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Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality (New Technologies/New Cultures)

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Abstract

Over the past few generations, expectations of comfort, cleanliness and convenience have altered radically, but these dramatic changes have largely gone unnoticed. This intriguing book brings together the sociology of

consumption and technology to investigate the evolution of these changes, as well the social meaning of the practices themselves. Homes, offices, domestic appliances and clothes play a crucial role in our lives, but not many of us question exactly how and why we perform so many daily rituals associated with them. Showers, heating, air-conditioning and clothes washing are simply accepted as part of our normal, everyday lives, but clearly this was not always the case. When did the 'daily shower' become de rigueur? What effect has air conditioning had on the siesta - at one time an integral part of Mediterranean life and culture? This book interrogates the meaning and supposed 'normality' of these practices and draws disturbing conclusions. There is clear evidence supporting the view that routine consumption is controlled by conceptions of normality and profoundly shaped by cultural and economic forces. Shove maintains that habits are not just changing, but are changing in ways that imply escalating and standardizing patterns of consumption. This shrewd and engrossing analysis shows just how far the social meanings and practices of comfort, cleanliness and convenience have eluded us.

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