

## **Cold War Modern: The International Impact of an Exhibition on Modern Design on Public Understanding and Curatorial Practice**

### **1. Summary of the impact**

‘Cold War Modern. Design 1945–1970’ (CWM) was a four-year research project exploring the impact of the cold war on modern art, architecture and design. Conceived, researched and curated as a major exhibition by Professors David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, it provided new interpretations of the history of design in the second half of the 20th century for a wide public, international audience. The exhibition was reviewed around the world and was acquired – as a ‘package’ of concept, exhibits and publications – by venues abroad. We are claiming impact in the fields of public and media understanding of post-Second World War cultural history and on the curatorial and collecting activities of museums around the world.

### **2. Underpinning research**

CWM belongs to a series of major Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) exhibitions exploring 20th-century art and design from 1999 to 2011. The series included ‘Modernism. Designing a New World, 1914–1939’ (2006), for which Crowley was an adviser, and ‘Postmodernism. Style and Subversion, 1970–1990’ (2011), of which Pavitt was co-curator. The CWM project was initiated in 2005 by Crowley (then and still at the RCA, Senior Tutor; Professor) and Pavitt (who joined the RCA in 2010 as Professor). As curators, they embarked on a programme of research to shape the content of the exhibition [see s3.1], events and accompanying books [s3.2]. Between 2005 and 2006, Crowley undertook funded (AHRC, V&A, RCA) archival research in Ghent, Warsaw and Prague. This research resulted in the identification of exhibits for the exhibition, sections of the accompanying book [s3.2], related publications [s3.5] and an essay [s3.3]. Working together, Crowley and Pavitt followed a systematic programme of research in archives and museum collections in 13 different countries (2006–7). Artists, architects and designers including Vaclav Cigler, Francisco Infante, Jack Masey, Alex Mlynarcik, Ettore Sottsass, Günter Zamp Kelp and many others active in the period were interviewed [s3.1 and s3.2]. To exchange ideas and share research with scholars during the research phase, the curators organised two public symposia: ‘Socialist Luxury: The Material Culture of the Eastern Bloc’ (January 2006) and ‘The Cold War Expo’ (January 2007). Scholars and curators from North America, Japan, Australia and Europe participated. The first of these symposia was published as a book [s3.4].

The cold war roles of objects and buildings that had hitherto enjoyed little or no scholarly or popular attention – such as the network of telecommunication towers built across Eastern Europe during the period – was established through painstaking primary research into their origins and effects. Original research also led to the discovery of many surviving objects (such as prototypes for plastic furniture and original architectural drawings), many of which were exhibited and represented for the first time [s3.1; s3.2].

Crowley and Pavitt put considerable energy into researching design in Eastern Europe, then a considerable lacuna in scholarship and understanding. One of the aims of the research – considerably achieved – was to produce new conceptual tools for understanding the economic, cultural and ideological role of modern design and material culture in Eastern Europe under communist rule. This is demonstrated in all the references in section 3.

Another innovative feature of the research was the approach taken to restaging original works for the exhibition [s3.1]. A large-scale inflatable structure, ‘Oasis no. 7’, originally made by the Austrian architectural group, Haus-Rucker-Co, for the Documenta art fair (1972), for instance, was reconstructed in detail and to scale. The research and remaking of the work was undertaken with the original architects and the exhibition designers, in tandem with a specialist contractor (Inflate Products Ltd). A second example was the re-staging of a film made by Le Corbusier for the Phillips Pavilion at the Brussels Expo in 1958 and then only surviving in fragments of images and sounds. Working with the black and white film supplied by the Phillips Company, the curators restaged the film with its music and light

effects (in collaboration with the artist and filmmaker David Bickerstaff).

### 3. References to the research

The outputs listed below have been subject to vigorous peer review to ensure their high quality. The CWM exhibition [s3.1], when proposed to the V&A, was judged by the Exhibitions Committee, a panel at directorial level and including museum trustees which reviews all such proposals to guarantee the quality of the institution's programme. When CWM was selected by the two partner institutions for exhibition abroad, the exhibition in outline form went through comparable review processes and senior curatorial staff came to London to review it in situ in the V&A galleries. The journal article and books published by Routledge and Northwestern Press [s3.2; s3.3; s3.4; s3.5] went through formal peer-review processes. All URLs last accessed: 22/11/13.

#### 3.1) Crowley and Pavitt

Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970, exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum, London (25 September 2008–11 January 2009), <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/c/cold-war/>>; MART, Rovereto (28 March 2009–26 July 2009); and the National Gallery, Vilnius (3 October 2009–6 December 2009).

#### 3.2) Crowley and Pavitt

Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970 (V&A Publications, 2008), 320pp. Crowley and Pavitt wrote 70% of its content. The book was translated into Italian, *La Guerra Fredda - Arte e design in un mondo diviso, 1945–1970*. Crowley's essay 'Looking down on spaceship earth' was translated into Polish as 'Krajobrazy zimnej wojny' in 'Autoportret', (2011), 2, 50–60. Two popular books were published by the V&A: Crowley, *Posters of the Cold War* (V&A Publications, 2008), 96pp., and Pavitt, *Fear and Fashion in the Cold War* (V&A Publications, 2008), 128pp.

#### 3.3) Crowley

'Humanity Rearranged: The Polish and Czechoslovak Pavilions at Expo 58' in 'West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture' (2012), 19(1). 88–105.

#### 3.4) Crowley and Susan E. Reid (University of Sheffield)

*Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Northwestern University Press, 2010). Crowley and Reid edited the 360pp. book and wrote an introductory essay, 3–52.

#### 3.5) Crowley and Pavitt

Pavitt 'The future is possibly past: The anxious spaces of Gaetano Pesce' and Crowley 'Homelessness to homelessness' in Robin Schuldenfrei, ed., *Atomic Dwelling: Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture* (Routledge, 2012), 26–44 and 277–90.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Impact 1: Public Understanding

The primary vehicle for the dissemination of the research cited in section 2 was a major exhibition in three leading European museums (totalling 183,000 visitors – V&A statistics available on request). The selection of the London exhibition by two other venues is testimony of significant impact in its own right. It was selected by the Ministry of Culture in Lithuania – via its delivery agency, Vilnius: Europos kultūros sostinė – as the centrepiece of its European Capital of Culture programme in 2009. As the chief curator of the National Gallery of Lithuania writes, 'The V&A exhibition was very well received both by professional and general audience and not only in Lithuania but also in the neighboring Baltic countries – Latvia and Estonia. It had...one of the highest museum visiting rates in Lithuania in the

course of the past 20 years...The educational impact of the project should also be mentioned...Above all the exhibition stimulated an interest in local art, architecture and design of the 2nd half of the 20th c. that remained unexplored and almost unknown to the public till quite recently' [s5.1].

The CWM research project set itself the challenge of bringing new knowledge to different audiences. In addition to the deeply researched book accompanying the exhibition, Crowley and Pavitt wrote short books for general audiences and school children. *Fear and Fashion in the Cold War* was written by Pavitt (V&A Publications, 2010, 128 pp.) and Crowley wrote *Cold War Posters* (V&A Publications, 2010, 96 pp.). The curators were invited to write a dozen articles to share the insights generated through research with different communities. These included articles in popular history titles such as 'History Today' and professional art and design magazines such as 'Creative Review' [s5.2].

A rich programme of public events accompanied the exhibition in London, including film screenings, designers' talks and public workshops. Public events – oriented to members of the general public as well as professionals, including secondary school teachers – at the V&A included a two-day international conference organised by Crowley and Pavitt with expert speakers from nine countries (21–22/11/08) and 'The Last Utopians' a day-long event with architects and designers who relayed their experiences of the 1960s (28/11/08), part-funded by the Austrian Embassy. The two-day conference also received £10,000 funding from the Council of Europe, which staged an accompanying meeting of their advisory board to discuss East–West European collaborative exhibitions. General Coordinator of Council of Europe Exhibitions writes that 'CWM convinced us, more than ever, that there were different narratives to be told, as an alternative to the linear account of (western) modernism' [s5.3].

We are claiming an impact on the media itself. CWM provided new frameworks for understanding design and culture in the period. Alongside extensive coverage in the arts sections of the press/broadcast media and scholarly press (c.171 press reviews and reports plus radio/television reports around the world), it is notable that the exhibition featured in the news, politics and business sections of newspapers and magazines such as *Newsweek* (USA 03/10/08), as well as national news broadcasts (such as BBC Radio 4 'The Today Programme', BBC World Service 'European News', BBC1 One O'Clock News, Deutsche Welle TV, NTV (Russia), ITV London News – all September 2008). Sectors of the media that rarely give attention to the history of design engaged in discussion of the capacity of designs to perform as political instruments. To give two typical examples: 'Design is too often presented as a succession of iconic chairs: here it is exposed for what it is, the most faithful encapsulation of the politics, economics and fears and desires of a moment' ('The Financial Times', 21/09/08) [s5.4]: 'For the curators [the exhibition] is not about canonization but a great thesis. The title "Cold War Modern" highlights the confrontation of systems and expands the concept of the era of modernity well into the postwar period' ('Tagesspiegel', 04/10/08) [s5.5].

## **Impact 2: Curatorial and collecting activity**

CWM has clearly had significant impact on the work of museums and curators within design, architecture and art. The Senior Curator and Keeper of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion department of the V&A, summarises the shift in understanding achieved by this research in the museum sector when he writes that CWM 'fundamentally altered the way in which curators working in former Eastern bloc countries, as well as a wider world of collectors and the interested public, viewed post-war design. No one looking at this era through its (mainly elite) material culture can do so without reference to CWM and, with the publication of its accompanying catalogue, many former overviews of post-war design have been rendered significantly less useful or credible' [s5.6]. Director of the Wende Museum, Los Angeles, writes 'Up until CWM, Cold War history continued to be viewed through the lens of the conflict in which east and west were not allowed to be treated together' [s5.7]. As evidence

of this fact, the V&A and other museums, including the State Tretyakov gallery in Moscow and the Olomouc Museum of Art, have extended their collections of post-1945 design by acquiring exhibits first shown in CWM [s5.8]. Commentators have identified its innovative approach to combining political and design/art history and a number of exhibitions abroad have adopted its concepts and themes [see s5.9]. For instance, the National Gallery in Vilnius – in conjunction with Tallinn City Art Gallery – established a major research project to record the history of modernism in the Baltic states in the 1960s and 1970s directly and explicitly under the influence and inspiration of CWM. This resulted in a major exhibition 'Modernisation. Baltic Art, Architecture, and Design. 1960–70s' in both venues in 2012 and a book, *Our Metamorphic Futures. Design, Technical Aesthetics and Experimental Architecture in the Soviet Union, 1960–1980* (forthcoming). The Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture Final Report (European Commission) – a formal impact assessment – identified this impact as one of the most significant achievements of CWM in the region [s5.10, p. 61]. The General Coordinator Council of Europe Exhibitions also corroborates the impact of CWM on the thinking and curation of the Council of Europe exhibition 'The Desire for Freedom. Art in Europe since 1945' exhibited in Berlin, Milan, Tallinn and Cracow, with related projects in Prague, Sarajevo, Budapest and Thessaloniki, 2012–15 [s5.3].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Copies of all sources to corroborate the impact are available from the HEI upon request. All URLs last accessed: 22/11/13.

- 5.1) Letter from the Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Art, Lithuania (dated 05/09/12).
- 5.2) David Crowley, 'Cold Comfort?' in 'History Today', v. 58, no. 10, 2008, 6-7.
- 5.3) Letter from the General Coordinator Council of Europe Exhibitions (dated 11/11/13).
- 5.4) Edwin Heathcote, 'Iron curtain-raiser' in 'Financial Times', Arts and Books section (20 + 21/09/08), 11. Also available on-line: <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/61e6bda6-86ac-11dd-959e-0000779fd18c.html#axzz2lgKSLGnZ>>
- 5.5) Bodo Mrozek, 'Die Form folgt der Angst' in 'Tagesspiegel' (4/10/08), 25. Also available on-line: <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/kunst-londoner-ausstellung-entdeckt-design-des-kalten-krieges/1338610.html>>
- 5.6) Letter from the Keeper of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (dated 13/05/13).
- 5.7) Letter from the Founder and Executive Director of The Wende Museum, Los Angeles (dated 12/03/13).
- 5.8) Gallery and museum catalogues: The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia: <[http://www.tretykovgallery.ru/en/collection/\\_show/image/\\_id/2800](http://www.tretykovgallery.ru/en/collection/_show/image/_id/2800)>; The Olomouc Museum of Art, Olomouc, Czech Republic: <<http://www.olmuart.cz/MMU/COLLECTIONS/our-treasures/COLLECTIONS-VAL/>>.
- 5.9) Muriel Blaive, 'Utopian visions: The 'cold war' and its political aesthetics' in 'Zeithistorische Forschungen' (2008), 5, 313–22 <<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/site/40208849/default.aspx>>
- 5.10) Andrew McCoshan, James Rampton, Neringa Mozuraityte, Nick McAteer (ECOTEC Research and Consulting), 'Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture - Final Report to DG Education and Culture of the European Commission in the Context of the Framework Contract for Evaluation Related Services and Support for Impact Assessment' (EAC/03/06), 2009 (see pages vii, 51, 58, 61 and 90).