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6. Visual and Literary Representations

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The history of shopping as an activity of cultural relevance in the Western world is inextricably linked with the process of urbanization and the development of the city as a spectacular space in every sense of the word. With the beginning of the twentieth century, visual art and literary genres increasingly reacted against the aesthetic and representational traditions established over the previous two centuries and while the *fin-de-siècle* period was often torn between anxieties about and celebration of modernity, art and literature of the post-World War One era embraced the modern age and its concomitant developments wholeheartedly. Ezra Pound's infamous injunction 'Make It New' not only served as the title of his collection of essays published in 1935, it also perfectly encapsulated the spirit of modernist art and literature and their desire to rid themselves of the outgrown traditions of previous centuries. Life in the metropolitan cities of Europe and the United States, and the ways in which it impacted upon emotional, intellectual and sensory experiences, established itself as a central theme in visual and literary representations. It contributed to the development of avant-garde styles and aesthetic practices that endeavored to express the experience of modernity in a plethora of manners. Shopping as a form of urban leisure and the concurrent rise of the department store as a site of experiencing the sense of the new continued to be an inextricable part of life in the metropolis where consumerism and consumption would gradually establish themselves as essential elements of modern subjectivity.

This chapter will focus on visual and literary representations of shopping in Western Europe and the United States from the 1920s onwards and the ways in which they can be understood as an archive of and a contribution to the experience of the modern self as demarcated by discourses of consumption, appetite and desire. Shopping will be explored as intrinsic to societies that in the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will become progressively defined by the ways in which they link the experience and expression of identity to participating in discourses of consumption. However, while modern and postmodern capitalist societies, their governments and their economies are heavily dependent on consumerism and inscribing their subjects into a culture of 'spend, spend, spend', shopping will also be explored as a form of cultural production that can lead to transformation and resistance. Class, gender, sexuality and race will be scrutinized as defined by, and simultaneously contributing to, an understanding of shopping as a cultural site where modern subjectivities are negotiated and challenged. Starting with literary and artistic representations of consumer culture in the 1920s and the ways in which they reacted to and shaped the notion of the modern/modernist city, the chapter will move on to the inter-war period and the rise of film as an increasingly relevant visual expression and representation of shopping as a cultural site and activity. In the war and postwar era rationing and the philosophy of 'Make do and mend' presented new moral implications by linking the notion of good citizenship to a celebration and stern acceptance of austerity. As a direct result, the visual language of commercial advertisements merged with the art of the political propaganda poster and created a new style of communication between government and their subjects. In the following decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, shopping and consumerism, at times enthusiastically embraced as an expression of identity, and at others fiercely condemned as its enslavement, would continue to impact on and be defined by styles and themes in literature, visual art, the cinema and television and by doing so become inextricably linked to the experience and variations of modern and postmodern life.

SHOPPING AND CONSUMPTION IN MODERNIST LITERATURE AND ART

In European history, the mid-nineteenth century marks a major changing point in regards to the meaning of shopping when it became an activity that was increasingly associated with the metropolitan centers such as London, Paris, Moscow and Berlin. By the final decades of the century, the urban department store had established itself as a major consumer destination, and where shopping was an activity defined by necessity as well as one associated with leisure and pleasure. It thus initiated a new process of commodification which saw a radical

shift ‘from production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires’ (Bowlby 1985: 1). The arrival and establishment of the department store can be understood as the result of the same forces that brought about major changes in the production and aesthetics of literature and art at the end of the nineteenth century. An effect of the industrial revolution, the Aesthetic movement, the move away from realism and the rise of mass culture, the literature and art of the long *fin de siècle* (1880–1914) confronted its consumers with new themes, settings, characters and styles that would often challenge long-held traditions and beliefs. However, most of all, like the department store, early as well as post-World War One modernist fiction, poetry and visual art is deeply linked to and defined by living in the city. In continuation from developments in the nineteenth century, emphasis on the spectacle, the hustle and bustle of the city where genders and classes rush along side by side, and the city as a liminal space in which the borders between public and private become increasingly blurred are as much part of the shopping experience in the new department stores as they inform the reading and writing of modernist literature and production and viewing of impressionist and modernist art.

One of the earliest genres of modernist poetry, Imagism, situates its poetic aesthetic very similarly to the ways in which the urban department store wants to convey the shopping experience and the value of the product it offers for purchase. As a precursor of high modernist poetry, the Imagists were centered in London with members from Britain, Ireland and the United States; it was also one of the first literary groups that – similar to the later Bloomsbury circle – included a number of female poets who not only contributed profusely to the anthologies but also influenced the underlying philosophy and style of the movement. In the preface to *Some Imagist Poets 1916*, the editors outline clearly what they regard as new about the poetry gathered in the volume: ‘In the first place “Imagism” does not mean merely the presentation of pictures. “Imagism” refers to the manner of presentation, not to the subject’ (Aldington et al. 1916: vi). Similarly, the products and goods offered in the new department stores are mainly meaningful in their aesthetic appeal and the way they are staged by theatrical lighting and manner of display. What the modern consumer desires is often not the object itself but its representational and transformative value and the pleasure it can convey. Thus, it is the experience of shopping, its setting and the presentation of the goods that attracts and constructs the consumer of the early twentieth century. For Imagist poets, presentation and style takes center stage and, not unlike modern shopping, disassociates itself from usefulness. As a radical new style and form of poetry, it wants to move away from poetry as a genre that traditionally has been defined in relation to its moral and educational value. Imagist poems are meaningful as an *experience* and what they offer is art for art’s sake with the aim to liberate their readers

temporarily from the restrictions of time and space. Just as shopping in the metropolitan department stores from the late 19th century onwards focused on the spectacular, and the pleasure derived by looking at and acquiring non-essential goods, Imagist and modernist poetry often distanced itself from a more 'utilitarian' sense of poetry by constructing a poetic realm in which the image and its transformative power was prioritized. A poem, Ezra Pound argued, is defined by 'the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective' (Pound 2005: 286), and can thus be understood as an aesthetic experience similar to the transformative effect brought about by the process of modern consumption.

While Imagism did not survive the war years, ending as a defined sub-genre of modernist poetry in 1917, its influence on style and themes in postwar modernist literature endured and left its mark on a range of literary genres. Its legacy can be found in modernist literature's focus on the city as a setting and the ways in which its texts often conveyed urban life in an aestheticized manner, thus looking at it as art rather than 'real' life. The novels and short stories by authors such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, E.M. Forster, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Franz Kafka, Alfred Döblin, Gertrude Stein, to name but a few, explore and engage with the metropolitan cities of Europe and the United States and shopping is often deployed as an activity that maps the city culturally and socially. In addition, characters who are window-shopping, buying or working as a sales-person often become emblematic of modern subjectivities and the ways in which they are informed by and constructive of new formations of class, gender, sexuality and race. Female authors writing in the 1920s and 1930s in particular often explore concepts of gender identity when they are situating their heroines in the commercial world of the city, depicting them behind the counter where lower class girls serve their upper-class clientele. The lives of middle-class women are often mapped out via shopping trips, and used as a trope for negotiating the shifting borders between domestic and public realm.

Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), for example, utilizes the shopping trip and the engagement between female subject and commercial urban world as a literary strategy in order to comment on consumer culture as an inauguration of 'forms of identity that were premised on a version of selfhood as that which is always in process, that is always becoming and unbecoming in the same moment' (Lysack 2008: 172). The novel's heroine, Clarissa Dalloway, is introduced literally on the threshold between the private and domestic domain, announcing that 'she would buy the flowers herself' (Woolf 1992: 3). Embarking on a shopping trip for her party, Mrs Dalloway follows the traditional commercial routes of Bond Street and Regent Street, which displays her class identity as firmly rooted in the British upper middle class. However, every encounter with the urban world initiates a loosening of fixed identities and presents the experience of the city as defined by a mode of

exchange and interaction which as a trope is directly reminiscent of the act of shopping itself. Furthermore, the stream of consciousness style of the text formally replicates the ways in which the novel's characters roam the city and engage with consumption and commerce to the extent that in effect shopping acts as its main metaphor. As in so many other modernist texts in which the urban environment takes center stage (for example James Joyce's oeuvre), shopping excursions in *Mrs Dalloway* function as a means to scrutinize the encounter between individual and an often chaotic modern world defined by consumerism and commercial interest as emblematic of the transient and impermanent nature of modern subjectivity. The mobility of objects that defines the act of commercial transactions is often representative of a sense of identity that from the nineteenth century onwards has become unrooted and subjected to a constant process of consuming and being consumed.

The link between commodity form and modernity is a central element of modernist literature and art from the 1920s onwards and contributes directly to the themes, styles and genres of the ways in which the mode of shopping is imbricated into modernist aesthetics. This is particularly pertinent to the role and representation of shopping in relation to mass and popular culture, which in many modernist texts and art works is often interlinked with anxieties about the loss of intrinsic values and meaningful traditions as, for instance in the writing of D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot. In addition, it can also function as a trope that offers new aesthetic and formal avenues into the interrogation of class, colonial and gender identity as exemplified in the work of James Joyce. Thus while modernist texts and art often define themselves by an exclusionary stance when it comes to mass culture that same modernist text through its pervasive irony, its internal dialogics, and through the frequent instances of a *mise en abîme* of high culture, demonstrates that there is no such thing as a purely aesthetic cultural product, and that cultural artifacts of all 'levels' share in the perpetual semiotic interchange that is the condition of art. The modernist text – and this emphatically includes the high modernist text – precisely parallels the popular cultural text in that its political function as praxis is indeterminate, contingent upon historical particulars (Kershner 1997: 15).

Indeed, the processual nature of shopping as an act of continuous exchange in which value and identity are always contingent on their environment and market forces, emerges as a factor of great significance for thematic and formal aspects of modernist writing and art. This gains particular relevance when modernist texts engage with consumption and commercial transactions in relation to femininity. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, contrasts the shopping habits of Clarissa with those of her daughter Elizabeth and the lower-class Miss Killman, Elizabeth's tutor. Clarissa navigates herself/her self through London's traditional shopping routes of upper-class women, and every excursion to the commercial parts of the city is an attempt to negotiate her

status in relation to her own and Britain's past and the radical changes brought about by the Great War. In contrast, her daughter Elizabeth not only strays from Bond Street and Regent Street and immerses herself into the West End without following a strict route, she lets herself literally get carried away by the city when boarding an omnibus: 'She was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious. It had been so stuffy in the Army and Navy Stores' (Woolf 1992: 115). According to Lysack, Elizabeth 'exceeds the position of passante . . . to emerge as an active, mobile subject, on whose perambulations are both occasioned by and ensured through her consumer practices in the West End' (Lysack 2008: 176). Meanwhile, Miss Killman is not only disassociated with British culture via class and nationality (her grandfather was a German-born shopkeeper), sexuality (her sexual interest in Elizabeth) but also via her relationship to shopping. While Clarissa and her daughter only ever buy luxury goods (mainly flowers and clothes) and thus maintain and gain status via commercial transactions, Miss Killman shops out of necessity in the cheap and uninspiring Army and Navy Stores and thus is reminded constantly of her limited means and abject place in the world.

Woolf's utilization of shopping as a formal and thematic trope is typical for the ways in which modernist literature engaged with the changes in the commercial world, the increasing urbanization and the emergence of mass and popular culture in the years after the Great War. While shopping and interactions with the commercial world are often depicted via middle- and upper-class identity, the shop girl features in the work of modernist writers as a figure of lower-class femininity. Ezra Pound's Imagist poem 'Shop Girl' from 1915 expresses the ephemeral and transient nature of the urban *flâneur* and Katherine Mansfield's early twentieth-century short story 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' (1908) conveys the hardship and dreams of the working-class shop girl who covets material goods as well as sexual attention. Representations of the shop girl in the Edwardian period show very clearly that literary and artistic imaginations of this figure are as in previous eras still not clearly fenced off from the other female street worker, the prostitute. Being displayed amongst luxury goods which she has to sell to customers constructed the shop girl as a site where notions of feminine independence sat alongside those of femininity as (sexually) consumable. Whereas earlier periods presented the shop girl often as a victim of the urban jungle, after the Great War literature and art now increasingly depicted her as a sassy young woman who could confidently navigate the city streets. Her working-class origin and her vicinity to the world of mass culture and commerce meant that associations with prostitutions still could not be cast off completely. The earlier shop girl romance books from the turn of the century and Edwardian period were followed on by the 1920s and 1930s popular or pulp fiction with its penny novels, cheap periodicals and fashion supplements of magazines for which shop girls were the target audience

(see Hoppenstand 2013; Whiteley 1997; Todd 1993). The shop or sales girl also became an important character in Hollywood cinema where the young girl working in the urban department store would often be depicted as a Cinderella-like social climber who would happily give up her independence in order to marry her prince. In the 1927 movie *My Best Girl*, Mary Pickford plays the stock girl Maggie Johnson who falls for her co-worker who unbeknownst to her is the store owner's son. The cross-class romance set in the consumerist environment of the department store only faintly references the working-class shop girl in relation to sexual transgression as it was so typical for her representations in turn-of-the-century literature and art. In addition, by the 1920s the shop girl would also have to be differentiated from a newcomer in the commercial world: the saleswoman. Stephen Sharot points out that there was a significant difference in relation to class and educational background between the saleswoman and the shop girl, relegating the latter to backstage jobs in the cheaper shops whereas the smart saleswoman's presence added prestige to middle- and upper-class stores (Sharot 2010: 78).

From the 1920s onwards, the majority of shop assistants were female, even replacing the male employees who traditionally worked in drapery stores (Wynne 2015: 111). While the shop girl might have begun to lose her association with moral transgression and the prostitute from the 1920s onwards, she still often served as a metaphor for low-brow art and mass culture. Le Corbusier, one of Modernism's high priests of minimalist and pared down design, for example, uses the shop girl and her aesthetic preferences as a symbol for frivolity and the decorative, both aspects that high-modernist art frowned upon. As Nigel Whiteley argues, 'The shop girl then, symbolized for Le Corbusier the sort of person who indulged in the fashion for unrestrained and unprincipled decoration' which singles out 'her social position and related debased taste' (Whiteley 1997: 205) as responsible for her irreverence for modernist art.

Yet, it is also in the various sub-genres, themes and styles of 1920s modernist art where traditional class attitudes are jettisoned and challenged, which often meant that works by artists such as Pablo Picasso, George Grosz, Max Beckmann, Salvador Dali, Henri Matisse, Georgia O'Keeffe, Piet Mondrian and Vassily Kandinsky, to name but a few, can be understood as sites where the encounter between high art and popular culture is aesthetically negotiated. This is the case in particular where the city and its consumerist and commercial environments are depicted and problematized in relation to constructions of modern subjectivities. George Grosz's allegorical paintings and drawings of German society in post-World War One Berlin, for example, often depicted the city as a place of chaos where conspicuous consumption and abject poverty encountered each other in the figures of fur-clad upper-class women with their luxury shopping and disabled lower class war veterans who beg in the streets in order

to survive (*Berlin Street Scene* 1930). Similarly, Otto Dix often depicts urban street scenes in his paintings in which shop window displays serve as a background foil in front of which the chaos of human life unfolds (Otto Dix, *Prague Street*, 1920) in order to show the corrupting and dividing influence of consumerism and mass culture. Paradoxically, many formal aspects of modernist art, its color palette, use of bold brush strokes, minimalist abstractions etc. would become highly influential on the style of commercial advertisements, which from the 1920s onwards became an integral part of the modern city and magazine publication. In addition, modernist artworks themselves became covetable goods and decorated the houses of the middle and upper class of the postwar period, and thus contributed to their social status as the new urban elite. The burgeoning European and American art market came to an abrupt end with the onset of the Great Depression in the aftermath of the 1929 Wall Street Crash. By this time, however, art as a consumer good and shopping for artworks which, paradoxically, often problematized mass culture and the consumer society, were established as central aspects of the ways in which the metropolitan bourgeoisie gave itself status and meaning.

As has often been argued, the commodification of modern life and, in particular, city life has been intricately intertwined with the department store and its role for modern culture. While commercial and trading places in earlier periods had also served as exhibition spaces for art, from the 1920s this relationship deepened even further. The Belmaison Gallery of the New York department store Wanamaker's, for example, housed the store's home decoration department and an array of art galleries. Department stores like Wanamaker's, Heather Hole has argued, can be understood as 'a complex enterprise in which distinctions between salesrooms, domestic interiors, and art exhibitions shifted and blurred' (Hole 2017). Like museums, the modern department store put the display of aestheticized goods at its center and its *raison d'être*. From the 1920s onwards the boundaries between art and commercial world became less rigid. For example, the American painter Florine Stettheimer participated in a range of art exhibitions in the Belmaison Gallery, an act that re-defined the commercial space as a quasi-museum and, at the same time, linked aesthetic and commercial values. In addition, Stettheimer's 1921 painting *Spring Sale at Bendel's* is set in a modern department store and its visual aesthetics links modernist art with styles usually found in commercial advertisement posters (Figure 6.1). The painting also comments on the way in which shopping is defined by aspects of social status and gender by marginalizing men, placing budget-conscious female shoppers at the center of the painting. The scene is observed from higher above thus indicating a more elusive and discreet upper floor where the wealthier customers will be served (Hole 2017).

Ongoing and increasing interchanges between modernist literature and art and commercial and consumer culture, as can be witnessed from the 1920s,

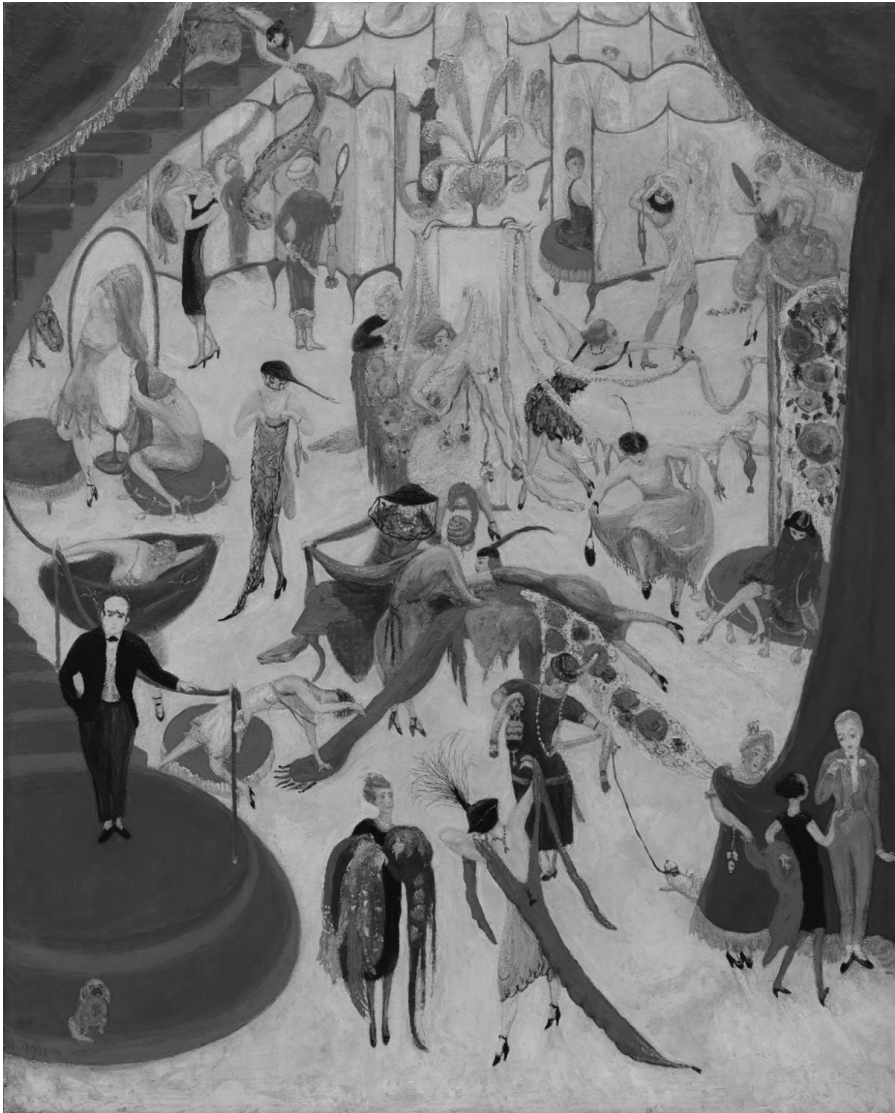


FIGURE 6.1: Florine Stettheimer, 'Spring Sale at Bendel's', 1921. Oil on canvas. 50 × 40 inches (127 × 101.6 cm). Framed: 55 1/4 × 45 1/2 × 3 inches (140.3 × 115.6 × 7.6 cm) Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Ettie Stettheimer, 1951-27-1.

emphasize one of the most intriguing aspects of the history of shopping: while what is traditionally regarded as 'high art' often thematizes and problematizes the corrupting and socially degrading effects of an increasingly capitalist and consumerist orientation of Western societies, its various artworks and texts nevertheless directly participate in the creation and commercial exploitation of

new markets, and their aesthetic and literary styles and structures often directly influence marketing and advertising strategies. This interchange contributes to a 'commodity aesthetics' (Haug 1986), which means that shopping and commercial culture, when represented and engaged with in art and literature, will also directly impact on new developments of literary and artistic expressions.

ADVERTISEMENTS, FILMIC AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF SHOPPING (1930S–1940)

While modernist art and literature of the 1920s and the following decade often engaged with consumerism and the increasing commercialization of post-World War One in a complex manner – simultaneously disapproving of and often being complicit with it on an aesthetic level – other artistic and literary movements also made the representation of urban commercial culture central to their narratives and characters. In Jean Rhys' 1934 novel *Voyage in the Dark*, shopping is used as a site where hopes for the future clash with sordid real life, and consumer culture is represented as increasingly influential on the sense of identity. Her heroine Anna expresses her bitterness about the rift between her expectations and the reality of a life lived in financial constraints when observing women in front of a shop window: 'The clothes of most of the women who passed were like caricatures of the clothes in the shop-windows, but when they stopped to look you saw that their eyes were fixed on the future' (Rhys 2000: 111). The place where you shop and the goods you buy will become increasingly relevant as tropes in early twentieth-century fiction, as for example in crime fiction, which developed into one of the major literary genres of the 1930s.

The 1930s are often described as the Golden Age of Crime fiction in Britain and saw the emergence of the hard-boiled thriller genre on the other side of the Atlantic. Crime fiction, and in particular the figure of the detective, is directly related to urban centers and the rise of consumer culture, and while the Golden Age fiction often features the country house as its setting, the bright lights of the city are nevertheless central to plot structure and character development in the books of authors such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh and others. Frequently referred to as middlebrow fiction because of its emphasis on plot and avoidance of formal experimentation, Golden Age crime novels often delved deep into the more mundane lives of the lower middle class, and by doing so represented their attitude to shopping and consumption as a means of characterization. Virginia Woolf famously defined the preoccupations of middlebrow literature as 'neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige' (Woolf 1943: 115). While Woolf's indictment of this type of fiction also reveals much about her own class status, it nevertheless makes a valid point about the ways in which crime fiction with its focus on criminal and moral

transgression often presents a site where high and low culture intermingle in conspicuous ways. Incidentally, the beginnings of crime fiction, and here in particular the Sherlock Holmes novels and short stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, featured mainly property crime such as theft and fraud and on the occasion when his famous detective had to investigate murder, inheritance and property were often revealed as its underlying reason. Crime fiction between the 1920s and 1940s continued to be mainly concerned with transgressions that originated in and were caused by a world in which consumption and the commercialization of human relations were seen as responsible for moral decline.

Shopping itself often features as a way to provide information about characters, in particular their class status and moral standards, but the goods purchased also often serve as vital clues to the identity of the villain. Agatha Christie's spinster-detective Miss Marple often uses the excuse of shopping as a cover up for a visit to London when her real aim is to find information about a crime or the identity of the murderer. Predictably, Miss Marple will visit the Army & Navy Stores, originally founded as a co-operative in the 1870s to provide affordable goods for Officers and their families. During the 1890s, further stores were opened outside London and in India and after World War One the general public was invited to shop there. In Christie's Miss Marple novels of the 1930s, her detective often visits the store to take advantage of its famous white sales, buying towels and household goods of quality at a reduced price. Shopping at 'the Stores' denotes Marple as prudent, frugal and more interested in the quality of her purchases than their decorative and display value. In addition, it underlines her quintessential rural Englishness and sound credibility as a moral judge, since her interest in shopping is never defined by desire for luxury and the pleasure of looking, as it has been the case so often for the urban *flâneuse* in early and high modernist fiction. Also, by frequenting the Army & Navy Stores, Miss Marple aligns her own moral values with those of the British Empire since the store and its origins are deeply steeped in Britain's imperial and colonial history. In her later novels, in particular the ones written post-World War Two, Miss Marple's visit of 'The Stores' would often function as a nostalgic reminiscing about a more stable society and used as a stark contrast to the moral decline of modern life:

The Army & Navy Stores had been a haunt of Miss Marple's aunt in days long gone. It was not, of course, quite the same nowadays. Miss Marple cast her thoughts back to Aunt Helen seeking out her own special man in the grocery department, settling herself comfortably in a chair, . . . Then there would ensue a long hour with nobody in a hurry and Aunt Helen thinking of every conceivable grocery that could be purchased and stored up for future use.

— Christie 1965

In contrast to the 'spectacularization' of the shopping event as it so frequently features in modernist fiction, middlebrow fiction often depicts shopping as a more mundane experience which renders the (female) shopper often invisible and unexciting. This makes sense from a narrative point of view since characters such as Miss Marple act in the shadows and their detective work is successful because they are inconspicuous. Her shopping habits and places hint at the elderly spinster's marginalized social status, however her very invisibility enhances her ability as a detective, as the narrator in *The Murder at the Vicarage* shrewdly recognizes: 'Miss Marple always sees everything. Gardening is as good as a smokescreen and the habit of observing birds through powerful glasses can always be turned to account' (Christie 1977: 15). While seeing and looking, particularly in relation to the shopping experience in modernist fiction, are often directly politicized and aestheticized, crime fiction and middlebrow fiction frequently introduce a tension between seeing and being seen, which also affects the ways in which characters, and here in particular feminine characters, consume: traditionally and inconspicuously.

However, class is as relevant as gender in relation to consumerism in literature, as is evident in Dorothy L. Sayers' contribution to literature of the 1930s. Her main detective figure, Lord Peter Wimsey, is a connoisseur of exquisite goods and his particular hobby of purchasing first editions not only presents him as a member of the upper class but also as educated and knowledgeable. In *Murder Must Advertise* (1933), Sayers uses the character of Wimsey in order to comment on a world in which consumerism and consumption can have a detrimental effect on society and culture. The narrative is set in Pym's advertising agency where Wimsey works undercover as a writer of advertising slogans, but his real task is to find out about the murder of one of the agency's employees. Deception, lies and cover-ups are central to the narrative and in the novel deeply intertwined with the increasing role and power of advertising. In the end, the detective is able to connect the murder at Pym's to a drug ring, and by doing so the novel critically comments on the narcotic and addictive nature of consumption.

Sayers encapsulates the relentless march of consumerism and the ways in which desires are created and manipulated:

All over London the lights flickered in and out, calling on the public to save its body and purse: SOPO SAVES SCRUBBING – NUTRAX FOR NERVES – CRUNCHLETS ARE CRISPER – . . . NOURISH NERVES WITH NUTRAX – . . . ASK YOUR GROCER –ASK YOUR DOCTOR – ASK THE MAN WHO'S TRIED IT – MOTHERS! GIVE IT TO YOUR CHILDREN – HOUSEWIVES! SAVE MONEY – HUSBANDS! INSURE YOUR LIVES – WOMEN! DO YOU REALISE? – DON'T SAY

SOAP, SAY SOPO! Whatever you're doing, stop it and do something else! Whatever you're buying, pause and buy something different! Be hectored into health and prosperity! Never let up! Never go to sleep! Never be satisfied. If once you are satisfied, all our wheels will run down. Keep going – and if you can't, Try Nutrax for Nerves!

— Sayers 1933

This is a far cry from the representation of the shopping experience as an enjoyable diversion and a pleasant mode in which the city can be explored. Later on, Wimsey muses on the power of advertising and the ways in which consumerism has become the ultimate meaning of life in modern society:

If this hell's-dance of spending and saving were to stop for a moment, what would happen? If all the advertising in the world were to shut down tomorrow, would people still go on buying more soap, eating more apples, . . .? Or would the whole desperate whirligig slow down, and the exhausted public relapse upon plain grub and elbow grease? He did not know. Like all rich men, he had never before paid any attention to advertisements.

— Sayers 1933

As soon as class is brought into the equation, Sayers seems to suggest, the glamour and shine of shopping vanishes and the more exploitative, manipulative and addictive aspect of shopping and consuming emerges.

The increasing power of advertising that Sayers explores and condemns in her novel can be understood as a direct reaction to the ubiquity of visual advertising posters in the city, radio adverts and images in magazines, the latter in particular directed at the female reader. In America, as well as in Europe, the Great Depression had paralyzed consumer spending, and from the 1930s onwards advertising became a central instrument to reinvigorate spending power. However, commercials were also used to re-enforce heteronormative sexuality and traditional gender roles, which on the one hand addressed women as consumers but also wanted to make sure they would not compete with men for the scant employment opportunities as a result of the recession. Representations of the female lower-class consumer in Europe as well as the United States depicted women as housewives and mothers who were shopping for their family or for products that would make them more attractive for their husbands. Sayers' point that rich people do not pay attention to advertisements is only true to a certain extent, since the 1930s saw an expansion of the market for luxury goods, here in particular fashion, cosmetics, perfume and travel. In a new development, advertisements in *Vogue* and other fashion magazines were aimed at female members of the upper classes not only because only they could afford the products, but also because of the visual style which was often

reminiscent of 'high art' such as the surrealist aesthetics of the advertisement for Schiaparelli's perfume *Shocking* from 1937. The name of the perfume chimes with the often provoking and sexual undertones of surrealist art and thus promised access to a slightly risqué experience which was, on the other hand, reined in by the context of its place of publication, the fashion magazine. Furthermore, Surrealism, which was an acknowledged and exhibited art by the end of the 1930s, gave the advertised article prestige and status.

Cinema and the star cult emerging from 1930s Hollywood similarly had a direct impact on fashion style and shopping habits in the ways in which it constructed in particular the female audience as potential customers. Costume design and the dresses worn by actresses such as Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Marlene Dietrich and others impacted directly on the fashion industry, and big Department Stores such as Macy's in New York would offer copies of these garments in their Ladies' fashion departments. As Sarah Berry argues, in the 1930s the Hollywood screen bridges 'the gulf between urban and rural merchandising, acting as a huge, luminous shop window and beacon to the fashion-disadvantaged across the nation' (Berry 2000: iv–v). In addition, this development marks a noticeable shift in the relationship between consumer and shop-bought goods since identity will now become much more rooted in what is consumed rather than in the production of goods. This would directly impact on the shopping behavior of female audiences in particular who now looked for fashion advice to the big screen rather than magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, which featured the styles of upper-class socialites. Furthermore, the ways in which female audiences modeled themselves onto the roles performed by the big Hollywood stars would be increasingly negotiated through their consumer choices, which in turn would re-enforce the repertoire of performative identities for the likes of Crawford, Garbo and other female stars. Film audiences, and in particular women, would be constructed as 'screen shoppers' (Berry 2000: xvi), which directly affected new design and what would be on offer in department stores. This also meant that new goods and new styles became now available to and affordable for a much wider consumer base. Fashion manufacturers and wholesalers would buy the copyrights to certain dress styles and sell them on to department stores whose designers would copy them, using cheaper fabrics and less complex patterns. Via shopping, customers could gain entry into the glamorous world of Hollywood and by doing so become part of a complex model of identity construction defined by the links between viewing, consuming and performance. As Berry points out: 'In addition to advertising clothes, cosmetics and accessories, female stars appeared in film costumes that could be purchased nationwide in department stores through tie-in lines such as "Cinema Fashions," "Studio Styles," and "Hollywood Fashions"' (Berry 2000: xvi). While after 1945 magazines and their advertising would become more directional as an

influence on female shoppers, consumer behavior maintained the link to the glamour of the film industry, thus generating ever more complex relationships between consumer fashion, re-invention via shopping and the screen (television and cinema).

The 1930s marked a decade that saw the consolidation of a new consumer culture and a new attitude to shopping that had seen its origin in the culture of modernity emerging from the 1850s onwards. By its end, war in Europe had started, and out of its ruins a new kind of consumerism and shopping behavior would emerge in which cultural and social identities would become indissolubly linked with consumption. It is not by coincidence that Walter Benjamin dedicated most of his writing in the 1930s to the *Arcades Project* in which he traced the genealogy of modern consumerism and its development in relation to the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century. The commodification of things, the way in which products and their consumption would link the mundane everyday life with the economic and social macrocosm of capitalism, sits at the center of this intellectual reflection of the relationship between reality and phantasy. After 1945 ‘the new forms of behavior and the new economically and technologically based creations’ (Benjamin 1999: 14), originating in the previous century, would become even more pertinent to our understanding of ourselves.

WAR AND POSTWAR AUSTERITY: THE MORAL DISCOURSE OF MAKE DO AND MEND (1945–1960)

In Europe, the post-World War Two landscape was one of devastation and destruction and there was not much difference between winners and losers of the war when it came to rationing and austerity. It was only in 1957, the year of Harold Macmillan’s famous ‘You never had it so good’ phrase, when in Britain austerity and rationing ended and first signs of a more affluent life emerged. Until then the general attitude in Britain and most of Western Europe was still defined by ‘Make do and mend’, a phrase introduced by the eponymous pamphlet published in 1943 by the British Ministry of information. Aimed at housewives, the brochure provided useful advice on how to best live with frugality and rationing without losing a sense of style. To a certain extent, the pamphlet attempted to turn the unavailability of goods in shops and stores into something positive, by aligning scrimping and saving with creativity and a sense of patriotic support for the country and its army fighting against Hitler’s Germany. By linking frugality with patriotism and the essence of Britishness, the catchy slogan and its underlying philosophy tainted shopping and extravagant spending as immoral, whereas lack of consuming did not signify poverty but became inextricably linked to ethical behavior and a sense of a unified nation.

Postwar British literature and its various themes perpetuated the 'Make do and mend' sensibility of the war years and it is again in particular the fictional work of female writers in which consuming and shopping are used as tropes and metaphors. Barbara Pym's protagonist Catherine Oliphant, in her 1955 novel *Less Than Angels*, moots that 'the smallest things were often so much bigger than the great things . . . the trivial pleasures like cooking, one's home, little poems especially sad ones, solitary walks, funny things seen and overheard' (Pym 1993: 99), suggesting that the small and marginalized rather than the spectacular events and things in life should be given relevance. By doing so, Pym introduces a heroine whose attitude to life is very different from that of the urban *flâneuses* of the 1920s and the silver-screen stars of the 1930s. Living ordinary and mundane lives, these often middle-aged spinsters do not experience the city, its streets and department stores as an exciting adventure; on the contrary, shopping is often associated with a feeling of alienation and bewilderment. Mildred Lathbury, a clergymen's daughter who lives in early 1950s London and is at the center of Pym's 1952 novel *Excellent Women*, for example, when buying some lipstick in a department store, sees herself and the other women in the shop as helpless and without agency: 'others like myself seemed bewildered and aimless, pushed and buffeted as we stood, not knowing which way to turn' (Pym 2005: 116). Initially aiming for the cosmetic counter of the department store to escape and 'to be lost in a crowd of busy women shopping' (116), Mildred, rather than receiving pleasure from the purchase of her 'Hawaiian Fire' lipstick, is only reminded 'of the futility of material things, and of our own mortality' (117). Shopping and consumption in the novel are associated with loss of individuality and identity and this is the case in particular in relation to luxury goods such as cosmetics. This attitude chimes with the sobriety of the immediate postwar era, which was still defined by the economics of rationing and the disapproval of waste and frivolity. Other authors, such as Elizabeth Taylor, engage with the world of shop girls in order to comment on working-class femininity and the ways in which employment in shops rather than domestic service impacts on the life and identity of lower-class girls. *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951), whilst set in the 1930s, nonetheless seems more pertinent as a characterization of the changed lives of working-class women in the post-World War Two era, when describing the antics of a group of girls working in a gowns shop, in order to represent the reader with their confident voices and at times challenging views:

Their hours were long, so they spared themselves any hard work, filched what time they could; went up to elevenses at ten, were often missing while they cut out from paper-patterns, set their hair, washed stockings, drank tea. Nothing was done in their own time that could be done in the firm's.

— Taylor 1986: 61

While narrated from a middle-class perspective, the novel is not judgmental about the shop girls' attitude; on the contrary, their behavior is depicted as a valid strategy when negotiating an exploitative capitalist culture that does not care about their wellbeing. In addition, shopping and wealth accumulated by selling goods on the black market in particular when conducted in the urban space often works as a trope for transgressive behavior as for example in the 1949 film *The Third Man*. Even a romantic narrative such as *Brief Encounter* (1945) links shopping with potential moral transgression when Laura's weekly expeditions to the nearby town nearly result in an adulterous affair.

To a certain extent, postwar literature and culture in Europe indicated a sea change, mainly in terms of class, gender and age. Kingsley Amis' novel *Lucky Jim* (1954), the 1950s poetry of Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, Thom Gunn, John Wain, D. J. Enright and Robert Conquest as part of 'The Movement', plays such as *Look Back in Anger* (1956) by John Osborne, the middlebrow fiction by Taylor and Pym all share an instinctive rejection of consumerism and consumption which, rather than functioning as a signifier for enforced austerity, suggests a desire for systematic change and a real break with the pre-war social order. Similar trends could be seen in other European countries, such as the literature published as part of *Gruppe 47* in West Germany and existentialist writing in France. However, by the end of the 1950s, and with the increasing Americanization of European culture and social life, these 'angry young men and women' would become a new consumer group, the teenagers, for whom shopping and consumption will be directly linked to the forging of new consumer identities.

TELEVISION, FILM, ADVERTISING, BRANDING: CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE FROM THE 1960S TO THE PRESENT

With the beginning of the 1960s, visual media such as cinema and television together with magazine publications that addressed specific groups (especially women and young people) became increasingly intertwined with a concept of shopping and consumption as a construction of specific identities. By purchasing specific products, consumers were promised a group identity and, paradoxically, a sense of individual uniqueness that would set them apart from the masses. While the activity and the place of shopping still featured as themes and tropes in novels and short stories, the following will focus on its depiction in television and cinema as they increasingly established themselves as the mass media of the postwar world.

Mass media, beginning with the radio from the 1920s, often blurred the lines between editorial content and advertising slots since both focused on information. Over the years, this developed into an established strategy in the

United States which never had a license fee. While the BBC has never permitted commercial advertising, with the arrival of ITV in 1954 and commercial radio stations in the 1970s, adverts started to become a common feature for listeners and viewers in Britain and all over Western Europe. From the 1960s onwards advertising as a means to entice customers to purchase certain products at certain places developed into a ubiquitous and increasingly sophisticated tool whose advance has been inextricably linked to research in the fields of psychology and sociology. Advertising agencies and its writers, at least in the 1960s and still in the 1970s, were often depicted as hubs of modern creativity and as a setting for romance and conflict. In the 1961 Hollywood film *Lover Come Back*, Doris Day and Rock Hudson play two rival advertising executives and much of the plot centers on the manipulation and deceit that underlies product development and the ways in which it is presented to consumers. Intertwining the romantic story with the specific narratives underlying modern advertising develops into a special feature and Doris Day stars again in a film which centers on the world of the commercial in *The Thrill of it All* (1963).

While the ad agency also features in prewar cinema, such as *The Ex-Lady* (1933) and *Take a Letter, Darling* (1942), it is in films from the 1960s onwards in which the setting and the discourse of advertising itself become more and more self-referentially involved in the filmic narratives. While the films featuring Doris Day in the early 1960s look at advertising from an ironic point of view, the focus is on the romance and is mainly defined by humor and playfulness. Later in the decade the tone is noticeably darker, as when in the 1969 film *The Arrangement* Kirk Douglas plays ad executive Eddie Anderson whose life is so empty and lacking moral value that he attempts suicide. In the same year, *Putney Swope* links the ambiguity of advertising with racial politics in the United States in order to give a satirical view of the ways in which perceptions and identities are created and negotiated via commercialism and consumption. The ad executive as protagonist and the advertising agency as a setting for literature and films have developed into a staple generic feature up until today. Films such as *Beer* (1985), *Lost in America* (1985), *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987), *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* (1989), *Crazy People* (1990), *Boomerang* (1992), *Renaissance Man* (1994), *What Women Want* (2000), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003) all use advertising as metaphor for the complex ways in which manipulation, deceit, loss of identity on the one hand, and desire for creativity and uniqueness on the other, fashion modern and contemporary identities. The all-invading presence of advertising as symptomatic of a culture in which everything is for sale is also picked up later in the twentieth century by poets such as Carol Ann Duffy, whose poems 'Money Talks' (Duffy 1990) and 'Translating the English 1989' (Duffy 1987), for example, comment ironically on 1980s Britain and the cynicism of an increasingly neoliberalist culture. Similarly, Martin Amis' 1980s *Money* (1984) and *London Fields* (1989)

engage with the wholesale culture of Thatcherite Britain and its cynical promotion of monetary power as a basis for a sense of identity.

In addition, the films focusing on advertising also disseminate their message about the difficulties separating fake and genuine identities in direct relation to constructions of gender. In the majority of these movies, it is the men who lie and pretend to be somebody they are not in order to seduce the girl and/or get the job. Women are depicted as honest, if not naïve, and while they come across as morally victorious they often end up without the job and married to the man they have tried to reveal as a liar and a cheat. By doing so, the initially unmarried female consumer with a disposable income turns into a wife/mother who, rather than shopping for luxury and fashion products, buys groceries and goods for her family. The 1972 novel and 1975 film *The Stepford Wives* comments perfectly on this development when in the final scene the initially rebellious Joanna glides robotically through the supermarket in order to do the grocery shopping for the family. Supermarket shopping itself will become a potent metaphor in films, television and literature in the postwar era and introduces a shift in the depiction of shopping from *going shopping* to *doing the shopping*. As a setting or image, the supermarket can turn into an aesthetic space as in Allen Ginsberg's mid-1950s poem, where the speaker goes on the search for Walt Whitman (the epitome of American poetry) and finds him 'childless, lonely old grubber,/ poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the/ grocery boys' (Ginsberg 2009: 144) in his poem 'A Supermarket in California'. Alternatively, it can illustrate the jungle of modern urban life where the mundane act of shopping can suddenly bring forth a deep and painful crisis in life, as in Ian McEwan's novel *The Child in Time* (1987), where the protagonist loses his young daughter when turning away from her for a second at the checkout.

With the growth of commerce and the increasing importance of shopping for economic, social and cultural identities in the postwar Western world, the boundary between artistic expression and commercial good becomes increasingly obscured, even more so, this act of blurring the lines itself will actually develop into an aesthetic trend as such. Much of 'high-culture' literature and art in the 1960s and 1970s still adheres to depicting consumerism, shopping and consumption as a danger to culture and a sense of authenticity as the literary works of Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, William Golding, Iris Murdoch, John Fowles and the minimalist art of Yves Klein and Mark Rothko demonstrate. At the same time, a new trend is emerging which celebrates populism and the commercial by turning them into *objets d'art*. The best-known proponent for this new development in visual art was Andy Warhol whose images depict everyday objects such as soup tins using the same kind of aesthetics as his portraits of celebrities. Warhol saw America and the ways in which capitalism impacted on social and cultural life as a sign of an ever-increasing equality since everybody would consume the same products:

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coca-Cola, Liz Taylor drinks Coca-Cola, and just think, you can drink Coca-Cola, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking.

— Warhol 2007: 100–101

For Warhol and other representatives of American pop art (Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist), consumer products, shopping and the department store deserved their place in art since they were regarded as equally culturally significant as the European legacy of 'high art' and its depictions of upper-class life. Aesthetically and formally, many of pop art's images were influenced by turn-of-the-century and early twentieth-century movements in modernist art; however by referencing those often on a parodic and ironic level, the works by pop artists also contributed critically to the debate surrounding the question: what is art? The 1964 exhibition *The American Supermarket* in the Bianchini Gallery on New York's Upper East Side, for example, organized the showroom like a supermarket in which paintings and art objects were displayed like goods in a supermarket, and by doing so emphasized the close relationship between consumerism and contemporary art. Thus, much of contemporary art in the 1960s and 1970s in America as well as in Western Europe contributed to the diminishing borderline between art and commerce by suggesting that art is as mundane and necessary as the everyday products in supermarket shopping trolleys (and vice versa). However, while the initial philosophy underlying movements such as pop art presented itself as a celebration of and hope for a more equal society in which mass production and mass consumption would erase class difference, pop art would contribute to the development of a new art market based on the idea of art works as investment. The picture of the humble tin of soup, whilst looking exactly the same as the actual object in the supermarket, was only affordable to the wealthy customers and thus entrenched rather than abolished social difference and status.

Representations of shopping, the supermarket and the department store in the twentieth and twenty-first century are directly linked with the cold war years, the ever-more accelerating development of global capitalism and the concept of modern identity as intrinsically linked to one's status as a consumer. In the postwar period, commercial television interpolated the viewer as a consumer with shows such as *The Generation Game* and *The Price is Right* where participants could win consumer goods as prizes. In later years, *Supermarket Sweep* turned the mundane event of shopping into a competitive game, which demonstrated in a playful manner how in an increasingly consumerist society the one who accumulated the most products in the quickest

time would be crowned the winner. The British sitcom *Are You being Served?* ran successfully from 1972 to 1985 and used its setting, a department store, as a stage for sexual innuendo, double entendre and sexually risqué catchphrases. In television drama and cinema movies, the shop, supermarket or department store would become a structural element, often used as a place where conflictual encounters could be performed and personal and professional crises visually imagined. Soap operas such as *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* depicted the corner shop as a community space where gossip was exchanged and as a domain which was neither fully private nor public. With the increasing ubiquity of the supermarket and superstores, these dramas also culturally negotiated the threat to traditional values, often represented via storylines where small shops had to fight for their survival against the commercial power of the multipurpose stores. These themes were also taken up in the cinema where films such as *Empire Records* (1995) and *You've Got Mail* (1998) intertwined the romantic storyline with narratives about independent stores fighting for their survival against powerful global conglomerates. From the 1980s onwards, storylines revolving around the demise of the small store and the increasing economic and infrastructural importance of supermarkets, superstores and shopping malls has informed the setting and narratives of a plethora of films and literary texts and has become an easily recognizable trope for the ambiguity of progress and unstoppable growth of global capitalism. However, shopping malls and department stores are also often depicted as places where reality and fantasy overlap and where the mundanity of life can be elevated and transformed into magical experiences. This is the case in particular in teenage movies such as *Clueless* (1995), where the mall is represented as the spiritual home of the main character Cher. The department store often gains a magical aura in Christmas movies such as *Elf* (2003), the original and various remakes of *Miracle on 34th Street* (1934, 1955, 1994) where the retail space often functions as a quasi-religious site which, ironically, allows characters to re-connect with an identity untainted by exchange values and commercialization.

As mentioned above, stores often function as community spaces in which the borderline between private and public identities is often transcended. This is true for the corner shop as well as for other commercial spaces such as the supermarket or the department store which in texts and films often function as sites where characters can meet and plotlines can cross over. Shopping is often depicted as an activity where the intimacy of private identities and their underlying desires is translated into a public spectacle since, as Rachel Bowlby argues, supermarkets and department stores presented a 'kind of indoor retailing space, which was *open*, with goods on display for looking at, and with no sense that customers had to come in with a definite intention to buy' (Bowlby 2000: 9).

This interlacing of public/private as an essential element underlying the representation of the retailing space is particularly relevant when it concerns

storylines surrounding female characters. In Joanna Trollope's *The Rector's Wife* (1991), a part-time supermarket job enables the main protagonist to start an independent life. Zoe Barnes' novel *Bumps* (1997) uses the trope of the 'Superwoman' in order to investigate the intricacies of femininity as defined by motherhood and working as a sales manager in a flagship store. Sujata Massey sets one of her crime novels in a big Tokyo department store where her Japanese-American detective Rei Shimura works undercover as a clerk in order to expose a murderer (*Girl in a Box*, 2007). The retailing space and the activity of shopping in these novels function as a site where the social, gender and sexual identities of the female protagonists can be negotiated and presented as defined by a wide range of desires and expectations.

Finally, shopping scenes in films can also reveal the complexities underlying the relationships between men and women in patriarchal societies by illuminating the close links between the female body and the commercial. The movie *Pretty Woman* from 1990 serves as a pertinent example where Richard Gere and Julia Roberts play a business man and a prostitute respectively in the framework of a Pygmalion-style romantic comedy. In a central scene, Gere takes Roberts shopping in an upmarket designer clothes shop in order to pass her off as a woman of his own class. The shopping scene clearly reveals the extent to which identity, rather than essential and fixed, is defined by the much more volatile values of the commercial and the monetary. This is the case in particular in relation to femininity and female sexuality which in capitalist and patriarchal society is trafficked between men in order to secure the status of masculine heterosexual identity as superior and powerful.

By the end of the millennium films and literary texts offer a new type of female shopper who is often seen as deeply intertwined with the vagaries and complexities of postwar feminism. The popularity of the genre of chick-lit and the immediate success of the television series *Sex and the City* are based on new imaginations of the single women and their position as consumers. Helen Fielding's character Bridget Jones and the female leads in Candace Bushnell's book had their first outing in newspaper columns (*The Independent* 1995 and *The New York Observer* 1997) and both writers present their narrators as alter egos and a conduit of their own experiences as single women. While the focus in both is mainly on life as a single woman in the metropolis (London and New York) and how modern femininity adds complex layers to concepts such as sexuality, marriage and relationships with men, *Bridget Jones* and *Sex and the City* also presented these issues in close relationship to shopping and consumption as gendered cultural experiences. Going shopping with their female or gay male friends is often presented as an alternative to the traditional life of married women and used as a trope for female independence and emancipation. In addition, fashion, clothes shopping and the sartorial as such are so evidently linked to the story lines and characters in *Sex and the City* that

it is often very difficult to understand the represented femininity as separated from their identity as consumer. As a result, their sexual, romantic and erotic adventures and the ways in which they imagine relationships to men are directly linked to their behavior in relation to the commercial and consumption. While Fielding's *Bridget Jones* series often emphasizes the comedic and farcical element of her single woman's character, Bridget's consumption of self-help books nevertheless frames the post-feminist woman as always lacking fulfilment and therefore in need of something that completes her. In *Sex and the City* shopping and conspicuous consumption are often presented as an emollient and as a substitute for romantic and sexual dissatisfaction, and at the same time as a sign of feminine power, self-fulfillment and identity. Oscillating between those contradictory aspects, shopping and consumption in chick-lit and films illuminate the extent to which postmodern and post-feminist identities are often a composite of complex and conflictual performances defined by the vicinity between romantic, erotic and consumer desires. The femininities performed and themes represented in chick-lit and television programs and films are also deeply intertwined with the success story of women's magazines which, like the films and books, interconnect advice on matters such as diet, fashion and relationships with the advertisements of branded products. At the same time women's magazines as well as the chick-lit books and films are consumer products themselves and are thus caught in the conundrum that if their customers ever achieved the promised perfection, the magazine would lose its customer base (Smith 2008: 21).

The similarities between magazines and chick-lit also extend to structural and narrative aspects and style. Sophie Kinsella's series of shopaholic books, based on the adventures of her protagonist Becky Bloomwood, for example, is written in short and episodic chapters and thus offers a reading experience similar to articles in a magazine such as *Cosmopolitan*. In addition, both publications discuss lifestyle and life choices of women in the editorial/story-part, which is often interspersed with product placement and, in the magazine, accompanied by advertisements for consumer articles related to the issues discussed in an opinion piece. Kinsella's book series, starting in the year 2000 with *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic*, has proved an extremely lucrative and successful venture and so far includes nine volumes (the most recent published in 2019) and a film version in 2009. The narratives map out the life of the female protagonist via the activity of shopping and consumption in general, discussing it in relation to retail therapy as well as the more serious issues of debt, addiction and shopping as a means to cope with mental health issues. While the overall tone of the books is a humorous and satirist one, the books can also be read as a critique of a society in which consumption is proffered as a panacea for any kind of crisis and as a distraction from the emptiness at the heart of the retail experience. As Rachel Bowlby argues: 'In the

picture of retail therapy, shopping is seen as a drug, but the drug is either addictive or therapeutic, oscillating uncertainly between the two' (Bowlby 2000: 247). Shopping in these novels and films is represented as a performative act which offers the constant re-invention of the consumer self and, at the same time, as an anxiety-inducing imagining of desire which always asks for more.

CONCLUSION

In the twentieth and twenty-first century textual and visual representations of shopping always seem to engage with the activity as intrinsically contradictory and complex precisely because of its close vicinity to imaginations of the self. The various examples in this chapter only skim the surface of the great range of literary and filmic debates surrounding consumer culture and many more could be added. In addition, with the increasing popularity of internet shopping and its underlying threat to traditional high street shopping, the image of the store is now much more of a virtual than a material nature. At the same time, a nostalgia for the small store and its apparent promise of treating the customer as an individual offers the fantasy of a retail experience that can make us whole and wholesome again. It will be interesting to observe how literary genres and visual media will react to and thematically and formally be impacted upon by these new developments.