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Bide, B orcid.org/0000-0002-5531-7190 (2023) Costume Design and Emotional Communication in 1940s British Cinema. In: Filippello, R and Parkins, I, (eds.) Fashion and Feeling: The Affective Politics of Dress. Palgrave Studies in Fashion and the Body . Palgrave Macmillan , pp. 63-82. ISBN 978-3-031-19099-5

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-19100-8_4

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Costume Design and Emotional Communication in 1940s British Cinema

Film costume is often thought of as surface. It is celebrated as the glitter that gives glamour to the tinsel of the silver screen or read as visual signifiers of character. However, enlarged on-screen, films present audiences with a hyper-real version of the materiality of clothes – whether familiar through their similarity to audiences' own clothes or alien in their extravagance or historical setting – and this material experience acts as a powerful form of emotional communication. This chapter asks what we can learn about the relationship between film costume, affect, and the historical study of emotions by engaging with how the materiality of clothes is represented and used on screen.

This chapter explores how clothes were depicted on-screen in the late 1940s in a selection of films produced by Ealing Studios and investigates how these were used by costume designers and cinematographers in order to communicate material experiences to British cinema audiences in the turbulent aftermath of the Second World War. By studying the construction, materials and wear evidenced in the presentation of clothes on screen, and by contextualizing these visual representations of materiality within the broader historical context of post-war Britain, this chapter suggests that costumes were designed to evoke complex and often contradictory sets of emotions within cinema audiences. Specifically, it considers how audience members might have understood the moral, gender and class connotations of fashion in film through their own experiences of making, buying and wearing clothes and how, in turn, these films shaped the way audiences interpreted their own bodily relationships towards the clothes they wore. Through this, it argues that film costume can further our understanding of the British public's changing emotional relationship to clothes during a period when conflict and global geopolitics disrupted every aspect of life, offering an insight into how mid-century audiences understood their place within contemporary British society and their relationship to the nation and its governance.

But uncovering how historic audiences felt about the multi-layered sensory consumption of clothes on-screen is easier said than done due to a lack of evidence about audience responses and active spectatorship before the age of mass digital consumption (Uhlirva 2013, p. 138; Khan 2012). In the place of recorded evidence, scholars have been left to speculate on how the visual presentation of garments as symbols of characters' feelings could trigger emotional responses in audiences, drawing on psychoanalytical theory to explore the individual, voyeuristic experience of watching a film at the

expense of understanding the social nature of cinematic experience (Swann 1987, p. 8; Bruzzi 2011, p. 178). Thinking phenomenologically about the visual experience of cinema offers an opportunity to access the emotions of costume in a different way. Recognising that film is a site of double embodiment between the film maker and spectator, costume becomes a lens through which we can understand 'what it means to be both an embodied visible subject and an embodied visible object' (Sobchack 1992, p. 260). Instead of 'reading' on-screen clothes in order to understand their symbolic agency, this chapter suggests that focusing on their materiality provides insight into how these fictional fashions conveyed very real shared material and bodily understandings between film makers and audience. This is achieved by exploring clothes on-screen as both visual and material sources, and by situating the consumption of film costume as an embodied visual and material practice for the cinematic audience. Additionally, by focusing on the way audience members consumed cultural values and narratives through the presentation of clothes on screen, it serves as a response to calls to consider the relationship between film and fashion consumption more broadly than simply the act of 'women shopping' for things they have seen in films (Warner 2012, p. 122-124).

The approach taken in this chapter further develops existing work that considers how the spectacle of clothes on-screen affects the audience (Uhlirova 2013, p. 19-26). It particularly draws on Giuliana Bruno's writing, which calls for us to think differently about materiality (Bruno 2014). Bruno is interested in how materiality manifests on the surface of different media and how the physicality of material objects can be translated into other mediums, such as photography and film. If, as Bruno discusses, 'materiality is not a question of materials but, fundamentally, of activating material relations', it follows that the contemporary ready-to-wear clothes shown on-screen in Ealing Studios productions provide a connection to the lost materiality of those garments, and through this, clues to the embodied and imaginative responses that 1940s audiences had to these costumes (Bruno 2014, p. 8).

Understanding that clothes on screen have a materiality is significant for their potential use as sources for exploring the relationship between historic fashions and feelings as a result of both the intimate, bodily relationship we have with the materiality of clothes and the way fashion can be used to communicate and negotiate individual and collective identity (Crane 2000). The growing field of emotional history is increasingly interested in the relationship between emotions and material objects (Plamper 2009). Historians of emotion have particularly noted the close, bodily relationship women have with garments and textiles (Dolan and Holloway 2016) and the potential of using these objects to tell narratives that give their makers and wearers historical agency (Fisk 2019). But emotional

histories are not just about individuals and this is not a chapter about contemporary readings of emotions in historic films since emotions are culturally and socially situated and so emotional experiences from the past cannot transcend time and space to be perfectly translated in the present (Tarlow 2012, p. 179). Instead, this chapter looks to clothes on screen to uncover clues about the structures of feeling operating in post-war Britain (Williams 1977). As Sara Ahmed (2004) notes, emotions are used to produce and maintain power structures and so exploring the histories of embodied experiences can help us understand how societies and cultures have changed and the processes and motivations behind these changes (Barclay 2020, p. 11)

Since the material culture of our environment can shape individual and collective feeling, it seems likely that the heightened sensory awareness of colours, sounds and light that occur in the darkness of the cinema provides a particularly effective space for the practice of emotions (Anderson 2009). Further, the popularity of cinema as a mass-entertainment medium in late 1940s Britain indicates it likely had a significant role as part of a cultural process by which the population learned appropriate emotional responses. Although the significance of the cinema as a historic space where emotions are practiced has not been explored in depth, it is well established that language and visual culture shape emotions (Rosenwein 2002). Research into the history of emotions broadly refutes the idea that humans have a set of innate emotional behaviours (Boddice 2018, p. 111-120). Due to the impossibility of emoting outside of a cultural framework, the field instead focuses on the practices that signal the connected processes of expression and emotion (Boddice 2018, p. 120). Using Pierre Bourdieu's definition of practice to connect society and the physical body, Monique Scheer has suggested that 'emotions themselves can be viewed as practical engagement' (Scheer 2012, p. 193). Scheer further draws on Bourdieu's idea of habitus to argue that cultural education is connected to the way that emotions are produced (Scheer 2012). Understanding emotions as something people actively do, rather than something that happens to them, this chapter uses Scheer's definition of emotional practice to suggest that the presentation of clothes on screen provides an extremely interesting source through which to consider how cinema audiences understood and used clothes in the practice of feeling.

Ealing Studios and the changing relationship between audiences and film fashions in post-war British cinema

Cinema played a particularly important role in the visual culture of post-war Britain due to its huge popularity. 1946, a year commonly remembered in historical accounts for fuel shortages and the

introduction of bread rationing, marked the peak of British cinema attendance, with audience numbers reaching 1,635 million (Williams 1998, p. 194). Moreover, films made in Britain for a British audience were more prominent than they had been since the 1920s as a result of government quotas to ensure a minimum percentage of films exhibited were British (Swann 1987, p. 84-85). One of the success stories that emerged from these circumstances was Ealing Studios.

The studios had been in operation since 1931 and became well-respected for their innovative documentaries during the Second World War, but it was in the immediate post-war years that the studio produced a series of comedy films that made their international reputation. This chapter explores two of these films. The first, *Hue and Cry*, was a comedy released in 1947 and told the story of a gang of semi-feral working-class London children who managed to foil a high-level criminal organisation. Following the success of *Hue and Cry*, Ealing focused on making more comedy films that celebrated the particular quirks of life in post-war Britain (Murphy 2003, p. 209). *Passport to Pimlico*, the second film discussed in this chapter, was subsequently released in 1949. It tells the story of a London neighbourhood so sick of rationing and austerity that it declared independence from Britain.

These films focused on reflecting an 'authentic' view of contemporary British life, drawing on the lessons Ealing's cameramen learned while making wartime documentaries in order to create films that, according to the studio's head Michael Balcon, projected 'Britain and the British Character' (Barr 1998, p. 7). 1940s reviews of Ealing Studios productions demonstrate that the 'realistic' depiction of everyday life was key to their appeal (Picturegoer 1947, p. 12). Although the appeal to film fashions is often considered to lie in the opportunities it offers for fantastical escapism, British cinema audiences began to reject outlandish Hollywood costumes in the late 1930s, preferring instead to see clothes that were closer to their lived experiences (Roberts 2022). This trend gathered further momentum due to the differences in wartime shortages and restrictions on clothing consumption between Britain and America in the 1940s.

The choice of clothes and the way they were depicted on screen provided an important way of communicating a shared sense of social realism to audiences and the wardrobe department took great pains to ensure the clothes on-screen were representative of what was available to buy, conducting in-depth research in both shops and street markets (Surowiec 2012, p. 115). The majority of contemporary costumes for female characters were items of ready-to-wear sourced from London

shops. Ealing's costume designer, Anthony Mendleson, would supply a costume list to the Board of Trade and receive a corresponding supply of clothing coupons in order to purchase these garments (Surowiec 2021, p114). This made sourcing last-minute additions or replacement costumes problematic—particularly during 1947 when factories were closed due to the winter fuel crisis and supplies were severely disrupted—and actors were encouraged to treat their costumes with care because the clothes were embedded in these austerity consumption processes (Surowiec 2012, p. 113-115).

Costumes for use on-stage or screen are generally considered as separate and different to the creations of fashion designers, but this method of sourcing clothes blurs this distinction between the materialities of clothes on- and off-screen (Stutesman 2011, p. 20). Many London audience members were familiar with the materiality of the clothes they saw on-screen because they frequented the same shops and owned garments by the same brands featured in the films. Yet the close-up shots of these garments on large cinema screens would have also confronted them with a strangely hyper-real view of these familiar clothes, prompting them to look again. The uncanny nature of this shared understanding between audiences and clothes on-screen made the costumes particularly effective tools for evoking sensory memories and emotions in audience members. However, these garments would also have signified different feelings to different people according to their socio-economic, cultural and geographical backgrounds (Barclay 2020, p. 3). This chapter thus considers the complexities of how the on-screen materiality of a garment's weight, smell and marks of wear might have been understood by 1940s audiences in multiple ways and reflects on how this ability of clothes on screen to simultaneously elicit multiple and sometimes contradictory emotions enables them to provide insight into the way people used fashion as a tool to negotiate their experiences of a deeply changed environment and society. In particular, it highlights how these on-screen clothes provided space to mourn what was lost and what people feared they were going to lose in the changes brought by post-war modernity.

Hue and Cry: negotiating the morality of desire and consumption at a time of austerity

The Second World War changed the physical and social landscapes of Britain. It loosened social hierarchies and widened opportunities (Porter 2000, p. 418). This had implications for the way people understood and interpreted how others dressed, since clothes are coded with cultural understandings

of class, respectability and social hierarchies. By extension, the consumption of clothes on screen provided a means by which the British public could practice and navigate these changes through what Erin Sullivan describes as ‘emotional improvisation’, a process by which individuals adjust their emotional responses to their surrounding environment so that those responses more closely correspond with prevailing linguistic and visual representations of emotions (Sullivan 2016, p. 9).

Ealing’s post-war films play with audience assumptions and perceptions of respectability in dress to explore the boundaries of Britain’s new social freedoms and the changing meaning of class at this time. On its surface, *Hue and Cry* (1947) uses the materiality of worn clothing to express an optimistic view of the power of the British public to topple unfair and corrupt social hierarchies by working cooperatively together. The film tells the story of a group of working-class London youths who discover that criminal networks have been sending coded messages using the pages of a children’s comic. In spite of widespread police corruption and incompetence, the children eventually manage to foil the criminal gang in a hopeful narrative of honesty and integrity triumphing over the vested interests of a powerful social elite.

[Figure 1 near here]

Figure 1: *Hue and Cry* scene still showing Rhona (far right) in bus queue. 1947. Studiocanal Films Ltd/Ronald Grant/Mary Evans.

The scale of the struggle faced by the children in order to bring down a criminal network entrenched within London’s social and cultural establishment is reinforced through the materiality of their clothes. The child-heroes of the film wear distinctly shabby attire. They appear dressed in the working-class uniform of hand-me-down suit jackets and ties, displaying various rips in their ill-fitting clothes. These outfits provide a clear visual distinction with those of the criminal elements in the film, who are not only neatly dressed in newer clothes, but are fashionable in a way that seems out-of-place and notably ostentatious amid the rubble and bomb damage of post-war London. The character of Rhona, one of the criminal gang, most clearly exemplifies this visual distinction. As is evident in figure 1 (picturing Rhona waiting in a bus queue with some of the children), Rhona is the model of contemporary high-fashion. From her crisp turban to her well-heeled shoes, Rhona embodies an aesthetic that nods unpatriotically towards the latest Parisian trends. The jarringly clear visual distinction between Rhona

and the other figures in this street scene raises questions as to how Rhona is able to get her hands on these fashions at a time of ongoing rationing and shortages, implying that such a look could only be obtained through the proceeds of criminal greed.

Beyond stylistic references, however, it is the material differences between how the criminals and the children wear their clothes that really casts suspicion on these characters and their self-interested motivations. In contrast to the children she stands with, Rhona's clothes look jarringly new. This is less to do with their style, and more the result of visual clues that indicate the difference between new and well-worn garments. For example, the shoulders of Rhona's jacket are smooth whereas the children's are dented where the shoulder padding has broken down and shifted as a result of a long period of wear. Similarly, the children's jackets show puckering on the quarters below the lapels, a product of shrinkage during washing that would be familiar to members of the audience at this time. Furthermore, Rhona's shiny open-toed heels contrast with the scuffed and stretched leather of the children's shoes, and her fine, sheer stockings stand out against the folds of their coarse wool socks.

The visual clues as to how the costumes in *Hue and Cry* had been worn, washed and used drew on the audience's shared understanding of what happens to clothes when they are embodied to challenge them to reconsider their own cultural assumptions that associated being well-dressed and being respectable. The materiality of the worn costumes worked against the underlying prejudices many Londoners felt about the clothes of the working classes, the shabbiness of which they interpreted as signs of vulgar and inferior tastes.¹ Conversely, *Hue and Cry* used dirty and heavily worn clothes to signify the eminently respectable characteristics of integrity and hard work. The central protagonist, a boy named Joe Kirby, is frequently shot in close-ups that clearly show the dark dirt marks around his cuffs. This dirt is gathered from his laborious work at Covent Garden Market as well as from the time he spends hanging out with the gang on dusty bomb sites, and it roots him as a productive contributor to the landscape he lives in.

In appealing to the audience's material understanding of what it was like to wear and care for clothes at a time of austerity, the film subverts prevailing cultural narratives about which members of society were most likely to make up the criminal class. This provided an opportunity for the audience to

¹ These prejudices are apparent in contemporary diaries, typically commenting on working-class dress as 'unmistakably vulgar in colour and design'. Diary for 12 November 1948. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474.

engage in processes of emotional improvisation by adjusting their conditioned responses to more closely correspond with an emerging and idealised vision of post-war Britain as a social-democracy where class played a diminished role in determining opportunities. The film's concern with criminality is a particularly fruitful site for this type of emotional improvisation due to the extensive media coverage in 1946 of a perceived crime wave and large numbers of petty burglaries (Hennessy 1992, p. 445). *Hue and Cry*'s dirty clothing explicitly challenges the moral panic contained in the newspaper reports that blamed this crime wave on the real gangs of youths who played on bombsites—the result, according to newspaper columnist Molly Panter Downes, of wartime family breakdowns and lack of disciplining father figures (Kynaston 2008, p. 113). However, rather than pointing fingers at these semi-feral children, the film harnesses these stereotypes within the story, playing off the understood material meanings of worn clothing to expose the hypocrisy of British society's tendency to turn a blind eye to the criminal behavior of certain types of people simply because they look respectable. The association between worn clothing, honesty and integrity is emphasised by the way *Hue and Cry*'s young characters get noticeably shabbier as the film progresses. Joe Kirby's journey from daydreaming youth to action hero is not marked by a transformation into a well-dressed young man, but can be traced in the deteriorating materiality of his crudely home-made jumper. Joe's visibly aged jumper, with a baggy, stretched neckline and darned holes, physically unravels in a series of ever longer loose threads as he solves the crime.

In contrast, the use of neat, new clothes to indicate an association between fashionable excess, self-interest and morally dubious behaviour in *Hue and Cry* echoes state narratives about post-war austerity, which associated material self-sacrifice with patriotism and concern for the greater good. In choosing this portrayal of clothes on-screen the cinematographers and producers seem to be supporting the emotional regimes of post-war Britain. Emotional regimes can be understood as the practices by which a 'set of normative emotions' are used to support the authority and power of organisations or groups, such as the government and the church, and through this act to underpin stable societies (Reddy 2001, p. 129). Close-ups of luxurious pieces of clothing in *Hue and Cry* invite the audience to test themselves according to the morality of post-war emotional regimes by contrasting materially attractive objects against the unappealing costumes of the youthful gang. When the criminals attempt a hit on Riches (an aptly named fictional department store on Oxford Circus), the children foil their plans against the backdrop of a fashion display that is stocked full of expensive evening dresses. The way the dresses are lit conveys a tactile sense of the luxury of these garments, accentuating the drape, weight and sheen of expensive fabrics against the clean marble floors of the store. As the camera closes in on one particularly dramatic full-length dress in silk satin, the visual

pleasure of the shot is disrupted by a mouse escaping from underneath its voluminous skirt, swiftly followed by a grubby child's hand and a threadbare jacket sleeve. The lack of regard this scruffy child shows for the luxury of the dress's fabric as he roughly pushes it aside chides audience members who were distracted from the higher-order business of the film's plot by the visual pleasures of material goods and reminds them of their social responsibility to sacrifice pleasurable consumption for the sake of national priorities at a time of austerity.

However, the materiality of clothing in *Hue and Cry* also highlights the complexity of the British public's relationship with the way they were encouraged to feel about ongoing shortages and sacrifices, and particularly the narrative that austerity regulations meant an equality of material sacrifice. On the one hand, the film clearly exemplifies a continuation of wartime emotional regimes celebrating patriotic material self-sacrifice for a greater good. On the other, it highlights the inescapable lure of material consumption and growing cracks in the mythology about fair shares for all under a Labour government, using contrasts between worn and unworn clothing to evoke a raw sense of the material unfairness of persistent class inequalities, which ran counter to the narrative of social reform and a new, fairer, post-war Britain (Hennessey 1992, p. 129). The ingrained and ever-present debris from bomb damaged buildings on the children's clothes also highlight the persistence of wartime trauma and the depth of these emotions. This particular type of dry dirt, formed of brick and plaster dust, seems to inescapably cling to their clothes, as if the built environment itself is resisting the modernising project of post-war social change. Through the lens of Avery Gordon's work on haunting, this simultaneously lingering and unreachable reminder of the pre-war built environment provides an insight into feelings that might be repressed under the politically sanctioned emotional regimes of the day (Gordon 2008). While these young characters may embody the hopes of a fairer and more egalitarian society, their clothes encapsulate the emotional difficulty of escaping the past.

Passport to Pimlico: navigating conflicted emotions through out-of-place clothes

Hue and Cry's moral message of sartorial self-denial felt increasingly out of touch with the national mood by the time Ealing Studios came to shoot their next comedy film. By 1948, the persistent difficulties of austerity, notably ongoing rationing and the high cost of living, left many feeling weighed down by the 'constant struggle' of life in post-war Britain (Kynaston 2008, p. 296). The 1949 release *Passport to Pimlico* mirrors this rising public frustration and introduces a heightened moral ambiguity into the way costume is used to convey individuality and material desires, once again allowing

audiences space to engage with processes of emotional navigation and improvisation through their imagined responses to the clothes on the cinema screen.

Passport to Pimlico offered cinema-goers the tantalising possibility of a return to unbridled consumption in an alternate post-austerity reality, with the opening credits humorously dedicating the film 'to the memory of' ration books—a clever solution to the fact that the government announced the ending of rationing on a number of items, including clothing, while the film was in post-production, rendering most of its rationing references immediately historical (Sellers 2015, p. 138). The film's plot centres around the discovery of a royal charter in a crater left by the detonation of an unexploded bomb in London's Pimlico area. This charter details that, due to historic land ownership, Pimlico is legally part of Burgundy. Seizing the opportunity to escape oppressive government regulation, the locals declare themselves independent Burgundians and enjoy the excesses of unrestricted consumption for the first time in years—at least until their supplies run out.

Unlike *Hue and Cry*, which celebrated reuse and repair, *Passport to Pimlico* finds hope through a rebellious rejection of austerity rules relating to clothes. The consumption of clothing is one of the first signs of the new freedoms enjoyed by Pimlico residents after gaining their independence. Upon hearing the news, the grocery shop assistant Molly (played by Jane Hylton) abandons her shop counter and runs to the local dress shop to purchase a blouse that she had previously not had enough coupons to buy. The freedom symbolised in the act of purchasing an item without coupons is further explored through the use of the materiality of clothes to convey a powerful sensory experience of consumption. The presentation of the material properties of fabrics in the shop evokes sensory memories of the excitement, pleasure and promise of shopping for new clothes. The clothes Molly rifles through on the shop's rack are made of lightweight patterned cottons, silks and new synthetic materials that move easily through her fingers with a tactile promise they would be accommodately comfortable to wear. The materiality of these garments provides a stark contrast to Molly's work overalls, which are made of a coarse, heavy cotton, the weight of which is further emphasised by the way the sleeves are rolled up into thick, tight bunches. The fabric of the overalls is aged into a grubby shade of white, and the back is covered in dirty marks from the day's work activities. The juxtaposition of these materials on-screen uses the implied tactile experience—beyond even the look—of the lightweight shop garments to equate this coupon-free purchase with the promise of an easier and less laborious future.

[Figure 2 near here]

Figure 2: *Passport to Pimlico*, 1949. Studiocanal Films Ltd/Ronald Grant/Mary Evans.

The physical weight of women's clothing is important throughout *Passport to Pimlico*. Audiences familiar with contemporary fashions would have known that the lightweight qualities of the garments worn by the newly-liberated Burgundians indicate that they are mass-produced items of ready-to-wear. These inexpensive clothes, which were unlined and made from cottons and synthetic fabrics, conveyed a material understanding of accessibility because they were affordable—so affordable in fact that it is only rationing that limits the film's characters from buying them. Britain's rapidly expanding medium-quality ready-to-wear industry sold the egalitarian notion that people from all walks of life should be able to access new fashion trends, and dressing characters in these clothes helped anchor the film's narrative as a relatable fantasy. By suggesting that, in a world without purchase tax or controls, British people of all classes might find pride in their ability to look stylish, Ealing Studios drew on the transformative promise of ready-to-wear as a method of indicating Britain's upward trajectory from austerity to modernity.

Elsewhere in the film, however, clothes are also used to disrupt the idea that this was a purely linear trajectory of progress. Although Ealing's post-war comedy films have proved enduringly popular as nostalgic representations of a gentler past, focused on community and celebrations of small triumphs, they are also rife with clues that point to the 'underlying anxieties' of post-war Britain (Boyce 2012, p. 6). From frustration at continued austerity to anger at pervading social inequality—as well as broader unspoken fears of an uncertain future, which compelled characters to long for a return to wartime and its reassuring sense of solidarity—Ealing's post-war films are underscored by a sense of sadness at the impossibly large gap between their fantastical narratives and the realities of their audiences' experiences (Barr 1998, p. 104-106). Although film scholars have considered how Ealing's comedy output made space for mainstream films to discuss troubling social narratives—and even celebrate ambiguous morality—through plots, music and actors that conveyed a light-hearted tone, the compelling insight that their presentation of clothes offers into the conflicted nature of the post-war hopes and fears of screen audiences is still widely overlooked (Daubney 2006, p. 61).

Where Ealing's wardrobe team used contemporary ready-to-wear fashions to root films in the present, the incongruous materiality of placing old clothes in contemporary settings was used to create a sense of unease by confusing audiences' expectations of what they thought they should be seeing. While *Passport to Pimlico* provides plenty of visual clues that remind the audience that the film is set in London in 1949, the costumes on the screen often challenge and confuse this temporality. Much like the layers of London's built history that were exposed by bombs during the blitz, the presence of old, out-of-style clothes on-screen dug up and exposed a version of past that intruded, unwelcomely, on the present.

Passport to Pimlico's darker, anti-authority, sentiment is encapsulated in its use of out-of-date military dress to ridicule and undermine establishment systems and the regulations that stem from them. These military costumes are worn in strange combinations and odd settings to muddle the audience's understanding of socially accepted power structures and hierarchies by placing these material signifiers of wartime authority within consciously atypical contexts. The most powerful example of incongruous military attire comes in the form of the makeshift uniform worn by the local policeman, P.C. Spiller, after he has taken on the role of Burgundian passport control officer. Spiller trades in his official police uniform for one that looks to be improvised from parts of his daily wardrobe, combined with a shirt and a British Wolseley pattern helmet of the type worn during the North Africa campaign—presumably remnants from his military service. The audience would have understood that this desert uniform was not only utterly out of time but jarringly out-of-place in Pimlico. This ridiculous attire is also ill-fitting and sloppily worn. The way the tie has been styled to hang carelessly off-centre reveals gaps between buttonholes where the shirt is stretched by Spiller's rounded stomach, suggesting he has physically let himself go somewhat since the end of the war. Both the clothes and the way they are worn serve to utterly undercut his claim to authority. This supposed uniform, comprised of objects that were once material symbols of patriotic service, has become a joke at the expense of official authority figures, likely resonating with members of the audience left politically disengaged and cynical of authority after their experiences of conflict (Fielding 1992, p. 623).

The film also incorporates non-military items of wartime costume, such as the old wartime tin helmets donned by shopkeeper Arthur Pemberton and his daughter Shirley in order to explore the crater left by a recently exploded bomb, itself a wartime relic. These Zuckerman helmets would have been instantly familiar to audiences as they had been standard wartime issue for civil defence personnel such as Fire Guards and ARP wardens. Arthur's helmet is even painted with the letters 'PW', indicating

his mid-ranking wartime role as a Post Warden and, with this, aiming a subtle dig at his inflated sense of self-importance. Shirley visibly struggles with the heavy materiality of her helmet throughout the scene, eventually resorting to fastening its chin strap extremely tightly in an attempt to keep it balanced on her head. Many members of the audience would likely share similar material memories of wearing such awkward and uncomfortable helmets on war service, and this may well have evoked embodied memories of the emotions they associated with civil defence duties during that frightening time. But the heavy materiality of the helmet is also juxtaposed with Shirley's lightweight civilian summer clothes, and the reflective qualities of its dull, dented metal contrasts with the shine of her newly painted nails, mixing the material memories of the past with a more modern tactile understanding of the present.

Although their overall effect is comic, the sheer number of these repeating remnants of an unpleasant past on the large cinema screen provided an inescapable provocation to the audience—reminding them of the length of time that had elapsed since the end of the war, and of the continuing distance between the unfulfilled promises made by wartime and post-war governments and the darker realities of their post-war lives (Williams 1994, p. 98-100). Thus the juxtaposition between the materiality of clothes from past and the present in *Passport to Pimlico* embodies both the disorientating emotional impact of rapid social change and the role of clothes on screen as a tool to help audiences navigate their emotional responses to this.

Conclusions

The presentation of clothes as weighty, challenging and disruptive on-screen presences in *Hue and Cry* and *Passport to Pimlico* highlights their ability to evoke embodied emotional practices from cinema audiences, conjuring a spectrum of responses and linking to individual and collective memories through their material associations. Through this, these clothes provided a way for audiences to navigate the difficulties, confusion and grief of living through an extremely turbulent period in British history and a means to process the disappointment and resentment caused by a lingering suspicion that, in spite of the grand promises of social reform, little of importance had really changed in Britain's New Jerusalem.

Enlarged on a cinema screen, Ealing films presented audiences with a hyper-real version of the familiar realities of their own clothes. The documentary-inspired style of the cinematography of these films highlights the materiality of how clothes are worn in unusual detail for fiction films of the time. It draws attention to marks of wear in the form of pulled threads and worn patches that might otherwise seem insignificant, and exaggerates the violence of ripped seams. 'Reading' the details of these film costumes and considering how they communicated with audiences through a shared language of material experience demonstrates that the presentation of clothes on-screen did more than just support the narrative told by the script. Unlike many Hollywood films from the era, the Ealing comedies of the 1940s did not offer an escape from austerity through fantasy or historical costumes. Instead, they held a mirror to it, exaggerating and distorting aspects of post-war life in order to provoke cathartic audience responses. Through the familiar materiality of the garments used and the realism with which they were worn, these on-screen clothes provided audiences with opportunities for emotional negotiation, evoking the moral ambiguity that lurked beneath the surface of life in post-war austerity Britain.

This material presentation of clothes on-screen demonstrates how fashion played an integral role in the way the British public understood post-war social change, helping people locate themselves, their desires, and their fears in a much-changed physical and cultural landscape (Bide 2020). As a result, studying the clothes in these films provides insight into the historical emotions of the 1940s and the importance of fashion as a tool for navigating and expressing these emotions. They reveal a public fearful that Britain's post-war problems went far deeper than material shortages and ongoing rationing. The compellingly realistic material *mise-en-scène* of clothes underpins the humour, comradery and localised community spirit of these films with an inescapable sense that Britain had paid the price for wartime victory by condemning itself to a future as an unpleasant, dirty and broken nation in which individuals found themselves confined to stifling lives with limited opportunities. But this presentation also offered audiences escape from their worst fears by allowing individuals to experience a cathartic purging of their own conflicted sentiments towards this strange time of change and tremendous loss, reminding them that there was also hope for a different future.²

² Catharsis here refers to the sense of pleasurable calm achieved by witnessing a tragic narrative unfold from beginning to end, allowing the audience to imagine the worst that could happen, experiencing a sense of completion as this unfolds and then a sense of relief at remembering that this is fiction (Nuttall 1996, p. 76).

By providing space in the darkness of the cinema for audiences to engage in these processes of emotional improvisation, these films actively used the materiality of fashion to help shift and shape the emotional regimes of post-war Britain. This reflects the politics of many at Ealing Studios, including the producer Michael Balcon, an ardent socialist who became increasingly disillusioned with the Labour Party and its post-war settlement throughout this period (Sinclair 1989, p. 250). Understanding the power that fashion had to resist and subvert the official government narratives and institutional propaganda that underpinned the emotional regimes of wartime Britain provides an important tool for reassessing the nostalgic lens through which the 1940s is often presented and dispel some of the historical mythologies about this period.

Film costumes play a significant role in crafting our understandings of national, cultural and class identity (Hole 2011). Acknowledging the conflicted emotions expressed and elicited by the materiality of clothes in these films therefore demands we also interrogate how these clothes have subsequently been discussed as representations of austerity moralities in Britain, finding heroism in the wearing of old worn clothes and plucky underdog spirit in clever legal loopholes around rationing. These types of narratives about the representational meaning of costume in *Passport to Pimlico* and *Hue and Cry* have validated a particular set of collective memories about both 1940s fashion and the broader cultural mood of the period—which revolve around narratives of creative making do and the nobility of sartorial sacrifice for the greater good—at the expense of excluding divergent experiences (Miształ 2003, p. 10-16). The continuing popularity of the Ealing comedies and the prevailing cultural nostalgia for austerity that they feed makes this a powerful narrative about the emotional cultures of post-war Britain, as exemplified by their use by the right-wing press in support of causes including the Conservative party and Brexit (Littlejohn 2020; Smith 2020).

Instead, by considering the spectrum of emotional responses that the material details of clothes might have evoked in audiences, this chapter unsettles these narratives by revealing the conflicted emotions of the immediate post-war period. These emotions speak of the contrasting experiences of the sections of British society enabled by the opportunities offered by post-war change and those frustrated by the lack of progress they perceived in reforms that were achieved through legislation, rather than bottom-up social change, leaving inequality, sexism and prejudice ingrained into British society (Morgan 2001, p. 108). Thus not only does close scrutiny of the materiality of clothes on film offer opportunities for the study of emotional histories, it also provides a means to resist the co-option of fashion by nostalgic and simplistic historical narratives that serve contemporary political interests.

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