Au Bon Marché: A Paradise for the Flâneuse

Catriona M. Schwartz

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By: Catriona M. Schwartz

Entitled: Au Bon Marché: A Paradise for the Flâneuse

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Master of Arts (Art History)

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

____ Examiner
Dr. Julia Skelly

____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. John Potvin

Approved by ____
Dr. Nicola Pezolet, Chair of Department

__________ 2025 ____
Dr. Annie Gèrin, Faculty of Fine Art

ABSTRACT

Au Bon Marché: A Paradise for the *Flâneuse*

Catriona M. Schwartz

Au Bon Marché: A Paradise for the Flâneuse begins in Paris in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century with the emergence of a new type of monumental store, the *grand magasin* or department store, which launches the age of mass consumption. Consumer culture, in the guise of the department store, which Émile Zola referred to as the "cathedral of modern commerce",[1] introduced the new concept of shopping for pleasure and *flânerie*, the act of browsing and viewing the merchandise without any obligation to buy. This in turn gave rise to a 'new' woman of modernity, the shopper as *flâneuse.* Considered to be the first modern department store in Paris, Au Bon Marché is used as a case study to examine the innovative retail practices that were initiated by its founder, Aristide Boucicaut, to illustrate how these strategies impacted the social and cultural life of Parisian bourgeois women. Boucicaut achieved this by challenging the traditional shopping conventions of the smaller specialty stores and transforming the mundane and sometimes unpleasant 'chore' of buying necessities into the pleasurable social ritual of shopping as a distinctly feminine leisurely pursuit. Boucicaut's Au Bon Marché thus became the domain of women in which they were encouraged to navigate this liminal 'public/private' paradise where they were free to be a *flâneuse*.

[1] Emile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*. Translated by Brian Nelson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1883] 2008, 234.

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INTRODUCTION

By the mid 1870s, the monumental Parisian *grands magasins* (department stores) were one of the most visible symbols of modernity and the new secular religion of consumerism. Consumer culture in the guise of Parisian department stores such as Au Bon Marché [2] introduced the new concept of shopping for pleasure and the act of browsing and looking (*flânerie*) without any obligation to buy. This in turn gave rise to a new woman of modernity, the *bourgeoise* consumer, who art historian Anne Friedberg names as "a new social character, the *flâneuse*."[3] Through the act of shopping, bourgeois women played a key role in modernity's consumer culture by 'worshipping' at the altar of these new monumental stores that had emerged chrysalis-like from their modest novelty store origins. The Parisian *grands magasins,* which Émile Zola referred to as the "cathedrals of modern commerce",[4] served as agents of social and cultural transformation. Consequently, they were emblematic of the way that French bourgeois society was changing for women with the dissolving of class distinctions and social boundaries which was signified by the intermingling of classes and genders. This social intermingling was exemplified by Parisian department stores and the horse-drawn public transport service, the omnibus. Both represented public settings were men and unchaperoned women could share close quarters without violating

[2] The store is referred to as Au Bon Marché throughout the thesis. This was the store's original name for 151 years - from the time of its establishment in 1838 as a *magasin de nouveautés*, until 1984 when the Louis Vuitton group (LVMH) acquired the store. Rebranded as a luxury high-end establishment, it has been known as Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche since 1989.

[3] Anne Friedberg, "Les Flâneurs Du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition." *PMLA,* vol. 106, no. 3, May 1991, 430, endnote 7. Later in my thesis, I address the debate surrounding the (im)possibility of the *flâneuse* as outlined by early feminist scholars such as Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff. To that end, two of Wolff's seminal essays are investigated: the first one being, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity" from 1989 and her 2008 follow-up titled "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)". More recent feminist scholars such as Mica Nava and Anne Friedberg have convincingly argued that the *flâneuse* did exist in nineteenth-century Paris. Their texts along with others are examined to support my argument that the *flâneuse* did indeed exist, in large part owing to the advent of the Parisian *grands magasins*.

[4] Émile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*. Translated by Brian Nelson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1883] 2008, 234.

rules of propriety.[5] "Making luxury democratic"[6] by virtue of selling mass-produced merchandise cheaply, served to sustain the frenetic consumer culture of modernity of which the Parisian department store was its apogee. In the process, the department store became the social domain of women, where modernity's new woman, the feminine version of Baudelaire's urban stroller, first made her appearance and claimed the safe interior space as her realm, and in so doing, the department store became a paradise for the *flâneuse*.

Owing to Zola's meticulous research primarily conducted at Au Bon Marché which is considered to be the first modern Parisian department store, his 1883 novel *The Ladies Paradise* has served as a foundational text for many scholars and for this thesis.[7] Describing his novel as *"le poème de la vie moderne"* (an ode to modern life), the novel's main protagonist is the department store itself, which Zola likens to a machine.[8] But it is Zola's remarkable attention to detail that results in his novel being as much a documentary as it is fiction, giving the reader a front row seat into the inner workings of the nineteenth-century Parisian department store and how it became entwined in the social and cultural lives of bourgeois women.

Using an interdisciplinary framework of feminist and social art history in conjunction with an examination of the groundbreaking nineteenth-century business practices initiated at Au Bon Marché, my thesis will argue that these innovative retail strategies had a dramatic social impact on the lives of nineteenth-century bourgeois women, by emboldening them to venture outside the security and domestic comfort of their homes and enter the liminal public/private space of the department store. Au Bon Marché's visionary founder Aristide Boucicaut (1810-1877)

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[5] Masha Belenky, *Engine of modernity: The omnibus and urban culture in nineteenth-century Paris*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2020, 1, 27.
[6] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 76-77.
[7] Émile Zola, *Manuscrits et dossiers préparatoires. Au Bonheur des dames.* Notes on Le Bon Marché etc. Volumes 1 & 2, 1881. BnF Catalogues 10277 & 10278.
[8] Ibid. See also his novel, *The Ladies Paradise*, 16.

transformed (what was, at the time) the mundane and sometimes unpleasant chore of buying consumer goods into the pleasurable and socially sanctioned ritual of shopping which became a distinctly feminine leisurely pursuit (Figure 1). As I outline in this thesis, he achieved this by challenging the traditional shopping conventions of the smaller specialty stores, many of which were still operating under France's defunct guild system.[9] Boucicaut's pioneering "Eight Rules of Commerce"[10] are examined to illustrate how these strategies were one of the contributing factors allowing bourgeois women to navigate what was becoming the ever-more fluid social boundaries between public and private. The nineteenth-century Parisian *grand magasin* served as a liminal realm, an intimate public/private space that became the domain of women. I argue that owing to Boucicaut's strategies including free entry into the store to browse (*flâner*) and look at the merchandise without any obligation to buy, a new feminine social character emerged: the feminine version of Baudelaire's *flâneur*: the *flâneuse* as consumer/browser who personified what art historian Ruth E. Iskin describes as the new "modern type of looking" by women that was characterized by "a browsing performed in crowds".[11]

As the French words (*flâner, flânerie, flâneur and flâneuse)* are used throughout the text, it is important to briefly define their usage in the context of this thesis. Most often associated with the city of Paris and modernity, the verb *flâner* and its derivatives represent a concept so French that there is no single English equivalent that captures its true essence.[12] The Larousse French

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[9] Shane Adler Davis, "'Fine Cloths on the Altar': The Commodification of Late-Nineteenth-Century France," *Art Journal*, Vol. 48, no. 1, 1989, 85-89., 86. The French guild system was abolished officially in 1791. Up until that time, shopkeepers such as Baudu (owner of the doomed drapery store *Au Vieil Elbeuf* in Zola's novel, *The Ladies Paradise*), could only sell one category of merchandise. Newer types of shops such as the *magasins de nouveautés* used the opportunity to expand their selection, while others such as Baudu kept the old ways of the guild.
[10] "Les huit commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut." Le Bon Marché. *Passerelles (BnF)*. https://passerelles.essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/chronologie/construction/huit-commandements-commerce-selon-boucicaut.
[11] Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 46.
[12] Emily Monaco, "The word that encapsulates 'Frenchness'." *BBC.com, Travel*, October 27 2019, np. https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20191027-the-word-that-encapsulates-frenchness.

dictionary defines the verb *flâner* as "to wander aimlessly, for the pleasure of looking".[13] The activity of *flânerie* is defined by Larousse as the "action or habit of strolling aimlessly without a specific destination or purpose" and described as the "*promenade de flâneur*".[14] The *flâneur* and the feminine form *flâneuse* are simply defined as "those who stroll".[15] Certainly, a key defining characteristic of being a *flâneur* or *flâneuse* is the act of strolling or browsing without a set purpose or destination, however it is accompanied by the acute observation of the surrounding urban environment. This was referred to by German philosopher Walter Benjamin as the 'gaze' of the *flâneur*.[16] There was much to see during the nineteenth century: Parisian consumer culture was a "visual culture" with its profusion of advertising images such as posters and fashion plates, along with merchandise that was openly and creatively displayed in the department stores.[17] As elaborated in Section II "Shopping as *Flânerie"*, the Parisian streets and arcades became the domain of the *flâneur*, whereas the safe liminal interior space of the department store belonged to the *flâneuse* for her viewing and browsing pleasure.

Before proceeding further, it is important to examine the phenomena of modernity in Paris which created the perfect conditions for the dawning of the *grands magasins.*

Nineteenth-century modernity and the emergence of the department store

The Parisian *grands magasins* could not have materialized and flourished without the Second Empire's Haussmannization of Paris. However, there were other critical modernization factors at play that also contributed to the advent of the *grand magasin*. These included accelerated industrialization in France during the nineteenth century resulting in the mass production of

[13] "Flâner", *Larousse Dictionnaire de français.* https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/flâner/34028.
[14] "Flânerie", *Larousse Dictionnaire de français.* https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/flânerie/34029.
[15] "Flâneur", *Larousse Dictionnaire de français.* https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/flâneur/34030.
[16] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Translated by Harry Zohn. London: New Left Books, 1973, 170.
[17] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 2.

consumer goods, which in turn led to mass consumption and the frenetic consumer culture of the newly wealthy *bourgeoisie*. The development of mass transportation such as the national railway network and the Parisian omnibus were also critical modernizing elements.

The most important element associated with modernity in nineteenth-century Paris was the radical urban redevelopment of the city between 1853 and 1870 by the Prefect of the Seine, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809-1891).[18] Often referred to as the Haussmannization of Paris, Haussmann was commissioned by the French Emperor Napoleon III to transform Paris from a 'closed' medieval city with its narrow streets and unsanitary conditions into an 'open' modern metropolis with wide boulevards, green spaces and apartment buildings with their iconic wrought iron balconies.[19] Haussmann's wide avenues facilitated the movement of goods and people within Paris, which was critical given the city's rapid population growth that by 1872 numbered 1.8 million people.[20]

The accelerated pace of industrialization in France during the first half of the nineteenth century resulted in the mass production of consumer goods such as textiles and other desirable consumer commodities.[21] Concomitant with this rapid industrialization was the bourgeoning French middle class or *bourgeoisie* which ranged from the *haute bourgeoisie* of wealthy bankers, industrialists and merchants to the *petite bourgeoisie* of shopkeepers, artisans, and white-collar workers,[22] all of whom were Boucicaut's target clientele for Au Bon Marché. As historian Rémy

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[18] Brian Nelson, "Introduction." In Zola, Émile. *The Ladies' Paradise*. Translated by Brian Nelson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1883] 2008, xiv.
[19] Ibid.
[20] T. Loua, "Paris en 1872. Mouvements de la population, d'après le bulletin municipal." *Journal de la société statistique de Paris*, tome 14, 1873, 320-325.
[21] "The first Industrial Revolution." *Encyclopedia Britannica online.,* Last updated April 11 2025. https://www.britannica.com/event/Industrial-Revolution/The-first-Industrial-Revolution. France was slower to industrialize than Britain owing to the French Revolution and subsequent uncertain political conditions during the nineteenth century. However, by 1848, France had become an industrial power.
[22] Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment o the Present*. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1987, 163-166. Wright describes the term *bourgeoisie* as being "amorphous" because of the fluid range of

Saisselin observes, the *bourgeoisie's* new-found wealth led to the acquisitiveness in which "the accumulation of things was inseparable from the bourgeois life of the nineteenth century."[23] He describes the bourgeois culture as an "ambiguous space where love of possession, love of art, and social ambition meet."[24] However, their 'love of art' involved acquiring decorative objects (*bibelots* or bric-a-brac) that were derived from "material culture rather than high art".[25] As art and design historian John Potvin writes, "bric-a-brac was considered a woman's delight and trifle and not something to be considered serious by men."[26] Parisian department stores such as Au Bon Marché exploited the bourgeois woman's supposed weakness for pretty *bibelots* or bric-a-brac by selling them at low prices. French art collector, Edmond de Goncourt (1822-1896) in his 1881 book *La Maison d'un artiste* referred to the *bourgeoisie's* obsessive buying of decorative objects as "*bricabracomania"*.[27] De Goncourt believed that this compulsive accumulation of objects was a compensatory response to the *bourgeoisie'*s new and rapidly changing industrialized society.[28] Moreover, the dual pleasures of buying the object and then the subsequent possession of it also came into play.[29] Thus, a personal collection of familiar *bibelots* was something tangible and reassuring for the bourgeois owner.[30]

The development of the French mass transportation system was another critical element in the modernization of Paris. This included the expanded railway network linking Paris with the rest

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occupations and wealth that it encompassed – leading to three sub-categorizations (upper, middle and petit bourgeois). On page 166, Wright notes that in the latter nineteenth century, access to the *bourgeoisie* became based on educational level and achievement.

[23] Rémy G. Saisselin, "Preface", *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984, xiv. Also, see Michael B. Miller - on page 165 of his book *The Bon Marché,* he argues that consumer culture was interchangeable with Parisian bourgeois culture.

[24] Ibid., xv.

[25] John Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort: Queer Aesthetics, Material Culture and the Modern Interior in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, 46.

[26] Ibid., 58.

[27] Saisselin, xiv.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort,* 47.

[30] Saisselin, xiv.

of France and Europe, transporting raw materials to factories and finished goods to markets, as well as carrying people into the city. Once in Paris, the inexpensive and egalitarian horse-drawn omnibus enabled the public to travel easily around the city.[31] Owing to Haussmann's urban renewal with its wide traffic arteries which permitted the unrestricted movement of goods and people, Parisian neighbourhoods were no longer 'autonomous' in the sense of being almost inaccessible and separate entities.[32] Consequently, Parisian department stores could draw their clientele from the entirety of the city, not just the neighbourhoods where they were located.[33] While these factors sustained the emergent frenzied consumer culture, Au Bon Marché's remarkable success could not have been maintained without the groundbreaking business strategies implemented by Boucicaut, as I outline later in the thesis.

Some of the key topics that I cover here include recent scholarship that has questioned earlier feminist theories regarding the nineteenth century's strictly gendered public and private spheres, in which it was argued that the existence of the *flâneuse* was an impossibility. In addition, there are questions as to whether the 'new' retail business practices that have always been attributed to nineteenth-century Parisian department stores were simply a continuation of the retail practices already in place at luxury stores in eighteenth-century London. This topic will only be explored briefly in the Introduction section as it does not apply to Parisian department stores, particularly when studied in the context of the traditional Parisian shopping conventions that were still in

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[31] Belenky, *Engine of modernity: The omnibus and urban culture in nineteenth-century Paris*, 1, 27. The nineteenth-century Parisian omnibus was one of the few public spaces where men and women could share close quarters without violating rules of propriety and where women could travel unchaperoned. Open to anyone regardless of gender, class or rank, the only requirement was payment of the 30 centimes fare. According to Monica Burckhardt in *Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche: The Invention of the Department Store* on page 22, one of the Parisian omnibus lines conveniently stopped in front of Au Bon Marché.

[32] Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Richard Bienvenu. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, 56, 59.

[33] Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, "The world of the department store: distribution, culture and social change." In Crossick, Geoffrey, and Serge Jaumain, eds. *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018, 23.

place during the nineteenth century. In that light, Boucicaut's new retail business strategies were indeed revolutionary rather than evolutionary, as will be examined in depth in Section III. What follows here is a brief synopsis of some of the topics under discussion in this thesis.

Early feminist art historians such as Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff argued that the existence of the *flâneuse*, the feminine version of Baudelaire's *flâneur* (the urban stroller and observer of modern life), was impossible owing to the strictly gendered public and domestic social spheres in the nineteenth century. The public sphere was defined as exclusively the domain of men, whereas women were consigned to the private or domestic sphere, and thus were excluded from the experience of modernity which, according to Wolff, took place in the "public world of work, politics and city life."[34] But were these ideological spheres as socially entrenched as Pollock and Wolff have proclaimed and more importantly, did these spheres accurately reflect the lived reality of the Parisian bourgeois woman in the latter decades of the nineteenth century? Even Pollock acknowledges that the spheres defined "a mental map rather than a description of actual social spaces."[35] Hence, the question is this: did the *flâneuse* make an appearance in nineteenth-century Paris? My position is that yes indeed, the *flâneuse* did appear, both on Haussmann's wide boulevards particularly during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and certainly within the liminal space of the Parisian department store.

Despite acknowledging the importance of consumerism to modernity, Wolff writes that "the role of *flâneuse* remained impossible despite the expansion of women's public activities, and despite the newer activities of shopping."[36] She further describes the department store as "an

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[34] Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity." *In The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York and London: Routledge, 1989, 141-142.
[35] Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity." In *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. London: Routledge, 1988, 68.
[36] Wolff, "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)". In D'Souza, Aruna, and Tom McDonough, eds. *The invisible flâneuse? Gender, public space and visual culture in nineteenth-century Paris*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, 21.

enclosed and circumscribed space" and the act of shopping as "a pre-defined and purposeful activity."[37] In fact, the opposite was true. I argue that the *flâneuse* existed within the vast public/private space of the *grand magasin* where she could enter unaccompanied, and where *flânerie* (the act of browsing without a set purpose and gazing at the spectacular displays and the crowds of shoppers while strolling throughout the store) was both encouraged and expected. Friedberg refers to this as "the ambulatory gaze" of the *flâneuse*.[38] Wolff's theories have been challenged by more recent scholarship which argues convincingly that in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the lived experience of the Parisian bourgeois woman was more socially fluid than the strict ideology of separate spheres would suggest. In Section II, "Shopping as Flânerie", texts by Anne Friedberg, Ruth E. Iskin, Mica Nava, and Lisa Tiersten will be used to support my argument about the existence of the *flâneuse*. In addition, I will discuss a primary source, French journalist Pierre Giffard's (1853-1922) 1882 book, in which he outlines the different types of *flâneuses* that could be found in nineteenth-century Parisian *grands magasins*.[39]

In Section III, the "Eight Rules of Commerce according to Boucicaut"[40] are analysed in detail to better understand how his new retail strategies transformed the act of shopping from a mostly unpleasant 'domestic chore' to a pleasurable social pastime. Until recently, it was generally accepted that the nineteenth-century Parisian department stores represented a sort of 'big bang theory' of groundbreaking retail practices that had never been used before. However, the newness of these practices has been questioned in an essay by British art historian Claire

[37] Wolff, "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)", 21.
[38] Friedberg, "Les Flâneurs Du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition", 420-421.
[39] Pierre Giffard, *Paris sous la troisième republique: les grands bazars*. Paris: Victor Havard, 1882.
[40] "Les huit commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut." Le Bon Marché. *Passerelles (BnF)*. Please note that there is no specific date when these 'rules of commerce' were established by Boucicaut. However, he did begin implementing some of his strategies upon becoming a partner at Au Bon Marché in 1852. This would indicate that Boucicaut's strategies were developed and evolved over time as his business grew and the store expanded from its origins as a modest novelty store into the monumental *grand magasin.*

Walsh. As a result, I ask: Were these new retail practices indeed revolutionary or were they evolutionary, as Walsh has suggested in her text on London's luxury stores in the eighteenth century?[41] Walsh challenges the assumptions concerning the nineteenth century retail strategies, viewing them as a continuation of practices already in place in the high-end shops of eighteenth-century London.[42] But as French historian Natacha Coquery has written, this was not yet the case in the eighteenth-century Parisian luxury shops where prices were not fixed or displayed, but were determined by bargaining with the shopkeeper.[43] This traditional practice of haggling continued well into the nineteenth century in the smaller Parisian shops, luxury or otherwise. It is my position that while not all of Aristide Boucicaut's 'Eight Rules of Commerce' were invented by him, many were indeed new and innovative, particularly when studied in the context of the traditional shopping conventions that were still in place in nineteenth-century Paris. In Section III, Boucicaut's strategies will be explored in more detail to better understand why they were generally considered revolutionary[44] and why they had such an impact on the social and cultural lives of Parisian bourgeois women.

Another important aspect of Boucicaut's innovations that is often overlooked but will be explored in Section III, is the architectural development of the department store building 'type'. Boucicaut had a vision of building '*un grand magasin de nouveautés*': a multi-storey palatial

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[41] Claire Walsh, "The newness of the department store: a view from the eighteenth century". In Crossick, Geoffrey, and Serge Jaumain, eds. *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018, 46-71.
[42] Ibid., 46, 68-69. Practices such as free entry to browse, fixed prices, and open displays of merchandise were already in place in eighteenth century London in the high-end shops catering to the aristocracy. It is unclear in her text whether Walsh is making this 'evolutionary' argument about nineteenth century department stores in general or specifically about British department stores.
[43] Natacha Coquery, "Luxury and Shopping in the Eighteenth Century: Paris, Capital of Luxury," Victoria and Albert Museum, April 2016 Lecture series, 6. Paris was known for luxury shopping as part of the Grand Tour by European nobility in the 18th century. For this reason, they were given instructions on how to bargain for the best price in the Parisian stores because there were no fixed prices and haggling was expected.
[44] Étienne Thil, "Les grands magasins: Aristide Boucicaut". In *Les Inventeurs Du Commerce Moderne: des grands magasins aux bébés-requins*. Paris: Arthaud, 1966, 23. Also see Françoise Parent-Lardeur, *Les Demoiselles de Magasin*, 59.

emporium dedicated to mass consumption.[45] In 1869, he realized his dream when he and his wife Marguerite Boucicaut (1816-1887) laid the cornerstone for the first Parisian department store 'built-to-purpose' and which established the monumental department store building type that other *grands magasins* soon copied.[46] The pioneering architects and engineers, including Louis-Charles Boileau (1837-1914), Armand Moisant (1838-1906) and Gustave Eiffel (1832-1923), who brought Boucicaut's vision to fruition during the phased building expansions between 1869 and 1887, utilized modernity's new materials of iron and glass, and in so doing, created the first modern department store.[47] The use of iron and glass along with innovations in building technology signified new ways of engaging with space. The store's interior spatiality with its openness and elegant lightness conformed to the specific business requirements of "mobility and visibility".[48] As a "space and place of consumption",[49] the new *grand magasin* was a transitory space encouraging a steady stream of shoppers to cross the store's threshold to view the ever-changing displays of merchandise.

The new architectural paradigm initiated by Au Bon Marché encompassed an ornate exterior with continuous large display windows at street level which, with their eye-catching displays, encouraged a new form of *flânerie*, namely window-shopping (*lèche-vitrine*). The luxurious interior with its vast processional cathedral-like space was designed for the *flâneuse*-shopper to

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[45] Thil, "Les grands magasins: Aristide Boucicaut", 29.
[46] Meredith L. Clausen, "The Department Store: Development of the Type." *Journal of Architectural Education,* Autumn, 1985, Vol. 39, No. 1, 20.
[47] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. 5th ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, 238. It should be noted that many texts mistakenly cite 1852 as the year that the Parisian department store was born. However, 1852 was simply the year that Boucicaut became a partner at Au Bon Marché which was still a small 300 sq metre *magasin de nouveautés*. It was not the monumental modern *grand magasin* that we know today. It seems logical then, that the year 1872 (when the first phase of the new Au Bon Marché building was opened for business), should be considered the actual year that the Parisian department store was 'born'.
[48] John Potvin, "Introduction: Inserting Fashion into Space." In John Potvin, ed., *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009, 2.
[49] Ibid.

stroll the length of the store and gaze at the dazzling displays of merchandise. The upper floors featured ornate wrought iron galleries "affording a superior vantage point" [50] for the observant gaze of the *flâneuse* while she looked at the spectacle of the swirling crowds of shoppers below. Au Bon Marché evolved into an immense 'cathedral of modern commerce' and thus played a significant role in the increasing public visibility of women by providing a safe liminal space, a paradise, in which the bourgeois woman could enter unaccompanied and become a *flâneuse*.

SECTION I: The Ambiguity of modernity and the blurring of social boundaries allowing for the appearance of the *flâneuse*

The ambiguity of modernity is exemplified by the difficulty of both defining modernity and assigning a timeframe for it. Many adjectives have been ascribed to the concept of modernity including transitory, fleeting, ephemeral, fluid, transient, fugitive, and ambiguous. In 1863, the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) defined the art of modernity as residing halfway between what is permanent or eternal and what is transitory or "the fleeting presentness."[51] He defined modernity as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable."[52] Cultural historian Mica Nava defines modernity as "a constructed narrative" that is "uniquely associated with the city and public life", particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[53] Art historian Griselda Pollock concurs: "It is generally agreed that modernity as a nineteenth-century phenomenon is a product of the city […] a world ruled by money and commodity exchange."[54] She also defines urban spaces as being

[50] Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex." In Dirks, Nicholas B., Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds. *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994, 133.
[51] Rachel Bowlby, ""Half Art": Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*." *Daedalus* 143, no. 1, Winter 2014, 46.
[52] Belenky, *Engine of modernity*, 3. Translation of Baudelaire by Masha Belenky.
[53] Mica Nava, "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, The City and the Department Store." In Falk, Pasi, and Colin Campbell. *The Shopping Experience* of *Theory, Culture & Society*. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 1-2.
[54] Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity", 66.

"the spaces of modernity" representing "a new Paris" in which the key signifiers are "leisure, consumption, the spectacle and money, along with the fluidity of class in the popular spaces of entertainment."[55] Accordingly, modernity represents a period of rapid social changes which were manifested in the rise of the *bourgeoisie*, capitalism, industrialization, increased urbanization, and the dissolving or blurring of traditional social boundaries.[56] These elements of modernity produced the ideal conditions for the advent of the Parisian *grands magasins* that promoted consumerism as a way of life and shopping as a pleasurable new leisure activity for bourgeois women.[57] Modernity does not have an agreed-upon historical timeframe, however for the purpose of this thesis for which modernity in nineteenth-century Paris serves as the backdrop, it begins with the Haussmannization of Paris in the 1850s, continuing with the dawn of the monumental *grands magasins* in the 1870s and 1880s, and on to the early twentieth century,[58] encompassing the period known as La Belle Époque from 1871-1914.

I.I. Dissolving social boundaries: the omnibus and the department store

Along with the advent of the *grands magasins* which were considered to be the icons of modernity, another important element of Parisian modernity was the expansion of public transit in the form of the horse-drawn omnibus which had been serving the city since 1828, prior to Haussmann's urban renewal.[59] As cultural historian Masha Belenky notes, the omnibus transformed everyday life for Parisians by enabling them to travel easily around the city, whether

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[55] Pollack, 52, 66.
[56] Belenky, 3-4.
[57] Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981, 165-166.
[58] Belenky, 3-4. According to Belenky (on page 4), modernity in Paris is generally associated with Haussmannization in the 1850s and 1860s. However, she notes that recent scholarship has argued that Parisian modernity may have started even earlier, at the time of the July Monarchy in 1830. The first 'monumental' department store in Paris was Au Bon Marché's new building that opened in 1872.
[59] Ibid., 1,18. In 1855, Haussmann consolidated all the omnibus companies into one monopoly, *La Compagnie générale des omnibus* (CGO) for greater efficiency and to ensure all areas in Paris had omnibus service.

for work or for entertainment such as going to the theatre or shopping at the *grands magasins*.[60] This is illustrated in a chromolithograph print from 1899, *Le Bon Marché customers in the Omnibus,* which depicts well-dressed bourgeois women with their Au Bon Marché parcels, inside the omnibus on their way home after a successful day of shopping at the store (Figure 2).

The omnibus was a transformational space of social blurring, where men and women of different social classes shared the confined interior for the duration of the trip.[61] It was one of the few public areas where men and unchaperoned women could share close quarters without violating rules of propriety.[62] This fluidity of gender and class intermingling is illustrated by two paintings set in the interior of the omnibus. One from 1877 by Pierre Carrier-Belleuse, *L'Omnibus,* depicts the intermingling of social classes - the bourgeois couple (he with top hat and monocle), the fashionably dressed young women with their pink bows, and the sleeping, slightly disheveled working-class man (Figure 3). The soberly dressed older woman seated beside him is looking on disapprovingly; whether her disapproval is directed at him or the young unaccompanied women is unclear. The second painting by Maurice Delondre, *Dans l'Omnibus,* from 1885 also portrays a socially diverse set of passengers including the bourgeois couple sitting opposite a working-class mother with a young child in her arms, and the top hatted man glancing overtly to the side while 'reading' the newspaper (Figure 4). But is he gazing at the unaccompanied well-dressed bourgeois woman seated beside him or the working-class woman, perhaps a domestic maid or cook, with her overflowing basket of flowers and produce?

A parallel can be drawn between the nineteenth century Parisian omnibus and the Parisian department store, in that both were public yet intimate spaces where social boundaries were

[60] Belenky, 1, 2, 4, 27.
[61] Ibid., 5.
[62] Ibid., 27.

dissolving. The omnibus (Latin: 'for all') was open to any fare-paying male or female passenger regardless of class,[63] and the department store with its policy of free entry without any obligation to buy was also open to men and women of all classes. Thus, both represented public settings where there was the ever-increasing public presence of women and an ongoing blurring of boundaries between genders and social classes, along with the anxieties that this proximity produced.[64] Nava describes modernity's "permeability of boundaries" as indicative of the difference "between women's lived experience and the discourse of their seclusion in the domestic sphere."[65] The reality of bourgeois women's lives was therefore far more fluid and nuanced than the ideology of gendered public and private spheres would indicate.

Nava and other scholars argue that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, women were in fact, fully engaged in the public "maelstrom of modern life."[66] This social fluidity was embodied in what sociologist Sharon Zukin describes as the "public-private liminal spaces" of the department store,[67] where the distinctions between public and private dissolved. Parisian department stores such as Au Bon Marché, while public, catered to bourgeois women by providing the intimacy of an almost private interior space of amenities such as a buffet serving refreshments and a reading room.[68] The *flâneuse-shopper* could, and often did, spend the entire day at the store which became a "second home", serving as an escape from dull domesticity.[69] In

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[63] Belenky, 1, 5.
[64] Ibid., 5, 11.
[65] Nava, "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, The City and the Department Store", 7.
[66] Ibid., 7.
[67] Sharon Zukin, "The Postmodern Debate over Urban Form." *Theory, Culture & Society* 5, no. 2-3, 1988, 438-440. Zukin refers to the liminality of the "public-private space" of the department store. While she is writing about post-modernity in the 1980s, she uses it in the context of the department store. It can certainly be associated with nineteenth century department stores, which Nava does by citing Zukin on page 5 of her essay, "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, The City and the Department Store".
[68] Monica Burckhardt, *Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche: The invention of the department store*. New York: Assouline, 2012, 59-62.
[69] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola.* New York: Routledge, 2010, 4, 6.

Zola's novel *The Ladies Paradise*, the store owner Octave Mouret boasts that his women customers spend the whole day at his store because they are "at home" (*elles sont chez elles*).[70]

I.II. Nineteenth-century women and the social ambiguity of modernity

Fashionable clothing became the sartorial signifier of class and wealth for the bourgeois woman.[71] However as historian Philippe Perrot has noted, with the growth of the French textile industry and the mass-produced ready-to-wear fashions sold at affordable prices in the department stores, everyone began to "look like a bourgeois."[72] This created a new type of social blurring – it was no longer easy to distinguish between the respectable bourgeois woman and the courtesan or kept woman. Within the social microcosm of the Parisian *grand magasin,* this social blurring was amplified by the new rules of commerce, particularly that of free entry which allowed for all classes of women (and men) to enter the store and mingle together under one roof. But who was the virtuous woman and who was not? This ambiguity is demonstrated by the right-hand panel of Felix Vallotton's 1898 triptych painting, *Le Bon Marché*, in which we see the back view of a fashionably dressed woman wearing an elaborate and almost avant-garde jacket (Figure 5).[73] Is she a respectable *bourgeoise,* or is she a courtesan? Both the courtesan and the bourgeois woman frequented the same stores and "the same dressmakers",[74] as well as promenading on the same wide boulevards, and both were equally well-dressed in the latest

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[70] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 254.
[71] Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, 8.
[72] Ibid., 4.
[73] Heidi Brevik-Zender, "Tracking Fashions: Risking It All at the Hippodrome de Longchamp." In Potvin, John, ed. *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2009, 29, 31. As Brevik-Zender notes, women of the Parisian demi-monde (such as the courtesans who were supported by wealthy lovers) were looked to for the latest styles. According to Brevik-Zender, the courtesan class was "the fashion elite", more so than "the ladies of reputable classes".
[74] Ibid., 28.

fashions.[75] This created much anxiety as expressed in an 1881 text by Madame Louise d'Alq, in which she wrote that in the immense space of a *grand magasin*, the respectable solitary shopper, who had simply stopped to rest or adjust her hat in front of a mirror, could easily be mistaken as a loitering prostitute by an over-zealous store inspector.[76]

The social ambiguity between the virtuous bourgeois woman and the courtesan is perhaps best illustrated in the 1885 painting by Jean Béraud, *L'Attente (The Wait)* (Figure 6).[77] It depicts a fashionably and well-dressed young woman wearing a hat, gloves, and dainty shoes on a deserted street in Paris (rue Chateaubriand). The title of the painting is ambiguous in meaning – is she waiting on the sidewalk for someone, as the title would suggest? But then, if she is as respectable as she appears to be, why would she be alone on such a deserted street? Or is she a sex-worker waiting for a potential customer? Even the man in the distance standing under the streetlamp seems to be unsure.

The social ambiguity of modernity certainly created a dilemma for the bourgeois woman owing to the dissolving of distinctions between the virtuous, respectable woman and the equally well-dressed courtesan. But there was also some concern about differentiating between the young women shoppers and the salesgirls (*demoiselles de magasin*) owing to both having "respectable and fashionable appearances."[78] However, the *demoiselles de magasins* (the young shopgirls) who worked in the department stores experienced a different kind of social ambiguity.

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[75] Sally Aitken, (dir.). *Seduction in the City: The Birth of Shopping*, Season 1, Episode 1, "A Genius Idea." Essential Media & Entertainment, Screen Australia, ARTE, Screen NSW, and Telefrance Ltd. Release date: July 7 2011 (Australia). Film. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ck3BH6uLR0.

[76] Louise d'Alq. *Le nouveau savoir-vivre universel*, "Usages et costumes de toutes les professions," *Le nouveau savoir-vivre universel*, vol. 3, Paris: Bureau des Causeries Familières, 1881, 217-218. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433075929236&seq=232. Also see Lisa Tiersten, "Marianne in the department store: gender and the politics of consumption in turn-of-the-century Paris", 120.

[77] Aitken, (dir.). *Seduction in the City: The Birth of Shopping*. In this Franco-Australian documentary, Béraud's painting is used to illustrate the difficulty in distinguishing between the virtuous woman and the courtesan or sex-worker.

[78] Nava, 11.

Most of the *demoiselles de magasins* came from the lower middle class (*petit bourgeois*), often the daughters of shopkeepers.[79] But they became part of a new social class that emerged alongside the evolution of the Parisian department stores.[80] Zola described them as an almost neutral class, an "anonymous class apart", somewhere between working-class and bourgeois.[81] Cultural historian Rachel Bowlby in *Just Looking*, refers to the shop girls as being "persons apart" owing to the "indeterminacy of their social status."[82] What set them apart was that by interacting with their *bourgeoise* clientele, the *demoiselles* learnt how to behave, how to dress fashionably, and no doubt began assuming their mannerisms and speech patterns.[83] The typical *demoiselle de magasin* was described as "an elegant, well-spoken person, impeccably coiffed, with well-groomed nails, and a perfectly tailored dress."[84] This is in evidence in James Tissot's painting *La Demoiselle de Magasin (The Shop Girl)* from 1883-1885 (Figure 7). The *demoiselle*, with a soft smile on her face and immaculately dressed in black silk, is holding open the shop door for us, the viewer representing the unseen customer who she has just served. The customer has found what she was looking for amongst the unspooled pink trimmings still left on the counter because as she leaves, the *demoiselle* is handing her a wrapped package of her purchases. We can deduce that the shopper is a wealthy *haute bourgeoise* as she has her own carriage with two horses and a uniformed footman outside the store waiting to transport her to her next destination. In the background, we can see a lively Paris street scene with the wide-open boulevards and the iconic omnibus. Tissot's painting also embodies the visuality of Parisian

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[79] David Chaney, "The Department Store as a Cultural Form." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol.1, issue 3, January 1983, 28.
[80] Burckhardt, *Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche*, 57.
[81] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 311.
[82] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 77.
[83] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise,* 312.
[84] Burckhardt, 58. She is quoting from the 1907 article by Paul Jarry, "La journée d'une demoiselle de magasin", *Lectures pour tous*, 1907.

consumption,[85] the looking and being looked at. Like the department stores, the novelty shop or *magasin de nouveautés* in the painting has the large glass display windows that gave rise to the new nineteenth-century pastime of window-shopping, which the woman in the black hat bedecked with red ribbons is engaging in. The older man wearing a top hat is also window-shopping, however he is not looking at the window display, but at the other shop girl who is busy stocking the shelves and who turns towards him to meet his gaze.

According to historian Françoise Parent-Lardeur, working for a Parisian *grand magasin* was a prestigious and much sought-after position.[86] But there were not a huge number of positions available, as they were concentrated in women-specific departments such as ladies fashions and lingerie.[87] At the time of Zola's visit to Au Bon Marché in 1882, out of 2,500 employees in the store, only 152 were *demoiselles de magasin*.[88] For those fortunate enough to be hired, the department store provided these young women with career opportunities and financial autonomy (salary and commission known as *la guelte*), giving them a degree of independence that they would not have had otherwise.[89] Furthermore, as sociologist David Chaney notes, the store provided a safe public space where the *demoiselles* could work as salesgirls on the shop floor rather than being hidden away in "quasi-domestic" work.[90]

The importance of maintaining the department store's reputation for respectability, despite the anxiety provoked by the proximity of unmarried female employees, led to a form of paternalism on the part of department store owners.[91] As Miller notes, the anxiety focused on the *demoiselles*

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[85] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 2.
[86] Françoise Parent-Lardeur, *Les Demoiselles de Magasin*. Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1970, 40. In order to be hired as a *demoiselle de magasin* in a department store, she needed to have at least one to two years prior experience working in a novelty store or *magasin de nouveautés.*
[87] Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*, 220.
[88] Miller, 193. Also, Parent-Lardeur, *Les Demoiselles de Magasin*, 62.
[89] Chaney, "The Department Store as a Cultural Form", 28-29.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 29.

was out of proportion to their representation (6%) of Au Bon Marché's total workforce in 1882.[92] While providing the *demoiselles* with lodging and meals along with a conservative black silk dress uniform, they strictly monitored their after-hours activities to safeguard the store's public image.[93] This ensured that the department store continued to be a safe public space where respectable bourgeois women could enter without risk to their reputations.[94] The critical importance of women, both as worker (*demoiselle*) and customer, to the success of Parisian *grands magasins* cannot be overstated. In return, both the *bourgeoise flâneuse*-shopper and the *demoiselle de magasin* were provided with free access to the liminal space inside the Parisian department store, a safe public/private space that became a 'second home' for both.

I.III. The arrival of modernity's new woman: the *flâneuse*

Stepping into the liminal public/private space of Parisian *grands magasins* and later promenading on Haussmann's wide boulevards unaccompanied while window-shopping, a new woman of modernity was born, the *bourgeoise* consumer, who Friedberg names as "a new social character, the *flâneuse*."[95] At a time when social conventions and boundaries were rapidly dissolving, the socially sanctioned shopping trips to the *grands magasins* allowed respectable bourgeois women to have free movement around the city and travel on public transport such as the omnibus.[96] Once inside the store, she was inspired to browse and become a *flâneuse*. *Flânerie* (the act of browsing along with the pleasure of looking and being seen while strolling in

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[92] Miller, 192-193. This figure is from Zola's visit to the store in 1882, as noted in the preceding paragraph.
[93] Chaney, 29. Also, according to Miller, in his book, *The Bon Marché* (pages 194-195), prostitution was not unknown amongst the shop girls working at smaller novelty stores where salaries were very low, and lodgings and meals were not provided. That bad reputation seems to have been applied unfairly to the *demoiselle* profession overall. However, prostitution does not appear to have been an issue for the *demoiselles de magasins* working in the Parisian *grands magasins*, particularly those who were lodged at the store. In addition, they were strictly monitored by store inspectors and faced instant dismissal (and homelessness) if caught behaving in an immoral manner.
[94] Ibid., 23.
[95] Friedberg, "Les Flâneurs Du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition." 430, endnote 7.
[96] Nava, 12, 14.

the store) was both encouraged and expected, as will be explored later in Boucicaut's "Eight Rules of Commerce". Wolff's theory that owing to the socially entrenched public and private spheres, nineteenth-century women had no access to public spaces, therefore the feminine version of the *flâneur* was "impossible",[97] has been re-evaluated by recent scholars such as Anne Friedberg and Mica Nava. This will be examined in the next section (Section II "Shopping as *Flânerie*) to support my argument that the allegedly invisible *flâneuse* did in fact exist in nineteenth-century Paris. However, unlike Baudelaire's *flâneur*, who in Walter Benjamin's words was busy "botanizing on the asphalt",[98] the intrepid *flâneuse* was inside the department store where she was busy 'botanizing' the merchandise.

SECTION II: Shopping as Flânerie: the department store as the domain of the *flâneuse*

In a 2019 article, journalist and Paris-based author Emily Monaco writes that the French verb '*flâner*' – 'to stroll or wander aimlessly' – is a concept so French that the word has no English equivalent that encapsulates its meaning.[99] As outlined earlier in the Introduction, the Larousse French dictionary has basic definitions for the verb *flâner* and its derivatives (*flânerie, flâneur and flâneuse)***.*** However, what these definitions fail to capture is the association with the city of Paris and modernity, as well as the emphasis on visuality while strolling, or what Iskin refers to as the "modern experience of viewing",[100] including seeing and being seen. Certainly, a key characteristic of being a *flâneur* or *flâneuse* is the act of strolling aimlessly without a set purpose or destination, however it is accompanied by the acute observation of the surrounding

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[97] Wolff argued that the existence of the *flâneuse* was impossible in both her 1989 essay, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity" and her 2008 follow-up essay, "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)". This will be investigated in SECTION II.II: Finding paradise in the *grand magasin*.
[98] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Translated by Harry Zohn. London: New Left Books, 1973, 36.
[99] Monaco, "The word that encapsulates 'Frenchness'." *BBC.com, Travel,* n.p.
[100] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 53.

environment. While the Parisian streets and arcades were the domain of the *flâneur*, the Parisian *grand magasin* was the realm of the *flâneuse*, where she could gaze upon the ever-changing phantasmagoria of the elaborate store displays and the swirling crowds of shoppers, while she herself was "viewing, browsing and shopping."[101]

II.I. Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin

The *flâneur* is most famously associated with the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and the German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). As such, the *flâneur* is a literary construct who resides in the epicentre of modernity, Paris, which Benjamin referred to as the capital of the nineteenth century.[102] In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire writes: "For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite."[103] He describes the *flâneur's* pleasure in the anonymity of the crowd and in his ability to disappear 'inside' a crowd in order to be an observer of life on the street.[104] Benjamin describes Baudelaire's *flâneur* as "botanizing on the asphalt", in other words, an urban naturalist, "observing, visually consuming the myriad variety of the modern street and crowd."[105] However, as he notes, in the period prior to Haussmannization, wide pavements were rare.[106] For this reason, in Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*,[107] the *flâneur's* urban strolling is associated with the Parisian arcades or *passages couverts* built in the first half of the nineteenth century, many of

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[101] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 46-47.
[102] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999. Benjamin referred to Paris as the "capital of the nineteenth century" on account of the city being the epicentre of modernity.
[103] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life". In *The Painter of Modern Life: And Other Essays*. Translated by Jonathan Mayne. London: Phaidon, [1863] 1964, 9.
[104] Ibid., 5, 9, 15.
[105] Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008, 114.
[106] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 36.
[107] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999.

which were later demolished during Haussmannization.[108] The precursors to the modern shopping mall, Parisian arcades with their vaulted iron and glass roofs were interior pedestrian walkways lined with shops and cafés and other forms of entertainment.[109] Architectural historian Charles Rice describes arcades as interior spaces that "reorganize relations between inside and outside",[110] by blurring the boundaries between indoors and outdoors. However, the arcades were sheltered from the outdoor elements and the muddy Parisian streets, thereby encouraging people to *flâner*, to browse, and to linger within the interior space.[111]

Benjamin's *flâneur* personifies the ambiguity and ambivalence of modernity in that he is "unwilling to forego the life of a gentleman of leisure", yet he resides on the margins of both the city and the bourgeois class, which is the reason that "he sought his asylum in the crowd".[112] There, he could observe the ever-changing spectacle or "phantasmagoria" of the modern city.[113] For Benjamin's *flâneur*, the public space of the arcade's covered narrow passageways was an "intérieur" where he was "at home".[114] As the arcades began disappearing, the *flâneur* moved to the department store which as Benjamin notes, represented the *flâneur's* 'last promenade'.[115] The vast space of the department store was no longer an *intérieur* for the *flâneur* but rather, it was a street where he "roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through

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[108] "Histoire des passages", *L'Association Passages et Galeries*, https://passagesetgaleries.fr/histoire-des-passages/.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Charles Rice, "Introduction." In *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2007, 10.
[111] "Histoire des passages", *L'Association Passages et Galeries*.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 54, 171.
[113] Ibid., 171. See also, Federico Castigliano, "Flaneuring the buyosphere: A comparative historical analysis of shopping environments and phantasmagorias." *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol 0 (0), 2022, 4.
[114] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 37.
[115] Ibid., 54.

the labyrinth of the city."[116] However, as Saisselin notes, once inside the new department stores, the *flâneur* was "soon lost in a crowd of new aesthetic consumers – women."[117]

Both Baudelaire and Benjamin refer to the *flâneur* as male; there is no mention of a *flâneuse*. This is not surprising, given that in 1863 when Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* was published (coincidentally the same year that Boucicaut became the principal owner of Au Bon Marché), it would have been socially inappropriate for a respectable woman to stroll unaccompanied and aimlessly on the streets of Paris where she could have been mistaken for a prostitute.[118] However, as the *magasins de nouveautés* such as Au Bon Marché evolved into *grands magasins*, "space opened for a female *flâneur* – a *flâneuse*."[119] The *bourgeoise shopper-as-flâneuse* made her appearance. Benjamin wrote that department stores were the *flâneur's* last or "final coup",[120] but as Friedberg argues, "they were the *flâneuse's* first."[121] The demise of the arcades and thus the *flâneur,* heralded the arrival of the *flâneuse*, first within the welcoming public/private space of the department store and in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, on Haussmann's wide boulevards.

II.II. Finding paradise in the *grand magasin*

In her 2008 essay "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)", Wolff revisits her influential 1989 essay, "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity" and addresses some of the critiques of her initial text. In the original 1989 essay, Wolff argues that women were excluded from the literature of modernity because they were confined to the domestic sphere and thereby barred from the experience of modernity which took

116 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 54.
117 Saisselin, 30.
118 Friedberg, 421.
119 Ibid., 420.
120 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 170.
121 Friedberg, 421.

place in the “public world of work, politics and city life.”[122] Furthermore, she argued that “the fleeting, anonymous encounter and the purposeless strolling” emblematic of modernity as experienced by Baudelaire’s *flâneur* could not apply to women’s activities, such as shopping in the department store, hence the ‘impossibility’ of the feminine version of the *flâneur*.[123] Wolff made this argument despite acknowledging that consumerism was central to modernity and that the establishment of department stores provided “an important new arena for the legitimate public appearance of middle-class women.”[124]

Even in her more recent 2008 essay and despite the convincing critiques put forward by other feminist scholars such as Mica Nava and Anne Friedberg (which Wolff acknowledges), Wolff continues to reiterate her assertion that the *flâneuse*, the feminine version of the male urban stroller and observer of modernity, could **not** have existed.[125] She states that modernity’s *flâneur* is “necessarily male. The privilege of passing unnoticed in the city, particularly in the period in which the *flâneur* flourished – that is, the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century – was not accorded to women …”[126] Nava disagrees with the historical timeframe that Wolff uses (in particular the mid-nineteenth century) which aligns with the ‘early modernity’ of Baudelaire and Benjamin’s “prehistory of modernity”.[127] As Nava argues, it was during the era of ‘high modernity’ (between the latter decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century), that “women’s appropriation of public spaces, in both symbolic and material ways, was growing

[122] Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity" (1989), 141-142.
[123] Ibid., 153.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Wolff, “Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)” (2008), 19.
[126] Ibid. It is interesting that Wolff’s long historical timeframe of 1850s to early twentieth century (1920s?) incorporates the golden age of the department stores and the ‘New Woman’ of the Belle Epoque (1871-1914). Hence Nava’s issue with this timeframe is well-founded. Women were already out in the public spaces of department stores, the omnibus, and the wide boulevards of Paris in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
[127] Nava, 3-4.

rapidly".[128] There was an expansion of 'fluid' public spaces that were deemed socially acceptable for respectable, unaccompanied women including international exhibitions, galleries, libraries, department stores, and the omnibus.[129]

Both in the 2008 essay and in her original 1989 text, Wolff negates the significance of department stores to consumer culture and women's active role in it. At the beginning of her 2008 essay, Wolff poses the question as to whether new public activities allowed the *flâneuse* "to make an appearance".[130] She responds by stating that "the role of *flâneuse* remained impossible despite the expansion of women's public activities, such as shopping", and that furthermore, "the department store cannot be the scene of urban strolling, not only because it is an enclosed and circumscribed space, but more importantly, because shopping is a pre-defined and purposeful activity".[131] However, this was no longer the case owing to Boucicaut's innovative business rules at Au Bon Marché, all of which were designed to make the act of shopping a pleasurable pastime for the *bourgeoise* shopper by actively encouraging feminine *flânerie*, the 'aimless' strolling and browsing inside the store, while looking at, and touching the merchandise.[132] Shopping in department stores was no longer the "pre-defined and purposeful activity" that Wolff describes, but rather an activity that was pursued "more for pleasure than necessity and where impulse buying replaced planned buying."[133] In addition, shopping for pleasure was and still is, a form of *flânerie* in which the shopper-browser wanders throughout the store, often without a set purpose

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[128] Nava, 3, 5.
[129] Ibid., 5.
[130] Wolff "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)", 18.
[131] Ibid., 21. Wolff's argument that the department store was an "enclosed and circumscribed space" is surprising because in her 2008 text on page 21 she references Walter Benjamin, who wrote that the department store was "the last [promenade] for the *flâneur."* Benjamin describes the *flâneur* as promenading through the vast interior of the department store as if it was a city street, wandering "through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city." (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 54.)
[132] "Les huit commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut." Le Bon Marché. *Passerelles (BnF)*.
[133] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 6.

– she is simply ‘just looking’. In effect, she is being a *flâneuse*. Benjamin recognized this aspect of shopping for pleasure in the *grands magasins*, by writing that they “made use of *flânerie* itself in order to sell goods.”[134]

As Friedberg observes, the nineteenth-century department store opened up a new public space for women, not only for the *demoiselles de magasin* working on the shop floor, but in particular for the female consumer, “the *flâneuse*” who Friedberg defines as a new social type.[135] She writes that the “ambulatory gaze that the *flâneur* directs on Paris” now belongs to the female consumer, the *flâneuse,* who directs her ambulatory gaze within the department store for the joy of ‘just looking’.[136] According to Nava, the Parisian department store had become a safe public space for unchaperoned women “in which to stroll aimlessly, to be a *flâneuse*, to observe people, to admire and parade new fashions.”[137] In other words, it was “a protected site for the empowered gaze of the *flâneuse*”, where she could be both the subject and the object of the gaze.[138] This aspect is illustrated by Émile Bayard’s engraving, *Le Bon Marché: Au comptoir de ganterie (The Glove counter)* from 1889 (Figure 8). Crowds of fashionably dressed bourgeois women, some unaccompanied, are shopping in the glove department at Au Bon Marché where they are examining the gloves and trying them on under the attentive eyes of the salesmen. The most striking element of the composition is the elegant woman in the foreground who is gazing at the spectacle of the female shoppers while looking through a lorgnette, visually representing what Iskin defines as the “bourgeois woman’s public gaze”.[139] She further describes this “modern type of looking” by women as the “browsing performed in crowds and characteristic of

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[134] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 170.
[135] Friedberg, page 430, endnote 7. See also Federico Castigliano, "Flaneuring the buyosphere”. On pages 2 and 6, Castigliano proposes that the *flâneur/flâneuse* should be viewed as the “prototype of the consumer.”
[136] Ibid., 420-21.
[137] Nava, 12.
[138] Friedberg, 421-22.
[139] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 25.

the gaze of mass consumption."[140] Not only is she, the *shopper-flâneuse* looking, but she herself is on display.[141]

In nineteenth-century Paris, the "feminisation of consumption" meant that socially sanctioned shopping trips to the *grands magasins* allowed respectable bourgeois women to move freely around the city by taking advantage of different forms of travel: some had their own carriages, as we saw with the unseen customer in the James Tissot painting (Figure 6), or travelling on public transit such as the omnibus.[142] These women also indulged in another new urban pastime, window-shopping, viewing the department store's opulent window displays while promenading on the wide boulevards. In her 2008 essay, "The *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle posters", Iskin argues that the *flâneuse* was not only found inside the department stores, but she was also out in public on the streets of Paris, particularly in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.[143] This is illustrated by a new form of *publicité,* the large, boldly-colored advertising posters that were displayed on the iconic Morris columns found on Haussmann's wide avenues.[144] Designed to attract the attention of female passersby, these posters were often commissioned by department stores to promote their products and their stores.[145] Posters from the 1890s often depict unaccompanied and fashionably dressed bourgeois women as *flâneuses* on the street, signifying that city streets were now a safe public space for the solo woman stroller.[146]

Iskin also recognizes the link between the *grands magasins* and feminine *flânerie* by paraphrasing Benjamin's statement referring to the department store as "the last promenade for

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[140] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 46.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Nava, 5, 12, 14.
[143] Iskin, "The *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle posters: advertising images of modern women in Paris". In D'Souza, Aruna, and Tom McDonough, eds. *The invisible flâneuse? Gender, public space and visual culture in nineteenth-century Paris*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, 113-128.
[144] The cast iron Morris advertising columns were another iconic aspect of the Haussmannization of Paris.
[145] Iskin, "The *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle posters: advertising images of modern women in Paris", 115-116.
[146] Ibid., 117.

the *flâneur*" and changing it to: "the department store became the promenade for the *flâneuse*".[147] As she notes, shopping provided a "socially sanctioned context" for respectable bourgeois women that was as much a part of the experience of modernity as walking in the city.[148] Furthermore, Iskin makes the compelling argument that we should not expect the nineteenth-century bourgeois woman to have the same freedom of movement that was accorded to Baudelaire's *flâneur*.[149] Nevertheless, these women did step out in public, actively participating in the urban pleasures of modern city life, which included shopping in the *grands magasins* such as Au Bon Marché.[150] They were *flâneuses*, but their version of feminine *flânerie* simply took a different form.[151] Historian Lisa Tiersten expands this argument by referring to the department store as "an extension of the city street".[152] The lavish window displays were the promise of the visual spectacle that lay within, enticing the *flâneuse* passing by on the street, to 'cross the threshold' into the *grand magasin*.[153] There, she could resume her urban promenade undisturbed within the store's safe interior space.[154] Like Baudelaire's *flâneur*, she was "a spectator rather than a participant", anonymously observing the spectacle of shopping.[155]

To further bolster my argument for the existence of the *flâneuse* in nineteenth-century Paris, the 340 page contemporaneous account of Parisian *grands magasins*, titled *Paris sous la*

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[147] Iskin, "The *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle posters: advertising images of modern women in Paris", 114, 126 note 7 (where she cites Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 895). See also Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 54.
[148] Ibid., 114-115, 121.
[149] Ibid., 125.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Lisa Tiersten, "Marianne in the department store: gender and the politics of consumption in turn-of-the-century Paris". In Crossick, Geoffrey, and Serge Jaumain, eds. *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018, 119-120.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

troisième republique: les grands bazars, has a chapter on "Les flâneurs".[156] Published in 1882, one year before Zola's *The Ladies Paradise*, it is written by Pierre Giffard who like Zola was fascinated and yet conflicted by these 'cathedrals of modern commerce'. Giffard describes them alternately as "standing colossuses", "towers of Babel", "Parisian monsters", and "fairytale palaces".[157] He consistently refers to them throughout the text as *grands bazars* rather than *grands magasins*, portraying them as being equally wondrous and wicked, particularly in the effect they have on women.[158] The chapter on "Les flâneurs" describes the types of *flâneurs* and *flâneuses* found in Parisian department stores.[159] He argues that there are two types of women shoppers frequenting the *grands magasins* – those that come to buy and those that come to browse (*flâner*).[160] Giffard describes six types of *flâneuse*, including the "elegant" *flâneuse* who stops her carriage in front of the store to see if anything new has arrived since yesterday.[161] The second type of *flâneuse* comes to the store not to look at the merchandise, but to look at the fashions "molded" onto the bodies of the elegant *flâneuses*.[162] Giffard describes her as "une petite-bourgeoise" who "tortures" the salespeople in different departments with detailed questions and then buys nothing.[163] The "foreign tourist" *flâneuse* comes to the store to *flâner*, as if she is visiting a tourist attraction, but buys nothing.[164] Instead, this *flâneuse* takes the store's catalogues back to her country estate, becoming the store's best mail order customer.[165]

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[156] Giffard, *Paris sous la troisième republique: les grands bazars*. By 1882, several *grands magasins* had evolved from their origins as modest *magasins de nouveautés*: Au Bon Marché established in 1838, Les Magasins du Louvre in 1855, Le Printemps in 1865, and La Samaritaine in 1870.
[157] Ibid., 294-5, 299.
[158] Ibid., 294.
[159] Ibid., "Les flâneurs", 108-118.
[160] Ibid., 108.
[161] Ibid., 108-109.
[162] Ibid., 109.
[163] Ibid., 109-110.
[164] Ibid., 110.
[165] Ibid.

Giffard's account, while satirical, is notable for his use of the feminine form of *flâneur* which indicates that the word *flâneuse* was in wide usage by 1882. Most importantly, it signifies that the *flâneuse* had definitely made an appearance in Parisian department stores and moreover, was recognized as a "new social character".[166] One year later, in Zola's *The Ladies Paradise*, one of the characters, Madame Guibal, is described as "walking around the shop for hours without ever making a purchase, happy and satisfied by merely feasting her eyes."[167] In other words, Madame Guibal personifies *flânerie* and what Friedberg describes as the "ambulatory gaze" of the *flâneuse*.[168]

Boucicaut's innovative business practices at Au Bon Marché were designed to make the shopping experience a pleasurable one for the *bourgeoise* shopper. However, it was Au Bon Marché's building expansions between 1869 and 1887, and the sheer scale of the new interior space that transformed Boucicaut's *grand magasin* into a paradise for the *flâneuse*. With its innovative use of iron and glass, the expanded multi-storey interior offered the *flâneuse-shopper* a processional cathedral-like space in which she could stroll freely. From the decorative wrought iron galleries on the upper floors, the *flâneuse* had a 'bird's eye view' where she could anonymously gaze at the visual phantasmagoria of the crowds of shoppers below.

SECTION III: Aristide Boucicaut's Au Bon Marché as *Grand Magasin*

Before outlining the innovative retail business model implemented by Aristide Boucicaut at Au Bon Marché, it is important to view his innovations in the context of the existing traditional shopping practices in nineteenth-century Paris. Boucicaut's new retail strategies, which will be

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[166] Friedberg, page 430, note 7.
[167] Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, 79.
[168] Friedberg, 420.

detailed later in this section, gave rise to shopping as a pleasurable leisure activity for the bourgeois woman. However, prior to that, the notion of shopping as an enjoyable or convenient pursuit was non-existent.[169] Instead, it was one of the bourgeois woman's domestic chores that she had to endure, a time-consuming and often antagonistic experience that was based purely on 'needs' not 'wants'.[170] In the nineteenth century, many of the smaller neighbourhood shops were still operating under the defunct guild system which had been dismantled in 1791 in the wake of the French Revolution.[171] The guild system had regulated the trades and instituted levels of craftmanship which in turn limited the small shopkeepers to a single speciality.[172] While some small shop owners used the abolition of the guild system to expand their product selection and to evolve into *magasins de nouveautés* (novelty stores), others continued to operate in the 'old way' by selling only a limited selection of merchandise at the highest price possible.[173] These shopkeepers also continued to cling to the traditional way of conducting business by treating the customer as "the enemy".[174]

As Saisselin notes, for the woman shopper, the simple act of entering these small shops signified that she was now obliged to buy something, in other words, she entered the store as a consumer, not as a *flâneuse*.[175] Browsing or 'just looking' did not exist - the merchandise was kept hidden behind the counters, in drawers or in the back of the store, so that the customer was forced to engage with the *boutiquier* (shopkeeper), further bolstering the unwritten social obligation to buy. As there were no marked prices on the items for sale, the price was at the discretion of the shopkeeper who used the outdated technique in which the price was determined

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169 Miller, 24.
170 Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 2.
171 Davis, "'Fine Cloths on the Altar'", 86.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Thil, 24.
175 Saisselin, 33.

"*à la binette"* (based on the customer's appearance or looks).[176] This inevitably led to the performative ritual of haggling.[177] Not only was it a stressful experience for the woman shopper, but it was also a time-consuming endeavour. To underline how disagreeable it was for the Parisian woman to shop in this manner, we have the 1860 writing of Countess Antoinette-Josephine Drohojowska:

> Nothing was more unpleasant or made me more irritated and suspicious than having to constantly bargain as shoppers were forced to do. Now, thanks to God, in all the respectable stores, they buy and sell at fixed [and marked] prices, simplifying everyday shopping and commercial relationships.[178]

This explanation of the traditional shopping practices in nineteenth-century Paris is foundational to understanding why Boucicaut's retail strategies were considered revolutionary, and why they had such an impact on the social and cultural lives of bourgeois women by making shopping a pleasure. Aristide Boucicaut's "Eight Rules of Commerce" will be outlined below.

III.I. Aristide Boucicaut and his Eight Rules of Commerce

Boucicaut is best known for his groundbreaking "Eight Rules of Commerce" (*Les huits commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut*).[179] These eight innovative retail strategies contributed to the remarkable success of Au Bon Marché, as well as transforming the social and cultural lives of bourgeois women by launching the shopping experience as an enjoyable social ritual, rather than what had been an unpleasant and time-consuming domestic chore. Boucicaut spearheaded *le nouveau commerce*, ushering in the age of mass consumerism which was based

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[176] Burckhardt, *Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche,* 21 for the reference to "à la binette" and Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 23-24 for the traditional ways of the *boutiquiers* (shopkeepers).
[177] Chaney, 24.
[178] Antoinette-Joséphine-Françoise-Anne Drohojowska, *De la politesse et du bon ton, ou devoirs d'une femme chrétienne dans le monde.* (2e édition), Paris, 1860, 98-99. « *Rien n'était plus désagréable, rien ne rendait l'esprit plus taquin et plus défiant, que cette éternelle nécessité de marchander, où se trouvait autrefois réduit tout acheteur. – Grâce à Dieu, maintenant, dans tous les magasins convenables, on vend et on achète à prix fixe, ce qui simplifie singulièrement les relations commerciales usuelles.* » English translation by the author.
[179] "Les huit commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut." Le Bon Marché. *Passerelles (BnF)*.

on impulse buying rather than buying out of necessity.[180] He accomplished this by exploiting the bourgeois woman's acquisitiveness and her purported weakness for pretty things at a "good bargain" (*un bon marché*). She was further enticed by what Zola described as the democratization of luxury as signified by mass-produced 'luxury' goods sold at low prices.[181]

Boucicaut came from modest working-class origins in Normandy, the son of a hatmaker.[182] In his early twenties, Boucicaut moved to Paris, finding work at a small drapery store.[183] In 1852, at the age of forty-two, he became a partner at the already-established *magasin de nouveautés* Au Bon Marché (founded in 1838 by the Videau Brothers), which was located on the corner of rues du Bac and de Sèvres in Paris's Left Bank.[184] In 1863, he became the sole owner of Au Bon Marché after buying out the Videau brothers who had become increasingly alarmed by Boucicaut's innovative business practices and his grandiose plans to expand the store into a multi-storey palatial emporium.[185]

As Miller notes, many Parisian department stores began as modest *magasins de nouveautés* (novelty stores) which were a new category of store created after the abolition of the French guild system in 1791.[186] Thereafter, they were permitted to carry a wide selection of merchandise that was only constrained by the size of their stores. From the early 1870s onwards, beginning with Au Bon Marché in 1872, the novelty stores began expanding and evolving into the monumental multi-storey *grands magasins* that we know today.[187] Nevertheless, as early as the

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[180] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 3.
[181] Crossick and Jarmain, "The World of the Department Store", 27.
[182] Thil, 24.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid. Au Bon Marché, now known as Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche, is still in the same location today.
[185] Ibid., 29.
[186] Miller, 21, 25. Known as haberdashery stores in the UK, Miller defines the Parisian *magasins de nouveautés* as drapery or fancy goods stores selling 'dry goods' such as silks, woollens, cloths, shawls, lingerie, hosiery, gloves, and sewing goods.
[187] Ibid., 21.

1850s, the *magasins de nouveautés* were already starting to be organized into departments by category of merchandise.[188] In 1852, when Boucicaut became a partner, Au Bon Marché had four departments, twelve employees, and sales revenue of 450,000 francs per year.[189] At the time of his death in 1877, Boucicaut had expanded his modest 300 square metre *magasin de nouveautés* into a massive 40,000 square metre *grand magasin* (department store) with thirty-six departments, 1788 employees, and sales revenue of 73 million francs per year.[190] When construction was completed in 1887 (ten years after Boucicaut's death), Au Bon Marché occupied an entire city block bordered by rues Babylone, de Sèvres, du Bac, and Velpeau with a footprint of 52,800 square metres. The store welcomed an average of 15,000-18,000 customers per day to its forty-seven departments, which were served by 3,173 employees, generating a sales volume of 123 million francs per year.[191]

How did Boucicaut achieve this remarkable success? Often referred to by contemporaries and historians as the 'father of modern merchandising',[192] part of Boucicaut's acumen was in understanding the spending potential of his target clientele, the Second Empire's emerging and wealthy *bourgeoisie*.[193] Boucicaut also understood the importance of treating his "nation of customers"[194] of mostly female shoppers with respect and not as the enemy, as was the case in the smaller traditional stores.[195] Accordingly, his "eight rules of commerce" (detailed below) were designed to ensure that the shopping experience was a pleasurable and safe social activity

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[188] Miller, 21, 25.
[189] Thil, 36.
[190] Miller, 43.
[191] Ibid., 42, 46.
[192] Ibid., 40.
[193] Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment o the Present*, 163-166. The emergence of the wealthy bourgeoisie is outlined in the Introduction section of this thesis. France's Second Empire under Napoleon III was in power between 1852 and 1870.
[194] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 234. In French, Zola wrote: "*C'était la cathédrale du commerce moderne, solide et légère, faite pour un peuple de clients."*
[195] Thil, 24.

for bourgeois women. In so doing, he emboldened them to venture outside the security and comfort of their homes and become consumers. Whereas Boucicaut's innovative commercial model is now standard operating practice in modern retailing, in nineteenth-century Paris, it was a dramatic departure from the traditional shopping conventions in place at that time. As early as 1852 when he became a partner at Au Bon Marché, Boucicaut started implementing several of his "Eight Rules of Commerce", not all of which were his inventions.[196] This included fixed and marked prices on the openly displayed merchandise and 'free entry' with no obligation to buy.[197] According to Miller, these practices were already in place at several Parisian *magasins de nouveautés* and had been since the 1840s.[198] Boucicaut also began accepting returns of merchandise for a full refund or exchange, which was unheard of in the smaller shops where it was *caveat emptor* (buyer beware).[199]

Here I list Boucicaut's "Eight Rules of Commerce"[200] along with a brief explanation of their significance in making shopping a pleasurable form of *flânerie*:

1. **Free entry *(Entrée libre*)**
   *Customers are allowed to enter the store and move freely through the different departments, stroll (**flâner**), touch and look without being bothered by the salespeople.*

There was no longer an unstated 'obligation to buy' simply by entering the store. Even though the store was open to all classes, Au Bon Marché only accepted cash payments, therefore only the *bourgeoisie* could afford to buy there.[201] Noteworthy is Boucicaut's use of the verb '*flâner*',

[196] Miller, 25-27.
[197] Ibid., 25.
[198] Ibid., 25-27.
[199] Ibid., 24, 25-27.
[200] "Les huit commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut." Le Bon Marché. *Passerelles (BnF)*. English translation (in Italics) by author.
[201] Miller, 24, 178-179. At Au Bon Marché during the nineteenth century, there was no credit as in the smaller shops – it was all cash sales.

encouraging his customers to browse, look at and touch the merchandise, to indulge in *flânerie* and stroll throughout the store, in effect to become *flâneuses*.

2. **Fixed price *(Prix fixe)***
   The fixed price rule puts an end to the unpleasant practice of haggling by allowing prices to be displayed on the merchandise and thus boosts competition.

Fixed prices displayed on the merchandise meant that all customers paid the same price and eliminated the time-consuming practice of haggling that was still common in the smaller shops. Customers could also compare prices at other stores to ensure they were getting the best price. Free entry and fixed prices were not Boucicaut's inventions. By 1852, these two practices as well as returns, had become common practice at other *magasins de nouveautés*.[202]

3. **Volume sales by selling at a low margin *(Vente à petits bénéfices)***
   Au Bon Marché implements this technique, reducing the profit margin on products from 50% to 13.5%, to permit a better stock turn (renewal of merchandise).

Considered to be one of his most groundbreaking innovations leading to the rapid growth of Au Bon Marché, Boucicaut used the technique of discount pricing by reducing the profit margin on products from the usual 50% to 13.5%, thereby giving his customers the lowest prices possible.[203] This practice fulfilled the promise of the store's name "Bon Marché" meaning "good bargain".[204] The low prices created a high volume of sales (cash only) with the resulting rapid turnover of stock (merchandise) thereby ensuring a plentiful cash flow. This allowed Boucicaut to constantly renew (refresh) and expand the assortment of merchandise, which encouraged his customers to return to the store, sometimes several times per week, to see what was new.

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[202] Miller, 27.
[203] Thil, 26-28.
[204] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*,76. Octave Mouret explains his business model as the "exploitation of Woman", achieved by "the low prices that attracted" women and "the marked prices that reassured them." According to Étienne Thil in "Les grands magasins: Aristide Boucicaut" on pages 26-28, Au Bon Marché had the reputation for having the cheapest prices in Paris.

4. Returns accepted *(Acceptation des rendus*)
This encourages customers to buy while reinforcing the notion of "quality products".

By implementing a returns policy at Au Bon Marché in 1852, Boucicaut took the worry out of buying, known as 'shopper's remorse', by allowing his customers to return any purchase for a full refund or exchange. This prompted his customers to 'impulse buy' (desire versus necessity*)* without consequence, while reinforcing the notion of a "quality product" that Au Bon Marché stood behind. Au Bon Marché's newspaper advertisements always included the company motto: "The system of selling everything at a small profit and with complete confidence is absolute in the Bon Marché stores."[205]

5. Proliferation of products on display (*Multiplication des produits exposés*)
The aim is to draw customers to products they might not consider buying.

At Au Bon Marché, the vast assortment of products under one roof were all on elaborate display – nothing was hidden away as in the smaller shops. The seductive visual displays and the incredible diversity of merchandise were designed to overwhelm, entice and incite the desire to impulse buy. The customer could see and touch the merchandise, even try it on, in the hope that she would purchase something that she had not intended to buy. The importance of the art of visual display will be examined later in this section.

6. Home delivery service (*Service de livraison à domicile*)
We deliver all orders free of charge, even in the provinces, by rail.

Another of Boucicaut's innovations making shopping a more pleasurable experience was the free home delivery of purchases.[206] This not only applied to catalogue shopping (for orders over twenty-five francs),[207] but in-store purchases as well. Any purchases made in-store were

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[205] *Le Siècle*, 30 March 1872. Newspaper advertisement for the opening of the newly expanded store in 1872.
[206] Burckhardt, 23.
[207] Ibid*.*, 26.

delivered to her home the next day, free of charge.[208] Au Bon Marché's horse-drawn delivery carriages began delivering in-store purchases to the home in 1860 to "Paris or the suburbs, within a distance that can be reached by horse."[209] Thus, the woman shopper was not encumbered by packages while shopping. She could continue browsing throughout the store at her leisure, being a *flâneuse*, in the hope that she would purchase more and empty her purse "without counting."[210]

7. Mail order sales (*Vente par correspondence*)

Au Bon Marché published the first mail order catalogue in 1867.

Boucicaut was a pioneer in mail order catalogue sales. Beginning in 1867, and each season thereafter, 500,000 catalogues with fabric swatches were mailed within France and abroad.[211]

8. The store as a place of leisure (*Le magasin comme lieu de loisirs*)

Places for relaxation such as the library or the buffet are being introduced into the store.

As Au Bon Marché evolved into a *grand magasin* owing to the phased expansions of the existing buildings, interior spaces were set aside for the relaxation and comfort of women shoppers. Amenities such as a reading room, library, a winter garden conservatory exclusively for women and a buffet serving refreshments were added as the store expanded.[212] In 1875, Boucicaut opened an art gallery inside the store.[213] By merging the activity of shopping with that of entertainment, Boucicaut transformed the shopping experience into a social and cultural ritual that was as important as buying something new.[214]

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[208] Burckhardt, 23.

[209] Ibid. Each department in the store had a cash desk where the customer paid in cash for her purchases which were then wrapped, taken to the shipping department where they were prepared for shipment and delivered to her home the next day free of charge.

[210] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 39. Mouret explains how he wants his women shoppers to be so overwhelmed that they empty their purses "without counting" before leaving the store.

[211] Burckhardt, 26.

[212] Ibid., 59, 62, 69.

[213] Ibid., 69. The gallery showed works by artists who had been rejected by the Salon des Beaux Arts. Boucicaut also staged evening concerts in the store performed by the Bon Marché orchestra and chorus.

[214] As Rachel Bowlby notes in *Just Looking* on page 6, the *grands magasins* became "places of culture, fantasy, *divertissements* which the customer visits more for pleasure than necessity."

The above eight rules were the guiding principles of Boucicaut's *le nouveau commerce*, however, there was also a ninth 'unwritten' rule – his "organized-disorder" (*désordre organisé)* strategy.[215] According to historian Erica Rappaport, during the late nineteenth century, the female shopper was considered an "ambulatory figure" whose movements could be directed once she was inside the store.[216] This was the principle that guided Boucicaut with his ninth rule. Upon completion of the initial expansions of the store in 1872 and 1876, Boucicaut rearranged some departments so that they were no longer logically placed. For example, the findings department (buttons, laces, and ribbons) was located far from the fabric department.[217] This manipulative strategy intentionally disoriented women shoppers by forcing them to stroll the length of the store, finding themselves in unfamiliar departments, in the hope that something would 'catch their eye' and they would be tempted to purchase something they had not intended to.[218]

One of Boucicaut's most important strategies was the implementation of monthly sales events which he called "*expositions*". He had discovered that a sense of drama and an almost carnival-like atmosphere (described as *le grand cirque*) created by the movement of the vast crowds during these events would multiply his sales.[219] The most famous of his *expositions* was the "*Exposition de Blanc*" held each January (what we know today as the White Sale).[220] Boucicaut invented the *Exposition de blanc* in January 1873 during the slow period after the Christmas rush.[221] Inspired by the snowy scenes outside, Boucicaut transformed the entire store into what Zola described as an "orgy of white" – from silks, linens, gloves, ribbons, laces,

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[215] Thil, 33-34.
[216] Erica Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*. Princeton University Press, 2000, 23**.**
[217] Thil, 33. Another example is that Boucicaut placed Ladies' coats far away from Ladies dresses.
[218] Ibid., 33-34.
[219] Ibid., 32.
[220] Burkhardt, 33-37.
[221] Thil, 32-33.

scarves, lingerie – only white merchandise was on elaborate display.[222] One of the displays in the linens department is described as a monumental sphinx that was formed from hundreds of white terry towels.[223] Under the stained glass ceilings, hundreds of white handkerchiefs were fashioned into sculptural forms and hung from invisible wires to imitate a flock of white doves.[224]

The phantasmagorical visual displays for the *Exposition de blanc* were like theatrical stage sets, becoming more extravagant from one year to the next. These displays merged the world of spectacle with that of shopping, by providing a multisensorial and immersive experience that engaged the minds and senses of the clientele, inciting them to buy.[225] This is illustrated by two images of the interior displays, one from the *Exposition de blanc* in 1929 with white peacocks (Figure 9), and the other from the 1936 *Exposition de blanc* with its polar bears, penguins and polar scenery (Figure 10).[226] The first year of the *Exposition de Blanc* in 1873, thousands of Parisians braved the wintry weather to be magically transported into an enchanting wonderland of dazzling whiteness.[227] According to Miller, up to 70,000 customers passed through the doors of Au Bon Marché daily during these special *expositions*.[228] The immensity of the crowds of shoppers on the Grand staircase at Au Bon Marché is depicted in an 1898 painting by Felix Vallotton, in the central panel of his triptych, *Le Bon Marché* (Figure 11).[229]

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[222] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 397, where he describes the "orgy of white". See also, Thil, 32-33.
[223] Thil, 33.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Castigliano, "Flâneuring the Buyosphere", 6.
[226] While these images are from 1929 and 1936, which is beyond the time-period of this thesis, they illustrate the incredible artistry of the displays. In particular, the polar scenery of the 1936 display in figure 9 is evocative of Zola's description of the White Sale polar display on page 397 of *The Ladies Paradise*.
[227] Thil, 32-33.
[228] Miller, 53.
[229] Despite their importance to consumer culture, Felix Vallotton was one of the few painters of the period to depict Parisian department stores. In her essay "Why the Impressionists never painted the department store", Aruna D'Souza poses an interesting question: "why didn't the Impressionists paint the department store?" given the importance of consumer culture to modernity and yet, the *grand magasin* is entirely absent from the Impressionist's repertoire. See D'Souza, Aruna. "Why the Impressionists never painted the department store." In D'Souza, Aruna, and Tom McDonough, eds. *The invisible flâneuse? Gender, public space and visual culture in nineteenth-century Paris*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, 129-147.

III.II. The art of nineteenth-century window dressing and display to encourage *flânerie*

One of the key factors in Au Bon Marché's success was Boucicaut's fifth rule of commerce, "the proliferation of products on display" in which extravagant visual displays of merchandise, both inside the store and in the exterior display windows, were designed to incite the desire to buy. Boucicaut understood instinctively what design historian Emily Orr describes as "the immersive power of display as the mediator between the consumer and the merchandise."[230] Modernity's new building materials of iron and glass ensured that natural light flooded the store's interior to enhance the impact of the displays, and new technologies in glass production supported the construction of huge plate glass display windows on the store's façade at street level.[231] While it may be a lost art in today's retail landscape, visual displays in Parisian department stores served to frame the displayed merchandise through the new nineteenth-century art form of window dressing. By creatively transforming even the most mundane product into an object of desire, window dressing (as store display was known in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) exemplified "the pairing of art and commerce".[232]

The title of Rachel Bowlby's book *Just Looking* refers to the conventional response that we all use as shoppers to fend off a salesperson.[233] But it also signifies the importance of the visual mode of 'looking', denoting *looking at*, for example, the elaborate displays inside the department store and in their store windows. Parisian consumer culture during the nineteenth century was a visual culture with a profusion of advertising images to look at, along with merchandise that was openly and creatively displayed in the *grands magasins*.[234] The act of 'looking' also refers to

[230] Emily M. Orr, *Designing the Department Store: Display and Retail at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020, 3.
[231] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 1-3.
[232] Orr, *Designing the Department Store,* 11, 18, 61.
[233] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 32.
[234] Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting*, 2.

being looked at, in other words, the observant and reciprocal gaze of the *flâneuse.* Au Bon Marché's emphasis on imaginative displays of merchandise beguiled the women shoppers, which in turn encouraged hours-long browsing and looking, 'feasting' their eyes like Zola's Madame Guibal.[235] For the *flâneuse*, the sumptuous displays became a magnet for the sheer pleasure of "looking, *just* looking".[236] In addition, the displays were an enchanting yet "ever-changing exposition", emblematic of modernity's ephemeral and fleeting nature, that inspired repeat visits to the store to look at the displays which changed from one visit to the next.[237]

For the nineteenth-century *grands magasins*, window displays were the signifiers of the incredible diversity of merchandise that lay within, in addition to acting as the 'silent salesperson' to entice passersby inside the store.[238] Parisian department stores such as Au Bon Marché with their eye-catching window displays inspired a new form of *flânerie* called window-shopping (*lèche-vitrine*). Consequently, *flânerie* became a way of life, a new pastime for the "elegant bourgeois *flâneurs* and *flâneuses*" promenading on Haussmann's wide boulevards.[239] These elegant strollers also developed a "passion for the art of the window display."[240] In 1927, jewelry designer Jean Fouquet lamented that window-shopping already belonged to a bygone era, writing: "In the past, city dwellers loved to stroll along the streets and boulevards. At each storefront, they stopped, peering into the windows, examining in detail the merchandise on display."[241] Moreover, the reflective surface of the display windows not only captured the

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[235] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 79.
[236] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 6.
[237] Orr, 6.
[238] Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, 56. She calls the display window the 'silent salesman'. I have changed it to 'salesperson'.
[239] Crossick and Jarmain, 23. Also, Castigliano, 6.
[240] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 55.
[241] Jean Fouquet, *Parade: Journal de l'étalage et de ses industries*, no. 5, Paris, May 1927, 9. The renowned Art Deco jewelry designer was lamenting that leisurely strolling in Paris had become a thing of the past since the advent of the automobile. But his remarks illustrate the importance of, and passion for, department store window displays to Parisian strollers in the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century.

window-shopper's own idealized reflection (evoking Narcissus and the pool), but also the images of other passersby and the surrounding cityscape,[242] thereby invoking the covert gaze of the window-shopper in their role as *flâneur/flâneuse*.

Unlike advertising, the drawing power of the window display is its visual directness or immediacy.[243] It gives the viewer direct visual access, while serving as a barrier to deny physical contact with the merchandise on display.[244] Thus the customer must enter the store in order to look at and touch the merchandise that has attracted her eye. The most eye-catching window displays were those that used creative display techniques involving the imaginative draping of textiles either on forms or mannequins.[245] An image of a window display for Au Bon Marché's 1925 White Sale is evidence of the artistry of the window dresser who has draped multiple ribbons of lace so that they are radiating from a mannequin (Figure 12).[246]

The department store became an enticing showcase for consumerism in which, as Bowlby states, "impulse buying replaced planned buying."[247] The interior sales floors were key display spaces for the window dresser to magically transform everyday items into tempting objects for consumption.[248] As Orr notes, the most elaborate interior displays were found on the ground floor's vast processional space where the merchandise on display could be viewed at a single glance.[249] This was designed to encourage browsing and looking (*flânerie*) on the part of the shopper, and to induce her to walk the length of the store. These dazzling displays were thought to produce in their female customers "states of mind removed from the normal: the

[242] Orr, 42. For the reference to Narcissus and the pool, see Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 29.
[243] Bowlby, *Carried Away,* 60.
[244] Orr, 42.
[245] Ibid., 77.
[246] For Zola, the sumptuous and creative window displays of the *grands magasins* were in stark contrast to the *vitrines mortes* (dead windows) of the traditional small shops such as Baudu's. See *The Ladies Paradise*, 7.
[247] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 3.
[248] Orr, 18, 131.
[249] Ibid., 133.

collective ecstasy of the nineteenth century crowd of women in front of an array of heavenly new fabrics."[250] In his novel, Zola describes the silk counter calling it "the altar of this cult of white" in which:

> Muslins, gauzes, and guipures flowed in light ripples, while richly embroidered tulles and lengths of oriental silk and silver lamé served as a background to this gigantic decoration, which was evocative both of the tabernacle and of the bedroom.[251]

This combination of the sacred and the sexual is clearly illustrated in Félix Vallotton's 1893 woodcut print *Le Bon Marché* in which women shoppers are seemingly overwhelmed by the lavish display of billowing silk fabrics while being served-seduced by the overly attentive salesmen (Figure 13). The dramatic visual impact of these store displays would have been impossible without Au Bon Marché's phased expansions of their existing building which established a new retail architectural 'type' or paradigm with its airy and open iron and glass structure.

III.III. The department store building 'type' as the domain of the *flâneuse*

> *If the vitality of an institution may be gauged by its architecture, the department store was one of the most vital institutions of the era 1880-1914.* (Lewis Mumford/ Hrant Pasdermadjian) [252]

Zola described his 1883 novel *Au bonheur des dames* (*The Ladies Paradise*) as *"le poème de la vie moderne"* (an ode to modern life).[253] Moreover, he characterized Parisian *grands magasins* such as Au Bon Marché as icons of modernity.[254] With the adoption of modernity's new materials of iron and glass, these architectural marvels had no historical precedent.[255] Architectural

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[250] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 9.
[251] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 398.
[252] Lewis Mumford's quote was paraphrased by Hrant Pasdermadjian in his book. *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution and Economics*, 24. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970. The original quote by Mumford on page 259 is: "If the vitality of an institution may he gauged by its architecture, the department store was one of the most vital institutions in this metropolitan regime."
[253] Zola, *Manuscrits et dossiers préparatoires. Au Bonheur des dames.* BnF Catalogues 10277 & 10278.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 234.

historian Sigfried Giedion associated the department store with other new nineteenth-century building types such as market halls, exhibition pavilions, and railway stations, in that they all served a similar purpose: "the rapid handling of business activities involving huge crowds of pedestrians."[256] The use of iron and glass together with innovations in building technology prompted new ways of engaging with space for these transient spaces of modernity. Department stores and railway stations were the most emblematic of modernity's ephemeral and fleeting nature owing to the transitory movement of people and goods that passed through their iron and glass structures each day.

Architectural historian Meredith Clausen credits the development of a very specific department store building type to Au Bon Marché's first multi-storey expansion which was completed in 1872.[257] The multi-storey model established by Au Bon Marché is characterized by exterior continuous large plate glass display windows at street level, with regular rows of windows on each floor allowing natural light to stream into the interior.[258] However, the most important characteristic is the monumentality of its form, and like Au Bon Marché, the department store's immense footprint often occupies an entire city block so that they become landmarks in the urban landscape.[259] In late nineteenth-century promotional publicity, Parisian department stores emphasized the colossal scale of their buildings by showing the entire building from an 'aerial' view, as shown in the colored lithograph of Au Bon Marché from 1872-1876 (Figure 14).[260]

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[256] Giedion, 234.
[257] Clausen, 20.
[258] Ibid., 22, 23.
[259] Robert Proctor, "Constructing the Retail Monument: The Parisian Department Store and Its Property, 1855-1914." *Urban History,* December 2006, Vol. 33, No. 3, 393-394.
[260] Ibid., 395.

Nevertheless, most Parisian department stores did not start out as monumental structures, but rather as modest novelty stores.[261] In the 1860s, as sales revenues increased owing to Boucicaut's innovative business practices, Au Bon Marché expanded in a somewhat haphazard manner. As neighboring buildings became available, the adjoining walls were torn down and merged into the original store, as can be seen in this colored postcard image from the mid 1860s (Figure 15).[262] In 1869, Boucicaut acquired the large site formerly occupied by the Petits-Ménages hospital, giving him ownership of the entire block.[263] He was now able to fulfill his bold vision of constructing a monumental multi-storey *grand magasin de nouveautés*.[264] Accordingly, in September of 1869, Aristide and Marguerite Boucicaut laid the cornerstone for the first phase of Au Bon Marché's new building on the corner of rue de Sèvres and the newly constructed rue Velpeau.[265]

The grand opening of the new building took place on 2 April 1872.[266] A photograph from 1875 shows the original store on the left, and on the right, the new building extension with the rotunda over the new main entrance (Figure 16). In the newspaper advertisement in *Le Siècle* for the grand opening, it is stated that Au Bon Marché is not only the "largest *magasin de nouveauté* in Paris", but the only one "entirely dedicated to a large trade in novelty items."[267] While there is still much debate as to whether Au Bon Marché was the world's first department store, as its current owner the LVMH group proclaims on their corporate website,[268] it was certainly the first

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[261] Miller, 21.
[262] Bernard Marrey, *Les Grands Magasins Des Origines À 1939*. Paris: Librairie Picard, 1979, 69.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid. The hospital buildings were demolished in 1868. The original hospital site was transformed into Square Boucicaut (inaugurated in 1870), as well as the newly constructed rue Velpeau and part of the expanded Au Bon Marché department store.
[265] Miller, 21.
[266] *Le Siècle* advertisement 30 March 1872.
[267] Ibid.
[268] "Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche", LVMH (Louis Vuitton-Moët-Hennessy group) website. https://www.lvmh.com/en/our-maisons/selective-retailing/le-bon-marche-rive-gauche.

modern Parisian *grand magasin* 'built-to-purpose', that is, a multi-storey building designed specifically for the sole purpose of selling merchandise. In so doing, the department store building type was established and Au Bon Marché became the architectural paradigm that other Parisian department stores would follow.[269] It would take another eighteen years to complete the multi-phased expansions, so that by 1887 (ten years after Boucicaut's death), Au Bon Marché occupied the entire city block.[270] The surface area of the store's urban footprint had expanded from 300 square metres in 1852 to a massive 52,800 square metres by 1887.[271]

Giedion referred to Au Bon Marché's new 1872 building (and the subsequent expansions in 1876 and 1880) as "the first modern glass and iron department store".[272] The new retail architecture established by Au Bon Marché with its airy iron and glass construction ensured that an abundance of natural light flooded the interior space. Regarded as a "model of elegance" at the time of its construction,[273] it was also a highly functional building, in which the interior space conformed to the operational requirements of "light, circulation, organization, visibility, and modernization."[274] This was embodied by the luxurious interior which served as a stage set for the elaborate ever-changing displays of merchandise,[275] while allowing for the free movement of the huge crowds of shoppers inside the store.[276]

[269] Clausen, 25.
[270] Miller, 20. The *magasin de nouveautés* Au Bon Marché was located on the corner of rue de Sèvres and rue du Bac. By 1887, the *grand magasin* Au Bon Marché occupied the entire city block bordered by de Sèvres, du Bac, rue Velpeau and rue de Babylone in the 7ème arrondissement, on the Left Bank (Rive Gauche). This is still its current location, where it is now operated as a high-end department store run by the Louis Vuitton Group.
[271] Ibid., 42.
[272] Giedion, 238.
[273] Ibid., 238-240.
[274] Orr, 23.
[275] Ibid., 36.
[276] Miller, 54. According to Miller, Au Bon Marché welcomed 15,000 to 18,000 customers daily and up to 70, 000 per day on special sales days such as the *Exposition de blanc* (White Sale).

Au Bon Marché's initial expansion phase from 1869-1872 was implemented by the architect Alexandre Laplanche (1839-1910). However, subsequent phased expansions between 1872 and 1887 were the work of architect Louis-Charles Boileau and engineer Armand Moisant with the assistance of civil engineer Gustave Eiffel beginning in 1879.[277] Boileau designed the new buildings with five main storeys, comprising two basement levels for shipping parcels and the receiving of merchandise, and three above-ground floors for selling merchandise and administrative offices, and the top mansard storey was devoted entirely to living quarters where *les demoiselles de magasin* were housed.[278] The use of cast iron for the new building's structure produced slender and elegant weight-bearing iron columns that could be widely spaced in Au Bon Marché's airy interior.[279] The openness and elegant lightness of the interior provided spatial "mobility and visibility"[280] by ensuring the free circulation of shoppers while giving them an unencumbered view of the merchandise on display.[281] Glass was the other dominant material used, not only for the windows, but also for the interior. Bright natural light streamed into the store's interior from the decorative stained-glass skylights that were installed between 1872 and 1880 over the atriums and the main hall, as illustrated by the 1887 engraving of the decorative iron columns and skylights (Figure 17).[282]

The "*grand magasin de vente moderne*" was intended to captivate its bourgeois clientele with its luxurious and opulently-appointed interior and exterior, in what L-C. Boileau described

[277] Marrey, 66-67. Boileau, Moisant and Eiffel were all renowned for their architectural work using iron and glass.
[278] Ibid., 66-67, 75. See also Clausen, 22-24.
[279] Clausen, 23.
[280] Potvin, "Introduction: Inserting Fashion into Space.", 2.
[281] Clausen, 23.
[282] Ibid. According to Clausen, the double-glazed system of skylights which were suspended from the exterior glass roofs were developed by engineer Armand Moisant. They were one of the new building's main innovations. See also "Le Bon Marché: La double verrière: une innovation remarquable." *BnF Passerelle(s),* https://passerelles.essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/chronologie/construction/178e99bf-e5fd-426b-a792-38e5d5376b4e-bon-marche/article/365918c3-3614-4afe-9134-5df8c5cb51bc-double-verriere-une-innovation-remarquable.

as "artistic effects" that would impress and overwhelm the shoppers and induce them to buy.[283] The vast iron and glass interior in Au Bon Marché's main hall featured the magnificent double-revolution grand staircase that cascaded out onto the main floor, as shown in the 1872 lithograph (Figure 18).[284] The grand staircase, constructed of ornately decorated wrought iron, conveyed a sense of airy lightness despite its massive size. Furthermore, it complemented the tiered galleries on each floor with their delicate ornamental wrought iron railings as illustrated in Boileau's 1876 architectural drawing (Figure 19).

The galleries with their decorative wrought iron detailing mirrored the iconic wrought iron balconies of the new Haussmannian apartment buildings, an example of which is seen in Figure 20.[285] Haussmann's large apartment windows and wrought iron balconies with their blending of public (exterior) and private (interior) offered the inhabitants a novel viewing experience of the city and the crowded boulevards below.[286] So too, Au Bon Marché's grand staircase and multi-level wrought iron galleries were the perfect site for the observant gaze of the *flâneuse*, offering an unfettered vantage point for reciprocal viewing, where the *flâneuse* could safely observe the whirlpool of activity below, while she herself was being observed. This aspect of the galleries as the "site and sight"[287] of observation is evident in both the 1872 lithograph (Figure 18) and the 1880 engraving of Au Bon Marché's central staircase (Figure 21).

Most importantly, the vast processional space (much like the nave of a cathedral) on the ground floor was designed for 'urban strolling' and accordingly, inspired his shoppers to follow

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[283] Louis-Charles Boileau, "Magasins du Bon Marche a Paris," *Encyclopédie d'Architecture,* vol. 9, A. Morel (Paris), 1880, 183.
[284] Clausen, 24. Inspired by architect Charles Garnier's *grand escalier* in the Opéra de Paris, it was considered the "crowning glory" of Au Bon Marché's new building.
[285] Temma Balducci, *Gender, Space, and the Gaze in Post-Haussmann Visual Culture: Beyond the Flâneur.* London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 114.
[286] Ibid., 114, 120, 146.
[287] Potvin, "Introduction: Inserting Fashion into Space", 6, 14.

Boucicaut's first rule of commerce which was to *flâner* – to browse and stroll the length of the store while focusing their gaze within the department store. Thus, the store became the domain of the *flâneuse*. As department stores began to occupy entire city blocks, they often aligned their floor plans with the layout of the surrounding streets.[288] Even Benjamin had metaphorically equated the department store's vast interior to a street.[289] The processional interior aisles were a continuation of the city streets into the store itself, so that the department store's interior became an urban thoroughfare that was connected to, yet separate from, the bustling city streets.[290] Tiersten also refers to the Parisian department store as "an extension of the city street" whereby the *flâneuse* could resume her urban promenade by "crossing the threshold" into the safe liminal space of the store.[291] In this way, the new architectural paradigm for the department store that was established by Aristide Boucicaut's Au Bon Marché from 1872 onwards, ensured that the Parisian *grands magasins* became a veritable paradise for the *flâneuse*.

[288] Orr, 126.
[289] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 54.
[290] Orr, 126.
[291] Tiersten, "Marianne in the department store", 119-120. Also see Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away*, page 77 where she writes: "The interior of the department store is as natural a promenade as the street outside."

CONCLUSION

Miller described the nineteenth century Parisian department store as "a monument to the bourgeois culture that built it, sustained it, marvelled at it, found its image in it."[292] The nineteenth century is certainly a period in which "consumer culture and modernity are inextricably interwoven" as embodied by Parisian department stores such as Au Bon Marché.[293] By promoting consumer culture, the *grands magasins* became intertwined with, and part of, the bourgeois culture of their clientele.[294] However, these monumental stores could not have materialized in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century without the preceding confluence of events that transformed the 'medieval' city of Paris into the epicentre of modernity whereby, according to Benjamin, Paris became the "capital of the nineteenth century".[295] These events included the Second Empire's Haussmannization of Paris, increased industrialization resulting in the mass production of consumer goods, which in turn led to the frenetic consumer culture of the newly-wealthy *bourgeoisie*. The development of mass transportation such as the national railway and the Parisian omnibus were the other key modernizing elements.

Modernity's fluidity and ambiguity were reflected in the evaporating boundaries between the public and private spheres, and the blurring of social conventions with the mixing of genders and classes, as exemplified by the omnibus and the department store. As a result of 'everyone' dressing "like a bourgeois" owing to the availability of affordable ready-to-wear fashions in department stores,[296] it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the respectable *bourgeoise* and the courtesan. In addition, when the *magasins de nouveautés* (novelty stores) evolved into *grands magasins*, a new, ambiguous feminine class was created – the *demoiselles de*

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[292] Miller, 3.
[293] Slater, 16.
[294] Saisselin, xiv.
[295] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project.*
[296] Perrot, 4.

magasins (the shop girls) who as Zola observed, became a neutral class apart, neither working class nor quite "full-fledged *bourgeoises*."[297]

The chrysalis-like metamorphosis of the modest *magasin de nouveautés* known as Au Bon Marché into a modern *grand magasin* was due to Boucicaut's pioneering "Eight Rules of Commerce".[298] These eight business rules were designed to transform the chore of 'going shopping' into a distinctly feminine pleasurable pastime by challenging the traditional shopping conventions of the smaller shops. Boucicaut's rules for *le nouveau commerce* included fixed and marked prices, returns for a full refund, elaborate visual displays and free entry with no obligation to buy, thereby encouraging feminine *flânerie* inside the store. With these strategies, a new woman of modernity made her appearance, the *bourgeoise* consumer, as "a new social character, the *flâneuse*."[299] Shopping for pleasure was and still is, a form of *flânerie* in which the *shopper-flâneuse* wanders throughout the store without a set purpose – she is simply 'just looking', in effect, she is being a *flâneuse*. This 'aimless' strolling by the *flâneuse* signified that shopping at Au Bon Marché was no longer the "pre-defined and purposeful activity" that Wolff described,[300] nor the inconvenient and unpleasant chore borne out of necessity endured at the smaller shops (as expressed earlier by Countess Drohojowska).[301] Instead, with Boucicaut's new retail strategies, shopping became a socially sanctioned ritual that was pursued "more for pleasure than necessity and where impulse buying replaced planned buying."[302]

However, as noted earlier in the thesis, the latter half of the nineteenth century was a period of dramatic change with the advent of modernity's new industrialized society, in which social

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[297] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, 311. Also, Miller, 195.
[298] "Le Bon Marché: Les huit commandements du commerce selon Boucicaut." Le Bon Marché. *Passerelles (BnF)*.
[299] Friedberg, 430, endnote 7.
[300] Wolff, "Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flâneur)", 21.
[301] Drohojowska, *De la politesse et du bon ton, ou devoirs d'une femme chrétienne dans le monde.*, 98-99.
[302] Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 6.

boundaries were dissolving, thereby creating ambiguity and uncertainty. This was manifested in behaviours such as the *bourgeoisie's* compulsive acquisition of decorative objects that de Goncourt coined as *bricabracomania*.[303] In addition, there were anxieties surrounding the bourgeois woman's increased public mobility and presence in the "feminisation of the consumer sphere" in particular, their presence in the *grands magasins*.[304] Contemporaneous critics such as Giffard decried the seductive power of the *grands bazars* amid fears that women would abandon the "moral sanctuary of the home" owing to their new-found obsession with shopping.[305] Tiersten argues that these anxieties were mostly based on a "nostalgia for a fictional past".[306]

One of Boucicaut's strategies was the open display of merchandise which was in stark contrast to the smaller shops where everything was hidden. However, an unfortunate consequence of these dazzling displays was a mental disorder called kleptomania in which a very small minority of *bourgeoise* shoppers, overcome by temptation, stole.[307] While most of the shoplifting carried out in Parisian department stores was criminal, the occurrences of kleptomania by respectable bourgeois women was greatly exaggerated by the critics but was downplayed by the stores, both for the sake of their reputations and for those of their bourgeois clientele.[308] As Miller notes, bourgeois institutions such as the *grands magasins* were "expected to uphold the moral order."[309] Au Bon Marché, with their large Catholic and provincial clientele,

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[303] Saisselin, xiv.
[304] Tiersten, 116.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid., 118.
[307] Kleptomania is defined as a control impulse disorder in which the afflicted person cannot resist the temptation to steal, even though they can afford to buy it. According to the Cleveland Clinic, only 4-5% of all shoplifters suffer from kleptomania.
[308] Miller, 197, 203. At the time of Zola's visit to Au Bon Marché in 1882, he estimated that there were 7-8 thefts per day, the majority of which were criminal. Considering that there were 15,000-18,000 customers daily at the store, the number of thefts were negligible.
[309] Ibid., 205.

fought any charge of immorality through publicity so that respectability and "virtue became a trademark" of Au Bon Marché's reputation.[310]

Despite these controversies, Boucicaut's groundbreaking business model became standard retail practice at other Parisian *grands magasins* such as Le Printemps and La Samaritaine.[311] With an ever-expanding assortment of merchandise, the 'one-stop-shop' became a hallmark of the modern department store.[312] As Chaney has noted, what made Parisian department stores so revolutionary in the 1870s and beyond, was not only their pioneering business practices, but also the sheer scale of their monumental size and the variety of merchandise they stocked, and consequently, the organization required to operate these immense 'cathedrals of commerce'.[313]

This leads to another key Boucicaut innovation – the establishment of the monumental department store building type. Upon becoming sole owner of Au Bon Marché in 1863, Boucicaut was able to fulfill his vision of building *un grand magasin de nouveautés* – a 'purpose-built' multi-storey palatial emporium dedicated to the selling of novelty items.[314] Au Bon Marché's phased expansions established a distinctive and recognizable department store building type. This new architectural model with the open and airy lightness of its iron and glass construction was considered to be both the model of elegance, and the apogee of modernity.[315] The department store's ornate exterior with its large display windows at street level, inspired a

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[310] Miller, 220. Miller references Zola who, in his notes (*Manuscripts Vol 2* – NAF10278), on page 50, wrote that "today the people of the quarter raise their daughters to enter Au Bon Marché [as *demoiselles de magasin*]."
[311] Thil, 38-39. Both Le Printemps and La Samaritaine were founded by ex-Department managers at Au Bon Marché. Le Printemps founder Jules Jaluzot was head of the silk department at Au Bon Marché and La Samaritaine's Louise Jay had been the head of Au Bon Marché's dressmaking department.
[312] The "one-stop-shop' was a key selling/marketing feature of department stores since their inception. The shopper could find all 'the necessities of life' from clothing and accessories to home goods and furniture under one roof. Thil, in his text "Les grands magasins: Aristide Boucicaut" on page 29, describes the department store as carrying "all imaginable articles, useful, useless and even superfluous or nonessential" (*tous les articles imaginables, utiles, futile et même superflus*).
[313] Chaney, 23.
[314] Thil, 29.
[315] Clausen, 23.

new form of *flânerie*, namely window-shopping. The luxurious interior with its immense cathedral-like processional space was designed for the *flâneuse-shopper* to browse and stroll the length of the store. From the decorative wrought iron upper floor galleries, the *flâneuse* could anonymously view "the ebb and flow"[316] of the crowds of shoppers and the visual displays below, while she herself was being observed. The new *grand magasin* also represented a new spatial type, a "space and place of consumption" and of the requisite "mobility and visibility".[317] As a transitory space of modernity, it was characterised by the never-ending stream of shoppers who crossed the threshold into the store to look at the ever-changing spectacle of the displays.

Along with the expansion of Au Bon Marché's physical space, came the expansion of the store as a place of leisure (Boucicaut's eighth rule) with amenities for the bourgeois woman such as a reading room and a buffet serving refreshments.[318] The store thus became the domain of women, a safe public/private liminal space that was a 'second home' (Zola's "*elles sont chez elles"*), in which she could enter unaccompanied and like Zola's Madame Guibal, simply be a *flâneuse* by "feasting her eyes" for hours on end.[319] The emphasis on dazzling displays (Boucicaut's fifth rule) and entertainment (*divertissements*) such as the monthly sales events or *expositions,* served to merge the world of spectacle with that of shopping.[320] As such, Boucicaut transformed the experience of shopping into a social and cultural ritual in which consumer culture and bourgeois culture merged into one,[321] and where *bourgeoise* shoppers were transported into a space that was both ephemeral and liminal, a paradise far removed from the mundanity of their everyday lives.

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[316] Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life", 9.
[317] Potvin, "Introduction: Inserting Fashion into Space", 2.
[318] Burckhardt, 59, 62, 69.
[319] Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*, pages 79 (Madame Guibal) and 254 (they are at home – *elles sont chez elles*).
[320] Crossick and Jarmain, 27-28.
[321] Miller, 165.

Finally, regarding the so-called (im)possibility of the *flâneuse*: Wolff's argument that the *flâneuse* could not exist in the nineteenth century owing to the gendered public/private spheres has been convincingly challenged by more recent feminist scholarship and I hope by this thesis. While the bourgeois woman may have been 'invisible' in the literature of modernity, in reality, she was an active participant in what the city of Paris had to offer.[322] The socially sanctioned activity of shopping in the *grands magasins* was as much a part of the experience of modernity as strolling in the city.[323] Au Bon Marché's vast interior space opened up a public milieu for a new woman of modernity, the *bourgeoise shopper-flâneuse,* who first made her appearance within the safe haven of the department store and later, promenading on Haussmann's wide boulevards. Benjamin wrote that department stores were the *flâneur's* last or "final coup"[324], but as Friedberg counters, "they were the *flâneuse's* first."[325] While nineteenth-century bourgeois women may not have initially had the same freedom of movement that was accorded to Baudelaire's *flâneur*, nevertheless these women were *flâneuses* – it is simply that their version of feminine *flânerie* took a different form.[326] In the cathedral-like interior space of Au Bon Marché, which had become the 'promenade' for the *flâneuse,* she had the freedom to stroll alone while simply looking, just looking. Unlike the *flâneur* who was busy "botanizing on the asphalt",[327] the *flâneuse* was in her paradise at Au Bon Marché where (to paraphrase Benjamin), she could be found 'botanizing' the merchandise.

[322] Iskin, "The *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle posters: advertising images of modern women in Paris", 125.
[323] Ibid., 114-115, 121.
[324] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 170.
[325] Friedberg, 421.
[326] Iskin, "The *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle posters: advertising images of modern women in Paris", 125.
[327] Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, 36.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Aristide Boucicaut* and *Marguerite Boucicaut*, 1875, oil on canvas. Each painting: 146 x 84 cm. © Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

Figure 2. *Le Bon Marché Customers in the Omnibus*, 1899, chromolithograph.
© Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

Figure 3. Pierre-Carrier Belleuse, *L'Omnibus*, 1877. Oil on canvas. 44.8 x 83.2 cm.
Private collection.

Figure 4. Maurice Delondre, *Dans l'Omnibus*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas. 90.5 x 119 cm.
Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

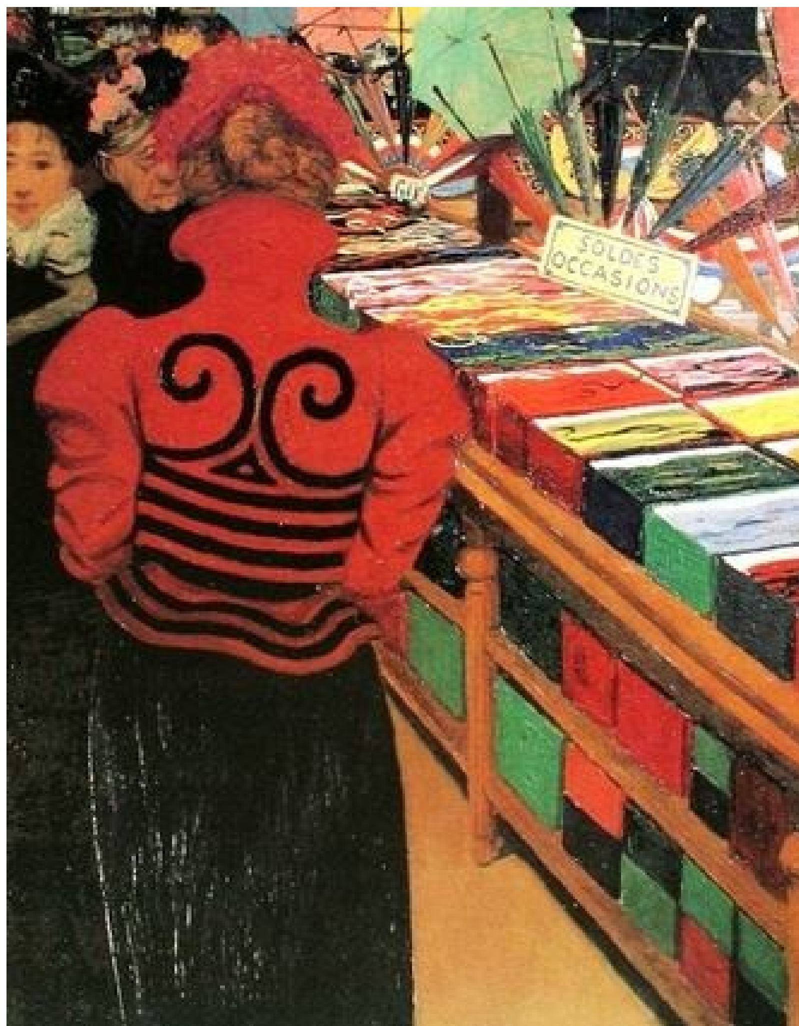

Figure 5. Félix Vallotton, *Le Bon Marché*, 1898, triptych, right panel. Oil on canvas. 70 x 50cm. Private collection.

Figure 6. Jean Béraud, *L'Attente (The Wait),* c. 1885. Oil on canvas. 55.3 x 39 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Figure 7. James Tissot, *La Demoiselle de Magasin (The Shop Girl)*, 1883-1885. Oil on canvas. 146.1 x 101.6 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Figure 8. Émile Bayard, *Le Bon Marché: Au comptoir de ganterie (The Glove counter),* 1889. Engraving on paper. Originally published in *L'Illustration* in August 1889. © Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Photo: Thierry Ollivier.

Figure 9. *Exposition du mois du blanc*, 1929. © Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

Figure 10. *Exposition du mois du blanc*, 1936. © Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

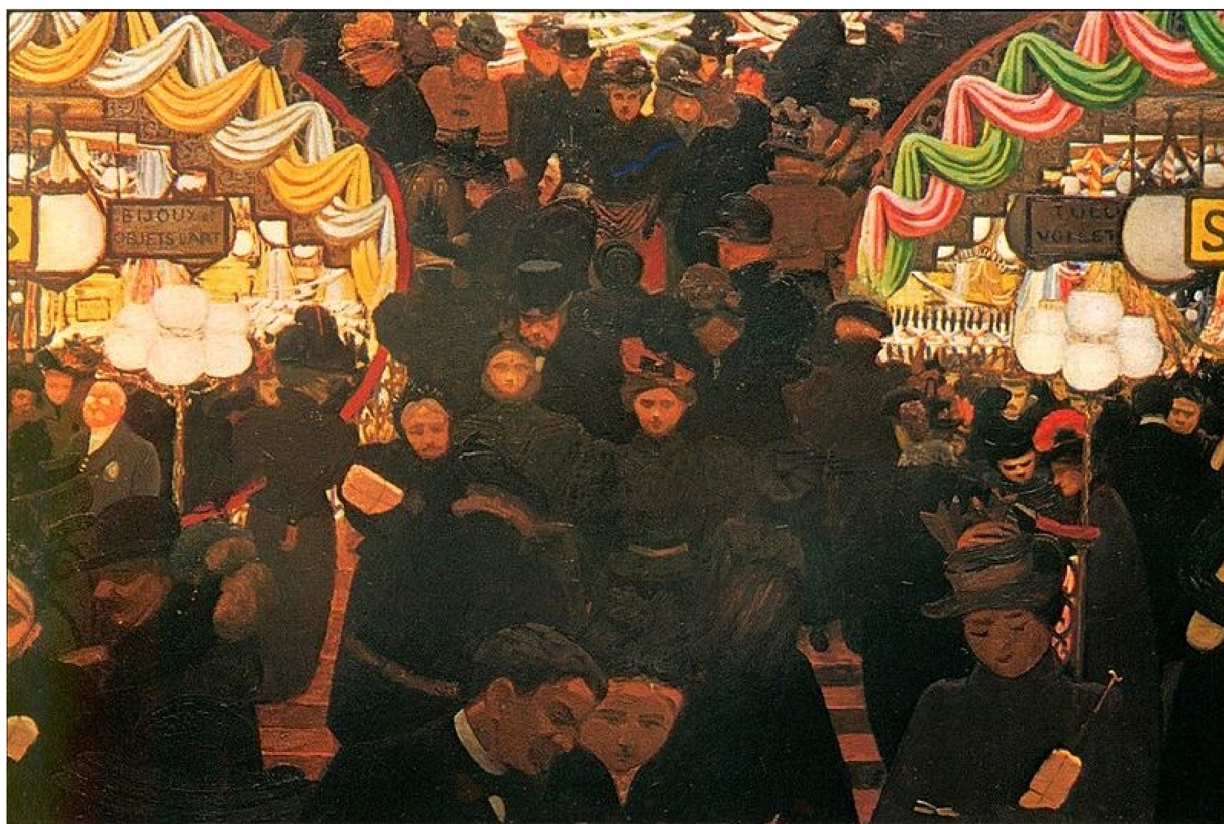

Figure 11. Félix Vallotton, *Le Bon Marché*, 1898, triptych, central panel. 70 x 100 cm. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

Figure 12. Therese Bonney, *Window display of lace for the annual white sale, for Au Bon Marché department store*. 1925. Photograph. Therese Bonney Collection, Smithsonian Libraries.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 13 – Félix Vallotton, *Le Bon Marché*. 1893. Woodcut block print. 25 x 32.3 cm.
© Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève.

Figure 14. *Le Bon Marché*, aerial view, 1872-1876, colored lithograph. "Le Bon Marché, 1870-1887." Le Bon Marché. Bibliotèque nationale de France. https://passerelles.essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/chronologie/construction/178e99bf-e5fd-426b-a792-38e5d5376b4e-bon-marche.

Figure 15. *Magasin de Nouveautés Au Bon Marché*, after 1863, colored postcard (*carte postale*). © Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

Figure 16. *Au Bon Marché store – original buildings and the new extension with its rotunda over the main entrance, circa 1875*. Photograph. © Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

Figure 17. *Magasins du Bon Marché glass atriums & iron columns*, 1887. Engraving.
© Archives Le Bon Marché Rive Gauche.

Figure 18. Charles Fichot, *Le Bon Marché, le hall et le grand escalie*r, 1872, Lithograph, "Le Bon Marché, 1870-1887." Le Bon Marché. Bibliotèque nationale de France. https://passerelles.essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/image/b15e46f4-7d21-4668-81b3-35eb099d2663-hall-et-grand-escalier-1.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 19. Louis-Charles Boileau (architect), *Magasins du Bon Marché, Grand Escalier and the Delicate Wrought-Iron Galleries*, 1876. Architectural plans. *Encyclopédie d'architecture*, vol. 5, 1876, A. Morel, Paris.

Figure 20. Pierre Emmanuel Faivre, *Iconic wrought iron balconies on a Haussmann apartment building*. Photo: Stock Photos from Pierre Emmanuel Faivre/Shutterstock.

POLOGNE AUTRICHIENNE. — Le voyage de l'empereur d'Autriche dans la Galicie. — Les fêtes de Cracovie.

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PARIS. — Les nouveaux agrandissements des Magasins du *Bon Marché*. — Le grand escalier central. — (Dessin de M. Scott.)

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 21. *Les nouveaux agrandissements des Magasins du Bon Marché - le grand escalier central*. *Le Monde Illustré*, 9 octobre 1880, 221.