



Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe

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This book explores the material and visual world of the socialist Bloc from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. The essays, by authors from a range of disciplines, examine the forms and uses of material objects that made up the environment of life behind the 'Iron Curtain', and investigates the particular ways in which these objects came to represent the often divergent aspirations of regimes and peoples in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The two decades after the end of the Second World War considered here constitute two contrasting periods: that of post-war Stalinism and the 'sovietization' or 'stalinization' of Eastern Europe; and, from the mid-1950s, the period of destalinization and relative cultural liberalization known as the Thaw. During the Thaw, consumerism and a moderate fashion consciousness began to be tolerated or even encouraged to varying degrees in different parts of the Bloc. Style, regarded as a suspect notion under Stalin, became a legitimate and even urgent issue. What forms of dress, home furnishings and housing, as well as of fine art, would provide a stimulating environment that could meet the physical and ideological needs of -- and give shape to -- modern, socialist life? Challenging the assumption that all cultural norms were generated and effectively imposed by Moscow, essays in this anthology investigate the interactions and exchanges between the countries of the Eastern Bloc and ask how, even in socialist economies, the consumption of material objects -- or the refusal to consume -- could project personal and collective identities and even articulate resistance.

Anyone who seeks to understand the effects of state socialism on life in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, or who is interested in the intersection of politics with art, design and material culture will find this book absorbing and illuminating.

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