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**Article:**

Bide, B (2018) More than window dressing: visual merchandising and austerity in London's West End, 1945–50. *Business History*, 60 (7). pp. 983-1003. ISSN 0007-6791

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2017.1400531>

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**More than window dressing: visual merchandising and austerity in London's West End, 1945-50**

**Bethan Bide**

**Abstract**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the fashion departments of London's West End department stores were not only challenged by austerity and bomb damage, but also by the growth of multiple retailers selling branded ready-to-wear goods. This article investigates how department stores responded by investing in display and visual merchandising to attract custom and rebuild their fashionable reputations. It argues that the difficulties caused by austerity conditions forced department stores to embrace new retail methodologies that helped them adapt to the changed circumstances of post-war fashion retail and compete with multiple retailers.

**Key words:** visual merchandising, window display, fashion retail, austerity, self-service

The numerous regulations concerning the making and selling of fashion goods that were introduced by the British government during the Second World War provided a catalyst for change in fashion retail. Although the impacts of rationing on fashionable consumption are widely discussed in historical accounts of the period,<sup>1</sup> rationing was only one aspect of wartime regulation and less well-known government legislation regulating the design and manufacture of fashion goods in the form of the Utility scheme and the Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) orders arguably had a more significant impact on fashion retailers.<sup>2</sup> Wartime legislation increased production of large-scale, mass-manufacture branded ready-to-wear clothing, changing the type of fashion goods available to buy in stores.<sup>3</sup> This article explores how, in the challenging economic climate of the late 1940s, developments in fashion production supported trends that ultimately challenged London's established retailers to develop new publicity and display strategies to boost sales of their changed fashion stock.

Although the era of austerity that immediately followed the Second World War – between the end of the war in 1945 and the early 1950s – is not typically remembered or studied as a time of innovation in retail techniques, archival material shows that a number of British stores were at the forefront of international developments in display practice at this time. In particular, retailers in London's West End, which had been doubly impacted by a combination of government regulations and aerial bombing between 1940 and 1945, made dramatic changes to their display methodologies. In the West End, small and medium sized department stores specialising in higher end goods experimented with new visual merchandising techniques and consumer psychology in order to boost sales of women's ready-to-wear garments at a time when economic circumstances and the growth of multiple fashion retailers increasingly challenged their existing business models. Although shop displays in London's West End had long been associated with fashionable trend-setting,<sup>4</sup> publicity and display activities became increasingly important to department stores in the late 1940s. Department store clothing and haberdashery sales rose year-on-year faster than any other category of goods between 1938 and 1950,<sup>5</sup> and so maintaining a strong market share of fashion sales in the face of growing

competition from multiple retailers was vital at a time when department stores were generally squeezed by austerity.<sup>6</sup>

This article calls attention to the significance of this overlooked post-war period in the history of visual merchandising in twentieth century British fashion retail. British retail histories that consider visual merchandising commonly focus on three distinct periods – the development of display in early department stores,<sup>7</sup> the innovations in retail spectacle during the interwar years,<sup>8</sup> and the well documented fashion revolutions that changed the look of shopping in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> In this article, I argue that changes to display methodologies and aesthetics during the post-war period should be considered in further detail in order to more fully understand how visual merchandising was used by retailers to successfully navigate changes in the types of fashion goods available and new ways of selling fashion in the middle decades of the twentieth century, considering the legacy and significance of austerity display within the broader history of post-war fashion retail. In particular, I explain how the Second World War disrupted display cultures and changed what was available to purchase in fashion departments; explore how the designers of window displays and departmental interiors were forced to innovate as a response to post-war austerity and changes in the fashion industry; and conclude by highlighting the prominent role West End retailers played as an international showcase for British fashion at a pivotal moment for the nation's clothing industry.

As a result of the transient nature of visual merchandising and the lack of consistent record-keeping by businesses (due to paper shortages and other concerns) during the 1940s, this research looks across a variety of different and fragmented archival sources and studies the archives of national retail groups and multiple retailers in a geographically specific manner. In order to investigate how the visual merchandising of fashion goods by certain West End retailers was impacted by the austerity conditions of post-war Britain, it combines the study of national surveys by the Retail Distributor's Association with research in department store archives and in the personal archives of display managers Eric Lucking (of Liberty & Co.) and Natasha Kroll (of Simpson's of Piccadilly). These are considered in the context of sources

relating to the changing nature of the British fashion industry, such as the national Census of Production, in order to understand the various influences and pressures shaping the decisions made by retailers and display managers concerning the visual merchandising of fashion goods at this time. By bringing together these sources – from the scribbled notes between a store manager and display designer, to the chance photograph or newspaper clipping featuring a display, and the visual merchandising advice contained within staff newsletters – a picture of a dynamic display culture emerges.

Alongside these archival materials, context for the merchandising environment of the austerity period is available through the trade press. *Display* magazine (later titled *Display, Design and Presentation*)<sup>10</sup> has proved to be a particularly vital resource in linking changing trends in the West End to both international retail developments and British austerity regulations, since its monthly publications – which offered display practitioners (pictorial and narrative) explanations of new techniques – provide informative commentary and documentary examples of how visual merchandising methodologies were changing. Re-examining the text and images that influenced austerity era practitioners alongside recorded archival evidence of displays incorporates visual analysis into this history of display and allows the telling of a more complete story about how the decisions made by retailers in regard to display contributed to the post-war development of West End fashion retail.<sup>11</sup>

### **Bomb rubble and boarded windows: the impact of the Second World War on fashion retail in London's West End**

In the early morning of 18 September 1940, multiple high explosive and incendiary bombs struck John Lewis's flagship store at 278 Oxford Street. Aided by high winds, fire tore through the building, leaving the store's West House little more than a set of skeletal remains. Surviving photographs taken after the fire demonstrate the precarious nature of London retail during the Second World War. They show how, in just a single bombing raid, the comfortable, middle-class

space of a West End department store could be transformed into something alienating and strange, resembling the monolithic 'ruins of a Greek temple'.<sup>12</sup>

Amidst the drama of such arresting images of bomb rubble and ruins, it is easy to forget that it was not just the destruction of buildings that changed the experience of shopping for clothes in the West End in the first half of the 1940s. From direct hits to routine blackouts and blast damage that resulted in darkened and boarded up display windows, the extent of aerial bombing between 1940 and 1945 seriously limited the ability of retailers to promote, display and sell fashion.<sup>13</sup> Although store owners would have counted themselves lucky to escape with nothing worse than broken windows, aerial bombardment deprived West End consumers of one of the greatest sensory pleasures offered by twentieth century retail: the visual spectacle of the shop window display.<sup>14</sup> During the war, expanses of plate glass were boarded up completely, or replaced by small peephole windows, looking on to limited stock. This not only disrupted the ability of retailers to promote their merchandise to customers, but it also interrupted the association between the activity of shopping and the pleasure of looking at elaborate shop displays for many London consumers.<sup>15</sup>

Stock shortages and government policies, including clothes rationing, further compounded the challenges faced by retailers who found themselves with fewer new fashions to promote. Clothing stocks were much depleted as labour and material resources were needed for the war effort. Fashion styles changed much more slowly during the war and immediate post-war period as the government's Utility Apparel Orders – which controlled the supply of fabric – encouraged manufacturers to produce larger runs of the same item, and the Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) orders – more commonly known as austerity regulations or restrictions – limited the amount of surface decoration that could be used in garment design.<sup>16</sup>

As the dust settled on Oxford Street and its surroundings after the war, retailers were finally able to assess the extent of the damage wrought by conflict to their businesses, from material harm to their physical holdings to the less easily quantifiable losses of expert staff and

estranged customers. The intense combination of bomb damage, wartime shortages and government regulations in the West End resulted in a particularly changed shopping experience when compared with more suburban areas. Gone were the brightly lit display windows and spectacular promotional events, not suitable for an age of austerity; gone were the well-trained sales staff, to war and wartime jobs; and gone were the previously luxurious dress departments, blighted by peeling paint and a shortage of goods.<sup>17</sup>

But the arrival of peace could not mean a return to old ways of selling fashions for many London stores, because the war had accelerated trends in garment manufacture that hit the city's higher-end retailers particularly hard. London's fashionable reputation had been built upon its concentration of high-end garment producers, particularly specialising in retail bespoke tailoring and dressmaking, where a customer would order made-to-measure items from an individual tailor, dressmaker or shop workroom. Prior to the war, these services could be found in the majority of West End department stores. From 1935 to 1948, the number of people employed in retail bespoke garment making across the U.K. fell by 47.81 per cent., indicating a rapid growth in mass manufacture that must have hit London particularly hard.<sup>18</sup> Although there is evidence of a moderate decline in retail bespoke manufacture as a percentage of national output throughout the 1930s,<sup>19</sup> this process was accelerated by the Utility scheme and its emphasis on mass production, as well as rising labour costs post-war, which pushed the price of bespoke clothing beyond the reach of many individuals.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of wartime economic and social conditions, customers increasingly turned to ready-to-wear clothes, and high-end West End retailers who had previously offered extensive bespoke services from their workrooms became increasingly reliant on ready-to-wear revenues. This placed them in more direct competition with multiple retailers, such as Marks and Spencer, who were already well known as purveyors of ready-to-wear fashions and were actively engaged in a variety of initiatives in attempts to raise the status of their own-brand clothing by relaunching their St Michael brand with a new friendlier logo in a hand-written style and a publicity campaign about the retailer's stringent quality controls and development of one of the

most advanced textile research laboratories in the country.<sup>21</sup> But department stores are not simply places in which passive customers buy goods; they are spaces in which individuals identify themselves and negotiate their relationships to wider society.<sup>22</sup> In order to distinguish themselves from the multiple retailers who sold increasingly similar types of ready-to-wear items and appease restless customers who were fed up with stock shortages, shabby stores and inflation, it became clear that West End retailers needed to do more than just plan to reconstruct their businesses according to a pre-war model.<sup>23</sup> Instead, they needed to reimagine the way they used publicity to sell fashion.

### **Changing exteriors: the increasing post-war importance of window display to West End retailers**

With the arrival of peace, the windows of the West End provided some of the first signs of post-war recovery in London retail. At a time when limitations on paper usage seriously limited the use of promotional catalogues, posters and mail-outs,<sup>24</sup> window displays were an increased priority for West End stores as they offered vital marketing access to London's growing post-war population and a way of announcing that London was once again open for business.

Reports by the Retail Distributors' Association on the 'Operating Costs of Department Stores' detail how the importance of display grew nationally as a result of war and post-war austerity conditions. The 1949 report (the first published following the war) explained that, from 1938, store expenditure on press advertising had fallen dramatically and direct mail advertising virtually disappeared.<sup>25</sup> Although department store publicity budgets (as a percentage of aggregate net sales) fell across both advertising and display, the display budgets fell by less than half the amount of the advertising budgets, demonstrating that display played a relatively more important role in publicity strategies in these immediate post-war years.<sup>26</sup>

Looking in more detail at department store operating costs in London reveals that not all London stores invested equally in display. Figures from the 1930s reveal that prior to the war,



'high-medium class' West End stores (defined by the Retail Distributors' Association by the cost of the goods they stocked) had invested considerably less in display relative to their 'medium-low class' counterparts, relying instead on advertising.<sup>27</sup> However, in the immediate post-war period, smaller high-medium class West End stores (those with between £100,000 and £500,000 worth of gross trading sales, such as Liberty & Co.) increased their display spends considerably relative to both larger high-medium stores and medium-low stores. Most interestingly, this is the only group of stores to spend proportionally more on display personnel than on props, labels and building materials, indicating a serious investment in the creativity of display designers and managers at a time of limited physical resources.<sup>28</sup>

This change in publicity strategy was likely a response to the particular difficulties experienced by smaller high-medium class shops as a result of austerity. West End department stores struggled with lower post-war sales growth than elsewhere in the suburbs and provinces, likely as a result of reduced central London housing stock and the unpleasant physical nature of the bomb damaged West End in comparison to areas that had experienced less aerial bombing.<sup>29</sup> It is probable that the fashion departments of high-medium class shops were particularly badly impacted due to their heavy reliance on retail bespoke sales, leaving them especially vulnerable to competition from multiple retailers.<sup>30</sup> For comparison, womenswear sales by multiple retailers grew by 27 per cent. from 1949-1950 while comparable sales at department stores remained steady.<sup>31</sup> Unlike larger stores with international reputations to help draw custom, smaller high-medium class shops (which often had somewhat old-fashioned reputations) needed to fight harder to attract new customers and retain their market share from the encroaching multiples in this increasingly competitive retail space, and the figures suggest they did so through investing in display.

#### *Austerity, consumer research and new aesthetics in West End window displays*

The end of the Second World War not only coincided with an increased importance of display in terms of store publicity budgets, but also with a noticeable change in the aesthetics of West

End window displays. As early as 1946, the trade magazine *Display* noted a staggering pace of change in visual merchandising on Oxford and Regent Streets, indicating that window displays were vital tools employed by stores in luring shoppers back to the bomb-damaged West End.

To quantify what exactly *Display* means by 'change' in this context, it is necessary to consider post-war displays in a longer historical narrative. Spectacular shop window displays were familiar sights in London well before the war; indeed, it can be argued that the history of spectacular consumption in the city even predates the department store, stretching back to the window displays of the city's eighteenth century cloth merchants.<sup>32</sup> Window display culture undoubtedly developed with the advent of the department store, and there is clear evidence of display managers and window dressers acting as tastemakers, responsible for the reputation of their stores, as early as the late nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> The most common method of window display in the first half of the twentieth century was the 'dictionary' style, where a large number of goods were shown in a flat manner, intended to create spectacle by demonstrating the shop's extensive range of stock.<sup>34</sup> Although this method was still common in the lead up to the Second World War, window display methodologies were beginning to change in the 1930s.<sup>35</sup> Experiments in graphic design by figures such as Ashley Havinden advocated for the incorporation of elements of abstract art into commercial print advertising,<sup>36</sup> and in 1937, the first commercial art school in Britain – the Reimann School of Art and Design – opened in Pimlico, having relocated from Berlin.<sup>37</sup> Notably, the Reimann School's window display department was staffed entirely without British teachers, but with staff members from countries such as Germany who brought continental display aesthetics with them to London.<sup>38</sup> It was in this context that some London retailers, such as Jaeger and Simpson's of Piccadilly, noticeably moved their window displays towards pictorial styles that relied on a greater sense of narrative, rather than pure visual spectacle, to generate passing interest.<sup>39</sup>

The war accelerated this trend in fashion display, notably fueled by shortages of exciting goods to show off. By 1945, London's more experimental display designers were rarely displaying large numbers of fashion objects in one window, but commonly featuring one or two garments

set in a narrative or surrealist scene, relying on symbolism to communicate with viewers. *Display* magazine provides a lens on this changing aspect of the retail landscape. Although *Display* continued to provide occasional editorial space for supporters of more traditional 'dictionary' styling—such as Sir Stafford Bourne of Bourne & Hollingsworth who believed this method was a more 'honest' way to sell to customers—revisiting issues from this period shows that the publication broadly advocated for display designers to embrace a more experimental and narrative turn.<sup>40</sup> The publication also indicates that, although many of the theoretical underpinnings of these evolving trends were provided by international retail developments—particularly in the form of new consumer research stemming from America—austerity regulations and limitations on materials dictated by the wartime and post-war British governments were significant factors in shaping the direction of post-war display in London.

Although West End retailers faced specific local difficulties as a result of austerity – such as rationing and price controls – their display personnel remained outward looking in their research. The particular importance of American ideas can be seen in the considerable investment many shops made in sending their display managers on lengthy research trips to the U.S.A.<sup>41</sup> Stores without the resources to send staff on fact finding trips abroad could follow international developments in visual merchandising on the pages of *Display*, which regularly devoted column inches to new American research and lavish images of Fifth Avenue shop windows. The extent of post-war American influence is particularly surprising as London retailers had strongly resisted American influences in the inter-war years.<sup>42</sup>

This American turn was related to the significant influence of psychologists and consumer researchers working in the emerging field of motivation research in the U.S.A. Although advertisers had harnessed the emotional responses of consumers during the interwar years, post-war interest in this field was heightened as figures such as Paul Lazarsfeld developed new techniques for understanding consumer desires, including focus group interviews, while others, most prominently Ernest Dichter, emphasised the potential selling power of presenting products to consumers as expressions of their personalities.<sup>43</sup> The content of trade journal

editorials highlighted the potential value in effective display over other publicity methods through statistics that impressed its influence on consumers, for example by reporting that ‘at least 25 per cent. of the people who enter a shop do so directly to the attraction of the window display’.<sup>44</sup> These reports indicate that West End retailers were familiar with new research that used qualitative methods such as traffic counts to investigate how displays could best encourage consumers to make a purchase.<sup>45</sup> Reflecting contemporary interests in motivation research, these reports repeatedly emphasised the idea that visual merchandising allowed retailers to tap into and shape shopper’s conceptions about aspiration and identity, suggesting that, when retailers put a garment in a window, they sold both that garment and ‘an exciting new way of living’.<sup>46</sup> Although department stores had been using their window displays as a tool to infuse everyday goods with associations of exclusivity and prestige since the nineteenth century,<sup>47</sup> this new research concluded that, in a marketplace increasingly dominated by standardised, branded fashion goods to the benefit of multiple retailers, department store displays needed to infuse the retail space itself with symbolic value.<sup>48</sup>

The idea that displays should sell aspiration and fantasy over and above the specific products they contained was especially enticing to post-war retailers that had to balance fashionable aspiration against stock shortages and the new economic realities faced by their customers. The 1946 National Insurance Act and post-war changes to taxation squeezed the incomes of the middle- and upper-classes, meaning that salary-earners were ‘on average considerably worse off’ in 1950 than they had been in 1938.<sup>49</sup> The impact of this was compounded by high rates of purchase tax on a number of fashionable goods and this dual tax burden resulted in many of the West End’s upper-middle class consumers feeling pushed out of fashion and forced to buy cheaper, ready-to-wear garments.<sup>50</sup> In response to this deterioration in spending power, multiple retailer Marks and Spencer concentrated on raising standards of customer service to help ease the impact of these changes to shopping habits.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, a number of higher-end West End department stores responded to emerging consumer research by turning their attention to creating aspirational displays.

Although there is a lack of contemporary consumer research to indicate how shoppers reacted to aspirational displays at a time of such shortages, a report from Mass Observation on window-shopping at Selfridges in 1946 found that shoppers were 63 per cent. more likely to stop and look at a display of expensive fur coats—even if they could not afford to purchase them—than they were to stop for a display of ‘everyday coats’.<sup>52</sup> There is also anecdotal evidence that consumer interest was piqued by displays that demonstrated an almost frivolous pace of change. For example, in December 1946 Bond Street department store Fenwick devoted an entire window to a single fur coat, half-draped through a gilt frame. This display attracted considerable attention because the coat was changed daily, providing an arresting source of variety for shoppers more familiar with the idea that a fur coat should provide decades of use, and confirming that spectacle could be just as attractive to shoppers as the material goods in the window.<sup>53</sup>

Some retailers even produced window displays containing items that were very different from the merchandise they encouraged people to buy. For example, display designers for Peter Jones’s highly successful fashion windows in Spring 1949 ensured that every display series included ‘at least one ‘model’ window devoted to high fashion goods’.<sup>54</sup> This move did not indicate that Peter Jones expected its shoppers to buy the luxury items from these ‘model’ windows in bulk, but by emphasising the shop’s status as a retailer of important fashions, they succeeded in raising sales in the shop’s low-cost dress department.<sup>55</sup> The use of window displays to sell a store’s exclusivity and fashionable prestige could even bypass departmental stock entirely, as was the case when Marshall & Snelgrove devoted all eight windows of their Oxford Street frontage to showing the original costumes from the film *An Ideal Husband*, famously designed by Cecil Beaton.<sup>56</sup> This type of aspirational selling was especially important for department stores competing with multiple retailers, who had proved much more successful at selling new trends during the peak fashion sales months that followed the spring and autumn couture shows. Sales figures from 1950-1951 show that multiple retailers saw considerably heightened fashion sales during April-May and November-December as compared

to department stores,<sup>57</sup> indicating that department stores needed to compete harder to take advantage of seasonal sales.

American proponents of new visual merchandising techniques were firm in their conclusion that successful display required store managers and display personnel to work more closely together, recognising that display needed to be better integrated into the business strategies of the entire company in order to be as effective as possible.<sup>58</sup> It is likely that West End stores were familiar with this idea, which may go some way to explaining the creation of new display manager roles—responsible for overseeing the entirety of a store’s display—during this period. Two stores to do this were Simpson’s of Piccadilly, who appointed Natasha Kroll, and Liberty & Co., who hired Eric Lucking. The work of Kroll and Lucking demonstrates how such smaller high-medium end stores effectively developed their display methodologies in response to austerity conditions, highlighting that the transformation of post-war display windows was not achieved in spite of austerity, but as a result of it, with shortages and limitations acting as catalysts for change.

#### *Responses to austerity conditions at Liberty & Co. and Simpsons of Piccadilly*

In spite of the conceptual influence of American consumer research and retail methodology during this period, implementation in London store windows produced displays that remained visually distinct from their transatlantic counterparts in New York and Chicago. Shortages of display props and the prevailing culture of austerity, which viewed the excesses of American consumer culture with moral suspicion (indeed, Kroll believed that the volume of new merchandise and display props that New York stores had access to led to a ‘lack of restraint’<sup>59</sup>) necessitated careful consideration of how American research could be used to best effect in London. Rather than adopting American aesthetics, small-medium sized higher end stores – such as Liberty & Co. and Simpson’s – reinterpreted consumer research and modified the narrative excess of some American windows, resulting in a unique display culture for which the West End would become well known in the trade press.

Both Natasha Kroll and Eric Lucking had backgrounds as display designers before they became display managers, and their creative approaches were rooted in a practical understanding of how to sell merchandise. Kroll had trained in display design at the Reimann Schule in Berlin. She later became a member of staff when the school moved to London in 1936, before working at Rowntree's Department stores as a display designer.<sup>60</sup> Kroll joined Simpson's in 1942, when the war allowed her to break through the traditionally male hierarchies of display, and over the next twelve years was promoted to oversee the store's entire publicity and design. The Reimann School was also important in the career of Eric Lucking – Arthur Stewart Liberty appointed Eric Lucking in 1945, after attending a course at the establishment that persuaded him of the importance in investing in display as a publicity method.<sup>61</sup> Eric Lucking was newly demobbed, but prior to the war had worked at as a display designer at a number of London stores, including Army and Navy, D. H. Evans, and Druce's. Lucking was Liberty & Co.'s first ever display manager, and was able to exert a high level of influence as his appointment to the role meant that individual departments were no longer in charge of dressing their own windows, instead allowing Lucking to oversee unified displays with coherent themes and connections.<sup>62</sup>

Government regulations placed limitations on what Kroll and Lucking were able to create by restricting the use of lighting and materials.<sup>63</sup> Shops faced quotas on how many of their damaged windows they could fit with new glass, meaning that even Harrods did not manage to fully restore its windows until June 1948.<sup>64</sup> For windows that were in a fit state to house a display, retailers struggled with a serious shortage in display props, mannequins, and official restrictions on the use of lighting and raw materials such as paper and wood. These restrictions prevented retailers from simply reconstructing for business as usual—yet they also allowed shops the time to explore new ways of creating spectacle through display and visual merchandising. In order to achieve striking visuals in spite of these limitations, display designers needed to be extremely resourceful. Both Kroll and Lucking believed that display creativity flourished as a result of shortages. Lucking explicitly explained that austerity conditions offered the opportunity for designers to break with the traditions of pre-war window display designs, which he described as 'too much gilding of the lily'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, issues of *Display* from late 1945

and early 1946 are dominated by distinctly 'make do and mend' ideas such as using dyed sawdust to cover damaged floors<sup>66</sup> and improvising display props. Lucking constructed backdrops from leftover blackout fabric<sup>67</sup> and Kroll is cited in *Display* for her experimental use of found objects, for example appropriating leaves and pebbles to use as price labels.<sup>68</sup>

A lack of display props and shortages of stock contributed to the widespread use of minimalist displays, often with single objects arranged on stark white columns or accompanied by coloured geometric shapes. These displays were more than just economical—they challenged the traditional aesthetic of many London shops, promoting a more modern and uncluttered approach to selling. Symbolism became important as a result of limited resources, and designers learned to make a feature of empty space, suspending items using invisible Nylon wires against plain backdrops to create an uncanny visual trick and allowing sparse props such as individual branches to stand in for the dense trees of a forest. In turn, this increasing familiarity with symbolism in props created an environment where the garments on display could also be loaded with symbolic meaning, requiring passersby to engage actively with the shop from the pavement. For example, customers learned to understand that, in lieu of an illustrative backdrop or an abundance of props, the incorporation of a single suitcase into a display of men's suits in a Simpson's window during Kroll's term at the retailer signified the exoticism of overseas travel.<sup>69</sup>

What is striking about these early post-war displays in the West End is not so much the ingenuity in sourcing such found objects, but the ambitious and artistic ways in which they were put to use to create fashion fantasy tableaux, balancing consumer aspirations with austerity realities in order to reconstruct the idea of shopping as a leisure activity, something that had been disrupted by clothes rationing. Although the link between desire and consumption was by no means entirely replaced by concerns of need and practicality during rationing, the emotional reward of shopping for fashions was certainly muddied by increased concern and purchasing guilt.<sup>70</sup> West End display managers recognised that window displays could provide a crucial tool in the battle to reestablish fashionable consumption as an enjoyable



activity, promoting shopping in department stores as a more stimulating experience than purchasing clothes from a multiple retailer.

Both Kroll and Lucking found inspiration for austerity displays in surrealist art. Surrealism was well established in relation to public art and display following the success of the 1936 London International Surrealist Exhibition and the influence of surrealism on the work of well-known British war artists such as Henry Moore and Paul Nash, not to mention in the fashion photography of Lee Miller, but it is only in the post-war period that its influence can be strongly traced in shop window display. The surprising juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous objects in display windows by both Kroll and Lucking reflects the surrealist belief that emotional power was contained in the bringing together of supposedly disparate realities, an act which revealed the false nature of those realities in order to attain a new level of social freedom.<sup>71</sup> They used this power to draw attention from passers-by, encouraging them to stop and engage imaginatively with their window displays.

The aesthetics of surrealism worked well within the confines of the limited props available to display personnel as a result of austerity, particularly in relation to the serious post-war mannequin shortage. Retailers struggled to find mannequins on which to display clothes, as old pre-war models were either damaged or seriously out of date in their 1930s shape and styling. British mannequin manufacture was virtually nonexistent during the immediate post-war years, and when the first post-war mannequin imports finally arrived in the UK in 1948 they were subject to prohibitively high rates of purchase tax.<sup>72</sup> Turning limitations into creative opportunity, both Kroll and Lucking countered this problem by disassembling old mannequins to create surreal displays that explored the physicality of fashionable aspiration and the dressed body. At Liberty, Lucking frequently removed damaged mannequin heads and replaced them with bunches of flowers or seaweed.<sup>73</sup> In some of his most eye catching window displays from the era, disembodied hands from old and broken mannequins held up gloves or bags.<sup>74</sup> Down the road at Simpson's, Kroll suspended hats above empty necks, as if perched on invisible heads.<sup>75</sup>

Lucking also used handmade wire mannequins, which could be constructed to perform active poses that were impossible for the stiff commercial shop mannequins of the time. A women's fashion display from 1949, featuring a single dress modeled on a headless wire display mannequin, illustrates the bodily power of these transparent figures in Lucking's work (Figure 1). The wire structure that stands in for a fashion mannequin is barely visible against the white background, and the missing head and arms place emphasis on an exquisite wire foot, highlighting the alluring nature of the dress as it drapes over the leg. A series of props float around the model as if in orbit to its power. By creating images disembodied women like this, Lucking evoked a sense of animation through abstraction, hoping that the clothes he featured would be brought to life by the agency of the shopper's imagination.

These surrealist, disembodied displays by Kroll and Lucking invited the consumer to engage with the garments that they featured by imagining the type of body that would wear it, and perhaps in turn aspire to be the body inside the garment. In this way, the austerity shortages that prompted Kroll and Lucking to turn to surrealist influences also freed the designers from the burden of representation, giving them more license to create unusual and surprising displays tailored to different types of merchandise.

### **Changing interiors: Reimagining fashion departments for self-service and ready-to-wear**

More than five years of wartime neglect and damage similarly left the interiors of West End fashion departments in need of redecoration and new looks, meaning that the area's retail spaces were poised for mass-modernisation on a previously unprecedented scale. Department stores particularly embraced this opportunity for change and redecorated at a rapid pace between 1945 and 1950. This was both a response to changes to the garments they stocked and a bid to compete with multiple retailers by using display and visual merchandising to create a strong sense of in-store atmosphere and brand identity. Once again, the nature of these in-store aesthetics were shaped by a mixture of international trends and local conditions. Many

stores found inspiration in the startlingly modern layout and appearance of American fashion departments and *Display* ran regular features detailing the refurbishment of stores such as Saks and Neiman Marcus in which they lauded the trend towards open plan spaces with clean, white surfaces and chrome finishes as the pinnacle of retail design. West End display managers, however, did not simply copy these ideas but imaginatively adapted them in line with the constraints of austerity.<sup>76</sup>

The most dramatically modern aesthetics were tested out in departments that primarily sold ready-to-wear clothes for young women.<sup>77</sup> When Hulme Chadwick, an architect and designer who would later work extensively on the 1951 Festival of Britain, was tasked by Eric Lucking with creating a new 'Young Liberty' fashion department at Liberty & Co. in 1949, he deliberately turned his back on the heritage of the Liberty brand, rendering the famous interior of the Arts and Crafts department store unrecognisable by completely covering its dark wood paneling with white painted panels and mirrors, lit by stark halogen strip lighting. To mirror the style of the new department's décor, merchandise was presented sparingly and in an uncluttered manner. In doing so, the Young Liberty department was visually and conceptually separated from the shop's exposed wood beams that overlooked its stacks of richly decorated oriental rugs and intricately printed fabrics. In stating the store's modern fashionable credentials through this new department's interior, Lucking cast aside Liberty's somewhat old-fashioned reputation, and in doing so laid the foundations for the fashionable rebirth of the old Tudor shop and its dress fabrics in the Fifties and Sixties.<sup>78</sup>

The dramatic over-haul of the aesthetics of women's ready-to-wear departments – such as Young Liberty – during this period was influenced by their growing reliance on standardised ready-to-wear clothes, leading to a move towards self-service in fashion departments. British ready-to-wear manufacturers began to adopt the American system of standardised, graded sizing between 1944 and 1950. This stemmed primarily from the demands of retailers, who found that standardised sizing – developed from extensive research to fit the greatest number

of people possible<sup>79</sup> – made it easier for customers to find items that fit well, reducing the amount of work that needed to be sent to store workrooms and so cutting overhead costs.<sup>80</sup>

Crucially, standardised sizing also allowed customers more autonomy when shopping. Customers familiar with the numbered system no longer required a sales assistant to help them navigate the different sizes and shapes of different fashion brands, but were instead able to pick a garment off the rack themselves, safe in the knowledge it should correspond to their size. As a result, the widespread adoption of standardised sizing by British manufacturers is strongly connected to the uptake of ‘self-selection’ (or self-service) in fashion retail, where customers would select their own garments from those on open display, rather than relying on a salesperson’s judgment and knowledge of back-room stock. The move towards self-service was accelerated during this period by a shortage of skilled sales staff, particularly in London, whose population had decreased during the war.<sup>81</sup>

Self-service meant department stores could no longer rely on the personal attention provided by knowledgeable and skilled salespeople to persuade customers to make a purchase, removing an aspect of the shopping experience that had previously distinguished them from multiple retailers. Instead, they had to explore new, subtler ways of influencing consumer choice, and increasingly relied on décor and display to sell fashions. This approach was not unique to fashion. The revolutionary effect of self-service on the grocery industry has been studied across Europe and North America,<sup>82</sup> with retail historians arguing that the uptake of self-service increasingly related the cultural value of goods to their packaging.<sup>83</sup> The move to self-service in West End fashion departments similarly increased the importance of the retail environment as a form of packaging. As a result, West End shops such as Liberty & Co. and Simpson’s expanded the role of their display managers to include oversight of the aesthetics of department decors as well as window displays,<sup>84</sup> creating a previously unseen level of brand coherence in fashion displays and decors that emphasised the unique fashionable identity of the store.

The study of visual merchandising and spectacle in post-war fashion retail reveals that self-service changed the process of buying clothes, giving store display an increasingly educational role as consumers adapted to this change. Visual merchandising was vital for the cultivation of a fashionably confident and informed consumer, capable of making their own selection from a range of garments. The educational role of a coherent display and departmental décor strategy is evidenced by D. H. Evans' successful 'Fashion Wise' promotional campaign, launched in the spring of 1949. The campaign's uncluttered posters featured images of just one or two outfits, reflecting the latest styles, and the simplicity of these posters enabled them to be used in both print advertising and in-store visual merchandising. They provided the inspiration and styling for a series of shop window displays, in which the 'Fashion Wise' campaign imagery formed the backdrop for simple mannequins dressed in items similar to the ones featured in the campaign.<sup>85</sup> Within the store itself, the posters were adapted to become showcase treatments on boards around the fashion department, guiding customers towards specific items of stock and giving them ideas of how to put individual items together to form a fashionable outfit. This level of visual direction was an important tool in assisting consumers to make the transition to self-service clothes shopping, helping individuals navigate through a confusing range of new season stock without relying on a member of sales staff.

Perhaps most importantly, West End retailers found that innovative display and store layout was able to provide shoppers with a sense of human interaction even where self-service had reduced this considerably.<sup>86</sup> In 1949, the newly refurbished Regent Street exterior of Richard Shops created a long glass gallery that customers walked through to enter the shop (Figure 2). The interior of the fashion department was recreated in this space, including a range of fashion mannequins in place of customers, arranged in a variety of active poses as if discussing certain items of stock or gossiping over the latest fashion trends with friends.<sup>87</sup> In this scene, the retailer presented the shopper with an idealised image of themselves as a fashionable consumer, happy in a friendly and welcoming shopping environment but also confidently independent in the way they shopped for clothes, thus reducing their need for help and advice from salespeople.

Other stores were less direct in the way they used visual merchandising to foster fashionable confidence in their customers, using interior design to give customers a greater sense of ownership of the retail space. For example, Swan and Edgar experimented with large floating islands in their young fashions department, positioned to lead the customer on a route through a series of neatly styled mannequins (Figure 3),<sup>88</sup> while the haphazardly arranged clothes racks in D. H. Evans Junior Miss department were interspersed with tables and chairs to encourage visitors to linger and socialise. Beyond traditional visual methods, West End display managers also experimented with sound and lighting in their attempts to create a greater sense of atmosphere. At Liberty & Co., teenage customers were often treated to live jazz music in the Young Liberty department, creating an atmosphere more akin to a club than a shop,<sup>89</sup> while Peter Robinson was one of several stores to experiment with the use of coloured lighting,<sup>90</sup> providing novel and exciting spaces for consumption that set the experience of shopping in West End department stores apart from more provincial stores or multiple retailers.

### **The legacy of austerity display**

In 1949, newly relaxed rules on electric lighting for shop exteriors enabled Oxford Street to turn on their Christmas lights for the first time since 1938, casting a red and green coloured glow that promised, after a long and difficult decade, that the 1950s would be a little brighter for both retailer and customer. Just as quickly as the importance of display in department store publicity strategies soared between the end of the war and 1949, it diminished with the decline of austerity conditions. As the 1950s progressed, stores once again began to focus their spending on advertising, confirming that the 1940s were a unique period for the importance of display.<sup>91</sup> The pioneering aesthetics, and in particular the trend for abstraction, faded towards the end of the decade as the availability of display props increased.<sup>92</sup> In doing so, London's window displays became more visually spectacular, compared to the understated surrealist aesthetic of the 1940s, but lost much of the unique visual culture they had cultivated during

that time, and began to more closely resemble those seen in comparative stores in New York or Geneva.<sup>93</sup>

However, this does not diminish the legacy of the 1940s display managers of the West End. Although their work has been largely forgotten today, business archives and *Display* magazine indicate that display managers such as Natasha Kroll and Eric Lucking were successful at creating a large amount of publicity for their stores, relative to their size, through innovative display. Further to this, these display managers pioneered a more joined-up approach to department store publicity, where display, departmental decor and print materials were brought together to create greater visual coherence and so foster customer loyalty and brand recognition.<sup>94</sup> As a result, display continued to hold a greater strategic importance in integrated publicity strategies in subsequent decades and the brand identity it fostered enabled stores including Liberty & Co. to survive the challenges posed by the growth of multiple retailers.

More broadly, the unusual and innovative fashion displays seen in the West End in the late 1940s seem to have played a role in promoting London as a destination for fashionable consumption to a national and international audience after the disruption of the Second World War.<sup>95</sup> Display and visual merchandising provided a way for West End department stores to remind their customers of the unique retail experience they offered at a time when multiple retailers selling ready-to-wear garments threatened their fashionable status. This was not only important for domestic fashion sales but also for the export trade of the British fashion industry, which relied on London as its sales window and was engaged in exceptionally fierce competition with both New York and Paris fashion following the war.<sup>96</sup> This international reputation attracted tourist custom, particularly following the devaluation of the pound in 1949,<sup>97</sup> and it is highly likely that the West End's rich visual merchandising and display culture contributed to the £8,000,000 that Harold Wilson estimated tourists spent 'on goods to take back home' in 1948.<sup>98</sup>

Cementing London's fashionable reputation at this moment had long-reaching consequences for the future of both London retail and the British garment industry. As clothing manufacture was increasingly outsourced, London moved from a city known as a place where high-end garments were made to one whose fashionable reputation relied symbolism and image.<sup>99</sup> Retailers who had previously relied on the quality of London-made bespoke and wholesale garments to provide a unique draw to their fashion departments needed to find a new way to publicise themselves now that they primarily stocked brand-name ready-to-wear fashions, which were also carried by a number of other stores. It is likely that the experimental and forward-looking actions of display managers such as Kroll and Lucking at the early stages of this transition played a role in enabling London's reputation to grow in subsequent decades by cementing the West End's continuing role as the symbolic centre of British fashion at a time when its status was far from certain.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Ziegler, *London at War*, 256; Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 297-298.

<sup>2</sup> Utility Apparel Orders were introduced in 1941 a part of a series of supply limitations designed to regulate the supply and price of cloth and made-up garments. TNA, BT 64/835. Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) orders were introduced in 1942 and controlled clothing styles, cuts and embellishment in order to reduce unnecessary materials and labour. TNA, BT 64/905.

<sup>3</sup> The Utility Scheme specified that production runs of each style of garments should exceed 1,000 items, whereas before the war the industry average was around 100. Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Breward, *Fashioning London*, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Plant and Fowler, "Report on Department Store Trading for year ending 1950", 8.

<sup>6</sup> Retailers faced increasingly squeezed profit margins primarily as a result of retail price ceilings on fashion goods, through which the government attempted to control inflation by limiting the percentage profits that could be made on each item sold, despite rising production and labour costs. TNA, BT 103/580.

<sup>7</sup> Trentmann, *History of Consumption*; Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.

<sup>8</sup> Scott and Walker, "Advertising, promotion, and interwar British department stores", 1105–1128.

<sup>9</sup> Ashmore, "I think they're all mad", 58-79.

<sup>10</sup> *Display* magazine was published in London under various titles between 1919 and 1976. It



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was titled *Display* between April 1945 and March 1946, and *Display Design & Presentation* between April 1946 and April 1951.

<sup>11</sup> *Display's* coverage is also valuable because it focuses on the West End's large department stores, who primarily sold everyday ready-to-wear clothing, providing an important counterpoint to the many studies of fashion retail from this period that cover London's couture dressmaking and bespoke tailoring industries. See Ehrman and De La Haye, *London Couture*.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, "The Blitz: Oxford Street's Store Wars".

<sup>13</sup> Even where stores were able to continue operating, direct hits often closed areas used for promotional activities, for example the closure of Selfridge's roof gardens, where the famed department store had previously staged fashion shows featuring ready-to-wear clothes. Westminster City Archives. ARP Message Form, Selfridges, 19 September 1940.

<sup>14</sup> The radical nature of this disruption can be seen in a photograph taken outside Oxford Street retailer Bourne and Hollingsworth the morning after a bombing raid in 1940, which shows the pavements covered in twisted metal and broken glass from the shop's shattered display windows. George W. Hales/ Getty Images. Photograph of Bourne and Hollingsworth in 1940.

<sup>15</sup> Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 99-102.

<sup>17</sup> Retailers struggled to maintain adequate stock of ready-to-wear garments due to fabric shortages and rising costs: inventories of ready-to-wear clothing in Central London shops reached an all-time low in May 1945, at less than two-thirds of what they had been the year before. They would linger at these levels until late 1947. *Draper's Record*, May 26 1945, 15.

<sup>18</sup> HMSO, Census of Production 1948, Table 8.

<sup>19</sup> The majority of London's clothing output was retail bespoke throughout 1930s and 1940s, even as this declined as percentage of national output. see "Census of Production" 1931, 1935 and 1948.

<sup>20</sup> TNA BT 64/2198 and BT 64/735, Board of Trade policies on purchase tax.

<sup>21</sup> Chislett, *Marks in Time*, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Miles, *Spaces for Consumption*, 184.

<sup>23</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1948, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Liberty & Co. did not produce its first post-war catalogue until 1952. City of Westminster Archives, Liberty & Co. catalogues.

<sup>25</sup> Plant and Fowler, "Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report 1949", 18.

<sup>26</sup> Between 1938 and 1949, department stores had reduced the amount they spent on general advertising (as a percentage of aggregate net sales) by 69.91%, while the amount given to display had only been reduced by 34.48% compared to 1939. Plant and Fowler, "Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report" for 1938 and 1949.

<sup>27</sup> Between 1936 and 1938, High-Medium West End stores were investing between 0.19-0.21 per cent of their aggregate net sales in display, whereas during the same period Medium-Low end stores spent between 0.49 and 0.78 per cent. Plant and Fowler, "Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report" for 1936, 1937 and 1938.

<sup>28</sup> Between 1950 and 1953, high-medium West End stores with less than £500,000 worth of gross trading sales were spending between 0.43-0.5 per cent of their aggregate net sales on display personnel, and 0.39-0.47 per cent on impersonal display costs such as props. This is

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considerably more than larger high-medium stores, which spent between 0.13-0.15 per cent on personnel and 0.17-0.25 per cent on impersonal costs. Plant and Fowler, "Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report" for 1950, 1951 and 195.3

<sup>29</sup> For example, between 1948 and 1949, high-medium class stores in central London saw a 1.3 per cent. fall in sales of women's coats, whereas suburban London stores saw a 14.3 per cent. increase, indicating that, as clothing became more freely available after the end of rationing, many people were choosing to shop in suburban locations rather than travelling into central London. Plant and Fowler, "Report on Department Store Trading" for years 1949 and 1950.

<sup>30</sup> City of Westminster Archives, Liberty & Co. catalogues, accounts demonstrate the store's retail bespoke focus.

<sup>31</sup> Plant and Fowler, "Report on Department Store Trading 1951", 5.

<sup>32</sup> Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 167.

<sup>33</sup> Marshall Orr, "Designing 'A Show-Place for Visitors'", 9-14.

<sup>34</sup> Lomax, "The View from the Shop", 281-2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>36</sup> Simpson, "Architecture and Interiors", 57-77.

<sup>37</sup> Suga, *The Reimann School*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>39</sup> The move towards more narrative displays can be traced in innovations in display mannequins, notably the 'sporting mannequins', staged in active poses, that J. Gottwald Ltd. began to produce in the mid-1930s. Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 48. See also Bronwen Edwards account of display design at Simpson's of Piccadilly in Edwards, *Making the West End modern*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> 'Letter from Stafford Bourne'. *Display*, April 1947, 22.

<sup>41</sup> This type of research is typified by the trip made by H. A. Holmes of Selfridges in December 1946. *Display Design & Presentation*, December 1946, 36.

<sup>42</sup> See Lomax, "The View from the Shop", 291.

<sup>43</sup> Schwarzkopf and Gries, *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research*, 6-9

<sup>44</sup> *Display*, February 1946, 10.

<sup>45</sup> See Erwin, "Display: Extra attention means extra sales", 114-120.

<sup>46</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, October 1948, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Parker, "Sign Consumption in the 19th-Century Department Store", 353-354.

<sup>48</sup> The number of firms producing branded womenswear lines increased 33 per cent. between 1939 and 1952. Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions*, 109-111.

<sup>49</sup> Worswick and Ady, *The British Economy 1945-1950*, 49.

<sup>50</sup> The sales figures of Sloane Square department store Peter Jones demonstrate that these financial pressures even affected previously comfortable consumers from the affluent centres of Kensington and Chelsea, reporting a drop of nearly £1 per average transaction in the fashion department in the year between January 1950 and 1951, from £6.10.10 to £5.12.10. In response to this squeeze in spending power, management ordered staff to highlight the good value offered by price reductions, and to refocus their stock procurement away from expensive garments to cheaper ready-to-wear items. John Lewis Archive, 268/9.

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- <sup>51</sup> Marks and Spencer's *Training News Bulletin*, a monthly publication for staff of all levels, reveals a sustained focused on educating staff in technical knowledge about clothes and fit in order to improve customer experience during this period.
- <sup>52</sup> 'Window shopping (Oxford Street)', 1946. Mass Observation, TC 4-5-D.
- <sup>53</sup> There are several examples of similar stunts during this period, with some displays being changed as frequently as twice a day. *Display*, January 1947, 33.
- <sup>54</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, February 1949, 38.
- <sup>55</sup> John Lewis Archives 2573/e, Peter Jones Department Reviews 1950-1952.
- <sup>56</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, December 1947, 25.
- <sup>57</sup> Plant and Fowler, "Report on department store trading 1951", 5.
- <sup>58</sup> Cowee, 'Display—or visual merchandising?', 48-52.
- <sup>59</sup> Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 134.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.
- <sup>61</sup> Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8, Eric Lucking personal papers.
- <sup>62</sup> Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 136-139. See also Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8, letters between Eric Lucking and Arthur Stewart Liberty, discussing display and publicity design.
- <sup>63</sup> The Ministry of Works regulated the supply of building materials and labour through a strict licensing system. In addition, the Ministry of Fuel and Power restricted newly nationalised energy supplies to industry and business as a result of national energy shortages. TNA, WORK 45/42.
- <sup>64</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1948, 12.
- <sup>65</sup> Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 137.
- <sup>66</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, March 1946, 6-9.
- <sup>67</sup> Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 137.
- <sup>68</sup> Symes, *Display Illustrated*, 131.
- <sup>69</sup> *Display*, *World Window*, 115.
- <sup>70</sup> Kirkham, 'Keeping up home front morale', 205-227.
- <sup>71</sup> Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*.
- <sup>72</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, March 1950, 9.
- <sup>73</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, May 1947, 22.
- <sup>74</sup> Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8/PL4, Eric Lucking's personal photographs of his display designs for Liberty & Co.
- <sup>75</sup> *Display Magazine*, *World Window*, 115.
- <sup>76</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1947, 16-17.
- <sup>77</sup> Menswear departments and retailers were more likely to place a high value on the historic fabric on which the area's reputation was built, combining modern ideas with more traditional aesthetics. For example, Austin Reed, a menswear retailer on Regent Street, incorporated elements of open space and modern industrial design into their ground floor ready-to-wear department, while retaining lush décor and wood paneling on the upper floor, which was the home of its upscale made-to-measure services. *Display Design & Presentation*, August 1947, 18. See also Edwards, "Shaping the Fashion City", 159.
- <sup>78</sup> Buruma, *Liberty & Co. in the Fifties and Sixties*, 7.
- <sup>79</sup> "Women: No Boondoggling". *Time*, 25 December, 1939.

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- <sup>80</sup> In a survey of British retailers, 80.8% noted that garments made according to standardised sizes for Dorville's 'American Size Dresses' range required considerably fewer workroom alterations in order to fit their customers than other brand dresses. *Draper's Record*, April 21 1945, 36.
- <sup>81</sup> John Lewis Archives, 946/7, notes on introduction of self-service in fashion departments in the autumn of 1951, Peter Jones Weekly Notes 27.11.51.
- <sup>82</sup> Sandgren, "From 'Peculiar Stores' to 'a New Way of Thinking'", 734-753.
- <sup>83</sup> Jessen and Langer, *Transformations of retailing*, 5.
- <sup>84</sup> Eric Lucking was promoted to the role of Display manager in 1947. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8, Eric Lucking personal papers.
- <sup>85</sup> "At D.H. Evans, posters set the tone", *Display Design & Presentation*, March 1949, 26.
- <sup>86</sup> As the move towards self-service in shops increased, innovative visual merchandising was even able to provide a solution to research that suggested customers increasingly wanted the idea of human interaction in a retail environment, without actually having to interact themselves. Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 47.
- <sup>87</sup> "Around the summer shows", *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1949, 15.
- <sup>88</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, August 1948, 23.
- <sup>89</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, September 1949, 23.
- <sup>90</sup> *Display Design & Presentation*, February 1949, 20.
- <sup>91</sup> Plant and Fowler, "Operating cost of department stores", reports for 1935-1938 and 1949-1953.
- <sup>92</sup> Abstract window displays were replaced in the early 1950s with a much more plentiful visual fantasy – where instead of a background of floating shapes or symbolic objects, garments were cast in a familiar (if glamorous) setting, such as a palace ballroom, dressed with copious props and often staged as a well-known fairytale narrative. "Dickens and Jones", *Display*, January 1950, 21.
- <sup>93</sup> *Display*, August 1951, 32-33.
- <sup>94</sup> Cant and Hefer, 'Visual Merchandising Displays', 1489–1496.
- <sup>95</sup> The international reputation of figures such as Eric Lucking is confirmed by the praise he received from *Fortune* magazine in 1951, in an article that generally praised West End window displays as world-class. *Fortune*, April 1951, 32.
- <sup>96</sup> See Elizabeth Ewing's descriptions of the post-war promotion of British fashion through its association with London by the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers and the London Model House Group. Ewing, *History of 20th Century Fashion*, 47.
- <sup>97</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 350.
- <sup>98</sup> "Bond Street is the shop window of the world". *Display*, December 1948, 15.
- <sup>99</sup> Gilbert, "From Paris to Shanghai", 27.

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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Beatrice Behlen and David Gilbert for all their support developing this research and to Peter Scott and the anonymous referees whose clear and thoughtful comments gave new direction and rigor to this work. I am grateful for all the help I received from archivists at the John Lewis Partnership Heritage Centre, City of Westminster Archive Centre and Marks and Spencer Company Archives. Thanks also to Thomas Buckley, Tristan Jacques and everyone else who contributed to make the first 'Evolution of the retail trade in the twentieth century' workshop such an inspiring event.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work was supported by an AHRC CDA in conjunction with the Museum of London [grant number AH/L003430/1].

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### **Figure captions**

Figure 1. Window display by Eric Lucking for Liberty & Co., 1949. *Westminster City Archives*.

Figure 2. Window display at Richard Shops, 1949. *Display, Design and Presentation*.

Figure 3. Junior Miss department at Swan and Edgar, 1948. *Display, Design and Presentation*.