

ated a retail environment unto itself, as cut off from the outside world as any latter-day Las Vegas casino. In addition, the parking lots that now encircled these retail malls shortened the distance customers had to walk to and from their cars. To his credit, Longstreth avoids the antimall animus that one finds in much architectural writing about the shopping center. Instead, he emphasizes that many leading mall developers deeply understood how the mall had replaced the downtown shopping experience and tried with great seriousness and sense of responsibility to fashion a new kind of urban experience. Architects and developers such as Victor Gruen and James Rouse attempted to create retail landscapes that they believed recalled the scale and meaning of preindustrial town centers in Europe—places that would offer all of the amenities of community without the “traditional urban physical characteristics” (212).

The final chapters of *The American Department Store Transformed* offer a novel-like conclusion to many of the issues and dilemmas that department store executives faced earlier in the century. By the 1960s, the department store, seemingly faced with extinction, had to reinvent itself as an integral part of a new suburban shopping experience. In many ways, even though the department store could never again reclaim its place as an essential and treasured element of the downtown shopping expedition, it could become the anchor and focal hub of the regional mall that had become a ubiquitous element of postwar American culture.

Greg Castillo

Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design

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312 pages. 93 black-and-white illustrations.

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Review by Gabrielle Esperdy

Greg Castillo's *Cold War on the Home Front* opens with a strategic pairing. The frontispiece to the Introduction is a reproduction of a 1940s U.S. propaganda poster depicting a confident couple, a white man and a white woman, holding hands as they stride forward atop a verdant hill. As four-engine bombers fly in formation overhead, a massive smoke-spewing factory sprawls into the distance. This is military-industrial power intended “to protect our way of life” through unbridled wartime production. On the opposite page, Castillo describes a fictitious bombing campaign imagined by an American sociologist in the early 1950s. In this “Operation Abundance,” U.S. bombers drop women’s nylons over the Soviet Union in hopes of subduing the new enemy with an impressive display of limitless postwar production. These two images represent a paradigmatic shift that is critical to Castillo’s book: no sooner was the Arsenal of Democracy retooled for peacetime prosperity than it was redeployed to fight communism with consumerism in the 1950s. The uses to which expanding consumerism were put in the political battle of wills between the communist East and the capitalist West in the decades after World War II is the fascinating subject of *Cold War on the Home Front*. The title refers not to civilian populations during the prolonged engagement but to the way agents on both sides of the conflict drafted the house, figuratively and literally, into their respective campaigns of psychological warfare. Despite this titular

pun, as Castillo’s book makes clear, these operations were utterly serious attempts to ensure that the war stayed cold despite the considerable heat generated by the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Castillo contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines how architecture and design advance political ideology and are, in turn, shaped by its strictures. While volumes such as Jane Loeffler’s *The Architecture of Diplomacy* (1999) and Annabel Jane Wharton’s *Building the Cold War* (2001) have looked at how buildings (embassies and hotels, respectively) displayed American power and prestige at midcentury, Castillo usefully looks both east and west, paying particular attention to the ways in which communism and capitalism manipulated cultural perceptions and realities through the promotion of domestic design and *Wohnkultur* via state and corporate sponsorship of manufacturing and display. The benefits of this dual perspective are evident throughout the book’s seven chapters, as for example in “Stalinism by Design” and “People’s Capitalism” (chapters 4 and 5), which explore the political and aesthetic rhetoric of hard-line antimodernists in East Germany and hard-line anticommunists in the United States. Taken together, these provide the reader with simultaneous portraits of two cultural moments that are as instructive in their surprising similarities as in their familiar differences.

Cold War on the Home Front covers some of the same territory as *Cold War Kitchen* (edited by Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, 2008), to which Castillo contributed an essay on “The American ‘Fat Kitchen’ in Europe.” Both books deal with the impact of American domestic technology on Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, and both analyze the famous kitchen debate between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev as a key stratagem of Cold War gamesmanship. Importantly for Castillo in the present volume, the confrontation, which took place in front of a model kitchen at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, was merely the endgame, only the

most iconic in a series of ideological gambits that amounted to a consumer goods parallel to the USA–USSR arms race.

The shift “from military hardware to modern housewares,” as Castillo memorably puts it in the Introduction (viii), was a means of exercising the “soft power” of the book’s subtitle. This term, coined by the political scientist Joseph Nye in his book *Bound to Lead* (1990) and further elaborated in *Soft Power* (2004), is distinguished from the hard power of military and economic coercion. Soft power, by contrast, attracts and seduces in order to win hearts and minds, operating through such channels as cultural diplomacy, information distribution, and propaganda. Throughout the book, Castillo documents and interprets soft-power assets, from model homes and furniture installations to cooking demonstrations and supermarket displays, as exploited by the Americans, the Germans, and the Russians. This includes the Marshall Plan, the United States Information Agency, the Office of International Trade Fairs, the *Internationale Bau-Ausstellung*, and the Party Central Committees in East Germany and the Soviet Union. The polemics and products on view in the Mutual Security Agency’s We’re Building a Better Life exhibit of 1952 (chapter 3), the Deutsche Bauakademie’s Live Better—More Beautifully show of 1953 (chapter 4), and the USIA’s American National Exhibition of 1959 (chapter 6) are examined in great detail, and Castillo’s excellent analysis of their planning and reception lays bare their ideological underpinnings.

Though the book’s illustrations serve Castillo’s arguments well enough, since they are all black and white it is hard to get a sense of the aesthetic impact that American consumer goods would have had behind the Iron Curtain. Only the single color illustration on the book’s cover hints at what this experience might have been like. It’s 1959 in Moscow and a smiling Betty Crocker demonstration baker stands in a model kitchen showing off a freshly frosted layer cake, presumably made from the boxed mix on the counter that separates her

from the Soviet visitors passing by. Her hair is perfectly coiffed, her pearls are tight at the neck, and her dress is emblazoned with a large red-white-and-blue badge of the exhibition’s logo. Behind her are bright yellow built-in appliances, including a huge box of a refrigerator and a wall-mounted oven with a see-through window. In front of her are electric burners set directly into a Formica countertop. Everything is shiny and new; even the dish drainer matches. This is American prosperity and abundance on display. Once the book is opened, however, the reader must rely solely on Castillo’s fine descriptions (i.e., “furnished by Macy’s Department Store in tones of blue and green” (159)) to convey Technicolor pizzazz. (Some of this may be gleaned from *Opening in Moscow*, a period documentary by D. A. Pennebaker, Albert Maysles, and Shirley Clarke, which is available on YouTube in a condensed ten-minute version.)

Looking at the photographs in *Cold War on the Home Front*, one sometimes strains to discern the differences between the secondhand modernism produced in the factories of the United States and Western Europe and the secondhand modernism produced in the factories of the Eastern Bloc. Profit margins and profit sharing don’t reproduce well in black and white, and if, as Castillo’s research shows, the communist furniture was more cheaply made than the capitalist furniture, you can’t readily tell from the pictures. At any rate, the differences are less important than their political uses. Nowhere is this clearer than in Castillo’s ongoing narrative, really the subplot of the book, tracing the political trajectory of modernism with an almost archaeological precision.

Parts of this story are undeniably familiar—the emergence of avant-garde modernism at the Werkbund and the Bauhaus in the 1920s, the condemnation of “degenerate” modernism by the National Socialists in the 1930s, and the assimilation of mainstream modernism by U.S. corporations in the 1950s. But Castillo revises the standard postwar triumphalism by his nuanced reading of mod-

ernism’s other postwar history, revealing what was going on back in Germany at exactly the same time that the Eamses, George Nelson, Herman Miller, and Knoll were becoming household names. In particular, he reveals modernism’s changing fortunes in the hands of the Politburo as it first reviled and then rehabilitated modern design—ultimately, as Castillo shows in chapter 7, declaring it safe for socialist consumption.

The book has the feel, if not the actual structure, of a point-counterpoint debate alternating between American and Eastern Bloc points of view. “Household Affluence and Its Discontents” (chapter 1) and “Cultural Revolutions in Tandem” (chapter 2) are especially excellent in this regard. While effectively emphasizing the inherent tension of the Cold War, by the volume’s end the ideological one-upmanship begins to seem absurd. This isn’t Castillo’s fault; blustering propaganda, whether communist or capitalist, needs little embellishment, particularly when it involves push-button appliances and packaged foods or Nixon and Khrushchev. Still, given the slyness of the book’s title, this reader expected at least a touch of humor on the author’s part, something along the lines of the 1982 documentary *Atomic Café*, (his recounting of the visit of a delegation of Soviet housing experts to America in 1955 comes close). But perhaps Castillo’s straightforward sobriety strikes the right cautionary tone. Two decades after the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, there may be something amusingly quaint about design as brinksmanship. But one decade after 9/11, with the United States still walling up its embassies, acting unilaterally, and engaging in hot wars, we would do well to heed the lessons of soft power—an asset Castillo so effectively reveals in *Cold War on the Home Front*.

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