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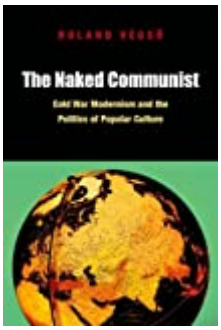

Roland Végsö. *The Naked Communist: Cold War Modernism and the Politics of Popular Culture.* New York: Fordham University Press. 245 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8232-4556-7; $24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8232-4557-4.

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The Naked Communist provides readers with an intriguing theoretical discussion of the forces of Cold War modernity. Roland VÃ©sgÃ¶ argues that four central figures shaped postwar ideology: the world, the enemy, the secret, and the catastrophe. The central purpose of his study is to examine the âaesthetic ideology,â or more aptly put what constructed anti-Communism and how it developed (p. 3). He uses nuclear holocaust, spy, and popular political novels juxtaposed with U.S. political culture and thought to show how these two seemingly different fields created a central ideology and program.

The Naked Communist offers a look into the construction and use of mass culture, along with an inspection of Cold War discourse. VÃ©sgÃ¶âs use of theory is well played and maintained throughout the study. He begins by setting up the theoretical framework that he employs later on. For instance, he brings out Louis Althusserâs theories on ideology in the first chapter. Here VÃ©sgÃ¶ discusses how Althusser claims that art does not âmake us conscious of its object (in the form of concepts)â (p. 12). Instead, the argument lies on the premise that art merely renders what is already true. It is not constructing a new pedagogy or thought; instead, it reflects cultural trends, fears, and aspirations. This concept is the heart of this book and a debate of current academic study and discourse.

As the United States joined the Allied forces in World War II, mobilization of the home front occurred via factories, governmental propaganda, and even advertising. The ads sold not only products but also the image of national unity and honor. In the postwar era, these same techniques were used to sell the civil defense ideology of this newfound nuclear period. Alongside Althusserâs theory, the author uses Paul De Manâs concepts of ânonphenomenal linguisticsâ to get at the heart of aesthetics and ideology (pp. 12-13). Here, âaesthetics assumes a double role: on the one hand, it is a particular philosophical discipline devoted to the study of art; on the other hand, inasmuch as aesthetic theory also fulfills a more general mediating role, it is also âcritical philosophy to the second degree, the critique of the critiquesââ (p. 13). Accordingly, aesthetics function within ideology as perceived by the viewer (in this case the larger society).

In the case of Cold War political mantras, civil defense came to dominate civil and social discourse and fears. The postwar years offered two solutions: the first pointed to the international position arguing for outlawing the atomic weapon with global authority and the second called for strengthening national security in the

name of global peace and harmony. Civil defense drills grew to become a common encounter; bomb shelters became additions to and selling points for homes; and readiness became (and remained) a mainstay in American social thought. The shock of the atomic bombâs destruction and the longevity of the war won at least partial support from the public, but Americans–in general–did not want to surrender their own national sovereignty in the name of critiquing nationalism. Hence, Americans were not ready to scrutinize their own government for the fails and fears of the world.

As VÃ©sgÃ¶ shows, the spy novels and political writings of this era capture this sense of complex fear and grief. Spy fiction allowed Americans to interact, albeit in a nonlinear reality, with the global fears inciting bomb shelters and defense drills in a so-called peace-filled era. Fiction brought these fears into a tangible character, which readers could identify with, to justify Sacco and Vanzetti, Alger Hiss, and even the Rosenberg trial. These moments of national hysteria became reinforced and accepted because even though fiction was just that, its parallel could not be ignored. These dramatic tales became markers of a potential reality that needed to be countered, fought, and feared.

Overall, VÃ©sgÃ¶âs work is a well-needed look at postwar mentality in terms of popular culture. The framing of fiction verses reality reinforces the notion that the public and the government interact–or mirror one another–to create social and national cohesion. The lay reader might find his use of theory cumbersome, but the apt scholar can easily see the complexity and dynamics of the era and how these undercurrents continue to shape current trends in nationalism and militarism.

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