnecessary words of the salesperson.

The use of glass also had a number of practical effects; glass maximized cleanliness, minimized dirt in the interior and protected goods from over-handling. The telling sales copy reads, "People Don't Always Ask you to show them EVERYTHING they are willing to buy. And as you are not a mind reader, you can't find out. The best you can do is to make a good display of your newest goods in a Silent Salesman All-Glass Show Case and let it do the suggesting to your customers."[5] Shopfitters promoted that their new fixtures could serve as a "silent" mediator between the customer and the commodities, therefore replacing customer contact with sales staff. In outdated setups in which most "merchandise was kept carefully

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[2] Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display," 12.

[3] Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?," 232.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Advertisement, Detroit Show Case Co., *MRSW*, February 1913, 63.

stored away in dingy showcases, boxes and drawers" the merchant filled "the wants that existed and was satisfied."[6] He retrieved the merchandise that the customer specifically requested. But by showing the consumer a great range of wares, beyond what their shopping list contained, the glass showcase produced new desires. The highly visible quality of this casework also allowed for the display to be autonomous and self descriptive. Objects no longer had to be demonstrated through physical handling and instead the power of optics suggested material qualities.

The aim of this chapter is to explore how the clever use of shopfittings, ranging from small stands to rows of casework dictated consumers' movement and vision, modernized the interior, and optimized the experience of shopping on a grand scale. This chapter will call attention to how the technical tools of shopfitting amplified the display moment in the life of the commodity. Discussion will begin with a few examples from the surviving visual and archival record of shopfittings and the messages and agendas that they contain. The second section will present how retail developed under the influence of scientific management. Third discussion will trace the professional development of the shopfitting trade in alignment with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century exhibition culture. Then shopfitting's effects on the optics of the department store will be evaluated in a shift from density to openness that marked the store as distinctly modern. Lastly the chapter will return to how the department store became an increasingly technical space in which shopfittings acted as silent salesmen to turn profits. Overall an evaluation of how shopfitters planned space, patterned movement, and aimed to accelerate sales will reveal that fixtures, or the material culture of display, acquired remarkable and unprecedented agency in altering the shopping experience.

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[6] Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display," 12.

The industry of shopfitting's engagement with modernity will be explored in terms of its fragmentation of the shopping experience into a varied series of views and moments, the speed at which it encouraged consumers to circulate, the rational approaches to organization that it made possible, and the theatrical, multi-dimensional presentation that it enacted.

The Visual and Archival Record of Silent Salesmanship

Through advertisements shopfitters disseminated a narrative of the department store as an increasingly mechanical space requiring less human interaction between salespeople and consumers and therefore more interaction between people and shopfittings. The Grand Rapids Showcase Company drew a direct comparison between the manufacturer, or the factory, and the department store in both venues' combinations of "materials, machinery, and men." In order to emphasize the efficacy of the shopfittings that they produced, the Grand Rapids Showcase Company purported that like the manufacturer, the shopfitter has found that "the production of his human element is regulated largely by the machinery with which it works…If they [department stores] place at the disposal of their salespeople, devices which automatically force the showing of a greater amount of merchandise, they are going to increase the individual sales check very materially."[7] Therefore, shopfittings were positioned as another element in the department store machine that could be optimized for efficiency. While making the tasks of the salesperson easier and more effective, these devices did not require much work on the part of the salespeople to operate and consumers only had to visually engage with them to ensure their role as powerful selling agents.

[7] Grand Rapids Showcase Company, *Getting Behind the Retail Business* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Showcase Company, 1922), 23–24.

Since the majority of photographs were taken while the department store was at rest, the surviving imagery that documents the department store selling space tends to lack human subjects. This exclusion of people from the visual record tempts one to make an even more dramatic reading about the power of silent salesmanship and the decline of personal contact on the department store sales floor. The various agendas of the photographs must be considered. Publicity departments staged their shots carefully so that all of the props were in place to invite the viewer to come play a part in the drama of merchandising. A photograph of Ponting's accessories counter (fig. 53) positions the viewer as consumer, much like the Abraham & Straus model (fig. 2). This image sets up a direct visual relationship between the viewer and the array of merchandise, facilitated by the silent salesmen of the stands and casework. The image appears open as if reassure the viewer that there is plenty of room for their participation. The lack of people lends a clear view of the silent salesmanship at work. Chairs along the counter face outwards to invite visitors to rest and linger, stands act as a set of arms, holding up multiple feathers at once to show their fluid shape, mirrored casework shows the shopper an object on all sides, and natural lighting from the atrium allows for accurate viewing of the merchandise. The silent quality of "silent salesmanship" can be observed here both in the frozen quality of the image and the non-verbal character of its subject. Undisturbed and in its ideal state, the Ponting's image shows the feather department just as the displayman had designed it. The introduction of people would add variables and alter the original conception.



Figure 53. Interior of the Showroom at Ponting's, January 1913. Photograph by Adolphe Augustus Boucher, Bedford Lemere and Company.
Source: Historic England, BL21979.

Similar to the show window display, the style and arrangement of shopfittings served to distinguish one store's shopping experience from their competition. For instance, while every store sold dress accessories, not every store sold feathers under the light of a dramatic atrium suspended on a brass stand set on a rounded wooden and glass case, such as Ponting's in London (fig. 53). Here the elevated stands turned feather accessories into flowing tree-like

formations, glass-fronted cases allowed for clear viewing of merchandise, mirrored case elements reflected the natural light coming down through the atrium and onto the merchandise on view. Meanwhile blankets hung down from the balcony above to provide a background of color and pattern. The eye is kept active by various sightlines, reflective surfaces, and the theatricality and luxury of the overall presentation.

Similar to the format of the window display, in the interior, the goods and the fixtures are components of a larger assemblage and act on one another. Compatibility between the fixtures, counters and display stands therefore established a coordinated background for the goods. As an advertisement for the 1903 opening of the new Schlesinger and Mayer praised, "Equipment and contents are in perfect harmony with the structure. The policy pervading the whole is as broad as the institution is beautiful and complete"[8] (fig.8). The interconnected nature of the industries of display was key to their coordinated artistry and efficiency that led to the department store's perception as a machine.

As the chapters on architecture and window dressing have established, the department store was a dynamic space in which refashioning was necessary to encourage repeat visits. In terms of shopfittings, this refashioning occurred on a number of levels. As design objects, shopfittings were subject to changes in style and material in accordance with trends in decoration and modern art as well as the needs of merchandise. An article on mechanical equipment in the stores of John Barker & Co. Ltd. of London expressed the vitality of shopfittings, "Fittings are almost as fickle as women's fashions. What is considered good today will be superseded next year by something far more efficient and far more attractive."[9]

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[8] Schlesinger & Mayer, Advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1903, 5.

[9] Mechanical Equipment in Stores, FRAS965, Archive of John Barker and Co., London, House of Fraser Archive.

While shopfittings were central to the presentation of an organized and rational presentation, the fixtures also played an integral role in the continual change of the department store interior, fostering consumer confidence through the use of the most up-to-date equipment while also signaling the store's alignment with modernity through offering a variable shopping experience.

During the 1880 to 1920 period the department store's investment in sophisticated shopfittings deepened and the variety of tools made available increased. In the case of Siegel Cooper in 1898, "The Big Store cost over Four Million Dollars to build. Its goods and fittings cost Two Million Dollars more."[10] An inventory of Ponting's, administered in August of 1918 for insurance purposes in case of fire or damage, documented the store department by department and took scope of all shopfittings. The inventory enumerated stands, mirrors, casework, carpets, electrical fittings and more. All together the fittings were valued at £18,591, the departmental plant (machinery and utilities) totaled £14, 492 and the carpets and blinds totaled £2.097.[11] While merchandise catalogues recorded the price and range of merchandise for sale, inventories such as this one are rare and valuable for the evidence that they offer about the objects that facilitated the sales. This inventory documents the material culture of the department store by recording the value, placement, and variety of the shopfittings. Such inventory data, along with the repeated enumeration of shopfittings in the press, and advertising materials that drew consumer attention to the details of the staging and context for goods on offer, will be mined to present a new reading of the role and impact of shopfittings in the department store interior.

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[10] Wade, *A Birds-eye View of Greater New York*, 142.

[11] Inventory and Valuation of Properties of Pontings, April 1918, FRAS 967, Records of Pontings, House of Fraser Archive.

Department stores often advertised their signature settings, therefore implicitly promoting the skills of their display staff to aestheticize the merchandise. In addition to postcards with the familiar three-quarter view of their building complex in downtown Chicago (fig. 27) Marshall Field's also produced a series of postcards that offered enticing interior views of departmental layouts (fig. 54). This postcard shows a novel departure from the street view convention and alternatively offers three photographic images of the interior displays in the shoes, linings, and colored dress goods departments. An art nouveau flourish of a peacock unites their asymmetrical composition and signals up-to-date styling. These images bring the viewer through the front door, along the columned aisles of the linings and shoe departments on the ground floor and upstairs to the carpeted sales floor of the colored dress goods. Without the departmental labels, the viewer might not be able to discern easily what category of merchandise was in fact on view. Instead, emphasis is on the shopfittings that lent the interior its organization and luxurious appeal; glass-walled casework glitters, the polished countertops shine, stately columns offer order, and elegant chandeliers glow to light the merchandise below.



Figure 54. Postcard, Marshall Field & Co., "Linings, Colored Dress Goods, A Portion of the Shoe Section, Marshall Field & Co.," postmarked March 15, 1905.
Source: Cardcow.com.

In highlighting three separate images of three separate departments, this postcard positions the department store as a place that offers a series of various, fragmented shopping experiences.

At the turn of the twentieth century, retail trade periodicals shifted from stressing the axiom "Goods well bought are half sold" to suggesting that "Goods well displayed are half sold."[12] Similarly in 1916 the *Dry Goods Economist* editorialized: "[W]hile 'What to Buy and How to Sell It" has been the Economist's slogan for over a generation, of late years emphasis has been transferred from the first three words to the last four."[13] This modification represented a shift in emphasis from the manufacture of the merchandise to the production of the display design for that merchandise. Harris & Sheldon, a leading British shopfitting company fittingly took up this phrase as its company signature.[14] This phrase was not used exclusively in relationship to the department store; journalists in trade journals for pharmacies, grocery stores, hardware stores and more all invoked the phrase, urging their readership to take full advantage of the commercial powers of up-to-date display. The department store with its grand scale and immense budget was able to embrace display at the most ambitious level, meanwhile setting the example for a new approach to retail methods that was modeled in many smaller stores across the market.

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[12] "How to Make a Full Line of Housewares Profitable in the Average Hardware Store, and Why the Hardware Dealer is the Natural Distributor of Housewares," *Hardware Retailer*, April 1914, 22; "Show Window Display," *The Iron Age*, January 23, 1902, 59; "Goods Well Displayed are Half Sold," *National Druggist*, August 1919, 327.

[13] "Seventy-One Years – And After," *Dry Goods Economist*, November 18, 1916, 27, quoted in Benson, *Counter Cultures,* 36.

[14] "Harris & Sheldon Limited History," n.p., Harris & Sheldon Archive.

Science of Shopkeeping: Optimization and Customization on the Sales Floor

A rationalized and increasingly scientific approach to technologies of display can be observed as evolving throughout the second half of the nineteenth century in the retail realm with the department store as the apex of these developments. In 1857, author Charles Manby Smith observed, "Notwithstanding that the English have been so long a nation of shopkeepers, it was reserved for the living generation to make the grandest discoveries in the science of shopkeeping."[15] Here Smith foretells that the great advancement in the retail sphere in the second half of the nineteenth century would center around retailers' focus on the technologies, tools, and methods of selling wares.

Department store owners and manufacturers on both sides of the Atlantic used the terminology the "science of shopkeeping." For instance John Wanamaker stressed, "Storekeeping with us is not a spasm or an experiment, but a system resting upon well-defined scientific principles."[16] These late-nineteenth century references to the "science of shopkeeping" suggest that the department store deserves more attention as a site in which ideas of Taylorist scientific management were developed before the formal formulation of these concepts later in the early twentieth century and their application to the better-known contexts of the kitchen and the home.

The department store was founded on principles of classification and organization that both continued to form the framework for the store experience by the late nineteenth century, but with the advent of new shopfitting technologies, these principles were exhibited in new ways. Shopfitting brought categories of goods into prominent view, while also providing more attractive storage solutions for wares whose housings became elements of the larger

[15] Smith, *The Little World of London*, 324.

[16] Wanamaker, *Annals of the Wanamaker System*, n.p.

visual picture of the sales floor itself. At the same time, economization and efficiency along with laborsaving and space-saving devices and strategies all became guiding principles of the shopfitting trade. These priorities were communicated visually through casework and fixtures that ideally fit the merchandise and set up prescribed visual and physical interactions with the wares.

Shopfittings' aesthetics of rationalization and standardized production point to an understanding of these objects as examples of industrial design. In 1920, a *MRSW* article on "Modern Store Equipment" explained, "…it is practically impossible to make a serious mistake in equipping the store. The reason for this is that store fixtures are now practically standardized."[17] The journalist attributes this development of a system of "standard store equipment" to the handling of merchandise in retail stores on "a scientific basis founded upon a general consensus of opinion."[18] For instance shelving of particular heights and wall cases of certain dimensions were determined as best for specific lines of merchandise.

Gordon Selfridge identified shopfitting as playing a central role in the creation of an optimized and attractive retail interior:

> Picture further this enormous space fitted with store furniture, every section and piece made especially for the purpose for which it is intended, each piece representing thought for the greatest convenience, economy of space, and beauty of design, and embodying every newest device to lighten manual labour and to give greater protection to the goods.[19]

Selfridge further identifies laborsaving advantages as well as protective features of shopfitting. All together these characteristics and systematic principles advanced the "science

[17] "Modern Store Equipment," *MRSW*, December 1920, 13.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Selfridge, *Romance of Commerce*, 366.

of merchandising" in the department store while also offering visual appeal. A realization of Selfridge's vision can be seen in his store's Umbrella Section (fig. 55). Specialized casework, "made especially for the purpose for which it is intended," facilitated the en masse viewing of umbrellas.[20] Mirrored casework multiplied consumer choice. Shopfittings created an organized layout of a great amount of merchandise while offering visual variety. This display functioned easily without the aid of a salesperson, whose primary responsibility was to retrieve merchandise and show it to the consumer, therefore lightening his or her "manual labour," as Selfridge noted. [21]

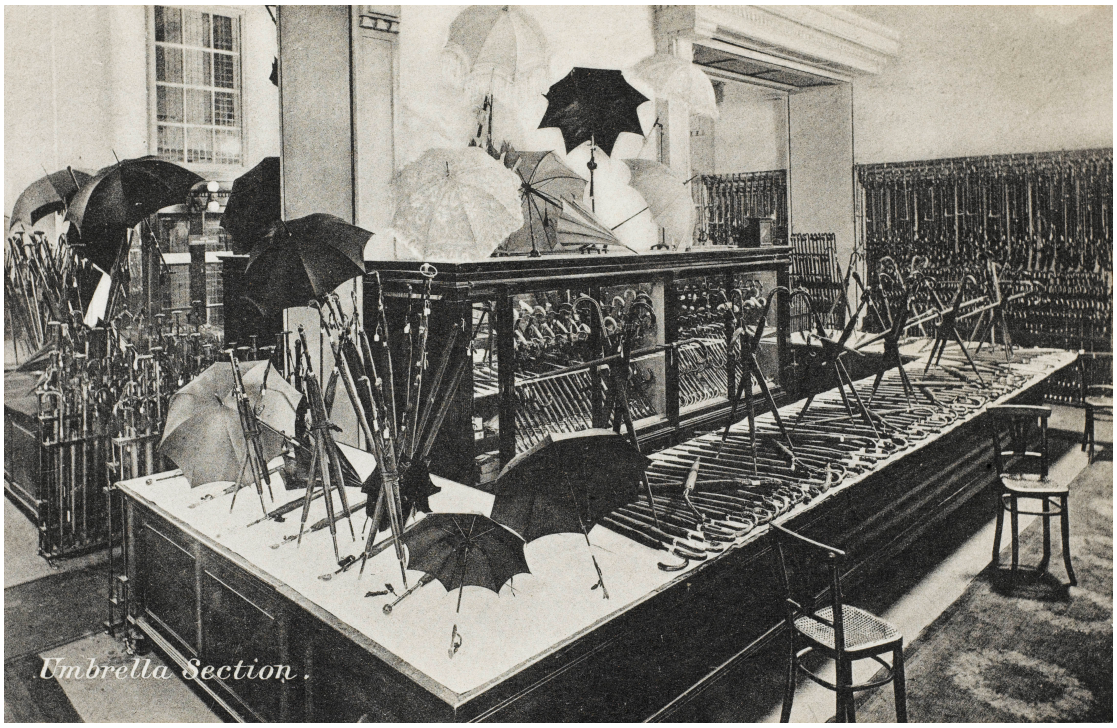


Figure 55. Selfridge's, Postcard, "Umbrella Section," ca. 1909.
Source: Grenville Collins Postcard Collection/Mary Evans.

Again, there is a conspicuous absence of people in this image that relates to the shopfittings' moniker of silent salesmen; the display does not need to make any noise or movement in

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

order to perform its service of showing merchandise and increasing temptation. Instead, the shopfittings and the arrangement of merchandise that they form do the talking: the chairs suggest that customers could seat themselves, test the umbrellas' mechanism and scale, and then model a variety in front of the mirrored casework to formulate an opinion.

Along the back wall, umbrellas hang in rows within easy reach for customers to help themselves. A rack that could hold thirty-eight umbrellas, many more than any single salesperson could balance, and similar to that used here, was advertised in Carson Pirie Scott's *Illustrated Catalogue of Staple and Fancy Notions* in 1893. The catalogue promoted that the device answered the "necessity for saving space and the better display of umbrellas." Its selling points were practical, sanitary, and enticing: "taking the umbrellas off the floor, out of the dirt, and off the counter out of the way, still showing them to better advantage, by placing the handles immediately in front of every customer."[22] In this scenario the consumer was also free to make their own choices and execute their own decisions, competences that are illustrative of the shift from an earlier retail setup that relied on the shopkeeper to do the offering versus the department store in which the consumer navigated and investigated the shopping space largely on their own.

Through its creative yet efficient arrangement, a balance of rationality and theatricality, this umbrella section achieves, in Selfridge's words, the "greatest convenience, economy of space, and beauty of design."[23] Here umbrellas lay flat, stand vertically, point at all angles, and hang from the wall. The umbrella's basic geometry of a stick form with a curved handle becomes a component in a larger pattern to attract visitors to the whole group

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[22] Carson Pirie Scott, *Illustrated Catalogue of Staple and Fancy Notions* (Chicago: Carson Pirie Scott, 1893), 312.

[23] Selfridge, *Romance of Commerce*, 366.

before they concentrate on a single model. While the umbrella was a most familiar everyday form, in the department store display context, the umbrella turned into an element of an energetic arrangement whose finesse was reserved for the space of the shop.

Shopfittings facilitated these striking visual arrangements that brought dynamism to the otherwise basic product of the umbrella. A handful of parasols have been opened and extend at all angles with the aid of stands to support them. A group of walking sticks spread apart in a spray thanks to an "umbrella ring" or a "patent clip" that held them together at their centers. Examples of these shopfittings can be seen in Harris & Sheldon's *Red White and Blue Catalogue* of 1899 that featured an assortment of fixtures specifically for umbrellas (fig. 56). Particular sets of fixtures for particular sets of objects exemplified systematic display in the department store. In addition to clips to hold umbrellas, shopfitters such as Harris & Sheldon also produced Cutlery Stands, Corset Stands, Flower and Feather Stands, Glove Stands, Golf Club Stands, Hat and Coat Hooks, Mantle Shoulders, Shirt Racks, and Waistcoat Stands and so many more specialized devices that advanced the "science of merchandising."[24] Since fixtures responded directly to the desire to display objects by type, the table of contents of a shopfitter's catalogue could read similarly to a department store sales catalogue for its merchandise. By 1906, the Harris & Sheldon catalogue listed and pictured many of the 4,000 items, most offered in six or eight sized and up to ten finishes. The catalogue had a worldwide circulation of 60,000.[25]

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[24] Harris & Sheldon, *Red White and Blue Catalogue*, 1899, vii, Harris & Sheldon Archive.

[25] Harris & Sheldon Limited History, n.d., Harris & Sheldon Archive.

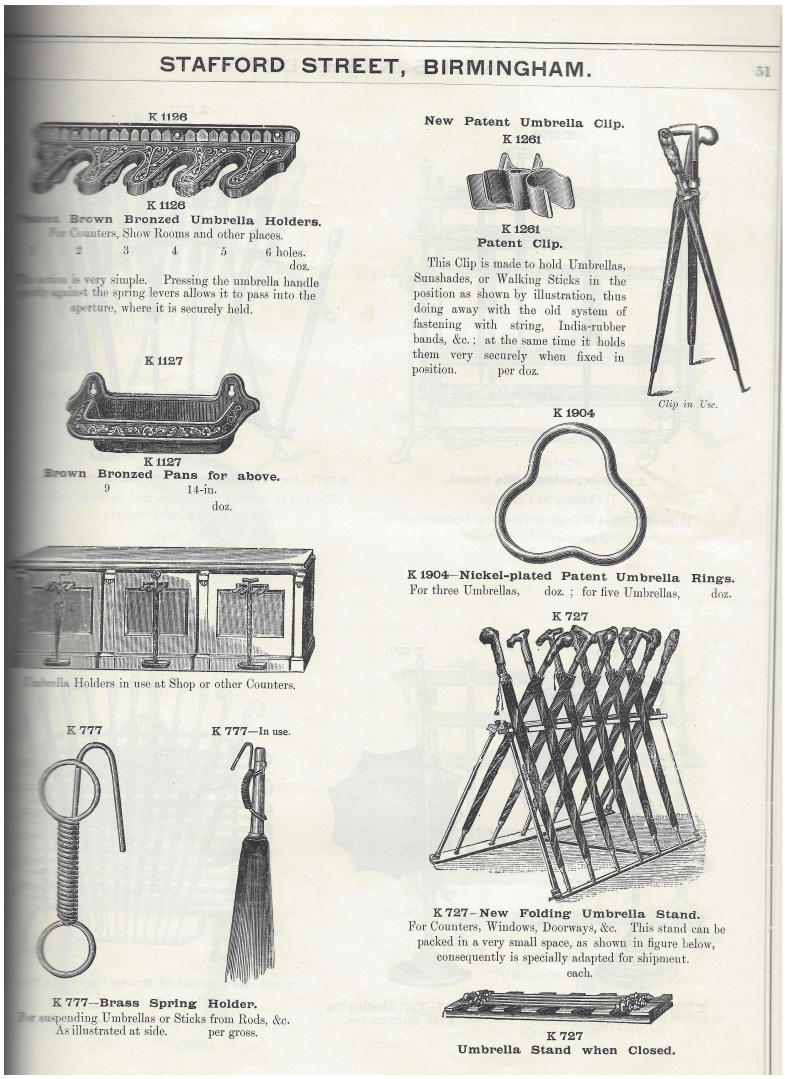


Figure 56. Umbrella Fixtures in Harris & Sheldon, *Red, White and Blue Catalogue*, (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1899), 51.
Source: Harris & Sheldon, Ltd.

A journalist for the *Illustrated London News* visited the showroom of Harris & Sheldon in July 1909. His remarks give an idea of the vast variety and specificity of the shopfitter's production that catered to the "manifold needs of the shopkeeper":

> Your first impressions as you stand in their showrooms are those of bewilderment at the manifold needs of the shopkeeper before he can start to attract the buyer. Telescope knife-stands, toothbrush-tacks, door-handles in brass, in ebony, or what not, parasol holders, pipe-brackets, umbrella-sockets, marble stands for grocers, glass sandwich or cake covers for buffets, the trying-on stools of bootmakers, boot-brackets, contrivances for hatters, for tailors, confectioners, drapers, fascias in gilt or glass, swing signs, designs for

> mosaic pavements: these are just a few of the medley of clever exhibits you come across as you walk round. [26]

The journalist's impressions are reminiscent of a visitor's tour through an exhibition; in this case the shopfittings, rather than receding to the background and functioning as silent backdrops to the goods, are in the foreground and showcased as commodities in their own right. Furthermore, the shopfittings were presented as both products of the shopfitting industry and producers of a new set of presentation operations. This journalist positions the shopfitter and his products as essential to the shopkeeper's abilities to "attract the buyer," again referencing the interconnected network of human and non-human elements that composed the department store.

Newspaper reports revealing details of inner workings of these shopfitting firms as well as illustrations of the factory floor show that there was public interest in craftsmanship. The publicizing of the factory space of the shopfitters is interesting to consider at time when there was an "obliteration of the factory" by advertisements for consumer goods, emphasizing the separation of the industrial spaces of production from their more pristine spaces of advertising and retail.[27] In the case of the shopfittings however, their mechanical, industrial nature was a positive trait that contributed to an understanding of the department store as a machine and a factory itself.

In their August 1890 catalogue, Harris & Sheldon pictured the exterior of their factory premises on the cover, and in the midst of pages of merchandise, one could also find images of their factory interior (fig. 57). Factory floor images such as these suggest that in addition to extending a visual invitation to their showrooms, shopfitters were eager to show off their

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[26] "The Man Behind the Window-Dresser," *Illustrated London News*, July 17, 1909.

[27] Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 77–80.

places of production. The image shows a row of men working on brackets along the right, in the middle ground one man has completed an umbrella stand, and in the foreground another man bending what looks like a pegged arm for another stand.



87

HARRIS & SHELDON,
MANUFACTURERS,
BIRMINGHAM.

Below we give a View from a Photograph of one of our General Brass Foundry and Brass Fitting Workshops.

COPIES OF TESTIMONIALS.

From Mr. E. H. MUNFORD, Jeweller, Tiverton.

Messrs. Harris & Sheldon.

Gentlemen,—I beg to enclose you cheque in settlement of account, and I must say your Cases and Fittings are admired by every one who see them. Commercial Travellers all tell me I have the smartest and most handsomely fitted shop they ever saw. I myself can give you great praise for your work, and shall have much pleasure in recommending you to others.

I remain Gentlemen, yours truly, E. H. MUNFORD.

From Messrs. MUMMERY & SON, Jewellers.

Messrs. Harris & Sheldon. Stafford, *Oct. 5th*, 1889.

Dear Sirs,—We received the shelves in due course, and are now completed as far as we know. We have great pleasure in saying you have carried out our ideas to our entire satisfaction. The design and finish of the work is a credit to your firm, and we think you have made us as pretty a little shop as any in the Midlands. The air-tight cases have been in use now more than twelve months, and we can say answer very well indeed. We are very pleased that we placed the entire fitting of the interior in your hands, and could wish you had had the outside too, but that could not be. Accept our thanks for your attention, and

Believe us, yours very truly, MUMMERY & SON.

Figure 57. General Brass Foundry and Brass Fitting Workshops with Copies of Testimonials in Harris & Sheldon, *Illustrated Price List* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1890), 87. Source: Harris & Sheldon, Ltd.

The catalogue also included images of the "Gas Fitting Workshop" and the "Joinery Department."[28] Such imagery gave the viewer, and potential consumer, an idea of the specialized labor that went into the production of shopfittings. Since fixtures were determined so closely by the merchandise that they showed, the industry had to continually invest and expand along with the rhythms of the market.

This litany of products calls attention to how each new type of merchandise demanded new and specific treatment in the marketplace. Kenneth Ames has pointed out a similar correlation in the American home, "The burgeoning output of industrially produced goods in the nineteenth century necessitated a corresponding increase in the number of furniture forms produced to accommodate and display those goods."[29] Ames's comment suggests an alliance between the trade of the shopfitter and the woodworking industries already in place; specific furnishings met a need and a desire for display in venues both public and private by the late nineteenth century.

Shopfittings reinforced the department store's policy of division that encouraged consumers to think categorically about goods. Pittsburgh-based W.B. McLean Manufacturing Co. advised that their "unit system" guaranteed an "orderliness in planning or the correct placing of departments" that was the "secret of dispatch and quick handling in retail business."[30] In an essay "Simplicity is the Keynote of Unit Planning" the company defended its system of units:

> The unit idea is the natural, logical sequence of order and system. All things orderly are in 'Units.' The national army is divided in 'Units' of brigades,

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[28] Harris & Sheldon, *Illustrated Price List* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1890), 88–90.

[29] Ames, "Trade Catalogues," 68.

[30] W.B. McLean Manufacturing Co., *Business Building Units: Goods Fixtures* (Pittsburgh: W.B. McLean Manufacturing Co., 1918), 3.

> regiments, companies and squads. Railroads are divided into 'Units' by 'divisions,' and 'sections.' Cities are divided into 'Units' by 'wards,' and 'districts;' and great retail stores are divided into 'Units' by 'departments.'[31]

The manufacturer aligned the modern retail environment with other major complex systems of infrastructure, defense, and urban planning due to its efficient and compartmentalized structure. Division of the store space furthered the impression of the department store as a series of stores within one larger store within which the fixtures served as visual demarcation. The essay continued, "Each department is made to stand or fail by itself, just as each 'Good Fixture' Unit is an individual piece of furniture with a purpose of its own and a definite work to perform."[32] This explanation endowed the shopfittings with an active role or "definite work to perform" on the department store sales floor. This unit-based concept of the department store may have also allowed for clear evaluation of performance between the departments again encouraging a conceptualization of the store as a machine that could be optimized for efficiency. The concept of the unit principle would have allowed the stores to better compensate for seasonal peaks of the various merchandise groups and assign the use of the display windows and floor areas accordingly.

This W.B. McLean product catalogue included a blank page on which the manufacturer invited the reader to draw the approximate plan of their current store to send for review and comment by their Planning and Design Service "who are glad to extend whatever ideas or helpful suggestions of practical nature that they might have."[33] Retail periodicals also offered such services, presumably staffed by shopfitters and displaymen with practical

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 1.

experience working in the retail sphere. The availability of such vetted services sets them apart as offering professional skills and knowledge.

In addition to seasonality, stores also ranked and arranged wares according to their immediate appeal, price range, and likelihood of purchase upon a quick glance. This approach upended the concept of skilled consumption behaviors and instead suggested that shopfitters could coerce shoppers through display tactics. In planning the layout of the sales floor, retailers divided and ranked their wares into categories according to their purchase appeal.

Categories such as impulse goods, convenience goods, necessities, and utilities were applied to object types to identify their salability that dictated their sales floor placement as well as their fixture usage.[34] This division maximized the potential to convert each shopper into a buyer. Rather than the more careful consumption practices of a female shopper planning dresses to make from yard goods, for instance, impulse purchases such as accessories took advantage of the shopper's vulnerability. An article in the *New York Times* in 1924 advised that these impulse goods be "placed along regular lines of traffic within the store so as to catch the eye of the consumer as she passes by."[35] Placed deliberately as a visual interruption, impulse goods attempted to affect patterns of consumer movement and manage traffic flow in the store by encouraging consumers to gravitate towards them. As the *Dry Goods Reporter* described in relation to Marshall Field's grand opening in 1902, "The first floor is chiefly given over to the small wares, the countless little things that shoppers

[34] "Department Store Layout of Goods: What Experience Has Show as the Best Way to Arrange Stocks," *New York Times*, April 27, 1924, 13.

[35] Ibid.

wish to buy quickly."[36] These small wares included dress trimmings, such as the feathers shown in the image of Ponting's (fig. 53), gloves, hosiery, notions, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, parasols, jewelry, and silverware.

Banks of elevators introduced and demarcated new geographical zones in the store that hosted a continual captive audience waiting for the elevator to arrive.[37] Some stores stocked this area with "quick selling bargains" far away from the store entrances, thus compelling the customers to "move through" the space past the costly goods on the main floor. Abraham & Straus in Brooklyn took a different approach and put its expensive oriental rugs near the elevator, knowing that people would travel there.[38]

Apparel departments occupied the upper tiers whose quieter and more private atmosphere lent itself to making the personal purchase of apparel. Furniture, lamps, china, and rugs also occupied the upper selling floors due to their bulk and the assumption that this merchandise could motivate customers to make the effort to journey upstairs if they were on a specific trip to make a purchase. The Abraham & Straus Model discussed in the introduction shows large furniture displays lining the second to highest floor (fig. 2). Customers needed space to navigate around this larger merchandise and appreciated the increased level of comfort and less crowded nature of the upper tiers.

In 1917 the fixtures manufacturer A.W. Shaw & Co., with offices in Chicago, New York, and London, published the illustrated treatise *Making Your Store Work for You* that included images and floor plans of fixture use department by department in order to illustrate

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[36] *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 11, 1902, 16, Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

[37] Wanamaker's biography recounts a story of him noticing a fault in the display of merchandise near the elevator door. See Gibbons, *John Wanamaker*, 39.

[38] Leach, *Land of Desire,* 73.

the practical benefits of their products in use on the retail sales floor. A.W. Shaw's publication included a series of photographs showing "The Old Way" versus "The New Way," to make the advantages visually apparent. This pamphlet is particularly useful as it illustrates outdated methods while also calling attention to contemporary debates and shifts in thinking in terms of display strategy. The unwieldy category of rugs featured. While stores persisted in the use of more artful presentations resembling eastern bazaars and colonial shops, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, A.W. Shaw provided another solution in the use of their up-to-date fixture (fig. 58).

These two photographs juxtapose "The Old Way" showing a sprawling light-filled layout of rolled and unrolled rugs, some wrapped around columns as decoration, leaving ample room for consumer navigation and viewing throughout the length of the floor. Rugs hang vertically or lay flat on the floor for examination. The caption pointed out "It is true that extremely striking effects are often obtained by showing rugs in this way, and the confusion caused by showing several rugs at one time is avoided. However, because of the immense amount of expensive floor space required to adequately display rugs it often costs much more than to use the modern fixtures."[39] The manufacturer drew attention to the space efficiency and cost-saving advantages of utilizing their products. The bottom image shows "The New Way" in which the A.W. Shaw fixture compresses the display by way of a "swinging fixture" that takes up a "small amount of space" compared with "the amount of goods that can be shown."[40] Not only was the new fixture practical in terms of its space-saving qualities but it also dictated the visual presentation of the rugs. Developed in the early twentieth century, this technique for selling rugs is still in use today.

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[39] A.W. Shaw Company, *Making Your Store Work for You* (Chicago: A.W. Shaw Co., 1917), 49.

[40] Ibid.



THE OLD WAY

It is true that extremely striking effects are often obtained by showing rugs in this way, and the confusion caused by showing several rugs at one time is avoided. However, because of the immense amount of expensive floor space required to thus adequately display rugs it often costs much more than to use the modern fixtures.



THE NEW WAY

Not the least advantage of a swinging fixture of this kind is the small amount of space taken up compared with the amount of goods that can be shown. This idea can of course also be used to advantage in displaying many other lines. Another advantage is that any sample can be shown with almost no effort.

Figure 58. "The Old Way" and "The New Way" of Displaying Rugs. A.W. Shaw Company, *Making Your Store Work for You* (Chicago: A.W. Shaw Co., 1917), 49.
Source: Hagley Museum and Library.

Shopfittings, including this rug-flipping fixture, were conspicuous on the sales floor as visible technology that sent the message of cutting-edge retail practice.[41] The caption noted that "Another advantage is that any sample can be shown with almost no effort," meaning that a salesperson did not have to go to the trouble of unrolling rug after rug for the consumers' perusal.[42] The fixture made it possible for the salesperson to show the most stock to the public in the most efficient, easy, and effective manner, to the better satisfaction of the customer who would have likely been impressed by the modern presentation.

The department store's classification system therefore determined a compartmentalized layout and the use of custom shopfittings visually distinguished those departments. Between 1880 and 1920 if a department store received a positive review in the press, the text almost always included references to not only its profusion of products on offer but also its proficient sorting system. For instance in 1890 Marshall and Snelgrove was reviewed as "an ornament to the metropolis…the whole forming a splendid example of systematic organization."[43] As this Marshall and Snelgrove review suggests, the "systematic organization" of the department store cultivated its own set of aesthetics that earned it the artistic reputation of an "ornament to the metropolis."

In addition to more fantastical effects, seen in the trees of handkerchiefs at Marshall Field (fig. 41) fixtures could also dictate a regimented visual effect that suggested the regularized profusion of industrial production. For instance, rows of handkerchief pyramids,

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[41] One of these A.W. Shaw Company rug fixtures, or a nearly identical model, was in use at the furniture and furnishings store W.J. Sloane in New York by 1902. See the photograph: Byron Company, *W.J. Sloane, Carpets Rug & Furniture, 19th St. & Broadway,* 1902*,* Museum of the City of New York.

[42] A.W. Shaw Company, *Making Your Store Work for You*, 49.

[43] *Modern London,* 82.

chairs, and lighting fixtures at Carson Pirie Scott in about 1900 (fig. 59) clearly communicate order and create a striking series of staccato impressions down the aisle.



Figure 59. Carson Pirie Scott, Cleaning and Handkerchief Departments, Chicago, Ill. Louis H. Sullivan, architect.
Source: Historic Architecture and Landscape Image Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago. Digital File #59982.

This lineup of handkerchiefs, fixtures, and salesmen again brings to life Kracauer's concept of the mass ornament as "the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires," also seen earlier in window displays with serial imagery.[44] This rationality is shown here in the exacting placement of the merchandise as well as the salespeople. Together they send messages of regularity and reliability as well as suggest the seemingly endless repetition of goods and staff within the machine of the department store.

While display could send messages of regulation and order, the store's ability to adapt to, in Selfridge's words, "new and workable ideas for improvement," was necessary to the

[44] Kracauer and Levin, *The Mass Ornament*, 79.

department store's ability to keep the public's attention. The fixture maker McLean pointed out, "Successful retail stores such as Wanamaker's, Field's, and Gimbel's employ what are perhaps the most skilled experts in the planning and designing service; yet there is never a time that carpenters and fixture men are not busy 'making alterations.'"[45] The shopfittings provide another outlet for examination of the department store as a site of design production and reinvention.

In addition to changing attitudes of retail strategy and the influence of new technologies, the display program also shifted in response to the needs and desires of the consumer. Wanamaker's biographer Herbert Adams Gibbons told how the store adapted to the changing lifestyle of its consumers: "…the story of an establishment like Wanamaker's was a history of changing styles. Departments of prime importance and large sales, such as veiling, corsets, gloves, and fancy underwear, no longer hold the place they used to occupy. In readjusting the space and sales force for departments like these (they are given only as illustrations – there are many others) the merchant has had to look ahead and study the habits of the people…"[46] As consumer preferences shifted, so too did department stores alter the positioning of its merchandise, always giving prominence to the goods that were the most popular at the moment.

Retail fixtures were also susceptible to changes in style, just as furniture for the domestic interior. In Grand Rapids, Michigan both the domestic furniture and retail fixtures industries were strong. This shared geography suggests that shopfitting should be given more attention as an important branch of the furniture trade in this period. In 1922 the Grand Rapids Show Case Company published a booklet *Getting Behind the Retail Business* that

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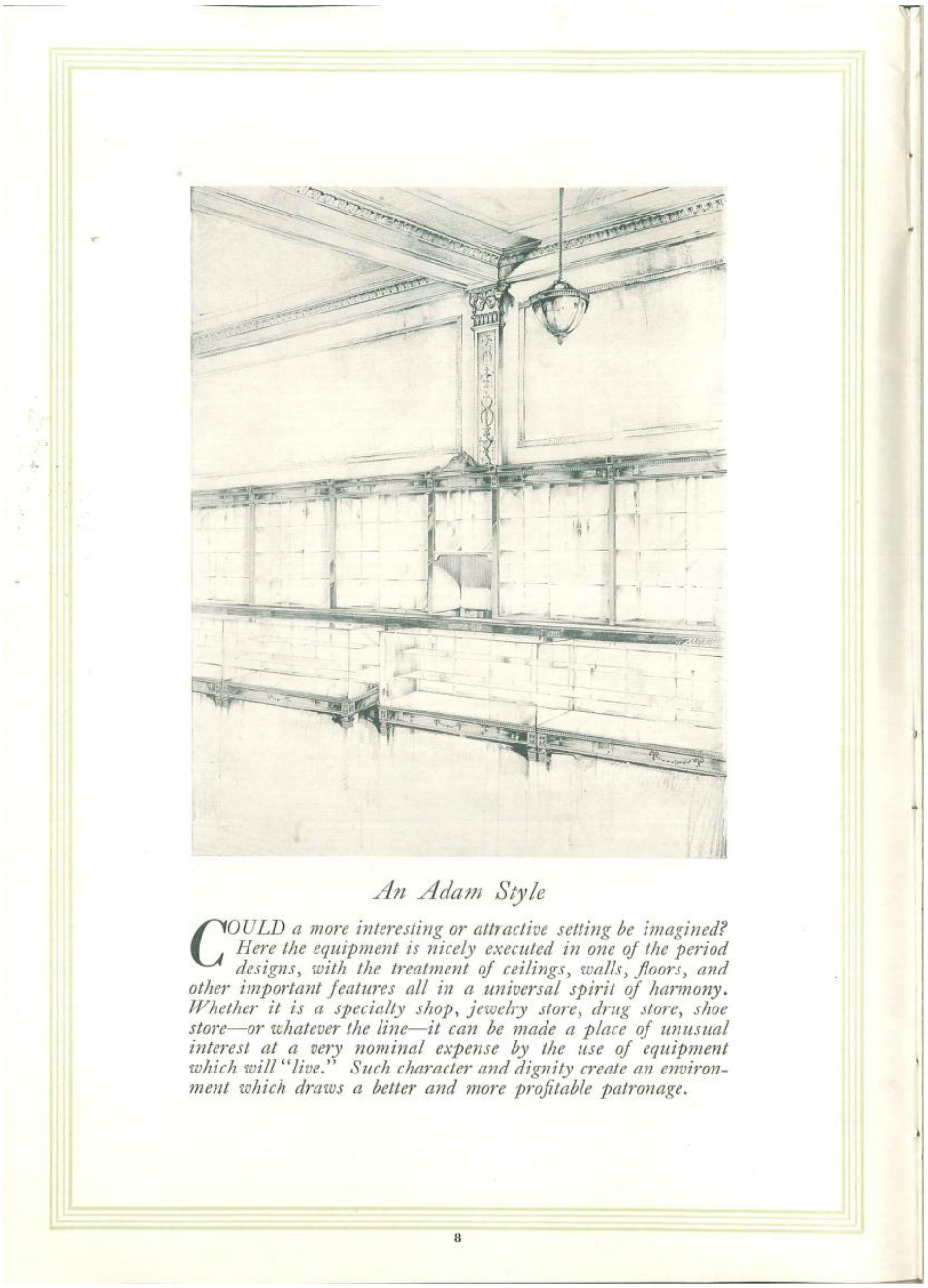
[45] W.B. McLean Manufacturing Co., *Business Building Units,* 3.

[46] Gibbons, *John Wanamaker,* 39–40.

analyzed display strategies to prove how their fixtures could attract consumers and improve business. The company identified that attention to detail in the design of the sales floor's casework and architectural elements should align with popular taste in interior decoration.

The manufacturer presented three complete styles, among many other schemes, which included Adam Style (fig. 60), Italian, and Flemish Styles. The copy read, "Could a more interesting or attractive setting be imagined? Here the equipment is nicely executed in one of the period designs, with the treatment of ceilings, walls, and floors, and other important features all in a universal spirit of harmony…Such character and dignity create an environment which draws a better and more profitable patronage."[47] Grand Rapids Show Case Company suggested that such a fashionable presentation of merchandise would have helped to justify the cost of the wares to the purchaser. Similar to the store's exterior façade, here classical styling is again chosen to send messages of dignity as well as luxury in the retail realm and used as an appropriate theatrical backdrop for the selling of goods. In this example the manufacturer also stressed the ability of "the equipment" to lend a "universal spirit of harmony" to the retail interior. Stylistic cohesion of the shopfittings and architectural elements maintained a sense of visual balance with the variety of wares on offer.

[47] Grand Rapids Showcase Company, *Getting Behind the Retail Business* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1922), 8.



An Adam Style

COULD a more interesting or attractive setting be imagined? Here the equipment is nicely executed in one of the period designs, with the treatment of ceilings, walls, floors, and other important features all in a universal spirit of harmony. Whether it is a specialty shop, jewelry store, drug store, shoe store—or whatever the line—it can be made a place of unusual interest at a very nominal expense by the use of equipment which will "live." Such character and dignity create an environment which draws a better and more profitable patronage.

8

Figure 60. An Adam Style, Grand Rapids Showcase Company, *Getting Behind the Retail Business* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1922), 9.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Building Technology Heritage Library.

The Shopfitting Industry and Exhibition Culture

Historians have drawn alliances between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century museum and department store in terms of their shared goals of categorization and comprehensive presentation. Museum and department store leaders in the 1880 to 1920 period were also aware of these equivalencies, as they were trying to determine what their institutions could and should offer the public. These alliances were not embraced by all museums, many of which insisted that the realm of art existed firmly outside of the commercial sphere. However John Cotton Dana, founder and director of the Newark Museum, was an advocate for the alliance of the store and the museum, writing in 1917,

> A great city department store of the first class is perhaps more like a good museum of art than are any of the museums we have yet established… it displays its most attractive and interesting objects and shows countless others on request; its collections are classified according to the knowledge and needs of its patrons… it is well lighted… it advertises itself widely and continuously; and it changes its exhibits to meet daily changes in subjects of interest, changes of taste in art, and the progress of invention and discovery.[48]

A calculated means of categorization as well as the attractive presentation of an impressive array of objects from around the world were of particular interest to both the department store and museum. Flexibility and change were also at the core of the strategies of both institutions. This section will show how a related use of shopfittings in the museum, exposition, and department store contexts provides a variety of concrete material and visual links between these venues.

A number of the shopfitters who contracted with department stores found their first work fitting out museums and expositions. One London newspaper claimed in 1884, "Previously to the Exhibition of 1851 showcases were of clumsy construction, and wholly

[48] John Cotton Dana, *The Gloom of the Museum* (Woodstock, VT: Elm Tree Press, 1917), 93.

destitute of either artistic conception or satisfactory workmanship. The Great Exhibition gave an enormous development to the [shopfitting] trade."[49] This observation suggested a more popular awareness of shopfitting practices due to visitor experience in trade expositions as well as more sophisticated casework presence in spaces of exhibition by 1884, ideally coinciding with the advancement of the department store in the following decades.

For museum curators and exhibitors in the frequent national and international exhibitions in the nineteenth century, sensitivity to the display of wares and an awareness of the ability of casework to flatter the appearance of its contents were considerations that paralleled those of the display staff in the retail sphere. The shopfitters served both sets of clients with analogous products. These commonalities in shopfittings contributed to the public's ability and tendency to visually read these spaces of display as related to one another, especially since many merchants organized exposition displays. In addition, the shopfitters' presence at international and national exhibitions was not only at the service of those manufacturers' wares which their casework displayed, but these fairs also served as a promotional opportunity for the shopfitting trade itself. Shopfitters won awards for their products, as shown on the cover of a late nineteenth-century catalogue for the shopfitting firm Frederick Sage & Co. that boasted, "Prizes at the London, Vienna, Philadelphia, Cape of Good Hope, Exhibitions."[50] At the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, J.R. Palmenberg's Sons was awarded three medals for general excellence for Metal Display

[49] "Old Gray's-Inn-Lane," *The Morning Post*, January 29 1884, 2.

[50] Frederick Sage and Company, *Shopfittings of Every Description for Home and Export* (London: Frederick Sage and Company, ca. 1898), Museum of St Albans. Frederick Sage and Co. provided casework for the museum (then the Hertfordshire County Museum) when it was founded in 1898.

Fixtures, Papier Mâché Forms, and Wax Show Forms.[51] These prizes evince the nationalism of the shopfitting trade whose products were made "for home and export" as the title to Frederick Sage's brochure identifies.

St. Louis, Missouri-based case manufacturer Claes & Lehnbeuter published a product catalogue in 1887 that pictured "No. 53: Centennial Premium Case" (fig. 61). The catalogue boasted that this double-strength glass case with a German silver frame, brass stands for glass shelves, set on a walnut table was "the most handsome and the most economical case ever constructed." The manufacturer cited the following accolades: "We carried premium on same at the Philadelphia Exposition. Bronze Medal and Diploma, with recommendation of the Judges Awards for substantial workmanship, good taste, and finish."

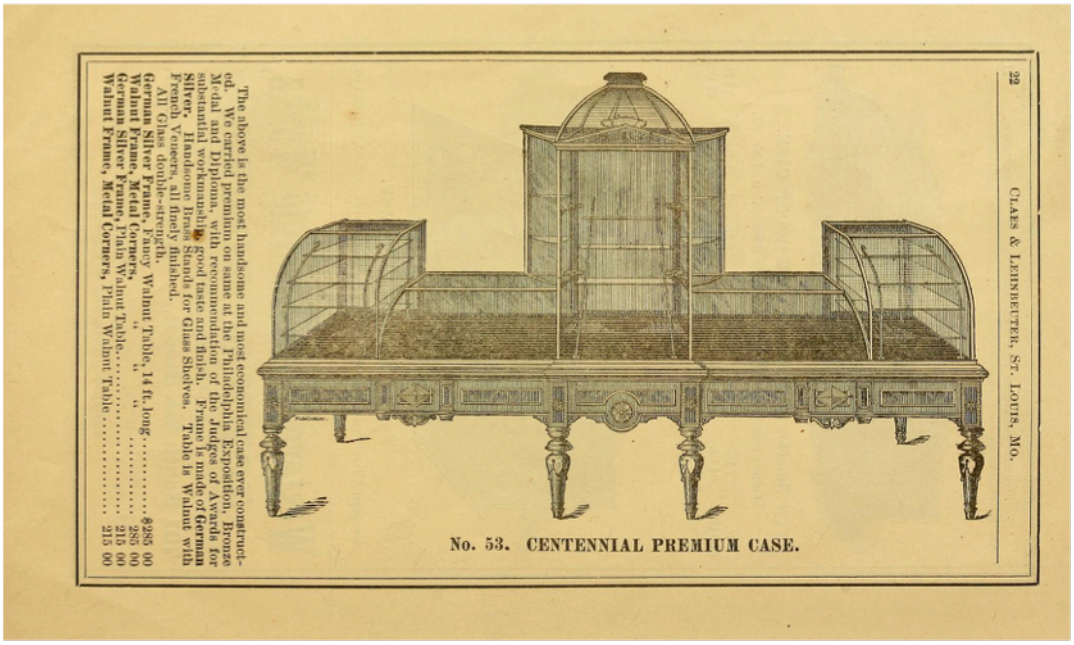


Figure 61. Centennial Premium Case in Claes & Lehnbeuter Manufacturing Co., *New Illustrated Catalogue* (St. Louis, MO: Claes & Lehnbeuter, 1887), 22.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Smithsonian Libraries

[51] J.R. Palmenberg and Sons, *Display Fixtures and Forms: Supplement D to 300 Page Pocket Catalog* (New York: J.R. Palemberg and Sons, ca. 1893), inside cover.

Not only did this case receive recognition at the Centennial Exposition for its craftsmanship, but the form of the case itself also references exhibition architecture. It is in effect a model of a glass and metal exposition building with a central tower set on a wooden stand. The manufacturer's appropriation of this recognizable building type reinforces the message that such structures were built for the purposes of display, using the modern materials of exposition buildings.

Shopfitters exhibited their wares internationally at expositions as well as made products with the export market in mind, as suggested by the language on the Frederick Sage and Co. brochure discussed above. Examining the shopfitting trade within the context of exhibition culture reveals and reinforces the international nature of this industry and its products. The Detroit Showcase Company for instance made a specialty of 'knocked down' showcases for export. In 1915, the *Dun's Review* reported on this technological breakthrough while also invoking the shopfitting trade's popular language of the period:

> "Goods are half sold when attractively displayed. A good showcase is a silent salesman that is always on duty. The Detroit Showcase Company, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A., make a specialty of 'knocked down' showcases for export. They are high in quality and low in price. The fact that they can be shipped flat, thus saving freight and eliminating the risk of breakage, should appeal especially to foreign buyers."[52]

In order to actively promote shopfitting as an American industry and profession, and assert its potential as an exportable skill and craft, the National Commercial Fixtures Manufacturers Association formed in 1912. At their second annual meeting in Chicago, sixty fixture manufacturers from all parts of the country were represented.[53]

This research has uncovered the story of one American manufacturer that worked

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[52] "Show Cases 'Knocked Down' for Export," *Dun's Review*, January 1915, 98.

[53] "Fixture Manufacturers Meet," *MRSW*, March 1913, 43.

across exhibition venues, both cultural and commercial. Charles F. & E. Biele "artisans in metal, glass and wood," was a little-known but leading maker of showcases and vitrines for merchants and museums "from Massachusetts to California."[54] Biele, located at 45-47 West Broadway, made cases for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library upon their openings. The *New York Sun* reported "dealers in paintings, sculpture and antiques bring their special show-case problems to the old firm."[55] A photographic album of eighty-four of the company's products survives in the collection of the Hagley Library and includes glass fronted and glass topped showcases, mirrors, and stools. Some cases, customized with a merchant's name and specialty, such as a showcase made for the hat maker A. Abrams (fig. 62), suggest their use in a trade fair.



Figure 62. C.F. and E. Biele, Standing Showcase for A. Abrams, 1882-84. Photograph by F. Waller.
Source: Hagley Museum and Library.

[54] "Cases are a Special Problem," *New York Sun*, December 31, 1938. The family business was first established in 1867 and Charles F. Biele took over his father's business in New York City in 1875. During the late 1880s, he and his brother Emil expanded the company and established operations in downtown New York.

[55] "Cases are a Special Problem," *New York Sun*, December 31, 1938.

The bold lettering at the top would have attracted the public's attention from faraway, meanwhile the glass-fronted form allowed for close looking at hats. Such showcases therefore operated on two visual levels. Here the manufacturer has personalized and branded the casework. Similar armatures with hooked arms were used to display hats in the department store.

C.F. and E. Biele also produced more ornamental cases, such as one for the jeweler LBJ Co. (fig. 63) that resembles the counter-top cases used in department stores that afforded close inspection of notions or jewelry.

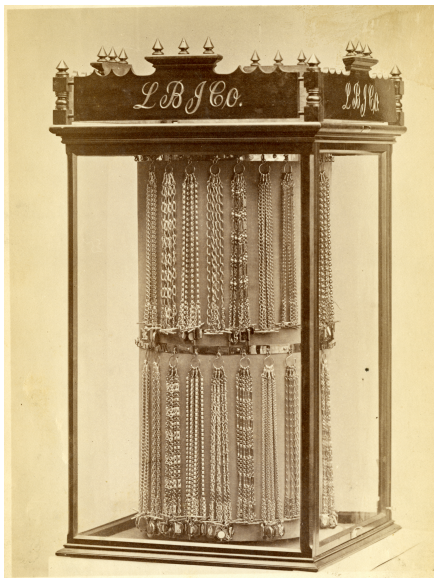


Figure 63. C.F. and E. Biele, Tabletop Case for LBJ Co., 1882–84. Photograph by F. Waller. Source: Hagley Museum and Library

This casework facilitated an attractive arrangement while also preventing theft. The ornamental cornice added a stylistic note and signaled the department store's fashionability. Its architectural styling also aimed to aggrandize the case's contents, setting them in a context that implied quality and value. In fact one American shopper in 1912 remarked on a recent department store experience that "unduly handsome fixtures" created an "idea of costliness"

which led "the masses to conclude that customers have to pay for the concern's lavish expenditures in the form of high prices."[56]

In Britain, catalogue evidence also reveals shopfitting firms' engagement with the larger culture of display. Founders Sydney Harris and John Sheldon of the noted British manufacturer Harris & Sheldon met as apprentices to Alfred Field, a Birmingham bronze merchant, where they worked in the Dispatch Department until about 1877. They formed a partnership in 1879-1880 and opened their first factory in 1880 on Newton Street in Birmingham where they produced household furniture, brassware, and outdoor lamps. Having the materials and resources in casting, joinery, and iron shops already in place, therefore provided for a smooth transition into the exhibition and retail markets. In the manufacturer's 1899 *Red, White and Blue Catalogue* the shopfitting firm Harris & Sheldon featured a "Handsome Exhibition Case" (Item K1543) along with the caption "The above Case was designed, made, and fixed by us at the Chicago Exhibition" (fig. 64). This case's presence at the 1893 Chicago Exhibition again points to the international nature of the shopfitting industry. Fenton Conner & Co. was a Belfast-based maker of linens so both the quality of the casework and its contents were being shown off as international products and this pairing further proves Harris & Sheldon's international client base. Following their success at the Chicago Exhibition and sensing the growth of the retail market, in 1894, Harris & Sheldon opened a new factory and expanded into shopfitting. The Display Fittings department employed about 150 men to start.[57]

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[56] "Building and Equipment," *Dry Goods Economist*, July 17, 1912, 31, quoted in Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 89.

[57] Harris & Sheldon Limited History, n.d., Harris & Sheldon Archive.

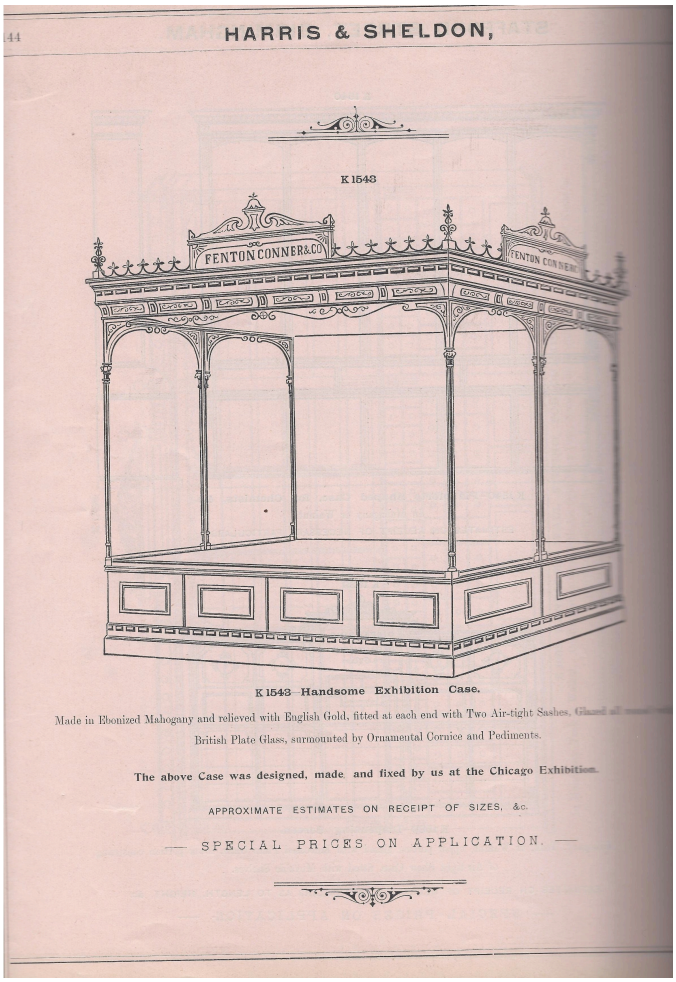


Figure 64. K1543, Handsome Exhibition Case in Harris & Sheldon, *Red, White and Blue Catalogue* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1899), 144.
Source: Harris & Sheldon, Ltd.

The ebonized mahogany, "air-tight sashes," large panes of glazing, and ornamental cornice and pediments seen on this Handsome Exhibition Case were design elements also present in their casework and fixtures aimed at the retail market.

The house of Frederick Sage & Company, Harris & Sheldon's major competitor, was founded in London in 1860.[58] They earned their reputation first in the museum field. Sage

[58] The son of a journeyman carpenter, Frederick Sage trained as a carpenter in Ipswich and arrived in London in 1851. He worked at two builder's yards for his first few years in London and after being discharged from that work, he founded his own business. Harris & Sheldon Limited History, n.d., Harris & Sheldon Archive

began patenting shopfitting equipment as early as 1861.[59] In 1876, Sage was earning top business contracts including wall cases for the South Kensington Scientific Exhibition, fittings for a store on Queen Victoria Street, and cases for a museum in Brisbane. On January 29, 1884 *The Morning Post* flattered Mr. Frederick Sage as "the chief developer of a new industry." The article continued, "This gentleman has laid himself out to supply an admitted want…we now find a single manufacturer employing two to three hundred skilled workmen in the making of show-cases and other adjuncts for the display of costly goods, whether in the shops of the vendors or at international exhibitions."[60] This journalist rightly highlighted the need for display fixtures across exhibitionary contexts.

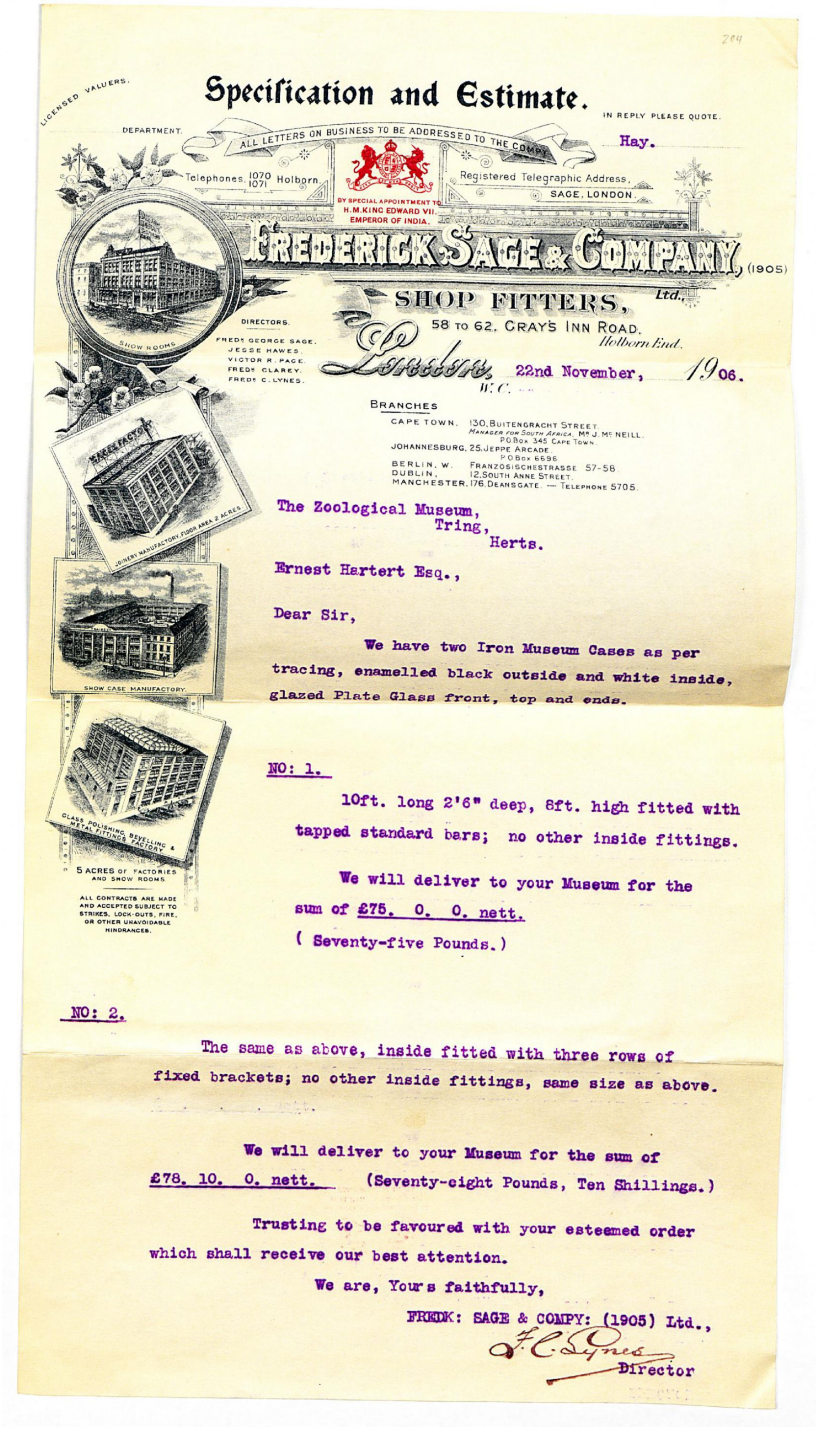
The Natural History Museum in London retains correspondence dating between 1900 and 1912 that tracks a number of orders for casework from Frederick Sage. The design of the firm's masthead and stationery illustrated the manufacturer's growth well (fig. 65). Down the side of the stationery are a series of buildings: at the top the "Show Rooms", then the "Joinery Manufactory, Floor Area 2 Acres," then the "Show Case Manufactory" and at bottom the "Glass Polishing Beveling and Metal Fittings Factory." A caption additionally revealed that all together these spaces added up to "5 Acres of Factories and Show Rooms."[61]

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[59] See "List of Patent Awardees," *London Gazette*, January 4, 1861. "To Frederick Sage, Builder No. 11, Hatton-garden, St. Andrew's, Middlesex, for the invention of 'improvement in brackets for carrying trays, shelves, glass cases, &c., in windows and glass cases.'"

[60] "Old Gray's-Inn-Lane," *The Morning Post*, January 29 1884, 2. The article additionally notes, "he has been asked to supply the majority of English exhibitors who have displayed their wares at all the international exhibitions."

[61] Letter, November 22, 1906, Mr. Frederick Sage to Ernest Hartert, TR1/1/27/479, Natural History Museum Archives.



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Tring,
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Ernest Hartert Esq.,

Dear Sir,

We have two Iron Museum Cases as per tracing, enamelled black outside and white inside, glazed Plate Glass front, top and ends.

NO: 1.

10ft. long 2'6" deep, 8ft. high fitted with tapped standard bars; no other inside fittings.

We will deliver to your Museum for the sum of £75. 0. 0. nett.
(Seventy-five Pounds.)

NO: 2.

The same as above, inside fitted with three rows of fixed brackets; no other inside fittings, same size as above.

We will deliver to your Museum for the sum of £78. 10. 0. nett. (Seventy-eight Pounds, Ten Shillings.)

Trusting to be favoured with your esteemed order which shall receive our best attention.

We are, Yours faithfully,

FREDK: SAGE & COMPY: (1905) Ltd.,

F. C. Lynes
Director

Figure 65. Letter, 22 November 1906, Mr. Frederick Sage to Ernest Hartert.
Source: TR1/1/27/479, Natural History Museum Archives, London,
By permission of the Trustees of The Natural History Museum.

Recalling the department store's use of architecture as advertisement via postcards and pamphlets, here the shopfitter has chosen a series of factories to represent the diversity of

their production. By 1910 the masthead expanded from the simple "Shopfitters" as used in the earlier years to include "Shop Front Builders, Shop Fitters, Show Case Makers and Decorating Specialists" with a "Museum Showcase Department" qualifier.[62] This shift in terminology from "shopfitter" to "show case maker," similar to the shift between "window dresser" and "displayman," emphasized the expanding nature of the field, not solely tied to the space of the shop.

In the fall of 1906, Ernst Hartert, the director and bird curator of the Zoological Museum at Tring was in touch with Frederick Sage to order a set of new cases. Their negotiation reveals a debate over crowded versus more spacious display strategy, which was also a point of contention in the planning of the department store sales floor. On October 22, 1910, Frederick Sage wrote to suggest a revision on the order based on a review of the museum's "Plan of the Premises":

> We were favoured with a visit by Mr. Huckvale on Thursday last, who brought us a Plan of the Premises, on which we have put down the Cases according to the sizes ordered. So far as we can tell without knowing your definite reasons for arranging for these sizes, the lengths of the Centre Cases might, with advantage, be altered, viz: - shorter one reduced by about 6 ft., and the longer one increased by that amount.[63]

Two days later, Dr. Hartert replied, expressing trepidation at decreasing display space:

> The reason why Mr. Rothschild [the museum's founder] wanted the cases as long as possible was: in order that as much as possible could be put into the given room. We do not think that your proposed alterations are desirable, but we can discuss the matter on Saturday…[64]

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[62] Letter, September 20, 1910, Mr. Frederick Sage to Ernest Hartert, TR1/31/505, Natural History Museum Archives.

[63] Letter, Frederick Sage to Ernst Hartert, October 22, 1910, TR1/31/505, Natural History Museum Archive Archives.

[64] Letter, Ernst Hartert to Frederick Sage, October 24, 1910, TR1/31/505, Natural History Museum Archives.

Founded on the premise that visitors would learn best by viewing as much material as possible at once, Victorian museums and by extension, department stores, struggled in representing their complete and comprehensive holdings while still leaving room for visitors to appreciate them.[65]

Examining how the shopfitter developed related products for exhibitions and stores provides a new link in the material culture of these two spaces. In both arenas the shopfitter worked to control the visitor's motion and vision at both the small-scale level with close-up looking via casework as well as the grand-scale level of a vast vista. Historian Erica Rappaport defines the late nineteenth-century female shopper as an "ambulatory figure" who "excited those who could profit from, control, or at least direct her movements."[66] The shopfitters were precisely "those who could profit from, control, or at least direct her movements." These designers inserted new objects such as casework, stands, and brackets in order to orient movement and behavior in the shopping space. Shopfitters positioned fixtures and furniture to decorate as well as structure the sales floor, as the next section will discuss.

The Interior Shift from Density to Openness

Architectural historian John Siry has written that the age of a department store could be determined by an examination of its floor plan: "…the lack of interior structural walls was representative of a building's modernity. In older assemblages of annexed properties, masonry partitions survived as remnants of party walls between adjacent buildings formerly

[65] Yanni, *Nature's Museums,* 107–110.

[66] Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure,* 23.

used as separate stores."[67] For instance, Whiteley's was originally arranged as a series of small shops with dividing walls due to the adaptation of existing buildings being joined together. In this configuration, traffic flow was limited by the door openings, leading to a crowded and cramped series of salesrooms. In contrast to Whiteley's earliest iterations, Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott building in Chicago, for instance, purpose-built from the ground up, had a steel frame that allowed for a spacious floor plan. Sullivan's building had an open area of 26,000 square feet on every floor, with all special elements such as stairways and elevators, set along south and east walls at the edges of the sales areas."[68] This crucial shift from density to openness was physically and visually managed by the placement and design of the casework and its accompanying interior display.

Affording the consumer a clear view and a sense of expansiveness became perceptible factors in the department store's embodiment of modernity. The introduction of the open plan, glass-fronted casework and lower fixtures in many stores in the late nineteenth century all linked to a sense of openness that designated the stores' visual concept as modern when compared to the dense, piled-high displays most popular earlier in the century, whose persistent use in some stores marked them as lagging in their methods. This shift from density to openness in the interior parallels the evolution of window display design and the move from the stocky window to the unit principle.

Upon visiting Whiteley's in 1892, one American reviewer, a Mrs. S.A. Brock Putnam, reported on how a dense display gave the impression that the store was not keeping pace with modern methods as practiced more widely in American shops:

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[67] Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*, 192.

[68] Ibid., 193.

> But while so remarkable in its general characteristics and in practical resources, the house of Whiteley, neither outside nor inside, by any means compares in attractiveness with our American shops of-many-wares. The building itself is straggling, homely and rude in effect, sadly contrasting with our palatial mercantile structures; and although, so conveniently laid out in compartments, these, to an American, accustomed to the airy spaciousness of our great stores, are narrow, close and stuffy, an impression which is accentuated by the mirrors set at each end, duplicating and reduplicating the effect until the narrow vistas with their piled-up counters seem to end nowhere.[69]

Not until Whiteley's remodeling in 1909 did the store achieve the stately magnificence, and openness, afforded by a steel frame. Mrs. S.A. Brock Putnam noted that although Whiteley's was organized, "so conveniently laid out in compartments" that the "straggling, homely, and rude" qualities of the building and the "close and stuffy" nature of the displays detracted from the effectiveness of the overall organization of the interior. Moreover, she notes that the vista is "narrow" rather than expansive, made worse by the use of mirrors that multiplied the profusion of wares that overwhelmed and confuses rather than impressed the visitor.

An image of Harrod's perfume display in about 1910 (fig. 66) indicates how the store's display still overwhelmed the eye well into the twentieth century. Mirrored casework climbs high and multiplies the already numerous small bottles of perfume that fill the aisles. The eye can travel down the aisle but cannot see across as the casework is too high and topped by a layer of greenery, whose presence was meant to lend a scent of freshness to the interior but whose physical mass and visual disorder crowded the visitor.

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[69] Mrs. S.A. Brock Putnam, "A Remarkable Shop," *The Decorator and Furnisher*, September 1882, 224.



Figure 66. Harrod's Perfume Department, ca. 1910.
Source: Tumblr, Arabelle Proffer.

In contrast, reviews of department stores in New York and Chicago stressed the wide-open impression that the visitor gained upon entering the sales floor. As early 1870, American department stores were commended for their openness. As one visitor to A.T. Stewart's marble palace remarked, "with no obstructions to the eye upon entering, the visitor has before him at one glance the two acres of floor upon which he stands."[70] As stores grew to take over entire city blocks, stores prided themselves on being able to offer an unobstructed view "one block long," as in the case of Marshall Field's (fig. 67).

[70] "A.T. Stewart & Co's Marble Stores," 22.



Figure 67. V. O. Hammon Publishing Company, Postcard, "Marshall Field & Company, Retail Store, State Street Aisle, One Block Long," ca. 1908.
Source: Illinois Digital Archives.

In 1914, B. Altman claimed that a visitor could see across their sales floor from Madison to Fifth Avenue: "Surveying the interior from the Fifth Avenue entrance, on the Main Floor, the visitor's gaze – following the course of the broad central aisle – meets a perfect perspective, which terminates only when it reaches the vestibule on Madison Avenue."[71] The press applied the term of the city block, vocabulary of the urban exterior, to the interior of the store in order to give the reader a sense of the visual scale and parameters of the sales floor. The department store's aisles, or pathways of movement, fit within the city grid and physically suggested the department store's interconnectedness with the city, as discussed in chapter one.

[71] *B. Altman & Co.'s Enlarged Store,* 20. Stern's also offered a block-long view. See "Guests Inspect New Stern Store: Building in Forty-second Street Will Be Thrown Open to the Public on Next Tuesday," *New York Times*, August 28, 1913, 18.

In her shopping guide of 1912, American author Frances Waxman keenly observed how differing strategies of casework affected the shopping experience in London's stores. When reviewing Selfridge's in London, she pointed out how the store differed from the other "British institutions," such as Harrod's as mentioned above. Instead Waxman likened Selfridge's with the spacious and organized shopping experience of leading New York department stores:

> Selfridge's does not look in the least like London, once you are inside. It might be a bit of Twenty-third Street or Broadway set down in the British metropolis. Its aisles are wide, its displays are coherently isolated. It is entirely possible to find what you are looking for, without delving though piles of irrelevant things in which you have no interest."[72]

Waxman stressed the positive impression of clarity and "coherent isolation" in Selfridge's while remarking on details such as wide aisles that allowed for smooth circulation.

Descriptive reviews and imagery aligned the department store with its surrounding city on physical and visual levels below and above ground. While the previously discussed Marshall Field's postcard showed how the substructure of Marshall Field's (fig. 29) aligned with the stratigraphy of the city, gridded "block long" aisles and show window-like merchandise arrangements extended the city streets to the store interior at ground level. One London journalist remarked on the experience at John Barker in 1905, "The visitor can walk from one end of the establishment to the other, and see what is to be seen, exactly as if she were passing from shop window to shop window in Regent-street."[73] The description of the merchandise arrangements as a series of "shop windows" also positioned the department store as a fractured visual journey. The *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* described how Marshall

[72] Waxman, *A Shopping Guide,* 10–13.

[73] "Successful Shopping, John Barker & Co., Kensington," *The Times,* November 3, 1905.

Field's casework also set up a pathway similar to the sidewalk and glass-walled casework simulated the effect of the show windows:

> Many thousands will naturally assume the privileged pleasure of wandering through this great aisle on their way up or down town in preference to walking along State Street. On either side tempting merchandise divided into sections, which in reality are 'shops' complete in every detail. The handsome rounding showcases take on the form of show windows and serve the purpose to a nicety. All those lines for both men and women which figure among the 'happen to think' needs, make up the stocks along this central arcade and first floor.[74]

This article suggests that walking down the grand aisle of Marshall Field's ground floor sales floor could be an alternate route to navigating through the city. This review also made a direct reference to the department store's predecessor of the traditional outdoor shopping arcade.

In addition to demarcating aisles, casework also contributed to an atmosphere of openness as their increasingly shorter physical profile allowed for the consumer's eye to roam between the aisles and obtain a clear view of the merchandise on offer. From the 1890s stores largely replaced high shelving and storage cabinets, often towering above the salespeople at seven or more feet tall, with lower units from five to five and a half feet in height.[75] When Selfridges was built in 1909, shop fixtures such as counters were purposely built lower than the usual height so that as one architectural critic claimed, one could "see from end to end of the building."[76] Just as dividing walls were undesirable, so too were tall cases that blocked the visitor's view through the sales floor space. One trade periodical

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[74] *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 11, 1902, 19–20, Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

[75] Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 40.

[76] Bylander, "Concrete and Steel Construction at Selfridges," *Builders Journal,* March 31, 1909, 280 quoted in J.C. Lawrence, "Steel Frame Architecture," 37.

praised new "low-type fixtures" and reported, "the advantage of the newer type of fixtures over the old, which tend to wall in the customer and obscure the premises, is apparent." With the lower fixtures, "a complete view of the store is afforded" and retailers benefit from "a generous distribution of attractive displays which serve to lure the customer's interest."[77] The reduced height of the department store's showcases was considered a mark of urbane modernity relative to the high shelves and vertical piling of goods familiar in older rural dry goods stores."[78] The use of stockrooms for surplus merchandise rather than heaping excess goods in piles on top of cabinets or stacked on the floor also helped to clear the sales floor.

Stylistically casework shifted from a solid wooden mass that was laid out in lengths and grew to substantial heights in the late nineteenth century to lighter glass-walled fixtures that assumed a shorter profile. For instance, Lord & Taylor's new building in 1870 had "Counters of dark, polished wood, varying from 20 to 50 feet in length" that covered the sales floor.[79] Meanwhile the British shopfitter Frederick Sage remarked as early as 1884 that it was his method to employ "as little as possible of that material [dark wood], preferring, when practicable, the introduction of hard wood of light construction and plate glass, which impart a peculiar lightness and elegance to his manufactures."[80]

A comparison of two models, nine years apart in the Harris & Sheldon product catalogues, illustrates well the increasing transparency of the casework. In 1890, the firm

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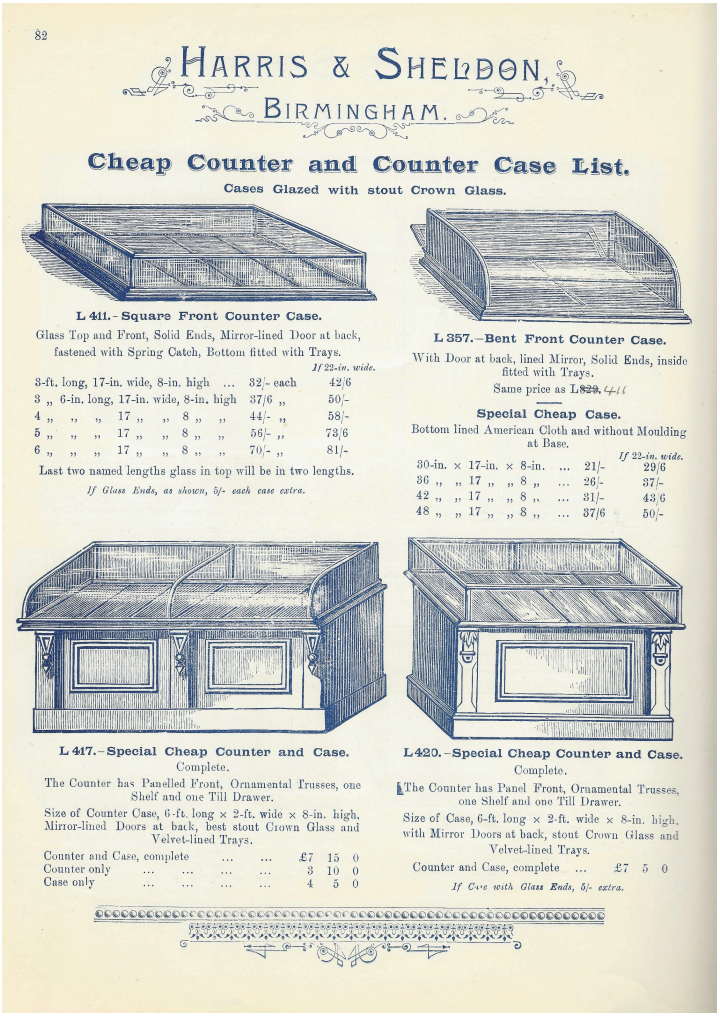
[77] "Modern Store Fittings: Suggestions from State Street," *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, June 18, 1898, 17.

[78] Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*, 211.

[79] "The New Building of Lord and Taylor," 2.

[80] "Old Gray's-Inn-Lane," 2.

introduced glass by way of glass boxes, “Square Front Counter Case” (L 411) and “Bent Front Counter Case” (L 357) that sat on top of solid wood counters (fig. 68).



82

HARRIS & SHELDON,
BIRMINGHAM.

Cheap Counter and Counter Case List.

Cases Glazed with stout Crown Glass.

L 411.–Square Front Counter Case.

Glass Top and Front, Solid Ends, Mirror-lined Door at back, fastened with Spring Catch, Bottom fitted with Trays.

		If 22-in. wide.
3-ft. long, 17-in. wide, 8-in. high ...	32/- each	42/6
3 „ 6-in. long, 17-in. wide, 8-in. high	37/6 „	50/-
4 „ „ „ 17 „ „ 8 „ „	44/- „	58/-
5 „ „ „ 17 „ „ 8 „ „	56/- „	73/6
6 „ „ „ 17 „ „ 8 „ „	70/- „	81/-

Last two named lengths glass in top will be in two lengths.

If Glass Ends, as shown, 5/- each case extra.

L 357.–Bent Front Counter Case.

With Door at back, lined Mirror, Solid Ends, inside fitted with Trays.

Same price as L~~329.~~ 411

Special Cheap Case.

Bottom lined American Cloth and without Moulding at Base.

		If 22-in. wide.
30-in. × 17-in. × 8-in. ...	21/-	29/6
36 „ „ 17 „ „ 8 „ ...	26/-	37/-
42 „ „ 17 „ „ 8 „ ...	31/-	43/6
48 „ „ 17 „ „ 8 „ ...	37/6	50/-

L 417.–Special Cheap Counter and Case.

Complete.

The Counter has Panelled Front, Ornamental Trusses, one Shelf and one Till Drawer.

Size of Counter Case, 6-ft. long × 2-ft. wide × 8-in. high, Mirror-lined Doors at back, best stout Crown Glass and Velvet-lined Trays.

Counter and Case, complete	£7	15	0
Counter only	3	10	0
Case only	4	5	0

L 420.–Special Cheap Counter and Case.

Complete.

The Counter has Panel Front, Ornamental Trusses, one Shelf and one Till Drawer.

Size of Case, 6-ft. long × 2-ft. wide × 8-in. high, with Mirror Doors at back, stout Crown Glass and Velvet-lined Trays.

Counter and Case, complete ... £7 5 0

If Cove with Glass Ends, 5/- extra.

Figure 68. Cheap Counter and Counter Case List in Harris & Sheldon, *Illustrated Price List* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1890), 82.
Source: Harris & Sheldon, Ltd.

Designed with a door at back and fastened with a spring catch, these boxes required the opening and closing by the hands of the store employees. The same year Harris & Sheldon began to offer combination wooden counters with paneled front complete with a fitted glass case on top, as seen below in the “Special Cheap Counter and Case” (L 417 and 420). As a single unit these provided a transition to the glass-walled case of later years.

By 1899, the company offered an elegant four-sided glass case with a wooden base. The K839 "Circular-ended Plate Glass Counter" of "Best quality, Air tight, in Mahogany, Walnut, or Ebonized, Mirror-lined Doors at back, Cloth-lined Bottom, fitted with one row of Plate-glass Shelves and Fittings" (fig. 69) was emblematic of the style that became the standard for well appointed department stores at the turn of the century. The transparency of similar models is shown off to great effect in the Marshall Field's postcard referenced above (fig. 67).

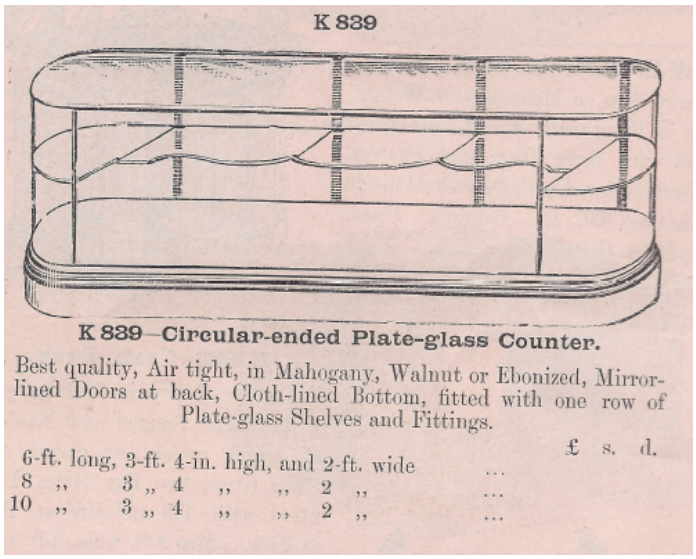


Figure 69. K 839–Circular-ended Plate Glass Counter in Harris & Sheldon, *Red, White and Blue Catalogue* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1899), 155.
Source: Harris & Sheldon, Ltd.

As the proportion of glass to wood increased casework took on a visual transparency similar to the show window. Rather than overwhelm the visitor, modern retail strategy and new styles in casework prioritized clear and concise viewing opportunities. Moreover, in a crowded shopping setting, a dynamic presentation of merchandise that consumers could scan with their eyes through glass held their attention while they waited for the individual attention of the salesperson to secure their purchase. The mirror-lined doors on this model allowed the

casework's contents to be seen in the round, therefore suggesting a concept of visual self-service. In addition, the walls' transparent quality allowed the floor of the store to be decorated in bands of colorful merchandise rather than be anchored by a heavy opaque base of wood. Glass shelving made it appear as though the second tier of merchandise was floating.

The quantity and quality of glass casework frequently featured in articles on store openings and renovations. When Stern's department store opened a new location in New York in the summer of 1913, the press reported, "A special feature of the establishment which has been carried out on almost every floor is the enclosure of practically all stock in glass cases… The new fixtures for this store represent, according to the authorities of the establishment, an expenditure of some one million dollars."[81] The materials and the price of shopfittings were in the consumer consciousness via advertising and such attention to details found in journalism.

Glass casework and widening aisles operated in conjunction with one another to create more room for consumers to crowd around casework and view the merchandise. At Stern's the "…spacing between the counters varies from ten to twenty feet, allowing ample room to accommodate large crowds comfortably."[82] As aisles widened, the space between the counters and shelving behind them accordingly decreased, therefore physically leaving less space for the display staff. In addition, as consumers appreciated the chance to shop unbothered and glass casework afforded the consumers the opportunity to select merchandise primarily via sight, casework and lighting filled the roles of the sales person in enabling the visibility of the wares.

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[81] "Guests Inspect New Stern Store," 18.

[82] Ibid.

Silent Salesmen: The Agency of Shopfittings

Shopfittings were not a neutral intermediary but instead mediators that relied on consumer interaction and merchandise in order to fulfill their role. Don Ihde's concept of "technological intentionality" is useful here. Ihde suggests, "the mediating capacity of artifacts is no essential property of things themselves, but emerges from the interplay of things and their context."[83] In other words, shopfittings had no function outside of the retail or exhibition setting. Ihde further offers that an object's "technological intentionality" is its directionality, or "an inclination or trajectory that shapes the ways in which it is used."[84] The trajectory of shopfittings invited the direct engagement of the consumer and reduced the need for the sales person to provide access to the merchandise. Therefore, the addition of professional shopfitting systems to the retail environment played an active role in overriding older processes of shopping that were largely built on storage and relied on the sales staff to retrieve wares, with more modern concepts of shopping that thrived on visual presentation and utilized specialized fixtures and furniture to facilitate display. The style and the materials of the shopfittings themselves influenced and framed the view of the merchandise.

The Welch-Wilmarth Company, a leading manufacturer of shopfittings in America with branch offices in New York and Chicago, advertised their glass casework with the tag line "When She *Sees* She Buys" (fig. 70). The copy elaborated "Welch-Wilmarth Method in

[83] Verbeek, "Artifacts and Attachment," 140.

[84] Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 114.

Merchandising store equipment insures that she **does** see – focuses the **interest** your advertising has aroused into **action** – converts the **prospect** into the **customer.**"[85]



When She *Sees* She Buys

When she doesn't see she goes elsewhere, saith the Oracle.

Welch-Wilmarth Method in Merchandising store equipment insures that she **does** see—focuses the **interest** your advertising has aroused into **action**—converts the **prospect** into the **customer.**

Welch-Wilmarth planned stores have a personality. Has your store a personality? Are **part** of your goods shown **some** of the time, and **some** of the goods **part** of the time? Exactly! Welch-Wilmarth stores show **all the goods all the time.**

Right now is the turning point of your business—of every merchant's business. Set the example **your** customers will follow—spruce up—move ahead. Basic conditions are sound. Do it now!

WELCH-WILMARTH COMPANIES

Grand Rapids, Michigan

BRANCH OFFICES:

Chicago Pittsburgh Boston St. Louis New York Minneapolis Denver Philadelphia Salt Lake City

I saw it in the December "Merchants Record"—Page 12

Figure 70. Welch-Wilmarth, Advertisement, "When She Sees She Buys," *MRSW*, December 1920, 12.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Smithsonian Libraries.

[85] Welch-Wilmarth Company, Advertisement, "When She *Sees* She Buys," *MRSW*, December 1920, 12.

In this example, the glass casework was absolutely essential in enabling the consumer to make the purchase. The *Dry Goods Reporter* anthropomorphized the glass case in order to emphasize its selling abilities in 1901, "The new glass combination case talks continually to any and everybody who ventures within seeing distance…it is a business creator in the fact that in forcing onto the attention of passing customers the goods, it creates wants which are immediately satisfied."[86] A Latourian framework again provides an apt tool of analysis; the casework becomes animated with the ability to talk to consumers as "the prescription encoded in the mechanism" is "brought out in words."[87] The glass-sided walls announced the desirability of the merchandise and invited the consumer to approach the case and evaluate.

In addition to their aesthetic and performative qualities, shopfittings also worked as elements in the machine of the department store. As Susan Porter Benson has described, well-designed shopfittings "saved labor and made larger volume and made higher-stock turn more feasible; they enhanced the disciplined, orderly, systematic use of resources within the department store."[88] Scientific retailing strategy promoted that these fixtures should enhance the performance of the salespeople and achieve the most advantageous interaction between human and non-human factors.

Stands were another major category of wares in the shopfitters' catalogue that played the conspicuous role of silent salesmen while also minimizing salesperson contact with the goods and maximizing viewing potential. Bolts of textiles were some of the most time-consuming and onerous goods to show consumers. In April of 1912, an investigator at *System* magazine "performed time studies in selling areas and announced the results with horror" at

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[86] *Dry Goods Reporter*, February 16, 1901, 15 quoted in Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-thieving*, 77.

[87] Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?", 232.

[88] Benson, *Counter Cultures,* 40.

the current methods in operation.[89] The report found that one of the major problems was that "inefficient fixtures required clerks to spend more time handling goods and less time attending to customers. In particular, the report found that for one clerk, twenty-three minutes "were devoted to removing bolts from shelves, rewinding, returning to shelves, and adjusting the stacks."[90]

The "Gem" and "Handy" stands for textiles, manufactured by J.H. Wilson Marriot of Baltimore, Maryland and illustrated in the guidebook *Nearly Three Hundred Ways to Dress Show Windows* (published by the manufacturer), were distinctly designed to address these challenges of displaying bulky bolts of cloth (fig. 71).

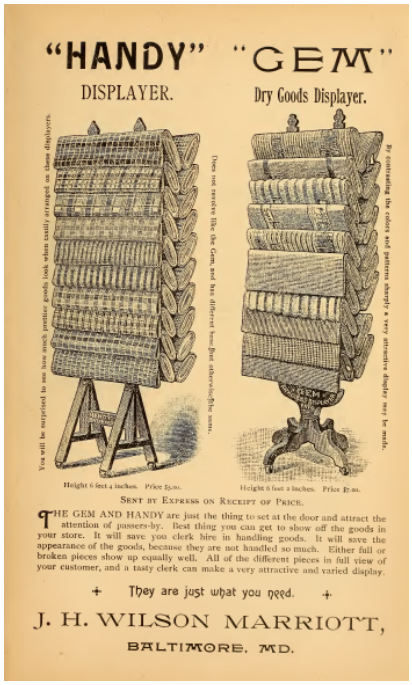


Figure 71. J.H. Wilson Marriott, Advertisement, in J.H. Wilson Marriott *Nearly Three Hundred Ways to Dress Show Windows* (Baltimore: Show Window Publishing Company, 1889), n.p.
Source: Achive.org; Digitized by Library of Congress.

[89] Edward Mott Woolley, "'Lost Motions' in Retail Selling," *System* 21 (April 1912), 371–2 quoted in Benson, 41–42.

[90] Ibid.

The copy reads, "The Gem and Handy are just the thing to set at the door and attract the attention of passers-by. Best thing you can get to show off the goods in your store. It will save you clerk hire in handling goods. It will save the appearance of the goods because they are not handled so much."[91] The "Gem" on the right even revolved for easier viewing and self-service. Meanwhile the name "Handy" referenced the stand's convenience. These devices were also space saving; their stacked design made it such that the customer could clearly see multiple patterns at once while the physical footprint of the stand was fairly small. In attenuated metal stands that sat atop casework and filled department store show windows, the arms of the stand can be interpreted as substitutes for the arms of the sales staff, reaching out to the customer and tempting them with merchandise (fig. 72).

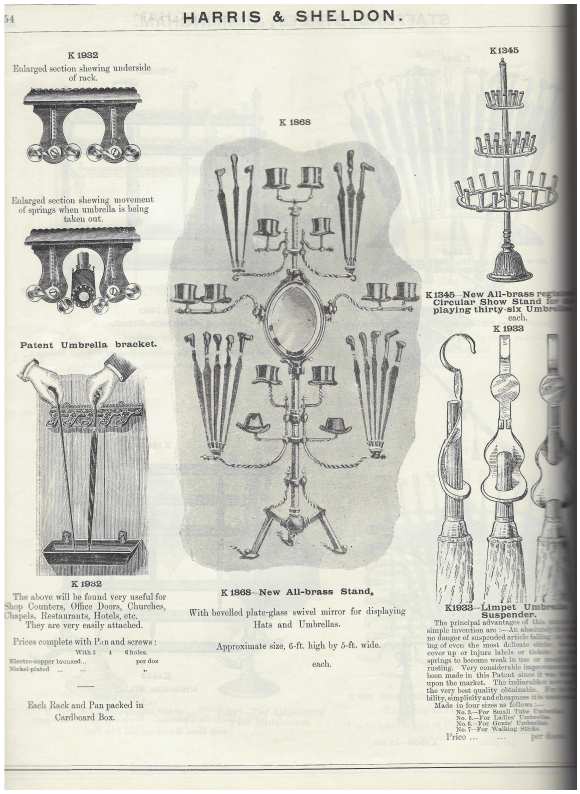


Figure 72. K1868 –New All-brass Stand in Harris & Sheldon, *Red, White and Blue Catalogue* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon, 1899), 54.
Source: Harris & Sheldon, Ltd.

[91] J.H. Wilson Marriott, *Nearly Three Hundred Ways to Dress Show Windows* (Baltimore: Show Window Publishing Company, 1889), n.p.

At six feet tall by five feet wide, this "New All-brass Stand" would have stood taller and commanded more space than any sales associate. At the same time it would have appeared as an exaggeration of the domestic form of the hallstand, a fixture also designed to replace human interaction and meet a service need. The stand also offered a mirror, which may have encouraged the consumer to linger with the merchandise longer as well as fulfilled the shopper's desire to try out those accessories on offer. This stand gives an extraordinary appearance to ordinary wares by forming hats and umbrellas into a dynamic, multidimensional, and layered arrangement. In addition to the eye-catching theatricality of this display, the stand also offered a practical advantage in showing hats and umbrellas side by side in order to encourage an ensemble purchase.

Similar to those stands shown in the accessories display at Ponting's (fig. 53) Harris & Sheldon offered a Handkerchief Stand, "Specially designed to make a big display in a minimum of space back to front"; 3ft. 6 in. high on heavy octagon base, with four sets of arms, which can be adjusted to any height and ticket clip."[92] When perched on top of counters, stands had a small footprint and yet could sturdily hold and display a good number of wares. This space at the height above the counters would have otherwise been lost. These stands were also designed with built-in flexibility such as this one that could "be adjusted to any height." The stands' adjustability would have been an asset to the displaymen who were constantly reconfiguring the merchandise on view. The flexibility of these stands raises the important point that the proper use of fixtures for display was a skilled operation and their proper use required the creative input and work of the displayman.

Shopfitters devised and patented specific stands to attractively display banal items such as buttons that might otherwise be difficult to show. Included in the button section of the Carson

[92] Harris & Sheldon, *Selphast Shopfitting Novelties* (Birmingham: Harris & Sheldon Ltd, 1900), n.p.

Pirie Scott Catalogue of 1893 was an advertisement for "Mosser's Button Exhibitor (fig. 72).[93]

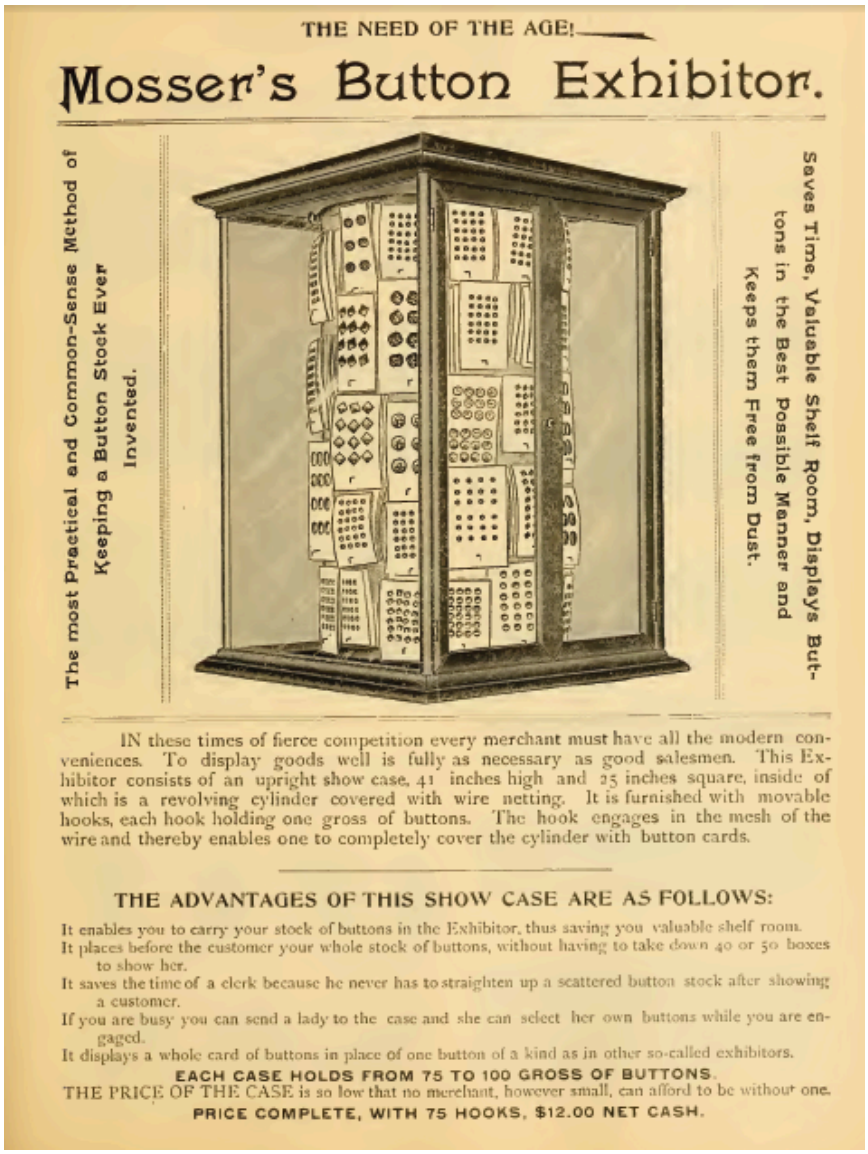


Illustration 72. Advertisement, Mosser's Button Exhibitor, in Carson Pirie Scott, *Illustrated Catalogue of Staple and Fancy Notions* (Chicago: Carson Pirie Scott, 1893), 293.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Winterthur

[93] Advertisement, Mosser's Button Exhibitor, in Carson Pirie Scott, *Illustrated Catalogue of Staple and Fancy Notions* (Chicago: Carson Pirie Scott, 1893), 293.

The device is a revolving mesh stand onto which are pinned stacks of buttons on cards. Around the whole device is a glass case to keep them free from dust. When the customer was interested in a button, she could open the door to the case and examine on a single card, a number of buttons at once. Once she has made a selection, the salesperson could then retrieve the button from a labeled drawer behind the counter. As the advertisement outlined, this method "saves the time of a clerk because he never has to straighten up a scattered button stock after showing a customer."[94]

Similar methods were also followed for the display of laces and collars. The masthead of the advertisement boldly proclaimed that this device was "The Need of the Age" to clearly amplify the importance and impact of this fixture. The advertisement also promised that this stand was "the most practical and common-sense method of keeping a button stock ever invented." As "the need of the age" this device incorporated all of the driving forces behind modern shopfitting: it was space-saving, flexible, movable, protected the merchandise, offered an attractive display solution, and most of all minimized the need for a salesperson. Similar to the glass casework, the Button Exhibitor in its offering of visual interest could keep a customer occupied if the sales counter was crowded. The advertisement offered, "If you are busy you can send a lady to the case and she can select her own buttons while you are engaged."[95] Its name, "exhibitor," suggests its effective role in the marketplace. Carson Pirie Scott included this "exhibitor" in their product catalogue, along with an array of buttons available in retail and wholesale quantities. The presence of this fixture in their product catalog suggests that the department store endorsed and used this method of display. This product catalog was advertising the goods that the store sold alongside the particular

[94] Advertisement, Mosser's Button Exhibitor, *Illustrated Catalogue of Staple and Fancy Notions*, 293.

[95] Ibid.

format in which the store chose to display them. Shown alongside the merchandise, this fixture was presented as a commodity and another element in the material culture of the department store.

Conclusion

The shop fitting trade developed along with the rise of exhibition culture in the nineteenth century, advanced with the growth and sophistication of commercial retail, and fully matured in the department store. This chapter has presented how fixtures were produced and used in the department store interior in order to show off merchandise in new ways; glass casework allowed for the viewing of an abundance of merchandise, stands made accessories into towering and energetic arrangements, meanwhile flexible feather stands showed off the fashion accessories' flowing shape. In all of these examples, the fixtures acted as "silent salesmen," facilitating visual access to goods, organizing the wares, multiplying the amount of material that could be seen clearly at the same time, while also adding a sense of theatricality to the display and lessening the need for the salesperson in the purchasing process.

Fixtures, in terms of their placement, form, and style, contributed to the department store's flexible design and overall visual impression. At the same time an emphasis on shopfittings as industrial and technical elements positions the department store within larger nineteenth century trends of technology in which the machine was progressively replacing the human agent and spaces from factories to stores were increasingly optimized and rationalized for superior performance. The ideal operation of the machine of the department store relied on cooperation between a variety of human and non-human elements as well as productive relationships between display-related professions. Fixtures were necessary to both the

functionality and the impressive appearance of both the show window and the interior and the window dresser and shopfitter had to work together in order to create a visually compelling and financially effective presentation. The *London Illustrated News* reported in 1909 that the window dresser "is useless unless he has behind him those who have made a science of shop-fitting and are specialist in the all-important matter of impressing the public."[96]

Archival research and extensive examination of ephemera in the form of catalogues, periodicals, advertisements, and photographs has yielded a new understanding of the strength, impact, and growth of the shopfitting trade in this period across exhibition venues, from department stores and world's fairs to trade expositions and museums. Examination of numerous catalogues that survive relating to individual American fixture companies demonstrates the more specialized nature of the shopfitting industry in America. These industries tended to cluster in Chicago and New York as well as in furniture making centers such as Grand Rapids, Michigan. The exploration of never before published archival material relating to the British firm Harris & Sheldon and their competitor Frederick Sage has yielded a new understanding of the roles of these major shopfitting firms in raising the quality of the display of objects across venues.

The Harrod's archive holds Frederick Sage invoices for the Ladies Hairdressing Department, Ladies Outfitting Department, Flower and Feather Department, the Bank, Furnishing Drapery Room, Shipping Department and Railway Ticket Office, Sports Extension Department, Gents Tailoring, and the Motor Department as well as cross-departmental invoices for repairs to and additions of casework.[97] The Harrods commission

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[96] "The Man Behind the Window-Dresser," *Illustrated London News*, July 17 1909.

[97] Invoices, Frederick Sage to Harrod's, September 30, 1905, February 27, 1906, March 13, 1906, April 5, 1907, February 22, 1907, March 15, 1907, March 6, 1907, April 1, 1907, April 26,1907, Harrods Archive.

monopolized Frederick Sage's output from 1900 to 1905. Even in the years following the new building's opening, the firm continued to keep the spaces up-to-date. Harrods' fixtures were more robust and less "silent" in their presence than most of the shopfittings discussed in this chapter, especially when combined with the ornate Renaissance style architectural elements that engulfed the store's interior. Upon visiting Harrod's in 1906, Joseph Appel, a manager at Wanamaker's department store, caught himself "admiring the fixtures and really not seeing the goods."[98] As a department store manager, Appel would have been particularly attuned to the selling environment in addition to the wares for sale. His comment also points to larger considerations in the debate between art and commerce whereby the interior styling might have overwhelmed the merchandise.

A booklet produced by Harrods in 1909 mentions rich marble and woodwork, the latter "mainly composed of natural Ancona Walnut, Mahogany, inlaid Satinwood and Oak" and adds "the ceiling and frescoes are worthy of special note, being painted and modeled by French Artists in the Renaissance style."[99] An image of the Harrods Ladies' Boot Department in 1919 exhibits how a whole host of shopfittings were put to task to bring flair, theatricality, and self-service to shoe display while complementing the visual energy of the surrounding architectural elements (fig. 74).

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[98] Sheppard, F. H. W., ed., 'Brompton Road: South Side,' *Survey of London*, vol. 41 (London: Athlone Press for the Greater London County Council, 1983), 22.

[99] Ibid.



Figure 74. Harrods Ladies' Boot Department, London, 1919. Photograph by Adolphe Augustus Boucher, Bedford Lemere and Company.
Source: Historic England, BL24450/021.

The shopfittings suggested where, at what posture, and how closely to interact with the merchandise. The tall bracket in front of the mirror offers the shoes to be tried on while sitting in the armchair to its side. Then the mirror could have been conveniently used for examination. Pairs of shoes stand at an angle supported by stands at their heels, edging towards the hands of the consumer, some already resting at ground level as they would look on one's feet. A symmetrical arrangement of shoes dances up a set of stairs and onto a framed stage on which the shoes, furniture, and drapery appear as props in some permanent theatrical set.

Although the shoes are static objects, the creative employment of stands adds visual interest and energy in the room. Since many of the forms are elevated on pad feet, even the

furniture appears to stand on its tiptoes. The shopfittings elevate the shoes and allow them to occupy many positions beyond their usual placement on the ground. The shoes are displayed in groupings whose dynamic rhythms mimic the flow of the curving lines and ornament on the plasterwork of the ceiling and columns. Precisely positioned by the fixtures, the shoes appear as additional decoration in this already grand Baroque interior.

Dotted on the floor and along almost every surface, the shoes' placement would have encouraged consumers to navigate through the room and immerse themselves in the theatricality of the space. This image gives a strong sense of how shopfittings and the merchandise interacted with the larger decorative scheme on the interior, which will be the focus of the following chapter. While this Harrod's image shows one corner of a showroom set up as a well appointed mixture of fixtures, merchandise, and interior architectural elements, the following chapter will explore how an even more contrived and contained use of the interior, be it a domestic space, a themed historical interior, or the simulation of a foreign shop, provided a changeable and customizable frame for display.

Chapter Four
The Department Store Interior: A Discontinuous Experience of Display

In 1907 Wanamaker's in New York debuted The House Palatial, "the very acme of the house designing, furnishing and decorative arts."[1] More than a model room, The House Palatial was a magnificent model home. Built into the central atrium of the Cast Iron Palace, the House Palatial was a two-storey twenty-four-room house of decorative color schemes, period furniture groupings, drapery, and art taken from the store's departments (fig. 75).

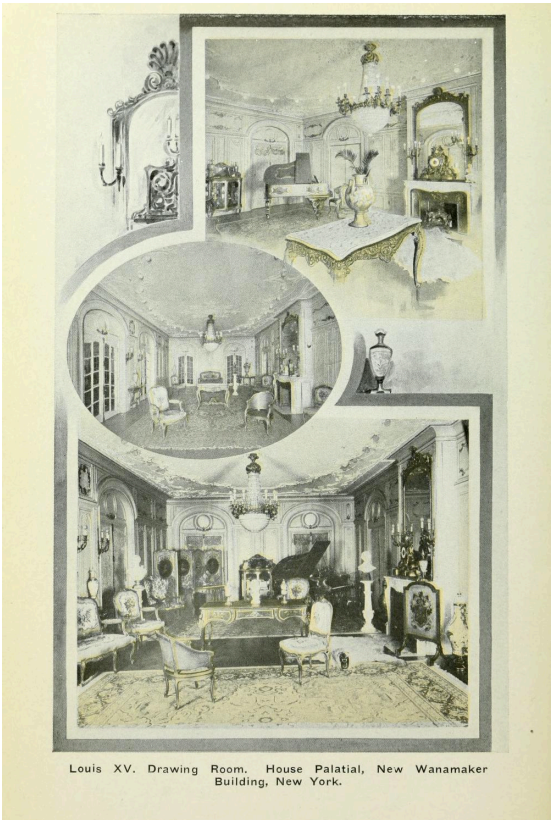


Figure 75. Louis XV Drawing Room, House Palatial, New Wanamaker Building, New York in John Wanamaker, Joseph H. Appel, and Leigh Mitchell Hodges, *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores* (Philadelphia, John Wanamaker, 1911), 283.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Boston University.

This Louis Quinze drawing room set a tone of elegance and was emblematic of "the home of a family of taste and wealth," and as the *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores* advertised

[1] Wanamaker, *What to See in New York,* 23.

"the best of its type that can be seen in Fifth Avenue, or Hyde Park, London."[2] Positioning themselves as an arbiter of good taste, Wanamaker's built a complete branded home as a memorable and impressive setting for the presentation of furniture and decorations. This sense of place enhanced the product identity meanwhile educating the visitor on how to assemble similar groupings in their own home or the homes of clients. While the execution of the room settings represented the creative expression of the store's interior decorators, this period room style presentation also had the practical benefit of educating and immersing the visitor in complete and purchasable interiors of the latest styles. Therefore creativity was balanced by rationality and a sense of the theatrical was tempered by thematic organization and an educational approach.

The environment of the House Palatial was both consumed directly and served as context for further consumption.[3] The model home operated by way of an immersive technique in which the visitor was taken through a series of themed spaces that bore little relationship to the urban exterior. The process of this journey was commodified in the form of a fictional narrative, *Betty Comes to Town: A Letter Home*, based on the "author" Elizabeth Fordham's visit to the House Palatial, published by Wanamaker's in 1909.[4] Such fictional illustrated narratives (fig. 26) were a trope of department store advertising, produced often at the time of a new building or new exhibit in order to entice the reader to visit the store in person.

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[2] Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges, *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores*, 296.

[3] Lisa Penaloza, "Just Doing It: A Visual Ethnographic Study of Spectacular Consumption Behavior at Nike Town," *Consumption, Markets, and Culture* 2 (1998): 387.

[4] *Betty Comes to Town: A Letter Home* (New York: Robert L. Stillson Company, 1909), n.p.

According to this Wanamaker's story, Betty visited her college friend Helen in Tuxedo Park, New York, and together the two of them went shopping through Wanamaker's around Christmastime. Betty narrates, "…can you imagine, for a moment, a store that has a house built into its galleries, of solid masonry, as a permanent educational feature – not a mere matter of furnished rooms – a really, truly, palatial house of twenty-two rooms, hallways and corridors, and a magnificent stair-case?"[5] Betty draws attention to the appeal of the House of Palatial's monumental size and seeming realism.

The House Palatial contained "A library, music-room, bed-rooms, play-room, nursery, dining-room, rooms for college girls and boys, bridal-chamber, guest-rooms, parlors, living-rooms, kitchen, bath-room and Italian garden" which were all "shown completely furnished in every detail."[6] In total it was a private home built into the store with its own halls and staircases, and a summer garden. Each room offered an entirely different interior experience, therefore mirroring the fragmented and multiplicitous nature of the department store itself. Wanamaker's promoted that the display staff presided over "every room in the house obviously different in character, although all help make up a harmonious whole."[7] For instance, a "Kate Greenaway night nursery, all in white and pink, with a broad frieze of rosy checked children at play," referenced imagery by the popular children's book author and illustrator and was shown in stark contrast to the Louis XV drawing room. (fig. 75)[8]

As historian Stefan Muthesius has observed, "To create rooms of a special character for the ordinary dwelling was one of the major new preoccupations of 19th-century design,"

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[5] *Betty Comes to Town,* n.p.

[6] Wanamaker, *What to See in New York*, 32.

[7] Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges*, Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores,* 295.

[8] "'The House Palatial' in Wanamaker's Store," *Meriden Morning Record*, October 24, 1908, 10.

and in fact this preoccupation dates even further back in the history of interiors to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[9] This presentation style of an interior of interiors was embodied by the House Palatial and also extended out to the rest of the department stores' displays of home furnishings and decorations. A series of interiors all distinct in their style, time period, and geographical orientation created a diachronic experience for the visitor. For instance the House Palatial contained a Jacobean Dining Room, Voysey Sitting Room, and a Sheraton Morning Room and from there the visitor could explore Wanamaker's Louis XV dress salon, "Little French Store" of imported lingerie, and a Moorish Room in the Upholstery department. The department store was a fractured experience in which consumers travelled via commodities and were continually present in different manifestations of time and place, foreign and familiar, inside and outside, and historical and contemporary.

The evocation of the period room within the House Palatial was communicated not only through style, but also by aiming at historical replication. For instance, the public could visit "an artistic Morris room from Kelmscott," a library with a "carved stone chimney and "carved oaken wainscot" that one paper reported "is a remarkable facsimile of what one sees in the old English manor houses."[10] Here Wanamaker's was not only selling an array of global commodities but also offering a chance to virtually travel to the commodities' place of origin. This recreation of historical settings in the form of "facsimiles" also calls attention to the department store's negotiations between authenticity and fantasy and impermanence and permanence. While the House Palatial was made to appear permanent and its believable "real" qualities were notable, the structure was nonetheless a display scheme that centered on

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[9] Stefan Muthesius, *The Poetic Home: Designing the 19th-century Domestic Interior* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009), 201.

[10] "'The House Palatial' in Wanamaker's Store," 10.

virtuality whose lifespan lasted about a decade. These contradictory dialectics were at the core of the modern interior and its use as a framework for selling in the department store.

A theatrical approach to the presentation was invoked in order to give the house a lived-in sense of legitimacy. In 1908, one Connecticut journalist reported:

> As you enter the foyer hall you will find it hard to dispel the illusion that you are intruding for at the end of this hall the dining room can be seen with the maids in attendance. The table is set for dinner, lamps are lighted in various rooms and the whole atmosphere is that of a house that is lived in. It is difficult to believe that the furnishings and things, even to the books lying open on the library table, are new and have been 'assembled' from the stocks of the various galleries.[11]

The House Palatial exhibited the domestic interior's potential as a framework for sales, while also turning the sales floor into a domestic interior itself through which Wanamaker's instructed by example. This educational goal was clear to one reporter who wrote that "In the owner's suite on the second floor the choice of Sheraton furnishing was made probably because it is the most difficult known style to assemble."[12] The House Palatial particularly targeted the consumer as interior designer. One pamphlet explained that the rooms representing various periods were laid out "to enable architects and home-makers to study and select proper furniture and house adornments, and to enable them to individualize their homes from the mere commercial furnishing way."[13]

Attendance numbers corroborated the House Palatial's novel attraction and justified its incredible expense of over a quarter of a million dollars, artwork and furniture included. The papers proclaimed that no event in the mercantile world in recent years has attracted

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges, *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores*, 295.

more widespread attention than the opening of the House Palatial and its impressive galleries of furnishing and decoration. More than 70,000 visitors attended on opening day.[14] But even the seemingly permanent House Palatial was prey to the department store's unceasing cycle of change. By 1912, the House Palatial had been completely redecorated, and in 1920 Rodman Wanamaker tore down the miniature building to make way for more elevators and what he deemed to be more efficient display space.[15] The furniture and interior decoration was renamed Belmaison and dedicated to a single floor.[16] The void of the atrium so celebrated in the grand stores of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had fallen out of favor by 1920 in exchange for floor-through construction that maximized sales floor space.

The department store organized and presented merchandise by type and also increasingly in cross-categorical groupings that suggested lifestyle usage. The use of the interior as a display scheme amplified the possibilities for fresh presentations of different types and media of objects shown together. Historian Roland Marchand has identified the "mystique" of the ensemble as evidence of a "mature consumption ethic" that took hold around the mid-1920s and this chapter will highlight the department store's role in cultivating the selling power of the ensemble earlier than the mid-1920s. [17] The House Palatial, as a large-scale model home and grand scale ensemble, was unique in retail schemes thus far. However the building of the House Palatial as an ideal environment for living was part of a trend of the constructed interior that began in the early twentieth century with the Daily Mail

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 81.

[16] Whitaker, *Service and Style*, 313.

[17] Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 132.

Ideal Home exhibitions in Britain (first in 1908) and peaked later in America in the 1930s in World's Fairs such as The Town of Tomorrow at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

With The House Palatial, Wanamaker's established their authoritative role in the production of taste and in displaying and communicating that taste. New York's *Evening Telegram* reported, "Instead of writing reams of preachments about how to furnish and how not to furnish, the Wanamaker Store has given the House Palatial as evidence of its furniture beliefs."[18] An advancement from the two dimensional visualization of themed and historicized interiors on the pages of pamphlets and merchandise catalogues, The House Palatial afforded the visitor a chance to immerse themselves in an interior and imagine it as their own.[19] As Penny Sparke has described, "The evocatively designed interior became, therefore, both a means (of selling) and an end (the location for the consumed goods) in this context."[20] The believability of the setting could lend a sense of reality while the consumers' imaginary mapping of that interior to fit within their own lifestyle expanded the shopping experience into a space of fantasy.

This chapter will begin with tracing the increasing responsibilities of the window dresser as his duties expanded beyond the window to the interior. A discussion of the balance between rationality and theatricality in the decoration program of the retail interior will follow. Similar to window display, interior schemes earned an impressive reputation due to their artistic expression but were also under pressure to ensure profitability associated with and regulated by the consumer calendar. Planned to coincide with the succession of holidays, building improvements, and current events, interior decorations were an extension of the

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[18] "Is Wanamaker's Different and Why?", 5.

[19] Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges*, Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores,* 295.

[20] Sparke, *The Modern Interior*, 55–56.

window displays that exhibited professional creativity, communicated through constant change, and reflected contemporary life. Then discussion will move on to explore and analyze themed and historical interiors that offered virtual travel via commodities and resulted in a fragmented and various shopping experience that marked the department store as modern. Lastly discussion will point to the links between the worlds of department store display and interior decoration as professional paths in terms of training, technique, and visual philosophy converged.

From Show Window to Show Room: The Responsibilities of the Window Dresser Expand

Upon visiting Whiteley's in 1881 one reporter observed that "Goods were almost entirely fresh in style since our last visit; the leading character of the energetic management being to secure the very 'last thing out.'"[21] The second chapter presented how the show window changed frequently to hold the interest of passersby, showcase new merchandise, and attract new customers. Under similar pressures, department store interiors continually refreshed their merchandise and design schemes, presenting the department store as a "permanent ever-changing exhibition" whose profitability grew from an emphasis on staging imaginative, practical, and changeable contexts for goods. [22]

Interior decoration aimed to uphold the high standards of artistic expression that the department store show window communicated from the sidewalk. As such, in many stores the window dressers were often dually responsible for the windows and the interior displays.

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[21] *Cabinet Maker* October 1, 1881 quoted in Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 41.

[22] Marshall Field & Co., *The Store of Service*, 4.

Arthur Fraser, famed display manager at Marshall Field's, gave an address at the meeting of the International Association of Displaymen in the summer of 1920 that reflected on the "Evolution of the Display Man": "There was a time, when I first started to do window trimming, that we called window trimming what I am talking about just now, – window trimming. I want to forget that we are trimming windows**.** I want to think that we are all decorators, to elevate ourselves to the point where we adorn the body and we adorn the home with beautiful artistic expression of our own temperament."[23]

Fraser positioned the arrangement of the store display as akin to a coordinated approach to design also practiced on the body and in the home; at a practical level, his analogy was fitting as the displayman possessed the skills and knowledge of dressmaking and interior design. Fraser also cited the roles of the nascent interior designer in order to validate and prove the status of the displayman. In line with modern department store strategy, Fraser shunned the banal commercial aspect of the display man's work and instead emphasized display's influence outside of the retail space, and its ability to connect with the public on personal and domestic levels. He also established retail interior decoration's professional engagement with the debate between art and commerce, personally weighing it as more of an "artistic expression" than a commercial pursuit.

Retail strategists suggested that the interior decorations should meet the expectations that the passerby had already formed when passing by the window and impress them further upon stepping inside so that they were compelled to make a purchase. As one American manual warned in 1921, "The store must maintain the atmosphere and appeal of the windows – there must be no depreciation in display arrangement."[24] Small-scale displays, typically

[23] "The I.A.D.M. Convention," *MRSW*, August 1920, 31.

[24] Woodward and Fredericks, *Selling Service with the Goods,* 128.

involving textiles, on top of casework or shelving on the sales floor, borrowed layouts directly from the window and provided visual continuity. Just as in the show window, everyday wares were given dramatic treatment and assembled into commodity pictures. An image of Selfridge's "Linen Section" shows a series of tables set up with stepped arrangements of folded linens; here each tabletop holds the equivalent of a section of window display (fig. 76). These arrangements were even more sophisticated than the window display in their four-sided visibility; consumers could walk around the table and see the arrangement from more than just a frontal perspective. In addition, goods spilled out over corners and metaphorically into the hands of the consumers passing by, inviting their handling of the wares, unlike linens off limits behind the plate glass of a show window.



Illustration 76. Selfridge & Co., Postcard, "Linen Section," ca. 1910.
Source: Grenville Collins Postcard Collection/Mary Evans.

In 1905, one American textbook explained that these "stock arrangement features of store decorating" are related to window-trimming because "the same forms, layouts, and units are

used in both," the differences being only in the size and shape of the spaces to which the stock display had to be adapted. [25] The easy identification of the "forms, layouts, and units" in the show window suggests again a link between prescription and practice, as well as the establishment of a key set of design principles. As the window dresser's oversight extended to the interior he became known by the more all-encompassing title of displayman, as addressed in chapter two, and the name implied responsibility beyond windows. Work on the interior continued to require knowledge of "methods particular to the stock to be exhibited," meaning knowledge of material properties of wares.[26] Parallel display desires and requirements carried over from the show window; the creation of commodity pictures, an informed use of fixtures, and the ability to catch the consumers' attention, all driven by the desire for constant change and visual variation.

Time-Sensitivity and Interior Display

Seasonality was one of the primary motivators of change in the department stores' program of interior merchandising. Large-scale decorative schemes marked time in the consumer calendar by communicating a seasonal or holiday event. These ambitious displays were primarily planned on the ground floor and along the interior of a central atrium, where a view of their effects could be taken in at once. Whereas show window schemes such as the Brooklyn Bridge emphasized the strength of the store's retail program by association with industry, seasonal displays on the interior often emphasized abundance through the beauty and profusion of nature (fig. 77). As *The Show Window* advised in 1898, "Your fall trim

[25] International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration,* vol. 4, sec. 38, 1.

[26] Ibid.

should be filled up, stocky effect..."[27] This particularly "magnificent fall-opening display" was "an object lesson" that "typified a similar bounteousness of the stocks of merchandise." The image's full description reads:

> It was an original harvest-home decoration, indicative of the fullness of the season when plenty reigns supreme. An object lesson, it typified a similar bounteousness of the stocks of merchandise provided in that store for the consumer. The color scheme was a dull yellow. The display staff executed a central arch, decorated with corn and grain and implements of farming, crowned with the figure of Ceres, the goddess of plenty. On the stage below the arch is a 'rural tableau' complete with farmers hauling a load of sheaves of wheat.[28]

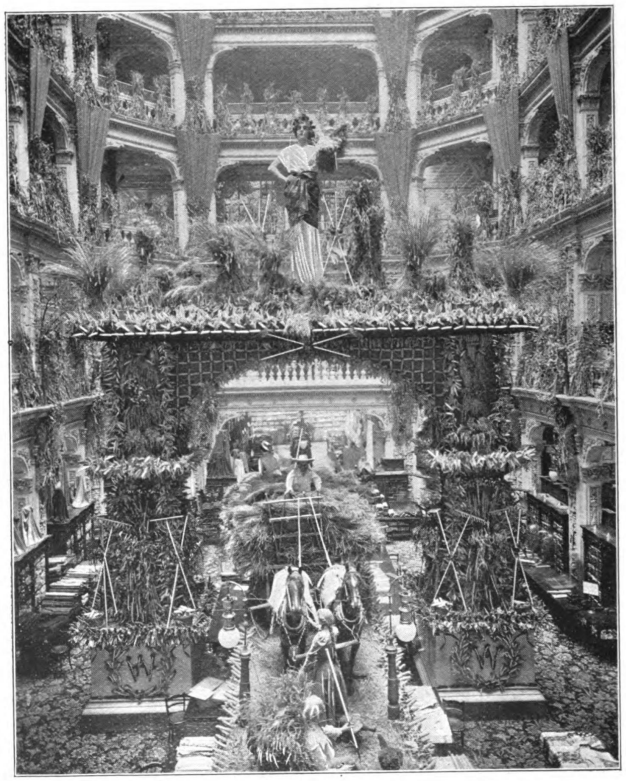


Figure 77. Fall-Opening Display in International Correspondence Schools. *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 4 (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1903), sec. 38, 12. Source: HathiTrust, Digitized by University of Wisconsin Madison.

[27] Will W. Sawyer, "Interior Trimming," *The Show Window*, February 1898, 49.

[28] International Correspondence Schools, *A Textbook on Mercantile Decoration*, vol. 4, sec. 38, 25–26.

Here the "rural tableaux" brings the bounty of nature and the rural farm, cloaked in classical symbolism, to the shopping arena. Such a display signified a clear break with the urban exterior by creating a fantastical departure from both the city streets and the banal commercialism of the store itself, while still ironically referencing it through imagery. The metaphor of prosperity and plentitude between the fall harvest at the farm and the fall offerings of merchandise at the department store was overt enough for the consumer to interpret and the decorative scheme entirely overwhelmed the merchandise. Husks of wheat even outlined the balustrade of the atrium, obscuring the view of the sales floor beyond. Uncovering the logic behind the department store's erasure of commodities in the name of promotional and creative endeavors is a significant line of inquiry. The commercial aspects of the store are here physically and visually blocked out.

As Jerome Koerber, Austrian émigré decorator at Wanamaker's in Philadelphia advised in *MRSW* in 1912, the aim of the interior decorator was to "eliminate the store by weaving through it some central ideas."[29] Although Koerber's biography is not known in detail, the displayman's Austrian heritage signals a likely awareness with the Viennese secession's development of the gesamtkunstwerk, a synthesis of the arts, which similarly promoted an all-encompassing and coordinated interior scheme. This larger-than-life harvest presentation effectively disguised the commercial aspects of the department store in its evocation of a theme that was entirely counter to business and the urban marketplace. This theatrical representation of the work of farming on the department store sales floor also speaks to the store's ability to bring anything and everything under one roof, even agricultural tools and products. Meanwhile, the construction of the arch out of commodities

[29] *MRSW*, April 1912, quoted in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 83.

and crops, farming equipment and hay, recalls the tradition of commodity pictures and the sculptural mode of window display.

Guidebooks and retail trade periodicals encouraged displaymen to look to the swift and recurring changeover of the seasons as inspiration for the pace and themes of their own display work. In 1898 *The Show Window* advised, "The trimmer should always keep in mind the season for which he is trimming, and trim accordingly. Make your spring trim light and airy. Your summer trim should be the lightest of the year, to give your store a cool appearance."[30] Within this seasonal, rational framework, displaymen also exerted their individual creativity. Christmastime was a highlight in the calendar when displaymen were encouraged to design interior decorations to an artistic extreme and to make, as one article in *The Show Window* advised, "your Christmas trim as gay and elaborate as possible."[31] As is the case today, Christmas was a critical profit-making time of the year.

The displays in the window would have signaled the celebratory themes of popular or holiday events first and then once lured to the interior, the consumer would have been immersed in the decoration. Similar to the execution of window display designs, practitioners relied on the props and products of outside contractors, such as Chicago's Botanical Decorating Company who supplied crepe paper poinsettias, festooning chrysanthemums, tissue folding bells and papier-mâché Santa Clause heads. Messmore and Damon, Inc., a New York-based manufacturer of display decorations, drew in a large business particularly around Christmas. In the September 1920 issue of the *MRSW*, the company ran an advertisement, a letter to all "Display Managers" announcing that they are now taking orders to handle Christmas business. The letter boasted that "Last year we supplied over sixty per cent of the

[30] Sawyer, "Interior Trimming," 49.

[31] Ibid.

largest stores of this country with papier-mâché Christmas decorations and they are writing in for our new line."[32] Joseph Damon and George Harold Messmore met while working on the parade for the Hudson Fulton Celebration of 1909 and founded their display business in New York in 1917.[33] They pushed new boundaries in terms of the scale and ambition of theatrical presentation in the retail, exhibition, and parade contexts. An August 1920 advertisement showed off an array of their papier-mâché offerings (fig. 78).



Illustration 78. Messmore & Damon, Inc., Advertisement, "Messmore & Damon's High Class Displays at the Detroit Convention," *MRSW*, August 1920, 11.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Smithsonian Libraries.

[32] Messmore and Damon Inc., Advertisement, "Christmas Decorations," *MRSW*, October 1920, 11.

[33] For more on the company's history see Messmore and Damon, Company Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

Mercantile interior decorators eagerly embraced every holiday as a pretext for themed display, priming the audience leading up to the ultimate spectacle of the Christmas season. For instance, Siegel Cooper showcased an Easter fertility theme in April of 1900 with cages of live canaries suspended from the ceiling and huge stuffed rabbits throughout the store.[34] In 1911, Wanamaker published the *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores*, a lavishly illustrated volume in celebration of fifty years of business. In addition to the traditional images of the store's exterior façade the publication also included "Views of the New Wanamaker Store in New York," which comprised two illustrations of the atrium space dressed alternatively for Lincoln's Birthday and Christmas (fig. 79).

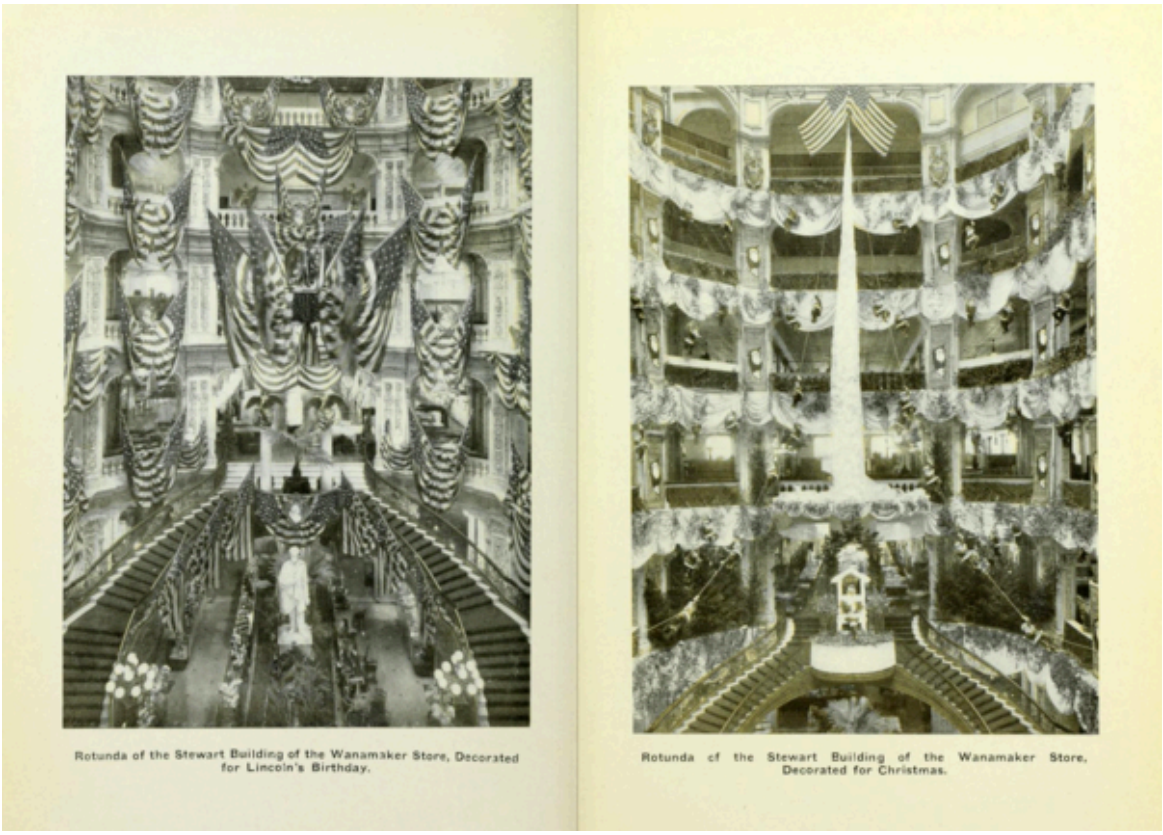


Figure 79. Rotunda of the Stewart Building of the Wanamaker Store, Decorated for Lincoln's Birthday and Christmas in Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges, *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores,* 296–97.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Boston University.

[34] Leach, *Land of Desire,* 83.

These two images depict how well Wanamaker's atrium space lent itself to changeable display and decoration impressive in scale and amplitude. As much as these photos call attention to the decorations they also feature how much space is not being used to sell the goods, visually suggesting why the atrium fell out of favor. [35] In the department store there was an ongoing debate over the correct balance between practical use of interior space and giving over space to display and decoration. These two images also illustrate very well how different display schemes could alter the appearance and experience of the same space in the same building. Display multiplied the variations possible for the consumer experience in one store over time or even one store on a single visit, ensuring the fragmentation that aligned the department store with a key aspect of modernity. To add one more layer of reconfiguration, it is important to note that the captions to these photos are labeled as "the Stewart Building at the Wanamaker Store" referencing the building's historical lineage and suggesting how the architectural shell of the department store can be inherited and reworked over time.

As the large dry goods stores and department stores began to offer annual sales events that coincided with the seasons in the late nineteenth century, the seasonal calendar and the mercantile calendar conflated. This mercantile calendar then became well known to consumers who began to be conditioned to make seasonal purchases at particular moments. [36] Annual sales events not only ushered in a fresh set of merchandise but were also announced with elaborate decorations. The White Sale in January represented the department store's creation of a new buying rhythm for the year in order to clear out stocks and stimulate sales again following the Christmas rush. This White Sale is notable too as a completely invented

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[35] Macy's had no rotunda, "the object being to utilize every square inch of floor space." "Macy & Co.'s New Store," *Dry Goods Economist*, November 15, 1902, 19, 8B Box 10, Macy's Archive.

[36] John Henry Hepp, *The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876-1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 83–84.

pretext to create similar urgency or specialness associated with major holidays such as Christmas. The White Sale had both a practical and a symbolic message. While for the rest of the year the department store was teeming with a diverse mix of wares of various patterns, colors, and forms, the White Sale typically cloaked at least the atrium and the first floor in an array of solely simple white textiles.

The whiteness of the interior decoration would have also suggested a clean slate and aligned the interior with the metaphor of a blank canvas, prime for the next year's series of decorations. Architectural historian Mark Wigley has pointed out how the ubiquity of the white walls in modern architecture "seems to render them strangely invisible."[37] On the contrary, the generous use of whiteness in the department store for the White Sale would have been used to call attention to its unique and annual decoration. This emphasis on whiteness was also in line with a clear visible break of the clutter of previous decades, a visual effect that was championed by contemporary interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe who reimagined the modern home against a backdrop of bright white walls.

At his Philadelphia branch in January of 1878, John Wanamaker may have been the first to stage a White Sale at an American department store.[38] An International Correspondence School Textbook explained the sale's concept in 1905:

> During the white sale, special prices are quoted on sheeting, table cloths, napkins, bureau scarves, handkerchiefs, ladies' muslin underwear, shirt waists, men's shirts, collars, cuffs, etc. Window and counter displays, and the style, setting, and illustration of the advertisements should harmonize with the "white" idea. Because there is no special reason for buying white goods in January, their sale must be forced by price inducements…The displays and the salespeople will effect the proper volume of sales in all the various lines.[39]

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[37] Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), xiv.

[38] Michael J. Lisicky, *Wanamaker's: Meet Me At the Eagle* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2010), 25.

[39] International Correspondence Schools, *Advertisement Display, Mediums, Retail Management, Department-store Management* (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1909), sec. 17, 36.

The store was typically bedecked in white, therefore also appealing to fantasy and turning the store into a winter wonderland, whose dramatic atmosphere, along with price cuts, did much to encourage sales. The concept for the White Sale was inherited from the Bon Marché. Émile Zola's novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*, based on the theatrics of the Bon Marché and other Parisian stores, features a dramatic white sale, "What gave the ladies pause was the stupendous Great White Sale…the galleries led away in a dazzling whiteness, a boreal vista, a whole landscape of snow, extending to infinity in steps hung with ermine like glaciers heaped and shining under the sun…There was nothing but white…a riot of white."[40]

Such impressive presentations attracted and re-attracted customers who came to expect reoccurring exhibitions inside the store. In a 1909 article in *Munsey's Magazine*, the journalist Anne O'Hagan wrote, "There is one special sale for which every department store must provide, and which it must conduct even if it has failed to make suitable provision for it. That is the after holiday 'white sale.' The 'white sale' originated in the Bon Marché in Paris. It was copied in this country [America], and has now become such a feature of the shopping winter that it would be a bold concern which would dare ignore it."[41] In this case The White Sale as a phenomenon that originated with and embodied the shopping culture of the French, became instantly attractive through association. As historian Tag Gronberg has observed, "…'Paris' functioned as the sign and guarantor of the fashionable…it was in this sense that 'Paris' itself became a commodity to be marketed and sold to both a national and international clientele….it was through association with high fashion and luxury that 'Paris'

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[40] Émile Zola and Robin Buss, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (London: Penguin, 2001), 387–89.

[41] Anne O'Hagan, "Behind the Scenes in the Big Stores," *Munsey's Magazine*, January 1909, 537.

aroused desire in the consumer."[42] This example of The White Sale suggests how display concepts travelled and were copied back and forth across the Atlantic.

While the consumer calendar of holidays most forcefully drove the display calendar, events of contemporary life as well as notable milestones for the stores themselves offered a whole other set of possibilities for celebratory display that were more grounded in the reality of the urban experience. In this case authentic events impinged upon the fantasy world of the department store. A weekly log of figures from the London department store D.H. Evans survives in the House of Fraser Archive. Dating to years at the turn of the twentieth century, the log is marked in the margins with notes on current events, holidays, and store milestones, implying that these occasions affected profits. Many of these events probably included special decorations to encourage sales and signal change. This log can therefore lend an understanding of the formation of a calendar specific to the retailing business and those factors that would have affected not only the movement of merchandise but the display and decoration of the space in which they were sold. Some examples of notations include: the week of April 2nd, 1898 as Boat Race Week (Oxford versus Cambridge, presumably); the week of October 15th, 1898 as when the new shopfronts were completed; the week of October 29th, 1898 as the inauguration sale after rebuilding; the week of June 17th, 1899 as Ascot Week; the week of October 7th, 1899 marked the first autumn show of the year; the week of June 2nd, 1900 was Derby week; and the week of January 26th, 1901 was annotated with the death of Queen Victoria.[43] This log is a compelling record of how the department store coordinated with the events of contemporary life. The frequency and number of the events

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[42] Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity*, 156.

[43] Private Book of Weekly Figures, FRAS 374/1, Records of D.H. Evans & Co., Ltd., House of Fraser Archive, University of Glasgow.

listed indicates how display changed as often as week to week, offering a continuously various shopping experience for the consumers.

The Marshall Field's opening in 1907 under the theme of "The Feast of All Seasons" marked an important milestone in the history of the store with a grand display scheme that yielded scores of positive press coverage; in spring of 1908 the *Dry Goods Review* ran an illustrated article whose title "A Great Decoration Event" promised a focus on display (fig. 80).



DRY GOODS REVIEW 51

A Great Decoration Event

On Temporary Decorations for Marshall Field Store Re-opening $100,000 was Spent:—Greatest Event of its Kind in History—Decorative Art of Different Ages—Details of the Scheme

An outlay of $100,000 for temporary decorations seems an immense sum of money to be expended for purposes, the direct benefit to be derived from which must necessarily be limited. This is the amount, however, which was spent on the interior decoration of the Marshall Field store, Chicago, on the occasion of its re-opening. It was the greatest event of its kind in the history of merchandising in the world, and not the least interesting of its features were the magnificent interior and window displays in the execution of which more money was spent than for any similar event in history.

The Decorations' Importance.

There is little doubt that the success of the opening of this, the greatest dry goods store in the world, was contributed to very largely by the work of the decorating and window-trimming staff, the members of which were relied upon to make the store so-attractive that those visiting it would carry away with them nothing but the most favorable impressions; impressions which would result in their continued visitation on occasions when they would be there as purchasers, instead of spectators.

Educative Value.

To those who are interested in the work of making their stores attractive through the use of decorations, possibly more than to any others, this event would appeal, because it was literally a feast of decorations.

Interior Decorations for Marshall Field & Co.'s formal opening showing the "Feast of the Seasons" in the rotunda and the perspective of the main aisle.

With the object of giving readers of The Review some information concerning this event, which they may be able to make some use of in their own stores, a series of illustrations of some of the striking features of the decorations has been secured.

It is true that in none of the Canadian stores could the scheme outlined here be carried out in its entirety, but the illustrations present ideas which may, with modifications, doubtless, be adopted by many Review readers.

Figure 80. "A Great Decoration Event," *Dry Goods Review*, Spring 1908, 51.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by University of Toronto.

The opening was not only significant for the store, but it also made an indelible impression on its visitors, showcased the immense talents of the store's display staff, and proudly represented the superiority of Chicago as a fashionable retail center. Marshall Field's tore down their original structure at State and Washington Streets (built 1878–79) and replaced it with a modern building, neo-classical in style with a five-story light court crowned with Tiffany's glass mosaic dome. When this building opened in September of 1907, classically inspired decorations overwhelmed the visitors and dominated the press reports on the store's expansion. This "Great Decoration Event," as the *Dry Goods Review* reported, had "magnificent interior and window displays" on which "more money was spent than for any similar event in history."[44]

While on special occasions other stores may have aimed to eliminate their commercial character with decorations, such as the example of the Wanamaker's atrium at Lincoln's Birthday and Christmas, Marshall Field's entirely erased commodities from its grand opening in 1907. *The Drygoodsman and General Merchant* reported, "It is worth noting that for the entire opening period there were absolutely no specific offerings of merchandise."[45] With even less than normal attention on the wares for sale, this event was seminal in the history of the display profession. Many merchants even closed up shop to allow their employees to visit Marshall Field's on opening day to learn and be inspired about the potential of display.[46] One journalist called the opening "the most significant and the most instructive event in the

[44] "A Great Decoration Event," *Dry Goods Review*, Spring 1908, 51.

[45] "Formal Opening of a Great Store," *Drygoodsman and General Merchant*, 1907, 15, 03052 (29), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

[46] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 31.

history of retailing in this or any other country in the world."[47] Displaymen flocked to Marshall Field's to witness and analyze their colleagues' latest creative achievements. Mayor of Chicago, Carter Harrison, was so impressed with the success of the event that he invited the store to extend the opening show by a week.[48]

The innovation of this event lay not only in the remarkable efforts of the displaymen and the expense of the decorations but also in the store's method and manner of the promotion of the displays. In addition to illustrated advertisements and postcards, the store also produced an engraved invitation to the event as well as a booklet *An Interpretation of the Feast of the Seasons* that decoded and elaborated on the meaning of the symbols and imagery chosen for the decorations. This breakdown of the individual elements of the display scheme communicated the department store's visual composition as an assemblage. In addition, the booklet's analysis of these elements of the decoration design, ranging from the statuary to the window displays, suggests the store's encouragement of close consumer engagement with the schemes that their displaymen had devised.

An Interpretation of the Feast of the Seasons pictured on its cover one of the central groupings in the store's atrium (figs. 80 and 81). "Mercury, the god of Commerce is surrounded by a group of figures representing the Four Seasons, bringing their tribute of fruits, flowers, and foliage appropriate to each."[49] The familiar themes of classicism and plentitude are recurrent here. With this grouping the displaymen have literally made art out of commerce, choosing to use Mercury as the centerpiece for their sculptural arrangement. The

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[47] "Formal Opening of a Great Store," 15, Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

[48] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 31.

[49] Marshall Field & Co., *An Interpretation of the Feast of the Seasons*, n.p, 03052 (28), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

booklet then enumerated a checklist of many of the stock elements of classical symbolism that appeared in the store and pictured a numbered guide to their themed windows.



Figure 81. Cover, Marshall Field & Co., *An Interpretation of the Feast of the Seasons*, 1907, 03052 (28), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company. Source: Chicago History Museum, ICHi-79030.

Some of the classical compositions that were on view around the two rotundas (one on the main aisle near Washington Street and one on the main aisle near Randolph Street) included: "The Four Seasons…gathered about a large vase bearing the offerings of the season," altars "decorated with the ram's head and festoon, an ancient symbol of sacrifice and devotion," and the twelve months "represented by twelve Cupids, bearing festoons

appropriate to the time of year."[50] The *Drygoodsman and General Merchant* reported, "all the allegorical figures were executed in staff [executed by existing display staff members], and had the appearance of permanent sculpture."[51] This journalist called attention to the tension between permanence and impermanence that is at the core of this most elaborate display scheme; while these allegorical figures were intended for short-term display, an impression of solidity would equate them with authenticity, a sense of the real, and the endurance symbolized also by the classical emblems. This sense of permanence was probably achieved through the use of the popular material of papier-mâché, which the displayman modeled while taking on the role of a classical sculptor.

This Marshall Field's scheme was overseen by a Belgian sculptor Mr. Van Derbergen who had a hand in many of the decorations of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and the 1904 St. Louis Exposition.[52] This mention of a displayman by name is extremely rare and suggests the unique nature of this event. It is also important to recognize that the press and the store's promotional material clearly noted the fact that these decorations were "executed in staff" within the store, therefore emphasizing the artistic abilities and skills that Marshall Field's had at its permanent disposal for ephemeral decoration.[53] Therefore this opening was significant in its showcasing of the architecture of the store itself and also for its promotion of the profession of the displayman and his ability to beautifully and thoughtfully transform the retail interior.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] "Formal Opening of a Great Store," 15, Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

[52] Ibid., 16.

[53] Marshall Field & Co., *An Interpretation of the Feast of the Seasons*, n.p., Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

An Interpretation of the Feast of the Seasons described the quality of the display work, "Though comparable to an exquisite stage setting, or to some of the great mural paintings, they [the decorations] are nevertheless unique in their appropriate representation of the spirit of the occasion, and may justly, we believe, be considered a notable artistic achievement."[54] The author points to display practice's alignment with other arenas of exhibitionary culture while also stressing how the decorations' temporary nature makes them entirely specific to the store itself. This text calls attention to the power of the display moment as it relates particularly to the time and place of its making. Operating within the regulations of the holiday calendar and built within the solid architectural parameters of the store itself, the practice of display fostered a new temporary, distinctive, and regenerative expression for the aesthetics of commerce. In the case of openings and holidays, the central atrium was most often the locus of celebratory decorations that offered an immersive themed experience for a short period of time. However individual departments on the upper tiers, particularly those selling imported goods, offered enticing possibilities of virtual travel via commodities and decoration on a daily basis.

Virtual Travel and "Place-Making" Through Display

While displays tied to holidays and store events celebrated the present and often engaged with events of contemporary life in their home cities, display also had the power to offer virtual travel to a time or a place faraway. This section will identify virtual travel as a particular merchandising strategy and through it forge new links between the department store, world's fairs, the museum and the theatre.

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[54] Ibid.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 offered a presentation of compartmentalized interiors, defined by geographic region, which was a strategy that the department store adopted for the display of its expanding range of global commodities. The decorations of the Courts of the Crystal Palace were in historical styles correspondent to the nationality of the work displayed within them.[55] For instance, Owen Jones designed an imposing series of decorated columns in the Egyptian manner for the Egyptian Court at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham. Historian Christopher Whitehead has pointed out how this particular system of presentation had practical benefits as well as artistic ones; the simulation of the context of origin furnished "greater possibilities of object comprehension" and "formed at the same time a means of physical orientation and demarcation between different sections of the exhibition…"[56] So too at the department store did specific schemes of decoration distinguish particular departments, a visual effect aided also by the use of specialized shopfittings. A few decades later at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, visitors experienced culturally specific settings in the exhibition's marketplace. Situated behind the main exhibition building, Turkish and Japanese bazaars took the form of freestanding pavilions in which the public could shop for exotic wares in an exotic market setting. Here the market setting that mimicked the objects point of origin lent the wares an authenticity and at the same time offered the public the opportunity to experience the simulation of a shopping trip in an exotic location.

The setting virtually transported the visitors elsewhere and signaled a disengagement with the surrounding city and the more immediate surroundings of the exposition. A Turkish bazaar and café "had a domed ceiling painted in the Turkish colors, and ornamented with

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[55] Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 40.

[56] Ibid., 41.

Turkish designs" while "On the east side was a dark walnut carved counter on which were ranged glass dishes filled with all kinds of oriental delicacies…Dispersed through the room, at the sides, were small bazaars where were sold rich costumes, carpets, pipes, swords, daggers, hilts, and many other novel ornaments."[57] Department stores staged very similar simulations of the exotic marketplace. Leon Mandel claimed in a company history that Mandel Brothers (established 1865) was the "First to build special foreign shops where one might wander as if in a foreign city." [58] A Marshall Field's postcard, printed in about 1910, features "A Portion of the Rug Department" and shows a colorful bazaar of rugs hanging down from the ceiling and mounds and drapes of textiles ready for consumer perusal (fig. 82). This department's presentation dually connected the rugs to their country of origin and set them apart as exotic due to their special display treatment.



Figure 82. V.O. Hammon Publishing Company, Postcard, "A Portion of the Rug Department, Marshall Field & Co., Retail, Chicago," ca. 1910.
Source: Illinois Digital Archives.

[57] J.S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of This Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centennary [sic] of American Independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1876), 544–45.

[58] Leon Mandel, "Seventy-five Years Young; A Store's Romance," *Chicago Commerce*, March 22 1930, Box 1, folder 1, Mandel Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

Similar to the reconstructed Crystal Palace at Sydenham, a permanent exhibition to commemorate the 1876 fair opened in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park in May of 1877 and offered many imported souvenirs available for purchase as well as an exhibition of objects donated by foreign governments. Historian Bruno Giberti offers,

> This arrangement…was supposed to be a boon for those unable to travel, while providing pleasant memories for the Grand Tour… Like all souvenirs, these mementos were intended to awaken the memory, to bridge the interval between past and present. In the displays of furniture, malachite, glassware, mosaics, and jewelry, travel not only was verified by consumption, as tourists do with souvenirs, but also was, in some sense, obviated by it. Thus, travel became a form of consumption – of objects and experiences. Inversely, consumption became a form of travel in which one experienced the world through its objects.[59]

Consumption became a form of travel in the department store as the objects represented the richness of the global marketplace and themed interiors provided reference to the objects' place of origin. In this way, department stores aimed to close the gap between objects' places of production and consumption.

In addition to exuding a sense of exoticism, foreign objects, as mentioned earlier in regards to the department stores' handkerchief production abroad, also symbolized the strength of global trade. This message also extended to the space of the late nineteenth-century museum where the lines between art and commerce were becoming increasingly blurred by the late nineteenth century. The Philadelphia Commercial Museum, founded in 1893 with objects from the World's Columbian Exposition, operated with a mission to facilitate American economic expansion overseas. In this institution, historian Stephen Conn has explained, "objects function metonymically" and "for the world's business."[60] The

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[59] Giberti, *Designing the Centennial*, 187.

[60] Stephen Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 117.

department store offered objects for purchase with similar symbolism and the business and culture of the department store was one that freely expanded and strengthened through global exchange (fig. 6). On view in the theatrical realm of the store sales floor however, imported commodities were presented free from the burden of colonial responsibilities.[61]

The creation of spaces of virtual reality was a technique that the department store borrowed in part from the realm of the museum. From the mid-nineteenth century, museums aimed for contextual display that eventually matured by the turn of the twentieth century into the acquisition of entire historical interiors.[62] In its interior of interiors, the department store's repeated use of contextual display fostered a sense of believability, another objective at work in the museum prior to its use in the department store. In an essay in the *Art Journal* of 1853, G.F. Waagen advised:

> It is, therefore, the duty of those entrusted with the arrangement of Museums, to lessen as much as possible the contrast which must necessarily exist between works of Art in their original site, and in their position in a museum…to realize in some degree the impression produced by a temple, a church, a palace, or a cabinet, for which those works were originally intended, and where a certain general hegemony reigned.[63]

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[61] Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life,* 117.

[62] The South Kensington Museum acquired its first period room, the Serilly Cabinet of 1778 (unfurnished) in 1869. In New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired its first room, the Bosco Reale Room of 40-30 BC, in 1903. Following the Hudson Fulton exhibition in 1909, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired the Hewlett House paneling in 1910, the first in a sequence that resulted in the opening of the new American Wing in 1924. Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior: The British Collector at Home, 1750-1850* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1989), 294–96; Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant, *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior Since the Renaissance* (London: V & A Publications, 2006), 11; John Harris, *Moving Rooms: The Trade in Architectural Salvages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007), 5; Kristina Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Design and Decorating During the Great Depression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, in association with the Yale University Art Gallery, 2004), 17.

[63] G.F. Waagen, *Art Journal*, 1853 quoted in Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum,* 39.

Here Waagen calls attention to the importance of a historically sympathetic setting in the presentation of objects in order to create an accurate atmosphere for their interpretation and viewing. While the museum's aim was more academic than the commercial goals of the department store, their strivings for visual unity and an authentic setting were similar.

On the upper tiers of Marshall Field's visitors experienced a fragmented presentation of departments, some of which were distinguished by their contextual displays. In 1902, the *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* included a description of the lingerie department in the new Marshall Field's store. The article shared, "On the third floor south room the special feature is the lingerie section, silk skirts, corsets and infants' wear. A special French room for displaying the hand made garments is designed after the high grade specialty shops in Paris."[64] A 1913 brochure for the store showed the lingerie section that still fit such a description (fig. 83). This pamphlet sets up a striking visual comparison between the "French Lingerie," presented against a painted backdrop of open windows and flowers, and shown on mannequins amidst elegant French style furniture, from the "Domestic Lingerie" presented in uniform piles on heavy and utilitarian wooden casework. The context for the goods rather than specific or clear views of the merchandise was emphasized in these images. Such a comparison provided readers of the pamphlet with a preview while encouraging them to scrutinize interior decoration for signals of the quality and type of the stock that it surrounded.

[64]*Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 11, 1902, 17, 03052 (24), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

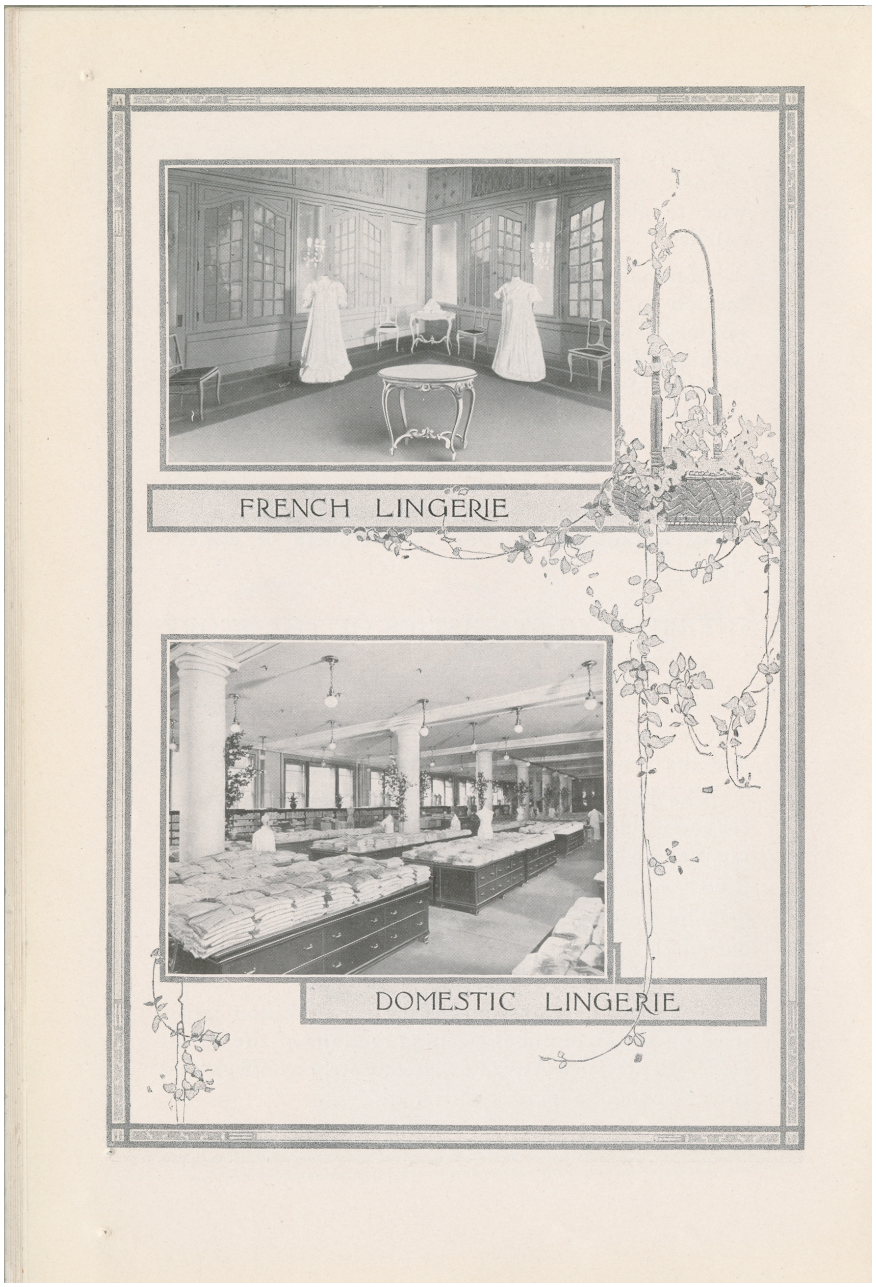


Figure 83. French Lingerie and Domestic Lingerie Departments, *Marshall Field and Company* (Chicago: Marshall Field and Company, 1913), n.p., 16023 (2), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.
Source: Chicago History Museum, IChi-79031.

Wanamaker's was particularly proud of their stock of French fashions and the environment in which the clothing was sold also differentiated these foreign wares from the rest of the ladies' dress department. By evoking the glamour of French dressmaking salons,

Wanamaker's enhanced the selling environment of the best ladies wares on offer. The store's promotional material purported, "The likeness, more than that, the very atmosphere of the exclusive dressmakers' atelier has been captured by the gray and pink salons of L'Art de la Couture…It is Paris dress making at moderate cost, without the trouble of voyaging to Paris."[65] In this case Wanamaker's offers French fashions and the French shopping experience claiming that, in Giberti's terms, consumption could obviate travel.

The French ladies wares on offer consisted of those wares which were currently fashionable in Paris, reinforcing the accuracy of the French experience. Wanamaker's claimed that "The fashion exhibits that are held at this store each season are looked forward to by New York women as sounding the authoritative note from Paris. So close is the connection of Wanamaker's (through its permanent Paris staff) with the great artists and designers of Paris, that new things keep coming by every steamer, and students of fashion say that the new things are shown at Wanamaker's almost (if not altogether) simultaneously with the Paris shops."[66] This visual and temporal alignment with Paris endowed the fashions with great appeal while also justifying their high price.

With the French presentation of these French salons, the display and decoration staff has embraced a key aspect to interior design, which historian Louise Weinthal describes as "understanding the dramatic qualities of objects as aspects of place-making."[67] Here the display staff has amplified the French quality of the fashions in order to activate and theme the surroundings. Once fitted out with appropriate furniture and decorations, the salesroom

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[65] "Is Wanamaker's Different and Why?", 5.

[66] Wanamaker, *What To See in New York*, 22–23.

[67] Louise Weinthal, *Toward a New Interior: An Anthology of Interior Design Theory* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 504.

then became a complete environment that evoked the place of the French dressmaker's salon. Weinthal further describes that the "inclusion of furniture and equipment…like props in a theater production, are the means at hand of envisioning and constructing features that bind the body and movement to architecture and to life in public places."[68] In other words, the interior decoration, here made up of merchandise, architectural elements, and furniture, served as an active mediator to visually and mentally immerse the consumer in a virtual reality of a French dressmaking salon and physically connect them with the shopping experience at Wanamaker's.

A salon dedicated to showcasing the work of the French milliner Marcelle Demay was located on the second floor of the Wanamaker's older building and the salon was copied after the salons of the designer by the same name at 11 Rue Royal, Paris (fig. 84). A brochure explained, "The decorations are in soft French gray. Thick, heavy carpet that is harmonious with the surroundings covers the floor. To complete the picture the salesgirls wear gowns of French gray. In the salons are many long mirrors in which gowns and hats may be seen at the best advantage."[69] The hats were purportedly made by French milliners in the atelier immediately adjoining the salons, and all the attendants were French.[70] In this case Wanamaker's engaged in a thorough exercise of place-making through the construction of a millinery department as an exact recreation of a contemporary salon in Paris, complete with staff and décor.

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Wanamaker, *What to See in New York*, 29.

[70] John Wanamaker, *New York City and the Wanamaker Store* (New York: John Wanamaker, 1916), 56.

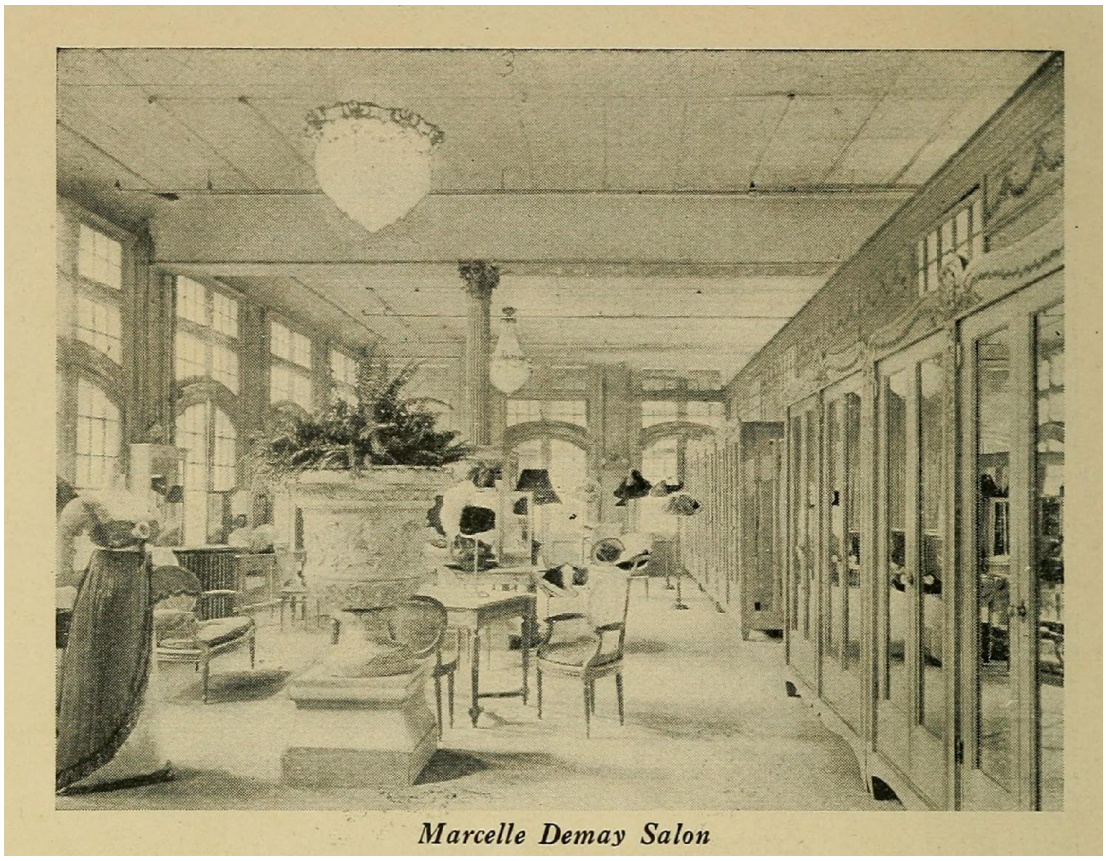


Figure 84. Marcelle Demay Salon in John Wanamaker, *What to See in New York* (New York: John Wanamaker, 1912), 30.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by New York Public Library

While Wanamaker's may have been the first to design French décor for departments of French wares, other New York department stores soon followed suit, suggesting the popularity and success of this place-making. In 1913, Stern's department store opened a new location on 42nd Street and a report in the *New York Times* reveals that the store also embraced an elegant French theme for their display of French wares very similar to that of Wanamaker's. The following description focuses on the gendered angle of Stern's French parlor presentation:

> The French parlors for the display of imported goods are expected to appeal to women shoppers. Inclosed [sic] from the general sales floor by glass grillwork, they present a delicate and most attractive appearance. The woodwork within is a soft French gray, wit [sic] ha [sic] thick carpet of the same pale shade. The chairs are of an attractive French pattern in a darker

> smoke gray and there are innumerable full length French mirrors mounted in gray, with special showcases and tables of artistic design.[71]

While the gridded open layout on the ground floor was in line with the stores' urban surroundings, these French salons on the upper tiers offered a striking disengagement with the city through a theatrical teleportation effect.

In 1913, department stores across New York invited the direct engagement with the Parisian fashion designer Paul Poiret, who embarked on exercises of place-making of his own design in the stores' French salons. Nancy McClelland, interior decorator at Wanamaker's, who will be discussed in more detail below, invited Poiret to "come to America to design a theatre for the fashion shows" and Poiret chose curtains and a backdrop of black velvet with tall narrow screens covered with his vibrant silk textile designs "which could be turned at all angles to make a beautiful background for the fashion models."[72] Along with Gimbel's and Macy's, Wanamaker's installed special Oriental settings inspired by the theatrical production *Le Minaret*, which had recently premiered in Paris, for the Fall 1913 fashion shows that they held in their salons.[73] As art historian Nancy Troy explains, Wanamaker's setup attempted to "reproduce sets from the Paris production of *Le Minaret* to reinforce the authenticity of the Minaret-style dresses presented on the [sic] their stages – and sold in their Women's Gown Salons."[74] These Fall 1913 installations were therefore layered with Parisian influence, from

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[71] "Guests Inspect New Stern Store," 18.

[72] "Au Quatrième, 1913–22," Box 4, Nancy McClelland Archive, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York.

[73] Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 223.

[74] Troy, *Couture Culture*, 223. The fall fashion display that Wanamaker's mounted was entitled "In a Persian Garden" and was presented in the auditorium of their New York store, much like a theatre performance.

the physical presence of Poiret on site at the stores and the importation of his authentic garments, to the staging of a set devised by the designer himself, all inspired by contemporary French theatre.

Beyond just the nod towards foreign exoticism that other stores could offer, Wanamaker created store within store spaces, an offshoot of the interior of interiors concept that directly recreated the foreign experience using architectural settings. These specialty shops offered fantastical departure away from the city of New York to Paris and London. By 1912, on the main floor of the new Wanamaker building stood an accurate reproduction of London's Burlington Arcade. (fig. 85)

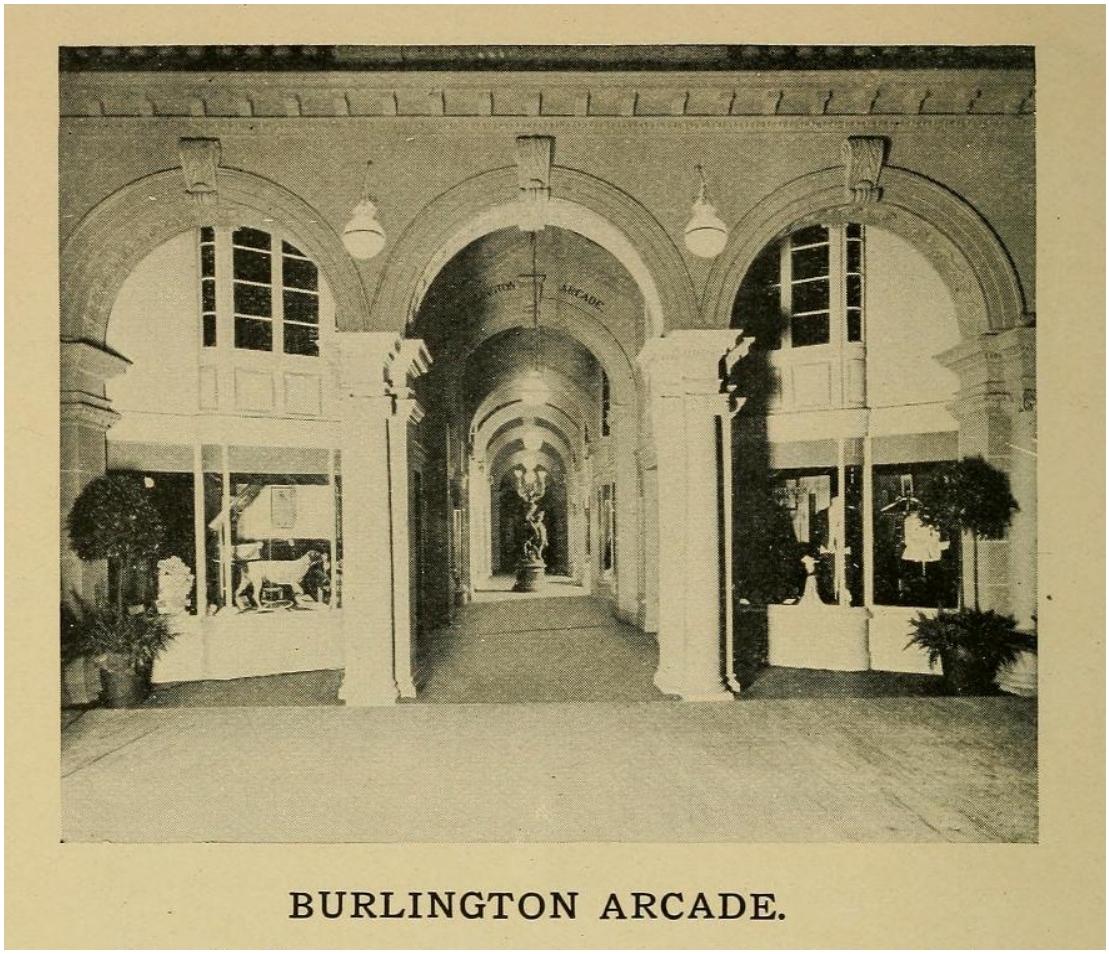


Figure 85. The Burlington Arcade in John Wanamaker, *What to See in New York* (New York: John Wanamaker, 1912), 28.
Source: HathiTrust; Digitized by New York Public Library.

Wanamaker's promoted:

> The fittings of the English shops have been carefully reproduced and the shop windows are dressed in English style. The goods sold in the little shops are selected by commissioners who make a careful study of the fashions and habits of the Englishman, as well as of the demands and requirements of the American man. There is now installed in the Arcade a tailoring shop for men, where a corps of expert tailors produce clothes equaling if not excelling, the best procurable elsewhere in New York.[75]

The Burlington Arcade setting reinforced the genuinely English quality of the goods, further stressed in the department store's campaign advertising the launch of this display concept. One advertisement in *The Evening Post* from September of 1912 read, "English Motor Apparel in the Burlington Arcade Shops: We emphasize the 'English,' because somehow no other motoring clothes have quite the look of these that come from London."[76] Meanwhile a promotion in the *New York Tribune* promised, "Garments as thoroughly English as the banks of the Thames. Not to be confused with the imitation with which American manufacturers have flooded the land."[77] In the case of the Burlington Arcade, Wanamaker's was also capitalizing on the cultural authority of London for menswear, meanwhile the lingerie salons aligned themselves with Paris as the cultural authority for women's wear. Wanamaker's attention to detail in the Arcade with the "fittings of the English shops" and the shop windows "dressed in the English style" implied that consumers would have been attuned to these differences in fixtures and display strategy. As well as a theatrical setting for the selling of English goods, the complete recreation of this Burlington Arcade was a physical

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[75] Wanamaker, *What To See in New York*, 28.

[76] John Wanamaker, Advertisement, "The True Man is a 'Gentleman," *The Evening Post: New York*, September 20, 1912, n.p.

[77] John Wanamaker, Advertisement, *New York Tribune,* January 26, 1912, 4.

manifestation of a cross-Atlantic conversation around the profession of visual merchandising.

In addition to providing an impressive stage set for buying and browsing and reinforcing the Englishness of the English wares, the Burlington Arcade was built in response to meet a specific consumer need. William Rowland Hotchkin, an employee at Wanamaker's in New York at the time of the structure's construction, recalled that the concept grew out of a meeting in which Wanamaker's employees were discussing "changed conditions in the trade."[78] In his book *Making More Money in Storekeeping*, an advice manual based on his experiences at Wanamaker's and Gimbel's in New York, Hotchkin shared that "some members of the conference were astounded when they learned that more than three hundred thousand automobiles were owned by people living in the State of New York."[79] In direct response to that discussion, the men's clothing buyer was sent to London to buy a fifty thousand dollar stock of automobile garments in "the accepted styles of Europe."[80] Thus this Burlington Arcade installation also shows how a department store was able to respond quickly to market demand with impressive merchandise and display strategy. Hotchkin wrote that "the movement was an enormous success" and that "thousands were glad to be shown what was *the correct thing in motoring apparel*."[81] The presentation of motoring apparel, a decidedly modern need, in the historical setting of London's Burlington Arcade, built in 1819, calls attention the fractured histories and geographies that the department store presented to its consumers.

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[78] William Rowland Hotchkin, *Making More Money in Storekeeping* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1917), 129.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 130.

Having experienced the French salons and the Burlington Arcade, one Wanamaker's customer, a woman who had known perhaps "twenty years of Europe" and a "cycle of Cathay," stood in the rotunda of Wanamaker's and was quoted in the press as saying, "This place is just like a mirror – it reflects every part of the world," and then she added "I could spend days here without going tired."[82] This customer's assessment of her shopping experience shows how the department stores' display strategy of geographical variability energized and captivated consumers. The 1910 newspaper article went on to boast, "Much traveled folk who love their Paris and London and Berlin, their Amsterdam, Hong Kong and Canton, are always impressed by the comprehensive atmosphere of this store, when they come to Wanamaker's straight from the steamer. They tell us it reflects the exclusiveness of the little Rue de la Paix or Bond Street shop, but reflects them COLLECTIVELY."[83] By stressing the department store's variety of global shopping moments and their accessibility under one roof, this journalist drew attention to the combination of the traits of fragmentation and assemblage at the core of the modern department store experience.

The Model Room as Display Device: Reproduction and Fragmentation

The model room, whether in the show window or presented on the store interior, facilitated the presentation of a succession of styles of interior decoration simultaneously. As a display device it embraced every central tenant of the department store's modernity: rationalization, speed, theatricality, variation, and fragmentation. By the time the concept of the model room reached the department store the public would have been familiar with the setup from a

[82] "Is Wanamaker's Different and Why?", 5.

[83] Ibid.

number of other cultural contexts, including the museum mentioned previously. With the popularity of "parlor room dramas" in the late nineteenth century, the public scrutinized assemblages of home furnishings as stage sets at the theatre. *Furniture and Decoration* magazine elaborated on the educational value of the theatre and the department store in 1897, "As a rule the examples exposed in the shop windows, and more especially the drawing-rooms reproduced on the stage, offer the public a fair idea of the prevailing fashion."[84] The domestic interior, the same ensemble that the department store was selling, served also as the stage set most often on view at the theatre.

Meanwhile still in 1922, display expert G.L. Timmons advised, "Such places as museums are frequently visited by display men in search of inspiration, and many period settings used by the big London stores have been the outcome of such visits."[85] Befitting its founding mission, the Victoria & Albert Museum and others taught displaymen good taste by example. As Jeremy Aynsley has observed, "Many overlaps and interconnections existed between the exhibited interior and another category of room, the commercialized and commodified period interior – that which was for sale."[86] Since the department store supported both the antique trade and exhibited rooms in historical styles, knowledge of the chronology of design and decoration was paramount to the success of the displayman's performance. The displayman was an intermediary not only between production and consumption but also an ideal figure to bridge the gaps between the store and the museum

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[84] *Furniture and Decoration*, February, 15, 1897, vol. 24, no. 764, 1 quoted in Helen C. Long, *The Edwardian House: The Middle-Class Home in Britain, 1880-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 25.

[85] G.L. Timmins, *Window Dressing: The Principles of "Display"* (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, 1922), xii.

[86] Aynsley and Grant, *Imagined Interiors*, 25.

and art and industry, all of which were crossing over in new ways in the early twentieth century. For instance by 1914 the Metropolitan Museum of Art was using objects from their collection to train department store workers in the principles of good design, which informed their selection and marketing of merchandise. In 1917, these efforts were bolstered by a newly created Department of Industrial Relations led by Alfons Bach who developed extensive relationships with industrial designers, manufacturers, department stores, and professional organizations.[87] Therefore links between the department store and the museum can be identified in terms of style education in merchandise as well as display strategies.

In September of 1920, the *MRSW* emphasized the importance of displaymen having a historical grounding in their training, "it is of utmost importance for the window man to study period interiors, general interior construction, painting, glazing, high-lighting, polychrome coloring, antiquing in general, draperies, fabrics, upholstery material….One should study the five architectural orders that assist materially in planning."[88] An early twentieth-century Marshall Field's postcard (fig. 86) shows how this historical training could have been applied to the presentation of period rooms in a series of show windows.

[87] Antoniette Guglielmo, "Good Design, Good Taste: Richard F. Bach and the Industrial Arts Exhibitions," *Now At The Met Blog*, July 30, 2012, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/now-at-the-met/features/2012/industrial-arts-at-the-metropolitan-museum.

[88] Paul F. Lupo, "Period Furniture Displays," *MRSW*, September 1920, 32.

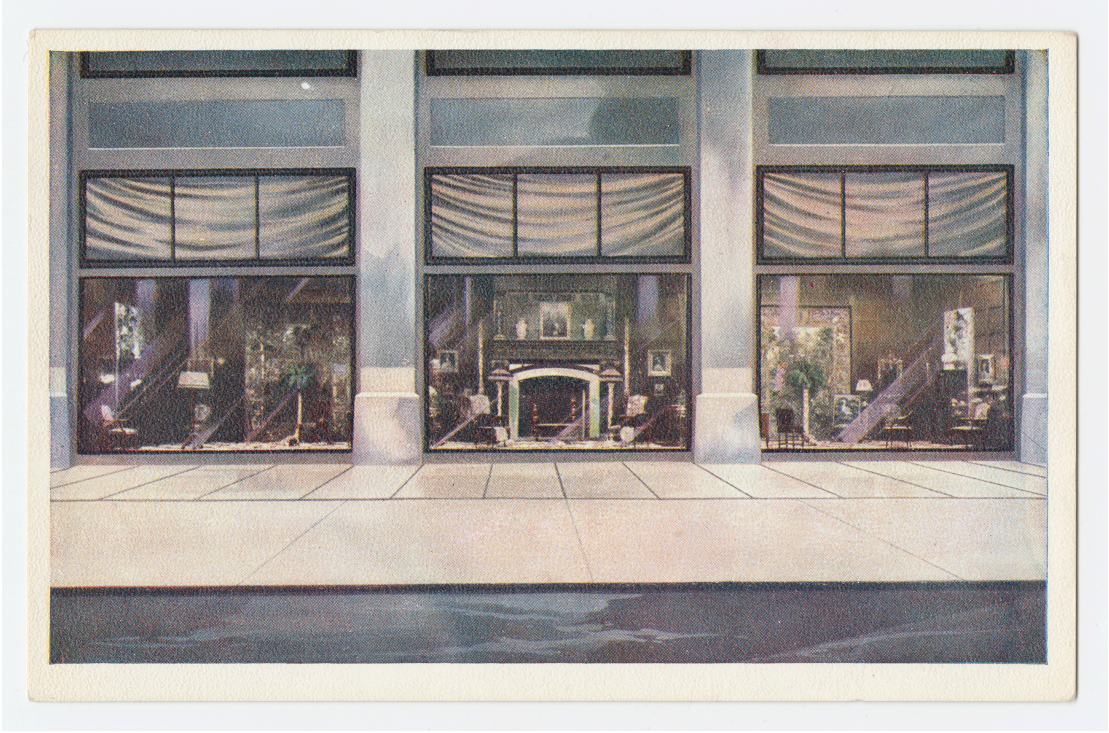


Figure 86. Marshall Field & Co., Postcard, "A Series of Display Windows," ca. 1910, 14005 (5), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company.
Source: Chicago History Museum, IChi79032.

The caption on the reverse reads: "A series of display windows giving an exact reproduction of the interior of a Large Hall, or Gallery, in an English Mansion of the 17th Century. Suggesting the resources and high standard of the Interior Decorating Section of Marshall Field & Company's Retail Store, Chicago."[89] In this case a single period room display of a grand subject spreads across a series of three windows encouraging the viewer to read them as a continuous image. This postcard is particularly noteworthy for the credit it gives to the store's interior decoration staff – the Interior Decorating Section of Marshall Field – and their successful engagement with historical decoration. The caption notes that the display is an "exact reproduction," implying the department store's commodification of a historical setting

[89] Marshall Field & Co., Postcard, "A Series of Display Windows," ca. 1910, 14005 (5), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Company, Chicago History Museum.

and evocation of authenticity in order to increase desirability. This exercise of reproduction via display executed by the display staff suggested to the consumer that what they observed in the window could also be replicated for their purchase. As Jeremy Aynsley has pointed out, "It is clear from looking at a range of trade journals and popular magazines that the idea of viewing or purchasing a complete historical interior was a familiar one in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries…"[90] The department store display communicated this concept in three dimensions rather than just the two dimensions afforded by printed matter.

Decorating advice literature and department store catalogues that listed one style of room after the next amplified consumer choice and gave the consumer the impression that stylistic alteration was feasible and in fact encouraged. Therefore an approach to the domestic interior as flexible and changeable was directly in line with how these spaces were shown in the department store context as one room repeated in multiple possible stylistic formats. The message was that with quality materials and modern techniques of production, the department store could reproduce any sort of interior, of any period, to a high standard of workmanship. In 1914, B. Altman boasted, "Several of America's best known hotels and theatres, as well as a large number of private residences, owe their interior beauty to the artistic resources of the Altman studios. A specialty is made of period interiors…"[91]

This engagement with historical decoration as well as the department store's trade in antiques added to the set of skills required by the average displayman. Thus in this turn of the century period, department stores hired a decorating staff who were knowledgeable in these areas of history and their application to contemporary interior decoration. As early as the

[90] Aynsley and Grant, *Imagined Interiors*, 25.

[91] *B. Altman & Co.'s Enlarged Store,* 30.

1870s, William Whiteley started a house-building and decoration service.[92] Wanamaker's established an Advisory Bureau since, as one newspaper reported in 1910, "The Wanamaker Galleries of upholsteries, carpets, rugs, furniture and paintings are not alone sufficient to make a beautiful home. It requires knowledge of art and a suitable outlay of time to choose and assemble the proper furnishings for the entire house."[93] Wanamaker's was promoting the professional skills of artistic arrangement that their interior decoration staff possessed. A letter in the Mandel Family Papers, presumably addressed to a potential client as "Sir," dating to September 14, 1904, boasted of the store's decorating services, not only for the domestic interior but also for public institutions:

> As no doubt you are aware, we have among the many departments of our immense mercantile establishment an admirably equipped organization for the complete decorating, furnishing, and fitting up of office and similar buildings, in the most appropriate and harmonious manner. The list of such buildings already fitted up by us, including banks, theaters, and other large structures, though too long to mention, is one that attests the artistic perfection of our corps of workers and the thoroughness of our craftsmanship… Our department of interior decorating, wall finishing and papering is conducted by experts whose skill and experience are the best obtainable and may be wholly relied upon.[94]

Thus these interior design professionals employed in the major department stores were not only in charge of planning a pleasing presentation for the sales floor, and setting up model rooms, but their services extended beyond the store walls and into the domestic and public realms. Many department stores offered the bespoke services of a "decoration bureau" that could outfit a home or an office.

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[92] *Illustrated London and Its Representatives of Commerce* (London: The London Printing and Engraving Co., 1893), 83, BF108849, Whiteley's, The Architecture of Shopping Project, English Heritage.

[93] "Is Wanamaker's Different and Why?", 5.

[94] Letter, September 14, 1904, Box 1, folder 1, Mandel Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

An image of the "Building Department Showroom" in 1912 at John Barker & Co. in London shows the materials, architectural elements, and decorations that the department store had on hand to outfit interior spaces (fig. 87).



Figure 87. The Building Department Showroom of John Barker & Co., December 27, 1912. Photograph by Adolphe Augustus Boucher, Bedford Lemere and Company. Source: Historic England, BL21967.

The Barker's showroom appears like the office of an interior decorator that is presenting the domestic interior as a kit of parts that needs to be professionally assembled with the input from the consumer as to how they would like to personalize it. Two chairs sit around a table beckoning discussion between the staff and the customer. Wallcoverings are unrolled for customer perusal and along the right hand side of the image are a series of room displays segmented with false half-height walls as demarcation between the settings. One 1890's promotional pamphlet for Wanamaker's drew attention to how the interior decorator did all

of the work of decoration on behalf of the consumer, meanwhile the displays did the selling of the merchandise to be selected:

> No need to guess that this or that will match, you can see the things together and *know*. You can see entire rooms fitted as they will be in use. You can be sure that the Carpets and Rugs and Upholstery and Furniture and Wall Paper harmonize as you wish, and that with no more effort than to sit in your easy chair and watch the butterflies flit by the window. We have made a dream of delight of the picking and choosing that used to be a drudgery and a dread.[95]

Thus the interior decoration staff utilized the device of the model room as a silent salesman. A coherent grouping of objects sent the message that the chosen elements would harmonize and suggested them for purchase together. The immersive nature of the model room, or corner as seen in the Barker's photograph, allowed the consumer to browse freely and learn and shop through observation.

The interior decoration staff evolved as an authority to be trusted, with knowledge of color theory, style, and history as well as intimate familiarity with the store's own stock that they could then combine to please clients. The interior decoration staff was repeatedly credited for uplifting the taste of the public and educating them on popular and historical styles of decoration. Stores considered this educational mission as befitting their mission as a cultural institution and proving, as Wanamaker's explained, that they have always been "more than a mart for buying and selling."[96] Marshall Field similarly claimed, "I have often thought of the esthetic influence of such a store and have wondered if there is any institution

[95] John Wannamaker, *Interior Decoration* (Philadelphia: Times Printing House, 189?), n.p.

[96]Wanamaker, Appel, and Hodges, *Golden Book of The Wanamaker Stores*, 300.

in Chicago, whether commercial or artistic, that has done so much to develop the taste of the public."[97]

While the field of interior decoration did not officially formalize until the 1930s (in Britain the Society of Industrial Artists was founded in 1930 and in America the American Institute of Interior Decorators was founded in 1931) the department store can be identified as promoting their display staff as a voice of authority as early as the late nineteenth century. Department stores, in the decoration of their own interiors and in the displaying and selling of the domestic interior to consumers, fostered skills, developed and codified services via publications, encouraged networking between display staff, and educated consumers on style and arrangement, all of which directly impacted the professionalization of the field of interior decoration at large.

In contrast to those displaymen in charge of interior display as decoration for the shop, gendered male as their title suggests, interior design, as it related to the home and whose concepts and elements sold through department stores, became an area where women took on an important role. Professionalized interior decoration by women was practiced in America from the end of the nineteenth century and by the outbreak of World War I it was well established.[98] Two of the first names that emerge in the profession are Nancy McClelland and Ruby Ross Goodnow, both of whom are tied to the history of interior

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[97] "Formal Opening of a Great Store," 15, 03052 (29), Federated Department Stores' Records of Marshall Field & Co.

[98] Penny Sparke, "The Domestic Interior and the Construction of Self: The New York Homes of Elsie de Wolfe," in *Interior Design and Identity*, Susan McKellar and Penny Sparke, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 73. See two of the earliest works on interior decoration written by females, as cited by Grace Lees-Maffei, "Professionalization as a Focus," 1: In Britain, Rhoda Garrett and Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* (London: Macmillan, 1876) and in America, Candace Wheeler, "Interior Decoration as a Profession for Women," *The Outlook*, April 6 1895, 559– 60 and April 20, 1895, 649.

decoration at Wanamaker's in New York. Nancy McClelland, who would become the first female president of the American Institute of Decorators in 1931, joined the advertising department of Wanamaker's department store in Philadelphia in 1900 where she created window displays and store exhibits. Therefore McClelland is the sole named female that this research has uncovered as being active in the arrangement of the window display. Her work in the window studying the art of "proper and effective arrangement" and "working out background for the various home furnishings" was a stepping stone to her later work of arranging store interiors, following the typical professional trajectory of the window dresser.[99]

In 1907, McClelland went to France as a "representative and buyer" for Wanamaker's and while she was abroad she studied art and art history and visited palaces, chateaux and museums.[100] Upon her return to the United States in 1913, Nancy McClelland was asked by John Wanamaker to rearrange the first three sales floors. An undated historical account in McClelland's archive claims that her new schemes were such a success that sales began to increase immediately.[101] On the heels of that favorable outcome, Wanamaker asked McClelland to redesign the fourth floor, where she established a decorating and antique shop, Au Quatrième, the first interior decoration department of an American department store (fig. 88) nearby to the French salons discussed earlier.

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[99] "In Memory of a Pioneer: Nancy Vincent McClelland, 1877–1959," *Interiors*, 119 (1959), 79 cited in Bridget May, "Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877–1959): Professionalizing Interior Decorating in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Design History* 21 (2008): 60.

[100] Bridget May, "Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decorating in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Design History* 21 (2008): 60.

[101] "Au Quatrième, 1913–22," Box 4, Nancy McClelland Archive, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

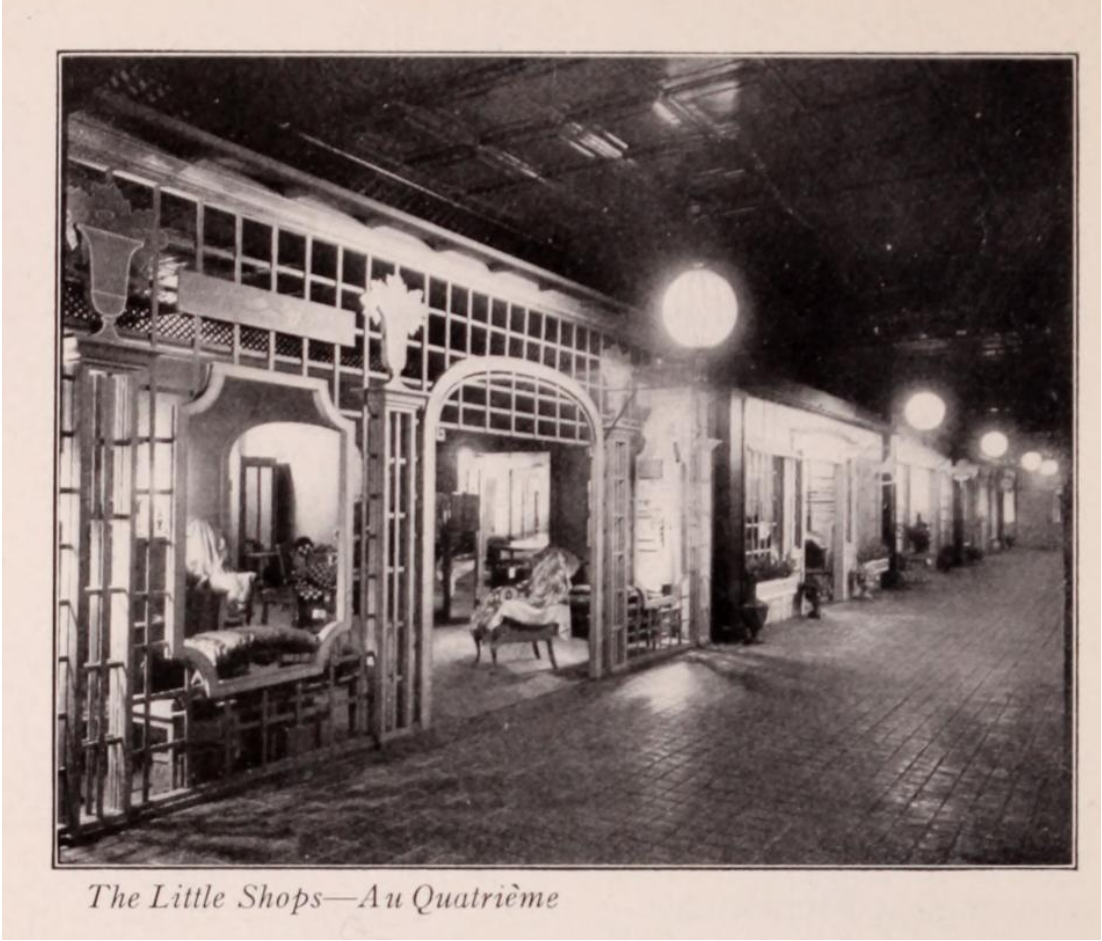


Figure 88. The Little Shops – Au Quatrième in John Wanamaker, *New York City and The Wanamaker Store* (New York: John Wanamaker, 1916), 60.
Source: Archive.org; Digitized by Columbia University Libraries.

A 1916 pamphlet described, "Down a red-flagged walk, with green vine-covered trellises, there are little painted shops" that included a Sports Shop, a Riding-habit Shop, a School Shop and a Novelty Shop.[102] The Novelty Shop sold all kinds of "strange and beautiful old and modern objects" presumably for accents in the interior. The act of the interior decorator in assembling these accents and the many other material and architectural elements, such as those observed in the Bark Barker's photograph, can be interpreted as creative fabrication, therefore emphasizing again the department store as a site of active design production. In

[102] Wanamaker, *New York City and The Wanamaker Store*, 59–60.

fact, Au Quatrième positioned design production as a front stage activity; the promotional pamphlet described, "Over by the windows is an open studio where artists are painting trays and flower-pots, and old trunks for wood-boxes and many other things."[103] These craft activities became a part of the display itself and likely served as demonstrations to encourage consumers to learn technique as well as marvel at the skill of the makers. Past the shops shown in the image above, stood the Little House, the ultimate design product of Au Quatrième's interior decorators. With open doors, the house of five rooms showed "how charming the new decorative ideas look when put into practice."[104] These model rooms were an ensemble of furniture and decorative elements on view separately and arranged by object category in the salesrooms nearby.

In 1918, McClelland hired Ruby Ross Goodnow (Wood), Elsie de Wolfe's first disciple. Before working for Wanamaker's, Goodnow had ghost authored de Wolfe's articles on interior decoration for the women's magazine *The Delineator*, which formed the basis for her book *The House in Good Taste* (1930). By 1921 Goodnow was the head of Belmaison, Wanamaker's "house of beauty" that offered twelve distinct rooms with rotating displays and by 1922, McClelland had established a decorating firm, Nancy McClelland, Inc., that specialized in the accurate reproduction of period interiors for private clients and historic houses.[105]

For both McClelland and Goodnow, the department store served as an important stepping stone in their professional careers, giving them access to material resources, travel,

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[103] Ibid., 60.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Important clients included John D. Rockefeller and Electra Havemeyer Webb. McClelland also worked at Mount Vernon in Virginia and the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow House in Portland, Maine.

chances to exert their leadership and test new ideas, build a client base for their own private practices, and establish their reputations within the field. The stories of these two women extend beyond the historical scope of this thesis yet this brief mention of their stores with the culture of display helps to call attention to the department store as significant in the history of the professionalization of interior decoration. Their biographies also draw attention to a gendered shift in the display field as the presentation of interior decoration within the store gained more attention and sales floor space and as interior decoration solidified as its own branch of the department store's client services.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed how elaborate decoration schemes and themed display settings transformed the interior architecture of the department store in order to distinguish a store's shopping experience, convince browsers to become purchasers, and to entertain and impress the public with the skills and artistry of the display staff. While scholars have repeatedly called attention to the department store's many and various products, this thesis has traced the material and visual effects of that number and variety – the spaces that the architect devised to suit a range of goods, the fixtures that shopfitters created to house and showcase the wares, and then, as this chapter has discussed, the individuality of the settings, designed by the display staff, in which the goods were presented and sold.

Display staff actively associated the department store with the everyday lives of its consumers through its displays and interior decoration that coincided with contemporary events while also encouraging consumers to become involved in the life of the store itself by commemorating its milestones at the times of openings or holiday sales. Laden with

symbolism and overwhelming visitors in terms of scale and visual strength, decorations were a major focus of many store celebrations and earned even more attention than the merchandise. This shift in emphasis, encouraged by promotional schemes of the department stores themselves, indicates the popularity and appreciation of display as a distinct element of department store culture.

As an interior of interiors the department store aimed to achieve a balance between expressions of creativity and profit-making strategy. In facilitating travel via commodities, the department store evoked the objects' place of origin in order to communicate exoticism, luxury, and authenticity. The model room rationalized display into a series of distinct experiences that educated visitors on interior decoration styles while also leaving room for them to imagine possibilities for customization and how their domestic environment could merge with the department store's staged ideal.

Lastly the department store played a prominent role in the shaping of the domestic interior in the 1880 to the 1920 period. The stores not only gave access to objects of furniture and home decoration, but also built entire homes, performed utility installation, improved living conditions, and offered personalized advice in the latest styles. For instance in 1886 cartoonist and illustrator Linley Sambourne engaged Maple & Co. for work in the "Best Bedroom" and "Dining Room" of his home at 18 Stafford Terrace, later hiring the store to lay his carpet in 1894, and electrify his home beginning in 1896. He later hired John Barker for repairs to the windows in 1909.[106] While this is an isolated example, it goes to show how the work of the department store's decorating and building staff extended outside of the retail realm and directly into the domestic sphere. While many of the names of these interior

[106] See Maple & Co. Receipts, ST/1/6/102/4, ST/1/6/102/11, ST/1/6/102/16, 17, 18, and 20; John Barker Receipts ST/2/4/5/3/5, Sambourne Family Archive, 18 Stafford Terrace, London.

decorators operating within the department store realm are still unknown, the archival records of the services and commodities that they provided serve as evidence of the department store as codifying, communicating, promoting, and selling the skills and services of interior decoration from its earliest years as a design profession.

Conclusion

From 1880 to 1920 many of the most important innovations in department store culture can be located within the realm of display design whose significance impacted retail architecture, strengthened the development of merchandising tools and technologies, and formed the focus of a new multi-faceted design profession. This thesis has positioned the architect, shopfitter, window dresser, and interior designer as essential participants in display design and thus in the department stores' transformation and growth during these years. The materials, technologies and methods with which these employees worked have been given new attention in their roles in accelerating the impact of the visual presentation of merchandise. Therefore this thesis has examined both the human and non-human factors that contributed to the formulation and significance of display design while exploring the meaning and context of the style decisions made and the materials and technologies employed.

From the late nineteenth century, displaymen drove a major historical shift in retail practice as the department store's guiding principles broadened from wealth and variety of stock to include and even prioritize the creative and changeable staging of wares in order to earn and condition the public's attention and investment. The stores' commercial imperative was both challenged and complemented by an artistic drive and display grew out of this duality. Chicago, New York, and London have been identified as particularly offering the financial and creative capital, material resources, professional talent, and attentive audience to further display as both a commercial and creative pursuit of the department store. In these cities display design was not only significant to the retail realm but also served as an ever-transforming and porous site of communication about contemporary culture and current events. Expanding outside of this home city focus, larger geographical implications of the

industry of department store display have been located in a cross-Atlantic conversation in which advancements in financial prowess, professional talent, and trade were pitted against one another in a backdrop of international competition.

This thesis has expanded the parameters of the material culture of the department store beyond the merchandise to include plate glass windows, brass display fixtures, mannequins, lighting technologies, window display backboards, casework, interior architectural elements, and more. This extensive examination of many design elements and their combined impression and influence was guided by an expansive conceptualization and implementation of display principles adopted by the stores themselves. As one Chicago business magazine encouraged in 1906,

> Window display, fine fixtures, and decorations inside of the store are really advertising as much as outside signs or display ads in newspapers. The extra coat of paint on the store front or delivery wagon is intended to attract attention, and to remind the public that the owner is prospering, and therefore quite logically deserving of more prosperity and patronage.[1]

This journalist's comments link well to the earlier discussion of "The Model Department Store" (figs. 1 and 3) in which Abraham & Straus deliberately featured window display, fine fixtures, decorations, their storefront, and delivery wagons to entice the recipient. As the department store broadened their scope of advertising and increasingly took advantage of display as an outlet for the projection of a strong public image, consumers took notice and display ascended in the department store's business model. Display was a communicator of up-to-date merchandise as well as financial stability, cutting edge business practice, and an awareness of contemporary trends in fashion, art, and design. Considering such elements as the façade of the store, electrical lighting, the layout of departments, and the casework

[1] Hubert F. Miller, "A Nation of Shopkeepers," *Chicago, The Great Central Market: A Magazine of Business* 1906, 3 (2): 41.

broadens the ways in which we can explore the significance around the context of the merchandise over the specifics of what the public purchased.

The making and viewing of display were elements in the complex formulation of a larger culture of show in the period from 1880 to 1920. A history of design approach has opened up the department store's material and visual culture connections to the city, theatre, interior design, advertising, international expositions, modern art, and more. All of these cultural and artistic institutions and events share with the department store a transitory and variable nature that helped to define their modernity. The department store was a dynamic environment of transition as everyday wares were transformed into commodities and passersby became consumers. Displaymen aimed to stay "wide-awake" to trends, new strategies, and technologies, while architecture, interior layouts, and the arrangements of goods themselves were continually reevaluated and reconfigured to garner consumer acclaim, bolster the profession of display itself, register the energy of the surrounding city, and increase store profits.

Key Conclusions and Reflections

From 1880 to 1920, display dramatically altered the experience of the department store by introducing new ways of viewing and interacting with commodities and affected the experience of the city at large by bringing urban space and time in alignment with the stores' retail agenda. "It has no independent existence," Karl Osthaus wrote of the show window in 1913. He continued "The regeneration of taste that we observe in all fields today has been integrated into its growth. It has become a venue for artistic experimentation, which is all the

most important as it takes place in front of everybody on the street."[2] As Osthaus suggests, display was a new design medium that distinguished itself in the ways that it absorbed influences of arts and culture and affected the flow of urban rhythms. Display publicly projected multiple messages of modernity including speed, variation, fragmentation, rationalization, and theatricality. Never before this period had the retail sphere made such great investment in terms of cost, time, and creative energy towards its visual presentation to the public and the messages that it contained. Never before this time period had the public paid such close attention.

This thesis has identified a number of factors that help to determine how display achieved an unprecedented level of influence during these years: the architectural profession's responses to the needs of display in terms of building configurations and new technologies, the expertise of a new professional class of designers who made the displays into a fluctuating and eye-catching feature of the store, the adaptability of the shopfitting industry who provided the tools and technologies for the displays to develop, and the fascination of consumers who became attuned to the production value of this increasingly sophisticated form of advertisement and retail identity.

Architects responded to the needs of display by managing construction and planning spaces on behalf of the presentation and movement of goods while considering the user of the building specifically as a consumer in relationship to these goods. The show window dominated the façade, architects provided tiered atriums, open sales floors, and ample natural light for the viewing of merchandise, and a program of continual construction communicated that the department store was ever adapting to provide a modern experience. Retail

[2] Osthaus, "The Display Window" (Das Schaufenster) in Kogod, "The Display Window as Educator," in Deamer, *Architecture and Capitalism*, 67.

architecture assumed a permanent impermanence demonstrating that the structural framework of the store could adapt to the temporary and variable nature of the wares it sold. Architectural form was read by consumers for its nationalistic, stylistic, and material qualities that presented the department store as an urban landmark, sound business, civic structure, and repository of culture and the latest in art and design.

Working with the vast dimensions and up-to-date technologies that the architect provided to amplify the visual impression of merchandise arrangements, displaymen tested the potential of display to attract customers and continually experimented with new ways to transform commodities particularly in the show window. The displayman's self-promotion of his own work and sharing of his skills via didactic literature and the popular press reinforced display as an essential component of the department store and sent the message of display as artistically, financially, and culturally significant.

Displaymen elaborated on the display moments in the lives of commodities and encouraged the public to consider not only what the store sold but wonder at how the display was achieved, appreciate the skill and artistic sensibility responsible, and even evaluate how the visual message of the display itself connected to their contemporary lives. From sculptural handmade groupings in the show window to carefully configured ensemble displays that filled the stores' interior sales floors, the creative work of these men made display into a key factor of department store identity by which consumers compared stores. Displaymen created a new medium that affected urban navigation and influenced the ways in which the public dressed themselves and outfitted their domestic interiors.

Shopfitters provided the displaymen with a supply of fit-to-purpose fixtures that made wares increasingly visible and covetable. Under the influence of Taylorist principles, the sales floor, from the ground level to the upper tiers, was optimally fitted with fixtures and

casework for the dynamic presentation of merchandise. These shopfittings were serially produced commodities in their own right, standardized for use with particular sets of merchandise, and adapted and customized by displaymen to function in particular merchandising contexts. The shopfitting trade was an integral contributor to the industry of display and its products can be interpreted as examples of industrial design. Herein display becomes not only the field of the retailer but also the field of the manufacturer. With the increased use of fixtures and technologies, the department store became a technical space in which the agency of these objects extended from, eased, and even replaced the tasks of the salespeople. In addition, while the main function of these shopfittings and the overall interior setup of the displays were designed to give the consumer seemingly boundless choice, a closer look at the shopfittings and their placement reveals the calculated nature of the displays that drove consumer vision and movement.

This thesis has recounted the story of display via a modernist outlook that display practices in this period were progressively improving and traced a narrative of progress strongly communicated by the literature of the display profession and embraced by the press. It is important to note that the display profession was self-congratulatory in nature and advertising language describing the displays was often superlative in tone. Didactic literature implied with certainty that up-to-date displays would yield financial gains. Yet a closer look at the primary material also produces acknowledgement of the challenges and even failures, large and small, of retail architecture, show windows, shop fittings and sales floors as new and changing concepts of display were introduced. Fires harmed and even destroyed major establishments, show windows were smashed, and goods depreciated in value due to light

damage and mishandling when put out on view in show windows.[3] Also even though displaymen followed the guidance of advice manuals and shopfittings suggested a particular set of interactions between salespeople, merchandise, and consumers, the success of the script of display was not guaranteed and sometimes had unintended consequences. For instance, the mechanical Swan and Edgar window display discussed in chapter two, drew great crowds, marking it at first as a success. But the magnitude of the crowd was too large and had the adverse effect of blocking the city's flow, therefore causing the motion of the display, its major element of novelty to be eliminated. The unintended consequence of traffic obstruction caused a failure in the script of display altogether. Since the department store was constantly in flux, reliant on multiple layers of interaction between objects and people, under the influence of new techniques and technologies, nothing was fixed and therefore although the department store can be metaphorically compared to a machine, complete regularization of the reciprocal influences and outcomes of the combinations of its many elements was impossible.[4]

Yet shopfitting firms and the professional literature of display made great promises of profit with the implementation of modern tools and strategies. In 1910 one American retailer testified that "store arrangement…is the greatest force in modern merchandising" and he attributed forty percent of total sales to effective shop arrangement.[5] While the historical record of the business of display is populated with such percentages, little to no evidence is given as to how these figures were obtained. A trustworthy, centralized method to test the

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[3] "Miscellaneous City News: A Heavy Fire in Sixth-Avenue," *New York Times*, April 13, 1880, 2; "Grogan Loves to Smash Plate Glass Windows," *New York Times*, June 5, 1906, 9.

[4] Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 126.

[5] C. E. Cake, "Arranging Goods to Make the Shopper Buy," *System* 18 (December 1910), 590, quoted in Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 43–44.

efficacy of particular display techniques was not fully in place during the 1880 to 1920 period. The formation of the National Retail Dry Goods Association in 1911 and the Retail Research Association in 1916 represented two important advances in the accumulation and centralization of data. While periodicals such as *System* and the *Dry Goods Economist* sponsored trials and surveys, the retrieval of reliable quantitative measurement was still difficult due to the interconnected nature of the department stores' elements and the variation between stores.

While manufacturers and stores were quick to cite great numbers of customers as a sign of success, the crowd itself was not a sure indicator of financial gain and did not translate directly to purchases. For instance, one source warned that mechanical effects "attracted big crowds outside the window but not into the store. The mechanical effect monopolized all the attention and the goods received little notice."[6] Through engagement with the primary literature, these difficulties come to the surface and raise new questions about potential gaps between the reality of the display world and the narrative of progress that the profession itself forwarded. It was not until 1920 under Dr. Norris A. Brisco, first Dean of the New York University School of Retailing, that the members of the faculty, began a systematic study and evaluation of retailing practices in order to discover and record the principles of successful store operation. A few decades following, in 1949 the National Association of Display Industries in New York reported on the first efforts to determine the selling effect of the show window. The study conducted store interviews and counted "lookers" versus "passers."[7]

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[6] Bird, "Window Trimming and Commercial Display," 50.

[7] Iarocci, *Visual Merchandising*, 6.

Regardless of the accuracy of the quantitative evidence supplied by the display profession itself, it is certain that between 1880 to 1920 stores invested more money, time, and personnel in the production of display, the industry of shopfitting grew in part due to its involvement in the retail sphere, display staff worked continuously to devise new methods, and display attracted crowds and influenced urban dynamics. In addition primary sources have revealed that displaymen devised and followed calculated templates and strategies in order to achieve visual impact. The script of display was recorded and shared in guidebooks and trade periodicals and this script was followed by practitioners who anticipated an intended effect such as consumers could visually browse and select merchandise without touching, robust holiday decorations would bring more sales, or motion in the window was a guarantee of attraction. Standards and recommendations of store layout, management of the flow of goods, and the best practices of display strategy were systematized, shared, and replicated between cities and across the Atlantic.

New Research Questions and Directions

This thesis has primarily considered the displayman as a figure employed by and with an allegiance to the department store as he formulated the display moment in the life of the commodity. However a few particular evolutions in department store culture, which began to take place towards the end of this thesis's timeline, altered the relationship between the store, the displayman and the merchandise. The first was the introduction of branded merchandise to the department store marketplace and the second was the department store's hiring of commercial artists, industrial designers, and fine artists as displaymen for particular projects. While these developments lie largely outside of the time period of this thesis, their significance indicates that the issues and debates around art and commerce, temporality,

attention strategies, and profit-making that played out between 1880 to 1920 were later amplified in new ways that deserve further research and exploration. The turn of the twentieth century period that this thesis has covered therefore served as a laboratory for later developments in the professionalization and influence of department store display.

When working for an independent manufacturer, the displayman's allegiance shifted to lie with the brand rather than with the place and space of the department store. The manufacturer's standardized approaches to window display with a national reach directly clashed with the department store display's core principles of variation, creativity, and artistry that were staged in conversation with a particular urban location and its population. By the 1920s display as a space and a medium had been converted into a valuable commodity itself, subject not only to shaping and styling but also made available to be reproduced and purchased. Shopfittings became more than essentially functional objects that served as a silent framework for display. These fixtures were recognized as attractive devices in their own right whose forms were more susceptible to trends in graphic design and modern art. Window and interior schemes were not only included in guidebooks for burgeoning displaymen to copy but also were bought, sold and industrially replicated through manufacturers (fig. 35). The window display space became the site of special edition commissions by artists and industrial designers, either hired by the store or the manufacturer and shopfittings were transformed under the influences of these new collaborators.

While at the turn of the century the displayman aspired for recognition as an artist, by the 1920s, fine artists and designers were eager to play the role of displayman. Fine art and commercial art melded in the department store's culture of show. In 1920s, Macy's established a program in "Promotional Training" that included a course in "appreciation of

color" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[8] The high standards for cunning use of color in the show window and interior display schemes may have helped to open up the field to fine artists. Joseph Cummings Chase, noted American portrait painter, was a consultant to the window display department at McCreery's department store in New York from 1914 to 1929. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported in 1929, "Joseph Cummings Chase is one of the foremost authorities on color in the United States. He is also an authority on window displays. While this may seem odd, a little consideration of the highly artistic window displays in some of the larger stores will prove of itself there is no incongruity in a real artist being consulted in the matter of attractive displays."[9] This journalist points to a new consideration of the window display as a suitable canvas for fine artists. The article concluded, "…it is no wonder that a real artist is extremely valuable to a shop. Joseph Cummings Chase does not consider his work as advisor to display departments a prostitution of his art. He considers it just another worthy phase of true art endeavor." [10] Art and commerce benefited from one another; the display window gained fashionability and credibility from associations with the contemporary art and fine art worlds meanwhile the artists and designers who completed projects for department store show windows benefitted from the additional publicity.

Along with a product's form, materials, and package design, retail display increasingly became another styling responsibility of an industrial designer working for a manufacturer in the interwar period. From 1930 to 1932 Norman Bel Geddes designed a line of radio cabinets for the Philadelphia Storage Battery Company and also devised their

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[8] Promotional Job Training Chart, ca. 1921, Box 9E, Macy's Archive.

[9] Mathilde Kinglsey, "Tells Secrets of Artists' Models," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 10 February 1929, 88.

[10] Ibid.

window display, and in the following year Yardley hired Bel Geddes to develop a display set for Yardley soap. Geddes proposed a mechanized display that rotated every few minutes, bringing dynamism to the everyday substance.[11] Manufacturers hired full-time display staff, such as Ernest Williams, display manager at Kodak Ltd., who later became the second president of the British Association of Displaymen, in order to devise national campaigns of point-of-purchase displays and window and interior merchandising schemes. In addition if a displayman worked to the satisfaction of a manufacturer with their product in the context of the department store, sometimes they were hired on a contract basis to develop the manufacturer's window display program for other stores or devise displays for trade expositions.[12]

These developments beyond 1920 attest to the importance of the role of the displayman in the history of design and the history of design professions in the decades previous. Debates in the balance between art and commerce, central to the mission and message of the department store, were also at the core of a rising professional class of commercial artists and industrial designers, who worked across a greater range of media, including display design by the 1920s. The department store fostered significant crossovers between design professions of commercial art, set design, industrial design, interior design and fine art. This series of connections and its accompanying shared set of skills and approaches contributed to the interdisciplinary nature of design into the twentieth century. While in the period 1880 to 1920, the names of many display designers have been lost to history, in the 1920s and 1930s, department stores benefited from the engagement of noted

[11] For more on Bel Geddes work with Philadelphia Storage Battery Company and Yardley, see Jobs 199 and 261, Norman Bel Geddes Collection, Henry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

[12] Duplan silk contracted with Herman Frankenthal following his successful displays for the manufacturer at B. Altman in New York. F.F. Purdy, "Notes from New York," *MRSW*, September 1920, 41.

individuals as well as provided the springboard for a number of important designers at the start of their careers who were in need of employment and a creative outlet. Norman Bel Geddes, John Vassos, Donald Deskey, Joseph Urban, Edgar Brandt, Frederick Kiesler, and Raymond Loewy among others all engaged with the design of the department store, ranging from window displays and graphic design to ironwork and architecture. This work deserves closer attention as it relates to the development of the careers of these designers, to the success of the particular stores that employed them, as well as to the development of the display field at large in the early twentieth century. The show window's contradictory nature of permanent impermanence was traditionally one of the fine art world's primary complaints with the medium. Yet this ephemerality was one of the space's appealing qualities to young designers looking to make a short-lived creative statement that prompted challenges to the hierarchy of artistic formats and encouraged their future engagement with commerce.

Original Contribution

This thesis has explored the multifaceted nature of display and its associated program of architecture, shopfittings, show windows, and sales floor configurations as new avenues in which to draw a much more nuanced picture of how the department store both shapes and reflects modernity. The production, appearance, and experience of department store display exemplify fragmentation, variation, speed, rationalization, and theatricality. Fragmentation and variation were present in the piecemeal construction of the department store, the division of merchandise, its selling spaces, its distinct fixtures, and the eclectic nature of the interior layout and its various thematic presentations. Speed was the motivator in the wide-awake nature of the display profession and its keeping pace with trends in art and architecture in

terms of styles, technologies and new materials. A swift pace also drove the communication of display styles and strategies within the profession as well as its promotion to the public. Scientific approaches and rationalization prompted stratification of the retail interior, the specialization of the sales staff, and the optimization of the sales floor. Meanwhile the overall presentation of the department store embraced theatricality and spectacularized the everyday, seen most overtly in the ample use of plate glass, displays that amplified the visual and material impact of commodities, and technologies such as mechanics and lighting that enhanced the sensory experience of display and steered consumer attention.

This thesis has shaped new lines of thinking around the department store as a site of design production. Elaborately folding textiles, cutting out composition backboards, positioning lighting, and arranging fixtures were some of the many calculated yet creative processes that display staff undertook. Ongoing building construction, continual reinvention of window and interior displays, and the recurring fabrication of new contexts for commodities all contributed to an active program of creation in the department store. In all of these aspects of display production, a new emphasis has been given to the assets of imagination and creativity as tempered by the business goals of rationalization and diversification. By investigating the production process of display, this thesis has also revealed new information about display-making's tools and technologies, the skills of the displayman, the industrial nature of display, as well as the meaning and context of the design decisions that shaped the final visual effects. The window dresser used newly invented fixtures and devised and followed calculated templates and strategies in order to achieve specific visual effects and lure purchasers.

A focus on the display makers alongside the larger development of the display profession itself has yielded new interpretations of the window display space and sales floor

as stages for professional skill. This study has also examined in depth how the work of these displaymen was documented, disseminated, and commemorated. The ephemera of the history of display in the form of guidebooks, retail periodicals, as well as the stores' promotional materials has been given new weight. The great variety of display formats recorded in this ephemera has produced new insight into the complexity of the display moment in the life of the commodity. At the same time an in depth review of department store ephemera has produced a better understanding of taxonomies of visual representation of the commodity practiced and shared between the cities of Chicago, London, and New York.

The identification, isolation, and evaluation of these display moments have revealed the diversity, multiplicity, and speed that characterized mediation in the department store as well as the many elements, both human and non-human, that worked together to make a visual impact and form a memorable consumer experience. This thesis began with discussion and description around "The Model Department Store," a three-dimension model of the Brooklyn department store Abraham and Straus whose recipient was placed in the role of the displayman and invited to construct the layout. Once complete the recipient could have observed the final result of the combination of all of these various elements as a stationary stage set.

A poetic narration, "written after a tour, for the first time, through Marshall Field & Company's Retail Store," leads off a pamphlet *A Store of Service* published in about 1920. The narrator enumerates a litany of individual features, including exotic merchandise, showrooms and salons, and tearooms and observes many of these elements coming together as an assemblage: "the world condensed – its sciences, arts and crafts interwoven into a wonderful tapestry called 'Merchandise.'"[13] This narrator then brings this description alive by

[13] Marshall Field & Co., *Store of Service*, 2.

perceiving a compelling sense of speed and motion that lay behind the rationality, theatricality, variation, and fragmentation present in the elements already mentioned. Surveying an overall picture of the department store, the narrative continues, "In the vast spaces illusion transformed a stream of shoppers into a trickle of trade. Yet there was left no sense of size, for the mass had unfolded into so many gorgeous particles."[14] While this narrative began with a clear list of distinct parts, human and non-human, once set into motion the rhythm of the department store achieved such speed that the distinctions could no longer be identified. The "stream of shoppers" and the "trickle of trade" or the interactions of goods and people through the space were mediated so rapidly by the department store's program of display, which by its nature was constantly expanding and revolutionizing itself, leaving nothing solid or permanent. Thus a new picture of the department store has emerged that places display at the center of an ever-evolving, contradictory, complex, yet distinctly designed modern experience.

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[14] Ibid.

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