INTERPRETING HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AS A PRELUDE TO PRESERVATION:  
THE SPECIAL CASE OF THE DEPARTMENT STORE

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Abstract

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People interact with and come to understand a place through experiencing it. The physical fabric and the experience contained in it are interdependent in creating meanings of a place. Preservationists often analyze meanings and significance of a historic site by its physical fabric alone when the ephemeral place-based experience contains historic meanings as rich and as important in understanding a historic site and its meanings to people in the past. The establishment of an analytical framework specifically for historic experience analysis, and its application to three New York City department store case studies explore the feasibility of analyzing historic experiences associated with the built fabric and advocates for considering historic place-based experience analysis as a prelude to making holistic preservation decisions.

Key Words architectural significance, department store, experience-triggering feature, Historic Preservation, place-based experience, place meanings, place studies
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Interpreting Historical Experience as a Prelude to Preservation – Zhang
Introduction

This thesis explores the importance of place-based experience to the preservation of historically significant department stores and looks to develop a method for identifying and analyzing place-based experience and allocating them to the built fabric. The underlying claims of this thesis are:

1. That place-based experience is an important feature of the significance of historic structures;
2. That understanding how a building was experienced by the public at large at its period of significance should be an important part of the way the building is physically preserved and regulated today;
3. That certain features of the built fabric can be preserved to act as “experience-triggering features” to recall/stimulate experiences like those of the past which gave meaning to the historical identity of these places.

This thesis relies heavily on the analysis and interpretation of experiences of historic buildings in the past. To recover the meaning of buildings as “places of experience”, I conducted research of historical and archival information which describe private and public reactions to the buildings. Close examination of the building in its historical context based on popular accounts in literature and newspapers also played a role in filling out the nature of the experiences of audiences in the past. Finally, the research method included close study of historical photographs, drawings, product literature and other material which assisted in the understanding of the physical structure upon which these historical experiences were based. This methodological strategy of combining research on physical places and the experiences they engendered in the day is central to this thesis and serves as a model for similar studies of place-based experience and the preservation of experience in other building typologies.

The thesis is divided into two main sections. Part I conducts and explains theoretical analyses on place-based experience, introduces the methodology that serves as the backbone of
the research, and builds arguments that will support the conclusions of the thesis or be further developed in Part II. Part II consists of historical analysis of department stores and three case studies in which the issues associated with the preservation of experience are examined in practice.

The first section of the thesis is broken down into two chapters: Chapter 1, Place-based Experience, introduces the concept of place-based experience and argues its interdependency with the physical fabric in constructing meanings of a place, thus justifying its potential contributions to preservation. Chapter 2, Methodology: Ways of Studying Experience and Places, explains the methods used for the thesis research, and introduces the tentative framework which is then used in the case studies in the second part of the thesis. The methodology section acts as a prelude to Part II.

Part II focuses on the department stores themselves as both physical entities and as the sites of human experience. It begins with Chapter 3, The Department Store as a Historical Place, which explains the importance of place-based experience in department stores. It consists of a brief history of department stores from the aspects of retail and architecture. It then builds the case that department stores were more than merely a programmatic response to the need to put commodities in front of consumers and that they were carefully constructed to create a significant experience for both the patrons and the public. This chapter then leads into Chapter 4, Case Studies.

This thesis examines three case studies in New York City. Historically, the three sites functioned as department stores targeting different customer groups, a factor that largely influenced the designs. Today, these buildings differ in the programs which influences preservation decisions and present different challenges in the decision-making process. These sites are chosen so that there would be variables in the research representing a wider range of real-life circumstances.
The three case study analyses are structured in the same manner. Each of them begins with a brief history of the site and of specific subjects relevant to later analysis, followed by a study on one of the identified experience-triggering features using the tentative framework. Experience-triggering feature is a term used in this thesis to address design features present within a space which once contributed to the cultivation of place-based experience, and could potentially be preserved as a feature stimulating an emotional reaction that could help forge the historic meaning and significance of the place to an individual or a group of people today. The analysis is developed based on the tripartite structure of the framework: the design of the building or place, its use in daily life (potentially extending beyond its program which defines an intended use), and the experiences with which that place was associated.

Through analyzing the three cases studies, three unique assessments and conclusions are drawn regarding the historical identity of these sites, the efficiency of the tentative framework is assessed, and a broader suggestion for preservation approaches supporting place experience as a feature of these places today, is presented. The goal of the thesis is to illuminate new ideas in the field by providing insights into the importance of preservation of place-based experiences, as well as demonstrate the feasibility of analyzing historical experience as a prelude to preservation decisions.
Part I

Chapter 1: Place-based Experience

1.1 What is place-based experience and why does experience matter to a place?

Experience is an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone.¹ It is a vague term which describes an interaction between a person and an impressionable event.² Place-based experience is one specific type of experience. The term “place-based” suggests that the experience is rooted in a physical structure. The place is the site of that experience, and the relationship of that place and experience are intertwined and inseparable to such an extent that the physical place cannot be remembered without simultaneously stimulating a memory of the event and vice versa.³

Experience occurs when people are present. Human and the environment work as an indivisible whole.⁴ No matter what program a place contains or what function it serves, ultimately the place is experienced by people. While Western scholars have had a long history of emphasizing the notion of space and time by removing human beings from places, in the 1970s, there emerged thinkers from the field of Geography such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, who advocated for the importance of subjectivity and human experience to a place. They claimed that people come to understand places only by experiencing them,⁵ in other words, the meanings of a place rely heavily on the human experience. In the field of Architecture, Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa finds that a work of art’s meaning does not lie in its form, but is transmitted by the forms and the emotional force they carry, and the artistic dimensions of an object exist only in the consciousness.

³ J. E. Malpas, Place and Experience. A Philosophical Topography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
⁴ Erin Anacortez Nolan, “A Phenomenological Qualitative Study of Place for Place-Based Education: Toward a Place-Responsive Pedagogy” (PhD Diss., Arizona State University, 2015)
⁵ Ibid.
of the person experiencing it. Human consciousness, actions, and interactions determine the nature of a place-based experience and the experience facilitates understanding and thus gives meaning to the place. In the book *Experience Design: Concepts and Case Studies*, the author Peter Benz concludes that place meaning is experienced in the context of spatial design and can be understood as a dynamic experiential product “construed in real time while it is experienced”. These findings showcase that, as place cultivates experiences, and experiences lead to meanings of the place, the “place” and the “experience” therefore, are interdependent in establishing a meaning to a place. This interdependency justifies the equal importance of the experience and the physical fabric of a place. A place meaning is constructed not only by the physical presence of a place, but also by the experience it offers to people. The importance of experience in determining a place’s meaning and identity is therefore apparent.

**1.2 Why does place-based experience matter to Historic Preservation?**

Place meaning is an indication of significance of a place. To explore a historical experience is to study its historical meanings to people of the past. Historic Preservation makes assessments of human-made places based on their significance. Preservationists assess, identify, and preserve the significance of a place, and seek ways to communicate the knowledge to the public. When assessing significance from a specific period, the significance is embodied in the historical meaning to the particular time, and the construction of these meanings relies on both the physical fabric of the place and people’s experience with the place. To recognize a complete historical

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8Peter Benz, *Experience Design: Concepts and Case Studies*, 83
significance of a place, preservationists should, therefore, research and analyze both the physical fabric and the past experience associated with the physical fabric.

This thesis uses the term ‘tangible” to refer to elements that have a physical presence and “intangible” for non-physical elements that are also ephemeral in nature. In Historic Preservation, analyses and decisions are primarily carried out with regards to the physical structure, and less attention is paid to the intangibles such as place-based experience. However, as mentioned before, place-based experience is as relevant as the physical fabric in terms of understanding the historical meaning of place. Benz states that experience is constructed by perceptual, cognitive, and emotional elements. At times the physical structure merely acts as a container for the ephemeral elements, and much of the meanings and significance of the structure relies on the experience it generates and contains. With the equal emphasis on physical fabric and experience to a place in mind, analysis of place-based experience should be considered on a par with the analysis of the physical structure. One is not always superior to the other as they are two different manifestations of a place. The most holistic way in understanding a place would be to consider both separately as well as in their mutual relationships. This proposed approach is not to suggest that decisions made based on input from the aspect of place-based experience would be radically different from those made solely based on analyzing the physical structure, but rather it has the potential of filling in the gaps of historical place meanings by offering a different perspective during the process of decision making.

10 Peter Benz, Experience Design: Concepts and Case Studies, 83
Not only would considering place-based experience in preservation influence the decision-making process, but it could also lead to innovative preservation approaches which could make a difference in how the audience of the present engage with and understand the place. Preserving by architectural significance allows the audience to examine a place predominantly based on their intellectual comprehension, while preserving by historical experience, enables the audience to understand the historical meanings of the place with their emotional experience and feelings.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines space as a continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied.\(^{12}\) It defines place as a building or area used for a specified purpose or activity.\(^{13}\) Space becomes a place when human agency and time is involved.\(^{14}\) With human presence, experience occurs and transforms space into a place with meaning.

Place-based experience is a form of experience generated by and evolved from the physical fabric. The place-based experience creates a human-scale perspective in terms of meanings to a place and has an interdependent relationship with the physical structure. This makes place-based experience equally useful for decision-making to historic preservationists whose efforts to define the “significance” of a building or environment rely on assessments of historical meaning. When the current field generally makes decisions based on architectural significance, which to some extent isolates the structure from people and time, place-based experience fills in the gaps and aids in a more holistic evaluation of meaning and value. Therefore, place-based experience should be considered equally important in contributing to the meanings of a place.

Taking into consideration place-based experience could also be helpful in informing the present-day audience of the historical meanings of a preserved place, as recreating an experience


\(^{14}\)Peter Benz, Experience Design: Concepts and Case Studies, 88
offers a different vehicle for understanding a place with associations to people of the past. While it is worthwhile to examine preservation approaches related to historical place-based experience, this thesis focuses on the importance of experience in preservation and the establishment of a method for analyzing historical place-based experience, which aims to serve as the foundation for future analyses of preservation approaches relating to place-based experience.

Chapter 2: Methodology - Ways of Studying Experience and Places

I mainly used published and historical information analysis for this thesis research to understand the experiences which individuals and groups of people had when they encountered buildings we now think of as being significant. The first part of the thesis is a general analysis of place-based experience which introduces, explains, and unravels concepts and ideas present in the research, and supports the arguments in the case studies. The second part of the thesis introduces department store history and carries out individual in-depth analysis of specific experience present in each of the three department store case studies.

2.1 Methodology Part I: Ways of Identifying and Understanding Experience in Historic Contexts

I used tactical qualitative methods in Part I to gain evidence to support arguments made in the thesis. In Chapter 1, I used interdisciplinary sources of published literature that explore the concept of place meanings and experience to define place-based experience and support the arguments of its importance to a place and preservation. This chapter and the researched materials led to the construction of a framework used in this thesis to analyze experience allocated to “experience-triggering features.”

In this thesis, the term “experience-triggering feature” stands for design features present within a space which once contributed to the cultivation of place-based experience and could be preserved as a feature stimulating an emotional reaction to forge the historic meaning and significance of the place to an individual or group of people today. In recognizing the value of features of a physical resource which may have given it meaning to people in the past, historic preservationists acquire a way of interpreting the significance of buildings and places in ways which have the potential to stimulate meaning and memory through experience in the present. The case studies which follow present a methodology of signification based on the premise that
“experience triggering features” can be identified and utilized in the interpretation of places to audiences in the present.

To flesh out this methodology, we can turn to the extensive writings on the subject to better understand how others have attempted to quantify the relationship between a physical place and the events or experiences which forged a memory yielding identity to that place.

Chapter 1 concludes that experience is an abstract notion, but “place-based” suggests the physicality of the term. Place-based experience ultimately influences place meanings. Both theoretical and empirical studies support the multi-dimensional nature of a place. Benz advocates for human consciousness, actions, and interactions being the three elements constructing a place-based experience.16 Place meaning researcher Judith Sixsmith’s empirical research concludes that place meanings are constructed by personal, social, and physical factors.17 Geographer J. A. Agnew’s argument of the complementarity of elements contributing to place meanings expresses that a place is understood by understanding its social context, social relations, geographic locations, social, economic, cultural surrounds, and the “sense of place” it offers to individuals simultaneously.18 These findings demonstrate the extensive dimensions place-based experience and place meanings could touch upon, and the various possibilities in establishing categories for the analysis framework.

In establishing categories of place-based experience, most writers on the subject focus on one specific attribute. For example, many tend to approach the development of an analytical framework from the perspectives of individual users or stakeholders, such as Relph’s “physical

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16 Peter Benz, *Experience Design: Concepts and Case Studies*
18 Ibid.
setting, activity, meaning”; and psychologist David V. Canter’s “action, conceptions, physical attributes.” Others tend to focus more on a broader social context, such as Agnew’s “location, locale, and sense of place.” Based on characterizations of place-based memory, Gustafson establishes a framework of “self, others, environment,” which aims to include components of a wider range of both individuals and the society.\textsuperscript{19}

While many writers also discuss the continuity and changing nature of place meanings, my research focuses on analyzing a specific experience from a specific time. Therefore, as much as changes are crucial in making preservation decisions, I did not take them into consideration in establishing the experience analysis framework for this thesis.

Through my research, I found that all writers argued for the multi-dimensionality of what a place stands for with framework categories extending beyond the physical fabric. The frameworks developed to illustrate their findings become more reasonable and dynamic over time. These frameworks are specific to analyses that are not limited to a particular time frame, and from the perspectives of the present. In facing historic preservation issues, however, these frameworks need adjustments as they become less efficient when attempting to analyze a specific historical experience.

There are differences between analyzing present-day experiences and historical experiences. First, information regarding present-day place-based experience can be obtained from large numbers of individuals, with methods such as interviews and surveys. In attempting to identify and interpret a historical experience, on the other hand, we face difficulties in obtaining individual opinions. Second, due to the indirectness of obtaining information about the experiences of people in the past, much information that present-day experience might take for granted remains

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
speculative in a historic case. This results in the need of putting more effort into the exploration of the fundamentals. For example, people today easily understand the use of an automatic umbrella bag dispenser, but historic boot scraper on the railings of a rowhouse needs more explanation for people today to understand its function. Therefore, for my tentative framework to be efficient in analyzing a historical experience, apart from incorporating both the tangible and intangible aspects of a place, two other factors should be taken into consideration. First, it has to generate useful information regarding an experience from a variety of sources to make up for the lack of individual accounts; and second, the categories within the framework must make sense of a historical feature in the present.

My tentative framework in analyzing experience associated with “experience-triggering features” consists of three analytical categories: design to signify the response to a specific program or intended use; actual use meaning the way individuals and the public actually experienced a place; and public accounts which document both the intended and actual experiences of a place. They could work separately in facilitating an understanding of the historical experience associated with each feature, and at the same time, the three are mutually influential in creating an experience. The three categories cover both the tangible and intangible, the subjective and objective and imply the necessity of obtaining both detailed historical accounts as well as more diffuse individual and public opinions reflected either directly or indirectly through written, graphic and photographic records.

*Design* represents the physical fabric as it was intentionally crafted by its “authors.” It is essentially the starting point of a place-based experience as it offers a physical environment for the experience to nurture, and the physical structure contains designers’ initial vision of an intended experience. This attribute involves an analysis of the design of the structure and the rationale
behind the design. It offers a chance for authoritative explanations of relevant contextual information. The analysis is based on primary and secondary resources including architectural drawings, photography, drawing depictions, interviews, newspapers, magazines, and advertisements.

*Use* represents activities and actions. It also offers contextual information but focuses more on factual information rather than design intentions. The analysis uses primarily secondary resources that have directly or indirectly documented the actual use of an experience-triggering feature. For certain features, the analysis of use also needs to be supported by studies of the historical context due to the lack of direct information.

*Public accounts* are vital for a historical analysis of experience. While present-day research utilizes primary sources to obtain information, historical experience relies on documented materials. Experience is ephemeral and does not exist in a physical form unless described and documented in texts. Public accounts in themselves are a product of social context and personal opinions. Incorporating public accounts into the analysis framework can help us figure out the authentic experience associated with a specific feature. Public accounts include voices representative of a large group of people available in resources such as newspaper and magazines, and individual voices available to us through autobiographical writings, memoirs and other personal reflections on historical experiences.

These three categories sum up the complex meanings present in a design feature in terms of spatial characteristics to society and individuals. This analytical framework supports the research which I present in the three case studies. My goal in each was to deploy this research method to identify and interpret experience triggering features of historic places. In this way, the
case studies serve as a test of the feasibility of this method of analysis and interpretation of historic structures.

2.2 Methodology Part II: The Case Studies

Part II begins with Chapter 3, The Department Store as a Historical Place which offers overall background information on department stores. The research for Chapter 3 relied heavily on historical sources on the department store as a retail type, as a building typology, and as a place in which complex experiences took place. Apart from known facts that are broadly accepted by the public, speculative information is supported and further enriched by opinions offered by various historians with interest in department stores and public space experience. Historical research is vital to this chapter because historical context is needed to make sense of a past experience.

The history section then leads into Chapter 4, which consists of three case studies in which I conduct more in-depth research on experience and deploy the analytical framework as a method of analyzing historical experience. Within each of the three case studies, one experience-triggering feature is analyzed. A brief history of the case study site and subjects relevant to later analyses is presented at the beginning of each case study followed by the experience-triggering feature analysis.

The three case studies possess various similarities. They are all based in New York City and were all purpose-built department store buildings. The common location choice enabled this research to have a controlling factor for potential comparisons. The case study buildings date from different periods, but they were all products of the heyday of American department stores, ranging from the late 19th century to early 20th century. There also exist differences between the three department stores. Historically, they targeted different customer groups and their operating
approaches varied. The target customer group is a crucial factor in determining the place-based experience of a site because the design language largely depended on the presumed audience. In their current incarnation, the biggest difference between each of these stores is the current use of the building. In only one of the case study subjects does the original use remain. The other two case study buildings have changed ownership and programs. This condition of variability in the use and reuse of historic buildings allows us also to consider the ways in which experience-triggering features can still effectively recall past experiences even in circumstances when the use and public access to a place have changed.

The three case study sites are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study 1:</th>
<th>Macy’s Herald Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>151 West 34th Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Use:</td>
<td>Macy’s Department Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience-triggering feature Studied:</td>
<td>Show windows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study 2:</th>
<th>Former B. Altman Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>365 Fifth Avenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Use:</td>
<td>CUNY Graduate Center and New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience-triggering feature Studied:</td>
<td>Interior lighting Fixtures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study 3:</th>
<th>Former Arnold Constable Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>881 Broadway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Use:</td>
<td>Retail and Office Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience-triggering feature Studied:</td>
<td>Mansard roof</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three case studies yield site-specific findings, but their primary purpose in this thesis is to test the feasibility of the tentative framework, to serve as illustrations of the importance of experience to place-based meaning and to demonstrate the possibility of incorporating experience analysis into the process of interpreting significance in historic structures.
Part II

Chapter 3: The Department Store as A Historical Place

Department store buildings possess various characteristics favorable to the study of place-based experience. Department store buildings built in the 19th and early 20th century are almost always purpose-built structures. Those which still exist have had their use changed, in most cases. Historically, the underlying function of these department stores was to bring “the department store experience” to patrons and the public. The gradual removal of use and context, as well as the ephemeral nature of experience, exposes the issue that a major meaning of these buildings gets lost in time, making the department store a feasible subject to be studied in terms of experience preservation.

This chapter provides a historical background to the department store as a building typology and historical phenomenon. Department store buildings have been associated with different experience overtime from the rise of the retail to its gradual decay, but the most relevant to their historical identity and to this thesis, which discusses a public experience offered to patrons, is since the day they were constructed and during the heydays of this form of retail. Since experience is context-based, it is crucial to get familiar with the historical context before analyzing the place-based experience in-depth. The general history of department stores in this chapter supports the research presented in the case studies whose focus is narrow and specific to a single site and the experiences it engendered.
3.1 Evolution of the Department Store

A department store is a form of retail which typically occupies an entire building and carries an extensive selection of goods categorized into “departments.” 20 The business concept incorporates a collection of advancements in the 19th century retail industry that took references from various speculative predecessors of the department store. 21 Historians often attribute the origin of department stores to the arcades, 22 the World’s Fairs, and small-scale retail establishments such as dry-goods stores. 23 Le Bon Marché in Paris was the first modern department store in the world, and the earliest department store in the United States was A.T. Stewart.

![Figure 1 Bird’s-eye view of the Bon Marché.](image)

21 Lingling Lian, Creating Paradise for Consumption: Department stores and Modern Urban Culture in Shanghai (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2018)
23 Jan Whitaker, “The Endless Shopping Spree” in The World of Department Stores, 60-98
In the United States, prior to department stores existed dry-goods stores, which carried products such as textiles and clothing. Most of the 18th and 19th century department store businesses evolved from small-scale dry-goods establishments, including A.T. Stewart. Hailing from its dry-goods business, A. T. Stewart opened in 1846 in the purpose-built “Marble Palace” in New York City, but it remains controversial whether the business at the time was a department store. Social historian Jan Whitaker considers the store to be of “a highly developed transition form” of retail, but it nevertheless contributed to the growth and recognition of the department store industry in the United States.24 The founder of the namesake department store, A.T. Stewart, introduced not only the concept of the department store to the United States, but also the idea of a purpose-built retail space and the use of palatial Italian Renaissance architectural designs on commercial buildings.

The built styles of the department store evolved along with its form of retail. Major cities like New York and Paris were early adopters of the retail concept. As specialized stores and dry-goods stores began carrying larger varieties of products, store owners began seeking opportunities

24 Jan Whitaker, *The World of Department Stores*, 22-28
to increase floor space. They often gradually purchased neighboring buildings or lots for expansion, which appeared as collections of buildings that did not possess a unified design language.\textsuperscript{25} Establishments such as Le Bon Marché and Wanamaker’s had also undergone such a development phase. Purpose-built structures became a desirable choice as store owners made enough profit and began visualizing the overall design and concept of their stores. They started to commission architects to design “palaces” dedicated to retail, and moved from their original amalgamated multi-establishments to newly constructed individual monumental buildings.\textsuperscript{26} Most of today’s preserved historical department store buildings are these medium- to large-scale purpose-built structures.

The built style of department stores has been a vital tool for store owners to attract attention and cultivate the “department store experience.” One speculated origin of department stores is the World’s Fairs. Sources such as BBC and historian Whitaker believes that the grand palaces and extensive exhibited goods at World’s Fairs influenced the later developments of the department store. BBC remarked that the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace shaped the general form of department stores we came to know today.\textsuperscript{27} The grand event impacted this form of retail in details such as the palatial architectural designs, the use of plate-glass, and ways of displaying goods. World’s Fairs also influenced department store developments as new store projects were immediately planned in cities announcing to be hosting the fairs.\textsuperscript{28} These claims regarding department store’s relationship with World’s Fairs demonstrate department stores’ design intention of attracting audiences and offering a memorable experience to them.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25}Ibid. 98-141
\item \textsuperscript{26}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Jan Whitaker, \textit{The World of Department Stores}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The design intention of purpose-built department store buildings was to satisfy human desires on levels beyond the simple action of shopping. It was crucial to first present the stores as feasts for the eyes, as the experience relied on the relationship between looking and buying.\textsuperscript{29} To build an impressive department store building, store owners and architects frequently chose the most celebrated and lavish styles at the time. The choice of built styles reflects a society’s aesthetics of a particular location during a specific period. For instance, in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Parisian department stores often resembled palatial, opera-house like structures, German department stores mimicked the appearance of government buildings and train stations.\textsuperscript{30} American department stores, New York establishments in specific, were open to latest design trends. Built about two decades apart, A.T. Stewart, and Arnold Constable, for instance, boasted different design languages.

\textsuperscript{29}Anne Friedberg, “The Passage from Arcade to Cinema” in \textit{Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern}, 42
\textsuperscript{30}Jan Whitaker, \textit{The World of Department Stores} (New York: Vendome Press, 2011)
Figure 4 The Grand Magasin du Louvre in Paris, circa 1930

Figure 5 The Wertheim Department Store in Berlin, 1900

Figure 6 A. T. Stewart, 280 Broadway, constructed in 1845, photo taken in 1893
Popular department stores hosted cultural events and exhibitions of innovative creations. Exhibited items ranged from gas lights to hot air balloons. Apart from exhibitions, innovations also remained an important aspect of department store designs and operations. Department store structures advanced due to new building technologies. With the invention of steel frame buildings, department stores could achieve the desired massing, install large skylights to invite ample natural light, and employ expansive display windows. People went to department stores to experience the technological wonders of the time, such as electric lightings, neon signage, elevators, air-conditioners, together with creative new programs such as art exhibitions, rooftop children’s parks, and live performances. Technological innovations and cultural activities helped department stores promote themselves as destinations of ultimate experiences. Over time, department stores became cultural institutions of cities with thoughtfully designed architecture, well-curated products, and extensive programs and activities. They became local landmarks and tourist

Figure 7 Arnold Constable, 881 Broadway, constructed in 1869, photo taken in 1906

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31 Lingling Lian, *Creating Paradise for Consumption: Department stores and Modern Urban Culture in Shanghai* 139-140
32 Ibid.
attractions and influenced not only the retail industry but the economic, social and cultural history at large.

3.2 Department Store as a Place to Experience

As previously mentioned, places, regardless of their functions, are experienced by people. The importance of experience is even more evident in department stores. Different from other uses where the function leads to an experience, the function of the department store is “to experience.” Store owners and designers deliberately introduced and brought experience to visitors through the design and activities associated with the department store.

As commercial and cultural institutions, most department stores targeted middle-class patrons while some served customers of high-society.33 Customers were primarily women, and department stores offered them the opportunity to leave their homes for leisure activities and the freedom of strolling and making decisions, in a period when women’s freedom was still considerably restricted.34

33Jan Whitaker, *The World of Department Stores*
34Ibid. 8-60
The experience began on the exterior, where the architecture and show windows attracted people’s gazes. Similar to how 19th century arcades functioned, people were free to look at the architecture and window displays of department stores, or to stroll through the store without the obligation to purchase anything.35 Before the shopping arcades, the activity of inspecting goods remained solely associated with food products. Arcades made it possible for people to look at goods of a broader range, such as textiles, and luxury items.36 Department stores took the concept further by offering extensive window displays on the exterior as well as curated products display and innovative designs on the inside, as interior design and applications of technology innovations greatly attracted patrons.37 Spectacles and new technologies helped department stores create more innovative, dramatic, and multi-sensory experiences.

Figure 9 Galerie Vivienne, arcades from 1916 Lansiaux, Charles. Galeries Vivienne, 1916.

35 Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*
36 Ibid. 57-61
37 Lingling Lian, *Creating Paradise for Consumption: Department stores and Modern Urban Culture in Shanghai* 128-138
Retail history experts have remarked on the resemblance of department stores to museums. Historian Jan Whitaker thinks that department stores functioned as “a museum of social occasion and modern technology,” as many first-time experiences of individuals took place in department stores, such as one’s first restaurant meal, escalator ride, telephone call, and fashion show.\textsuperscript{38} Department stores became unofficial cultural institutions of cities in presenting not only the latest products to be sold but also the latest technology innovations and social activities. Visitors of the stores did not all enter to shop, many went to experience new creations of the time, and they were expected to do so.\textsuperscript{39} Cultural tourism researcher Richard Prentice views museums as “experiential products, quite literally constructions to facilitate experience.”\textsuperscript{40} It is reasonable to apply this same concept to the department stores, as their constructions and conceptualization were heavily influenced by the experiential qualities owners intended to bring to the patrons and the public.

Experience remained a part of the identity of department stores, and are as important as, if not more important than, the activity of consumption.\textsuperscript{41} Retail was one of the experiences, but department stores conveyed more than the action of making a purchase. Similar to other business establishments, multiple identities existed for a department store from the perspectives of different stakeholders. For example, for operating managers, a department store’s identity mainly consisted of its two major operational competencies: the ability to store large quantities of goods due to mass production, and efficient retailing systems. For customers and the general public, the identity of a department store mainly aligned with its design intentions: the idealized environment and the

\textsuperscript{38}Jan Whitaker. \textit{The World of Department Stores}, 7
\textsuperscript{39}Lingling Lian, \textit{Creating Paradise for Consumption: Department stores and Modern Urban Culture in Shanghai} 128-138
\textsuperscript{40}Richard Prentice, “Managing Implosion: The Facilitation of Insight through the Provision of Context”, \textit{Museum Management and Curatorship} vol.15 No.2 1996, 169-185
experience present within the structure. Thus, a department store can be seen as a place for goods manufacturing, a symbol of mass production, a site for female leisure activity, and a place to experience. Each of them being a partial identity to the department store, each of them being as valid as the notion of a department store as a place for retail. Since this thesis studies the public experience of a department store, the main focus is the identity of a department store as a place to experience.

As stated in Chapter 1, place-based experience is interdependent with the built fabric. Seeing the extravagant skylight at Le Printemps, listening to the performance of a pipe organ at Wanamaker’s, and walking down the brightly lit hallway of B. Altman, all constitute the experience of a department store, and they are all attributed to a specific architectural element.

Architecture made these experiences possible and facilitated the drama and excitement. The experiences, in turn, provided meanings to department stores. Department stores created desirable images of people and places, not only by the items they carried but also the design language of the place and the experience nurtured by the physical structure.

The evolution of the department store has occurred as a result of proprietors and their designers trying to improve the experience the buildings and their contents offered to the public.
One cannot explain the history or the significance of department stores without mentioning the experience associated with them. Even though conventional ideas suggest that the purpose of department stores was to house the activity of retail, it is evident that the underlying purpose of department stores was also to “experience.” Given the centrality of “experience” as the fundamental purpose of the department store, place-based experience becomes evidently crucial in forming an understanding of the historical identities of department stores. The emphasis on place-based experience accentuates the directness of the experience present in department stores, making it an efficient subject to be analyzed, and a beneficial type of structures in experience preservation in return.
Chapter 4: Case Studies

This chapter consists of three case studies. I chose one specific design feature as an experience-triggering feature for each case study to conduct in-depth analysis of its associated historical experience. The analysis builds on the analytical framework previously established and approaches each case study from the perspectives of design, use, and public accounts. Before each framework analysis, there is general background of the specific site as well as subjects in need of explaining to facilitate understanding of the experience-triggering feature and the analysis of its historical experience.

The choice of the three design features does not suggest that they outperform other features in terms of the historical experience they provided. It aims to demonstrate that the method could be applied to analyze any feature on site that showcases evidence of generating a historical experience. The studies aim to provide three relatable examples that could contribute to future analyses on historical experience associated with design features.

4.1 Case Study 1: Macy’s Herald Square

I chose to analyze show windows as the experience-triggering feature for Macy’s Herald Square. In Contextual History, I examined the historical context which supports the analysis and arguments that follows. History of Macy’s Herald Square introduces the architecture of the specific store and the developments of Macy’s as a retail business. Department Store Show Windows provides background information on the development of the design feature, justifying the architectural and social significance in its physical presence. Department Store Window Dressing offers an overview of the evolution of the professional field which is directly linked to the physical fabric of show windows. The three sections form a fundamental understanding of the design feature present at Macy’s.
Then, the analysis of show windows at Macy’s are broken down into the three categories within the analytical framework: design, use, and public accounts. Design offers an analysis of the physical fabric in isolation. The study of use puts context into the analysis. Public accounts explore the historical experience show windows brought to people of the past with its physical presence and the use.

4.1.1 Contextual History

a. Macy’s Herald Square

Macy’s Herald Square is located on 151 West 34th Street in Manhattan. The architecture firm Cordes & De Lemos designed the department store building. Constructed between 1901 and 1902, the building occupies the entire block within a boundary formed by Broadway, Seventh Avenue, 34th Street, and 35th Street, except for a small lot on the southeast corner and another on the northwest corner.

The building we observe today consists of 3 sections built in 3 different periods. The first phase is a 9-story, steel-frame, masonry building on the Broadway side constructed in 1901-1902.
A 1-story structure was added to the original construction in 1910, followed by a 20-story building in 1922-1924, all in the similar built style.42

As a retail business, Macy’s targeted middle-class customers. Macy’s persistent efforts to sustain and improve operation and service qualities made the company one of the most successful businesses in the department store industry in the United States and worldwide. Many of the activities people take for granted today were first promoted by Macy’s, including selling with the lowest possible price, advertising on newspaper and magazines, outdoor advertisements, show window design, and window shopping.43

b. Department Store Show Windows

Store windows have remained a central and significant feature of the current Macy’s Store. To understand their meaning in relation to Macy’s, one must first consider their genesis as a form and subsequently as an essential component of the public experience of the department store. Show window as a design element is significant to the typology of department stores. Stores in the Ladies’ Mile District in New York City used the feature extensively, and it became a character-defining feature for department store buildings in the city. As noted on the LPC designation report, double-height show windows were a shared design element among department stores in the area.44

Show windows gained its prominent identity as a staple architectural element in department store buildings partly due to the evolution of plate glass manufacturing. Large and flat window glass was not a feasible product to manufacture until the late 1800s. Between 1848 and 1920, there existed three major methods of producing larger pieces of flat glass. The cheapest method was to simultaneously draw and dry thin sheets of glass from molten glass which yielded products of inferior quality. A more sophisticated method called for a system producing continuous ribbons of glass between rollers. The costliest method involved casting glass on an iron surface and undergoing multiple processes of grinding, smoothing, and polishing all done by hand until the 1860s. After the 1860s, machinery made it possible to increase productivity and cut cost, but the technique was still time-consuming and expensive, while the product was high-priced.\(^{45}\)

In 1869, there existed two plate glass manufacturers in the United States. The 1869 *Scientific American* recorded a manufacturer based in New York and another in New Albany, Indiana, which at the time was still in its infancy. However, in most records found today, the latter, owned by John B. Ford, is promoted as “the first American plate-glass manufacturer.” Ford’s company installed the first store-use plate glass window in John Heib’s tailor shop in New

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Albany. A new plate glass production method, the float glass method, was also invented in this period but did not become feasible until after 1920. It is a method involving ribbons of glass floating above a molten tin bath, making it the most efficient and least labor-intensive way to produce plate glass. During Macy’s construction period around 1902, plate glass manufacturing was in the process of development and increased popularity. Given the time frame, domestic plate glass production was already feasible but remained a high-priced feature for retail establishments.

c. Department Store Window Dressing

The increased productivity and popularity of plate-glass show windows facilitated the development of window dressing as a legitimate career. Department stores often employed in-house display designers, also known as “window dressers.” There were a variety of publications dedicated to the field of window dressing, ranging from journals to books, justifying the social recognition the professional field gained in the past.

L. Frank Baum, the author of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz, advanced the professionalization of show window designers. He earned a living by editing The Show Window journal years before publishing his famous children’s book. In the same year of the release of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Baum also published The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors. Baum praised the power of show windows in his work by claiming that “no matter how much she (a customer) purchases under these conditions the credit of the sale belongs to the

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49 Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern, 66
window.”\textsuperscript{50} As the founder of the National Association of Window Trimmers of America, Baum emphasized the importance of capturing viewer’s imagination in show window designs. He advocated for the use of live performances, magic tricks, and mannequins in attractive poses as window dressing techniques. Baum’s idea for window dressing resembled theatrical and cinematic spectatorship in many aspects.\textsuperscript{51} In \textit{History of Shopping}, author Dorothy Davis talks about the social influence of show windows as an activity to educate, and remarked that department stores educated “the tastes of the rising middle class” long before the popularization of cinema.\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{4.1.2. Experience-triggering feature: Show Windows}

\textit{a. Design of Macy’s Show Windows}

Macy’s target customer group was the middle-class, those somewhat sensitive to price. Therefore, unlike upscale department stores in the city which targeted a more exclusive customer group, the design of Macy’s was not as lavish, but stayed true to its brand identity and core functions. Macy's choices of placing elevators on the sides, low ceiling heights, unbroken floor space, as well as the extensive use of show windows revealed its design rationale. In addition to the target customers for its core business, Macy’s intended audience for its show windows was the public at large.

The original structure of Macy’s consisted of display windows and polished red marble ashlar on the first story.\textsuperscript{53} A total of 180,000 square feet of plate glass was used in the 1902 construction of Macy’s where a considerable portion was dedicated to its show windows.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52}Dorothy Davis, “Modern Times” in \textit{A History of Shopping} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1966) 292
\textsuperscript{54}“Fireproofing the Macy Store”, Safety Maintenance & Production Vol 4 (New York: The Insurance Press, July-December 1902) 510
However, the idea of lining the entire first floor with double height windows was not a widely appreciated concept back then for both customers and designers. The architects involved in designing the Macy’s building, August W. Cordes and Theodore De Lemos, were not convinced by the concept even after the project completion. According to De Lemos, “the structure apparently stands on a glass base…and this is the most awkward possible condition for architectural effect.”

The “architectural awkwardness” however, translated into a commercial success. Macy’s vision in innovative ways of activating advertising space, the evolving window dressing profession, and the advancements in plate-glass mass production in the 20th century mutually influenced one another and catalyzed the idea of window dressing becoming a recognized professional and artistic field. Macy's also contributed to making window shopping a praised activity, leading to these windows becoming a prominent feature in department store buildings.

b. Use of Macy’s Show Windows

As the public gradually accepted show windows and regarded it as a symbol of the architecture of the department store, it is not to forget that these windows were only implemented to reveal what was behind them and to deliver an experience of looking through these windows rather than looking at them.

Macy’s utilized show windows to display goods, attract crowds and attention, and engage with cultural and social affairs. As the window dressing career became legitimate and celebrated, designers began to incorporate more artistic and visually compelling elements, and more publications dedicated to show window designs began to emerge. The entertainment industry also

56Jan Whitaker, *Service and Style: how the American department store fashioned the middle class* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, August 2006)
has had a significant influence on department store show window designs. A former display manager of Macy’s, Owen Rossiter once remarked that he “sees and finds ideas everywhere, in theaters, churches, or even at the movies.”

Rossiter at the time worked for Macy’s very own display department dedicated to show window designs and the team constantly came up with innovative display ideas. One of the projects were described in the January 1921 publication of *Merchants Record and Show Window*. W. A. Malet, the then head of the department, proposed a unified blue theme throughout all windows. At the time, it was a pioneering act to coordinate the theme for all show windows of a store. As the publication praised, it was a “demonstration of the strength imparted to a stretch of windows by having a single idea persist throughout the entire length.”

Another praised work of Malet was a display of girl’s dresses. *Merchants Record and Show Window* described it as “simple and pleasing.”

![Figure 15 Girls’ dresses display by W. A. Malet for Macy’s New York, circa 1921](image-url)

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59 Ibid. 26.
However, cases like these are hard to trace today because as much as the profession was of great importance to the business, department stores did not particularly value window dressing records. The head of design was not the most stable job, and as the head changed, internal documentation of window dressing works associated with that person would often be destroyed.\textsuperscript{60}

Apart from the day-to-day designs of show windows, Macy’s put up special displays during festive seasons. R.H Macy was a pioneer in the American festive retail phenomena. The theatrical experience of department store show windows reached its peak during holiday seasons, when the display became an entire cinematic event that was meant to be admired and talked about, and not necessarily linked to consumption. Macy’s was the first store to establish holiday window designs purely for a theatrical experience.\textsuperscript{61} For instance, the store decided to base their 1933 Christmas window designs on the latest movie \textit{Alice in Wonderland}.\textsuperscript{62} The concept was not directly related to any product advertisement, and the purpose was not to draw people into the store to purchase. They were meant to be looked at from the outside for everybody and be talked about by everybody. The experience was open to people from every social background possible. These window designs became a way to link, record, and inform the various cultural events happening at the time in society.

\textsuperscript{61}Keri Hanson, “The History of Macy’s: from Humble Beginnings to Stunning Success,” Macy’s Tourism Marketing and Development
\textsuperscript{62}“Nation’s Department Stores to Feature ‘Alice’ Windows”, \textit{Variety}, November, 1933
c. Public Experience of Macy’s Show Windows

The action of looking into a show window was an acquired habit in the late 19th century. Many people considered show windows unnecessary and window gazing an undignified act. To encourage people to look into show windows, not only did store owners make an effort in bettering their designs, some department stores even hired women to dress up as high society patrons and gaze into their windows to attract others to follow. Macy’s, as a popular brand among a wide range of customers, played an important role in introducing the action of “window gazing” into people’s life.

Macy’s and its designers successfully communicated the cinematic and theatrical experience they intended to bring to the audience through show windows. This is evident through historical depictions of show windows. The drawing below (figure 17) was a depiction of Macy’s at its original location before relocating to Herald Square. It emphasized the importance and the dramatic effect of the ground floor show windows by exaggerating the window size and the number of viewers, as well as by reducing the size of human figures in relation to windows. This

63 “The Spectator”, *The Outlook*, January 1898, 265-266
technique was found in many early drawings of department stores. Although drawn with exaggerations, this drawing highlights the public experience of window gazing: big, clear plate-glass windows, dramatic displays, and crowds. Another popular public experience associated with Macy’s show windows were to see them lit by artificial lighting at night. Many period photos documented such an experience.

Figure 17 An early rendering of an animated display at R.H. Macy’s in New York City, circa 1884

Figure 18 “Around the World at Christmas Time”, 1933.

Show windows at Macy’s contain a public place-based experience open to everyone. “Macy’s window is well understood as the ultimate in public exposure.”66 People gazed into show windows by themselves and within a crowd. Macy’s show windows gradually became an attraction and a reason to visit the store.

4.1.3 Section Conclusion

Macy’s show windows constituted a very public experience available to all social class without any barriers to entry. Not all stores took the opportunity to attract more gazes. In the 19th and early 20th century, wealthier customers preferred businesses that kept a low profile.67 Upscale department stores during that period like A.T. Stewart, B Altman or Arnold Constable did not put as much effort in show window designs and considered it an “undignified” act. Macy’s, emerging in the beginning of the 20th century as a department store welcoming a broader clientele, understood the importance of show windows to attract customers and pedestrian gazes. The store recognized its ability to address cultural phenomena of the time through window dressing. As aforementioned, the 20th century also marks the institutionalization of the art of window dressing and mass production of plate glass. They supported the growing interest in department store show

67Jan Whitaker, The World of Department Stores, 181
windows. Children, families, and tourists gathered in front of these massive windows to admire and discuss the latest display.

Show windows at Macy’s was an innovation in architecture, retail, and the culture at large. The displays and designs were extensions of the interior and showcased the best the store had to offer and more. Their presence celebrated plate-glass manufacturing and mass production, praised extensive advertising, and emphasized the artistic and experiential qualities of a retail venue.

This analysis draws different aspects of historical accounts together to demonstrate the multilayered nature of the experience-triggering feature. There is adequate information from all three aspects to conclude on the critical role place-based experience plays in providing meanings to the feature and the place.

4.2 Case Study 2: B. Altman

This case study analyzes light fixtures as a type of experience-triggering feature for B. Altman. In Contextual History, B. Altman introduces the company’s business and architectural history. American Department Store Lighting Designs 1880-1930 offers overall background on the development of electric lights from 1880 to 1930 in American department stores, providing historical context to understand lighting fixture choices at B. Altman.

Lighting fixtures at B. Altman is analyzed based on the three categories present in the framework: design, use, and public accounts. Design offers an analysis of the choice of lighting fixtures. Use discusses the functions of these light fixtures in the 1900s. Public accounts discusses the experience these lighting fixtures brought to people of the past.
4.2.1 Contextual History

a. B. Altman

B. Altman & Company was a department store corporation in New York City active in the late 19th and 20th century. It is an example of a dry goods store turned prominent department store in the United States. The site is 365 Fifth Avenue in New York City. The building occupies an entire block within the boundary of Fifth Avenue, Madison Avenue, East 34th Street and East 35th Street. The building was originally designed by the architecture firm Trowbridge & Livingston and was constructed between 1905 and 1906. The original 8-story palazzo design included sections that were still holdouts by the time the new store opened for business, and the entire design was fully implemented in 1911. The same architects also carried out the design for the 1913 addition extending to Madison Avenue.68

B. Altman targeted middle- to upper-class customers, “for whom cheap prices are not the first desideratum.”69 The department store aimed to cultivate a shopping experience of “integrity,

68 “B. Altman & Company Department Store Building”, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, January 2015
69 Ibid.
excellence of quality and efficiency of service.” Amid its customers’ claimed insensitivity to prices, the business still stayed competitive in terms of pricing. Being able to purchase goods directly from manufacturers meant that B. Altman could sell its products at a lower price to its customers, often far below the actual market values, as claimed by the company. The store even sent buyers to Asia to select and purchase rugs for unique designs and lower prices.

Among the three case studies in this thesis, B. Altman remains in the middle in terms of the social class it targeted. One of the characteristics of B. Altman was their use of interior designs to elevate customer experience and promote shopping as an enjoyable activity. Tessa Maffucci, a researcher on consumer culture in early department stores, concluded that B. Altman cultivated a social experience of leisure and luxury intended to make patrons feel pampered.

b. American Department Store Lighting Designs 1880-1930

The introduction of electric lights to department store interiors allowed the often-massive space to be illuminated when needed, leading to longer operating hours, better working conditions and improved shopping environments, as well as letting people enjoy an innovation that was not available to all households until the 1920s. Although boasting to be “well-lit,” these lights were far from what we came to know as interior illuminations today. In the late 1800s, the two major kinds of electric lights used in department stores were arc lamps and incandescent lamps. The former illuminated with a blue-tinted hue, while the latter provided a yellow glow to everything. Frequently, department stores used both lights so that the color distortions could offset each

72Tessa Maffucci, “Fashioning Desire at B. Altman & Co.: Ethics and Consumer Culture in Early Department Stores” (Master’s thesis, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2016)
other.\textsuperscript{73} It was partially due to the inadequate lighting systems, that many department stores of that period had skylights and extensive windows. Customers were to bring goods near store windows to examine the actual color and texture.\textsuperscript{74}

At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, department stores adopted the latest innovations of lightings without color distortions. Store interiors were able to rely on these lightings and subsequently blocked out window openings as they were no longer needed, in order to utilize more floor space.\textsuperscript{75} Blocking of windows or the reduction in window openings acts as proof of effective light systems in department stores and as an evidence to date department store architecture. Store buildings constructed after the 1930s had fewer windows designed on their facades.

In addition to sourcing reliable artificial lightings, department stores also placed great emphasis on light fixture designs. A 1921 bulletin from Edison Lamp Works (of the General Electric Company) detailed several general considerations for store lighting, including the basic requirement for the store to be well-lit, mandatory placements of shields to avoid glare, as well as artistic designs of lighting equipment but only to the point so that customer’s attention would not be removed from the products.\textsuperscript{76} The bulletin also suggested that it was common to see different types of light fixtures in various stores because lightings were an element expressing the characteristics of stores.\textsuperscript{77} In the 1939 publication \textit{Store Interior Planning and Display}, the author emphasized on the equal importance of the ability to illuminate a space and the aesthetics of lighting fixture designs. He remarked that “illumination must be considered in relation to the

\textsuperscript{73}Jan Whitaker, \textit{Service and Style: how the American department store fashioned the middle class} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, August 2006)
\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{76}A. L. Powell, \textit{The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores} (Harrison: Edison Lamp Works of General Electric Company, October 1921)
\textsuperscript{77}\textit{Ibid.}
character of the interior, the nature of the merchandise, and the more exacting requirements of display.” 78 The book then went on to discuss various styles of lighting fixtures in details, demonstrating the fact that lighting designs were indeed an essential feature in the department store interiors.

In the June 1916 edition of Lighting Journal, a commentary on a pendant light designed specifically for the department store H. & S Pogue Co. in Cincinnati offered insights into the role lighting fixtures played in creating a place experience. The article described the fixture as a semi-indirect lighting unit that offered “a simple but very pleasing design” through its tassel ornamentation, husk, and moonstone glass, and possessed “distinctiveness and individuality.” The article also noted the fact that designing and providing lighting fixture for department stores were a competitive business at the time.79

4.2.2 Experience-triggering feature: Lighting Fixtures

a. Design of Lighting Fixtures at B Altman

When designing a basic retail environment, designers used lightings to purely provide sources of illumination.80 However, mid to high-end retail venues like B. Altman put more effort into the designs of lighting fixtures themselves and relied on them to cultivate an intended place-based experience. A customer visiting a higher-end department store like B. Altman had to be made comfortable in the space to take their time before making a purchase. The design of both the light fixtures and the illumination, catered to create a specific atmosphere the store intended.81

81 Ibid.
Historical depictions of B. Altman’s store interior show that lighting design was of great emphasis to B Altman. There was a variety of designs present in the store, and the fact that they were drawn in details on the official brochure further proved the importance of the feature in the overall design of the store interior.\textsuperscript{82} Historical records show that the procurement of store-used decorative goods was not bounded by one single provider. B Altman sourced its decorative ornaments and displaying systems from various parties. At least two manufacturers were recorded to have provided lightings to the department store.

Many of the depicted lighting fixtures were likely products of the General Electric Company. Not only did their appearances in drawings resembled those from the lighting company’s brochure, but a record from General Electric Company also showed that B Altman ordered “fourteen-hundred and eighty-four form 12 edge-wise wound direct current multiple lamps, complete with casings, reflectors, globes.”\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{lighting Fixture.png}
\caption{Lighting fixture from General Electric Company brochure and light fixture drawing from B Altman’s official brochure}
\end{figure}

Evidence also suggests that some designs might came from Clark Electric Co, a company specialized in arc lamp production based in New York. The company had supplied arc lamps to

\begin{itemize}
\item[B. Altman & Co., B Altman & Co’s Enlarged Store: Fifth Avenue-Madison Avenue, Thirty-Fourth and Thirty-Fifth Streets, New York]
\item[\textsuperscript{83} “Supply Department” in General Electric Company Review, New York: General Electric Company, November 1905, 7]
\end{itemize}
major department stores in New York City such as Macy’s and B Altman since when they were still in their original locations. Their design styles boasted more elaborated metal parts and consisted of enclosing globes usually finished with a tip.

In the early 20th century, electric lighting was still in its development phase. From the images above, we could identify the use of pendant lightings with globes of diffusing glassware,

Figure 22 Clark Electric Co. light fixtures (left and middle), and drawing of B Altman light fixture (right)

Figure 23 Detailed drawings of light fixtures in the B Altman 1914 brochure

hanging from the ceiling by metal chains. Glassware enclosed illuminations enabled the production of a partially corrected light and reduced orange-red rays of glare.\(^8\) The glare was one of the most important factors to consider when designing lightings in department stores.\(^6\) The technique of using diffusing glassware was immensely popular during this period and was highly praised by major manufacturers like General Electric Co.

The aesthetic qualities of these light fixtures came from modifying the designs of their technical features such as reflectors, hooks and chains, and metal parts. At B Altman, similar to many upscale department stores at the time, lighting choices were dominated by pendant lights with reflectors or enclosing globes and suspended by either a single stem or chains. Prismatic glass bowl reflector was one of the basic designs (Figure 24, left), but was highly efficient in directing light to desired angles. It could accommodate a variety of interior designs including darker wall and ceiling colors due to the transparency of the glass bowl to allow light to gain maximal reflection. Sometimes the glass bowls would appear to be opalescent (Figure 24, middle and right) or tinted, making the light semi-direct or completely indirect. The expressive design sacrifices its capability to illuminate. Hybrids had been designed to be more maintenance-friendly. For example, there were designs of diffusing bowls with an opalescent bottom and transparent upper-half, so that dust collected within the bowl was not visible, thus requiring less cleaning.\(^7\)

\(^6\)A. L. Powell, *The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores*
\(^7\)Ibid.
Enclosing globe (figure 25) was another widely used fixture type for department stores. Shapes may vary according to each store, and the globes were mostly opalescent. Spherical globe sends equal amounts of light to every direction and was said to bring “cheerfulness and brightness” to a store. Flattened globes gained its popularity in the 20th century. (figure 25 shows flattened globes) They work more efficiently than conventional globes as the light goes straight up and down and less sideways.88

Lighting installations were extensive throughout the ceilings of B. Altman. Large quantities of light fixtures were implemented in the store to give a “soft flood of light in all directions necessary for the high-class shop.”89 Most of them were of small-scale pendant designs and had

88Ibid.
89The National Engineer, Volumes 21-22 (December 1917) 475
organized spacing. One of the general rules was to not place lamps farther apart than the ceiling height, and they should be installed as high up as possible towards the ceiling so that they could work efficiently without drawing unnecessary attention.90

The widespread of pendant lightings resulted in chandeliers becoming less popular in public spaces as pendant lightings could provide sufficient illumination without having to group several lamps together.91 However, chandeliers were still used in private areas or areas in need of more elaborate designs. At B. Altman, chandeliers were found in the president’s office suite.92

Figure 26 President's Office Suite at B Altman

b. Use of Lighting Fixtures at B Altman

The primary use of all lighting fixtures was to illuminate a space. Artistic features remained optional and diverse but were all catering to the need of better illumination. Therefore, the use of lighting fixtures at B. Altman has to be examined by both the characteristics of illumination and artistic features present in the lighting fixture.

90A. L. Powell, *The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores*
91Ibid.
92B. Altman & Co., *B Altman & Co’s Enlarged Store: Fifth Avenue-Madison Avenue, Thirty-Fourth and Thirty-Fifth Streets, New York*
As sources of illumination, these ceiling lights contributed to the general ambiance of the space instead of casting light on specific cabinets or objects. Before the 1920s, when most households were not equipped with electric lightings, these sophisticated fixtures became features to be appreciated and admired together with the overall design aesthetics of the store interiors. Lighting fixture designs implemented according to each department’s decoration needs was also a symbol of an upscale department store. B. Altman used different styles of illumination for its varying departments, contributing to different ambiances.

In some departments, artistic features predominated the choice of lighting fixtures, including ladies’ waiting room and the lobby area. Soft, diffused lights coming from sources with elaborated designs harmonizing with the overall ambiance allowed patrons to rest in comfort. In areas such as the entrance and places involving dense foot traffic, lighting fixtures boasted designs that could supplement the ornate interior. The floor lamp beside the stairs in B Altman harmonized with the design language and stood out as a peculiar design by itself. However, it should be noted that in the early 1900s, artificial lights at B. Altman were only used in the short operating hours after dark or during bad weathers.

c. Public Experience of Lighting Fixtures at B Altman

Management of B. Altman understood the importance of lighting fixture to its store ambiance. In a brochure published by the company, light fixtures featured prominently in every drawing depictions of the interior space. The store intended lightings to be a part of the experience at B. Altman. This could be seen from the detailed drawings of different lighting styles.

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94A. L. Powell, *The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores*
95B. Altman & Co., *B Altman & Co’s Enlarged Store: Fifth Avenue-Madison Avenue, Thirty-Fourth and Thirty-Fifth Streets, New York*
in the public space of the building, as compared to the minimal sketches used to outline lightings in staff areas. Electric light fixtures were innovations of the 19th and 20th century, and one of department stores’ perceived functions was to showcase and provide a place for commoners to experience the latest innovations.96 Many did not enjoy electric lightings in their own homes until the 1920s.97 B. Altman provided an opportunity for its middle- to upper-class customers to experience the technology firsthand.

Figure 27 Customers strolling through first floor hallway at B Altman

B Altman’s design of regularly spaced layout and pendant fitting lightings throughout the space were considered fashionable and modern in its time.98 Not all visitors had the opportunity to see these light fixtures in use, because they were only lit when natural light was not sufficient99, but all were able to walk under the large quantity of neatly organized light fixtures, which constituted the experience associated with these light fixtures.

96Lingling Lian, Creating Paradise for Consumption: Department stores and Modern Urban Culture in Shanghai 128-138
97Jan Whitaker, “Shedding Light on the Merchandise” in Service and Style: how the American department store fashioned the middle class
98Albert Edward Hammond, “Interior Illumination” in Store Interior Planning & Display 84-98
99Jan Whitaker, “Shedding Light on the Merchandise” in Service and Style: how the American department store fashioned the middle class
Electric light manufacturers considered department stores to be some of their most valuable customers and advertisements. Manufacturers placed advertisements in journals and magazines and specifically mentioning their works done in popular departments stores. They also published brochures dedicated to department store lighting designs.\textsuperscript{100} General Electric Co. also pointed out that as compared to other programs, department stores were more consistent in maintaining the overall conditions of lighting fixtures, because they were to present the most pleasing experience to their customers.\textsuperscript{101}

4.2.3 Section Conclusion

This case study identifies light fixtures as the experience-triggering feature of B Altman. The case study utilizes the analytical framework to explore the place-based experience associated with these light fixtures. While extensive sources documented the design and the function of light fixtures in the early 1900s, it proved to be challenging to identify historic accounts depicting a public experience the light fixtures brought to patrons. This group of experience-triggering feature

\textsuperscript{100}A. L. Powell, \textit{The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores}
\textsuperscript{101}A. L. Powell, \textit{The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores} 17-18
sits in an awkward position of being both an aesthetic feature to be admired, and a functional element to provide illumination without attracting unnecessary attention. Therefore, even though they contributed extensively to the overall experience, they might not always be recognized and explicitly appraised. Although records for public experience associated with the light fixtures were not as extensive, the design and the use in part explains the experience these light fixtures brought to the public, both from a decorative perspective and from a functional perspective as a source of illumination. As a feature with a specific function, it proves to be adequate to draw conclusions on the historic experience from its use and design, supported by limited public accounts and contextual information on the feature.

4.3 Case Study 3: Arnold Constable

This case study examines the Mansard roof present on the exterior of the Arnold Constable building as the experience-triggering feature. Arnold Constable & Company from Contextual History looks at the development of the company and its positioning in the society as both a trendy upscale department store and an advocate for French designs and culture. Second Empire Style in New York City offers background information on the emergence and development of the architectural style the Mansard roof belongs to in New York City, which helps to build a case for both the architectural significance and social representations the Mansard roof contained in the past.

The Mansard roof analysis consists of the three perspectives in the analytical framework: design, use, and public accounts. Design looks at the physical fabric in isolation, and the rationale behind such a design. Use examines both the intended immediate function and any indirect or acquired functions associated with the feature. Public accounts discusses the experience the roof brought to people of the past with its physical presence and the use.
4.3.1 Contextual History

Figure 30 Arnold Constable & Co. building, showing Fifth Avenue facade looking East, 1877

a. Arnold Constable & Company

The Arnold Constable & Company at 881 Broadway was an upscale department store in Ladies Mile (now Ladies Mile Historic District) in New York City. The building faces Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and East 19th Street. Architect Griffith Thomas designed the original structure. Constructed between 1868 and 1869, the original structure faced Broadway and East 19th Street. In 1873, the building expanded block long along East 19th Street, extending from Broadway to Fifth Avenue. The enlarged structure accommodated new carpet, furniture, and wholesale departments. Its signature Mansard roof was an addition to the structure from the same construction period in 1873.102 Apart from the needed expansion of the store, New York Magazine described the additional space and roof as a response to the opening of Arnold Constable’s rival Lord & Taylor in the same neighborhood.103 The expanded structure was known as the “Palace of Trade.” The New York Times regarded it as “the largest, most commodious, and best-lighted stores to be found in the city.”104

Arnold Constable was a top-tier department store in terms of the clientele it served. A considerable collection of goods the store housed were sourced from France. The store promoted French products and culture extensively and could be seen as both an influence and an outcome to the wide popularity of French elements in the city.

News articles depicting scenes inside the store were available every new fashion season when products arrived and were put on display.\textsuperscript{105} However, Arnold Constable rarely appeared publicly in the form of advertisements, due to its positioning in the market. The business was also among the few in the city that resented the idea of extensive advertisements and show windows.

\textit{b. Second Empire Style in New York City}

Second Empire style was popular in New York City between the 1850s and 1900s, the period right after the Civil War. The style originated from France when Napoleon III looked to develop a new national architectural style and took reference from French Renaissance designs. The style soon spread to other parts of Europe and the East Coast of the United States, facilitated by the World’s Exhibitions that took place in Paris in 1855 and 1867.\textsuperscript{106}

Things French had always been popular in New York City in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Paris was considered to be “the most admired” source for importing textiles, wallpapers, and furniture.\textsuperscript{107} The Second Empire style became one of those French elements that were warmly welcomed and extensively used. It was an urban architectural style developed for the city planning of Paris. It was adopted in the United States to address the “unprecedented urban growth.”\textsuperscript{108} Designers and

\textsuperscript{106}“Second Empire // Mansard style 1860 – 1900”, \textit{Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission}. www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/second-empire.html
\textsuperscript{107}“The Second Empire: C.1855-1875”, \textit{Old-House Journal} (Vermont, January 1992) 33
developers saw the style as a solution to growth in verticality after the introduction of steel-frame architecture and elevators which enabled buildings to be built taller. Critics viewed the style as appropriate for those seeking “visibility, prestige, and financial profits.” The style’s underlying characteristics of prestige and authority, its connection to Paris and France, as well as its less controversial nature as compared to built styles such as the Victorian Gothic, made it more suitable for post-Civil War commercial and government buildings in the United States. Commercial establishments like Arnold Constable, Lord and Taylor, hotels such as the Waldorf Astoria, the Manhattan and the Plaza, as well as schools, apartment buildings, insurance company buildings, and post offices were among the many that favored a Second Empire architectural design.

Figure 31 Lord & Taylor, circa 1905.

Figure 32 The original Waldorf Astoria (now demolished) 1897

Ibid.
The characteristics of the Second Empire style are elaborated stone facades with columned windows, and dramatic two-story high shingle Mansard roof with dormer windows.\textsuperscript{110} Mansard roof was one of the defining features of the Second Empire style. It was named after its original designer François Mansart. Although the Mansard roof has existed since the 1600s, it was the Second Empire Style that brought it to its worldwide recognition. In the United States, the Mansard roof had an underlying symbolization of prosperity and power. The conceptual influence of the Mansard roof remained long after Second Empire style’s decline in popularity, and many corporate headquarters continued to employ high roofs resembling a Mansard roof in their designs to show power and prosperity.\textsuperscript{111}

4.3.2 Experience-triggering feature: Mansard Roof

\textit{a. Design of the Mansard Roof at Arnold Constable}

The Mansard roof on the Arnold Constable store building was a later addition three years after the completion of the initial phase of the building. The roof was added during a period of the widespread of the Second Empire Style in New York City. During that period mansard roofs could be spotted on commercial and residential establishments alike. The Mansard roof on the Arnold Constable department store was a two-story addition, designed by architect Griffith Thomas who also designed the entire department store architecture. Thomas specialized in using Second Empire style and cast-iron framing, which he was able to demonstrate on the Arnold Constable building.\textsuperscript{112} Some of his other buildings include the Pike Opera House (1868), the National Park Bank (1868), and the Gunther Building (1870s).

The store owner decided to enlarge the store by extending it along 19th Street, during the same period as the Mansard roof addition. The bulky dark-colored roof topped both the original marble front side on Broadway and its new cast-iron façade extending to Fifth Avenue. The roof appears to contrast significantly to the rest of the façade in color, making it even more visible to people on the street and from afar.

The iron Mansard roof with slate shingles had dormer windows, iron cornice, and delicate wrought-ironworks. The original parapet, balustrade, and finials had to be removed to build the new roof. The roof appears in three tower parts on both the Broadway and the Fifth Avenue side, each side having two square corner pavilions connecting to a central pavilion. The roof on East 19th Street, the long side of the building, consisted of 6 major pavilions connected by hyphens. Within the roof, there were two additional levels used for operational and storage purposes, restricting public entry. The implementation of the Mansard roof increased the building height by two stories and gave the building more presence in the neighborhood where more commercial establishments began to emerge.

b. Use of the Mansard Roof at Arnold Constable

The two major functions of the roof were to make a statement with the appearance and to increase floor space. The presence of the Mansard roof made both an instant and long-term statement to its surrounds. Arnold Constable was one of the conservative department stores targeting the upper-class. Although it had first-floor show windows, accounts from newspaper such as the Outlook\textsuperscript{114} and historians including Jan Whitaker\textsuperscript{115}, recorded that management at Arnold Constable opposed the ideas of putting up signage or using show windows to attract customers’ attention, which at the time was also considered an undignified act. Therefore, similar to A.T. Stewart, its architecture became its way of building an identity in the city. Thus, the Mansard roof became an effective tool in achieving the goal.

The additional two-story space was used for manufacturing, supplying and sustaining the business downstairs which by then, extended from retailing fashionable apparel to carpet and upholstery, as well as wholesaling. Records reveal that there were tanks on the top floor of the building holding 3,000 to 5,000 gallons of water in each container. The tanks were connected to pumps from the basement and the store utilized the water collected.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114}“The Spectator”, \textit{The Outlook}, January 1898, 265-266
\textsuperscript{115}Jan Whitaker, \textit{The World of Department Stores}, 181
\textsuperscript{116}“Arnold, Constable & Co.’s New Wholesale Store” \textit{The Independent: Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economics Tendencies}, Jul, 1877, American Periodicals.
c. Public Experience Associated with the Mansard Roof at Arnold Constable

Arnold Constable was the most prominent among the three department stores discussed in this thesis. In its heyday, its clientele included wives and families of Grover Cleveland, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt. At a time when “things French” were popular in the United States, Arnold Constable provided the latest fashion right from its offices in Paris and Lyon.

The height and massing made a prominent presence for the building in the surrounding neighborhood. Guidebook publisher Moses King describes the structure as “huge and magnificent.” The New York Herald called the building “one of the finest edifices in the city.” The tribune referred to it as “the White House in the Skies.” The Independent remarked that the structure’s massing and its distinctive designs made it “visible for many blocks up or down the Avenue.” Almost all historical account praised the addition of the Mansard roof and recognized the positive impact it brought to the experience and identity of the building and the business.

As previously mentioned, the Second Empire built style came to New York City as a fashionable architectural trend, in a time when things French were celebrated. As “one of the most fashionable retail dry-goods houses,” and as a major institution promoting French goods, Arnold Constable was very well-suited to adopting an additional Mansard roof as a bold statement about the building’s social identity and function, proving its French-ness and trendiness further to its

118 Moses King, King’s Handbook of New York City (Boston, September 1892) 788
121 “A Great Establishment”, The Carpet Trade Review, volume 4, January, 1877, 92
patrons and the public. However, this is not to say that the public experience associated with the Mansard roof was the sense of trendiness and French. Even though the Mansard roof could be linked to Arnold Constable’s Parisian connections, the sense of fashion and French was not necessarily an experience encountered by the public. Given the context of Second Empire style in New York City, it is evident that the public understood the underlying characteristics of prominence and authority through the Mansard roof better than its French references. Guidebooks and magazines often described the roof as a prominent feature to the majestic Arnold Constable building\textsuperscript{123}, but rarely depicted the context as a department store housed under a French roof. To the public, the roof represented Arnold Constable, but not a French-inspired architecture in New York. The roof was an advertisement for the store, and essentially an embodiment of the identity of the store. People immediately recognized the store when seeing the roof from afar.

4.3.3 Section Conclusion

The Mansard roof is a feature with the experience residing in an urban context associated with power and visibility and relied on the contextual understanding of Arnold Constable’s retail business and the Second Empire Style in New York. People in the past were not necessarily all familiar with the term Second Empire Style, but the context determined that they were able to understand the experience and emotions associated with the built style.

The information gathered according to the framework is not as extensive as the previous two case studies, partially due to the fact that Arnold Constable was in business in the 1860s, when department stores hadn’t become the global cultural phenomenon, as well as the owner’s intention to keep a low profile. The lack of documented public experience associated with the Mansard roof

\textsuperscript{123}Moses King, King’s Handbook of New York City 788
was due to its nature as an architectural ornamentation to be looked at, thus preventing people from entering into any further interaction with the feature. The study also lacks concrete evidence of how the public viewed the Mansard roof at Arnold Constable, except for accounts such as newspaper and architecture critiques. The overall Second Empire history and representation is utilized to fill in the gap of the missing information, resulting in a relatively general analysis of a Second Empire Style design feature in New York City’s urban environment.

**Case Studies Conclusion**

This section concludes the three case studies. The assessment of the tentative framework is available in the overall conclusion of the thesis. Analyses on the historical experience associated with the three experience-triggering features present at the three case study sites show the rich experience each of the features and sites contained and offered to the public in the past. The research justifies the importance of historical place-based experience in understanding the historical meanings of a place.

The experience-triggering feature identified for Macy’s is the collection of ground floor show windows. The experience they were associated with was achieved by the event of looking through these show windows at curated displays, by oneself, or in a crowd. The experience-triggering feature is a tangible architectural feature which still attracts and engages with visitors today allowing audiences in the present to experience a feature in the same way it was experienced historically.

The experience-triggering feature in the B. Altman case study is light fixtures. It is a collection of tangible interior design feature where the function and the aesthetics both contributed to the historical experience. The experience in focus here comes more from their role as a part of the design language, both regarding the design of the fixtures and the illumination they provided.
The experience-triggering feature in the Arnold Constable case study is the Mansard roof. The experience is directly associated with the historical meanings and identity of the store, and the social connotations of the Second Empire Style. The roof acted as both a decorative element and a symbol of the building’s identity and social status. The experience is generated by looking at the physical structure with an understanding of all of these factors.

Today, the three experience-triggering features have undergone different treatments and are in varying conditions. Plate-glass show windows remain on the first floor of Macy’s, but are underused. Current situation of the show windows does not generate the same experience as in the past. The action of “looking through” the window becomes “looking at” it, constituting a completely different experience. A show window needs an event of “looking through them at the displays” to trigger the experience and activate its true meanings. The action of “looking through” the show windows is the key to experience associated with this feature, both for the people practicing the action, and for the public seeing the people in action.

Light fixtures are no longer present in the B Altman building currently serving as the City University of New York’s Graduate Center. A more standardized lighting design replaces original interior lightings. The constant change and improvements in functional features such as lighting,
and change in program, as well as the lack of regulations in interior landmarking act as obstacles in the preservation of the interior elements.

The Mansard roof at the former Arnold Constable department store building remains relatively intact. The building today is used for retail and offices. When the building is no longer seen in the same way by the public as they did in the store’s heyday, the symbolism aspect of the function is removed and the historical experience transforms. While physical preservation could keep the roof intact, it is not enough to preserve the Mansard roof as an experience-triggering feature. The understanding of the place and the built style’s social meanings was crucial to receiving the authentic experience, and such an understanding is removed from the building today due to changes in the spatial program and the society at large.
To illustrate the application of historical experience analysis in preservation, a few precedents that could potentially incorporate the analysis outcome are listed. While it remains challenging for people today to encounter the authentic experience associated with these features, preservationists could come up with creative approaches in offering interpretations that could reactivate the features’ experiential qualities and mimic the historical experience to aid in the understanding of the historical meanings of the place.

Show windows at Macy’s are relatively easy to be reactivated as the physical fabric, the retail business, and the contextual understanding are all present. It needs intriguing programs and displays to be able to attract people’s attention today. To be eye-catching is more challenging than in the 1900s due to the exponential increase in types of leisure activities and entertainments available to people today. Inviting collaborators from other professional fields could bring new ideas to window displays. The example below shows one of the window displays designed by filmmaker David Lynch for Galeries Lafayette in Paris. It consists of drama, technology, and movements that would attract gazes and form crowds.

![Figure 38 Galeries Lafayette show window by David Lynch](image)

Audience engagement with innovative technology is another way to invite the audience to interact with show windows. The example below showcases an interactive show window of John
Lewis Oxford Street in London. It utilizes both interactive technologies and audio to attract pedestrian attention.

To recreate an experience associated with a lost or non-functioning feature such as lighting fixtures at B Altman, preservationists could look into installation-based projects. They are capable of informing a past experience when executed well, and they could be done in ways that do not affect buildings adapted to new uses.

The below example is an interactive three-dimensional installation by Rachel Feinstein at the Hudson Yards. It takes reference from scenography and successfully offers context knowledge, historical depictions, and audience interactions through this large-scale installation project.
For exterior architectural ornamentation with symbolistic values, interpretive events occurring on the exterior such as projection mapping could be feasible in terms of communicating history and bringing back the gazes the building used to gain. In the case of Arnold Constable, this method also echoes with the company’s intention of making the building the advertisements instead of actual advertising signage.

The example below is a projection mapping illustrating 600 years of history of the Prague old town clock tower. This is an ideal way to explain the historical context to people and draw people’s attention to the building, and could potentially reach more audience and communicate information more effectively than descriptive texts.
Figure 42 A scene of the 600 Years of Prague Clock Tower Projection Mapping, 2010.
Conclusion

The research established a method in analyzing historical place-based experience associated with architectural design features, also known as “experience-triggering features” in this thesis. Conventional architecture preservation emphasizes the rational and tangible aspect of a place, whereas experience preservation attempts to identify physical features associated with experiences in the past which might have similar experience-based meanings in the present. The preservation of the tangibles versus the intangible features of historic structures are not two separate categories of place competing against each other. On the contrary, the ephemeral experience of department stores would not exist without the tangible physical structures to provoke that experience. Therefore, this thesis does not aim to isolate experiences from the physical structure to argue that one is more important than the other, but rather aims to offer an alternative perspective on the assessment of significance and its interpretation to contemporary audiences.

The outcome of the research shows that place-based experience is vital in helping people understand the historical meanings of a preserved place. The analysis could be adopted as a prelude to making preservation decisions and considered on a par with architectural significance assessments. The choice of analyzing experience associated with specific experience-triggering features is due to their versatility as compared to a structure in its entirety. Interventions made to specific features allow the building to transform through time or adapt to new uses. The building is not confined to one particular historical identity or form in order to preserve a historical experience.

The three case studies offered insights into the historical place-based experience in 19th- to 20th-century department stores in New York City. The study employed the analytical framework developed for the research to analyze the historical experience associated with each experience-
triggering feature. The three categories consisting of *design*, *use*, and *public accounts* allowed for detailed analyses and research on each of the categories, which showcased the rich meanings extending beyond the physicality of the feature. However, this analytical framework heavily depended on the availability of historical information. For instance, the analysis of Macy’s was much more specific and efficient than Arnold Constable because much of the information was readily available, whereas the Arnold Constable case study relied on more indirect sources of information to support the claim of importance to an experience-triggering feature. Another finding of this research is that although the three analytical categories could be applied with equal weight, they function consecutively and interdependently, with the succeeding category built on information obtained in the preceding categories.

It is evident that the small sample size is incapable of representing all typologies and sites in need of preservation and nor is that the intention of the study. The research aims to use the study of historical place-based experience in department stores to shed a light upon the different perspectives place-based experience offers in examining meanings of a place, and to establish a method in identifying and analyzing the historical experience. The thesis advocates for the analysis of historic place-based experience to act as a prelude to more creative preservation approaches to accommodate different aspects of an object in need of preservation.
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