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Department of Geography

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date September 89, 1991
Abstract

This thesis draws together and reformulates two literatures in order to provide a fresh perspective on the ways that commodities are important in the construction of femininity. On the one hand, studies within retail history and geography, with few exceptions, ignore the salience of shopping as a cultural practice and retail institutions as contexts where the contours of shopping and the imbrication of commodities with everyday life are shaped. On the other hand, scholarship in feminism and cultural studies has persuasively documented the percolation of commodities throughout society, social relations and femininity, but have effectively ignored one of the sites where commodities and consumption practices become intertwined with femininity: retailing. This latter literature is critiqued on the basis that: retailing is ignored through an inadequate conceptualization of consumption; the subject and femininity are insufficiently theorized; and the importance of place in both of these ignored. An alternative framework is offered, drawing on poststructuralist insights, which facilitates an understanding of the location of retailing in relation to consumption, the importance of place in retailing and the ways that retailing is potentially part of the construction of femininity. In particular, retailing is shown to be involved in the construction of femininity through control over the activity of shopping and shoppers, and attempts to fix the meanings of commodities.

These discussions of the construction of femininity through shopping in the context of retailing are grounded through a case study of the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver between 1945 and 1960. The case study demonstrates the role of retailing in the construction of femininity, and
in particular highlights the importance of place in such constructions. The retailing discourses permeating Woodward's were simultaneously place-making discourses, and the characteristics of the place created pervaded the meanings of the commodities and the activity of shopping.

The time and place of the case study also throws into sharp relief the operation of two discourses that have been identified as important in the construction of femininity: modernity and familialism. The analysis developed here shows how they intertwine to produce the femininity of shopping. In particular, the feminine shopper is shown as the outcome of a relation, constituted by power and knowledge, between the salesclerk and the shopper, such that shoppers are positioned as inferior and feminine. In so doing, the maligning of both femininity and shopping is demonstrated.
**Table of Contents**

Abstract ii  
List of Tables vi  
List of Figures vii  
Acknowledgements viii  
Chapter One  
Introduction 1  
A. Modernity, Familialism, Consumerism and Place 4  
(i) Consumerism, Commodities and Consumption Practices 4  
(ii) Familialism and Femininity 6  
(iii) Modernity and Rationalization 8  
(iv) Place and Space 10  
B. Outline of the Thesis 12  
Chapter Two  
Making Space for Retailing 15  
A. Material Culture, Marxism, Popular Culture and the Conceptual Exclusion of Retailing 16  
(i) Material Culture and The World of Goods 17  
(ii) Marxism, Commodities and Consumer Society 22  
(iii) Popular Culture and Consumption 26  
(iv) Summary 29  
B. Making Space for Retailing 31  
(i) Elements of a Poststructuralist Approach to Consumption - Discourse and Power. 32  
(ii) Consumerist Discourses and the Circulation and Meaning of Commodities. 35  
C. Retailing and the Place-specific Meanings of Commodities 38  
(i) What is Retailing? 38  
(ii) Retailing and the Meaning of Commodities 39  
(iii) Shopping and Retailing 43  
D. Retailing and the Production of Subject Positions 43  
(i) The Subject, Subjectivity and Subject Positions 44  
(ii) The Subject Position of Shopper and Consumer 48  
E. Summary 49  
Chapter Three  
Femininity, Modernity and the History of Retailing 51  
A. A History of Retailing in Europe and North America 53  
(i) The Corner Store 54  
(ii) The Department Store as a Retailing and Cultural Form 57  
B. Femininity, Domesticity and Retailing 64  
(i) Consuming and Femininity, 1880-1940 66  
(ii) Shopping and Femininity in 1950s Canada 70  
C. Woodward’s Department Store in Downtown Vancouver, 1892-1960 73  
(i) History of the Woodward’s Department Store 74  
(ii) Woodward’s and Vancouver 79  
D. Conclusion 80  
Chapter Four  
A Place for the Modern Vancouver Family 82  
A. Woodward’s as The Vancouver Department Store 84
B. Woodward's as the Modern Vancouver Department Store 91
   (i) The Woodward's Store 92
   (ii) Window Displays 94
   (iii) Salesclerks as Display 96
C. Woodward's and their Family of Employees and Shoppers 99
   (i) Reconceptualizing Retail Labour 100
   (ii) The Family of Woodward’s Employees 102
D. The Customer-Salesclerk Relation and the Woodward’s Shopper 108
E. Conclusion 113

Chapter Five
Femininity, Modernity and the Micro-Geography of the Woodward’s Department Store 1945 - 1960. 115
A. The Modern Vancouver Woman as Home Economist 117
B. Family Shopping 127
   The Main Floor 127
C. ‘A Scientific Home’ 131
   Second Floor 131
D. Women as Commodities 136
   Third Floor 136
E. Shopping Around the World 140
   Fourth Floor 140
F. Modern Technology 142
   Fifth Floor 142
G. Transitional Space 144
   Sixth Floor 144
H. Production Space 146
   Seventh and Eighth Floors 146
I. Conclusion 147

Chapter Six
Woodward’s, Modernity, Familialism and Femininity 148
A. Retailing and the Circulation of Commodities 148
B. Retailing and the Meaning of Commodities 150
C. Retailing, Shopping and Femininity 151

Bibliography 154
A. Secondary Literature 154
B. Secondary Sources on Woodward’s 166
C. Primary Sources on Woodward’s 167
   (i) The Beacon and Beacon Flash 167
   (ii) Photographs 168
   (iii) Miscellaneous 170

Appendix 172
A. Secondary Sources 173
B. Primary Sources 173
   (i) Woodward’s Archives 173
   (ii) Oral Histories 174
**List of Tables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1: Departments on the Woodward’s Food Floor, 1961</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2: Departments on the Woodward’s Main Floor, 1961</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3: Departments on the Woodward’s Second Floor, 1961</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4: Departments on the Woodward’s Third Floor, 1961</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5: Departments on the Woodward’s Fourth Floor, 1961</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6: Departments on the Woodward’s Fifth Floor, 1961</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7: Departments on the Woodward’s Sixth Floor, 1961</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8: Departments on the Woodward’s Seventh and Eighth Floors, 1961</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1: Exterior View of Woodward's Circa 1950</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1: Salesclerks and Display, Main Floor Woodward's</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1: Mrs. Consumer Week Window Display 1944</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2: Woodward's Food Floor, Circa 1950</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3: Cooking Demonstration Circa 1950</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4: Woodward's Third Floor Circa 1950</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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... a productive channel of investigation might be opened up by considering what women as ideological sign, and women as subjects caught or participating in various levels of social relations, have in common with commodities, ... and also, by looking at how women as consumers enter into a reciprocal relationship with commodities.¹

My purpose in this thesis is to contribute to understandings of the social construction of femininity through an analysis of one social practice in which women are positioned and femininity constructed: shopping.² Shopping, as a practice in which commodities are purchased from and within retail institutions, is not only an economic activity, but a cultural one as well. Commodities are not meaningless objects but instead have widely circulating and constructed meanings that are part of and contribute to the constitution of the everyday world.³ Moreover, the manner of acquiring commodities (i.e., shopping) is important in the construction of these meanings, as well as being a significant cultural practice. Gender, and particularly femininity, are crucial in the meanings of commodities and the cultural salience of shopping. Associations between femininity and commodities and shopping are constantly made and re-made throughout society, and as Bowlby suggests, become important in the oppression of women.

¹ R.Bowlby, 1985, Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreisser, Gissing and Zola, London, Methuen, p.27.
In this thesis I examine one institution in which shopping, femininity and commodities become intertwined: retailing. Retail institutions, concerned with the distribution of commodities from producer to final consumer, also control the activity of shopping and the meanings of the commodities bought. That is, through attempts to encourage the purchase of commodities, commodities are imbued with meaning and the activity of shopping controlled. According to Morris, such control translates into control over, and constitution of, femininity:

The study of shopping centres today is necessarily involved in a history of the positioning of women as objects of knowledges, indeed as targets for the manoeuvres of retailers, planners, developers, sociologists, market researchers and so on.⁴

Surprisingly, however, little research has been undertaken on shopping⁵ or on the construction of femininity through shopping.⁶ Through an analysis of one particular retail institution - the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver between 1945 and 1960 - in this thesis I focus on retailing as a site of the construction of femininity. In particular, I show that commodities purchased in shopping are important in shaping the contours of domestic labour. In addition, I demonstrate that the activity of shopping itself, and shoppers, are constructed as feminine in the sense of being inferior. Here, I am building upon previous analyses of shopping that have illustrated how it is constructed as irrational and frivolous, and as such, feminine.

The analysis offered here of the linkages constructed between femininity, shopping and commodities is more specific than this, through a

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⁵ With the important exception of J.Carrier, 1990, 'Reconciling commodities and personal relations in industrial society', Theory, Culture and Society, 19, pp.579-598.
focus on the forms of these linkages in a particular time and place. In the Woodward's department store in the 1950s, the femininity of those who shopped there was the product of an intersection of four elements or discourses: familialism, consumerism, place-making and modernity in the sense of rationalization. That is, discourses of science and modernity, in combination with familialism, were drawn upon to create a particular place and establish a relation between commodities and femininity. In particular, femininity was constructed through a relation constituted by power and knowledge in the sense that women shopping at Woodward's were novices in comparison to the expertise and knowledge of Woodward's and their salesclerks, and as such, were constructed as inferior and feminine. Moreover, the intertwining of a discourse of modernity with that of familialism meant that even though shopping was inferior, domestic labour was increasingly scientific and rational.

As such, the analysis presented here bears upon a number of important debates in feminist and social theory, particularly those concerning modernity, familialism, place and consumerism. In the remainder of this introduction I want to: sketch what is meant by familialism, modernity, place and consumerism; introduce the theoretical context in which they are used; outline the way they intersect and are implicated in the construction of femininity through the media of commodities and retail institutions; and provide a summary of the rest of the thesis. In so doing, a context for what follows is provided.
(i) Consumerism, Commodities and Consumption Practices

Consumerism, as a set of ideas governing the way commodities and consumption practices are thought about, talked about and situated within the social milieu, has become increasingly pervasive throughout twentieth century western society. Academic discourse has contributed to this pervasiveness, as considerations of commodities and consumption practices have multiplied. One dominant focus of such scholarship has been on the significance and consequences of using commodities, with assessments ranging from consumption being responsible for the political incorporation of the working class to commodities being the means through which the self can be expressed.

Recent scholarship, of which this thesis is a part, has focused on the processes whereby commodities and consumption practices percolate through the constitution of individuals and society. Attention is paid to the ways that commodities are bought and used as expressions of the individual - their personality, position in society, gender, and so on. Either the individual

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7 For a review see M.Nava, 1987, ‘Consumerism and its contradictions’, Cultural Studies, 1,2, pp.204-210.
creates meanings from commodities, or since commodities have been imbued with particular meaning by capitalists and advertisers, then the use of commodities implies the appropriation of these meanings by the individual. Attention is also directed toward the ways that commodities become part of everyday practices. For instance, the introduction of appliances into the home changed the nature of domestic labour.\textsuperscript{11}

Consumerism has been particularly important in the construction of femininity, and the rhythms of consumer culture have been well documented by feminists.\textsuperscript{12} Both commodities and practices associated with consumption like shopping, have been identified as important in the positioning of women and the constitution of femininity. This is particularly the case with the domestic labour performed by women, for throughout the twentieth century, the tasks of domestic work have become increasingly bound up with the use of commodities.\textsuperscript{13} Further, the process of searching for and purchasing commodities for use in the home and in the care of the family forms an important moment in domestic labour.\textsuperscript{14} Commodities are also important in the disciplining and positioning of women as objects. Bartky, for instance, demonstrates the production of a ‘feminine’ body in terms of both gesture and appearance, and although she doesn’t explicitly consider commodities, the

The purchase and use of commodities in such disciplining practices, should be apparent. The purchase of commodities, especially fashion, is critical in the commodification of women.

Similarly, the subject position of consumer has been identified as critical in the percolation of an instrumental rationality throughout society and especially femininity. To Marcuse, for instance, commodities replace 'real' social relations and are emblematic of the rationalization of society. At the same time, the subject position of consumer was a way of negotiating modernity for women. In this thesis I trace out these interconnections between modernity, femininity and commodities through the medium of retailing more fully.

(ii) Familialism and Femininity

The family, particularly the nuclear family, and familialism, defined as a set of ideas based on and constituting the nuclear family and women's location within it, are central to these discussions of femininity. Familial discourses constitute the family as a place where women's 'role' is naturalized and oppressive femininity maintained:

---

15 S.L. Bartky, 1988, 'Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power', in Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, eds. I. Diamond and L. Quinby, Boston, Northeastern University Press, pp. 87-118.
17 H. Marcuse, 1964, One-Dimensional Man, Boston, Beacon Press.
18 Carter, op.cit.
19 V. Beechey, 1985, 'Familial ideology' in Subjectivity and Social Relations, eds. V. Beechey and J. Donald, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, pp.98-120. Familialism is used in preference to familial ideology because of the conceptual baggage attached to ideology.
The biological facts of childbearing and lactation lead, with an inevitability so obvious that it does need to be spelled out, to primary responsibility for child-care, to a close, intimate, warm bond between mother and infant, which extends naturally to buying and preparing its food, washing its clothes, healing its wounds.20

In particular, familialism shapes the contours of domestic labour. As such, the commodification of domestic labour that I document in this thesis consists of a link between commodities and femininity that is sustained by familialism. There are two strands of recent discussions of familialism that are contributed to in this thesis.

The first is the identification of the pervasiveness of familialism throughout society. In particular:

Just as the family has been socially constructed, so society has been familialized. Indeed, it can be argued that in contemporary capitalist society one dominant set of social meanings is precisely an ideology of familialism.21

Familialism and paternalism in particular, have been especially prevalent in institutions like orphanages,22 factories,23 and department stores.24 The percolation of familialism through such institutions helps locate the construction of femininity and women's oppression in places other than the home and the family.

The second strand is the attention paid to the networking of familialism with other discourse, especially a discourse of rationalization. According to Donzelot, for example, from the late nineteenth century relations within the family, were infiltrated and characterized by the ideas of experts.25 That is,

21 ibid., p.31.
22 Barrett and McIntosh, op.cit.
through an alliance of mothers and experts, mothering took on different and more scientific characteristics. Similarly, Reiger has analyzed ‘attempts to modernize domestic life according to the principles of science and technology and the rational efficiency thought characteristic of capitalist industry’.26

These two points - the efficacy of familialism in spheres other than the family, and the linking of familial and modern discourses - are important in the construction of femininity through shopping presented here due to the presence of familialism in retail spaces and links with modernity.

(iii) Modernity and Rationalization

Prompted by the disputed arrival of postmodernity and postmodernism, recent discussions in social theory have been dominated by reconsiderations of modernity.27 These debates are complex and contradictory, and it is impossible to do justice to them here. Considerations of modernity bear upon, and are contributed to, in this thesis in two ways.

First, one theme that has emerged recently is the role of the commodity and newness in modernity. According to Benjamin, a defining characteristic of modernity was its simultaneous ephemerality and eternity. That is, modern life appears to be ever-changing, but is really the new in the context of the ever-same.28 As Benjamin put it:

---

The point is that the face of the world, that enormous head, never changes, certainly not in what is the newest, that this newest remains the same in all its parts.\textsuperscript{29}

As both stable and constantly changing (new commodities are being invented all the time) the commodity is both a material manifestation and emblematic of modernity. Although the characteristics of what is new may vary, the fact that the commodity is new, and the defining characteristic of modernity, does not change.\textsuperscript{30} Feminist interpretations have taken issue with the masculinity of such conceptions of modernity. As Wolff points out, it is impossible for women to assume the archetypal modern position - the flaneur - due to women's confinement to the so-called private sphere as well as the masculinity of the activity itself.\textsuperscript{31}

A second theme of recent discussions of modernity that is relevant here is the increasing rationalization of modern life. In other words, as the twentieth century has progressed, so too has the incursion of an instrumental, or means-end, rationality. This too has been central in the modernity/postmodernity debate, especially in the critique of modernity. To Habermas, for instance, the colonization of the lifeworld by the system may be diagnostic of some of the pathologies of modern life.\textsuperscript{32}

Here I focus on the centrality of gender to such conceptions of modernity. Far from being gender neutral, the rationalization of modern life has been effected through the medium of gender. As one of the ways in which links are made between the family and official economy of modern life,


rationalization occurs through gender differentiation.\textsuperscript{33} In particular, as I show in this thesis, the processes of rationalization construct masculine and feminine subject positions, with femininity positioned as inferior.

(iv) Place and Space

Throughout the three themes that I have just elaborated is a thematic of place and space that is foregrounded here. I referred to the family as a site where femininity is produced, and recent contributions have emphasized the importance of context in feminism and the construction of femininity.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, consumption places like the department store have been central in considerations of consumption.\textsuperscript{35} These comments resonate with other debates in contemporary social theory concerned with the spatiality of modern life. For instance, Giddens has highlighted the regionalization, and importance of context, in social interactions.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, cognizance of the difference that space makes has been alleged to be the boundary between modern and postmodern social theory.\textsuperscript{37} I build upon this somewhat abstract work more concretely here, emphasizing the importance of place in the construction of femininity and retailing. In particular, I attempt to go beyond a recognition that ‘geography matters’,\textsuperscript{38} and demonstrate the importance of

\textsuperscript{33} See N.Fraser, \textit{op.cit.}
place in the constitution of social relations. In particular, following Agnew, I focus here on the construction of place in terms of location and sense of place, and demonstrate the way they help shape social relations.\(^{39}\)

These four elements - modernity, familialism, consumerism and the social construction and importance of place - along with their inherent gendering, come together physically and metaphorically in the figure of the department store. The department store, as a form of retailing, is simultaneously a modern, feminine and family place and a place that contributes to the construction of modernity, femininity and familialism. Originating in the mid-nineteenth century in France and the United States, the early department store was important in adumbrating the boundaries of the emerging commodity culture in the late nineteenth century, as well as in defining femininity.\(^{40}\) An ideology of familialism structured the early department store and was used as a selling strategy.\(^{41}\) Further, the early department store was emblematic of modernity in the sense that it was a repository of things but was also new itself. In the period studied in this thesis modernity in the sense of rationalization became increasingly important as the design of stores and meanings of commodities changed.


\(^{41}\) See M.B.Miller, *op.cit.*
B. Outline of the Thesis

Yet it is impossible to understand and illustrate these interconnections between modernity, familialism and consumerism with femininity in the department store, in the context of present understandings of retailing. Retail geography remains attached to an atomistic model of society, with a commensurate focus on consumer choice and the optimal location of supermarkets.\textsuperscript{42} Such an economistic focus has also characterized orthodox retailing perspectives.\textsuperscript{43} Studies in the history of retailing, on the other hand, although not economistic, tend to focus on particular firms with the aim of accumulating detail rather than shedding light on particular theoretical questions.\textsuperscript{44}

Thus, in order to shed light on these themes, some conceptual modifications to previous analyses of consumerism and the role of retailing need to be made. Chapter two is a critique and reconstruction of ways of thinking about consumerism and retailing. There, in a review of scholarship on commodities and consumerism, I show how a consideration of retailing has been conceptually excluded because of inadequate conceptualizations of


consumption. I then offer an alternative conceptualization of consumption, which captures the two major characteristics of retailing: the construction and manipulation of space; and the constitution of subject positions and particularly femininity. In so doing, I provide a framework in which retailing and its intertwining with modernity, familialism, place and femininity can be understood.

Chapter three is a transitional one between the theoretical framework of chapter two and the more substantive claims and evidence of chapter four. I use the conceptualization developed in chapter two to reinterpret the existing literature on the history of retailing, and also introduce the case study. Here, I demonstrate historically the salience of retailing and its spatiality to the construction of femininity. Specifically, I show the location of the twentieth century department store in relation to familialism, femininity and modernity, and also document the nexus between femininity and rationalization. In order to provide a context for the case study that follows, I briefly outline the history of the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver from 1892 to 1945.

Chapter four uses the case study of Woodward's between 1945 and 1960 to ground the themes of familialism, modernity and place as well as their embedded femininity. In particular, my aim in chapter four is to demonstrate how a modern and family department store was being created by the place-making practices of Woodward's, to be inhabited by a family of feminine shoppers. Methodologically, in this chapter I use the traditional sources of retail history - newspaper and in-store advertising, photographs of the store and relations between Woodward's management and employees - in a non-traditional manner.
In chapter five I tackle the linkages of modernity, familialism, the commodity, and place with femininity from a different vantage point. Through an analysis of different parts of the store, I show how these linkages and especially the femininities constructed, are themselves spatially variable within the store. Here, I am specifically concerned with the manipulation of space by Woodward's, and in particular how this led to place embedded constructions of femininity. Moreover, I suggest that the spatial arrangement of the store was an input into the construction of shopping as feminine.

In the concluding chapter, I provide a general overview of the argument presented in the thesis. I return to the themes introduced here, and elaborate their interconnections with retailing and femininity.
Chapter Two: Making Space for Retailing: Meaning, the Circulation of Commodities and Retail Spaces

Research in retail geography has directed subsidiary, if any, attention to the reconstitution of social life by and within retailing. The involvement of retail institutions like the department store in creating the meaning of commodities and shaping relations of consumption, is by and large ignored. Any attempt to understand the construction of femininity in retailing, therefore, needs to go further afield than retail geography, and consider the substantial body of literature concerned with the contours of social relations surrounding and constituted by commodities, after they have been produced.¹

The focus of this literature on the imbrication of commodities and consumption practices (which include shopping) with everyday life and the self can potentially offer unique insights into the relations between retailing, commodities and femininity. Thus my first aim in this chapter is to review this literature in an attempt to develop a framework in which to understand the construction of femininity through retailing.

My review of this literature shows how a consideration of retailing is not only lacking, but is conceptually impossible within current understandings of consumption. Further, the intertwining of discourses such as modernity and familialism with femininity through consumption practices is difficult to discern in current understandings because of inadequate conceptions of the subject and limitations on the processes whereby commodities become meaningful beyond use. Thus my second aim in this chapter is to offer an

¹ For reviews see M.Nava, 1987, ‘Consumerism and its contradictions’, Cultural Studies, 1,2, pp.204-210; and G.McCracken, 1988, Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Bloomington University Press.
alternative conceptualization of both consumption and its location within society, the place of retailing within consumption practices and the uniqueness of retailing. This second aim is achieved through the use of a poststructuralist approach to consumption, retailing and femininity.

The chapter is in four parts. In the first, I review three approaches to consumption and show how despite their differences the three approaches conceptually preclude consideration of retailing. I then elaborate an alternative approach to and conceptualization of, consumption that highlights the role and uniqueness of retailing, one that can potentially capture the inter-relations between retailing, spatiality, femininity and modernity. I use this framework in the third section, where I delineate the characteristics of retailing and the ways meaning is produced within retailing, highlighting the production of spatiality in both of these. In the fourth section I consider the links between retailing, shopping and femininity, and briefly introduce the ways that femininity is the product of retailing discourses, through both the subject position of shopper and the appropriation of commodities.

A. Material Culture, Marxism, Popular Culture and the Conceptual Exclusion of Retailing

My purpose in this section is to review the literature on consumption in order to garner some insights about the nature of retailing. Given my desire to weave together a focus on gender, retailing and geography, the review focuses on the following questions: What is consumption and where does retailing fit in? What is retailing? What are the conceptions of the self and the constitution of the self in these approaches? What connections, if any, are
drawn between subject construction and retailing and/or consumption practices? Finally, is any credence given to the place-specificity of consumption practices?

Throughout the literature I review in this section, it is generally agreed that relations of consumption, as well as commodities, form critical social relations and are important in the constitution of the self. According to Tomlinson, for example:

It is incontestable that meaning and consciousness are vitally linked to the relations of consumption.2

Beyond this, however, disagreements persist. In particular, the means by which commodities become meaningful and part of everyday life are contested. As a result, three approaches to consumption are identified and reviewed: material culture where meaning is produced by and for individuals; Marxism where the class meaning of commodities is produced by capitalists; and popular culture where the multiple meanings of commodities are produced by both producers and users of commodities.3

(i) Material Culture and The World of Goods

The perspective labelled as material culture, analyzing the role of material artefacts and particularly commodities in the production of cultural meanings, is a pervasive perspective in the consumption literature.4 Here,

3 It is important to note that my review does not consider non-western approaches to commodities. For a review of such approaches, see A. Appadurai, ed. 1986, The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
consumption and commodities are perceived as both tools and indicators of
culture and people's identities in the sense that the use of goods, either
personally or as gifts, is a medium through which we express our perceptions
of our selves and our relations with others.

The work of Douglas and Isherwood exemplifies this approach. To
them, it is undeniable that the consumption or use of commodities plays a
part in the construction of an individual's identity, for material goods are
'nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty' in the sense that
commodities are used to say something about the person that possesses them.5
This process of meaning creation at the level of the individual then becomes
the building block for broader societal processes, for the consumption of goods
is needed 'for making visible and stable the categories of culture'.6 That is,
the many uses of goods in material societies are important in culturally
constituting that world, as the meanings of goods circulate and become fixed
and generalized. As they put it:

Consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and
licked into shape. The housewife with her shopping basket arrives
home: some things in it she reserves for her household, some for the
father, some for the children; others are destined for the special
delectation of guests. Whom she invites into her house, what parts
of the house she makes available to outsiders, how often, what she
offers them for music, food, drink and conversation, these choices
express and generate culture in its general sense.7

Douglas and Isherwood's pioneering efforts have been influential
throughout the literature on consumption, especially with those who wish to
emphasize the active agency of individuals in the process of consumption. For

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Material Culture and Symbolic Expression, Boston, Unwin Hyman.
5 M.Douglas and B.Isherwood, 1979, The World Of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of
6 ibid., p.57.
7 ibid.
instance, a recent work specifically focused on understanding the symbolic character of consumption elaborates the notion that the individual uses goods to constitute crucial parts of the self.\textsuperscript{8} Such an approach has also formed an important element of marketing approaches, or consumer research, where the notion that consumers create meaning with goods is used to improve the marketing of commodities.\textsuperscript{9}

Two relevant insights are provided by this perspective. First, in demonstrating the role of goods in the cultural constitution of the world and individuals, an important corrective to production based accounts of culture and society is provided.\textsuperscript{10} Second, in the notion that goods are used to create meaning is an acknowledgement of the constantly shifting meaning of commodities: the meanings of commodities are not pre-given but subject to continual negotiation and creation. Meaning, especially the meaning attached to commodities by individuals, 'flows and drifts and is difficult to grasp'.\textsuperscript{11} Despite these advances, however, there are three inter-related and insurmountable flaws remain: a problematic conception of the subject; an incomplete understanding of the commodity and the ways that commodities are imbued with meaning; and a narrow conceptualization of consumption.

The conception of the subject, and more particularly the process of subject constitution underlying both these approaches is a highly individualistic one. To Douglas and Isherwood, the subject is equated with the individual, a rigidly demarcated, conscious, rational thinking person. Although Douglas and Isherwood say that 'no human exists except steeped in

\textsuperscript{8} G.McCracken, \textit{op.cit}, pp.71-89.


\textsuperscript{10} See also, in a similar vein, F.M.Nicosia and R.N.Mayer, 1976, 'Toward a sociology of consumption', \textit{Journal of Consumer Research}, 3, pp.65-75.

\textsuperscript{11} Douglas and Isherwood, \textit{op.cit.}, p.64.
the culture of his [sic] time and place',\textsuperscript{12} in practice they imply that people are not created by the social world but create it. The individual human being may be part of a whole, but when it comes to consumption, people and society actively construct meaning out of commodities. By implication, an individuals' place in society is constructed by her or him, not constructed and established for her or him. This is evident in the following summary:

Within the available time and space the individual uses consumption to say something about himself, his family, his locality, whether in town or country, on vacation or at home.\textsuperscript{13}

Such a perspective on the way that the subject and subjectivity are constituted has been roundly criticized from many vantage points.\textsuperscript{14} By equating the subject with the individual, a coherent, unified subject is assumed. The existence of such a centred subject is contested.\textsuperscript{15} Further, the assumption that the individual creates his or her own world and identity neglects the claims of those who argue that the individual and society cannot be separated.\textsuperscript{16} One implication of the collapse of the individual-society dualism is that the individual cannot simply create his or her own world without constraints since the individual is already part of, and influenced by, society.

Moreover, the subject in Douglas and Isherwood is either not gendered or gender is ignored. Throughout, especially in terms of language, the subject of the world of goods is unequivocally a man. Furthermore, where gender is evident it is unacknowledged. In the previous quotation about the importance

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} ibid., p.63.
\item \textsuperscript{13} ibid., p.65.
\item \textsuperscript{14} For a review of individualism see J.Henriques, et.al., ‘The subject of psychology’ in Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity, eds. H.Henriques, et.al., London and New York, Methuen;
\item \textsuperscript{15} ibid.
\end{itemize}
of consumption, the gender of the housewife and her relation to her goods is assumed to be 'natural'. In so doing, and important facet of both the subject and the subject of consumption is ignored.

Stemming from and related to this theory of the subject is the assumption that there are no fetters on the meanings that an individual may construct out of consumption. Although there are time and space constraints, as indicated in the preceding quotation, there are no constraints on the possible meaning of goods: anything goes. It is possible that goods have many meanings, and the aim of consumption is to stabilize meaning. On this reading, however, there are no hegemonic meanings, nor are there any significant power relations involved in the stabilization of meaning. Yet it is surely unrealistic to propose that the meaning of commodities is not given in any way. For instance, even if we accept that the individual creates his or her own social world this must be done in the context of other societal meanings. In short, it is absurd to think that the meaning of commodities is solely and freely determined by the consumer. Commodities circulate within webs of meaning, and the consumer is only one component of those webs.

Finally, these deficiencies can be traced to the definition of consumption which Douglas and Isherwood employ. They treat consumption as the 'use of material possessions that is beyond commerce and free within the law'. By confining consumption to use in this way, consideration of the pre-given or constructed meanings of commodities is precluded at the outset. As a result, consumption is involved in culture-making practices only at the level of use, which means that the multiple ways that commodities are imbued with

17 See Douglas and Isherwood, op.cit, p.57.
19 Douglas and Isherwood, op.cit., p.57.
meaning and become cultural signifiers cannot be understood. Such a definition of consumption precludes at the outset any consideration of retailing, since the process of acquiring commodities is not given any efficacy in the cultural constitution of society or the individual.

Material culture approaches to consumption practices thus have three overwhelming deficiencies, which are both products of and contributors to this narrow conceptualization of consumption. First, in ignoring the social construction of the individual the importance of consumption must be tied to the use of commodities by the individual. Second, confining consumption to use means that the meaning of commodities pre-use can neither exist nor be considered. Finally, the result of this is that retailing and shopping are given neither consideration nor salience.

(ii) Marxism, Commodities and Consumer Society

Marxist approaches to consumption became dominant in the 1950s, and maintained this hegemony until the 1970s. These approaches, although focusing on commodities and the negative implications of consumer society, contain insights into consumption practices that allow one to go beyond the limitations of material culture perspectives. In particular, this literature provides a far richer understanding of the social construction of the individual and of how the meanings of commodities are created.

Marxism also views consumption and commodities as means of integrating individuals into the social order, a means of producing culture. Yet this integration is not carried out by the active agency of the individual,

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20 See M. Nava, _op. cit._
but by the system of mass production and distribution. Consumption was and is a form of social control, an activity that moulds people's lives and their identity. The outcome of this exercise of social control is a transformation in the personality of individuals:

The people recognize themselves in their commodities, they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment.\(^{22}\)

To Baran and Sweezy, for instance, mass consumption was an integral component in the incorporation of the working class into capitalism. The real social and exploitative relations of the workplace were being masked by the imaginary relations produced by commodities and their consumption.\(^{23}\)

Variants of this approach are taken in the contemporary literature that addresses advertising. For instance, Stuart Ewen takes the view that advertising in the early twentieth century created a mass market whose participants had their desires created for them.\(^{24}\) According to Ewen, the emergence of the culture of consumption around the beginning of the twentieth century served to inculcate new, non-class based and obfuscatory values.\(^{25}\) A similar approach is taken by Williamson, who sees consumption and commodities as central to the ideology that supports capitalism.\(^{26}\)

Despite these variations, these approaches inadequately deal with three issues. First, the process whereby the subject is constructed, where it is considered at all, is one-sided. Throughout these perspectives, the consumers'
role is one of receptor of meaning created by advertisers and capitalists. In contrast to material culture approaches discussed above, consumption shapes identity by consumers internalizing and reproducing the meaning of commodities given to them. This can be traced to the general Marxist view of the subject, where the individual is an actor rather than a script writer. The subject is a sponge that soaks up meaning, a receptor of ideology promulgated by capitalists. The meaning of commodities thus produced is internalized, not negotiated, by consumers. Williamson’s early work provides one example of this, where Marxism is used in conjunction with semiotics to illustrate the false consciousness produced by commodity advertising.

Second, and as a result of the first, commodities only have a class meaning, and consumption moulds the subject in class terms. This can be illustrated in two ways. On the one hand, the class character of commodities can be traced directly to Marx, for commodities are once and for all the products of social labour and this is their true meaning. Indeed, when commodities are given other meanings, when they are used as substitutes for real, class-based, social relations, commodity fetishism and false consciousness become paramount. On the other hand, as Smith notes, Marx will only allow himself to consider individuals insofar as they are the personification of economic attributes like class. Class is the defining characteristic of the Marxian subject, being the primary lens through which the individual

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30 See P.Smith, 1988, Discerning the Subject, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p.4.
experiences their world and the subject position most important politically. These two points are aptly summarized by Smith:

... individuals are only the ground, the resting place for certain properties which are abstract and they attain the status of the concrete only at the point where they belong to a class...31

Combining these two factors with the issue of consumption, we can see how according to critical theory the effect of consumption on subjectivity is a class one: of replacing the reality of relations of production (which are class relations) with the obfuscatory relations of consumption.

Such a class-based account of both subjectivity and the commodity are also subject to a variety of criticisms. Specifically, the multiple subject positions which a person occupies, such as gender and race, cannot be accounted for by a story that gives primacy and singularity to class.32 In addition, scholarship throughout this century has emphasized the over-determined and multi-dimensional character of the commodity. Although produced for exchange, in order to be sold, through advertising, commodities are imbued with many meanings that cannot be reduced to class.

Finally, consumption practices like shopping are given no credence at all, for conceptually the production of meaning can only be in the conditions of production of commodities, never in the use of commodities themselves. Consumption is not important in its own right, but as a mirror into production.33 Consumption merely consists of consumers using and therefore internalizing the capitalist (and advertising) produced meaning of

31 ibid.
32 This is doubly apparent in the feminist literature where the possibility of interpreting women's lives in class terms is disputed. For recent contributions see K.Harriss, 1989, 'New alliances: socialist feminism in the eighties', Feminist Review, 31; and a response by L.Briskin, 1990, 'Identity politics and the hierarchy of oppression: a comment', Feminist Review, 35, pp.102-108.
33 Baran and Sweezy op.cit. give a classic account of this.
commodities. There is no intermediary step, nor is there any negotiation or contestation of meaning. As well as not according any significance to retailing, or any efficacy to individual agency, such approaches deny the independence and cultural significance of consumption practices beyond the spectre of political incorporation.

Relatedly, even if it is accepted that consumption is such a process of internalization of meaning, no maps showing how this occurs are provided. The production of false consciousness through activities like consuming is a black box, a process that just somehow happens. Moreover, the process whereby commodities become part of people’s lives remains unexamined, as does any analysis of the activity of consumption itself. Again consumption is seen as a single act, not a process.

(iii) Popular Culture and Consumption

With the shifting attention toward popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s consumption practices were placed firmly back on the research agenda and given renewed significance and legitimacy. Being couched within a popular culture framework has meant that the constitutive character of commodities and consumption has been a paramount issue, as has the possibility of hegemonic meanings being negotiated by the consumer. As a result, some of the flaws of material culture and Marxist approaches have been countered.

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35 See J.Fiske, 1989, Reading the Popular, Boston, Unwin Hyman; Tomlinson, op.cit.; and Nava, op.cit.
Specifically, the perspective of popular culture holds that advertisers and capitalists neither reflect nor produce societal meaning but reconstitute it.\(^{36}\) This reconstituted meaning is then negotiated by the consumer: ‘we ourselves take part in the creation of meaning in messages, . . . [we are] participants in a code that unites the designer and the reader’.\(^{37}\) Similarly, Fiske in one of the latest works on this topic, says:

> meanings of commodities do not lie in themselves as objects, and are not determined by their conditions of production or distribution, but are produced finally by the way they are consumed. The ways and whys of consumption are where cultural meanings are made and circulated, the system of production and distribution provides the signifiers only.\(^{38}\)

Significantly, however, the consumer imbued meaning of commodities is neither free-floating nor unconstrained: it occurs in the context of signifiers provided by the systems of production and distribution, to use Fiske’s terminology. Leiss puts this another way: ‘consumer choices are largely a process of becoming acquainted with messages about commodities and arbitrarily choosing which to believe for the time being’.\(^{39}\) That is to say, the meanings of commodities are not solely determined by the consumer, nor the producer or distributive agent or advertiser, but is the product of both.

Such approaches are definitely an advance on the Marxist and material culture approaches discussed earlier. In particular, the point at which the meanings of commodities becomes apparent is not fixed, but is located at the interstices of production and consumption, effectively in the body of the consumer. Finally and as a result, the concept of the negotiation of meaning


\(^{37}\) ibid, p. 159.

\(^{38}\) J. Fiske, op. cit, p. 28.

\(^{39}\) W. Leiss, 1976, The Limits to Satisfaction: an essay on the problem of needs and commodities, Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press.
facilitates a much more nuanced understanding of the subject. People are not only constructed by consumption practices, but through consuming, in that it is a construction participated in by the individual.

Despite these advances this framework would seem to have its limitations. First, the actual process by which consumption shapes subjectivity remains unexamined. We know that it is some sort of negotiation, but the characteristics, influences, terms and location of the negotiations are not elaborated in any coherent way. What does it mean to say that meaning rests with the consumer? In particular, the vagueness of stating that consumption affects subjectivity through a process of negotiation implies a danger of celebrating and exaggerating the active agency and imagination of the consumer. Such a possibility of falling into the trap of individualism has been realized in Fiske's preoccupation with resistance, proletarian shopping and the guerilla tactics of shoppers. In sum, adhering to an essentially unspecified notion of negotiation, curtails the potential insights the perspective of popular culture can offer into the cultural significance of consumption because it is too broad.

This lack of understanding of the process of negotiation is partly the result of an inadequate conceptualization of consumption, which is my second criticism. Although the definition of consumption is broadened to minimally include the acts of purchasing and using commodities, these two acts are essentially conflated. According to Leiss, Kline and Jhally consuming is the process whereby consumers make connections between themselves and the commodity. That is to say, using and purchasing commodities are accorded

41 Fiske, op.cit, p.16.
42 Leiss, Jhally and Kline, op.cit, p.155.
the same significance. For example, Fiske’s discussion of ‘shopping for identity’ essentially equates shopping for commodities with the advertising induced meaning of commodities, with shopping merely being a conduit of those meanings.\textsuperscript{43} Yet consumption is a multi-dimensional process, as others have shown, and these dimensions should not be conflated.\textsuperscript{44} Consumption practices minimally include searching for and/or purchasing commodities, accumulating information about commodities, modifying commodities, using them and disposing of them. These dimensions of consumption practices occur under different contexts in different locations, which means that they cannot be conflated. Retailing is one of these contexts, a factor whose specificity and general contours cannot be understood within a framework that has a uni-dimensional conception of consumption.

Thirdly and relatedly, although the subject is seen as socially constructed in the parlance of popular culture, it is essentially a contextless subject. That is, the bartering that occurs between producer and consumer appears to occur in a vacuum, not in particular times and places that have an effect on the negotiation. Yet it is clear that if the meaning of commodities is variable and may be context dependent, then so too would be the construction of the subject.

\textit{(iv) Summary}

In this section I have made three consistent criticisms of the dominant approaches to the culture of consumption. First, all three retain an

\textsuperscript{43} ibid.

incoherent notion of the subject. Material culture approaches remain tied to humanist individualism; Marxist work accedes to the uni-dimensionality of a class-based subject; and although useful in highlighting the social construction of the subject and the potential productivity of agency and resistance, popular culture theorists fail to recognize the contextuality of such constructions. Thus even if retailing was the focus, understanding of retailing is precluded from the outset since its salient characteristics of many subjectivities and spatialities cannot be grasped.

Second, common to all three approaches is an inadequate understanding of how the commodity is imbued with meaning. The meaning of commodities lies at either end of the producer-consumer dichotomy according to the first two approaches; whereas in the third meaning is a product of a negotiation whose terms are never specified. Again, this precludes consideration of retailing in that the possibility of the meaning of commodities being produced beyond the producer or consumer is not recognized.

Finally, too narrow or too broad conceptions of consumption characterize the literature. Within material culture and Marxist perspectives, consumption as a meaningful practice is confined to use. Uni-dimensional conceptions of consumption are not confined to the approaches I have considered here, but are more widespread. Williams has noted that historically and etymologically in English, the term consumption was most often associated with using up or wasting away, as indicated in the use of the word as a synonym for tuberculosis. Interestingly, the word consumer, referring to the using-up of what was produced, gained precedence in the mid-twentieth century over the word 'customer', used from the fifteenth century to

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45 R. Williams, 1976, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, New York, Oxford University Press, p.78.
describe a buyer or purchaser. On the other hand, the reverse problem exists in popular culture and its antecedents, where consumption is a multi-faceted process of negotiation. Again, this can be seen as part of wider theoretical currents. Arising in part from the influence of de Certeau, who defines consumption as any use of a text, popular culture studies of commodities characteristically conflate purchasing and using.

Derivative of, and contributing to, all three criticisms is the fact that retailing is unchartered and its specificity unable to be captured. Retailing as a moment in which the meaning of commodities is constructed, consumption practices reconstituted, and subject positions constituted are not recognized, nor accorded any conceptual or cultural efficacy. If consumption practices are treated monolithically and uni-dimensionally, then parts of those practices like retailing are inevitably missed.

B. Making Space for Retailing: Consumerist Discourses and the Circulation of Commodities

The inability to visualize and conceptualize the importance of retailing is in part the result of the use of theoretical frameworks incapable of addressing simultaneously the multi-dimensionality of consumption practices in general and the specificity and contextuality of specific consumption practices like shopping. In effect, all three approaches reviewed above are embedded in frameworks permeated by dichotomies, such as those between production and consumption, producer and user, that preclude consideration of

46 Ibid., p.79.
an element like retailing that lies in the middle. Since consumption is essentially concerned with the circulation of commodities, with many meanings in many sites, then some attention to fluidity is required. What is needed, therefore, is an approach able to encapsulate the many meanings of commodities, the many sites at which these meanings are located and fixed, and the many subjectivities that are the result of, and embedded within, these meanings. I outline the components of such an approach in this section.

(i) Elements of a Poststructuralist Approach to Consumption - Discourse and Power.

Much of the theoretical impetus for recent interest in cultural studies has come from poststructuralism, here broadly defined as a multitude of theoretical perspectives that share criticism of traditional concepts such as class primacy and production-based accounts of society, and the link between modernity and progress; and are also alert to the multiple perspectives on and ways of constituting the world, to name but a few characteristics.\textsuperscript{48} Its influence throughout cultural studies is wide, especially because of the way the cultural constitution of categories and of everyday life is emphasized.\textsuperscript{49} Two important displacements made by poststructuralism can be noted.

First, poststructuralist analysis is an approach that does not take the existence of categories for granted, but instead examines the conditions under which and through which such categories come into existence. One way that we can understand the constitution of these categories is through the concept of discourses, the ways in which knowledge, the possibilities for knowledge


\textsuperscript{49} F. Haug et al., 1987, \textit{Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory}, London, Verso, p.17. See also Nava, \textit{op.cit.}. 
and an individual's position in society are produced, maintained and reproduced in a variety of ways. Weedon has provided a relatively clear portrayal of discourses, which she sees as:

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern.\(^{50}\)

It is important to see that discourses are also material. They are not only ways of thinking but also inhere in the ways in which the world is organized. Notions of masculinity and femininity embedded within familial discourses, for example, structure the way we think about men, women and the family.\(^{51}\) But they also inhere in the material practices of everyday life, such as domestic architecture, or the physical design of the family home.\(^{52}\) Indeed, so-called 'material' elements like the built environment are products of, and contributors to, the discursive construction of categories. As put by Rajchman,

... the singular manner in which the general hospital gave mad people to be seen precedes the elaboration of the classical theory of madness, and the architectural reorganization of prisons precedes the new theory of crime.\(^{53}\)

That is, architecture is not just a manifestation of power but can make discourses visible.\(^{54}\) More generally, the commodity, as a material thing, has its meaning constructed discursively and becomes an expression of that meaning.

\(^{50}\) Weedon, op.cit., p.105.

\(^{51}\) For a summary see Beechey, op.cit.


\(^{54}\) ibid.
It is equally important to understand that discourses are always and everywhere gendered. Feminist criticism of Foucault has been broad and wide-ranging, centering around the sexism of Foucault's analysis. These criticisms have led to a recognition of the gendering of discourses, and the ways that gender is subsequently constructed. Such an analysis has proceeded by identifying both the implicit gendering of discourses like those surrounding those of the citizen, as well as discourses specifically related to femininity and masculinity. One example of the latter is familialism, interpreted as ideas based on the family and masculine and feminine roles within it, that inhere in many social relations and institutions and as a result are important in the constitution of gender. Thus despite Foucault's neglect of gender, it is possible to combine a focus on discourse with feminism to productively highlight the gendering of social life.

Poststructuralists have also displaced the location of the source of power, positing a different source and impetus for the discursive constitution of categories. Instead of focusing on class and capital alone, or solely on gender and patriarchy, discourses in the modern era draw from many sources, in many places and are related in such ways that cannot be traced to a single dominating source like capital. What this effectively means is that there is no absolute source from which all power and all discourses emanate. Rather, power inheres in every social relation. With respect to consumption, this implies that the meaning of commodities is constructed from a variety of vantage points, not just the individual or capital. Again, this can be

55 See the contributions in I. Diamond and L. Quinby, 1988, Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Boston, Northeastern University Press.
productively used from a feminist perspective, where the impossibility of reducing gender oppression to class oppression and the multi-dimensionality of femininity are central concerns.

Just as power is everywhere, so too is the power/knowledge nexus. There exists a relation of mutual dependence and reinforcement between power and knowledge, such that knowledge and what is defined as true is constituted through power relations and also that relations of power (between shoppers and retail institutions, for example), are also the product of knowledge.\(^{58}\) What this means is that knowledge, such as the discourses of the human sciences, become important in the constitution of society and individuals, as I will show below.

\textit{(ii) Consumerist Discourses and the Circulation and Meaning of Commodities.}

Poststructuralist insights have informed recent discussions of commodities and consumer society and Nava suggests that the concept of consumerist discourses can be used to overcome the problems I have identified above.\(^{59}\) Consumerist discourses are the ways in which consumption, commodities, shopping, buying and selling are thought about, talked about and situated in the social milieu. They are not only confined to activities directly related to commodities and the market but permeate all facets of life. That is, in the modern world, consumerist discourses are ubiquitous. They are to be found in the legal system, in political discourses, in education (e.g., training on how to be a good consumer), in technical discourses on design and

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\(^{59}\) M.Nava, \textit{op.cit.}, p.207.
in the more traditionally recognized areas of retailing, advertising and market research. They spread through a variety of media: from magazines, television, newspapers, retail spaces, through to academic papers and conferences. In summary consumerism is effectively a discursive field, with many different discourses and ways of seeing and organizing the world competing for dominance.

The concept of consumerist discourses addresses the problems of isolation and narrow definition of consumption and the process by which the meaning of commodities is created, in the following ways. Since consumption practices are governed and constituted by consumerist discourses that are ubiquitous, then it follows that practices of consumption are not isolated to the act of using commodity, but permeate social life. Further and relatedly, the cultural meanings of commodities are products of consumerist discourses. What this means is that since there are many discourses of consumption, there are many meanings with which that commodities can be imbued with. Commodities do not only have a class meaning, nor a meaning that solely says 'buy me', but many potential meanings since consumerist discourses draw upon other discourses.

Yet despite this ability to comprehend the multi-dimensionality of both consumption practices and the meanings of commodities, the concept of consumerist discourses is empty and subject to the same criticisms I directed at the definition of consumption in popular culture unless it is fixed or grounded in some way. Just because commodities potentially have many meanings produced from many vantage points, and the meaning of a commodity changes as it circulates through society, it does not necessarily follow that commodities and their meanings are continually in flux. Instead, in order to maintain hegemony consumerist discourses must fix or stabilize the
cultural meanings of commodities in an effort to control meaning and in many cases ultimately encourage consumption.

The important point to note here is that meaning is not just in flux, but also is in transit. As McCracken puts it: 'Meaning is constantly flowing to and from several locations in the social world'.\(^{60}\) Moreover, these meanings are fixed in particular times, places and contexts. Others have suggested, from different theoretical perspectives, a variety of places in which attempts are made to fix the meaning of commodities. For instance, to McCracken, there are three repositories of the meaning of goods - the culturally-constituted world, the good and the individual consumer.\(^{61}\) The meaning of commodities is transferred between these by a variety of mechanisms, including advertising, the fashion system, and exchange rituals like gift giving, all of which would be considered here as elements of consumerist discourses.\(^{62}\)

Although problematic from the perspective of dichotomies and unexamined categories, this work makes the useful point that efforts to fix meaning occur in particular places at particular times, and it is here that the materiality of consumerist discourses can be understood. There are many places in which meaning and subjectivity are fixed by consumerist discourses, such as: the home, the workplace, school, holiday resorts, and retail spaces. Further, these places are not just containers or contexts in which meaning-laden commodities are created, but also have an effect on these meanings, as I show in the next section.

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\(^{60}\) McCracken, op.cit, p.71.
\(^{61}\) ibid., p.72.
\(^{62}\) ibid., pp.77-87. Carrier, op.cit, also develops a similar scheme but pays more attention to shopping.
C. Retailing and the Place-specific Meanings of Commodities

(i) What is Retailing?

Retailing is one point through which commodities circulate and at which attempts are made to fix their meaning. Controlled by retailing institutions or retail capital, retailing is the node through which commodities are transferred from the produced to user, or the medium through which:

objects begin to leave the realm of work, commodities and commodity relations and enter the realm of home, possessions and gift relations.63

As part of the consumerist discursive field, retailing draws upon and becomes intertwined with consumerist discourses. Specifically, the structure and activities within retail institutions are constituted by retailing discourses.

In some ways this conceptualization is not very different from other understandings of retailing. For instance, the economically-focused literature sees retailing as a system of distributing commodities from the producer to the final user, with retail capital ‘that part of total social capital which is located between productive capital and the final consumer and the distinctive function of retail capital the final exchange of commodities.64 This is also well recognized in the marketing literature.65

Yet in other ways this conceptualization is different and more insightful, for retailing is more than a medium or node through which

63 Carrier, op.cit, p.592.
commodities circulate. Retailing discourses, as part of the network of consumerist discourses, influence the meanings of commodities and consumption practices in varied ways. Retail institutions are often the most visible edifices of consumption, through their physical presence and incorporation into everyday life. Moreover, as a moment in which commodities and consumption practices are shaped, retailing influences general attitudes toward consumption. As part of consumerist discourses, and in the process of selling commodities, attempts are made to fix the meanings of commodities within and by retail institutions.

(ii) Retailing and the Meaning of Commodities

The production and control of the meanings of commodities in and through retailing occurs in two major ways which I delineate in this section: instilling commodities with meaning through retailing advertising discourses; and the manipulation of space.

That the primary aim of retailers is to sell commodities or more specifically to buy from the producer (or wholesaler) and sell to the consumer, is without exception. That is, the continued viability of retailing institutions is dependent on the steady movement of commodities into and out of the store. Retailers in this sense are very much like the producers of commodities, and devote their efforts toward selling commodities. Retailing discourses, therefore, are necessarily advertising discourses, entailing strategies to sell goods or commodities. In a similar way that advertisers imbue commodities with meaning in order to sell them, so too do retailers.

Retailers give a commodity a certain meaning and in the majority of cases this meaning is appropriated and/or negotiated in and through shopping.

Given the interconnections between elements of consumerist discourses, it is likely that the meanings produced by retailing discourses may be the same as manufacturers meanings or commensurate with societal attributes of that particular commodity. In this respect retailing would be merely one link in the chain encircling the circulation of commodities. However, such a description does not capture some of the uniqueness of retailing as a site where the meaning of commodities is produced.

Retailing is not only metaphorically a moment or place in which the meaning of commodities is fixed, it is also literally a place where the meaning of commodities is produced. That is, with few exceptions, the acquisition and distribution of commodities occurs in a particular place, which is different and separate from the points of production and use. Throughout the history of modern retailing, retail institutions have been connected to a particular place. It therefore follows that the processes by which commodities are imbued with meanings within and by retailing do not occur on the head of a pin but in particular, bounded and controlled environments. This simple and apparently obvious point has diverse implications for a conceptualization of retailing, some of which are outlined by Benson:

67 See chapter three for a brief history of retailing. An important exception to this generalization is mail-order catalogues, see T.J.Schlereth, 1980, 'Mail-order catalogs as resources in material culture studies', in Artifacts and the American Past, ed. T.J.Schlereth, Nashville, American Association for State and Local History, pp.48-65.
Manufacturers appealed directly to the consumer on the relatively narrow basis of the product alone, usually relying on a trademark or slogan to convey their message. But the newly self-conscious department store-manager spoke lyrically of developing a store image - presenting the store as a coordinated whole, harmonizing all its aspects, standardizing so with a special twist that would distinguish the store in the mind of the public.  

Benson’s work suggests, but does not explore, one of the most unique and interesting ways that the meaning of commodities is produced within retailing: the availability of space as a resource. The place-embeddedness of retailing means that one of the few resources with which retailers can make themselves and their commodities distinctive - a necessary component if commodities are to be sold - is the actual location that they inhabit and the space within the store itself. Thus the manipulation of space and place can be identified as integral to, and characteristic of, retail capital and institutions.

The place specific nature of retailing means that the meanings with which commodities are imbued are also dependent on that place. Retail spaces are built for the display of commodities, which are not displayed in isolation but in association with each other. In particular, commodities are arranged thematically and spatially in an attempt to fix the meaning of commodities. It is important to note that this manipulation varies with the form of retailing and between different retailers. For example, throughout the twentieth century, special places within stores like furniture showrooms with commodities displayed in ‘real’ settings, have been established to aid the process of fixing meaning. In the contemporary shopping mall, the location of

69 The manipulation of space by retailers is also recognized by in N.K. Blomley, 1988, Consumption Space, Production Space, unpublished manuscript, Department of Geography, Boston University, to which I am indebted.
particular stores within the mall is strictly controlled, as is the movement of people within the store.\textsuperscript{71} In short, as spaces of commodities, retailing manipulates location in order to imbue commodities with meaning and sell them.

Further, in order to sell commodities, retailing institutions need not only to encourage people to buy once in the store, they also need to encourage people to visit and hence buy from the store frequently. This is recognized in both mainstream and alternative accounts.\textsuperscript{72} This latter aim of encouraging frequent custom of the store often takes the form of encouraging loyalty to the firm, which in turn involves the retailer in strategies of place making. In order to ensure loyalty and frequent custom retailers would make their space an inviting one. They would essentially mould the environment and ambience of the store. As put by Haug:

\begin{quote}
The exhibition of commodities, their inspection, the act of purchase, and all the associated moments, are integrated into the concept of one theatrical total work of art which plays upon the public's willingness to buy.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

People visit the space not just to buy commodities, but also to buy and consume the environment. The retail space itself becomes a commodity.

In sum, retail institutions are not only involved with imbuing commodities with meaning, but do so in novel, spatial ways: locations within the store or retail environment is used to fix the meaning of commodities relationally; and place-making strategies are used. Given these strategies, it follows that an integral component of the meaning of a commodity is the

\textsuperscript{73} Haug, \textit{op.cit.}, p.69.
characteristics of the place from which it was purchased. Thus when a commodity is bought from a retail space it is not only the commodity that is purchased but, in a sense, so is the place in which it is purchased. I will return to this point in chapter five.

(iii) Shopping and Retailing

Not only are place-specific meanings of commodities constructed within retail spaces through the media of retailing discourses, but commodities are also purchased within retail spaces. Retail spaces are therefore places where the negotiation between consumer and producer highlighted in popular culture discussions occurs. Shopping, involving the purchase of commodities within retail spaces, is important in the way that commodities become part of everyday life. Furthermore, shopping is a practice governed and constituted by retailing discourses. An analysis of retailing, therefore, helps delineate the terms of the negotiation between consumer and producer (retailer) that occurs in the process of appropriating commodities.

D. Retailing and the Production of Subject Positions

As a place where the meaning of commodities is fixed and as a context for the negotiation of meaning between producer and consumer, retailing is therefore implicated in the construction of subjectivity. Two major ways in which subjectivity is produced or constructed through the place-contingent activity of purchasing commodities can be identified: through the representations of subject positions embedded in commodities and through
influence over the process of acquiring commodities, or shopping. In order to explore these processes, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by subject position.

(i) The Subject, Subjectivity and Subject Positions

To say that these three terms - the subject, subjectivity and subject position - are misunderstood would be an understatement. Misunderstanding and mis-specification of the terms pervade the literature:

In some cases, the 'subject' will appear to be synonymous with the 'individual', the 'person'. In others, - for example in psychoanalytical discourse - it will take on a more specialized meaning and refer to the unconsciously structured illusion of plenitude which we usually call 'the self'. Or elsewhere, the 'subject' might be understood as the specifically subjected object of social and historical forces and determinations.\(^7^4\)

The concept of subject position is perhaps most easily grasped. A subject position is a position called into existence through discourse.\(^7^5\) Put most simply, a subject position can be described as a particular way of being in the world, a way of acting, thinking that forms a component of who we are. Subject positions are effects of, and caught within, a web of discourses and social practices in the sense that ways of being are constructed by discourses.\(^7^6\)


\(^7^5\) See Beechey and Donald, op.cit., for an overview of different conceptions of the subject.

\(^7^6\) Henriques et.al. op.cit., p.112.
This notion of subject position can best be understand with an example. For instance, Ferguson shows how clients of bureaucratic, welfare state discourses have to necessarily adopt a feminine position and are actively constructed as feminine. This adoption of a feminine position is the product of three inter-related moments. First, particular types of behaviour are implicit in bureaucracies understanding of its subjects. Thus ideas of masculinity and femininity inform its functioning, and are embedded in the design of programmes. Second, different bureaucratic discourses address different types of people. Since bureaucratic discourses are part of a network of power relations of which gender is a part, then the discourses address women in a particular place in society, since welfare for women tends to be support based on their roles as wives and mothers. This is what I mean by constructing a subject position - it is only from these positions that bureaucratic discourses can be accessed and understood. In some senses, then, the process whereby a subject position is constructed is much like Althusser's process of interpellation, in that interpellation also is the identification with a discourse or ideological system.

Although not coterminous with the individual, I find it most useful to think about the subject as conceptually approximating the individual in common parlance. That is, the subject is the constellation of forces, positions and characteristics that make us different; give us our specificity. The subject is more than the sum of subject positions. Both consciously and unconsciously, the multiple subject positions that comprise the subject collide and are mediated in complex ways. What this means is that there can be no one-to-

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78 Coward, op.cit.
one mapping of subject positions into the individual. However, what can be ascertained are the subject positions of which the subject is comprised.

Finally, subjectivity is most productively thought of as the potential for agency, resistance, or independent action in the face of the discursive constitution of the subject. It is therefore different from both the subject and subject positions.

It follows that when analyzing a cultural practice or environment composed of a set of discourses like shopping and retailing, the notion of subject position is most relevant. Because of the presence of the unconscious and inability to determine how various subject positions combine to form the subject, then it is not possible to talk about the subject or subjectivity of shopping, or the subject produced within and by retailing, without recourse to extensive analyses, perhaps psychoanalytical, of individual shoppers. With a focus on the strategies of a particular department store rather than shoppers, we can only talk about the subject positions constructed by retailing discourses.

Foucault's conception of the subject as always and everywhere 'the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces', which implies the discursive construction of subject positions has been attacked from many fronts. It is claimed that Foucault's position involves omnipresent, omniscient power and discourses. The subject is totally constructed by discourses, and since there is no essential humanity - 'the individual is not a pre-given entity' - there is no way the subject or individual can counter it. In essence, there is no room for either

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81 Foucault, 1980, op.cit, p.73.
agency or political change. As a result, Foucault leaves no room for independent political action and constructs a quite deterministic account of the modern subject. Foucault himself did not adequately address this question, maintaining but not explaining that where there is power there is resistance.⁸²

Part of the problem here lies with a confusion of terminology, especially between the subject, subject positions and subjectivity. Just because subject positions are constructed does not mean that subjectivity is completely determined. As Smith notes, it may be that the contradictions between the various subject positions a person is called into through discourse may form a basis of resistance and agency.⁸³

The more relevant criticism here is acutely summarized here by Smith:

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\ldots \text{specific subject positions, each a small datum in subjectivity, cannot necessarily be predicted as the outcome of specific discourses. This is because the subject-position that might be demanded by an interpellation is not necessarily the one which is effected: each interpellation has to encounter, accommodate, and be accommodated by, a whole history of remembered and colligated positions.}^{84}
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However, an approach focused on discourses and representations can identify possible subject positions that may be taken up and is useful in this respect. Moreover, the identification of possible subject positions envisaged through discourse illustrates the context in which subjects are formed, and have an influence even if somehow they are resisted. As Weedon cogently notes, even if we decide not to take up a particular subject position, we are still being influenced by that discourse.

⁸² M. Foucault, 1990, op.cit.
⁸³ Smith, op.cit., p.xxv.
⁸⁴ ibid., p.34.
We may embrace these ways of being, these subject positions wholeheartedly, we may reject them outright or we may offer resistance while complying to the letter with what is expected of us. Yet even when we resist a particular subject position and the mode of subjectivity which it brings with it, we do so from the position of an alternative social definition of femininity. In patriarchal societies we cannot escape the implications of femininity. Everything we do signifies compliance or resistance to dominant norms of what it is to be a woman.85

Thus the focus on discourses and their implied subject positions can be justified on at least two grounds, as long as the limitations of such an approach are realized.

One final point about subject position is its construction through the power/knowledge nexus. In particular, subject positions are often constituted through relations of knowledge, of what is defined as true, as well as relations of power. Moreover, these relations are inherently gendered.

(ii) The Subject Position of Shopper and Consumer

In terms of the discursive construction of subject positions, retailing discourses necessarily construct the subject position of the shopper: a position that shops, buys and ultimately consumes commodities, and is subject to the control of the discourse. Once inside a particular retail space, a shopper is subject to the terms of the discourse. In particular, an analysis of retailing discourses which operate within and construct, a specific place, highlighting,

... the forms of subjectification involved in modern constructed spaces - the ways in which social agents are constituted as persons with certain definite attributes and capacities with certain forms of buildings/institutions.86

85 C.Weedon, op.cit., p.86.
Consistent with the poststructuralist emphasis on multiple subject positions, there can be no pre-determination of these characteristics nor any hierarchy. However, the femininity of the shopper is worth noting here and will be taken up throughout the rest of the thesis.

The second way that subject positions can be constructed within and through retailing is through the medium of the commodity and of representations. That is, in much the same way envisaged in earlier approaches, the commodity is involved in the construction of subject positions. In imbuing commodities with meaning and selling them, representations about people are presented, which are negotiated in the act of purchasing the commodity. Due to the many meanings of the commodity the process of acquiring commodities will necessarily involve contact with many subject positions. Further, the geographical specificity of retail discourses and commodities within retail spaces means that the subject positions constructed will take on peculiar, localized characteristics.

E. Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to develop a framework in which the intersection of modernity, familialism, commodities and place with femininity in retailing can be captured and understood. Given the paucity of literature that approaches retailing from a cultural perspective, I began by reviewing three dominant approaches within scholarship concerned with the contours of twentieth century consumer society and the way that commodities become part of everyday life. Here, in discussions of the ways that commodities are imbued with meaning and become implicated in subject positions, retailing
was not only neglected, but any understanding of retailing was foreclosed by: 1. the confinement of consumption to use in the case of material culture or the conflation of consumption practices in popular culture; and 2. a non-contextualized understanding of the subject and subject positions. Moreover, even if retailing was the focus, its intersection with discourses of modernity, familialism and place in the construction of femininity could not be understood because of inadequate understanding of the place of consumption practices in society.

In the second section of the chapter I attempted to overcome this conceptual exclusion of retailing by simultaneously adopting a poststructuralist approach and broadening the definition of consumption. I suggested that consumption practices like shopping and the way we think about commodities were constituted by consumerist discourses. Such a perspective counters the criticisms of the first section in that through the multiplicity of consumerist discourses there are: 1. many dimensions of consumption practices; 2. many meanings of commodities; and therefore 3. many subject positions potentially constructed. Combined with a geographical sensitivity, it also follows that there are many places in which these occur.

With this in mind, it is possible to understand retailing as one site where attempts were made to fix the meanings of commodities, and subject positions potentially constructed through both the medium of the commodity and constitution of one particular consumption practice - shopping. Due to the place-specific nature of retailing institutions, attempts are made to fix the meanings of commodities through the manipulation of space in terms of location and also through place-making practices. Subject positions are constructed through control over the shopping environment and the activities of shoppers, and also through control over the meanings of commodities.
Chapter Three: Femininity, Modernity and the History of Retailing

Traditional research in retail history and geography has paid little attention to the department store as a point of intersection between discourses of modernity, consumerism, femininity and familialism and as sites where the meaning of commodities are produced. In general, retail geographers have focused on economically based issues like marketing, consumer choice and optimal location. Similarly, scholarship directed toward the history of retailing to a large extent has a chronological and factual intent: to describe the evolution of particular stores in particular cities. In both cases a useful bank of information has been accumulated that can be turned to an examination of the issues posed in the preceding two chapters.

My aim in this chapter is to make two slices through these literatures in order to demonstrate historically the inter-connections between retailing, subject positions and consumerism. In the first cut, I focus on the history of retailing and demonstrate its links with consumer society as well as its historical and geographical variation. I show how the department store, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, is a near perfect exemplar of the intersection of space, place, and femininity through the medium of the commodity. I also demonstrate how discourses of modernity

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2 This is a growing field. See the review of P.Samson, 1981, 'The department store, its past, its present and its future: a review article', Business History Review, 55,1, pp.26-34 and other references throughout this chapter.
and familialism surround and constitute this intersection. The second cut exposes the same time period from the perspective of subject positions, especially femininity. Through an elaboration of the interweaving of the consumer and shopper subject position, commodities and femininity I introduce one of the predominant subject positions constructed by retailing and consumerist discourses. Here I also document the incursion of modern, scientific discourses in the relation between femininity and commodities.

A second, and equally important, aim of this chapter is to introduce the case study that forms the basis of chapters four and five. Thus in the third and final part of this chapter I document briefly the history of the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver. My aim is not merely one of providing a chronology but is also to place Woodward's in its historical and geographical context. These four components - retailing, the department store, Vancouver and fifties femininity - provide a background to the case study that follows.
A. A History of Retailing in Europe and North America

According to Benson,

At its height, the department store expressed the spirit of the city as much as the meetinghouse embodied that of the seventeenth-century New England towns. The congestion, the liveliness, the material promise, the grand scale of the city, were distilled into the great stores. With as much as forty-two acres of floor space and a quarter of a million customers per day, these stores were not just places to shop but public spectacles and tourist attractions as well. Locals promenaded through the stores to see and be seen; out of towners were as eager to see Macy's as Central Park.³

The department store, often lauded as the signifier of the arrival of consumer society precisely because of the characteristics described by Benson, in fact grew out of a much older consumer society. In Britain the eighteenth, as well as the nineteenth, century, saw a consumer boom.

Men and in particular women, bought as never before . . . the later eighteenth century saw such a convulsion of getting and spending, such an eruption of new prosperity, and such an explosion of new production and marketing techniques, that a greater proportion of the population than in any previous society was able to enjoy the pleasures of buying consumer goods.⁴

It also saw, necessarily, changing attitudes toward consumption and shopping, with commodities forming an ever-increasing part of everyday life.⁵ Although debates exist as to the timing of this change, what is most interesting about

this period for my purposes is the identification of a commensurate form of retailing: the corner shop or general store.6

(i) The Corner Store

Following the decline of rural and urban fairs as methods of distributing commodities from producer to consumer, the corner or general store became the predominant type of retailing in the beginning of the eighteenth century.7 Consumers did not buy goods directly from the producer, as was the case earlier, but instead purchased commodities from stores that carried a wide range of commodities: the small, general store.

Almost everything from food (mainly staples like flour, sugar, butter), hardware and stationery were sold. Into this category can also be placed dry goods stores, which as sellers of fabric for clothing and furnishings, were as abundant as the corner stores.8 However, an important point to note is that goods in either the corner or dry goods store were not generally packaged in any way but were instead bought and sold in bulk, according to a particular customer's needs. Relatedly, small quantities of items were bought, such as two ounces of meat.9

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Although the corner store as a form of retailing cannot be mapped neatly into the characteristics of its contemporary consumer society, it is worth noting that the relatively small-scale of the circulation of commodities both contributed to, and was influenced by, the corner store. Further, the identification of general stores as catering to the working-class is commensurate with prevailing attitudes towards consumption and commodities.\textsuperscript{10} The purchase of commodities was not defined as a pleasurable activity, nor was it an activity engaged in by the middle classes. Instead, the purchase of commodities in general stores was perceived as purely functional and necessary. In sum, the characteristics of the corner store as a form of retailing were aligned with general perceptions of consumption.

Family ownership of corner stores was indicative of the spatial strategies of this form of retailing. The store and the family home were one and the same, with the store being one room, or the downstairs portion of the owner's house.\textsuperscript{11} Further, the corner or general store was dispersed and multiple, most often located in the centre of small, discrete, neighbourhoods, catering to a small customer base. This pattern was partly due to a lack of refrigeration, and because of financial inability to buy more than one meal in advance, twice daily trips to the corner store were common. Location in the family home and the contours of consumption practices meant that the display of commodities was not paramount and the environment of the store was not necessarily important. This can be seen in the fact that only minor alterations to the family home needed to be made to turn it into a store:

\textsuperscript{10} On the class nature of the general store see Bowlby op.cit. and Alexander, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{11} C.Hall, 1982, 'The butcher, the baker, the candlestickmaker: the shop and the family in the Industrial Revolution', in The Changing Experience of Women, eds. E.Whitelegg, et.al., Oxford, Open University Press, pp.2-16.
The small dining-parlour was to be converted into a shop, without any of its degrading characteristics; a table was to be the counter; one window was to be retained and unaltered, and the other changed into a glass door.\textsuperscript{12}

Finally, the corner store encouraged a peculiar mode of shopping, which is to say that a particular way of acquiring commodities went along with the corner and small dry goods stores. Consistent with the presence of family members in a small, often cluttered and not systematically organized store environment, the mode of shopping in the original corner store was also very personal and functional. That is, a personal relationship existed between store owner/worker and customer, and commodities were acquired in small quantities as they were required. Both the aim and mode of shopping were purely functional - the acquisition of already known commodities to satisfy needs. As a result, the corner store was an integral component of a small, local culture. Storekeepers and their families had a prominent place in the local hierarchy and the extension of credit to customers (women asked for credit, not men), placed the corner store in a central, yet difficult, position in the local culture.\textsuperscript{13}

Drawing all these factors together, it can be seen that the inter-relation of architecture, ownership, location and method of displaying commodities and mode of shopping within and encouraged by, the corner or general store was such that shopping and consumption were pursued as ends rather than means. The use value of commodities was paramount, as was the utility of shopping. Further, women and children shopped, not men.

\textsuperscript{12} Mrs.E.Gaskell, \textit{Cranford}, cited in Hall, \textit{op.cit.}, p.2.
\textsuperscript{13} Roberts, \textit{op.cit.}
(ii) *The Department Store as a Retailing and Cultural Form*

A dramatic reorganization of the way that commodities were distributed and perceived occurred in the mid to late nineteenth century. Although corner stores remained, their importance and uniqueness as retail institutions diminished as a result of the evolution of the department store.\(^{14}\) Often developing out of existing dry goods stores (and occasionally out of grocery stores), the department store was responsible for many retail revolutions.\(^{15}\) The department store first appeared in the mid-eighteenth century, at about the same time in France (particularly Paris), the United States (especially Chicago, New York and Philadelphia) and Britain (particularly London).\(^{16}\) Over the next seventy years the department store developed as a hegemonic form of retailing, with many subtle but minor changes occurring along the way.\(^{17}\)

Although 'no serious study has been undertaken of the actual rise and development of this [Eaton's] department store or of the transformation of the Canadian retail industry'\(^{18}\) it is worth briefly piecing together a history of the Canadian department store. Eastern Canadian department stores developed along with their counterparts from the United States: Henry Morgan and

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15 See for instance the survey provided in S.P.Benson, 1986, *Counter-Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

16 *ibid.*

17 For more discussion of these changes, which includes the feminization of the sales workforce, see S.Benson, 1986, *op.cit.*, esp. pp.12-30; and D.Chaney, 1983, 'The department store as a cultural form', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 1,3, pp.22-31.

Company opened in Montreal in 1845; Timothy Eaton established his first dry-goods store in Toronto in 1869; Simpsons opened in Toronto in 1874; and the Hudson's Bay Company moved into retailing in Winnipeg in 1881.\textsuperscript{19} Like department stores in the United States, these stores invariably expanded in situ, or moved to larger premises at a later date. In addition, these stores, especially Eaton's, were purveyors of the emerging culture of consumption and critical in the development of the character of Canadian cities.\textsuperscript{20}

What made the department store so successful and hegemonic in such a relatively short period? The major institutional and financial characteristics of the department store, which were a blend of the old and the new, help us to answer this question. Traditional readings of the department store present it as a form of retailing characterized by three major elements.\textsuperscript{21}

The first element is \textit{scale}. In comparison to small corner stores and even contemporary specialty stores, the department store was enormous in terms of both selling space and quantity of commodities for sale. Even early department stores often occupied an entire city block, sometimes ten storeys high, offering thousands of commodities were for sale.\textsuperscript{22}

Second, partly as a result of the scale of operations and partially the product of new methods of management, a distinguishing feature of the department store was the arrangement of commodities into \textit{departments}.\textsuperscript{23}

That is, either commodities of a given type were grouped together, or accessories were grouped with centrepieces - ties with suits for instance - into

\textsuperscript{19} H.Kalman and T.McDougall, 1985, 'Big stores on Main Street', \textit{Canadian Heritage,} 11, 1, pp.16-23. See also J.L.Santink, \textit{op.cit.} and excerpts on individual stores in J.W.Ferry, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{20} See for instance photographs of the exterior and interior of Eaton's in chapter 8 of J.L.Santink, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{21} It is important to note that these characteristics remain relevant in contemporary department stores.
\textsuperscript{22} See for instance the photographs of Macy's and Marshall Field and Co. in J.W.Ferry, \textit{op.cit.} compared to those in Roberts, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{23} See Benson, 1979, \textit{op.cit.} for an elaboration of these managerial methods.
departments. These departments became the building block, both financially and managerially, of the store.24

Third, although individually or family owned, the department store, because of its size, was run and controlled like a corporation.25 In other words, the owner, generally a man, would be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the store through a team of managers and workers. In this sense the department store as an institution was not only a qualitatively new and different form of retailing but was also a new form of business.26 This new form of retailing did retain some of the 'old', especially in the pervasiveness of paternalism in the running of the store.27

But these factors do not exhaust the distinctiveness of the department store; they miss the multiple ways that the department store lay at the heart of familialism, modernity, consumerism and spaces of femininity. I now want to offer an expanded interpretation of the department store, considering it as part of a nexus between the form of retailing (and shopping) and the emergence of consumption and shopping as cultural and pleasurable activities.

As a moment in the circulation of commodities, it should be obvious that retailing was part of, and a contributor to, the complex of attitudes and ideas about consumerism and the role of commodities in everyday life. The specific set of discourses governing and shaping the place-specific transference of commodities from producer to consumer in the department store were coincidental with, and linked to, general ideas about consumption and the

27 See Miller, op.cit.
circulation of commodities at the same time. Specifically, the rise of the department store as a form of selling and a set of discourses governing the way commodities were acquired was conjunctural with the emerging culture of consumption. Attitudes towards, and patterns of, consumption also began to change around the mid to late nineteenth century, as the 'age of thrift' gave way to an era where material possessions became increasingly important. The circulation of commodities and the activity of consumption itself became increasingly important both financially and culturally, and commodities formed a part of broader societal attitudes and ethos. The very existence of the department store served to document and inculcate these new ideas and practices in relation to consumption, in at least three ways. First, their existence in the centre of downtown districts, most often dominating their immediate surroundings, altered the city experience. In particular, the predominance of window displays brought commodities to the streets, to be gazed at in wonder. Second, the presence of daily advertising in the newspapers served to generate and reinforce a constancy and permanency to relations of consumption as a 'natural' part of everyday life. Third, the interior of the store was presented as a treasure house of commodities and so


32 On newspaper advertising see Benson, 1986, *op.cit.* p.103.
made very plain the new basis of society. These factors are evoked by Zola's description of a newcomer's reaction to the department store:

But Denise was absorbed by the display at the principal entrance. There she saw, in the open street, on the very pavement, a mountain of cheap goods - bargains, placed there to tempt the passers-by, and attract attention. Hanging from above were pieces of woollen and cloth goods, merinoes, . . . Close by, round the doorway, were hanging strips of fur, narrow bands for dress trimmings. . . . Below, on shelves and on tables, amidst a pile of remnants, appeared an immense quantity of hosiery - . . . The establishment seemed bursting with goods, blocking the pavement with the surplus.33

Zola's description also highlights the modernity of the department store. The motif of newness, through the media of the commodity and of design, permeate the description of the department store I am discussing here. Further, in displaying abundance and associated way of life in terms of commodities, the department store was instrumental in the yoking of modernity with commodities. Finally, shopping was being defined as an intricately modern activity. The acquisition of commodities was constructed as the modern thing to do.

It is important to note here that the link made between the department store and modernity was predicated on a specific definition of 'modern'. To be modern meant not only to be up-to-date, but to be up-to-date in a bourgeois manner. Consumption was moulded as modern in the terms of the day, as a bourgeois or middle class value. As a child and parent of bourgeois culture, the department store:

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33 E.Zola, 1976, [orig.1883], Ladies' Paradise, English translation of Au Bonheur Des Dames, by Management Horizons Inc. Columbus Ohio; p.2.
sought to create new sets of social relationships, perceptions, and roles that would permit the adaptation of themselves, their work force, their clientele, and the bourgeois public to the changing society that the department store represented and was itself helping to bring about.  

In particular, the department store was central in confining large scale consumption to the affluent. Despite claims to the contrary, the department store did not herald a democratization of consumption, for,

... the apparent democracy of the selling floor was superficial, and for many shoppers proximity to conspicuous wealth could only intensify disparity between want and plenty.  

This was because the department store made appeals to bourgeois manners and pretension in attempting to sell commodities and shopping, and the working class were excluded through price and a lack of time to browse. Through such appeals to the culture of the bourgeois, therefore, the department store was simultaneously drawing upon and constructing the newness and modernity of both consumption and shopping.

It is here that the particular form that the manipulation of space took in the department store becomes apparent. A major component of such an appeal to bourgeois values was the architecture and appearance of department stores. Early stores have been described as palaces of consumption. They were luxurious places, often with marble floors, rotundas, chandeliers and floor after floor of luxury. They were also

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37 Both were also constructed as feminine, a factor I deal with in section B.
modern, new, places, where a modern activity - shopping - was carried out. Such environments were themselves valued and consumed. In this sense the department store itself was a commodity, a commodified space: the environment of the store was as much for sale as were the commodities it housed.

Further, the department store as a retail form developed unique and successful ways of manipulating space. The demarcation of commodities into departments not only encouraged consumption but was also an important element in the meaning of commodities, providing a context in which potential purchases could be evaluated. Interestingly, the use of space as a resource in which to effectively display commodities did not remain confined to the department store but was influential in other settings also in the business of display. The conventional museum, for example, experienced a crisis of declining attendance and lack of confidence because of the archaic way it displayed artifacts in comparisons to the department store. It was only when the museum adopted the display techniques of the department store that confidence and attendance were restored.\footnote{See N.Harris, 1978, 'Museums, merchandising and popular taste: the struggle for influence' in Material Culture and the Study of American Life, ed. I.M.G.Quimby, New York, W.W.Norton pp.149-74.} In this instance, then, the department store was not only an important shaper of popular taste but also a moulder of the use of space.

Using an alternative perspective thus provides some interesting windows into the department store as a form of retailing. The intervention of the department store and the associated retailing discourses in the circulation of commodities was important in terms of both fixing the meaning of commodities and the societal meaning and prevalence of consumption itself. Moreover, in the department store, especially that of the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries, was distilled new attitude toward space and the manipulation of space in display. However, it remains to document the history of department stores after 1940, especially in Canada, and particularly their intersection with femininity and modernity, which I begin in chapter four.

B. Femininity, Domesticity and Retailing

The sexual division of domestic labor assigns to women the work... of purchasing and preparing goods for domestic consumption. You can confirm this even today by visiting any supermarket or department store or by looking at the history of consumer goods advertising. Such advertising has nearly always interpellated its subject, the consumer, as feminine. In fact, it has elaborated an entire phantasmatics of desire premised on the femininity of the subject of consumption.41

Concomitant with the rise and consolidation of the consumer society in the late nineteenth century were new ways of life involving commodities:

New ways of relating to the objects of everyday life - the material culture of American society - developed along with this physical and economic landscape. During the decades around the turn of the century, branded, standardized products came to represent and embody the new networks and systems of production and distribution, the social relationships that brought people the things they used.42

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41 N.Fraser, 1989, Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press; p.125.
That is, commodities became integral ingredients in social relations and the act of purchasing and ultimately using commodities became increasingly important.\(^{43}\)

Retail institutions and particularly department stores were directly involved in the establishment of these new ways of life. This was through the instigation of a new type of social activity: shopping. As Harris notes, the:

\[\ldots\] creation of an American system of consumption, the establishment of relationships between Americans and a range of objects that were unprecedented in number and variety. These relationships were supported by a set of shopping rituals, and by habits of appropriation, which have become the commonplaces of modern capitalist society.\(^{44}\)

Whereas previously shopping, particularly at the corner store, was an activity in which the effort and pleasure involved was minimal, shopping now became a significant activity in its own right. Moreover, shopping was not only a symbol for modernity but was also an activity solely undertaken by the middle class, partly because of the middle-class character of department stores themselves.\(^{45}\)

Yet the activity of shopping and shopper subject positions cannot be understood without reference to gender, for as Fraser notes, the role of consumer in forging links between the family and economy is ‘effected as much in the medium of gender identity as in the medium of money’.\(^{46}\) The primary reason for this is that consumerist and retailing discourses throughout the twentieth century have constructed these positions as

\(^{43}\) Ewen and Ewen, op.cit., p.75.
\(^{45}\) On the middle class character of shopping see Benson, 1986, op.cit.
\(^{46}\) ibid, p.124.
feminine. In what follows I trace the interconnections between consuming and social constructions of femininity throughout the twentieth century.

(i) Consuming and Femininity, 1880-1940

From the outset, links between femininity, consuming and the commodity were embedded in the emerging commodity culture. From the perspective of the imbrication of commodities in social relations, the commodification of the home and of the female body were particularly important in yoking femininity and commodities. As Strasser notes,

... creation of modern American consumer culture involved not only introducing new products and establishing market demand for them, but also creating new domestic habits and activities, performed at home.48

In other words, the infringement of commodities into ways of life and being was particularly important for women, through what has been termed the commodification of the home. The introduction of new appliances like the washing machine, refrigerator and vacuum cleaners implied a change in the nature of domestic labour carried out by women.49 Whereas previously chores such as cleaning and cooking had occurred manually, they were now to be carried out with the 'help' of modern technology.50 In transforming domestic labour, prevailing definitions of femininity were also altered. An integral

47 In a recent geographical work on the topic it is suggested that men may have shopped at corner store, but with scarce evidence that conflicts with the work of S.Bowlby, op.cit. and Roberts, op.cit. See R.Miller, 1991, ‘Selling Mrs Consumer: Advertising and the creation of suburban socio-spatial relations’, Antipode, 23,3, pp.263-306.
48 Strasser, op.cit.
49 R.Miller, op.cit
characteristic of middle-class femininity came to be the use of modern technology in the running of the home.

Commodities became implicated in another aspect of femininity in this period. The introduction of ready-to-wear clothing meant that appearance, long a component of femininity, could be purchased. As LaPlace notes, 'happiness for women is contingent on Their creation of themselves as desirable objects (possible only through the consumption of mass-produced products)'.

In this sense, commodities themselves became increasingly important in the commodification of the female body and in constructing femininity.

The department store, which also rose to prominence in this period, was important in the implication of commodities in social constructions of femininity. Although little research exists on this point, it is evident that the promotion and sales of products like vacuum cleaners within department stores contributed to these new definitions of domestic labour and femininity.

Moreover, the department store was instrumental in the marketing and consolidation of women's (and men's) ready-to-wear clothing and in so doing was critical in the commodification of the female body I have just outlined.

A second way that the emerging commodity culture and femininity became linked was through the new activities of buying and shopping being assigned to women and constructed as feminine traits. Purchasing and preparing commodities for the family's consumption replaced tasks like making clothes and bread. At the same time, this new feminine activity and

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52 See Ewen and Ewen, op.cit
subject positions was a product of consumerist discourses. According to Strasser:

Advertisers came to see women as their audience - home economists taught women how to shop and how to plan for shopping . . . mail-order houses, department stores, supermarkets and chain stores, emphasizing impersonal relationships between buyer and seller and dominated by large corporations, replaced small shops, country stores and public markets.54

The point is not just that women were drawn into the subject position of consumer, but that this subject position was feminine. The techniques used were not only directed at women, but were those that accorded with the status of femininity in western society. It is at this point that the role of the department store becomes significant, for it was within retail spaces that the two-way traffic between femininity and shopping was established.

Department stores were significant in propagating the femininity of shopping. Department stores were created as welcoming places for middle-class women. At the Bon Marche in Paris, for instance, diaries, calendars, bulletins and even transport to the store were provided for the women of Paris.55 Similarly, Benson shows how American department stores provided services like childcare, restaurants and reading rooms so as to create an environment in which women could be comfortable yet remain feminine.56 In sum the department store environment was being used to sell shopping and consuming to middle-class women.57

56 S.P.Benson, 1986, op.cit. Interestingly, Benson also documents the manipulation of these facilities by women, often leaving their children at the store whilst they explored the rest of the city.
Simultaneously, shopping was being constructed by the department store as a peculiarly feminine activity in the sense that shopping was a subsidiary activity. Shopping within the department store was defined as fanciful and frivolous. Women shopping were prone to become out of control, having an insatiable desire to buy. Managers of department stores helped construct this perception through the way shoppers were treated once in the store. For instance, floor walkers, men who escorted women around the store helping and controlling their purchases, were common till the 1920s. Similarly, shopping was not a lauded activity. Original attitudes toward this new activity, were derisory:

The shopping mania ought to have received more attention than it has from the faculty. It is a species of absorbing insanity.

In particular, the association of the alleged frivolity of shopping with the women who shopped served to intensify the maligning of feminine subjectivity. Department store discourses were therefore instrumental in the construction of femininity as negative and inferior to masculinity.

Although the evidence is much more patchy, the situation in Canada during this period was much the same. The commodification of the home and of domestic labour were also continuing apace. In English Canada, for instance,

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a fundamental transformation - from an economy based on thrift, a multiplicity of small domestic producer, and resource extraction and primary manufacturing, to one based on consumer credit, large-scale production separated from the family residence and secondary manufacturing and tertiary industries was underway.60

The centrality of women and femininity to consumption was in evidence. For instance, Strong-Boag notes the ‘discovery’ of Mrs. Consumer in the 1920s and 1930s, where ‘Canadian women and the homes they superintended were at the centre of a celebration of consumerism’.61 Moreover, the femininity of consuming and the importance of retailers in this new type of femininity was also evident.

Merchandisers set forth a public world of consumption in which women would spend more and more time. Women could find in department stores and their competitors the prospect of excitement and indulgence, much like, although on a lesser scale, that available on radio and in the movies.62

Unfortunately, however, no known studies of Canadian retailers in this period are available that could be used to substantiate the role of specific department store in this process.

(ii) Shopping and Femininity in 1950s Canada

The conventional view of women and femininity in the 1950s is an all-pervasive, powerful, yet ultimately negative one.63 One British account describes the 1950s as characterized by women yielding their war-time jobs to men, the re-domestication of women and the emphasis of outward signs of

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61 ibid, p. 116.
62 ibid., p. 129.
sexual difference.\textsuperscript{64} Although this has recently been questioned,\textsuperscript{65} it is clear that the percolation of consumerism through the social construction of femininities and the resultant focus on women's work in the home and as commodities continued.

It has been much commented on that the fifteen years immediately following the end of the second World War saw an intensification and deepening of the consumer society.\textsuperscript{66} Again the commodification of the home was an important conduit and effect of the commodification of life.\textsuperscript{67} For instance, Strong-Boag notes that the commodification of the home through the opening up of the market for consumer appliances began in the 1920s, receded during the depression and reached its zenith in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{68}

There are three things to note about the uniqueness of the femininity-commodities relationship in this period, points that I will take up in the following two chapters. First, an important characteristic of fifties femininity and of the commodification of the home was its lack of class specificity. Whereas in the earlier period it was predominantly the middle class who shopped, shopping became part of the everyday lives of nearly all urban women in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{69} Relatedly, the use of household technology became generalized across all households, with the result that regardless of class the

\textsuperscript{64} L.Heron, 1985, Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties, London, Virago.
\textsuperscript{65} In Canada, Pierson questions this on the grounds that women's wartime roles did not overturn prevailing notions of femininity. See R.R.Pierson, 1986, 'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart.
\textsuperscript{67} R.S.Cowan, op.cit. p.192.
\textsuperscript{69} See S.Bowlby, 1984, 'Planning for women to shop in post-war Britain', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 2, pp.179-99. See also Belec, Holmes and Rutherford, op.cit.
time spent in housework by women and the organization of their day remained the same.70

Second, the use of commodities in the home and hence prevailing definitions of femininity were intertwined with the increasing rationalization of society. To be modern and new in this period was to be scientific and rational. Rational practices and scientific appliances were not only essential but would also overcome the 'drudgery' of housework.71 In this period, domesticity in all its aspects was defined in terms of rationality.72 The home was to be run like a factory:

Like employees in favoured sectors of the economy, the lucky housewife could increasingly perform her work in clean, sanitary and efficiently organized surroundings, perhaps even to the tunes of a new radio or still later to the visual messages of the television.73

In other words, consumerist discourses in this period became intertwined with discourses constituting the increasing rationalization and modernization of society. These infiltrated the arenas of commodity design as well as social practices.74

Third and finally, consuming and shopping became increasingly important in defining femininity, with women and femininity defined as 'consumption managers'.75 The correct use of commodities to look after the family and the home took up a significant proportion of women's time and

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72 See K.M.Reiger, 1985, The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1880-1940, Melbourne, Oxford University Press who traces the precursor to this.
73 Strong-Boag, op.cit. p.134.
74 On design, see A.Forty, 1985, Objects of Desire, New York, Pantheon.
their sense of themselves. This scientific management of the home was promoted by advertisers and retailers alike. Scientific discourses percolated through retailing discourses and constructions of shopping in the 1950s. As a result, two contradictory definitions of shopping were competing in this period, which is what makes it so interesting. On the one hand, appeals to Mrs. Consumer rested upon women as responsible purchasing agents but on the other hand women were assumed to be, and treated as, compulsive housewives.76 The contradictory character of shopping in this period therefore requires further examination, as does retailing in western Canada.

C. Woodward's Department Store in Downtown Vancouver, 1892-1960.

While the province of British Columbia was still young, she [sic] gave birth to two lusty children - Vancouver, the village that became a great City, and Woodward's, the Store that has become an institution. Their birthdates are within a few years. Their stories have followed a remarkably parallel course.77

Woodward's was and is a Vancouver institution. About to celebrate its first 100 years in downtown Vancouver, like siblings, the store and the city of Vancouver have shared many times and experiences, and have both become part of the lives of many generations of people living in Vancouver. To many, Woodward's is retailing in Vancouver, and recollections of commodities cannot be divorced from recollections of Woodward's. How did Woodward's become such an institution? What was the store like in comparison to other

76 This example is from the experience of the Canadian Home Improvement Plan documented by M.Hobbs and R.R.Pierson, 1988, 'A kitchen that wastes no steps..gender, class and the home improvement plan, 1936-40 ', Histoire Sociale/ Social History, 21, 9-37. Such in-depth Canadian analyses are rare, and a similar point is emphasized in chapter four.
department stores of a similar period? What was the store like in the 1950s? It is my aim in this section to simultaneously address these three questions. That is, I want to briefly document the history of Woodward's; show its historical and geographical uniqueness in relation to other department stores, particularly those I described in the first chapter; and give some feeling for what the store was like in the 1950s.

(i) History of the Woodward's Department Store

Like many other department stores, the founder of Woodward's - Charles Woodward - started business in a small grocery in Ontario in the 1880s. With the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Vancouver, Charles Woodward decided to move west to try his chances. In 1892 he opened the first Woodward's department store on the corner of Harris Street and Westminster Avenue (now Main and Georgia streets) in downtown Vancouver. With a population of 13000 at the time, Vancouver was a small but growing city, with few streetcars and paved roads. This first store was obviously small in comparison to department stores in cities like Chicago and New York, being only three storeys high, having a fifty-seven foot frontage and made from a wooden frame. It consisted of only three departments: dry goods (sometimes called piece-goods), groceries and boots and shoes. A fourth - drugs - was added in 1896. From the outset, then, the Woodward's department store was unlike those in large, North American

79 D.E. Harker, op.cit. Unless otherwise stated, this is the source for the biography of the store presented here.
80 J.W. Ferry, op.cit. p.329.
cities, and in many ways was more like a corner store than a department store. As one contemporary put it, 'The store was all in confusion; things scattered about in a regular junk heap'.

The first store soon became too small, and the lack of prospects of acquiring adjacent blocks (the usual way that department stores expanded) forced the relocation of the store to its present site on the corner of Hastings and Abbott streets in 1903. By then, Vancouver's population had grown to 41,000, and the centre of town had shifted from Cordova to Hastings street. The store took a year to build, and according to Harker, the building process excited the entire population of Vancouver. Woodward himself commented:

When the building began to take shape and the citizens saw the size of it they were amazed, for there was no building of the same size here.

This new store was more like those I have previously described. In 1903 the store was five storeys high and by 1911 consisted of twenty departments, including the famous mail-order. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the store became more like the great department stores, as expansion in all respects - store area, sales, customers and employees - continued unabated. In 1908 the building was enlarged, and horizontal expansion through to Cordova Street (also of five storeys) completed by 1925.

Throughout the early period of Woodward's history, the remnants of corner store characteristics lingered as the transition to large modern

81 J.B. Giffen, quoted in Harker, 1976, op. cit.
83 Quoted in ibid. p. 55.
department store was made. Woodward’s folklore is that Charles Woodward did not believe in elaborate fixtures.

The fixtures, moreover, were simple. He had watched with suspicion and skepticism the elaborately magnificent structures which had tempted many of the merchant princes of the North American continent and he had consistently avoided embellishment which was not functional.  

Some elaborate fixtures were used, like a ‘four piece orchestra’ playing on Saturday nights in an effort to attract customers. However, these were the exception rather than the rule. In the main, the simplicity of the shopping environment was emphasized, as the photographs collected by Harker attest. Moreover, such simplicity was partly a product of the marketing strategy of Woodward’s. Woodward’s has long been positioned as a ‘working-class’ department store, catering to price-conscious consumers. In an effort to keep prices low, store embellishments were not common.

With the completion of the 1925 extensions and the retirement of the founder Charles Woodward in 1925; store philosophy began to change somewhat. Due especially to the influence of P.A.Woodward, one of the sons of the founder, and commensurate with changing circumstances in Vancouver, the modernity of the shopping experience at Woodward’s came to be emphasized. Extensions to the store throughout the next twenty years emphasized the newness and modernity of the store as well as making Woodward’s an inviting place to visit. In 1939, the Woodward Memorial Auditorium (later the staff lunchroom in the era I am concerned with) was

85 Harker, 1976, op.cit, p.106.
86 ibid., p.55.
87 ibid., pp.56-66.
89 Harker, 1976, op.cit., p.89.
included in further extensions to the store. Final and major extensions to the store costing one million 1947 dollars were completed in 1948 and 1949.\textsuperscript{90} Five new elevators were added, as well as 132,220 additional square feet of selling space. The store was now eight storeys high, occupying an entire city block. Completely new departments were created, including men’s wear on an entire floor, bakery manufacturing and an expanded food floor. In 1949 the store extended beyond the confines of Hastings Street with the opening of the Grandview Service building which housed the general warehouse, city delivery and furniture warehouse departments.\textsuperscript{91} The store in 1950 is shown in Figure 3.1.

Further, the 1930s saw the introduction of a modern mode of shopping:

In the 1920s the late P.A. Woodward had travelled throughout the United States and Canada to study changes in merchandising methods. One of his innovations was the establishment of a self-service basement floor food store in his Hastings Street department store. Given the pattern of central shopping already set in Vancouver, the idea of a weekly shopping trip for staples became a common part of Vancouver’s domestic life.\textsuperscript{92}

For instance, in 1930, in an attempt to become modern, a self-parking garage was built adjacent to the store, connected to the store by walkway and subway. This was followed by the addition of another two floors across the entire building in 1937. In 1924, Woodward’s served five million customers, and by 1928 this had risen to more than nine million.\textsuperscript{93}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{90} In 1947 dollars.
\textsuperscript{91} D.E. Harker, 1950, ‘Savings and service’, The Beacon, November, p.3.
\textsuperscript{92} Hardwick, \textit{op.cit}, p.67.
\textsuperscript{93} Harker, 1976, \textit{op.cit}, p.105.
\end{flushleft}
Figure 3.1. Exterior View of Woodward's, Circa 1950.

Source: File: Woodward's, Greater Vancouver's Family Shopping Centre', Woodward's Archives
(ii) Woodward's and Vancouver

In the 1940s and 1950s the Woodward's store was at the centre of a bustling retail environment along Hastings Street. Immediately surrounding the store were restaurants, a cinema, and a F.W.Woolworth and Co. store. These, and other small stores, 'catered to price-conscious customers' that came predominantly from the east-side of Vancouver. Moreover, it can be said that this was also a welcoming environment for women, in the sense that it was directly served by trolley buses and the many restaurants welcomed women. By this time, the store was dramatically different from the original Hastings store of 1903. Long hours were no longer kept and the store was open five days a week, being closed on Wednesdays. Despite these shorter hours, in one two-week period in 1952, 657,000 customers were served, a figure which rose to just under one million customers in the two weeks preceding Christmas.

Woodward’s was not only centrally located in retailing in Vancouver, it was also important in defining the contours of the emerging consumer society. This was particularly the case during the second World War, when the then Woodward’s President, W.C.Woodward, served as a special advisor to Canada’s war effort. The Woodward’s store itself was deeply involved in the war effort. As Pierson points out, one of the major roles women played in the second World War was as consumers. Women were required to creatively use discards and meagre rations to ‘keep the home fires burning’

94 Exterior view of Woodward’s, April 1942, photograph, Woodward’s Archives.
95 Hardwick, op.cit, p.71.
96 FN interview.
97 Woodward’s Sales/Salary Ledger 1952/53.
99 Pierson, op.cit.
and ensure the morale of the troops. Woodward’s were active in encouraging this role. Special displays were established to help women be better consumers during the war. Two particular displays stand out and have been used as illustrations of Canada’s and Vancouver’s war efforts. In one display used in a chronicle of the second World War as evidence of women battling on at home, fresh fruit and vegetables are displayed in order to encourage people to achieve ‘better health’ and ‘eat right to fight’. Further, in an analysis of Vancouver in the 1940s and 1950s, a photograph of the Woodward’s food floor is used to illustrate the effects of rationing. Although these are obviously examples of special circumstances, they nicely illustrate the envelopment of Woodward’s into Vancouver society and attitudes toward consumption and femininity.

This description provides the context for an understanding of the Woodward’s store in the period 1945 to 1960. The store had moved beyond the original ethos of not using ‘embellishments’ and was beginning to build an image based on modernity. The store was at the centre of a bustling retail district catering to price-conscious consumers, and had become increasingly involved in linking femininity and the role of shopping and consuming.

D. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate three inter-related points. First, through a brief history of two types of retailing - the corner

100 Woodward’s ‘Eat right to fight’ display, Public Archives of Canada, PA 803923 in J.Bruce, 1985, Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War at Home and Abroad, Toronto Macmillan, p.13.
store and the department store - I have tried to illustrate the usefulness of the approach developed in chapter two in understanding consumption practices and the roles of retailing within them. In particular, I have shown how retail institutions like the department store form an integral element of consumerist discourses, contributing to, and a product of, general perceptions of commodities, consumption practices and the imbrication of commodities with everyday life and femininity.

Second, through a survey of the role of commodities in society during the same time period, I have attempted to show the embeddedness of femininity in conceptions of consumption and commodities, and have alluded to the part retailing has played in these constructions. In particular, I have emphasized the increasing modernity or rationality that has characterized the association of commodities with femininity as the twentieth century has progressed.

Third, through a discussion of the postwar department store, fifties femininity and a brief history of the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver, I have tried to provide a historical and geographical context for the case study that follows. In the following chapter I build upon this context and illustrate how the retailing discourses permeating Woodward's between 1945 and 1960 were also place-making discourses.
Chapter Four: A Place for the Modern Vancouver Family

Differentiating shopping centres means, among other things, looking at how particular centres produce and maintain . . . ‘a unique sense of place’ in other terms, a myth of identity.¹

. . . in suburban shopping practices it isn’t necessarily or always the objects consumed that count in the act of consumption, but rather that unique sense of place.²

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the intersection of familialism and modernity with femininity and shopping through the lens of place. That is, by focusing on the place-making strategies of the Woodward’s department store between 1945 and 1960, I aim to demonstrate the ways that familialism and modernity combined in the construction of the feminine subject position of shopper. The activities of the Woodward’s department store were not confined to the selling of commodities, for simultaneously, a place with a particular identity was being sold and created.

This intersection is demonstrated here, through an analysis of how the three dominant characteristics of Woodward’s as a place - the modern, family and Vancouver department store - were made. The first motif is that of Woodward’s as a unique place within Vancouver. Woodward’s was a place that was different from and special amongst all other places in Vancouver, created through constant newspaper advertising and outside activities of the firm. In this sense Woodward’s can be described as the Vancouver department store; the place where Vancouver people shopped. As a setting for social interaction, or locale, Woodward’s was created as a modern place, a

² ibid., p.222.
place, emblematic of modern society in terms of design, commodities, fashion
and mode of shopping. Third and finally, the Woodward’s department store
was a family place. Drawing upon a discourse of familialism, a place that was
welcoming and inviting to the whole family, through its pricing policy and its
family of employees and customers was being created. Woven throughout
these three place-making strategies and characteristics was the constitution
and re-constitution of gender, and specifically femininity. Thus throughout
my discussion of these three factors I highlight the construction of gender as
well as place. Combined, these three characteristics provide a context for, and
the contours of, the practice of shopping at Woodward’s. In particular, these
three characteristics and the discourses of familialism and modernity that
constituted them, intersected in the construction of femininity. Thus in the
fourth part of the chapter I demonstrate this intersection in the construction
of the feminine shopper.

Some methodological notes are required at the outset. Given my focus
on the place-making practices of Woodward’s, I am not directly concerned
with the marketing of commodities, nor with the overt meanings of
commodities. Instead, most attention is paid to strategies designed to ensure
loyalty amongst customers and hence strategies related to making
Woodward’s a place that the people of Vancouver would visit frequently and
would become part of their lives. However, given the inseparability of
retailing and place-making strategies within the retail environment, I will
refer to discourses specifically aimed at selling commodities. My aim here is
not to elucidate the specific characteristics of commodities, but to draw out the
place-making practices embodied in such discourses.

A brief note on sources will help introduce the analysis. The bulk of the
data from which this and the following chapter are drawn were collected from
Woodward's own archives in downtown Vancouver. As such, they consist of two major types of documentary evidence: photographs, of the store, of employees, of special occasions and of the many displays of commodities; and official communications between management and staff, through the staff journal *The Beacon*, weekly newsletter *The Beacon Flash*, and staff manuals. Some data was collected in the form of interviews with former employees and former (and still current) shoppers of the Woodward's downtown store. These three sets of qualitative data form the basis of this chapter.³

A. Woodward's as The Vancouver Department Store

As documented by Morris, an important component of retail strategy is to make the store part of people's lives and the surrounding history and geography.⁴ Such a strategy was a central motif of Woodward's. One of the pervasive characteristics of the Woodward's department store was its intertwining with both the history and geography of Vancouver so as to define it as *the* Vancouver department store. Despite the presence of other department stores in downtown Vancouver,⁵ it has been suggested that it would be hard to speak of either the history or geography of Vancouver without referring to Woodward's, for Woodward's has become a household name in Vancouver.⁶ For instance, recent media speculation about the future of Woodward's has invariably referred to Woodward's as a Vancouver

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³ For more detailed information on sources see the Appendix.
⁴ M. Morris, *op.cit*.
⁵ Spencer's on Hastings and Seymour, taken over by Eaton's in the mid 1950s; and The Bay at Georgia and Granville.
⁶ See, for instance, the quotation from D.E. Harker, 1958, *The City and the Store*, Woodward's, in chapter three.
institution, and describes the relation between Vancouverites and the Woodward’s department store as being one of ‘fondness’.\(^7\) In the fifteen years immediately following the second World War, this yoking was strong, for the store was not only a part of Vancouver people’s lives, but was also a unique location within the city. How did Woodward’s become a specific place or unique environment within Vancouver?

Woodward’s became a place within Vancouver, and hence became known as the Vancouver department store by making itself visible in the lives of the people of the city. Efforts were made to reach out to the people of Vancouver and make Woodward’s a household name and the downtown store a familiar place like home. Since this entailed reaching Vancouver people in general, by necessity, then, these particular place-making strategies have to be located outside the downtown store itself. Three methods by which this was achieved can be identified and are worth considering in detail: physical visibility of the store itself; daily newspaper advertising; and participation of Woodward’s in Vancouver society.

The physical presence of large department stores in the downtown core of cities like Vancouver played a major role in inculcating the values of consumerism. This presence also served to make the department store a fixture in the city, a place that belonged there. The location and architectural characteristics of the store were important ways of making Woodward’s visible in the city of Vancouver. In terms of location, the corner of Hastings and Abbott streets was the centre of a bustling retail district.\(^8\) The Woodward’s department store was located midst restaurants, small retail outlets and the

Spencer department store. Moreover, Hastings was a major terminus for streetcars and later trolley buses.

The Woodward's building itself was physically visible throughout Vancouver, helping promote the visibility of shopping at Woodward's in Vancouver. During the early 1950s most buildings in downtown Vancouver, with the exception of the Hotel Vancouver and the Marine Building, were less than three storeys high. As a result, the ten story Woodward's was particularly apparent in the Vancouver skyline. The heightened visibility of the Woodward's store can be interpreted as helping establish the place of Woodward's in Vancouver in that the building became part of Vancouver and its skyline.

However, the other major department stores in Vancouver - Spencer's and The Bay - were also tall and visible buildings. The visibility of the store took a unique and additional from at Woodward's through the Beacon. The Beacon, consisting of a seventy-five feet high, small-scale model of the Eiffel Tower, with a large 'W' spinning around on top, was constructed on the top of the building in 1927. It can be seen in Figure 3.1 in the previous chapter, although it should be noted that when this photograph was taken, the 'W' had still not been placed at the top, after being removed from its position during the second World War in case it attracted bombers. The Beacon was and still is visible from many parts of Vancouver, a constant reminder of the existence of Woodward's and of its place in the geography of Vancouver. In making the store itself highly visible within Vancouver, a process exemplified by the

9 The interview with FN described the surrounding environment, including a restaurant frequented by employees and customers alike.
10 Roy, op.cit.
11 This point was suggested to me in an interview with LT.
Beacon, Woodward's became a particular and fixed place within Vancouver, an element of the everyday.

Daily newspaper advertising was a second way in which Woodward's became a particular place in Vancouver and part of the everyday. Since their foundation, department stores have advertised daily in newspapers. The more commonly recognized function of daily newspaper advertising is to alert potential customers to special promotions, attractions and 'bargains'. Woodward's certainly used their advertisements for this purpose, for their daily advertisements in the *Vancouver Sun* were filled with bargains and special promotions. Although this function is important, it is not the most interesting aspect of newspaper advertising from the perspective of place-making. The regularity of newspaper advertising by stores like Woodward's suggests that the importance of newspaper advertising lies precisely in its frequency. Daily newspaper advertising is an important bonding agent, helping cement the position of the department store in its city and community. This function is much more indirect in that regardless of the content of the advertisements, an important effect of regular advertising is to make the store visible in its city.

Since its inception, Woodward's has advertised in the *Vancouver Sun* each day of the week except Sunday. In the 1950s, the advertisements were usually two or three pages long, and invariably began on page five. Although there were a variety of motifs running through these advertisements, I want to emphasize the general effect of newspaper advertising here. By advertising daily in a newspaper that many people in Vancouver read every day, Woodward's were creating a place for the store in these lives. Woodward's was just as much part of Vancouver as any other landmarks or activities, also part of the everyday. This served to naturalize the existence of Woodward's
in Vancouver. In addition, all advertisements in this period contained the slogan ‘Woodward’s, Greater Vancouver’s Family Shopping Centre’, implying that shopping in Vancouver meant shopping at Woodward’s. Combining the two characteristics, it can be seen that newspaper advertising helped to make Woodward’s a Vancouver institution, attempting to make the link that shopping in Vancouver meant shopping at Woodward’s.

Another aspect of place-making had a slightly different effect, although still making the broad connection between Vancouver, Woodward’s and shopping. Woodward’s was very involved in social and economic activities outside the store. Some of these are illustrated in Harker’s biography of the Woodward family and store, especially his references to the philanthropy of the various members of the Woodward’s family. For instance, he refers to the endowment of the Woodward library at the University of British Columbia, and the role of W.C.Woodward in the politics of the second World War and as Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.\textsuperscript{13} It cannot be doubted that such activities, regardless of their intention, would have had the effect of heightening the visibility of the Woodward’s store. However, what I wish to focus on is the involvement of the downtown store itself in the wider Vancouver community, and illustrate how such activities served to underline both the existence of the store and the contours of 1950s consumer society. Four examples will help illustrate this point.

First, Woodward’s invariably became involved with special events within Vancouver. One such event was the visit of Princess Margaret to Vancouver in 1958. Not only were special window displays devoted to her visit, but the Woodward’s family and management were centrally involved in

\textsuperscript{13} Harker, 1976, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.215-220.
a ball held in her honour on July 25, 1958. In particular, the display department was given the task of using techniques normally used for displaying and selling commodities to turn a ship - the HMCS Discovery - into a ballroom fit for a Princess. Such an event would make both the Woodward’s name and the downtown store, since they were responsible for the decorations, prominent in the news of the day, and would help cement the yoking of Vancouver and Woodward’s.

The second example is a more general one, being the many fashion shows that Woodward’s both sponsored and held throughout the 1950s. These fashion shows were held both inside and outside of the store environment, and it is those held beyond the confines of the downtown store that I want to single out here. Generally held seasonally, the fashion shows exhibited the latest in women’s and children’s fashion and did not entail any direct compulsion to buy. For instance, in 1954 a fashion show was held in the Georgia Auditorium, sponsored by Woodward’s and consisting of the display of a variety of women’s fashions. In arranging an event outside the store, the management of Woodward’s can be seen as establishing a bond between being fashionable in Vancouver and buying at Woodward’s.

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15 The Royal Family was used often by Woodward’s as the archetypal family used in the discourse of familialism. At Woodward’s, Royal ‘events’ like coronations, weddings and visits to Vancouver were lauded with special displays. In fact, royal displays were recycled to fit the occasions. See, for instance, File: Coronation, Woodward’s Archives; Woodward’s Beacon Flash, February 6th, 1960, reporting the display of replicas of the Queen’s tiara and Crown Jewels; ‘Royal visit and British trade Week meant work and more work for display department’, The Beacon, July-August 1959, where the entire store was decorated in order to ‘gaze upon that charming couple from England’; and File: Royal Wedding 1947, Woodward’s Archives.

16 I deal with these in more detail in chapter five.

17 See for example, photograph of fashion show in file ‘Fashion Show Georgia Auditorium 1958’ Woodward’s Archives.
The third example is the presence of Woodward’s at the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE), held annually in Vancouver. Although only referred to tangentially in the archives, it appears that Woodward’s exhibited regularly at the PNE and was a popular exhibit. The presence of Woodward’s at another Vancouver institution like the PNE would have increased dramatically the visibility of Woodward’s, as well as helping establish a link between Vancouver and Woodward’s. Again, in involving themselves in other Vancouver institutions like the PNE and the Royal Family, an intricate bond between Vancouver and Woodward’s was being made, one that made Woodward’s an important place in Vancouver.

There is another example of the imbrication of Woodward’s and the lives of the consuming Vancouver public that is worth singling out here. Throughout the 1950s Woodward’s had a strict policy that only one member of a family could work at Woodward’s at any one time. The outward aim of this policy was to ensure that as many people from Vancouver as was possible had contact with the store. Thus it was hoped that through 2500 employees a sizable majority of people living in Vancouver would have personal knowledge of the store. Generally this policy took the form of prohibition: once one member of a family worked at Woodward’s (in any capacity from management down), that person’s brother, sister, mother, or father could not work at the store. The policy took on its most extreme and restrictive form in the case of married women. When two employees of the store married, the woman was required to resign because of the family policy. Since salesclerks were advocates of the store, by limiting the number of employees who knew each other, the customer base was broadened considerably at no cost. As a result,

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19 ibid.
20 FN interview.
the policy served to cement the place of Woodward’s in Vancouver. Personal contact with, and knowledge of, Woodward’s was extended throughout the Vancouver population, with the hope that the visibility of Woodward’s within Vancouver would be consolidated.

In conclusion, a place within Vancouver was being created through all these activities of Woodward’s. The Beacon made the actual store visible from many parts of Vancouver as well as a landmark of the city and therefore part of the everyday. Daily newspaper advertising also worked with a similar intent. Activities of Woodward’s beyond the downtown store like fashion shows and limitation on family employees served, inter alia, to increase the extent of the visibility of Woodward’s within Vancouver. Throughout, Woodward’s as the Vancouver department store was being created.

B. Woodward’s as the Modern Vancouver Department Store

Throughout the discourses pervading and structuring the Woodward’s downtown store was the theme of being modern. Unlike earlier department stores, Woodward’s was not modern because of bourgeois motifs, but was modern because it was a place that was new, up-to-date in terms of its appearance, and offering the latest in commodities and technology available. Drawing upon the discourses of mass consumption and modern, streamlined design and architecture, a place that was distinctly modern, 1950s style, was being created. Here, Woodward’s modernity can be defined as having three intersecting and salient characteristics. First, it was a place that was new, even in comparison to the Woodward’s of earlier times. Second, it was modern in the sense that it was up-to-date, housing the latest in commodities.
Finally, it was modern in the sense that it was a scientifically and rationally controlled environment.

It should be noted that the creation of Woodward’s as a modern place within Vancouver occurred in conjunction with the visibility strategies that I have just documented. The focus of newspaper advertising on commodities, especially their abundance, would have helped proclaim the modernity of Woodward’s. A similar effect would have occurred through fashion shows, and the presentation of new and ever-changing clothes. However, the strategy I want to highlight here is how the store environment itself was used in the creation of Woodward’s as a modern place. Through the manipulation of the space within and immediately outside the store a modern space within downtown Vancouver was being made.

(i) The Woodward’s Store

Consistent with the desire to sell the newest and latest commodities, Woodward’s were creating a place of and for modernity, indicated by the design and architecture of the place itself. In contrast to the department stores I documented in chapter three, the Woodward’s environment was neither luxurious nor palatial but plain and functional. With the completion of extensions in 1948, the physical space was available in which to create a modern place - in the sense that it was a clean, uncluttered, spacious and streamlined environment. Cleanliness was a particularly important motif, beginning in the 1930s:
Figure 4.1. Salesclerks and Display, Main Floor, Woodward's.

Source: File: Woodward's, Greater Vancouver's Family Shopping Centre, Woodward's Archives.
Visitors become customers and customers return again because there is some attraction in the display of merchandise, the brightness of the lighting, the cleanliness of the store, in fact the whole atmosphere of the place is bright and clean.\(^2^1\)

In keeping with this layout, commodities were to be displayed in an orderly, tidy, manner, aisles were to be wide and linear. This can be seen in the photograph of the Main Floor in Figure 4.1, and other photographs used in chapter five. Thus Woodward's was a modern place in the sense that it was rationally and scientifically organized, as well as clean and uncluttered. The actual environment of the store was used to create this modernity.

(ii) Window Displays

The use of the design and layout of the store in proclaiming the newness of the store is also found throughout window displays. Window displays have been the hallmark of the department store, performing an important advertising function as well as forming part of the physical environment of the store. Further, many reactions, both past and present, to the department store are based on the dazzling array of commodities presented in store windows, as seen in the following:

The windows of the department stores were theatres. They showed American lives as yet unlived in, with vacant possession. When your nose was pressed hard against the glass, it was almost yours, this other life that lay in wait for you with its silverware and brocade. . . . The distance between slum and mansion was less than a mile; hard work . . . a lucky break . . . and you could roam through Bloomingdale's and Macy's, buying up the life you wanted to live.\(^2^2\)

Throughout the history of the Woodward's department store, windows were a central component of display and advertising:

\(^{2^1}\) President's Talk No.5, July 10th, 1935. Woodward's Archives.
Window displays not only tell and show the public what we have to sell, but by their cleanliness, neatness and constant change, bring to the customer’s mind the fact that, as a store, we are on our toes, so to speak. **WINDOWS REFLECT THE VERY CHARACTER OF THE WHOLE ORGANIZATION.**

Although of declining importance, window displays were still significant in the 1950s. Moreover, one of the notable features of the 1948 expansion programme was the increase in the extent of window displays, to 250 feet of display on Hastings Street alone. Although changed sporadically in the 1970s, in the 1950s windows were changed once a week. All sorts of commodities were displayed in the windows, which were also used to advertise special promotions.

Window displays were used in the construction of the modernity of Woodward’s in two senses. First, the actual amount and type of commodities were intricately modern. That is, as I show in more detail in chapter five, the commodities were new, rational, efficient and streamlined, as well as abundant. Second, and more importantly from the perspective of place-making, window displays were used to proclaim the modernity of the Woodward’s store itself, the newness and virtues of the present store. This is most easily illustrated through the technique of self-reference and historical comparison used in many window displays, especially for special occasions. This technique compared, by juxtaposing in the one window, the old, traditional and backward Woodward’s with the new, modern and progressive Woodward’s. This is most apparent on Woodward’s fiftieth anniversary in

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1942. In one display, 1892 and 1942 food shopping and clothes are juxtaposed to highlight the virtues of 1942. In the sixtieth anniversary display, photographs of the original Woodward's were used to show the modernity and newness of the present Woodward's, in the sense that the old Woodward's, although appropriate for its time, was backward, traditional and inferior to the modernity of Woodward's in the 1950s. In sum, window displays are indicative of the way that Woodward's was being created as a modern place, in the sense of new, progressive, place in Vancouver.

(iii) Salesclerks as Display

The final example and aspect of the modernity of Woodward's is the appearance of salesclerks. Employees, through their omnipresence throughout the retail environment, form an integral and obvious element of the ambience of that environment. That is, employees' physical appearance, actions and general demeanor are also part of the packaged atmosphere of the store which management are trying to create. Thus, factors like dress regulations, shopping regulations and terms of employment become important in the creation of a 'machine for selling'. At Woodward's in the 1950s, the presence of employees in the store served to substantiate the modernity of the store in the sense of rationalization, a factor that can be illustrated through dress regulations.

Rules governing the appearance of employees are perhaps the most easily discernible input into the creation of the Woodward's environment.

27 Photograph 'Woodward's Internationally Known Food Floor', File: Old Books of Window and Interior Displays Food Floors Circa 1940s/50s, Woodward's Archives. The same file contains non-food related examples and examples from the BC Centennial in 1958.
28 'Our memories of June 1952', The Beacon, July-August 1952. Unfortunately, many of these photographs are unavailable for reproduction here.
Officially during the 1950s Woodward’s did not have dress regulations, but standards, set in the 1930s, remained in effect. In 1935, men were required to wear dark suits, dark shoes and white collars (shirts).29 For women, the regulations were much more stringent and detailed, being required to wear: black or navy dresses, white blouses if fresh and clean, white or cream collars or cuffs, but they must be small and of simple design. Coloured trimmings and ornaments were not permitted, nor were knitted blouses or suits. Dark shoes and stockings were also required.30 By 1948 the regulations for men remained the same, but those for women had been simplified and expressed in terms of what was deemed appropriate. Women were

‘expected to appear in apparel suitable for business. Good grooming is essential. Hair-dos, makeup, costume jewelry and nail-polish should be in good taste and in keeping with a business like appearance. . . . The wearing of hose is essential for neatness.31

Although it may appear that this dress code was less rigid than the previous one, the following quotation from 1961 suggests otherwise:

It has been observed that some of our ladies are wearing sleeveless blouses and sundresses. Whilst we have no rigid dress regulations, this type of dress is not considered business-like. We therefore request your co-operation in this matter immediately.32

Three general effects and characteristics of these dress regulations can be noted. First, the discouragement of ostentation and frills, especially on the part of women, formed part of the modern, streamlined environment Woodward’s were attempting to create. In other words, the simplicity of the salesclerks attire was to both make them blend into the environment as well as exemplify modern design. This can be seen in Figure 4.1, where the

29 Dress Regulations, May 1st 1935, pamphlet, Woodward’s Archives.
30 ibid.
31 Woodward’s Our Methods, pamphlet, Woodward’s Archives.
women and men working in notions and men's wear blended into the environment.

The second notable characteristic of these dress regulations is the gender difference produced and maintained. For men to appear professional, no masking of masculinity was required. In contrast, women's apparel had to lose all references to femininity traditionally defined: no frills, no colour, no skin showing, no body-revealing knitted clothing. Thus to be professional a woman salesclerk could not be feminine.

It is important to note that employees' appearance was indicative of more than modernity. A 'Shop Around the World' promotion was held annually at Woodward's, being a week devoted to products from many different parts of the world. This event was designed to encourage tourists to shop at Woodward's, often as part of city-wide tourism campaigns. During the 1960 promotion, staff were reminded that:

\[\text{It is up to each of us to make the tourist's visit to Woodward's 'the hi-spot' of her shopping tour. We can do this by giving here that little extra attention.}\]

Salesclerks were also to become part of the visual component of such promotions. In 1955, staff were encouraged to wear the national dress of their 'home' country, as part of this promotion. In one photograph of the food floor, seven women salesclerks were photographed working in their national dress, which was mostly European. In this way, employees appearance was used to consolidate the effects of the promotion.

In sum, dress regulations and appearance of employees are not only strategies of control and construction of employee subject positions by

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33 Woodward's Downtown Beacon Flash, July 2nd, 1960, Woodward's Archives.
34 File: Shop Around the World at Woodward's, Woodward's Archives.
Woodward's management, but are also visual elements of the store environment.

The salesperson was herself part of that presentation, helping to create an atmosphere of service and contributing to the seductiveness of the merchandise.35

Although the general principle was the same as that used in the earlier department store referred to in this quotation, the effect was somewhat different. At Woodward's, general dress regulations although not official, helped establish the modernity of the store.

In conclusion, the manipulation of the appearance of the store was integral in creating Woodward's a modern - in the sense of new, up-to-date and rational - place. The layout of the store, location of the fixtures, as well as window displays helped proclaim the modernity of Woodward's. Further, the regulation of employee appearance to exude professionalism consolidated the rationality of the Woodward's environment. However, this does not encompass the only role of Woodward's employees in the environment of the store, for they lay at the centre of social relations permeating the store and in turn helped create Woodward's sense of place. It is to the social environment of the store that I now turn.

C. Woodward's and their Family of Employees and Shoppers

Woodward's was also a family department store in the sense that it was constituted by a discourse of familialism that structured relations between employees, management and shoppers. In this section I show how

Woodward’s was a family department store, focusing on the three-way triangle between shoppers, management and salesclerks.

(i) Reconceptualizing Retail Labour

Relations between management and/or owners of the store and employees particularly salesclerks, form an integral axis of retailing discourses. Surprisingly, however, the involvement and moulding of salesworkers in retailing’s strategies of place making has not been pivotal in research on saleswork. Instead, most accounts of department store workers focus on the more traditional concerns of labour history: capital-labour relations, division of labour, or unionization (or lack of unionization). In the historical literature, for instance, work in Canada has documented attempts to unionize department store workers. Contemporary scholarship on retail labour has tended to concentrate on the deskillling of retail labour, the increasing use of part-time work and the implications of both of these in flexible production methods. Though useful and insightful, the importance of the salesclerk in the ambience of the store has been underestimated.

Unlike other types of labour,

The customer, usually a phantom to the production worker and frequently absent from the scene of service work, was a continuing presence in the life of a saleswomen. In the department store, the two-way interaction between workers and managers became a complex triangle of saleswomen, managers and customers.

Like other service work where interaction between the service worker (salesclerk, nurse, teacher, etc.) and a third party who is buying the service (customer, patient, student etc.) is important, retail labour is characterized by a relation with a shopper.\textsuperscript{39} That is, the job of a retail worker is to interact with customers and encourage them to buy. What this means is that the salesclerk lies at the intersection of the relation between the retailer and the shopper, being a conduit of retailing discourses. As a result, salesclerks within retail spaces are especially important in the environment that is created. This is so in two ways.

First, the form of relations between owners and/or management and salesclerks can provide interesting insights into the character of the retail space. For instance, the familial ties between salesclerks in the corner store was both indicative of and a contributor to the nature of retailing in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{40} Similarly, the paternalism that characterized the early department stores, or the 'sense of being members of a corporate family more than simply employees',\textsuperscript{41} was often carried over into relations with customers with female customers treated paternalistically. Second, the shopper-salesclerk relation forms an integral component of the shoppers' experience in the store. The way that customers are addressed, treated and helped (or not helped) all contribute to the ambience of the store, thus impinging upon the meaning of commodities created within the store. For instance, customers' memories and first impressions are very much bound up with the salesclerks they encounter. As Benson eloquently puts it:

\textsuperscript{39} ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} See the discussion in chapter three.
\textsuperscript{41} D.Chaney, 'The department store as a cultural form', Theory, Culture and Society, pp.22-31; p.23.
The people behind the counters could enhance or doom management efforts to make the store efficient, profitable and an effective agent of the culture of consumption. Managers could devise policies to improve their profit positions or their standing with the public, but the salespeople determined the success of such policies by the way in which they implemented them and through their own interactions with the stores' clientele. Managers might advertise lavishly, but their expenditures were for naught if salespeople failed to follow up in the interest they awakened in customer. . . . Managers might streamline their stock and choose assortments cannily, but merchandise would sell only if salespeople presented it convincingly to customers.42

For this reason most stores devote careful attention to their employees and the moulding of salesclerks relations with customers become prime components of retailing discourses. The importance of salesclerks in the retailing discourses of Woodward's is evident in the following quotation.

Every day, every week, every month, the store management spends thousands of dollars attracting customers to come and do their shopping at Woodward's. A very fine job they make of it too. The windows are attractive; the advertisements interesting and newsy; the promotions well-timed and skilfully planned.

So the customers come in . . . but all too often the salespeople are indifferent to whether they buy or not.43

(ii) *The Family of Woodward's Employees*

Since its inception, and particularly between 1945 and 1960, the three-way relation between management, salesclerk and shopper at Woodward's these relations were structured around and constituted by familialism. That is, a variant of familial ideology was in place, whereby employees were encouraged to think of themselves as part of the Woodward's family, which in turn became part of the way they dealt with Woodward's family of customers.

In 1952, Woodward's employed approximately 2500 people, a figure that includes management, all sales and clerical staff, restaurant staff and those working in occupations not directly related to the downtown store like garage and mail order. These 2500 employees served an average of 670,000 customers in a two-week period (67,000 per day based on a five day week of Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday).

The notion that store employees (from owners and management down) were members of one large happy family pervaded in-store communications like The Beacon and training manuals and was also central to former employees' recollections of working at Woodward's. The store's relations with its employees have been consistently described to me as friendly and amicable, which can be illustrated in a variety of ways. Employees have fond memories of their time working there, emphasizing that they were known individually by members of the Woodward family, and that they were treated like a person rather than a number. One interviewee was at pains to point out to me that 'old Charlie Woodward' personally knew everyone in the store, their capabilities, strengths, weaknesses and their family situations. His strolls around the store were legendary, and it was not uncommon for him to personally offer somebody a promotion. On the last trading day before Christmas, the entire Woodward's family and their families would wait at the exit of the store and personally wish each employee a Merry Christmas. On the occasion of Woodward's Golden Jubilee in 1952 each staff member was

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44 Unfortunately, Woodward's have kept no employee records. The figure of 2500 is from the Beacon Flyer of May 9, 1952, which notes that 2500 copies of each issue of the newsletter were copied and distributed. The figure was confirmed by Rose Bancroft, who was involved in the production of the newsletter.
45 Woodward's Sales and Salary Ledger 1952/3, Woodward's Archives.
46 FN interview
47 RD interview
48 FN interview
given an individualized birthday cake by Woodward's.\textsuperscript{49} These vignettes allude to the family roles that the employees and management of Woodward's played.

In general, familialism at Woodward's was produced through a breakdown of the public - private division. That is, the personal life of Woodward's employees was seen to be an integral component of their jobs, and Woodward's made itself a part of employees' 'private' lives, and in particular their families. Three major ways in which the name and character of the Woodward's store became imbricated in the lives of its employees are illustrative of this familialism: \textit{Beacon} gossip columns, the social club and social outings, and more formal employee regulations.

An in-store journal - \textit{The Beacon} - was produced bi-monthly by people hired by Woodward's to work as editors of the magazine. In 1949, the magazine was produced by two men, a point whose irony was not lost. According to one of the editors:

\begin{quote}
Sometimes I find myself wondering why the entire staff (2) of this little publication should be composed of men, in acting for an organization which is comprised almost entirely (99.8\%) of female employees.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

The outward purpose of the journal was the provision of information about the store, management policy and decisions and special promotion. A perusal of \textit{The Beacon} suggests that one of the prime objectives of \textit{The Beacon} appears not to be the promulgation of information about the store, policy and what employees should be doing, but was to operate as a gossip column. Columns entitled 'around the departments' appeared in each issue, containing information about new members of departments, social outings and the like.

\textsuperscript{49} LT interview.
\textsuperscript{50} Beacon Flyer, June 10, 1949, Woodward's Archives.
These columns were complied by the editors, who had literally wandered around the departments beforehand. ‘Around the departments’ often extended to four or five pages of a twenty page The Beacon. These columns consisted of information about members of each department - their families, ‘romances’, weddings, engagements, births and reports of social events undertaken collectively and by individual departments.

These gossip columns demonstrate the impossibility of severing the private and work lives of Woodward’s employees. On the one hand, the very existence of the columns evinces the store’s concern with the personal lives of their employees and encouragement that salesclerks should bring their homelife to work. However, it needs to be noted that only the familial aspects of their home life, especially in relation to traditional gender roles, were to be brought to work. This is especially the case in relation to women salesclerks, where engagements, weddings, children and dating are considered important and predominate. This was an important tactic in the creation of a familial attitude amongst its employees, for such active encouragement of social ties between employees implied that these ties should be part of the workplace and led to the belief that Woodward’s employees were members of one big happy family. On the other hand, the presence and foregrounding of the columns in The Beacon is illustrative of a motivation to make Woodward’s part of their employees lives. That is, just as employees were to feel a part of the Woodward’s family, Woodward’s was to be a part of the employees’ families. It could also be said that the restrictions on the number of people from one family that could work at Woodward’s at any one time would also limit the importance of any rival family within the store.

Woodward’s more official policy on employee behaviour also embodied attempts to become part of their employees lives. The personnel manager
Douglas Harker generally wrote monthly in The Beacon, and his columns were noteworthy for their pronouncements on employee behaviour. These pronouncements spread beyond the confines of the store in the sense that the conduct of employees required the importation of outside activities and vice versa. For instance, at Christmas 1952 Harker wrote about recreation, stressing its importance and even legislating what it should consist of: different from your occupation, provide friendship and companionship and take you into the fresh air. This is another example of the way that Woodward's sought to permeate their employees' lives, and in so doing instance the familialism of the store.

Perhaps the most pertinent example of the importance of Woodward's in the outside lives of their employees was the activities of the social club and especially the outings they organized. The Social Club organized for and by Woodward's employees was prominent activities within and outside the store. Picnics were organized once or twice a year, and were considered great events for the whole family. One particular outing to Bowen Island was remembered with fondness by all the employees I interviewed - 'it was the highlight of the summer'. Similar trips to Crescent Beach and other Vancouver attractions were similarly recalled. One of the salient effects of these social occasions was the sense of belonging to a family, which employees felt. This was achieved through the presence of the Woodward family themselves, and their circulation amongst their employees. Once again, the public-private division has been severed in both ways. The picnics were an occasion for employees to

51 This is the same person who wrote the two Woodward's biographies I referred to in chapter three.
53 LT interview.
bring their families into the Woodward's family, and a time for Woodward's to become part of these families.

The purpose and effects of the familialism that pervaded the store are multi-faceted. Familialism as a strategy of control was certainly evident at Woodward's. The practices I have just documented ensured loyalty to the store from employees, and a friendly, amicable environment that was important in the image of Woodward's. In comparison to other Canadian department stores of the era, the lack of unionization at Woodward's is noteworthy for its amicability instead of hostility.\textsuperscript{54} Interviews with former employees stressed the friendliness of the store, and the redundancy of a union. At Woodward's, an \textit{Advisory Council} basically played the role of a union, acting as an intermediary between management and staff on all issues except wages. The Advisory Council began in 1943 with the aim of letting people know what was going on in the store. The range of issues it considered was broad, but mainly related to employee benefits and concerns, such as food shortages in 1944, hosiery shortage in 1945, and a profit sharing plan.\textsuperscript{55}

The familialism that structured the employee-employer relation was also a place-making discourse, in the sense that a friendly, familial atmosphere would have pervaded the store making it a family place. In treating employees like family, there was an implied encouragement to treat customers like family too. This highlights the relation between shoppers and salesclerks, a relation monitored and regulated by Woodward's management, to which I now turn.

\footnote{Sufrin, \textit{op.cit.}}
\footnote{C.McCranor, 1953, 'Our Advisory Council', \textit{The Beacon}, January-February, p.8.}
D. The Customer-Salesclerk Relation and the Woodward’s Shopper

Once in the Woodward’s downtown store, individuals (particularly women) become subject to the control of the prevailing discourses propagated by Woodward’s management and marketing: they become shoppers. By shoppers I mean a subject position whose object is the perusal and purchase of commodities within a particular environment. Given that salesclerks were important conduits of retailing discourses, it follows that the shopper is an outcome of the shopper-salesclerk relation. Shoppers are forced to take on certain characteristics if the discourse is to be intelligible. In the Woodward’s department store in the 1950s, the shopper-salesclerk relation was constituted by discourses of familialism and modernity.

The familialism which pervaded the salesclerks’ relation with Woodward’s management was also infused in the shopper - salesclerk relation. For instance, in the Staff Manual of 1948 Douglas Harker outlines a ten point plan for successful selling, which included:

* treat customers as you would invited guests
* have a wholesome attitude
* watch your health
* keep your personal appearance neat and attractive

Harker’s first and second points provide an intriguing perspective on the shopper-salesclerk relation. The shopper-salesclerk relation was to be one of friendliness and respect, just as you would treat an invited guest in your home. Moreover, this relation was to be infused with the individual’s wholesome, healthy attitude and neat appearance. Shoppers were to be made to feel comfortable in the store, at home in an environment where they

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56 Woodward’s, *Our Methods*, Woodward’s Archives.
57 ‘Wholesome’ was not defined.
may not necessarily feel comfortable because of a lack of money. As put by Harker:

customers comments show that one of the main pleasures they have in shopping at Woodward's lies in the fact that they can browse around the store without being bothered to buy unless they wish to do so.

The friendliness and familiarity with which shoppers were to be treated is in sharp contrast to an earlier period in department store history, where the subservient aspect of saleswork was paramount. Part of the reason for this difference can be traced to class. In the earlier period customers were predominantly middle class and salesclerks working class. Thus Benson documents the use of salesclerks’ femininity to mask their class characteristics and particularly to be subservient to the customer and treat her with respect. In contrast, at Woodward’s in the 1950s, femininity was to masked and customers were to be treated in a friendly manner.

Simultaneously, and sometimes contradictorily, the salesclerk was to explicitly position her or himself as an expert, something achieved through training. The personnel manager’s columns in The Beacon were polemics on the virtues of training, which meant acquiring more knowledge about how to sell commodities. In-store training classes were conducted regularly by Harker, with the curriculum consisting of such items as buying, personnel relations, history of retailing, ‘The Customer’, consumer demand and

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58 Rainwater et.al. in their study of working class women shopping in the 1950s find hesitancy and trepidation to characterize the working-class woman’s attitudes toward shopping. It is on this basis that the friendliness of the shopper - salesclerk relation can be understood. See L.Rainwater, R.P.Coleman and G.Handel, 1959, Workingman’s Wife: Her Personality, World and Life Style, New York, Oceana Publications, p.164.
59 D.E.Harker, ‘We are counting on you ’, The Beacon, December 1952, p.12.
60 Benson, op.cit.
advertising. Training and reading were to be used to become an expert. According to Harker:

And so, whoever you are who read these lines, we suggest that you give even more serious thought to Training. If you are an executive, do what you can to facilitate the training endeavours of your staff, for their sakes, your own and your customers.

If you are a salesperson, take full advantage of the training offered you by the Store: visit the Reference room: study all the literature about your branch of the retail merchandising profession that you can lay hands on.

Become an expert.

There are other sources of information open to you - your manager, your fellow-workers, the labels and tags on your merchandise, manufacturers' representatives, your own initiative .... Use them all.63

However, it is important to note the gender differentiation embedded in training. Training classes were different for male and female salesclerks. In 1949, for instance, there were three men's classes covering diverse topics such as the customer, consumer demand, advertising and the history of retailing, and one 'ladies' class focusing on merchandising alone.64 As a result, these were masculine and feminine experts, with the masculine stream concerned with the more 'scientific' aspects of retailing and the feminine stream with the everyday tasks of selling commodities.

This expert positioning of the salesclerk established an inevitable power relation between shopper and salesclerk. The salesclerk possessed power through knowledge, and in so doing could educate the shopper. This positioning of the salesclerk in relation to the shopper is evident in the following:

62 D.E.Harker, ‘From the training department’, The Beacon, January 1949
Have you considered how many articles sold in your department were unknown in your father's youth? We would take a wager that at least half the merchandise you sell is the product of today's invention.

Grandma's toaster, for instance, was a three-pronged fork which she held over the fire, with a piece of bread attached; but Mrs. 1948 uses an electrical gadget which toasts both sides of the bread at once, mechanically times the toasting, and throws the finished article onto her plate at the right moment. In fact, the toaster does everything except cut the bread and eat the toast.

This is just one instance of the infinite variety and complexity of modern merchandise. Man's needs are no longer simple. Even the toothbrush is about to be mechanized.

We are not decrying the march of science. Far from it. For the scope and interest of the retail salesperson's job have, in consequence, been doubled, their status and dignity immeasurably raised. Gone from their midst are the hucksters and the high-pressure bandits, interested only in sales and their commission therefrom. Gone, too, are the simple souls who wrapped merchandise in brown paper bags and, knowing less about it that their customers, handed it in silence across their counters.

This is the day of the expert.

Bewildered housewives, struggling to run their homes, feed and clothe their families as economically and efficiently as possible, can no longer keep pace with scientific evolution. They are baffled by the volume and intricacy of new consumer goods.

The retail salesperson has become an advisor, one who knows intimately the goods he is selling, who can protect his customers from fraud, who can explain to them how by proper use and care they can get the most satisfaction from their purchases. Study and training are as important for him as for doctors and lawyers.65

Not only was the Woodward's shopper to be treated like a guest visiting the family home (the store) but the visitor was ignorant of the customs of this particular family home and was therefore in need of education. Moreover, the Woodward's shopper did not know what he/she wanted. In another of Harker's columns, he states:

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65 D.E. Harker, 'The day of the expert', The Beacon, March 1, 1948.
Customers frequently will not tell you what is in their minds. They make a brief request. Behind that request is a host of needs-wants-desires. A skilful professional salesperson will tactfully, delicately, but determinedly, ferret out those needs and satisfy them.\textsuperscript{66}

This positioning of the salesclerk in relation to the shopper in terms of science and expert knowledge was one that pervaded other social relations of the period and has been summarized as rationalization. The Woodward’s store and its employees were to collectively comprise a voice of authority, and Woodward’s was to be a place where the families of Vancouver could learn to be modern - how to buy the right things at the right price.

Such expert positioning has been identified as consisting of masculine and feminine positions, and this was certainly the case at Woodward’s in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{67} That the prototypic Woodward’s shopper was a woman is evident in Harker’s column, and throughout Woodward’s store literature. The shopper is always referred to as ‘ladies’ or ‘she’, or Mrs. Consumer, or Mrs. Housewife. Photographs of the store, especially on 99 cent days, present a sea of women, confirmed by interviews with employees.

The Woodward’s shopper was also feminine. She was feminine in the sense that she was inferior to the salesclerk, was not comfortable around many commodities and was to be educated about these commodities. The Woodward’s shopper was an unknowing, ‘bewildered housewife’, who, when confronted with a vast arrange of goods, did not know where to turn. Moreover, if left unchecked this ignorance would result in the shopper spending all her husband’s money and trivialities. This is most evident in the following jokes from \textit{The Beacon}, which work as humour precisely because of the trace of truth or familiarity to Woodward’s employees in each of them.

A 5 year old boy, out shopping with his mother, got lost in a crowded department store. ‘Well, young man’, said the salesclerk, ‘what does your mother look like?’

The youngster answered through his tears, ‘She’s the lady with a lot of packages and no money’.  

and:

ISN’T IT THE TRUTH? A woman has two reason for buying something - because nobody has it, or because somebody has it’. 

The Woodward’s shopper was also treated in a patronizing manner:

Any trained salesclerk knows that a customer likes to be congratulated on her buy, thanked for her patronage, educated in the care of the product which she bought.

The subject position of Woodward’s shopper was therefore the product of the interweaving of a discourse of familialism with a scientific discourse pushing the role of the expert. Moreover, the apparent contradictions between the two discourse were resolved in the construction of the Woodward’s shopper as feminine, in that both construct femininity as inferior and as a particularly maligned form of subjectivity.

E. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have tried to elucidate the particular way the modernity, familialism and place were interwoven with the Woodward’s downtown store and how this constellation led to the construction of the feminine subject position of shopper. In particular, I have illustrated that Woodward’s was not just a temporary resting place for commodities, but

70 D.E.Harker, ‘We are counting on you”, The Beacon, December 1952, p.17.
a place important in Vancouver and pervaded by discourses of modernity and familialism that structured social relations within the store. In this sense, this chapter has been an elaboration of the interweaving of the discourses of familialism and modernity through femininity and place. I have not considered the commodity, nor have I addressed the question of whether these interconnections varied in different parts of the store. In the next section I turn to a consideration of the micro-geometry or internal differentiation of Woodward's, examining the creation of particular places and femininities within the store.

Window shopping involves a seemingly casual, but actually purposeful, wandering from shop to shop, which means wandering from potential identity to potential identity until a shop identity is found that matches the individual identity, or, rather, that offers the means to construct that identity.¹

The organization of space within department stores and supermarkets and the new shopping centres is very different from that found in the corner shop.²

The organization of space within retail spaces, in terms of the spatial arrangement of commodities and fixtures as well as social relations, has been a central feature of recent contributions to understandings of retailing. Studies of West Edmonton Mall, for instance, have analyzed the ways that retail spaces are internally differentiated and how such spatial variation contributes to the construction of West Edmonton Mall as a place.³ Fiske, in focusing on the outcome of spatial variation, rather than the processes by which it is constructed, sees the relative location of stores within a particular mall as a metaphor for social relations: ‘democratic’ shops are found on the lowest level; ‘middle class’ stores on the middle level; and ‘luxury’ stores on the upper level.⁴ With respect to the department store, the grouping of commodities into departments has been described as a management strategy to control the flow of money and commodities through the store.⁵ These diverse studies contribute to the growing understanding of the manipulation of

¹ J.Fiske, 1989, Reading the Popular, Boston, Unwin Hyman, p.38.
⁴ Fiske, op.cit., p.37.
space within retail spaces. However, spatial variation is seen as the end-product rather than as an input to the social relations of shopping. Yet what is potentially most interesting is the way space becomes implicated in the meaning of commodities and the subject positions constructed through commodities.

My aim in this chapter is to show how space and particular environments are used in one retailing institution to fix the meaning of commodities and was also critical in the construction of contradictory femininities. In so doing, I offer an alternative perspective on the micro-geography of the department store, through the case study of the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver between 1945 and 1960. I achieve this aim through a movement up the store, showing how the discourses of familialism and modernity intersect in different ways in different parts of the store, implying the construction of different, and contradictory, masculinities and femininities. Starting at the basement of the store in the grocery department, I gradually make my way up the store, through the familialism of the main floor, to the modern domesticity of the second floors, traditional femininity of the third floor, happy homemaker of the fourth floor, modern furniture and design of the fifth floor and finally to the bargain basement sixth floor. I finish with an overview of the micro-geography of the store.

Methodologically, then, this chapter is directly concerned with Woodward's attempts to fix the meanings of the commodity. As such, it is based on an examination of advertisements for Woodward's and the commodities they were attempting to sell. These are in-store advertisements and displays as well as window displays. In particular, I am interested in the meanings commodities were imbued with through special in department displays and window displays, and the variation throughout the store.
A. The Modern Vancouver Woman as Home Economist

Located in the basement of Woodward's is the most important department in the Woodward's marketing strategy, the department that gives Woodward's its uniqueness and the centrepiece in the retailing discourses that inculcated loyalty within the Woodward's shopper: the grocery department, more colloquially known as the food floor. Consisting of the departments or groups of commodities listed in Table 5.1, the food floor has been the mainstay of the Woodward's department store since its inception in 1892. Moreover, in terms of both number of customers and amount of sales, the food floor was consistently the most important department. In the two weeks before Christmas in 1952, for instance, 250,000 customers visited the food floor.\(^6\) Marketed as the ‘Internationally Renowned Food Floor’, the food floor figured prominently in annual ‘Shop Around the World’ promotions as well as special anniversary promotions.\(^7\) The food floor was also central in historical recollections of Woodward's. An account of shopping in Vancouver in the 1940s and 1950s not only refers to Woodward's but refers specifically to the food floor.\(^8\) Further, all former employees of Woodward's I interviewed lamented the decline of the Woodward's food floor and still wished to shop there. Finally, the advertising of the Woodward's food floor was nationally renowned. In 1960, the Food Division of Woodward's advertising won national advertising awards for Thanksgiving displays.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) ‘Vancouver: The Forties and Fifties, Urban Reader, 4,1, pp.3-31.

Table 5.1: Departments on the Woodward’s Food Floor, 1961.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country packing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food floor restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country shipping and shopping service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ironically, given this centrality, the food floor was located in the basement of the Woodward’s downtown store, a location that is both unique and odd from the perspective of most understandings of department stores. As a relatively dark and confined space, basements were not seen as being conducive to the optimal display of commodities, nor an inviting place for customers to visit. As a result, departments important economically are not generally located in basements. The location of the food floor at Woodward’s is therefore anomalous. The importance of the grocery department at Woodward’s was also anomalous. Ferry’s relatively comprehensive history of even the smallest and shortest-lived department stores in the United States only finds one store with a grocery department worth mentioning. Yet in Canada and Britain food floors were much more common. This prevalence can be traced in part to the origin of Canadian department stores, which generally emerged out of small grocery stores, in contrast to the evolution of American department stores out of dry goods stores. In Vancouver between

1945 and 1960, neither The Bay nor Spencer’s department stores had food floors.

A wide range of food products was sold on the food floor, not just groceries, as can be seen in Table 5.1. Given the time period, the range and quantity of commodities available in the food floor was enormous. Diversity in types of commodities in the food floor is indicative of more than scale, for through advertising and other strategies, diversity became intricately bound up with both modernity and femininity. Thus, in the food floor was a unique constellation of modernity, femininity and shopping, which I illustrate below.

According to Woodward’s, the wide range of commodities available on the food floor was indicative of the modernity of the food floor. This can be illustrated through the example of one of the many window displays devoted to the food floor, reproduced in Figure 5.1. Although from a slightly earlier period, this display nicely distills the connection between plenty and diversity apparent in the food floor. In comparison to an earlier period - yesterday’s ‘Mrs. Consumer’ of 1920 - today a wide variety of commodities could be found, bought and put to good use from Woodward’s. Specifically, in 1920 ‘Mrs. Consumer’ could buy 100lb of sugar and 41bs of flour for thirty six dollars. In 1944 the same amount of money would buy these two items and much more, including: ‘dehydrated dog food, Brocks bird seed, U-need-me cereal, Daltons horse radish mustard, Catelli’s macaroni and Royal City plums’. The implicit message was that the increased variety of commodities was better, as were the commodities themselves. For instance, the commodities (like flour and sugar) were not boring, mundane and requiring work, but were name-brand, attractively packaged and convenient.

12 Photograph ‘Food floor’, album, Woodward’s Archives.
13 Photograph ‘Mrs. Consumer Week in Canada’, File: Woodward’s, Greater Vancouver’s Family Shopping Centre’ Woodward’s Archives.
Figure 5.1. Mrs. Consumer Week Window Display

Source: File: Woodward's, Greater Vancouver's Family Shopping Centre', Woodward's Archives
This window display technique of historical comparison was often used by Woodward's in relation to the food floor. Another display, commemorating Woodward's fiftieth anniversary in 1942 is used similarly to proclaim the modernity of the food floor. Here, allusions about modern food shopping are made, but more explicitly. A comparison of 1892 and 1942 is linked visually by a statement:

[Woodward's Internationally Known Food Floor] Merits the title not on size alone, but because it has kept abreast of the times in modern equipment and using efficient methods of food merchandising.14

Thus while the visual aspect of the display demonstrates modernity through diversity and packaged commodities, the text refers to the modernity of the means of acquiring commodities on the food floor.

The mode of shopping on the food floor was distinctly modern, best approximated by the phrase self-service. Self-service was first introduced in the Groceteria in 1919 and by 1950 had been extended throughout the food floor.15 By self-service is meant a mode of acquiring commodities where the shopper browses and chooses the commodities herself and then takes them to a cashier to pay for them. In contrast, a more traditional mode of shopping involved asking a salesclerk for a particular commodity. This traditional mode of shopping is described by Woodward's:

customers were required to wait at both of these points of purchase to receive a salesbill, wait again at the cashier booth, and a still further infringement of their shopping time in waiting for their purchase.16

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14 Photograph, 'Woodward's Internationally known food floor', File: Old Books of Window and Interior Displays Food Floors Circa 1940s/50s, Woodward's Archives. Due to unavailability, it is not possible to reproduce many of the photographs used in this chapter.  
15 D.E.Harker, 'Savings and service', The Beacon, November 1950, p.3.  
It is interesting to speculate on whether this cumbersome mode of shopping was more detrimental to Woodward's management and shoppers. In the 1940s, one component of self-service - customers taking their purchases directly home with them - appears not to have been demanded by customers, as is evident in the following.

Woodward’s being centrally located in the downtown shopping area of Vancouver, the majority of customers must return home by street car or bus. This created the problem of whether or not Mrs. Housewife would be willing to return to her suburban home with her groceries in bags, instead of completely parcelled as she had been used to in the past.

Rather than act only on theory, an experimental checkout was installed for a trial period of several months, and it was ascertained that customers could be educated to readily accept their purchases in bags, especially when it meant faster service at the checkout desk.17

After the 1940s, the modern mode of shopping prevailed on the food floor, with customers roaming the aisles searching through the many commodities to find the one they wanted. The design of the store was critical in this, for the layout of space was manipulated in order to encourage a particular mode of shopping. As seen in Figure 5.2, the aisles were wide, and commodities were well-organized, both facilitating a modern mode of shopping that consisted of methodically searching out desired commodities. The mode of acquiring meat and chicken differed somewhat. Here, a shopper, confronted with an enormous display, would make her choice and then ask a butcher (male) to give it to her.18 However, modernity motifs prevailed, through the presentation of commodities, design and the abundance of commodities, for hundreds of chickens make up a display.19 To summarize

18 Photograph ‘Food floor’, album, Woodward’s Archives.
19 ibid.
the food floor mode of shopping it can be said that the modern Vancouver woman, chose from a wide variety of name brand commodities, superbly organized and presented, herself with a modern shopping cart and took her purchases home with her.

Throughout these three aspects of the food floor - its appearance, commodities available and mode of shopping, were the representation of certain types of femininities. It was accepted that the shopper was a woman - the references to Mrs. Consumer are continual. At this obvious level in defining and encouraging women to be shoppers, and specifically to purchase food for the family, an important component of women's domestic labour was being reproduced. Woodward's were, however, doing much more than this, for shopping was simultaneously feminine and an important component of defining shoppers and women as home economists.

The positioning of salesclerks as experts and the holders of knowledge in relation to shoppers was clearly apparent on the food floor. The men who served meat and fish wore white, being positioned not only as hygienic but as expert. Similarly, the staff of Bea Wright's kitchen,²⁰ wore nurse-like, professional uniforms. The shopper was to be educated by these people in how to best use these commodities.

The Woodward's food floor was not only a site or location where the women of Vancouver bought their food, it was also a place where they would learn how to cook, learn what new and modern foods were available and hence how to be a better wife and mother. Learning about commodities was achieved through frequent special promotions or displays within the food floor encompassing such diverse topics as Brazilian coffee week and an Australian

²⁰ Which I discuss in more detail below.
For example, in 1959 a special ‘Salad Symphony’ display was established on the food floor. This symphony consisted of an array of salads, prepared by the Astor Hotel Burnaby, presented on a table in the centre of the food floor. Shoppers were encouraged to try the salads and take recipes.

There are two points to be made about such displays. First, in assuming that women needed to be told how to cook, the construction of femininity as inferior, especially to the masculine professionalism of Woodward’s staff, can be seen to have been consolidated. Second, and at the same time, the nature of femininity was also being changed, with femininity and the role of home economist being linked.

This modern linking of femininity and home economist occurred through the creative use of space on the food floor, and in particular through the establishment of particular locales within the food floor. For instance, in May 1954 a display kitchen was built on the lower main (food floor) for a food floor home economist service. Here, the modern Vancouver shopper could learn how to cook the modern foods she had bought. In particular, she could learn how to cook the food scientifically and hygienically so that her family would remain healthy. This occurred in conjunction with large scale cooking schools, which I deal with in section D. It is also interesting to note that such educative functions added a binding agent to the attempts by Woodward’s management to cement or fix the meaning of commodities. In demonstrations, potential uses of commodities were limited and a form of dependency on Woodward’s created.

Figure 5.2. Woodward's Food Floor, Circa 1950

Source: File: Woodward's, Greater Vancouver's Family Shopping Centre', Woodward's Archives
Through these activities like displays and cooking demonstrations it can be seen that Woodward’s was also attempting to naturalize the association between the purchase and use of these commodities and the store. The Woodward’s name was prominent throughout all advertising on the food floor, and the creation of special environments like display kitchens meant that women were buying more than commodities at Woodward’s. Their education by Woodward’s would not only influence the meaning of the commodities they bought and how they used them, but also their likelihood to return to Woodward’s.

In sum, the food floor of Woodward’s was a place where shopping, femininity and home economist as a component of femininity were being associated. By shopping in the modern way, Woodward’s shoppers could potentially acquire a dazzling array of modern commodities and learn how to use them to make their lives and their family’s lives more modern and better. These femininities were partly constructed through the manipulation of space within the food floor, with the implication being that only at the food floor of Woodward’s could the possibility of being a modern home economist become a reality. Moreover, this prevalence of the rationality and modernity of shopping was also used explicitly to say that women’s lives were better. For instance, a photograph of the second floor of a woman shopper talking to Bea Wright, with her daughter and shopping cart behind here, is surrounded by the sign ‘Live in Ease! Let Bea Wright Plan your summer mealtimes’.24 With packaged goods acquired in an easy manner, it was thought that women’s domestic chores would be reduced considerably.

B. Family Shopping: The Main Floor

The main floor of department stores has traditionally had a number of distinguishing characteristics. Both historically and presently the main floor of the department store has been the most heavily utilized area and hence worth the most in terms of economic rent. Simultaneously, the appearance of the main floor has been the most important since it is the point of first contact with shoppers and as a result has many resources devoted to it in terms of display. Further, with respect to commodities, the main floor has been the mainstay of the department store in terms of women’s’ wear, and has also been the place where men have shopped. It has long been the opinion of retailers that men do not like to shop and that therefore masculine commodities should be as conveniently located as possible. In practice convenience has been translated into the location of masculine commodities on the main or ground floor, for it is assumed that men have neither the time nor the inclination to search for what they want.

The main floor of Woodward’s had entrances on three sides - Hastings St, an Abbott entrance and Cordova. Upon entering through any of these entrances, a shopper of the 1950s, like her counterpart thirty years earlier, would be struck by the array of commodities available. The environment was plain and quite simple: with counters of goods organized in rows overseen by business-like salesclerks. An important component of the Woodward’s main floor was the means of transporting customers to other parts of the store, with elevators, elevator ‘girls’ and escalators dominating. Part of the main floor is shown in Figure 4.1, depicting men’s wear and notions in 1950. The

departments found on this floor and listed on Table 5.2 can be categorized as:
two types of masculine commodities - clothing and accessories on the one hand
and sporting goods, auto accessories and hardware on the other; feminine
departments and particularly commodities directly related to the appearance
of women; and children’s commodities - sporting goods and candy.

Table 5.2: Departments on the Woodward’s Main Floor, 1961.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sporting goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto accessories, service and garage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosiery and gloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and prescriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevator operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s furnishings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationery and mezzanine lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notions, ribbons and neckwear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watches and jewelry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the main floor of the Woodward’s department store between
1945 and 1960 in terms of both appearance and commodities found in it, is
somewhat anomalous. In terms of decoration, as I pointed out before, the
main floor of Woodward’s was neither palatial or luxurious, but rational,
ordered and modern. In terms of commodities it only housed portions of
women’s clothing, but had in addition a variety of masculine and children’s
commodities. In terms of the traditional department store, the grouping of
departments listed in Table 5.2 on the main floor does not make sense, nor
does it appear that a specific environment is being created. However, the
main floor does make sense when it is considered as indicative of one of the
dominant motifs of the store: familialism. That is, the main floor was the
place where the entire family could shop, for there were commodities in which
that they could all be interested. It is through familialism that the departments on the main floor are linked, and it is this motif that structures my discussion.

In comparison with the food floor, the masculine commodities, particularly clothing, sold on the main floor, necessitated a different mode of shopping. Most commodities, as in Figure 4.1, were displayed in cases, and specific commodities would be requested. In this respect, then, a link between masculinity and mode of shopping was being forged. The production of gender difference is also evident in the contrast between window displays for men’s and women’s clothing. The advertising of suits, for instance, would not be shown on an entire mannequin, but just the torso of a man’s body, without a head.\(^\text{26}\) In all the photographs of window displays, the entire female body was always shown. Thus although they may be consumers, men, unlike women, were not being constructed as commodities, or objects to be looked at. The combination of mode of shopping and buying clothes suggests that shopping and dressing were both purely functional. The masculinity represented at the main floor of Woodward’s, therefore, was one where clothes were important in functional rather than appearance terms.

Another form of masculinity was also potentially being constructed on the main floor. In encouraging men to buy, or at least to buy tools for the home and sporting goods, Woodward’s were encouraging a form of masculinity that has been identified elsewhere. According to Segal, where men did participate in domestic labour in the 1950s it was in relation to activities like building, gardening and fixing things.\(^\text{27}\) Thus Woodward’s were aiding in the construction of ‘family men’ to be achieved through the use of commodities.

\(^{26}\) See for instance photographs in File: Men’s Wear 1959, Woodward’s Archives.

Yet as shoppers men were positioned differently on the main floor. In contrast to the femininity of shoppers on the lower main and second floors, Woodward’s did not attempt to train men in how to use hardware and auto-accessories. The implicit assumption was that men both knew what they wanted and how to use it, and were therefore positioned differently as shoppers.

The main floor was also a place for children to shop for sporting goods and candy. However, not much information exists on these departments, or on Woodward’s marketing strategy to children, although it is apparent that some special displays were established to encourage children to be consumers. For instance, in 1957 a ‘Boys and Girls Exhibition’ was held on the main floor, focusing on sport and music.28

In terms of commodities, the main floor was a place for traditional femininity. Commodities such as ribbons, jewelry and accessories were presented in display cases.29 What is most interesting about this area of the main floor is the way in which these commodities were to be acquired, for they were to be purchased in the same way as men’s commodities. Although this may in part be due to the small size of the commodities, this different mode of shopping is intriguing. One possible, but difficult to document explanation, is that traditional, appearance based femininity through commodities could not be purchased in the modern way.

A discourse of familialism thus dominated the main floor. Commodities for women, men and children were coincident spatially, but marketed differently. It was also a familial place in the sense that the positioning of

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28 File: Boys and Girls Exhibition 1957, Woodward’s Archives.
masculinity, especially in relation to domestic labour was such that it consolidated rather than challenged the division of labour within the home.

C. 'A Scientific Home': Second Floor

Walking past the jewelry to the escalator, or through notions to reach some of the newly installed elevators, assisted by an elevator girl guiding you to your destination, the ascent to the second floor is marked by significant gender and mode of shopping differentiation. Although there were two masculine departments on this floor as shown in Table 5.3, the second floor of Woodward’s was a haven of modern, rational and feminine domesticity. Paints, boy’s wear and shoes combined only comprised one-third of the total customers to this floor, with kitchenware making up the other two-thirds. For this reason, and the importance of modern domesticity throughout the rest of the store it is kitchenware, defined as posts, pans, silverware, stoves etc. that I focus on in this section.

Table 5.3: Departments on the Woodward’s Second Floor 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy's wear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paints and wallpaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchenware</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The location of kitchenware, central in the definition of fifties femininity, on the second floor was itself a product and construction of the femininity of shopping. It required effort to get there, which women, not men, would be prepared to make. In contrast, the centrepieces of masculine domesticity were located on the ground floor.

The commodities found on the second were diverse modern, in the sense that they were always the newest, the best quality and the best available for the price. This is evident in the way three commodities were displayed. The first example is that of the presentation of cutlery. In a display of cutlery, surrounded by silk drapery, the caption is ‘Woodward’s presents Community’s new pattern ‘Evening Star”. This theme of newness pervades the second example, advertising cookware in 1959. Here, a group of women surround a stove, using Corningware, which, according to the caption:

Now for the first time in Canada the all-new cookware

- Beautiful
- Practical
- Versatile
- Withstand extremes of temperature

The final example distills this newness and introduces the themes of place and femininity. In the early 1950s a special display of two to three week duration was devoted to the new stainless steel and its virtues for the modern Vancouver woman. Here, the newness and modernity of stainless steel are both proclaimed in the sense that stainless steel ‘gleams’ and the window displays show only the products in an uncluttered kitchen-like environment. The newness and modernity of the commodities of second floor is therefore

33 File: Stainless Steel Colour Photos Early 1950s’ Woodward’s Archives.
evident, consolidated by the modernity of the design of Woodward’s and the fact that individual commodities would be surrounded by many other modern commodities.

Again, like the situation on the food floor, the use of space and the positioning of the Woodward’s salesclerk in relation to the Woodward’s shopper, were used to fix the modernity of these commodities and their associations with femininity. Special displays were common on the second floor. For instance, the stainless steel promotion I referred to above was a special display kitchen on the second floor. In presenting the commodity in a 'real' situation, women were being educated as to its use and its meaning fixed. As a result, shoppers were more likely to buy the product and therefore more likely to appropriate the meaning presented by Woodward’s.

The allusion to rationality and kitchenware was also made through the creation of special environments within the store. An 'industrial design exhibition from Britain' was held in 1957.34 Throughout the store, displays of the relation between industrial design and the modern home and kitchen were constructed. The effect of these displays was to help cement the scientific basis of the modern home, as is evident in the following example. In a window display announcing the exhibit was an engine in the middle, a display of saucepans on the right and the following caption on the left:

Why is a saucepan like a Merlin Engine?  
Visit the Industrial Design Exhibition.35

Upon visiting the exhibit, the shopper would be confronted with a vast array of modern industrial and domestic technology, illustrating not only the commodification of the home, but also the incursion of technology into the

34 File: Industrial Design Exhibition from Britain 1957. Woodward’s Archives.  
35 Ibid.
home. This served to substantiate the modernity of Woodward's kitchenware, for not only was it new, it was also scientific and rational.

Woodward’s shoppers were also to be educated in how to use modern cookware. Due to space limitations this did not occur on the third floor, but on the sixth floor. If the woman shopper was prepared to travel to the sixth floor, she would be educated in how to use these products. There, Bea Wright’s kitchen helped inculcate the values of rational domesticity. Bea Wright, a fictional home economist created by Woodward’s, was used to personalize the Woodward’s shopping experience. She was also integral in the creation of the Woodward’s home economist, an important component of which was the second floor. For instance, a photograph in 1955 has a woman in a professional, nurse-like uniform, including cap, in a kitchen with a modern fridge, stove and dishwasher. Here, the Woodward’s shopper is positioned as less knowledgeable and feminine in relation to Bea Wright. At the same time, the Woodward’s shopper could learn how to become a home economist, through education on how to use kitchenware was provided in cooking schools, one of which is shown in Figure 5.3. Another cooking school held in 1953, shows rows of women surrounded by appliances. By educating Vancouver women in the use of these modern products, these activities directly linked the modernity and scientific basis of commodities with their use and in definitions of femininity.

37 File: Cooking School 1953, Woodward’s Archives.
Figure 5.3. Cooking Demonstration Circa 1950

Source: File: Woodward's, Greater Vancouver's Family Shopping Centre', Woodward's Archives
There are two useful points to be drawn from this discussion of the second floor. First, a link between femininity and being a home economist was being established. Through the purchase of commodities from Woodward's, a shopper could become a better home economist. Second, these links were made through the manipulation of space, within the department store, specifically the creation of environments where women could learn how to use the new technology. Modern technology was infiltrating the modern home, with Woodward's being an essential conduit.

D. Women as Commodities: Third Floor

On the third floor of Woodward's dresses, hats, lingerie as well as clothes for their children were available for the women of Vancouver. As seen in the list of departments in Table 5.4, the third floor was characterized by an objectifying femininity in the sense that the commodities available were those relating to appearance. Moreover, it was a place filled with women, given the presence of women salesclerks in the staff lunchroom and the location of restrooms and the commensurate presence of women shoppers.

Table 5.4: Departments on the Woodward's Third Floor 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ladies wear and sportswear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millinery and dresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff dining room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingerie and children’s wear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of commodities for sale, the third floor was important in constructing women as objects to be looked at. Interestingly in light of the traditional femininity and mode of shopping of the main floor, these commodities were to be acquired through the peculiarly modern mode of shopping that I described earlier, encouraged by the wide aisles of Figure 5.4. Commodities like coats were to be purchased by browsing through them in an orderly manner, assisted by a salesclerk if relevant. Again, allusions to newness permeated the meaning of these commodities, such as seen in the window display of hats from Paris: 'Direct by air from Paris'. Moreover, the fashion was not just new, but unique. Each hat, although there were many, was different: 'there is an intriguing difference in each one that makes them as exciting as their Paris labels.' The modernity proclaimed on the third floor mirrors nicely definitions of modernity discussed in chapter one. Commodities like hats were fundamentally the same but their differences created and emphasized through advertising.

This newness intersected with the educational position of Woodward's in an interesting way on the third floor. For instance, the introduction of artificial fibres like nylon and Orlon was heralded as very modern and indicative of the newness of Woodward's. At the same time, Woodward's perceived a need to educate Vancouver women as to how these were produced as well as their uses. Thus one window display was devoted to depicting these new fibres, the clothes they were used in and how they were made. In this sense, Woodward's were preparing and educating their shoppers for modernity.

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38 Photograph ‘Parisian Fashion’ circa 1951-53, File: TCA.
39 ibid.
Figure 5.4. Woodward's Third Floor, Circa 1950

Source: File: Woodward's, Greater Vancouver's Family Shopping Centre', Woodward's Archives
Again, the manipulation of space was used as a strategy in which to fix the meaning of commodities and potential subject positions. On the third floor this was mainly through fashion shows, held every season to display the latest fashions available from Woodward's. In store fashion shows illustrated how the Vancouver woman could properly wear the clothes she bought. It is interesting to note that a similar strategy was also used for young women's clothes. A 'teen'n'twenty' shop was established, marketed in conjunction with fashion shows. Here, not only were adults to be educated, but young women were to be shown how to be the next generation of consumers.

Here, the bodies of salesclerks were being commodified in addition to those of shoppers. Salesclerks were used as models in these fashion shows, such as the photograph of 'Miss D.Vivian: Ladies Ready-to-Wear' that appeared in The Beacon after one fashion show in 1947. This is the most explicit example of the use of salesclerk as display, as well as of the commodification of the female body.

In sum, in the third floor was a confluence of many femininities. Women (and feminine) shoppers were being encouraged to purchase images of themselves as commodities and as objectified, an association that was made partly through the commodification of the bodies of the female salesclerks. Moreover, the use of the Woodward's environment to educate shoppers as what was fashionable aided the cementation of these meanings, as well as the ever-changing nature of fashion.

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41 'We go to the fashion show', The Beacon, January 1947.
42 File: Fashion Shows Early 50s, Woodward's Archives.
43 File: Fabric Fashion Fair, Woodward’s Archives
Traditionally, the making of clothes for the family has been an important component of domestic labour. The selling of dry goods to aid the fulfillment of this component of domestic labour was also the mainstay of the early department store, as I pointed out in chapter three. Interestingly, this function was relegated to the fourth floor of the Woodward’s downtown store in the 1950s, where a space for and of this activity was being created. With the exception of chinaware, all the departments on the fourth floor listed in Table 5.5 are related to this theme of making things. Here, the fourth floor can be seen as a transition from the objectifying, woman as commodity, femininity of the previous floor, to the women as housewife, worker, rational producing agent of the next floor. That is, women were being positioned as commodities through the focus on appearance, which at the same time was to be achieved through rational methods that were also to be used to make things for the home.

Table 5.5: Departments on the Woodward’s Fourth Floor 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dress goods and silks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior design, draperies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinaware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The manipulation of space and place-making took an interesting turn in the fixing of the meaning of the commodities on the fourth floor. In the
marketing of fabric, allusions to exotic, other places, like California abound. In one promotion, California style prints were marketed on the basis that by buying tropical print fabric women could buy ‘sunshine by the yard’. In this sense, once on the fourth floor of Woodward’s the Woodward’s shopper could go beyond Vancouver into sunny California. Here, the image of another place - California - was being used to fix the meaning of commodities within the Woodward’s downtown store.

Salesclerks were again part of the display here. Given that fabrics before being used are not good indicators of their finished form, their meanings was fixed at Woodward’s by salesclerks wearing clothes they had made themselves. The boundaries between commodities and salesclerks become very fuzzy here. In one photograph of the fourth floor, with salesclerk positioned with salesclerks, it is almost impossible to distinguish the two.

Place became important in fixing the meaning of commodities once again, although in different and interesting ways. With respect to fabric relating to the interior of homes, specific environments were created to help fix and make familiar the meanings of commodities. For instance, throughout this period Woodward’s had an interior design gallery in which families could learn how to furnish their home. Woodward’s could satisfy the homemakers of Vancouver, for ‘Every homemakers dream and scheme for a home of beauty filled with versatile home furnishings from Woodward’s’. In short, not only could Woodward’s provide the modern woman with a beautiful home, but her desire for a beautiful home could be fulfilled by Woodward’s. It is here that modernity becomes apparent, for at Woodward’s:

Our interior decorators are expertly trained to assist our staff and customers to furnish and decorate their homes completely, or room by room. They also do complete modernizations of kitchens, including built-in ovens and refrigerators.46

This is indicative of an interesting intersection of femininity defined in terms of familialism and beauty with the expert knowledge of the Woodward’s salesclerk. The Woodward’s salesclerk was simultaneously a commodity and an expert. Furthermore, the association between femininity and making things was made through the creative use of space. Again, these factors intersected with femininity in the assumption that every Vancouver woman would want to look beautiful and have a beautiful home; an assumption which in part Woodward’s were constructing. By buying and learning at Woodward’s, Woodward’s could help women achieve their aim the modern way.

F. Modern Technology: Fifth Floor

Traditionally, as one moves vertically up the department store the commodities encountered become those requiring more space and likely to have entailed a special trip to the store. The fifth floor of Woodward’s is indicative of both these trends, consisting of modern appliances generally not bought on impulse, and furniture, requiring a large amount of room to be adequately displayed. These departments are listed in Table 5.6. There are two points to be made about this floor.

First, the display of furniture consisted of ‘life-like’ agglomerations of furniture in furniture showrooms, in the sense that furniture was arranged in

46 Woodward’s Beacon Flash, February 6, 1960, Woodward’s Archives.
‘ideal’ living rooms, kitchens and so on, thus continuing a tradition begun in the 1930s. Unfortunately, however, no other data exists as to the marketing of furniture.

Table 5.6: Departments on the Woodward’s Fifth Floor 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Furniture</th>
<th>Floor coverings</th>
<th>Stoves, radio, TV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Second, appliances like radios and televisions were economically important to the store. Although not visited by many customers, the radio department had one of the highest volumes of sales and the highest spending per customer, obviously partly due to the high price of the product being sold. It is therefore intriguing that such appliances do not figure prominently in Woodward’s advertising. There could have been many reasons for this: the non-gender basis of these commodities, sufficiency of national advertising or inability of Woodward’s to make them distinctive and give them Woodward’s imprint. Stoves, on the other hand, fit nicely into prevailing definitions of femininity and figured prominently in the construction of the modern scientific femininity throughout the store.

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47 Sales/Salary Ledger, 1952/53, Woodward’s Archives
G. Transitional Space: Sixth Floor

The sixth floor of the downtown Woodward's store, the most difficult to reach of the selling floors, contained an eclectic mix of commodities as well as some administrative functions, as shown in Table 5.7. As such, it can be characterized as a transitional space. In terms of selling, it had two major functions. The first is the use of large amount of space for special displays and functions like cooking schools and industrial design exhibits that I have discussed previously. Location on the sixth floor in this sense can be seen as a lure to get people moving through the store.

Table 5.7: Departments on the Woodward's Sixth Floor 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personnel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substandard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One further example is a special coffee week promotion on the sixth floor in 1956, which fits in nicely with the educative and home economist motifs of other displays on this floor. Here, a special booth was set up to teach shoppers how to brew 'good' coffee. Shoppers were also being educated about the coffee trade. Bea Wright's kitchen was established in a small area for this display, and the background consisted of a map of North and South America showing the coffee trade. It was described by the following caption:

48 File: Coffee week on the Sixth Floor 1956, Woodward's Archives.
Trade between the Americas is a two-way street. Latin America sells almost three-quarters of her coffee to the United States and Canada. In return, coffee dollars enable Latin America to buy our autos, metals, wheat and other goods. In this case, Woodward's were again making way for modernity, educating customers in the background of commodities and using space to do so. Throughout, the meaning of commodities was inevitably tied to Woodward's.

The second use was as the home of substandard, the resting place for damaged and difficult to sell commodities. In this sense, the sixth floor was Woodward's 'bargain basement'. Again, this location would make those looking for bargains walk through the entire store. This floor was also differentiated in terms of the meanings of commodities, for they were displayed and sold in a different manner. In terms of advertising, for instance, in one window display, commodities were cluttered into a small space and prices were prominent. Thus price, rather than the commodity, can be seen to be paramount and gender motifs are difficult to discern.

The other function of the sixth floor was administrative. For the most part, many customers would have no contact with this part of the store. Periodically, however, the sixth floor would be transformed, becoming a centre of activity. Before the introduction of the charge card in 1960, Woodward's had a complicated system of credit, whereby after being interviewed on the sixth floor, women were given credit for the day. At busy shopping periods like Christmas, there would be a race to the elevator to get to the sixth floor and be interviewed for credit. Even though it was women shopping, most women were given credit in their husbands' name. This was the case even after the introduction of charge cards, as is evident in the following quotation:

49 ibid.
51 Announced in a window display, File: Charge Plates 1960, Woodward's Archives.
52 LT
We are pleased to report that Charge Salesbills are showing a marked improvement. Staff are now concentrating on getting the husband's Christian name instead of using initials. Keep up the good work!

H. Production Space: Seventh and Eighth Floors

The seventh and eighth floors were production space, housing activities listed in Table 5.8 relevant to the maintenance of the store. As such they were also masculine spaces. One of the more interesting aspects of these floors was the presence of the 'bakery manufacturing' department. Consistent with the emphasis placed on the food floor, an entirely new bakery on site was established in the 1948 renovations. The scale of the operation is enormous and indicative of the size of Woodward's in this period. The bakery employed 50 people on the seventh floor. In many ways, although invisible, the seventh and eighth floors provided the oil to keep the Woodward's machine running smoothly.

Table 5.8: Departments on the Woodward's Seventh and Eighth Floors 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engineers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drapery workroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakery manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving and city shipping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54 So called to distinguish it from the 'bakery department' where baked goods were sold.
55 'Our Bakery Department', The Beacon, March 1948.
I. Conclusion

Shopping at the Woodward's department store between 1945 and 1960 and moving through the store meant moving from potential identity to potential identity. Each floor was different, not only in terms of the commodities it housed but also in terms of the meaning of these commodities, and in particular how their use related to aspects of femininity. If the Woodward's shopper took the modern, rational mode of shopping to heart, she would start at the food floor and shop to become a modern home economist, then to the familialism of the main floor, learn the scientific basis of running a home on the second floor, revert to objectifying femininity on the third floor and combine this objectification and rationalization on the fourth floor. She would go to the fifth floor to purchase 'truly modern' commodities, and the sixth floor would be her destination to learn how to be modern. Moreover, on each floor the space within that floor was used to fix the meanings of commodities through educating shoppers in the use of the commodity. In this respect, then, the micro-geography of the department store is of more than economic importance, and is a defining characteristic of the meanings of the commodities it houses. Further, the spatial arrangement of the store helped in the yoking of women and shopping. Even if men shopped at Woodward's, they were not encouraged, by either retailing discourses or the layout of the
store, to go beyond the main floor. Thus, the layout of the store was instrumental in the reconstitution of feminine shoppers.
Chapter Six: Woodward's, Modernity, Familialism and Femininity

My aim in this thesis has been to show the multiple ways that one retail institution - the Woodward's department store in downtown Vancouver between 1945 and 1960 - was involved in the positioning of women as subjects of discourses and hence in the construction of femininity. Despite the denial of the efficacy of retailing in present understandings of consumption practices, I have shown how the Woodward's department store was not just a conduit of commodities, but a place in which the meaning of commodities was fixed and potential subject positions constructed. In particular, I have documented the way that discourses of modernity and familialism intertwined in the positioning of women shoppers. Throughout, I have made three points about retailing, the place-specific meaning of commodities, and the association of femininity and shopping, which I return to briefly in this conclusion.

A. Retailing and the Circulation of Commodities

As a retail space, the Woodward's department store was both a conduit and component of consumerist discourses and commodities. As a visible edifice of consumption, made more visible at Woodward's through the Beacon tower constructed on top of the ten-storey building, Woodward's served to inculcate the values of consumerism into Vancouver. Unlike earlier department stores where these values were distinctly middle class, the consumerism and associated use of commodities in everyday life encouraged at Woodward's was that tailored to price-conscious consumers. In so doing,
Woodward's was involved in the extension of practices of consumption that was occurring throughout the 1950s.

However, the retailing discourses constructing shopping at Woodward's were neither exclusively reproducing consumerist discourses, nor working in isolation. Instead, the discourses structuring Woodward's were part of a network of consumerist and other discourses. It is here that the utility of the poststructuralist framework developed in chapter two becomes apparent. The discourse of modernity that pervaded the store was part of a network of discourses of rationality and the scientific home that were becoming dominant as the twentieth century proceeded, as I documented in chapter three. Familialism was used as a strategy in which to make the working-class consumer feel comfortable in the Woodward's shopping environment, and in so doing helped in the extension of commodities and consumption practices.

Moreover, the retail institution grounded the negotiation between producer and consumer, a necessary process if commodities are to become part of everyday life. As I discussed in chapter two, popular culture approaches to consumption practices posit that commodities are appropriated through a process of negotiation between a producer of the meanings of commodities and the consumer or user of those commodities and their meanings. Retail environments are places where this negotiation occurs and is controlled, as attempts are made to fix the meanings of commodities and control the way these meanings are appropriated through shopping. I demonstrated here the terms under which this negotiation occurred at Woodward's, particularly through the construction of the Woodward's shopper and the modern mode of shopping. In so doing, I have shown how control over the activity of shopping and the meaning of commodities are important fetters on the negotiation between producer and user.
B. Retailing and the Meaning of Commodities

Most understandings of retailing see retail spaces only in terms of the distribution of commodities. In contrast, I have argued throughout this thesis that retail institutions, and specifically the Woodward's department store in Vancouver, and are more than non-efficacious transfer points between the realities of production and the obfuscatory relations of consumption. The Woodward's department store was a place where the meaning of commodities was fixed. Through an examination of the place-making strategies of, and manipulation of space in terms of location by, Woodward's, I have illustrated the ways place becomes important in the constitution of everyday life.

Turning first to place-making, commodities in Woodward's were imbued with a general meaning through the creation of Woodward's as a modern, family department store for the people of Vancouver. Here, management was positioning the store as part of the everyday of Vancouver through daily newspaper advertising and involvement in the day to day activities of Vancouver. It was also a modern department store, rationally planned and organized, and given the diversity and modernity of the commodities housed within it, the place where people shopped to become modern. Finally, Woodward's was a family department store, consisting of a three-way relation between management, shoppers and salesclerks constituted by a discourse of familialism. Employees were made to feel like members of a large, happy family, as were shoppers.

At the juncture of familialism and modernity was the Woodward's salesclerk. Salesclerks, as part of the Woodward's family were simultaneously conduits of familialism and modernity, in the latter case through dress
regulations and training. Combined, these three factors percolated through the meaning of all commodities in the store, which were modern in the sense of scientific and rational, and for use in the family home. In this respect, commodities within a retail space like Woodward’s are imbued with meaning in relation to their environment.

Commodities in Woodward’s also gained meaning through a relation with each other, because of the micro-geography of the department store. Each floor of Woodward’s was created as different, in terms of the commodities found there and the mode of acquiring them. As such, the differences I documented in chapter five were illustrations of the way that discourse of modernity and familialism intertwined in discrete ways in different parts of the store, as well as the relational construction of the meanings of commodities on each floor. Space became important here again, for the creation of special environments on each floor, such as display kitchens and interior design galleries, were used to fix the meanings of commodities.

C. Retailing, Shopping and Femininity

Both these factors of the meanings of commodities and the role of retailing, cannot be understood without reference to gender, and the construction and representations of femininity has been primary in my analysis of Woodward’s. This was particularly the case with my analysis of the discourse of familialism that permeated relations between Woodward’s and its employees. There, employees were gendered members of the Woodward’s family. As a result, gender differences in dress regulations and training were clear. Further, in showing how the role of shopper is
constructed as one to be performed by women and as feminine, my discussion of the Woodward’s shopper has highlighted the three-way relation between women, femininity and commodities.

First, women were encouraged to be consumers, to shop for commodities to help them care for their husbands and children. Throughout the Woodward’s store women were targets of retailing discourses. Moreover, the spatial arrangement of the store operated so as to consolidate the construction of women as shoppers. The convenient location of commodities likely to be bought by men on the ground and first floors fed into the understanding that men do not like to shop and are not shoppers. In contrast, the construction of women as home economists on both the lower main and third floors was based on the assumption that women would willingly move through the entire store. Location fed into this assumption.

Second, through the meanings given to commodities, some close ties between domestic labour and femininity were made. The intertwining of the discourses of modernity and familialism meant that the contours of domestic labour were commodified and rationalized.

Third, and as a result of and part of, the first two, shopping itself was constructed as feminine. Even though Woodward’s shoppers were encouraged to shop rationally and scientifically for modern commodities, shopping and shoppers remained maligned. The subject position of shopper constructed by Woodward’s was the outcome of a relation of power and knowledge, with the shopper unknowing and inferior in relation to the expertise of Woodward’s and their salesclerks, and shoppers were to be educated by Woodward’s in modern ways of life. Salesclerks and shoppers were hence positioned as masculine and feminine respectively.
These three points, in combination with the manipulation of space, constructed the feminine shopper and maintained the maligning of femininity. Although the practice of shopping may have been enjoyable and an opportunity for resistance for women in Vancouver in the 1950s, control over the activity of shopping was an important fetter on such practices. In shaping what commodities were bought and how they were purchased, retail institutions limit this potential for resistance.
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File: Charge Plates 1960, Woodward’s Archives.

File: Cooking School 1953, Woodward’s Archives.

File: Fabric Fashion Fair, Woodward’s Archives.


File: Fashion Shows Early 50s, Woodward’s Archives.

File: Men’s Wear 1959, Woodward’s Archives.

File: Old Books of Window and Interior Displays Food Floors Circa 1940s/50s’, Woodward’s Archives.

File: Shop Around the World at Woodward’s, Woodward’s Archives.

File: Stainless Steel Colour Photos Early 1950s’ Woodward’s Archives.


Photograph ‘Food floor’, album, Woodward’s Archives.

Photograph ‘Food floor’, album, Woodward’s Archives.


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Photograph, ‘Woodward’s Internationally known food floor’, File: Old Books of Window and Interior Displays Food Floors Circa 1940s/50s, Woodward’s Archives.

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Woodward's Our Methods, pamphlet, Woodward's Archives.
APPENDIX

Studies in the history of retailing are very much dependent on, and restricted by, the availability of sources. Traditional sources are confined to published accounts of retailing institutions, including fiction; and official figures on sales within specific forms of retailing, as well as number of establishments. In addition, professional retail journals can be used to creatively elucidate the intentions and marketing strategies of retailing in general, as done by Benson. However, these traditional sources suffer from two inter-related deficiencies that make them inappropriate for this thesis. First, from the perspective of a particular store, general sources like those used by Benson cannot give any insight into the operation of particular firms, although they can provide useful background. Second, the available store biographies, which satisfy the first criterion, are not useful to answering theoretical questions. In particular, store biographies are more likely to contain information on the founder of the store, broad management practices and are often celebratory.

For these two reasons, the analysis of this thesis is based on the selective use of secondary sources and on a compilation of information from two sorts of primary sources: information collected and maintained by the Woodward's downtown store; and oral histories of shopping and working at Woodward's. The purpose of this Appendix is to outline the nature of these sources and how they are used.

A. Secondary Sources

As the premier western Canadian department store, there are a few secondary sources on Woodward’s publicly available. In the main, these works focus on the people involved in the running of the Woodward’s store, especially in the period preceding 1940. However, they contain useful insights into three factors central to this thesis: background information on the history of Woodward’s; detail on the architecture and design of the store; and information on the succession of managers and management strategies of the firm.

B. Primary Sources

(i) Woodward’s Archives

Due to the foresight of a number of individuals in the Woodward’s organization, a fairly comprehensive record of the Woodward’s department store have been preserved. This record forms the bulk of this thesis. Unlike many other private archives, the Woodward’s archives is predominantly pictorial, consisting mainly of photographs of the store and of special displays within and outside the store. Internal correspondence, letters of the founders and employee records have not been kept. Some sales and customer data exists, which is utilized in chapters four and five. The bulk of the thesis is based on two data sources: photographs of displays and staff journals.

During the 1940s and 1950s the advertising and display departments were not only the pivots of the ambience of the store, but also kept records of all displays and promotion within the store. These form the basis of chapter five.

The second major source is the staff magazine *The Beacon*. Beginning in 1947, this magazine was published every two months, with the aim of informing staff of what was going on in the store. In terms of content, *The Beacon* consisted of: information on the social life of the store; information on special events; and advice from management to salesclerks.

(ii) *Oral Histories*

The information from the archives, although useful, proved to be without a context in many ways. It was difficult to gain a general sense of the store from the photographs and journals, so a limited set of interviews was conducted with former employees of the store. The interviews have thus been used to provide a context and substantiate points.

Four former employees from the time period were interviewed, representing those working in mail-order, credit department, cashier and sporting goods. Interviews were unstructured, based around the following issues:

* department worked in
* type of employment
* social occasions
* recollections of working at Woodward's
* work conducted
* shopping at Woodward's
* general environment of Woodward's