

# PREFACE

In 2004, while researching socialist fashion in Moscow, I met Lydia Orlova, a fashion journalist, author, and former editor of several Soviet fashion magazines. Orlova had been a dedicated Communist party member under socialism and was still a beautiful woman genuinely interested in fashion. During the later phases of socialism she had been a powerful promoter of fashion. In the late 1970s, as fashion editor of the most popular mass women's weekly, *Rabotnitsa* (Working woman), she had consistently presented information about Western fashion and introduced paper patterns from the German women's magazine *Burda*. However, during the Perestroika years in the late 1980s, Orlova argued in the mighty Communist party daily *Pravda* that socialism deserved its own proper fashion. Through her high-level political connections, she managed to revive three Soviet fashion magazines to compete with the arrival of *Burda* on the Soviet market. Far removed from the reality of the poor-quality clothing provided in the shops, and presenting exclusive prototypes of dresses designed within the central fashion institution, the Dom modelei in Moscow, these Soviet magazines looked even more luxurious and elitist than *Burda*. During our interview, Orlova told me: "Believe me, Dior had many more fans in the USSR than in France."

Indeed, in 1959 the Soviets had invited the fashion house Christian Dior to present its latest collection in Moscow's sports hall, called The Soviet Wings Club. Street posters helped to widely publicize Dior's fashion show. The mass weekly *Ogonek* excitedly stated that "Soviet women would finally have the chance to see Paris fashion that, for centuries, has dictated new trends to half of the world's population."<sup>1</sup> Dior's highest representatives and twelve fashion models stayed on in Moscow for a week, presenting two to three shows a day with 120 outfits. Heavily scented with Dior's perfumes, the hall's eight hundred seats could not accommodate all the women who wanted to see the fashion house's summer dresses, which were modeled with background music from the latest Paris and New York soundtracks. The audience consisted of women designers and employees from the textile industry, young actresses, and nomenklatura wives and daughters.

This total fascination with the most famous representative of Western fashion, combined with support for a genuine socialist fashion that would be able to compete sartorially with the West and eventually overtake it, while simultaneously neglecting the reality that the average woman could find only poor-quality clothing in the stores, encapsulated all the contradictions of fashion under socialism. While preaching modesty in personal appearance, the socialist regimes were fascinated by an elitist, haute couture type of dress. The elitism and exclusivity that lies at the core of high fashion suited the high-minded aspirations of totalitarian ideology, and led to the invention of the phenomenon that I call "socialist fashion."

While this book also covers two other sartorial practices under socialism—utopian dress and everyday fashion—socialist fashion was its unique and most durable sartorial product. It was born in the mid-1930s in the Stalinist Soviet Union and survived until the end of the 1980s, both in the Soviet Union and in the East European socialist countries covered by my research—Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. Although socialism eventually invented its own fashion, it was not the genuinely new socialist dress style that the constructivists had dreamt of in the early 1920s. On the contrary, socialist fashion officially preferred the most conventional aesthetic and promoted the most conventional concept of gender. This book presents its story, following its rise from the crushed utopian dream of the early Bolsheviks in the 1920s Soviet Union through its enforcement in the East European countries following the Communists' coups in 1948, and its gradual demise in the later decades of socialism. Embedded in socialism's slow-moving master narrative and sharing its fear of change and discontinuity, socialist fashion lost its struggle against its dynamic and ever-changing Western counterpart. But its very existence—manifested in the regimes' large-scale efforts to maintain it through their central fashion institutions, and to promote it through their women's magazines—showed the socialist system's deep anxieties about the phenomenon of fashion.

By paraphrasing the first sentence of the *Communist Manifesto*, the title of this book suggests that fashion was a spectre that haunted socialism. As an ephemeral, incomplete, and ever-changing phenomenon, fashion contradicted and seriously challenged socialist values, which were organized around stability, fear of change, predictability, and eternity. Although central planning, shortages, a controlled and undeveloped market, and political turbulence are not the main focus of this book, they are the background against which we can explore the conceptual and practical aspects of the phenomenon of fashion—surroundings that differed significantly from its conventional setting. Thus, this book covers the hitherto unknown part of fashion history that took place on the other side of the divide, designated both geographically and politically as “East Europe.”

The official and unofficial spaces which accommodated socialist fashion showed that it was an elitist phenomenon, as its practices required time, money, and connections. In that context, my interviewees were privileged, as they had mainly been practitioners within the official fashion institutions and the official media. But most of them, such as Lydia Orlova, Dorothea Melis, Eva Mészáros, and Margit Szilvitzky, to name just a few, were also capable and well-educated professionals who would probably have succeeded in any fashion system. I am very grateful to them, as to all my other interviewees, for their time and their willingness to talk to me. It was my privilege to hear their thoughts and their memories. My empirical research included various written and visual sources, from women's magazines, picture weeklies, political dailies, state archives, printed materials from museum collections, and posters and films, but spoken sources added a special and lively experience to it.

In that sense, the twenty-four interviews I held with participants in various fields of fashion production, including fashion designers, managers of central fashion institutions, models, organizers of official fashion shows and fairs, journalists, and authors, enriched my

insights on the topic of fashion under socialism. Nevertheless, my main research source on socialist fashion was women's magazines, which were informed by the conventions of both fashion journals and political bulletins. As the magazines were state-owned, the regimes channeled all official policies on dress and gender through them. Although highly controlled and carefully composed, these magazines nevertheless revealed the contradictions within the system and its confrontations with the everyday.

During my research for this book, conducted over more than ten years, I have received the support and help of many individuals and institutions. I am especially indebted to Elizabeth Wilson and Amy De la Haye for their patient support and intellectual encouragement, as well as to Lou Taylor and Caroline Evans for their helpful comments and suggestions. I also appreciate very much the kind support of Chris Breward. I am grateful to Olga Vainshtein and Oksana Gavrishina, who invited me to present my work in Moscow at the State University for the Humanities and for their valuable assistance in my field research in Russia; to Raisa Kirsanova for her constructive discussion with me on Soviet fashion; and to Liuda Alia-bieva and Natal'ia Shustikova for helping me with fieldwork in Moscow. Irina Prokhorova's invitation to give a talk at the conference "Socialist Fashion: A New Look," organized by the journal *New Literary Observer* in Moscow in 2007, gave me another opportunity to engage with my Russian colleagues and accomplish additional fieldwork there. I appreciate very much my discussion of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova with Alexander Lavrentiev in Moscow. In London, I had an opportunity to discuss Soviet fashion with Oksana Sekatcheva, which I found very useful.

My initial research in Hungary was made possible by a grant from the Gender Department at the Central European University in Budapest. I am grateful to Anna Wessely from ELTE (Budapest) and Marton Oblath for their assistance during my work in Budapest. During my subsequent research trips to Budapest, I was greatly helped by the Hungarian dress historian Katalin Dózsa, and had a valuable opportunity to discuss Hungarian socialist fashion with one of its leading experts, Tibor Valuch. I am also grateful to Ildikó Simonovics, who invited me to talk at her conference on socialist fashion in Budapest in 2007, which provided an excellent opportunity to meet other researchers, including Katalin Medvedev, who kindly assisted me during my interview with Margit Szilvitzky. I am also grateful to the Soros Open Society Foundation (Zagreb) for a travel grant that enabled me to carry out my fieldwork in the Czech Republic, where Konstantina Hlaváčková, curator of the Museum for Applied Arts in Prague, was extremely helpful in my research. Katja Remus offered kind and efficient aid during my research trips to Berlin. I am also indebted to Ariela Grundy from the London School for Slavonic and East European Studies, who patiently checked my Polish translations. Gar Powell-Evans was always prepared to help me while I worked on this book.

I am indebted to my editor Roger Conover at the MIT Press for his trust in me and his continual support during this project. I am especially grateful to Valerie Steele for her encouragement and discussions of the ideas contained here. The friendship that I enjoyed with her and her husband, John Major, was a wonderful support. Ana and Danko Steiner

were always prepared to help with highly appreciated advice and constructive suggestions. Davor Milišić and Jasna Biočić were hugely supportive throughout my endeavor. I am also indebted and immensely grateful to William Bartlett for his generosity of time and effort throughout this project as he read and commented on the original manuscript.

I feel privileged to have worked at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London during my research for this book, where I have enjoyed an intellectually stimulating atmosphere and the full support of my colleagues and especially from Helen Thomas, the director of the Research Office. Moreover, the Research Office of the London College of Fashion generously helped toward the cost of the publication of the color images in this book for which I am very grateful. The Croatian magazine *Gloria* and its editor, Dubravka Tomeković Aralica, also kindly contributed toward the same cause.

I have spent many days and months in libraries during my work on this book. I enjoyed that time, especially as I was usually helped by extremely well-informed and kind staff. I am very grateful to the librarians at the British Library, the library of the School for Slavonic and East European Studies, London, the National Arts Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the National Library in Zagreb, as well as the archive at the Croatian publishing house Vjesnik, the library of the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest, the Hungarian National Library, the Moscow Arts Library, the Historical Library in Moscow, and the Modearchiv in Berlin.