The Organisation and Reception of Eastern Bloc Exhibitions on the British Cold War 'Home Front' c.1956-1979

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Brighton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2010

The University of Brighton in collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum
ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates government-sponsored exhibitions originating in the USSR and Eastern Europe held in Britain between 1956-1979. These incoming manifestations of cultural diplomacy were a locus for cultural exchange during the ideological conflict of the Cold War, providing temporary public spaces in which cultural artefacts from the eastern bloc – perceived as an unfamiliar, isolated and rival territory – were displayed and responded to. This research scrutinises the organisation and reception of these usually reciprocal displays of art, historical artefacts, and commercial goods on the British Cold War ‘home front’.

Taking a British perspective on these exhibitions, this thesis investigates three main research areas. Firstly, organisation: it asks how and why these exhibitions took place and analyses the roles and aims of various British agencies, galleries and museums in facilitating these displays. Secondly, it investigates their cultural diplomatic messages and how they were conveyed through visual and material cultures. Thirdly, it investigates British the responses of British critics and organisational agencies, analysing what these disclose about British attitudes to the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Cold War.

Drawing on a range of predominantly archival sources e.g. the Arts Council Archive, the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, the British Council Archive, the Royal Academy Archive, Foreign Office records, and the Earls Court Archive, in addition to contemporary press, this thesis asks the overriding research question: what do these exhibitions tell us about Britain’s position in and attitudes to the cultural Cold War?

Following a contextual chapter on the development and practicalities of British-Soviet and British-Eastern European cultural diplomacy after 1956, three chapters focus on different groups of exhibitions. Firstly, art historical exhibitions in which the Soviet and British authorities collaborated in and contested ownership of the artistic history and culture of the USSR; secondly, reciprocal eastern European ‘embassy exhibitions’ which used displays of predominantly historical ‘treasures’ from Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania to assert distinctive national identities; and finally, a series of three Soviet industrial exhibitions in London which presented a mythic ‘dreamworld’ of the Soviet ‘way of life’. The thesis suggests that these exhibitions reveal a nuanced and subtle picture of British attitudes towards the Eastern Bloc where the Cold War could be only one part of a broader picture of mixed political, cultural and commercial considerations.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to the AHRC for funding this thesis, the collaborative doctoral award scheme attached to the exhibition project Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970 (Victoria and Albert Museum).

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisors, Jane Pavitt and Jonathan Woodham for their guidance and support. I am grateful for the assistance I have received from staff at the CRD over the past years, including Chris Pearce, Lena Warming and Madeleine Meadows. Other members of staff at the University of Brighton, particularly Lou Taylor, have provided great encouragement throughout the project. I am also indebted to the CRD and the School of Historical and Critical Studies at the University of Brighton for their financial support, which has enabled me to attend conferences and make vital research visits.

The patient and understanding help of staff at various libraries and archives has been invaluable, especially the NAL, the V&A / AAD, Catherine Moriarty and Lesley Whitworth at the Design Council Archive, Monica Brewis at St Peter's House Library, Mark Pomeroy at the Royal Academy Archive, and all staff at the Earls Court complex, the National Archives, the British Library.

I would like to thank Edward Braun for his generosity in speaking to me about Art in Revolution and Robert Freeman for kindly allowing me to see his photographs of the Earls Court exhibition.

I would like to say a big thank you to my friends and family for their unfailing support: Mum, Dad, Rod, Greg, Lloyd, Grandad Eric, Trish, Mike and Izzy, Sarah Pain, Tina and Stuart Lamour, David Davis, Janet Lawrence, Louise Williams, Sarah Norris, Tasha Alden. Coco the Siamese has faithfully kept me company and spent many hours taking advantage of my lap while typing away on the computer. This is for Dominic, who has been there through everything, with all my love.
Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or to any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

[Signature]

Dated

14 June 2010
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAD</td>
<td>Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Arts Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACGB</td>
<td>Arts Council Archive</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>British Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLSA</td>
<td>British Library Sound Archive</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSFS</td>
<td>British-Soviet Friendship Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BW</td>
<td>Designation of British Council files at TNA</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGR</td>
<td>Czechoslovak Glass Review (journal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CND</td>
<td>Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPGB</td>
<td>Communist Party of Great Britain</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRD</td>
<td>Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Earls Court Archive, London</td>
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<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Foreign Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign and Commonwealth Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITF</td>
<td>Industrial and Trade Fairs Ltd</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRD</td>
<td>Information Research Department, Foreign Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAL</td>
<td>National Art Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLSC</td>
<td>National Life Story Collection (part of British Library Sound Archive)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>President of the Royal Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Royal Academy of Arts London</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAA</td>
<td>Royal Academy Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA</td>
<td>Royal College of Arts, London</td>
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<td>RWS</td>
<td>Royal Watercolour Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCR</td>
<td>Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives, Kew, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V&amp;A</td>
<td>Victoria and Albert Museum, London</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOKS</td>
<td>Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries</td>
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The perception of the Iron Curtain as a solid barrier isolating East from West is misleading. Though highly restrictive, it was not impermeable: at particular times and under specific circumstances it permitted the movement of people and objects from one ideologically opposed side to the other.¹ These travellers could take on the role of 'ambassadors'. They ranged from high profile individuals, like the Soviet leaders' state visit to Britain in April 1956 [Fig. 1.1], to the movement of culture in all its multifarious forms: ideas, literature, music, sport, art. Such movements had not been possible during the early, isolationist Cold War, but with the death of Stalin and subsequent advent of the 'Thaw' from 1956, East-West contacts – and especially cultural exchanges - increasingly began to take place. These were far from politically neutral – despite speaking the language of 'mutual understanding' and 'friendship', these cultural contacts functioned to continue ideological aims of the Cold War by cultural means. Exhibitions were one cultural form utilised in this way. At national and international level, they have been acknowledged by contemporary commentators and historians alike as highly politicised events, epitomised by the ideologically oppositional 'gladiatorial exhibitions' respectively staged by the USA and the USSR in Moscow and New York in 1959.² But these high-profile propagandist events were extreme examples. There were also exhibitions which were less obviously confrontational and more 'ambassadorial', such as those held in Britain from the Eastern Bloc from the late 1950s onwards. These exhibitions demonstrate that, outside of the main binary superpower relationship, Cold War cultural diplomacy could be more subtle and encompass a range of motives and meanings.

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Like many other Western countries, the British government encouraged greater movement of people and ideas between the West and the Eastern Bloc following the shift toward 'peaceful coexistence'. Starting with the Soviet Union and expanding to the countries of Eastern Europe, reciprocal cultural exchanges were established. Almost all forms of art and culture were utilised in sending 'manifestations' abroad: scholars, dancers, actors, books, art, commerce and science were all called into the service of cultural diplomacy in the belief that exposure to Western 'freedoms' and culture could help to ease Cold War tensions, and may even eventually bring about the collapse of the Communist bloc by 'tacitly' encouraging internal reform behind the Iron Curtain. By 1966, 'exports' of British culture such as exhibitions and theatrical tours had reportedly made a 'deep and lasting impression' on Eastern European audiences. But this was not a one-way movement from West to East. Because they were reciprocal, these exchanges resulted in the mirror-image events from the USSR and Eastern Europe in Britain, including exhibitions of art, design, commercial products and historical artefacts.

As Nicholas points out, it is the very ambiguity of the arts that makes them a 'powerful weapon in cultural diplomacy', 'capable of double coding, as both innocent of politics and heavily implicated in it'. But this also made them difficult to control and regulate, and their impact could differ from the intended message of cultural diplomacy. Pre-existing perceptions of culture in 'the East' could colour British responses. The British politician and ardent Cold Warrior Christopher Mayhew recalled a telling incident in his memoirs:

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4 The National Archives (henceforth TNA) FO954/1595 'East-West Cultural Contacts' report by Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Cultural Contacts, Foreign Office, 31 October 1966 5 'East was sometimes strikingly like West', whether via patterns of 'mirror imaging' - one side copying another - or 'mirror opposites', where a deliberately opposing position was chosen. Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War." 7. For literature exploring this theme see John Le Carré, The Looking-Glass War (London: Pan, 1965).
I remember too that, as a leaving gift, Khrushchev presented me with, among other things, five albums of Soviet gramophone records. I knew nothing about Soviet records, and was saddened, but not surprised, when the sound quality of the first one I tried turned out to be extremely poor. I assumed that this was another example of the notoriously low standard of Soviet consumer goods. A few days later, however, when I put on a British record, the same sound distortion resulted. It was the British radiogram and not the Soviet record that was at fault. I felt I had been taught a lesson about prejudice.

Viewed through a British lens – or in this case, heard on a defective British record player - Eastern Bloc objects in the Cold War could also reveal the preconceptions of the receiving culture at this highly politically charged time. The artefacts that came to Britain in the form of exhibitions from Poland, the USSR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania from the mid-1950s onwards were seen through a filter of rhetoric of what ‘East’ and ‘West’ meant culturally and politically. Such stereotypes of the Cold War Eastern Bloc could be brought into focus by critical reactions to these displays; equally these exhibitions could challenge ideas about their place of origin.

This thesis investigates the government-sponsored exhibitions originating in the USSR and Eastern Europe held in post-war Britain. These incoming exhibitions became a locus for cultural exchange during the ideological conflict of the Cold War, providing temporary public spaces in which cultural artefacts from the Eastern Bloc – perceived generally as an unfamiliar, isolated and rival territory – were displayed and responded to. It scrutinises the organisation and reception of these displays of art, historical artefacts, and commercial goods on the British Cold War ‘home front’. It examines critical responses not only to the exhibits, but also to the manner and context in which they were displayed – the elusive ‘charged zone where spectator and art object meet’. An exhibition setting allows visitors to experience a ‘direct encounter’ with the object itself. In the

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ideologically charged context of the Cold War, the display of objects from the 'Eastern Bloc' gave this 'unique sense of immediacy' between the viewer and the viewed item extra potency.\textsuperscript{10}

Despite a great deal of scholarly interest in international exhibitions during the Cold War – especially ones originating in the USA - many exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc, such as those held the UK between 1956 and 1979 have largely slipped from view historically. Exhibitions, by their nature, are temporary cultural constructs; those under scrutiny here could be surprisingly ephemeral, with durations ranging from a few months to a few days.\textsuperscript{11} However, they were not overlooked by contemporary audiences. Although some were minor ‘embassy exhibitions’ – small-scale shows, usually from Eastern Europe, which existed simply to fulfil the terms of bilateral cultural agreements – this study also encompasses exhibitions which were major cultural and political events, ubiquitous in the press and generating reams of Foreign Office paperwork. Certain shows – such as the first Soviet Industrial Exhibition at Earl's Court in 1961, billed as ‘a rare opportunity for the ordinary British citizen to see something of life in the USSR'\textsuperscript{12} - were extremely well attended, attracting over half a million visitors to view 10,000 exhibits. This thesis asserts that a study which encompasses both large-scale exhibitions and those of a lesser stature can offer insights into the subtle, complex and varied British position in and reactions to the cultural Cold War.

This introductory chapter firstly sets out the key research questions. It then presents an overview of the sources, methodological issues and limitations of this thesis. The scope of the study is explored by using key words from the title as a starting point for setting out the range and context of the work that follows. In particular, it critically examines the literature on

\textsuperscript{11} These exhibitions could range from days (Bohemian Glass, Laing, 1965) to weeks (USSR exhibitions at Earls Court, 1961, 1968, 1975) to a few months. The longest was Bohemian Glass at the V\&A (1965) which was extended to run for four months. V\&A VX.1965.003 Hugh Wakefield, Circulation Dept. to H Hickl-Szabo, Assistant Curator, Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, 18 October 1965
\textsuperscript{12} Design October 1961, issue 154, 42
the Cold War and cultural Cold War, and Britain's position within these in order to position this thesis against a broader background of scholarly research. Finally, it gives an overview of the chapter structure and thesis argument.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis investigates exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc in order to discover what insights they provide about Britain and the cultural Cold War. In doing so, it addresses three research questions. Firstly, it asks why and how these Soviet and Eastern European exhibitions took place. This question probes not only political issues and concepts of cultural diplomacy, but also practical matters of exhibition organisation. It requires the analysis of the complex, shifting and sometimes conflicting roles and aims of various British agencies – notably the Arts Council, Foreign Office, British Council and major British galleries and museums – in facilitating these displays of artefacts. Secondly, what messages were these exhibitions intended to convey? They used visual and material culture to represent histories, cultures, and societies from the Eastern Bloc. The displays of objects could be either explicitly or implicitly ideologically loaded; propagandist or subtle. This question is tackled via close analysis of the content and display of the exhibitions and their representations of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Lastly, how were these exhibitions and their messages about the Eastern Bloc received? Using the responses of critics, commentators and British organisers, the thesis explores the range of reactions to these exhibitions, analysing what they disclose about British attitudes to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.
METHODOLOGY, SOURCES, LIMITATIONS

The British perspective on the cultural Cold War is crucial to the methodology of this thesis. In looking at Eastern Bloc exhibitions, the aim to unpick aspects of the British reaction to and involvement in the cultural Cold War: archival sources from the former Eastern Bloc are not included in this study. This is in part due to the linguistic difficulties of accessing Soviet and Eastern European evidence and the relatively limited amount of Western scholarship that has been carried out in this area. Although, given the bilateral nature of these cultural contacts, a full comparative study of the organisation and reception of exhibitions both in East and West could be highly revealing, this beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, the methodological basis of this study shares more in common with recent work looking at the presence of the USA’s Marshall Plan exhibitions in 1950s Germany, using governmental archival material to present a detailed investigation into one side’s perspective.

The mood of secrecy and restriction surrounding many Cold War interactions means that the aims of ‘the Russians’ and ‘Eastern Europe’ were the subject of assumptions and educated guesses by the British authorities. These opinions were not necessarily fact, but they do provide evidence of how the Eastern Bloc was perceived in Britain. This thesis attempts to avoid the sometimes clichéd and biased assumptions prevalent in some English language scholarship written during the Cold War era, which second-guesses the Soviets’ motives for engaging in cultural contact, usually from an American perspective. In the 1960s, these

13 In Western scholarship (with the exception of projects such as the Winter 2002 issue of the Journal of Cold War Studies, and the work of academics such as Susan E Reid and David Crowley) both the USSR and the Eastern bloc in general is ‘heavily under-researched’ in cultural and social history terms. What research there is has tended to focus on key moments such as the Prague Spring. Major and Mitter, “East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War.”
14 Ibid., 7-9
were attributed to the warlike 'Soviet Cultural Offensive', an allegedly deceitful and propagandist approach the mind of Yale professor Frederick Barghoorn. Conversely, in undertaking similar activities, the USA displayed supposedly 'noble objectives' (such as the promotion of freedom of thought and the desire for consumer goods). This tendency remained to the end of the Cold War, and can still occur in more recent scholarship. This is not to say that their conclusions were incorrect, just that they were influenced by Cold War patterns of thinking about the 'other side'.

Recent analysis has challenged the USA's Cold War characterisation of all eastern motives as suspect and all western motives as worthy and generous. Frances Stonor Saunders' thorough research has demystified the 'myth of altruism' in the CIA's widespread cultural patronage of 'front' organisations of the 1950s and 1960s in Europe. As Mayhew - founder of the Soviet Relations Committee (SRC) of the British Council - recalled, in the 1950s both sides had ulterior political motives:

The Russians valued organized contacts as a means of promoting Soviet communism and as a cover-up for their ruthless suppression of genuinely free communications....But there was humbug on the British side, too....our aims were political: we wanted to break down the isolation of the Soviet people from the West and to disrupt their ties with British communists and fellow travellers.

But there were rarely clear distinctions in the cultural Cold War: cultural aims were interwoven with ideological motives. By looking not only at the motives and actions of political bodies like the Foreign Office, but also at cultural or commercial organisations, this thesis acknowledges the interaction between these different reasons for involvement in Cold War cultural exchanges. This leaves room for ambiguities and presents a more

19 Stonor Saunders, Who Paid the Piper? The C.I.A. And the Cultural Cold War. 4
20 Mayhew, A War of Words: A Cold War Witness. 58
nuanced picture of how cultural events interacted with the broader political situation.

This thesis also seeks to provide some insight into the spectrum of Western responses to Eastern Bloc cultural presence in the West. The focus of much existing scholarship to date – especially American research - has been on projections of the Western 'way of life' against or inside the Soviet Bloc. In this, the scale of the academic response has mirrored the West's more significant financial and communication resources that gave it 'greater ability to spread the propaganda message abroad'. For example, Robert Haddow has investigated the USA's post-war displays of consumer abundance in European locations such as trade fairs and the Brussels Expo of 1958. Walter Hixson, in his in-depth study of the major USA-USSR reciprocal national exhibitions of 1959 comments only briefly on the 'minimal' Soviet infiltration of the USA, focusing instead on the American events in Moscow. Hixson's conclusions about the triumphant impact of the USA exhibition in the Soviet Union have recently been convincingly challenged by new insights that investigate the complexity of the Soviet response. Nevertheless, investigations into the impact of Eastern Bloc culture in the West have remained rare. Although such events have frequently been seen as marginal, there is much to be gained from the study of these Eastern Bloc forays into Western cultural territory. In Britain, in addition to the formal, governmental approved exchanges (such as the exhibitions which form the focus for this study), a multitude of smaller scale events were organised by 'Friendship' groups sympathetic to communism, for example film screenings, dance displays, peace rallies and exchanges of delegations which have been largely neglected in

21 Masey and Lloyd Morgan, Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War.
24 Hixson, Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War 1945-1961.
academic research thus far but can form a useful counterpoint to more mainstream cultural events.\textsuperscript{26}

Thus, this thesis aims to redress the overall lack of research into the staging of and responses to Eastern Bloc cultural events in the West, specifically Britain. The exhibitions under consideration in this thesis are approached broadly from a design history perspective, drawing upon a range of predominantly archival sources. These include the Arts Council Archive, the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive, the British Council Archive, the Royal Academy Archive, Foreign Office records and others at the National Archives, and the Earls Court archive. Extant oral history testimonies from key participants have been used to supplement these archival materials.\textsuperscript{27} The contemporary press, both mainstream and specialist, has also provided a valuable source of information which has helped to indicate the scale and nature of reactions to exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc. Caution has been taken in using these resources to avoid easy assumptions that all the attitudes and activities were conditioned by confrontational 'Cold War motives'. As a whole, they have demonstrated how these institutional, cultural and personal stories were interwoven with the broader political landscape.

The exhibitions under analysis were ambassadorial exhibitions – pieces of cultural diplomacy intended to promote ideas of 'mutual understanding' and 'friendship' and usually resulting from a bilateral cultural agreement (or, in the case of the Earls Court exhibitions, commercial contracts). Exhibitions not only from the Soviet Union but also from the countries of Eastern Europe were chosen to give a more balanced view and to bring into focus the differences between how the Soviet Union and its 'satellites' were perceived in Britain. The selection of exhibitions to research was


\textsuperscript{27} In addition to author-conducted interviews e.g. with Ted Braun, the oral testimonies in the British Library Sound Archive has provided insights into the views of now deceased participants such as Sidney Hutchison, Norbert Lynton and Joanna Drew.
made on the basis of a number of factors including availability of surviving and accessible source material and the impact generated, although less popular exhibitions are also examined. Because they were all temporary exhibitions installed in British museums and galleries, much has disappeared historically. This study also exposes the tricky issue of how to recreate the essence of a long-dead temporary exhibition via extant sources. Such information is frequently textual: administrative correspondence and memos, object lists, catalogues, press responses. Less commonly, photographs of the installation and the exhibition plan have survived. It has been useful to draw on the methodologies of other design historians in re-imagining these displays, in particular the approach of design historian Kevin Davies in reconstructing and analysing post-war Finnish design exhibitions held in Britain. Public responses to these exhibitions remain largely obscure, except in the few cases where visitors' books survive; as a result, the impact of the show is gauged here largely through the reactions of critics and government bodies. This thesis does not aim to be a comprehensive survey of Eastern Bloc exhibitions in Britain; rather, it analyses key moments, themes and significant shows giving different flavours of Cold War cultural exchanges.

KEY THEMES AND SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

The key themes and scope of this thesis are indicated in the wording of the title. This section takes each term in turn in order to suggest a definition, to place the theme in the context of existing literature and to indicate where this thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge.

The two simple words 'Cold War' belie a mass of contested definitions. Questions are still asked about what kind of 'war' it was, given that it was 'strictly limited as a military conflict', and how to approach it historically. A

growing body of historical work has shifted the emphasis from military issues and high politics to the 'psychological and cultural conflict' at the heart of international relations in the post-war period. Culture was used both to communicate and manipulate, internally and externally, and on both sides of the ideological divide. These social-cultural approaches to analysing the Cold War have become increasingly established and are extremely broad in scope. The 'psychological contest' between East and West is seen to have manifested itself in almost every sphere of human activity: art, sport, film, drama, science and technology, literature, education and consumption. Other salient themes in recent research include the workings of propaganda, media and consumerism. It is within this broad perspective of the Cold War as a cultural struggle that this thesis lies.

The early weighting of much cultural Cold War scholarship towards the American experience is now supplemented by a growing body of English language work on the Cold War experiences of other countries, both in the West and the East. Similarly, the imbalance created by a reliance on Western sources is starting to be redressed in all fields of Cold War studies as a result of the greater accessibility of Eastern Bloc material and the work of historians such as Susan E. Reid and David Crowley.

Although this thesis does not utilise Eastern sources directly, it echoes this

30 Shaw, "The Politics of Cold War Culture." 59
33 Stonor Saunders, Who Paid the Piper? The CIA And the Cultural Cold War. 17
36 Recent conferences which embraced this broadened scope include 'Propaganda and the Mass Media in the Making of Cold War Europe', 11-13 January 2007, University College Dublin and 'Cultural Representations of the Cold War', University of Osnabrück, 5-7 December, 2008.
37 Shaw, "Introduction: Britain and the Cultural Cold War." 109
broadening scope by considering Eastern European cases alongside examples of exhibitions from the Soviet Union.

As has already been noted, a British perspective on the Cold War is central to this study. But what was Britain’s position in the Cold War? This is a question that has attracted growing scholarly interest, both politically and culturally, although studies have tended to concentrate on the late 1940s and 1950s when the Cold War played a major role in international and domestic politics. It would be unwise to overstate the impact of the Cold War on Britain in the post-war period at the expense of the interaction of other complex social and political changes – decolonisation, for example. Nevertheless, Britain did play an important Cold War role. Geraint Hughes has argued that Britain was 'as significant a participant in the Cold War as Western Europe's two other major powers, France and the Federal Republic of Germany'.

Britain’s high-level political role was especially significant between the late 1940s and the mid 1950s when direct relations between the USA and USSR were limited and Britain could act as an intermediary. The importance of this role declined with the establishment of direct bilateral relations between the two superpowers; this waning of influence became more obvious in the period following the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Used as a framework for the analysis of political, social and cultural events, Cold War themes can be interwoven with the variety of other influences operating in post-war Britain. The 'British Cold War' reveals a different weighting to significant political and social events, suggesting an alternative to the usual superpower-centric historical narrative. Markers such as Suez in 1956, intrinsically tied to Britain’s post-war decline as a

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39 It has been suggested that British activities in the first twenty years of the Cold War displayed a measure of self-interest, attempting to sustain traditional foreign policies in order to maintain international influence under the cover of the East-West conflict. See Michael F. Hopkins, Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerk, "Introduction," Cold War Britain 1945-64: New Perspectives, eds. Michael F. Hopkins, Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerk (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
world power, assumed much greater importance than events like the Hungarian uprising of the same year. Indeed, Britain’s position in relation to its former empire resounded with Cold War significance: the UK was targeted specially by Soviet intelligence services not only because of its position as the USA’s closest European ally, but also because its remaining and former colonies were perceived to be susceptible to Communist take-overs. Convincing arguments have been made to suggest that nations such as France and Britain were as much embroiled in a ‘North-South struggle over decolonization as in the classic East-West confrontation’. The Cold War was only one part of this broader political tapestry.

To some extent, Britain held a hybrid position, as both a nation in Europe but also as the USA’s closest ally, post-war. This made it an important and ambiguous location, particularly for Soviet cultural activities. Britain was linked to America, but was also different from America: the range of Eastern Bloc exhibitions which took place in the UK during the 1960s and the responses to them seem not to have direct parallels in the USA, although similar cultural exchanges (with their corresponding events in the Eastern Bloc demonstrating Western ‘freedoms’) took place in other European NATO countries. Britain also differed from Europe – its communist party was much less potent than the equivalents in France and Italy, and although concerns over communist infiltration were prevalent in the early Cold War, support for the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) declined markedly following the events in Hungary. By the early 1950s, the CPGB had become increasingly isolated from mainstream politics and was regarded with suspicion by the majority of the population.

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41 Jones, "The Impact of the Cold War." 24
42 Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War." 4-5
43 With the exception of the 1959 USSR-USA exchange of national exhibitions, there seems to have been a paucity of Eastern Bloc activity in the USA until 1972. Richmond, U.S. - Soviet Cultural Exchanges 1958-1986 - Who Wins?
44 The highest post-war membership was about 43,500 in 1950 (plus an estimated 200,000 fellow travellers. Jones, "The Impact of the Cold War." 25
Movement were seen by the Foreign Office as a 'propagandist weapon of war'. An abortive attempt to stage a Peace Congress in Sheffield in 1950 was undermined by the British government which refused visas to key participants and attacked the peace movement as part of 'a larger strategy to discredit the entire Soviet system and international communism'.

If the Cold War is taken to be a struggle between rival cultures, whereabouts were the main battlegrounds for this conflict? As this chapter has established, the Cold War was not like conventional 'hot' wars: its battles were rarely fought on actual military fronts, and those that were frequently distant from British shores. Yet the struggle also had an impact closer to home. Particularly in the case of the USA, academics have investigated what may be called Cold War 'home fronts': how the Cold War affected and interacted with the everyday lives of the American population in the 1950s, 1960s and beyond. It is on this domestic 'front' that Cold War culture – both high and low, both home-grown and coming from beyond the Iron Curtain – was usually experienced. In the USA, studies such as Kuznick and Gilbert's investigation into the films, literature, and consumer culture of the period almost seem to indicate that 'Cold War culture' and American post-war culture were almost synonymous, so numerous are their points of intersection. However, they also note that there were many different American experiences of the Cold War, depending on gender, age, religion, race, class and region.

Cold War home front cultural events could be unusual and specific to that conflict in a particular part of the world, such as Fried's documentation of American anti-communist public pageantry, including a highly esoteric media-staged 'communist invasion' of a town in Wisconsin. But they

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46 TNA FO110/370 Secret report on Sheffield Peace Congress, 15 January 1951
48 For example the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam.
49 Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., Rethinking Cold War Culture (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001). 11
could also be literally closer to the 'home' itself: in both East and West, 'the political significance of the home was greatly amplified by the Cold War'. Concepts of domesticity and consumption came to the fore in the 1950s as the terms of Cold War competition shifted from military technology to national plenty. In 1951, American sociologist David Reisman invented a fictional tale of 'Operation Abundance' a.k.a. 'The Nylon War', which documented an imagined campaign in which the USSR was 'bombed' with consumer goods. Consumer goods continued to be powerful and contentious objects for both sides throughout the Cold War. But other material culture could also be used as cultural diplomatic messengers of the ideologies of the Cold War, as the exhibitions of commercial, historic and artistic objects discussed in this thesis demonstrate.

In common with many western nations, détente brought an expansion rather than a reduction in the amount of overseas cultural activities conducted by the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe on the British Cold War home front. But the implications of the Cold War have yet to be fully integrated into standard accounts of culture and society in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain. As the historian Harriet Jones has noted, the dominant event which coloured the second half of Britain's twentieth century was World War II, where the 'common struggle against totalitarianism' – in this case, Nazi Germany - has been emphasised as the generating force behind post-war consensus and the focus of collective popular memory.

In the post-war world, the external threat of Hitler could be converted into

52 Pavitt and Crowley, eds., *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*
54 This continued during the period of re-unification (Wende) in Germany. Ina Merkel, "Consumer Culture in the G.D.R., or How the Struggle for Antimodernity Was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture," *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
55 Shaw, "The Politics of Cold War Culture." 59-60
56 Shaw, "Introduction: Britain and the Cultural Cold War." 110
57 Jones, "The Impact of the Cold War." 35
the ideological threat of the USSR in areas such as film and the popular press.58 Responses to Soviet aggression, amplified by a complex process involving anti-communist propaganda from the IRD, opinions in the British popular press and the need for a closer Anglo-American relationship contributed to a 'broad anti-Soviet consensus' amongst the British public from the late 1940s.59 By 1950, the so-called 'Russians' (a term interchangeable with the 'Soviets') had 'moved in to fill the space left by the Nazis in popular consciousness for national enemies'.60 The Second World War also forms the starting point for conventional historical narratives such as the shift from 'austerity' to 'affluence' in 1950s Britain. The Cold War needs to be interwoven with these existing stories and more investigation is required into how the concerns of this ideological conflict 'overlaid pre-existing cultural patterns and themes'.61

It is possible to analyse the social, cultural and political impact of the conflict on the everyday lives of British people and institutions: this has been defined as the 'Cold War Home Front'.62 It can be used both in the literal domestic sense and also to indicate the population's experiences in Britain more widely. In this thesis, the term Britain is used to describe the location of Eastern Bloc exhibitions; although most of the exhibitions are London-based (frequently because of Soviet and Eastern European demands for prestigious national venues), this thesis also includes some exhibitions in Scotland or which toured to regional cities.

Fred Inglis's take on everyday life in Britain in the shadow of the superpower conflict - although the Cold War could be 'ignored', it could not be 'forgotten' - gives an indication of how it paradoxically pervaded everyday life, simultaneously absent and present.63 Recent research carried out on this 'home front' demonstrates how the broader international

58 See, for example Michael Paris, "Red Menace! Russia and British Juvenile Fiction," Contemporary British History 19.2 (2005).
61 Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War." 13
62 Shaw, "Introduction: Britain and the Cultural Cold War." 109
63 Inglis, The Cruel Peace: Everyday Life in the Cold War. pxii
situation influenced a variety of cultural and social spheres conventionally seen as remote from the orbit of East-West politics. Stefan Schwarzkopf has shown how British consumerism in the 1940s and 1950s was shaped by the advertising industry's appropriation of Cold War rhetoric. Sport, which has more conventionally been seen as 'war minus the shooting' (Orwell) has unsurprisingly attracted the attention of those wishing to unpick cultural relations across the Iron Curtain, including those with Britain.

Whilst the object of this thesis is cultural exchange with the Soviet Union and its satellites, it is important to record the fact that the period saw an increasing American influence on British culture. In the 'imaginary' war of East-West confrontation, it was popular imagery in British and American films, literature and other media that shaped the majority of the British population's ideas and images of the Cold War conflict. The USA's influence on British culture was many times greater than that of the Eastern Bloc, manifested in cultural events such as the Earls Court Soviet exhibitions or the historical displays from Eastern Europe. This thesis questions why these Eastern Bloc events did not have a long-lasting impact in Britain, through an analysis of British perceptions of the cultures of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

The Cold War was not a 'monolithic' time-period; Britain was affected differently at various times depending on a complex mixture of political and social events both within the country and overseas. The various phases of the Cold War was also shifted and changed: it has been well documented how the more relaxed 'Thaw' of the mid-1950s onwards followed an icy Stalinist period when relations between East and West were characterised

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64 Schwarzkopf, "They Do It with Mirrors: Advertising and British Cold War Consumer Politics."
66 Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War." 16
67 Shaw, "Introduction: Britain and the Cultural Cold War." 113
by great anxiety and suspicion. The earlier portion of the Cold War has tended to be the main focus of academic study. Research on cultural exchange has been devoted overwhelmingly to the eventful immediate post-war period and the 1950s – the ‘first cold war’ leading up until the Cuban Missile Crisis but this is now starting to shift as more political archives are released and this early scholarship is built upon. It has been suggested that subsequent to the Cuban Missile Crisis and on through the 1960s and 1970s, established Cold War moralities in the West began to be challenged: the former sharply defined boundaries between the two sides became increasingly blurred.\(^68\) The underlying narrative of this study seems to indicate a growing acceptance of the entrenched East-West status quo, and an inevitability about its continuation. However, although its character shifted the Cold War remained a key factor shaping international and domestic policy throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and its cultural impact continued to resonate throughout governmental activities, high culture and popular culture.

The timeframe of this thesis – 1956-1979 – encompasses this relatively less investigated period of the cultural Cold War in Britain. Like the USA, the mechanisms of British-Eastern Bloc cultural exchange in the 1950s were characterised by ‘control, strict reciprocity and suspicion’, but in the British case a less strict working relationship, particularly with the countries of Eastern Europe, seems to have developed during the 1960s as contacts increased.\(^69\) By 1966, the Foreign Office was able to congratulate Britain’s significant achievements in cultural exchange ‘through what we no longer call the Iron Curtain’.\(^70\) There was even a perception in the mid 1960s that the ‘Cold War’ – perhaps as known in the isolationist pre-Thaw period – was being replaced by new phase of international relations was in

\(^{68}\) Whitfield, amongst others, in his analysis of the effects of the Cold War on US popular culture, has argued that the early 1960s saw a blurring of the established (Western) moral boundaries of the East and West, reflected in the publication of novels such as John Le Carré’s *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* (1963) which presented both sides as equally ruthless. See also the film *Dr Strangelove*. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd (1st 1991) ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996). 205-208; Pavitt and Crowley, eds., *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*.


\(^{70}\) TNA FO854/1595 ‘East-West Cultural Contacts’ Speaight, 31 October 1966
place. A memo of 1966 counselled against circulating advice on combating the communist-fronted Friendship Societies because 'we would merely give the impression that the Foreign Office were still fighting the Cold War and this would put people's backs up.'\textsuperscript{71} The main emphasis of this study is on the under-investigated 1960s and early 1970s, which is when the exchanges of exhibitions resulting from cultural agreements were at their most prevalent. Although the cultural shifts of the vibrant 1960s in Britain have been well documented, the subtle but ongoing influence of the Cold War has been largely omitted from this story. This period saw a more complex phase of the cultural Cold War, and also a highly active phase in reciprocal British-Eastern Bloc cultural presence abroad.

1956 is a marker for a number of significant Cold War events; in this case, it is the opening up of cultural contacts between the Soviet Union and the West, coinciding with Khrushchev's 'secret speech' repudiating Stalinism at the 20\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress, that marks a convenient starting point. In Britain, too, 1956 saw the visit of the Soviet leaders and movements towards a regulated programme of cultural exchanges with the USSR, manifested by the activities of the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council.\textsuperscript{72} Although the first major exhibition scrutinised by this thesis did not take place until 1959 - \textit{Russian Painting from the 13\textsuperscript{th} to the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century} - preparations had been taking place since 1956. The end point of this thesis, 1979, is marked by the final Soviet Industrial Exhibition at Earls Court, a marker between the détente of the 1970s and the renewed hostility post-Afghanistan. Although cultural exchanges continued during the 1970s, the significance of exhibitions as cultural diplomacy seems to have declined markedly from the mid 1970s with little comment on Eastern Bloc exhibitions in the press. Additionally, regulations surrounding the release of archival material mean that it is at present difficult to research the post-1979 period.

\textsuperscript{71} TNA FCO13/266 'Communist Front Organisations: Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR 1967-8' Minute by R Cecil, 20 December 1966
\textsuperscript{72} The SRC was created in April 1955. TNA BW2/250 'Soviet Relations Committee: Correspondence about its formation in 1955 and its responsibilities'
The British focus also allows for a wider geographical perspective on the Cold War than the more conventional, narrowly-viewed superpower conflict, bringing in the activities not only of the USSR but of other Eastern European nations. The thesis title uses the term ‘Eastern Bloc’ to denote the Soviet Union and the other countries covered by this research which lay in the Soviet sphere of influence: Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania.\(^{73}\) As the chapter structure reveals, exhibitions from the USSR and from Eastern Europe have been considered separately. Not only were the regions perceived differently by contemporaries – the USSR was seen as an aggressor and this vaguely hostile image continued to underpin Foreign Office responses in the 1960s - Soviet cultural contacts developed earlier, and at a different pace than those of the other countries of Eastern Europe. With the exception of Poland, which had maintained a British Council presence throughout the post-war period, until the later 1950s, the British Foreign Office did not attempt to promote government approved cultural exchanges with the countries of Eastern Europe. It feared that this would grant legitimacy to the ‘puppet’ communist governments of these Soviet ‘satellites’. This view later shifted to one of encouraging cultural contacts, the British government demonstrating support for what it came to see as victimised populations living in the shadow of Moscow’s control. Once official cultural contacts were established, they were broadly along similar lines to those with the USSR. Yet there were also notable differences between the Soviet and the Eastern European ‘manifestations’ in Britain. Those exhibitions from the USSR reflected its position as a superpower: they were fewer in number but usually larger in scale than those from countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia, often tied to concurrent political events such as diplomatic visits and the signing of trade agreements. As this thesis will show, critical responses to these exhibitions maintained a greater degree of hostility and mistrust towards the USSR in comparison to cultural

\(^{73}\) This thesis does not examine all countries in Eastern Europe. It omits East Germany and Albania which had no diplomatic relations with Britain at this time, and also Yugoslavia which was outside the Soviet bloc. Although Bulgaria was involved in cultural diplomacy with Britain, it rarely held exhibitions until the 1970s.
manifestations from Eastern Europe, which were generally received in a much less politicised way.

The epithet 'Eastern Bloc' is itself part of a particular Cold War lexicon. Other related terms such as 'Iron Curtain', 'satellites', a generic 'Eastern Europe' or 'the Russians' are prevalent throughout the archival sources used in this thesis. This reflects how the rival 'Bloc' – the 'East' - was linguistically codified and understood in post-war Britain (part of its opposite, the 'West'). Robert L Ivie has investigated similar metaphors of Cold War rhetoric in the US-Soviet context, demonstrating how they became ‘powerful conventions of public discourse’ which constrained political and public opinion by linguistically ‘depersonalizing’ and ‘decivilizing’ the Soviet enemy.74 This thesis briefly explores this terminology in relation to Britain, particularly in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. It uses such terms in the text not to denigrate the ‘Eastern Bloc’ and resurrect Cold War antagonism, but because these were the contemporary descriptions used in Britain by the organisers and viewers of these exhibitions.

But it is true that these terms were loaded ones, carrying assumptions of Western superiority and stereotypes of a less developed ‘other’ in the East.75 Whilst a positive rhetoric of ‘freedom’ became associated with the West from the early years of the Cold War, and came to be used to sell the idea of the Western ‘way of life’ in the Eastern Bloc,76 Soviet claims to ‘peace’, ‘friendship’ and ‘coexistence’ were accused of being hollow in the West.77 Such Soviet assertions were seen as increasingly hackneyed and implausible in 1960s Britain, as the discussions in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 will demonstrate. Such vocabulary was also an intrinsic part of how

77 Mayhew, A War of Words: A Cold War Witness. 51, 55
Britain understood and responded to the cultural Cold War. The idea of an 'Iron Curtain', for example, though grounded in the reality of Eastern Bloc isolation, coloured perceptions of an austere, unfriendly and secretive Eastern bloc throughout the 1950s and 1960s. 78

Particularly in the immediate post-war decade, the countries of Eastern Europe were referred to as mere 'satellites' of the Soviet Union, indicating official British perceptions that their communist governments were only puppets. Such language is bound up in some of the preconceptions and prejudices revealed in the analysis of the exhibitions in this study. In the anecdote previously cited, Mayhew was caught out by his assumption that Soviet records would be of poorer quality than those in the West. Exhibitions had a part to play in the 'complicated processes involved in the creation of Cold War stereotypes'. 79 They could display unexpected views of the Eastern Bloc, or alternatively could confirm these prejudices. Although not all the British organisers and viewers of Eastern Bloc exhibitions shared in these stereotypes, preconceived notions about the 'other side' of the Iron Curtain did surface. In relation to critics’ reviews of Eastern European exhibitions of nationally distinctive historical treasures, some British responses indicated a predisposition to view Eastern Europe as a generic, less developed, isolated and largely unknown region, which could be challenged by unexpected displays of seemingly 'progressive' or 'western' artefacts. 80 Similarly, faced with the mammoth scale of the 1961 display of the 'Soviet Way of Life' at Earls Court, British views were mixed, some expressing surprise at the Russians’ presentation of modern consumer goods and fashions that contrasted with imagined notions of day-to-day existence in the USSR. The concept of the imagined or mythic

78 Western tourism to the USSR was conducted mainly through communist-run agencies like Progressive in the 1950s and 1960s. Such tourism had been almost non-existent prior to the Thaw when there was no tourism or currency agreement; only around 4000-5000 westerners in total travelled to the USSR between 1946-1953. ‘Visits to Russia as Propaganda’ The Times 11 September 1953.

79 Shaw, British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus, 3.

stereotype of the ‘Eastern Bloc’ is explored further in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Although Cold War cultural diplomacy drew on almost every branch of the arts or sciences, this thesis takes exhibitions as its subject. It analyses not only artistic exhibitions, but also trade fairs and industrial shows. But how can these exhibitions be conceptualised? Writing in 1965, Michael Brawne (the architect responsible for designing the installations for many of the ‘imported’ Eastern Bloc exhibitions in this study) defined the museum as a predominantly visual ‘medium of communication’ where it was possible for the viewer to experience a ‘direct encounter’ with the object itself.81 In a political and cultural climate where ‘direct encounters’ with peoples and cultures of the Eastern Bloc were relatively rare, these potential meetings with the material culture of the ‘other side’ could take on a heightened significance. Paul Betts has discussed the ‘Cold War politicization of material culture’ where design was invested with unprecedented political power during the Cold War, if for no other reason than it was often used – along with consumerism itself – to measure the differences between East and West.82

But a significant proportion of exhibits that will form the basis of this thesis were not purpose-made to play a role in the Cold War, but were rather historical or artistic objects that had been appropriated and drawn into the ideological confrontation. It useful to consider this in the light of existing studies on the applications of varieties of art in the Cold War by America: the USIA did not care what kind of art used as long as made in USA and ‘crucially not linked to communism in any way’.83

The act of placing an object in a museum or other exhibition setting – and the curatorial decisions that lead to it being placed there – confer a special

81 Brawne, The New Museum: Architecture and Display. 7
82 Betts, The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design. 3
status on the artefact. As Pence has demonstrated in her investigation of the Leipzig trade fair in the 1950s, the trade exhibition could act as a 'bridge' or 'mediator' between East and West. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's portrayal of exhibitions as locations where the new and the strange can be seen also resonates with Cold War exhibitions coming to Britain from the isolated Eastern Bloc. Particularly in the Eastern European exhibitions discussed in Chapter 4, critics remarked upon the unfamiliarity of historic artefacts from the Eastern Bloc.

This thesis analyses a range of exhibition types. There are constants between these 'multiple sites of modern display', such as their presentation as being 'foreign' within the British context. Some work has been carried out on the idea of the 'ambassadorial' exhibition in the British context of the 1930s, for example in Haskell's study of the use of Botticelli by the Italian fascist regime. Exhibition types varied in how political they were perceived to be: some had a less controversial image than others, but even trade fairs could be contentious in this highly politicised period. Many of these Cold War exhibitions were multi-functional, not just displaying one type of easily categorised object or merely functioning as agents of 'cultural diplomacy'.

The 'symbolic universes' created by arranging and displaying objects in the form of exhibitions, like many other forms of cultural and artistic

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87 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage.
88 Wiesen, "Miracles for Sale: Consumer Displays and Advertising in Postwar West Germany." 167
91 The 'symbolic universe' concept of a 'structure of legitimation that provides meaning for social experience, placing "all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future" was created by sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. It has been applied by Robert
expression, took on renewed political significance in the global 'armed truce'⁹² of the Cold War period. Exhibitions have always had multiple meanings and functions:

...they can be used for propaganda, by representing the culture of one nation to another in a language which all nations can read; and they can even have economic effects (whether intended or not).⁹³

During the Cold War, at national and international level they have been acknowledged by contemporary commentators and historians alike as highly politicised events, epitomised by the ideologically oppositional 'gladiatorial exhibitions' respectively staged by the USA and the USSR in Moscow and New York in 1959.⁹⁴ Noticeably, Western academic emphasis is often on the presentation of American consumerism or modern art to the Soviets rather than the reception of the USSR exhibition in the USA.⁹⁵ Similarly, scholarly attention has recently been paid to how such ideological displays were stage-managed and received in the context of the international expositions of the post-war period: in particular Brussels (1958), but also Montreal (1967) and Osaka (1970).⁹⁶ These analyses usually focus on the visual and cultural manifestations of political posturing between the two superpowers.

However, more recent scholarship has started to investigate the more subtle, ambiguous and contradictory cases of exhibitions occurring within both the superpower relationship and those staged in and by other

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⁹³ Major and Mitter, “East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War.” 4
⁹⁴ Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 33
⁹⁶ For Brussels, see Haddow, Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s.
countries caught up in the 'virtual conflict'\textsuperscript{97} of the Cold War. The spread of US high culture in Europe has been broadly investigated by Krenn via the presentation of American art exhibitions across the continent, and more specifically by McDonald in the case of 1950s France and the MOMA art and design exhibition \textit{50 Years of American Art}.\textsuperscript{98} Davies and Hawkins have shown through analysis of travelling exhibitions of design the complex and contradictory positions of nations outside the two main power blocs. They each document Finland's use of the design exhibition format to assert a national and cultural character remote from the Eastern Bloc and fully engaged in the Western world.\textsuperscript{99}

The examples of Eastern Bloc exhibitions received in Britain are also complex and nuanced, and can be placed within this literature of ambassadorial exhibitions. They reveal a range of scenarios more subtle than the blunt 'gladiatorial' blows of the USSR and USA reciprocal exhibitions of 1959. Britain is significant not only for the number but also the variety of exhibitions from the Eastern bloc it staged during the post-war period and the institutional and personal contacts established and maintained with the Soviet Union and its 'satellites'. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, these imported exhibitions were the 'quid pro quo' sent by the Soviet Union and countries of Eastern Europe in return for British art displays such as Henry Moore, alleged to demonstrate Western freedoms. Some Eastern Bloc exhibitions were more desirable than others, and the practical issues surrounding reciprocity for low quality exhibition — venues, funding and the like — repeatedly caused problems for the British organisers. Finding appropriate accommodation for all exhibitions - not only those from the other side of the Iron Curtain - remained an issue throughout the timeframe of this thesis. The Arts Council relied heavily on

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{97} Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War." \textsuperscript{4}
\textsuperscript{98} McDonald, "Selling the American Dream: MoMA, Industrial Design and Post-War France.
\end{footnotesize}
the goodwill of venues like the Tate, the Royal Academy and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The art historian Margaret Garlake has shown how in the immediate post-war period British exhibiting systems were a 'skeleton' which was not 'fully fleshed out' until the 1960s. Sandy Nairne, the curator and museum director, also positions the moment of change in Britain's institutional infrastructure for exhibitions in the late 1960s, claiming that it was only by the 1980s that Britain had developed a 'culture of contemporary exhibitions' at a level seen in New York and Paris of the 1950s. Contemporaries such as Brawne also noted the slow pace of change in British museums and galleries in the post-war period, with no major new museums being built until the Hayward Gallery in 1968.

Exhibition style changed in the period 1956-79. Most exhibitions were relatively simple displays in the 1950s and early 1960s, but from the later 1960s more complex installations began to be used. For temporary loan exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc, installation techniques varied from utilising already available walls, vitrines and cases to the creation of precisely planned settings that transformed the venue. Although they are outside the scope of this study, audiences too changed. The post-war decades saw growth in the numbers of people visiting museums and galleries. Writing in 1965, Brawne noted how museum attendance had 'considerably increased' in recent years, suggesting that many visitors made repeat trips to venues such as the Tate.

Finally, the thesis considers the roles and views of key organisations in staging Eastern Bloc exhibitions in Britain, and also the critical reception of these displays. Whilst it is possible to evaluate the opinions of the different

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102 Brawne, *The New Museum: Architecture and Display*, 126
104 These installations could be planned by the visiting nation, as was the case for *1000 Years of Art in Poland* or designed by British architects, for example the Edinburgh showing of *Rumanian Art Treasures.*
105 Brawne, *The New Museum: Architecture and Display*, 16
organisational bodies from archival material, the views of the majority of visitors to these exhibitions have been lost. In a few cases, visitors' books survive, but these should not be treated uncritically as a record of what the viewer 'really' thought.\textsuperscript{106} Responses in the mainstream and specialist press can be used to generate a picture of the critical responses. These sources need to be used with an awareness of the individual biases of their authors and do not provide a measurable, generalised 'British response'. But when used with an awareness of their limitations, they can indicate some of the range of reactions to these exhibitions. Such reactions rarely corresponded with the intended messages of cultural diplomacy. The effect of any exhibition is difficult to control, but this was intensified with the cross-cultural East-West movement of the exhibitions under scrutiny. Existing scholarly analyses have picked up on similar disparities between intended and received messages. Denis Doordan has noted the lack sophistication and control of some Cold War exhibitions whereby the subject of the exhibition could undermine the intentions of the cultural diplomacy effort – the 'various campaigns of persuasion'.\textsuperscript{107} Along the same lines, Katherine Pence comments on the uncontrollable 'many faces' of the Leipzig Fair which disrupted the unambiguous image the East German government wished to present.\textsuperscript{108}

Assessing British attitudes to the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War is a tricky issue. One thing is clear: the Soviet Union was perceived differently from its 'satellites' in Europe. The impression was of an aggressor and its victims, particularly in the aftermath of events in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Tony Shaw has suggested that there was a broad, popular 'anti-Soviet' consensus in Britain in the post-war period, encouraged in the late 1940s and 1950s by the popular press, governmental propaganda and semi-secret organisations such as the

\textsuperscript{106} Susan E. Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited," \textit{Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History} 6.4 (2005), 680; Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959."


\textsuperscript{108} Pence, "a World in Miniature': The Leipzig Trade Fairs in the 1950s and East German Consumer Citizenship." 41
IRD. This did not preclude contacts and exchanges with the USSR or the presence of dissenting opinions. In common with many other investigations, Shaw focuses on the period leading from 1945 to the early 1960s; it is not clear whether or how this consensus was modified later. Other studies of British-Soviet relations attempt to ground 'the British opinion' by looking at historical contacts, cultural and political ties, popular images and perceptions, but these frequently admit to a scarcity of evidence and much speculation. Northedge and Wells argue that there have always been mixed relations between the two nations, who could be described as 'neither enemies nor friends'. British-Soviet contacts from 1942 onwards – encompassing the period of their alliance during the Second World War - have been described as a 'modus vivendi' on the British side, particularly concerning practical necessities such as trade. Britain has, in marked contrast to the USA, demonstrated 'a willingness to do deals with the Soviet Union'. It has been argued that British foreign policy in the period 1945-1964 was motivated not only by the considerations of fighting the Cold War, but also by an attempt to maintain diplomatic influence and her existing overseas interests in the face of a decline in stature on the world stage. The work of Brian White and Geraint Hughes analysed foreign policy positions such as the pursuit of détente or investigated attitudes at specific political moments like the Czech invasion of 1968, which show the ambiguities of Britain's position internationally and its impact on the pragmatism of the Wilson government's attitudes. However, despite these uncertainties Britain has – with the possible exception of the Grand Alliance of the Second

111 Northedge and Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution.
113 Hopkins, Kandiah and Staerk, "Introduction." 4
World War and its immediate aftermath – never been overly friendly towards the USSR, though even during the Cold War these views fluctuated, and there were periods when the Soviet Union could be viewed more sympathetically.\(^{115}\)

Civil servants, museum staff, academics and artists were all active on the British side in persevering with the organisation of these joint exhibitions in sometimes trying, sometimes smooth circumstances. In doing so, they were compelled to deal with the various Ministries of Culture and museum staff in the Eastern Bloc. These relationships were not homogenous: they could range from collaboration to conflict. When such relationships were beset by difficulties and conflicts of interest (both between nations and between different political and cultural agencies on the British side), such difficulties were not automatically the result of Cold War political tensions and could be attributed to more mundane problems. James Chapman's archival analysis of the BBC's suppression of the contentious drama documentary *The War Game* (1965) reveals the fallacy of presuming that deliberate political motives inevitably underlie such events. He argues that the was less a 'political conspiracy' to hide the truth of nuclear warfare, instead 'a rather more ad hoc process through which a range of institutional and cultural factors determined the BBC's decision.'\(^{116}\) This thesis takes a similarly critical approach.

Agencies involved in negotiating and organising the Eastern Bloc exhibitions included the Foreign Office, the British Council, the Arts Council, diplomats, museums and galleries such as the Royal Academy and the Victoria and Albert Museum, trade organisations, department stores and other private sector parties. In doing so there could be a

\(^{115}\) Significantly, these moments of sympathy often look back to the time when the Soviet Union and Britain were fighting together against the Nazis. In this thesis, the historical exhibition *Great Britain: USSR* (1987) plays on this alliance as the keystone of contemporary Anglo-Soviet 'friendships'; Mitter and Major identify another instance, in Jeremy Isaac's television series *The World at War* which similarly focuses on the wartime alliance. Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War."\(^{10}\)

\(^{116}\) James Chapman, "The B.B.C. And the Censorship of 'the War Game' (1965)," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41.1 (2006): 75
blurring of positions, with museums becoming 'quasi-governmental' and adopting a 'crucial, 'unofficial' foreign policy role'.117

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In addition to the introduction, the thesis comprises four chapters investigating different analytical groupings of Eastern Bloc exhibitions in Britain followed by a conclusion. Chapter 2 introduces the theme of exhibitions as Cold War cultural diplomacy. Interweaving the example of Great Britain: USSR – An Historical Exhibition (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1967) as the epitome of a politically charged display of historical artefacts, it explores how and why Britain became involved in and tried to regulate Cold War cultural diplomacy, moving from the creation of bodies like the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council in the mid 1950s to the signing of inter-governmental Cultural Agreements, first with the Soviet Union in 1959 and then with the nations of Eastern Europe. It examines how British attitudes to cultural exchange with the USSR differed from opinions towards Eastern Europe. Offering an analysis of how these programmes of cultural exchange worked in practice, paying specific attention to exhibitions, the chapter addresses the practical and ideological motives and issues that arose in organising Eastern Bloc exhibitions. The 'problem' of reciprocity is especially salient, and is highlighted because it was this that resulted in the British showings of most of the Eastern Bloc exhibitions in this thesis. Finally, the chapter examines the selection of, and responses to, the exhibits of Great Britain: USSR. It investigates how the highly selective and politicised narrative of the exhibition, which told of centuries old 'friendship' between the two countries, was perceived by both British organisers and critics.

Although Great Britain: USSR was noted in the British press for its misleadingly 'smooth' political tale, it was exhibitions of Soviet fine art

117 McDonald, "Selling the American Dream: MoMA, Industrial Design and Post-War France." 398
which aroused a much fiercer critical outcry. Chapter 3 takes these exhibitions as its subject, comparing two shows: *Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Century* (Royal Academy 1959) and *Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design Since 1917* (Hayward Gallery 1971). These were art historical exhibitions in which the Soviet and British authorities both collaborated in, and contested ownership of, particular images of the artistic history and culture of the USSR. It investigates the position of particular types of Soviet art during the cold war: socialist realism and revolutionary avant-garde art. In order to place these exhibitions in context, it looks at the degree of British awareness of Soviet art in the 1950s and 1960s via both exhibitions and publications. Because these works were little known in Britain, there was a strong cultural motive to stage these displays. The issue of curatorial power and the control of a particular image of Soviet art history came to the fore in both exhibitions. At both shows, works of art were either not permitted or were withdrawn. Particularly in the case of *Art in Revolution*, which was an Arts Council exhibition with input from the USSR, the issue of Soviet censorship was highly contentious. The critical reactions to these displays centred around politically charged discussions of the USSR as a repressive regime. Both exhibitions appeared to confirm a general pre-existing impression of the Soviet Union as a hostile communist body and its poor constrained and censored artists as deserving of Western pity.

The intensity of response to the politicisation of Soviet fine art seems to stem in part from a general British sense that it was wrong or immoral to use art for such purposes. In contrast, the applied arts seem to have attracted much less passionate responses. Similarly, exhibitions from the Soviet Union attracted a much greater and a much more politicised response than those from the countries of Eastern Europe. Chapter 4 investigates these exhibitions, examining case studies from Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. These were reciprocal 'embassy exhibitions' arising from the official cultural programmes; they were of varying size and import and used displays of predominantly historical ‘treasures’ to portray distinctive national identities. Throughout, the nature
of how national identities from socialist Eastern Europe are constructed, portrayed and received is investigated. Firstly, the chapter looks at the organisation of and responses to displays from Romania and Hungary to investigate how and why these exhibitions of ancient artefacts were aligned with a long-standing stereotype of Eastern Europe as homogenous, old fashioned, isolated and less developed. Then it turns to exhibitions from Czechoslovakia and Poland to demonstrate how this 'monophonic' image of the Eastern Bloc was challenged by the more 'polyphonic' national characters on display. Exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass, notably *Bohemian Glass* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1965) presented Czechoslovakia as progressive and modern. And *1000 Years of Art in Poland* (Royal Academy, 1970) suggested that the Iron Curtain was an historical anomaly. This exhibition presented an expansive, multi-faceted Polish national identity fully integrated with the major currents of European art and culture.

The fifth chapter returns once more to the Soviet Union, and takes the series of Soviet Industrial Exhibitions at Earls Court (1961, 1968, 1979) as its subject. These were ostensibly Soviet trade fairs; however, they were also propagandist visions that claimed to demonstrate the contemporary Soviet 'way of life'. Looking mainly at the 1961 and 1968 exhibitions, the first section investigates their political and cultural position. It examines the concept of a 'way of life' as a type of illusion — a mythic 'dreamworld' — in this case constructed through gigantic displays of Soviet space hardware and consumer goods. The critical responses to the exhibits are analysed in detail, suggesting that the reception of these exhibitions was coloured by existing British stereotypes about the material culture of the Soviet Union. Preconceived ideas, filtered through perceptions of the Cold War, about what an 'ideal' Soviet object might comprise were juxtaposed with what was actually displayed. Yet there could be a surprising willingness to play along with the Soviet 'dreamworld' on display: in 1961 Earls Court had been transformed into an enjoyable fantasy environment of 'sputniks and sideboards', removed from political realities. Nonetheless, the events
of 1968 broke this illusion, and by the 1979 exhibition British critics could no longer countenance the playful fantasy of the Soviet 'way of life'.

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CHAPTER 2:
THE EXHIBITION AS COLD WAR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY
IN BRITAIN

Soviet flags fluttering on Cromwell Road, London heralded the arrival
Great Britain: USSR – An Historical Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert
Museum (9 February - 2 April 1967), an historical survey of documents,
diplomatic gifts and cultural objects linking the two countries since the
sixteenth century. Endorsed by both the Soviet and British governments
and hastily assembled in less than six weeks\(^1\) - an incredibly fast
timescale in any context, let alone one involving collaboration with the
USSR - the display was created to coincide with the state visit of the
Soviet Premier, Alexei Kosygin.\(^2\) This visit was unusual and politically
significant: the first trip to Britain by a Russian leader since Khrushchev
and Bulganin in April 1956.\(^3\) The ceremonial opening of the exhibition
formed part of Kosygin’s packed schedule of visits to industrial, cultural,
historical and sporting events in England and Scotland [Fig. 2.1].\(^4\)

Kosygin’s visit was primarily the occasion for a series of talks concerning
expanding British-Soviet co-operation\(^5\) and working towards a settlement
in Vietnam.\(^6\) Its wider political context was the active pursuit of détente in
the mid 1960s.

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\(^1\) Although an exhibition along these lines had been under discussion since summer 1965, the
British Council thought it unlikely to take place. In the last week of 1966 the Soviet authorities
suddenly demanded that the show be held in February 1967; the British government, seeing its
importance, acquiesced. TNA BW 64/66 'Protocol' 2 August 1965, Moscow.

\(^2\) The request to stage the show was only received at the end of December 1966; the British
Ambassador asked that it be given 'urgent and sympathetic consideration'. According to the
Russians, the short timescale should not have posed a problem as 'a similar exhibition was
arranged in France at 30 days' notice'. AAD, ACGB/121/459 Box 1 telegram Sir Geoffrey Harrison,
British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office 20 December 1966.

\(^3\) The visit of 'B & K' (as they were referred to in the British press) occurred a matter of weeks after
Khrushchev’s secret speech denouncing Stalin at the 20th Party Congress. Whilst their visit did
include cultural excursions, including a visit to the British Industries Fair, no exhibition was
organised specifically to coincide with their presence in the UK.

\(^4\) Victoria and Albert Museum Archive (henceforward V&A) VX.1967.001 file 1 “Visit of His
Excellency Mr A.N. Kosygin Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR 6-13 February 1967”

\(^5\) TNA FCO 28/366 Parliamentary debates (Hansard) HOUSE OF LORDS OFFICIAL REPORT vol
280 No 107 Monday 13 February 1967 (London, HMSO) Statement: Mr Kosygin’s visit (Col. 34)

\(^6\) Britain was perceived to have a role, as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, in working
towards a settlement in Vietnam. The visit coincided with the Tet period cease-fire and Wilson had
vainly hoped that this was an opportunity to turn the temporary truce into a lasting peace by
interceding for the USA and using Kosygin to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh. For analysis of these
discussions, see Geraint Hughes, “A ‘Missed Opportunity’ for Peace? Harold Wilson, British
Diplomacy and the Sunflower Initiative to End the Vietnam War, February 1967,” Diplomacy and
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Great Britain: USSR was the epitome of cultural diplomacy in exhibition form. It was a collaborative exercise in creating a selective, mutually beneficial political narrative which asserted that ancient diplomatic alliances between Britain and Russia had led inexorably to contemporary ‘friendships’. Historical periods of alliance were ‘repositioned as the norm’ whilst periods of ‘mutual hostility’ were depicted as an ‘aberration’.7 Against a backdrop of the rhetoric of co-operation and ‘mutual understanding’, the display consisted predominantly of flat, documentary exhibits – treaties, letters, manuscripts and the like- supplemented by a small selection of artistic pieces of historical significance such as metalwork, portraits, costume, silver, and ceramics [Fig. 2.2]. These ancient and modern artefacts -‘evidence of our very close and long standing cultural and scientific ties’- were reframed in the context of a specific moment of Cold War politics in the mid 1960s. The exhibition glossed over international tensions, promoting a story of ‘mutual understanding’ and implying that the Cold War was a transient historical blip. Cumulatively, the centuries-old treaties, diplomatic gifts and cultural exhibits challenged the conventional Cold War vision of East versus West and laid claim to a fictionalised ongoing story of international co-operation in commercial, political and cultural fields. Although ostensibly an ‘historical’ exhibition, it was equally about the present and the future. The Soviet Ambassador, Mikhail Smirnovsky commented in the catalogue:

This exhibition does not merely remind us of the past. It can also make those who visit it think of the opportunities opening out before us, today and tomorrow.

It aimed to be ‘a valuable contribution to the further development of relations’ between Britain and the USSR.8

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7 Reid suggests that this strategy was visible in the Soviet public’s responses at the 1959 American exhibition in Moscow. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959." 887
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This was not the only instance of an exhibition in Britain being used for cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, although it was arguably one of the most explicitly politicised. Cultural diplomacy is a type of 'cultural propaganda' — more recently described as 'soft power' — which aims to enhance national prestige and influence and promote political or economic objectives through other means, frequently cultural. In Britain, it was often conducted through institutions like the British Council, established in 1934 to 'provide a lubricant to the everyday workings of British foreign policy' by promoting British culture abroad. Despite the potential political power of culture, the British government viewed the use of 'cultural diplomacy' with some ambivalence. The professor of politics JM Lee has argued that the British government was 'intermittent' and 'uncertain' in its use of cultural diplomacy in the early years of the Cold War. Unlike the outlook of the French — who were perceived to be 'convinced culture merchants', in Britain, the idea of 'culture' carried negative connotations. Although the term 'cultural diplomacy' - defined as 'using the contacts made between different peoples in order to further the line of policy being taken in relations between governments' - was coming into use by 1955, phrases such as the 'British way of life' continued to be used in preference.

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9 In addition to the exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc which are analysed in this thesis, Britain was the site for incoming propaganda exhibitions from the West. These ranged from showings of American Abstract Expressionist art such as Seventeen American Artists (Krenn, Fall out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War, 144) to propagandist displays of Russian weapons seized in the Korean War on Horseguards Parade, London ('Russian Guns on Show: Weapons Taken in Korea' The Times 4 August 1951) via NATO travelling exhibitions including a 1962 'Berlin' exhibition organised by the British Atlantic Community (BAC) at the Mayfair Hotel intended to explain to the British public NATO's commitment in Berlin ('Importance of the indivisibility of the common fate of Berlin and the Western Community') and the division of the city by the Berlin Wall. (TNA FO371/163705 *Berlin exhibition in London* 1962)

10 The term was coined by the Harvard academic Joseph Nye in the 1990s.


12 Ibid., 172


14 TNA FO371/116150 File Folder N 1752/3 Clinton Pelham, British Ambassador in Prague to Harry Hohler, Northern Dept, Foreign Office 15 August 1955

15 Taylor notes that the term 'cultural diplomacy' had been associated with the French since the late nineteenth century: they were first to 'recognise the value of international cultural exchanges'. Taylor, The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939. 125

16 Lee, "British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-61." 113
Nevertheless, despite these misgivings, cultural diplomacy became an important weapon in Britain's Cold War arsenal. In 1956, the Chair of the Fine Arts Advisory Committee of the British Council, Sir Philip Hendy, called for greater funding in order to satisfy what he called the 'tremendous demand' for British art abroad. In particular, he favoured sending the sculpture of the 'superb ambassador' Henry Moore. The political connotations of the British Council's proposed cultural 'push' were made apparent by the terms in which Hendy requested an extra £55,000 per year to promote British art abroad: 'half the price of a tail of a misguided missile, a negligible amount in the cost of the cold war'. Not only was cultural diplomacy argued to be highly effective, it was also cheaper than the military option. By the 1960s, the Foreign Office was convinced that by 'developing closer commercial, cultural and scientific contacts with the Warsaw Pact states' – first the USSR, then later the 'satellites' - Britain and the other NATO powers could 'tacitly encourage internal reform behind the Iron Curtain'. Despite her decline as a 'great power', Britain remained an important participant in the Cold War throughout the 1960s.

The Foreign Office's involvement in cultural relations was 'primarily interested in the projection of Britain abroad'. Particularly in the 1950s, diplomatic reports from the USSR indicated that there was 'profound ignorance and much curiosity about western countries' amongst the Russian people. One means by which the British government aimed to remedy this was by promoting contacts and visits between intellectuals, professionals and artists in Britain and the Soviet Union. The movement of people and ideas was vital to 'project an image of our society which can correct the distortions to which it is subjected by foreign official

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17 “British Council Calls For Another £55,000’ *The Guardian* 23 October 1956, 2
18 See TNA F0371/177821 SC(61)25 United Kingdom Policy Towards the Satellites, emphasis added, 27 Jan 1964, quoted in Hughes, "British Policy Towards Eastern Europe and the Impact of the 'Prague Spring' 1964-1968." 118-9
19 TNA FC013/80 CCB Stewart to HT Bourdillon, 15 February 1968 ref CR3/1/2
20 TNA CAB21/4630 Sir Patrick Reilly, British Ambassador in Moscow ‘First Impressions of the Soviet Union’ 1957.
propaganda'.21 Frequently, the same methods of contact (visits, delegations, exhibitions, concerts) - or even the same artistic 'manifestations' - were used by both governments and pro-communist organisations to further conflicting ideological messages. In the context of the Cold War, this ambiguity made artistic contacts a 'powerful weapon in cultural diplomacy': they were 'capable of double coding, as both innocent of politics and heavily implicated in it'.22 In 1965, Professor Max Beloff commented in an article in favour of the wider projection of Britain abroad that the fine arts were a particularly useful cultural export to countries where 'where access to all external stimuli is government-controlled' because they could be 'regarded as less politically-orientated than some other aspects of our cultural offering'.23 There was a perception at the British Council and the Foreign Office that the populations of the Eastern Bloc were 'deeply susceptible' to the effects of 'first class artistic displays (dramatic, musical or pictorial)', especially the 'young and intelligent'.24 It was thought that an interest in the arts was more 'widespread in all classes in the Soviet Union and East Europe' than in Britain, thus:

...the impact of a tour by a first rate theatre company or of an exhibition of things we do better in the West can be deep and lasting.25

By the mid 1960s, strengthening links with the Communist world in cultural, scientific and commercial matters had become a major objective of British Foreign Policy.

This chapter investigates how Britain became involved in Cold War cultural diplomacy from slow beginnings in the mid 1950s to the signing of cultural agreements with the Soviet Union and countries of Eastern Europe. It looks at the political and institutional efforts by bodies such as the Foreign Office, British Council and Arts Council to develop and control

21 Max Beloff, "The Projection of Britain Abroad," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs) 41.3 (1965). 487
22 Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s." 97
23 Beloff, "The Projection of Britain Abroad." 487
24 TNA BW2/532 Minute from Deputy Director General to Director General 'USSR Manifestations', 11 November 1957
25 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
East-West cultural contacts in order to give context to the Eastern Bloc exhibitions explored in later chapters. By the 1960s, reciprocal exhibitions resulting from these negotiations had become a highly visible manifestation of East-West intergovernmental cultural agreements in Britain.

Using *Great Britain: USSR – An Historical Exhibition* as a case study, it investigates how Anglo-Soviet cultural diplomacy was manifested in Britain via exhibitions. This is an exhibition which, though of great diplomatic significance to the Foreign Office at the moment of its staging, has since been forgotten. This chapter suggests a new way of perceiving Cold War exhibitions in contrast to the confrontational national displays at international Expos which had taken place since the late 1950s as part of the armoury of the 'cultural Cold War'.26 Instead, *Great Britain: USSR* aimed to gloss over national differences and promote a collaboratively constructed, mutually beneficial image that stressed the historical parallels and shared diplomatic and commercial histories between two countries on either side of the Iron Curtain.27 Pragmatic political motives could override opposing ideological standpoints. This chapter contributes to scholarly understanding of the cultural Cold War by demonstrating how such contacts were not simply antagonistic, but could also encompass a variety of more subtle characteristics, including what Mitter and Major have called 'accommodation and restraint'.28 It uses this exhibition to examine what the much-vaunted concept of 'friendship' or 'mutual understanding' meant in the context of Cold War cultural diplomacy, and investigates how this was received by British critics of *Great Britain: USSR*. To what extent was this exaggerated tale of historical 'friendship' believable? Cultural diplomacy was never completely free from controversy: the British Council could be accused of spending taxpayers' money on 'ineffective attempts'

26 See for example Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s.*
27 Rohan Butler's introduction stressed the commercial element in British-Russian relations over the centuries. Catalogue: *Great Britain: USSR An Historical Exhibition* (1967)
to 'impress' or 'charm' the Russians. In the case of Great Britain: USSR, the attempts of the British hosts to conform to the Soviets' perceived wishes in selecting exhibits and the omission of particular historical events could lead to allegations of censorship and British collusion in a re-written myth of longstanding Anglo-Soviet amity.

THE ORIGINS OF COLD WAR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN BRITAIN

The conventional, Western timeline of Cold War politics – an isolationist Stalinist period, followed by a 'Thaw' and more open relations from the mid 1950s – is broadly echoed in the development of Anglo-Soviet cultural exchange. Government-sponsored exchanges with Eastern Europe began later in 1960; starting from a more modest base, these expanded much more rapidly than contacts with the USSR, trebling in volume between 1960 and 1966. These contacts began in response to a shift from perceiving the countries of Eastern Europe as 'satellite regimes' with puppet governments controlled by Moscow, to recognising them officially and helping them to build up an 'independent status'. This increase was partly due to what HMG perceived to be the 'more favourable' potential of the countries of Eastern Europe, stemming for example, from their closer and more recent historical links to mainstream Western European culture. This section examines these processes by which a broad range of cultural exchanges – including exhibitions – became part of Britain's cultural Cold War.

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29 TNA BW2/532 Minute from Deputy Director General to Director General 'USSR Manifestations', 11 November 1957
30 The term 'Anglo-Soviet' is used here as it was by the Foreign Office – to indicate contacts between Britain and the USSR, not just those involving England.
31 £20,000 was allocated for British Council exchanges with Eastern Europe in 1960; by 1966, the sum had grown to £100,000 per year. In contrast, government controlled exchanges with the USSR increased by around 30% in the same period. TNA FO924/1595 File CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
32 TNA FO924/1589 Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office 'Cultural Agreements with East-Europe' 13 April 1966
33 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
34 The East-West cultural contacts under consideration in this chapter were defined by the British government in their widest sense, including all forms of exchanging information and ideas via personal contacts and communication media: education, drama, music, fine arts, languages, scientific and technological exchange. Relations with businessmen or churches were not included.
In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the British mood towards their ally the Soviet Union was one of goodwill and gratitude for Soviet sacrifices.\textsuperscript{35} The war had seen a 'level of cooperation unparalleled in Anglo-Russian history.'\textsuperscript{36} Geoffrey Warner has remarked on the unusual nature of this alliance, calling it an 'enforced and uneasy four year truce in seven decades of suspicion and hostility between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world'.\textsuperscript{37} The alliance was reflected in two exhibitions of Soviet Graphic Art based around works by war artists and organised by the Soviet agency for cultural relations with foreign countries, VOKS and the British-based Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR) in London in 1945 and 1946.\textsuperscript{38} But such goodwill proved to be short-lived, dissipating with the advent of what historian Peter Hennessy has characterised as the 'high cold war'.\textsuperscript{39} This period, between 1947 and 1953 was the 'frostiest and isolationist period when one international dispute could lead to world war and nuclear annihilation could be but one international incident away.'\textsuperscript{40} The Soviet Union first demonstrated its nuclear capability in 1949, intensifying nuclear tension, and there were a series of fraught international situations including the Berlin Blockade (1948-9) the Korean War (1950-1953). Soviet policy of the late 1940s was one of international isolation, withdrawing from the Marshall Plan negotiations and insisting that states such as Czechoslovakia and Poland follow suit. In addition to the anxious international situation, Britain was preoccupied by her own post-war problems: decolonisation, and severe financial weaknesses that demanded loans from the USA and Marshall

TNA FO371/116150, N 1752/4 'Memorandum on the state of cultural contacts with the satellites' 1955
\textsuperscript{35} For example, Coventry and Stalingrad, which both suffered devastation during the war, were twinned in 1943 and exchanges followed throughout the post-war period. The Stalingrad Sword was a powerful symbol of this mutual sympathy and admiration.
\textsuperscript{36} Michael F. Hopkins, "Worlds Apart": The British Embassy in Moscow and the Search for East-West Understanding," Contemporary British History 14.3 (2000), 134
\textsuperscript{38} Held at the Royal Academy (1945) and Whitechapel Gallery (1946), these appear to have been very similar in content.
\textsuperscript{39} The extent to which this new 'anti-Soviet consensus' was manufactured is still a matter for debate. See Shaw, "The British Popular Press and the Early Cold War."
\textsuperscript{40} Peter Hennessy, Never Again: Britain 1945-51 (London: Cape, 1992), 296
Plan support. Additionally, after 1947, it became clear that Britain was not equal to the superpowers, and the government sought out a new ‘high profile East-West role’ just below USA and USSR but above other European allies.

The British Council - founded in 1934 to promote Britain culturally around the world via her achievements in art, drama, literature and music, in addition to the teaching of English as a foreign language - had never been able to operate in the USSR during the pre-war period, so there were no existing official cultural diplomacy links. Britain was slow to develop a coherent policy of cultural diplomacy post-1945: J.M. Lee suggests that it was only by the mid 1950s, in the face of Soviet cultural propaganda and threats to British interests in the Middle East that a more consistent strategy was developed. From this time, the organisation took on a renewed significance, increasingly recognised not only as a body to implement cultural conventions in Europe but also as a vital instrument in fighting the ‘battle for men’s minds’ of the Cold War. As a consequence, the British Council became ‘an unacknowledged arm of foreign affairs, supporting foreign policy through a velvet glove of high culture’. During the 1950s, British Council promotion of the Western ‘way of life’ was largely targeted in the Commonwealth, the middle and Far East, and on the ‘fringe of the iron curtain’, areas thought susceptible to communist propaganda. With the exception of Poland, the British Council was not allowed to operate directly in the Eastern Bloc. Neither was it allowed to use as a tool to influence public opinion abroad. 

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41 Garlake, New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society. 4
42 This role has been described as an ‘illusion rather than the substance of power’. White, “Britain and East West Relations.” 159-160
43 The end of 1947 saw British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin finally reject his hopes of achieving a united Europe via understanding and co-operation with the Soviet Union. Ray Merrick, “The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the Cold War 1946-47,” Journal of Contemporary History 20.3 (1985). 463
44 The ‘very fact that there was a need to project British achievements abroad was in itself symptomatic of Britain’s declining influence in international affairs.’ Taylor, The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939. 173
45 Lee, “British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-61.”
47 Garlake, New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society. 17
48 This was defined as Poland, Yugoslavia, Germany, Austria, Greece and Turkey. National archives, FO924/843 CRL 160/49 17 June 1950 quoted in Donaldson, The British Council: The First Fifty Years. 165
open an office in the Soviet Union; in those periods when it was able to operate (1945-7 and from 1963 onwards), it did so through a cultural attaché working at the British Embassy in Moscow.

Unsurprisingly, there was a paucity of contacts between Britain and the Eastern Bloc during the isolated and anxious post-war decade. Some of the most high profile events involved tours of sporting teams. The few cultural exchanges – visits of Soviet dance troupes and delegations to the USSR, via the communist-front tourist organisation Progressive, for example - were not dealt with on a diplomatic or governmental level; instead, contacts tended to be conducted through 'communist front' or 'fellow travelling' organisations. Organisations with which the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was associated were branded 'communist front organisations', notably Peace, Youth and Labour groups. They were portrayed in the media as deluded instruments of Soviet foreign policy, not to be taken seriously by the majority of the public. The most active of these groups involved in cultural events were the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (SCR), the British-Soviet Friendship Society (BSFS) and the Scotland-USSR Society. Such societies ostensibly existed to promote 'understanding', 'peace' and 'friendship' with the Soviet Union and via artistic, musical, religious and professional presentations.

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49 These limited contacts have received some academic attention. See Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s."; Shaw, British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus.; Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War.
50 Kowalski and Porter, "Cold War Football: British-European Encounters in the 1940s and 1950s."
67 The SCR was described by the Foreign Office as having 'strong Communist connections, although some perfectly respectable people also support it'.(TNA FCO13/266 HFT Smith, Foreign Office to Sir George Godber, Ministry of Health 10 August 1967). It has been suggested that the BSFS was seen as a more political organisation than the SCR. (Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s.* 86) Both organisations denied such connections SCR claimed it was 'avowedly non political', whilst the BSFS claimed 'friendship' as its aim (Letter to the Editor, H Fagan The Times 31 March 1951)
51 e.g. British Peace Committee (established in 1949) Thompson, "British Communists in the Cold War 1947-52." 115
52 The SCR had been founded in 1924 by a group of artists and intellectuals including EM Forster, Bertrand Russell and Virginia Woolf. The SCR continues today as the Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies. The BSFS was previously the British-Soviet Society, established in 1927 and changing its name in 1950 (BBC and Soviet' The Times January 30 1950)
53 Our Society...is extremely interested in all types of exchanges of information, exhibitions and visits between this country and the Soviet Union.' TNA FO 371/111799, NS1861/1 Pat Sloan, General Secretary, British-Soviet Friendship Society to Rt Hon Anthony Eden, Foreign Office, 31 May 1954.

59
The most high profile events staged by the BSFS and SCR were the Friendship Months, held annually from 1950 in cities across the UK, which incorporated programmes of concerts and entertainment. The BSFS and SCR worked closely with the British agency of VOKS, the long-established Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Created in 1925, it promoted Soviet culture overseas by permitting foreign intellectuals and artists to tour the USSR and by sending a variety of artistic and cultural events overseas.

Dance and music were increasingly the most prominent and prestigious manifestations of Soviet culture in Britain following the death of Stalin in 1953. Larraine Nicholas has analysed how dance became a useful tool for the Soviet Union in international relations in this period:

It was this possibility for the arts – especially the non-verbal, apparently unpolitised art forms of dance and music – to express a political aim while simultaneously occupying a moral high ground above such things, which was a feature of cultural diplomacy in the Cold War.

Exhibitions were rarely a feature of these communist front exchanges: the BSFS and SCR lacked the financial resources, contacts and prestige to arrange major Soviet displays in the UK. In 1954, at its height, the BSFS had a membership of approximately 12,000, with around 50,000 affiliated members. But events in Hungary in 1956 badly damaged the BSFS.

55 These grew in prominence from 1953 and could be on a surprisingly large scale. In 1954, the month had 53 concerts in 26 towns in England and Wales, and a week of performances in Scotland. ‘British-Soviet Friendship Month’ The Times September 151953; Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s." 89
56 TNA BW 2/532 "British Soviet Friendship Society, 18 November 1957" appendix to Note on the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council CF / GTB/ 460/48H
58 Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s." 84, 86, 93
59 There were a few small scale shows: an 1958 exhibition of Soviet Graphic art in Southend, which 'passed almost unnoticed in London' and a 1955 exhibition of children's art from the Soviet Union in London: the Foreign Office attempted to get an article in the press emphasising the 'frightening' aspects of the show, including the 'artistic straitjacket' imposed on the child artists. TNA FO 371/135388, NS1752/1 GM Warr to Sir Anthony Meyer, Moscow 5 Feb 1958; TNA FO 371/116823 NS1756/16 'Discusses the possibility of approaching a member of the Sunday Pictorial staff about the Children's Art Exhibition arranged in conjunction with the SCR'
60 TNA FO 371/116827 'Activities of the British-Soviet Friendship Society: cultural exchanges and visits by academics' 1955
61 The BSFS lacked financial power and suffered particularly badly when membership dropped and concerts were cancelled in the wake of the Hungarian invasion of 1956. British Soviet Friendship magazine, November-December 1959
1955 onwards saw a turning point in cultural relations with the Soviet Union. British governmental attempts to expand cultural contacts began in earnest with the creation of the Soviet Relations Committee (SRC) of the British Council in April 1955. This development took place against a broader backdrop of events that heralded what was hoped would be a new, less antagonistic and more stable, approach to East-West relations. At the Geneva meeting of Foreign Ministers in July 1955, it was made clear that HMG favoured an expansion of exchanges with the Soviet Union. The following year, mere weeks after the 'secret speech' denouncing Stalin, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Bulganin visited Britain. This was the first official visit of 'B and K' - as they were popularly referred to in the British press – to the West and was seen as concrete evidence of this new Soviet 'war of smiles'. The USSR was moving towards a more 'outgoing diplomatic policy' which promoted so-called 'Peaceful Coexistence' and 'Friendship'. The British authorities were under no illusions about the contradictory nature of these aims, given what the British Ambassador in Moscow described as the Soviets' 'fundamental hostility to the West' and their desire for the 'inevitable triumph of World Communism'. Nevertheless, the British government supported these shifts: Prime Minister Eden believed that more should be done to promote visits and exchanges of all kinds, asking:

Our main weapons of resistance of Soviet encroachment have hitherto been military. But do they meet the need so the present time?

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64 The visit took place in April 1956 Deighton, "a Different 1956": British Responses to the Polish Events, June-November 1956." 456
66 TNA CAB21/4630 Sir Patrick Reilly, British Ambassador in Moscow 'First Impressions of the Soviet Union' 1957.
67 TNA CAB21/3217 PM Eden to Sec of State for Foreign Affairs 30 April 1956
Despite possible 'problems and embarrassments', an increase in these contacts was seen as 'worthwhile' by the British authorities. There was a belief that this would lead to 'closer contact with Western reality' for the Soviet people. 68

The Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council (SRC) was not only intended to expand activities, it also aimed to act as a regulatory body. The ultimate goal of this short-lived organisation (1955-59), established and chaired by the politician and 'Cold Warrior' Christopher Mayhew, was to become the 'clearing house' for all cultural exchanges with the USSR. 69

In doing so, it aimed to make contacts 'official' and 'representative' by breaking the monopoly of communist-run associations on cultural contacts. 70 Mayhew saw the cultural activities of the communists as dangerous and 'damaging', 'misleading' the British about realities in the Soviet Union and vice versa. 71 The political implications of the 'unrealistic' images of both the USSR and Great Britain promoted by these communist-dominated contacts were troubling to the British authorities. They were keen to offer an alternative view of British 'reality', in order 'to demonstrate that the solution to the modern design for living is not of necessity bound up with Soviet ideology'. 72 They believed that Soviet visitors would be impressed by the higher living standards and greater freedom of expression in Britain. It was hoped that closer contact with 'Western reality' would 'help to open their eyes' to 'a more civilised way of life'. 73 The SRC also aimed to influence British domestic opinion, exposing

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70 The SRC had three priorities in promoting 'closer cultural relations between Britain and Russia'. These were: i) to bring influential Russians to this country; ii) to send sensible representatives of Britain to the Soviet Union; iii) to promote, on a reciprocal basis, artistic and cultural manifestations such as an exchanges of theatrical companies." TNA BW 2/520 Appendix of draft minutes of 154th meeting of the executive committee of the British Council May 10 1955.
71 In Mayhew's subjective opinion "The organisations that did most of the damage were the BSFS and the SCR. Both were presided over by winners of the Stalin peace prize and run by a hard core of British Communist Party members' Mayhew, A War of Words: A Cold War Witness, 52
72 TNA BW2/532 Soviet Relations Committee Working Party paper ref SRC/WP (56)10, 26 September 1956
73 TNA Archive BW2/532 Note on Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council. CF/GTB/460/48H September 1956
the realities of the USSR and eradicating romantic or idealistic notions about the Soviet Union.

The SRC focused on developing personal contacts between academics, intellectuals and scientists in the UK and USSR but also tried to 'freeze out' the BSFS and SCR in artistic and cultural 'manifestations'.74 This was done in two ways: firstly, by offering the Soviets and British commercial impresarios who worked with their musical, dramatic and dance events a 'positive alternative'; and secondly, by planning their programme of contacts officially with the Soviet authorities.75 A third, rarely used measure at the disposal of the SRC – the withdrawal of visas for Soviet artist and musicians coming to Britain under the auspices of the SCR and BSFS - was seen as severe. Although the BSFS frequently accused the British government of intervention and anti-communist bias, HMG had limited controls over Soviet-related cultural events organised in the early 1950s. This was only used very reluctantly as it was feared that it could lead to Soviet reprisals and undermine the SRC’s position in the organisation of future Soviet events.76

Prior to its temporary suspension following the Hungarian invasion of 1956, events organised by the SRC followed the pattern of those established by the 'fellow travelling societies': a typical SRC event was the performances of the Red Army Ensemble at the Empress Hall.77 Very few exhibitions were organised by the SRC, although a visit to Moscow and Leningrad to investigate the contents of Soviet museums and art galleries ‘before planning British exhibitions suitable for the USSR’ was organised in July 1956.78

74 ‘Projects for manifestations should be governed by cheapness and their suitability for making wide impacts, i.e. suitability for television and broadcasting’. TNA BW2/532 Soviet Relations Committee Working Party SRC/WP (56)10, 26 September 1956.
75 It was suggested that this could be via a ‘mixed commission’ similar to that used by the French, which agreed on all envisaged exchanges in advance.
76 This had been done at the aborted Sheffield Peace Congress (1950). TNA BW 2/532 ‘British Soviet Friendship Society, 18 November 1957’ appendix to Note on the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council CF / GTB/ 460/48H
77 Earls Court archive (henceforward EC), Box 1006 Programme Summer 1956
78 The SRC sent the Director of the British Council Fine Arts Department and Sir Gordon Russell, Director of the Council of Industrial Design; they were joined by a delegation comprising Professor Sir William Coldstream, member of the Art Panel of the Arts Council, and Mr Philip James, Art
The SRC dealt solely with the USSR: in 1955, improving Soviet relations were prioritised over encouraging revolution in the 'satellites' of Eastern Europe. Maintaining the mutually accepted division of Europe into Eastern and Western blocs provided strategic security for both the West and the USSR.\(^{79}\) With the exception of Poland, which was the only Eastern Bloc country continuously to retain its British Council office and as such was comparatively 'open' to Britain,\(^ {80}\) between 1947 and June 1950 the British Council had been forced to withdraw from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania at the request of their new communist governments, amid accusations of being a cover for intelligence work.\(^ {81}\) Those few contacts that existed with Eastern Europe were scarce and communist-run. A 1955 Foreign Office memorandum on cultural contacts with the satellites noted that apart from journeys by communists, fellow travellers or officials on diplomatic or commercial business, the only exchanges of persons between the UK and the 'satellites' were in the form of delegations. The total number of individuals travelling was extremely small. Arrangements had to be channelled through the central bureaucracies of the satellites; this rigid control of visitors meant that the access to Western ideas and culture remained minimal, and Western visitors risked being exploited for propaganda purposes.\(^ {82}\) Cultural manifestations in Britain related to Poland were relatively common,

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79 Deighton, "a Different 1956: British Responses to the Polish Events, June-November 1956." 470
80 It had bases in Warsaw and Cracow, including a library, film library and reading room, and there were numerous exchanges of scholars and academics. Donaldson, writing in the 1980s, described the British Council facilities in Poland as 'enormously open'. (Donaldson, The British Council: The First Fifty Years. 361-362) In 1948, there were eight British and 23 Polish subjects on the staff of the British Council's Polish branches and about £35,000 was spent annually. (The Times, April 16 1948 'British Council's work in Poland: General Adam's visit') This is a large sum compared to the total of £20,630 spent in 1961-2 on re-establishing cultural contacts in all four countries of Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. (TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/3 "Note of Meeting held at British Council on January 25th 1961, to discuss Council work in the Satellites"). The British Council was also able to maintain an office in Yugoslavia from 1945 onwards.
81 This happened concurrently with severe grant cuts for the British Council from 1948 onwards and other financial troubles from 1949 which resulted in withdrawals from other parts of the world. Donaldson, The British Council: The First Fifty Years. 152-153
82 TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/4 'Memorandum on the state of cultural contacts with the satellites' 1955
possibly due to the Polish diaspora. Exhibitions of Polish folk arts, paper sculptures and the like were relatively frequent, though on a small scale, in the period 1949-59.63 In contrast, the Foreign Office noted a meagre list of other Eastern European artistic and musical contacts comprising an 'abortive Roumanian (sic) ballet visit', 'Bulgarian dancers' and 'Czech puppets'. It bemoaned how, in common with early Soviet cultural exchanges, 'friendship societies seem to have put a finger in the pie though sometimes rather indirectly'. 84 However, these societies seem to have been seen as less dangerous than the Soviet-oriented ones.85

In the early 1950s, it was politically difficult to justify dealing with the communist governments of the East European 'satellites' which were perceived to be 'fraudulent and not genuinely independent'. 66 HMG feared that official cultural contacts would boost the 'prestige' and legitimacy of these Moscow-controlled 'puppet' governments. 87 A brief of April 1956 stated that:

While the United Kingdom has recognised the Satellite Governments and exchanged Missions with all but Albania,88 British policy hitherto has been to have as little to do with the Satellite Governments as possible, except where there was a clear political need or advantage.69

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63 These exhibitions included 1949: Folk Art of Poland / Folk Sculpture in Poland (Arts Council and Polish Cultural Institute); 1950: Polish book illustration and book covers (Circulation Department, V&A and the Polish Cultural Institute); 1956: Exhibition of Polish Folk Art, RWS Galleries; 1960: Polish Contemporary Graphics (Arts Council)

84 TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/4 'Memorandum on the state of cultural contacts with the satellites' 1955

65 In the years following the war, other 'Friendship' groups associated with almost all the countries of Eastern Europe sprang up. By the late 1960s there were a bewildering number of similarly-named societies some sympathetic to communism, others reactionary groups opposing the regimes. TNA BW 51/26 'Societies in Britain concerned with Communist Countries' 10 December 1968

86 Harold Macmillan, Foreign Secretary (1955) quoted in Deighton, "a Different 1956": British Responses to the Polish Events, June-November 1956." 456

87 TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/5 'Argues against a policy in which the satellites are abandoned in our attempt to reach a settlement with the Soviet Union'

88 There was a virtual absence of contacts of any kind with Albania: no unofficial 'friendship societies' existed in Britain and there were no diplomatic relations with Britain. Consequently there was no possibility of any cultural contacts: "In effect, there are no contacts of any kind with Albania at present" (1955) TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/5 'Argues against a policy in which the satellites are abandoned in our attempt to reach a settlement with the Soviet Union'; TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/4 'Memorandum on the state of cultural contacts with the satellites' 1955

89 TNA CAB21/3223 'Visit of the Soviet Leaders to the United Kingdom April 1956: UK Briefs: Anglo-Soviet Relations"
Only 'nominal' sums were available for cultural or information work. However, at that time there was reportedly 'very little opportunity' for such distribution of British news and information in the Satellites.\textsuperscript{90} For example, from 1950-58 the Foreign Office's 'cultural work' in Hungary was 'virtually at a standstill'.\textsuperscript{91} The British Government did not recognise the GDR.\textsuperscript{92}

The Foreign Office saw clear-cut differences between their attitudes towards cultural contacts with the USSR and with Eastern Europe. In 1955, the levels of exchanges were not 'of a scale to warrant expanding the scope of the present Committee [SRC]. Activities like so-called 'information work' and showing British films abroad were believed to be a better use of funds than sending musicians and theatre companies to Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{93} Indeed in 1955, the lack of cultural contacts with Eastern Europe and the multifarious government restrictions which hampered their development led to some discussion over whether it would be better to 'abandon' the 'satellites' in favour of achieving better relations with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{94}

However, there was support for increasing cultural contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe. Clinton Pelham, the British Ambassador in Prague took exception to the Foreign Office's implication that cultural exchanges with the Satellites were a 'waste of effort' and that 'it does not really matter much what their peoples or governments think'. He emphasised the distinction between the governments and the peoples of Eastern Europe and called for a programme of cultural exchanges aimed at the peoples of the Satellites: 'the more we can keep them thinking, the

\textsuperscript{90} TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/7 "US-UK Information Working Group Meetings April 1961"
\textsuperscript{91} TNA FO924/1413 CR1211/3 Draft Submissions on Anglo-Hungarian Relations' January 1961
\textsuperscript{92} There was no diplomatic contact with either the GDR or Albania. The East German regime was not recognised by Britain between 1949 and 1973. Although there were some British-based 'friendship' groups, such as BRIDGE, official cultural contacts were non-existent. Stefan Berger and Darren G Ulleker, "The British Labour Party and the German Democratic Republic During the Era of Non-Recognition 1949-53," The Historical Journal 45.2 (2002). And Stefan Berger and Norman Laporte, The Other Germany: Perceptions and Influences in British-East German Relations 1945-1990 (Wibner, 2005). Ian Wallace, "The G.D.R.'S Cultural Activities in Britain," German Life and Letters 53.3 (2000).
\textsuperscript{93} TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/2 Memorandum, Miss G Brown, Foreign Office 23 May 1955
\textsuperscript{94} Discussion in TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/5 'Argues against a policy in which the satellites are abandoned in our attempt to reach a settlement with the Soviet Union'
better." He contended that it was important for HMG to take the initiative and take up official or semi-official contacts with the Satellites: the strong Western cultural traditions of countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland would provide 'fertile ground for our activities....[which] would help to keep alive this tradition in the face of strenuous efforts at reorientation to the east'. He also asserted that it would encourage those who still 'maintain an independence of spirit' that they would one day be able to reassert this. The alternative – doing nothing – would leave the Czechoslovakian people 'disheartened', believing that they had been 'written off' and 'once again let down by the west'.95 The British Council supported Pelham's view, noting that the Czechs had 'long memories' and would 'draw their own conclusions if they saw the Council at work in Prague again'.96

Thus, the possibility of resuming official cultural contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe remained under consideration in the years prior to 1959. The legations in Eastern Europe were informed that if the SRC proved successful in 'drawing exchanges away from the friendship societies we may reconsider the possibility of extending its work to the Satellites'.97 However, the British Council believed that they should be officially represented in these countries before starting a regulated programme of cultural exchange, thinking it would be more valuable to have permanent offices and libraries there than to send 'manifestations' and exchange visitors.98 But there seemed 'little likelihood' of the British Council being able to return Eastern Europe in 1957.99 Continuing financial constraints also hampered efforts to set up official cultural contacts with Eastern Europe, despite what some saw as a 'moral obligation' to the peoples of these countries.100 When members of various satellite legations

95 TNA FO371/116150 File Folder N 1752/3 Clinton Pelham, British Ambassador in Prague to Harry Hohler, Northern Dept, Foreign Office 15 August 1955
96 TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/9 WRL Wickham, Controller Overseas C, British Council to H Hohler, Northern Dept, FO 19 September 1955 ref GEN/684/10
97 TNA FO371/116150 N 1752/22 Memorandum, Miss G Brown, Foreign Office 23 May 1955
98 This 'might only have the effect of bolstering up the existing regimes.' TNA BW2/532 Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the Soviet Relations Committee, 25 March 1957
99 TNA BW2/532 'Extract from minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the Soviet Relations Committee' 1 May 1957
100 The Eastern European 'satellites' were only 'Priority II', whereas funds were only available for activities in 'Priority I' countries, i.e. the former colonies in Africa and the Middle East which were
met in September 1957 to discuss these issues, Mr Dudley the Romanian representative argued that the peoples of the Satellites were ‘grit in the Russian machine’. The British aim was not to encourage revolt, but to ‘let them know that their spirit of non-cooperation was appreciated’ and that they were not forgotten by the West.101

A shift took place at the end of 1958 when a decision was made to resume a modest level of cultural activities.102 Direct cultural contacts began when their status as ‘Satellites’ changed as their governments were treated as legitimate (though the pejorative name remained in use).103 The populations were perceived to have a ‘very different’ relationship with their governments in comparison to that of the Soviet government and people.104 From the early 1960s, official Foreign Office policy was to help these countries grow in independence from Moscow via an expansion of cultural contacts.105 The official Foreign Office line in 1962 emphasised the importance they attached to cultural contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe as a means of ‘promoting understanding’.106 The real impetus behind the conduct of cultural exchanges with such states was political: to enhance their individual prestige and cultural standing [‘respectability’] separately from Soviet influence.107

From the outset, the British authorities were aware that every country in Eastern Europe had very different circumstances and requirements.108 Some regimes could be ‘obstructive and uncooperative’, whilst others

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101 TNA FO371/128436 ‘Minutes of Meeting held on 30th Sept [1957] to discuss Cultural Relations and exchanges of visits with the Satellite States of Eastern Europe’
102 TNA FO924/1367 CR602111/7 ‘US-UK Information Working Group Meetings’ April 1961
103 TNA FO924/1595 CR61111/27 Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office “East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66”
104 TNA BW2/532 ‘Report of Meeting to discuss Cultural Relations with Satellite Countries. 9 April 1957’
105 TNA FO924/1367 CR602111/10 Notes of meeting of East Europe Department at the British Council 27 November 1961
106 TNA FO924/1413 CR12111/10 ‘Anglo-Hungarian Talks in London. Briefs’ March 5 1962
107 TNA FO924/1589 Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office: Confidential Paper ‘Cultural Agreements with East Europe’ 13 April 1966.
108 ‘There was not, therefore, the same pressing need to take advantage of every single opportunity to work with the Satellites regardless of relative value; we could better afford to pick and choose.’ TNA BW2/532 ‘Report of Meeting to discuss Cultural Relations with Satellite Countries. 9 April 1957’
were more open\textsuperscript{109} and these relationships could shift over time. In 1961, Poland and Hungary, the 'most promising' of the satellite countries, were singled out for special attention.\textsuperscript{110} The Foreign Office stated that their motives were political:

We want to increase pressures inside Hungary and other communist countries for a relaxation of the Stalinist system, and we can get very useful information through these exchanges, which we cannot get easily from other sources, on subjects such as Hungarian agriculture, education...\textsuperscript{111}

By the mid 1960s, the Foreign Office was increasingly aware of the need to tailor programmes to specific countries and circumstances: for example, in relation to cultural openings in a particular country, or to modify programmes in line with 'national character'.\textsuperscript{112}

There was a growing awareness that Eastern European culture had a common heritage with Western culture that could be exploited via cultural exchange. The people of these countries had been "out of touch with the west' only for a matter of years. The potential of re-establishing British Council offices and libraries in each country was an attractive one.\textsuperscript{113} Additionally, by the early 1960s, the progress towards the 'normalisation' of Anglo-Soviet cultural exchanges had slowed, impeded in part by the difficult political climate and poor international relations.\textsuperscript{114} In contrast, the countries of Eastern Europe offered a location for more productive cultural diplomacy, with room to expand activities rapidly. This early period (1960) was seen as a time when HMG could take the initiative: 'our hands are not yet tied by Cultural Agreements with the Satellites'.\textsuperscript{115} In early 1968, the Secretary of State for Defence reconfirmed that 'earlier and more tangible

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{109} In 1957 Romania allegedly had 'the most obstructive and unco-operative regime' and was 'only interested in exchanges of municipal delegations and dance troupes'. This had shifted by the mid 1960s. TNA BW2/532 'Report of Meeting to discuss Cultural Relations with Satellite Countries. 9 April 1957' \textsuperscript{110} TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/4 'Cultural Activities in the Satellites with special emphasis on the Importance of Poland and Hungary, 31 January 1961' \textsuperscript{111} TNA FO924/1413 CR1211/12 Humphrey Trevelyan, 'Anglo-Hungarian Talks in London' 9 March 1962 \textsuperscript{112} TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66" \textsuperscript{113} TNA BW2/532 'Report of Meeting to discuss Cultural Relations with Satellite Countries. 9 April 1957' \textsuperscript{114} TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/7 Speaight 'US-UK Information Working Group Meetings April 1961' \textsuperscript{115} TNA FO924/1367 CR 60211/2 , Minute RH Mason, Foreign Office 20 December 1960}
results' were possible in bilateral relations with the Countries of East Europe in trade, technology, and cultural work', advising that 'our effort should be increased in all these fields'.

By 1967, the Foreign Office was able to state that cultural exchanges with the majority of Communist countries took place 'largely as a result of intergovernmental negotiation'.

CULTURAL AGREEMENTS IN PRACTICE

Great Britain: USSR was not unique in the era of détente. Similar shows illustrating the history of ‘friendly relations’ between Russia and France and Russia and Sweden had been held in the years preceding 1967. Like the British collaboration, these shows were part of official programmes of cultural exchange negotiated between respective governments from East and West. This section investigates how these 'cultural agreements' – which form the context for the majority of exhibitions considered in this thesis – were negotiated and operated in Britain. The British government's attitude towards these agreed programmes was ambivalent: whilst they formalised and regulated cultural exchanges, they could also be limiting and restrictive, tying governments to 'agreed programmes' and conditions of 'reciprocity'. In 1966 a Foreign Office minute complained that such agreements were concluded with the communist bloc 'not because we wish to do so but because we cannot otherwise do business with them'. Nevertheless, the framework provided by a cultural programme made it 'easier to secure effective co-

116 TNA CAB148/37 Secretary of State for Defence "Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe" 17 June 1968.
117 TNA FCO13/80 Cecil (CE) King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967''
118 This was held at the Hotel Monnet, Paris around 1965 (exact date unknown).
119 The Swedish show was held at the Pushkin Gallery, June 1965 TNA BW64/66. CR13816 Alan Brooke-Turner, British Embassy Moscow to Richard Speaight, Cultural Relations, Foreign Office 13 July 1965.
120 TNA F0924/1589 Minute by R Cecil, 8 March 1966
operation from the authorities'. Larger 'manifestations' could be individually named, and the documents also included a clause facilitating future proposals for events including exhibitions.

Initially suggested in 1956, the first Anglo-Soviet inter-governmental 'Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Education and Cultural Field' was signed in Moscow in March 1959. This biennial cultural agreement was intended to be an 'enabling document', renegotiated and updated every subsequent two years. The 1959-61 agreement encompassed a broad range of cultural contacts including exchanges in education, medicine, social security, science, agriculture, the arts (including fine art, music, dance and theatre), cinema, radio and sport. The British Council had expressed some misgivings about the benefits of formalising exchanges with the USSR. In reference to the first USSR-USA cultural agreement, which had been signed in January 1958, Sir Paul Sinker, Director General of the British Council commented that 'it seems we are doing far more without an Agreement than the Americans are doing with one'. Despite this, the first Anglo-Soviet cultural agreement was negotiated by the SRC of the British Council in February 1959, following which the SRC was disbanded. In its place were established two new bodies to deal with Soviet relations: a more formal Foreign Office committee with British Council representation, and the Great Britain-USSR Association intended to encourage more informal contacts.

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121 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
122 e.g. TNA BW2/711 Anglo-Czechoslovakian Agreement 1966-68
123 This laid out the programme until the beginning of 1960; a further updated document for 1960-61 was signed in London on 1 December 1959. Mayhew, A War of Words: A Cold War Witness, 75
125 See Hixson, Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War 1945-1961, 153
126 TNA BW63/68 Minute Sinker, Director General British Council to Brenda Tripp, SRC Secretary re: USA-USSR Exchanges 8 October 1958
127 TNA CAB21/3233: Anglo-Soviet Communiqué 21 Feb 1959
128 It was felt it would not be appropriate for a relatively unofficial body to be involved with the arrangement of subsequent Agreements Mayhew, A War of Words: A Cold War Witness, 73
129 For an anecdotal memoir of the activities of this body in the 1970s and 1980s, see John C.Q. Roberts, Speak Clearly into the Chandelier: Cultural Politics between Britain and Russia 1973-2000 (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000). The Great Britain-USSR Association was formed to conduct unofficial contacts. It linked groups and individuals with shared professional or artistic / academic interests. It was led by Fitzroy MacLean MP (the alleged inspiration for James Bond)
Formal agreements with the countries of Eastern Europe developed later than those with the USSR. 'Limited' government level cultural exchanges with Eastern Europe, not governed by agreements, began from 1959-60. These early moves were tentative: this was an experimental year, with only £13,000 available for contacts with all four targeted countries. The 'meagreness' of resources available was also a consequence of financial and political priority being given to information work in other areas such as Africa. By 1961-2, this budget was revised upwards to £20,630: within this sum, priority was given to Hungary, with over a third of the budget devoted to this one country. This was because Hungary was thought to have stronger 'western traditions' and a continuing interest in development in the West; their intelligentsia were said to have a 'non-conformist attitude'.

The Foreign Office initially resisted Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria’s requests for more formal agreements along the lines of the Anglo-Soviet contract. In April 1961 there was concern that these might 'unnecessarily boost their government's claims to respectability'; more importantly the scale of British activity in these countries at that time was on such a minor level – usually scholarships, visits and the distribution of books and periodicals - it was not thought to justify a formal agreement. Additionally, the Foreign Office claimed that they would only conclude Cultural Conventions with those countries which recognised the British Council as an agent of HMG and allowed it to 'function freely'.

Nevertheless, from 1962 onwards, the informal 'exchanges of programmes' with Eastern European countries began to be put on a more

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130 Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria
131 TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/7 'US-UK Information Working Group Meetings April 1961'
132 £7,030 was specifically allocated to Hungary in comparison to £4,790 (Czechoslovakia), £3,560 (Bulgaria) and £2,300 (Romania); the remainder of the funding covered reserves and UK costs. TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/3 'Note of Meeting held at British Council on January 25th 1961, to discuss Council work in the Satellites'
133 TNA FO924/1413 CR1211/3 'Draft Submissions on Anglo-Hungarian Relations' January 1961
134 TNA FO924/1367 CR60211/5 'Meeting to discuss Miss Tripp's Brief for her visit to Budapest and Prague beginning March 13 1961'
135 TNA FO924/1589 Minute by R Cecil, 8 March 1966
'official footing'. A condition of the first Hungarian Cultural Programme (1962) was that the Hungarian authorities explicitly accepted the British Council as the government's agent for the implementation of official cultural exchanges. British Council standing remained limited. It was still not allowed to reopen libraries and offices: instead, individual Cultural Attachés were attached to the various legations in Prague, Budapest, Sofia, Bucharest, and Moscow from 1963. Because East-West cultural relations were intergovernmental, the Foreign Office's East-West Contacts Department remained responsible for the negotiation of these 'agreed programmes'; however, as 'HMG's cultural arm overseas', the British Council played a role in negotiations and its funds were used to implement the programmes. The British Council's newly formed East Europe Committee (1963) - a similar body to the SRC - was tasked with fostering and encouraging these cultural exchanges to increase 'mutual knowledge' of each other and develop 'stronger friendship between our various peoples.

Like the Anglo-Soviet agreement, the biennial cultural exchange programmes with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania were wide-ranging, all including a general paragraph on the development of technological exchanges. 'Exchanges of persons' - academic, technical and others - comprised the 'essential core' of the formalised cultural exchange programmes. Tours of drama, music and exhibitions came next, followed by film exchanges and non-political book presentations. Student and youth exchanges with the Eastern Bloc were considered to be

136 TNA FO924/1387 CR60211/7 'US-UK Information Working Group Meetings April 1961'
137 TNA FO924/1414 CR1211/27 'Parliamentary Question 12 November 1962; asking the Lord Privy Seal if he will take steps to re-establish an office of the British Council in Hungary'
138 Bucharest was in 1964. Donaldson, The British Council: The First Fifty Years. 371-376
139 In 1967 the Great Britain East Europe Centre, directed by Sir William Harpham, was established to replace the East Europe committee. See TNA BW2/711 Letter from the Chair of the East Europe Committee to the Ambassador of the Czechoslovak People's Republic 23 March 1965; also TNA BW51/26 (1968)
140 TNA FO942/1592 CR 6111/10 'Technological Exchanges with East Europe, May 1966'
141 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
particularly valuable' by the Foreign Office. The teaching of English was assigned particular importance.

However, not all official cultural exchange programmes were equal. All were negotiated between their respective governments, but only the Soviet Agreements on 'Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Educational and Cultural Fields' were presented to the British parliament. In contrast, the agreed 'cultural programmes', which were a feature of cultural exchanges with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria from the early 1960s, were a more informal, 'special type of contract' with the communist governments. Like the Soviet agreement, they were reviewed and renegotiated at regular intervals, forming a series of rolling, temporary agreed joint programmes. These limited cultural agreements signed with communist countries were strictly reciprocal and usually listed specific undertakings to exchange particular 'manifestations': people, tours, exhibitions and the like. The countries of Eastern Europe pushed for their temporary programmes to be changed into a more permanent and prestigious agreement along the lines of a Cultural Convention. Such Cultural Conventions were usually longer term, more generalised agreements, seen as appropriate only for countries which had a free flow of 'cultural traffic' with Britain, such as the 1948 Cultural Convention signed with France. A Cultural Convention had been signed with Czechoslovakia in 1947, prior to the communist coup.

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142 Written following his retirement as the Director of East West Contacts at the Foreign Office, Richard Speaight's extensive 1967 survey of individual and group exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe illustrates the continuing importance of this element of cultural exchange in the eyes of the Foreign Office and British Council. TNA BW 1/504 Speaight 'Aspects of East-West Cultural Contacts 1963-7: A Survey of Individual and Group Exchanges with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, organised by or in association with the British Council'

143 TNA FO924/1595, CR8111/2 Richard Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"

144 A 'cultural programme' was also signed with Mongolia. In 1967, there were no cultural agreements of any sort with China, Cuba or Poland. TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'

145 TNA FO924/1589 R Cecil, 8 March 1966

146 For example, in Hungary there had been a 1961-2 programme, which was reviewed and then a 1962-3 one agreed. TNA FO924/1413 CR1211/2 'Anglo-Hungarian Cultural Programme'

147 TNA FO924/1589 R Cecil, 8 March 1966

148 In 1962, for example, Hungary showed 'enthusiasm' for such an agreement. TNA FO924/1413 CR1211/1 'Possibility of Anglo-Hungarian Cultural Agreement'

149 TNA FO924/1589 Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office 'Cultural Agreements with East Europe' 13 April 1966
theoretically in force in the 1960s, it had "always remained a dead letter". Although a full Cultural Convention was signed with communist Yugoslavia in January 1966, the Foreign Office refused to engage in such conventions with the Soviet 'satellites' for financial and ideological reasons:

Apart from the financial aspect we object in principle to conclusion of permanent cultural conventions with Soviet bloc countries. We turned down similar suggestion from Soviet Government in 1959.

Poland consistently held a 'special position' as the only Warsaw Pact country where the British Council could function 'normally'. To the Foreign Office, this informal 'Polish Pattern' of contacts, with a minimum of centralized control and no formal cultural agreement was seen as an ideal to which they should aim in relations with other communist countries.

The British Council's work focused around sponsoring visits by Poles to Britain, encouraging academic and expert exchanges with Poland, developing a library in Warsaw and organising 'major manifestations' in Warsaw such as the 1967 exhibition of British painting from Hogarth to Turner. Particularly after the suppression of the Prague Spring, Poland was deemed an 'important bridge into the communist world'. Demands from the Polish authorities to formalise a cultural agreement with Britain, with its concomitant demand for reciprocity, were rebuffed by the Foreign Office. The British Council agreed that 'every care should be taken...to ensure the maintenance of this special relationship.'

How were the exhibitions that arose from these bilateral cultural agreements implemented in practice? Some 'cultural manifestations' were

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150 TNA FO924/1589 Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office 'Cultural Agreements with East Europe' 13 April 1966
151 This ran for six years, and was automatically renewed if not denounced. TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'
152 TNA FO924/1413 CR1211/1 Telegram Foreign Office to Embassy in Budapest 15 January 1962
153 TNA FO924/1589 Minute by R Cecil, 8 March 1966
154 TNA FO924/1589 Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office 'Cultural Agreements with East Europe' 13 April 1966
155 TNA BW 51/26 'General Policy: including proposed Anglo-Polish cultural convention' Jan 1966-Dec 1969
156 TNA BW 51/26 PG Lloyd, British Council representative in Poland 11 December 1969
157 TNA BW 51/26 Memorandum on Polish Approaches to Date November 1966
158 TNA BW 51/26 Memorandum J Sutherland Director N Europe Dept to Controller Overseas. 7 August 1969
specifically named; additional exchanges could be mutually agreed in the duration of the contract.\textsuperscript{159} Great Britain: USSR was one such exhibition ‘facilitated’ by the cultural agreement, resulting from discussions by both sides to open up access to historic archives for scholars. Initially referring to it as a ‘non-starter’, the British Council had been reluctant to take part in this reciprocal exchange of exhibitions (the return show USSR: Great Britain, intended to be shown in Moscow in September 1968, was cancelled following the invasion of Czechoslovakia).\textsuperscript{160} It perceived that this historical show of ‘documents, books and personalia embellished with works of art’ would have less propaganda effect in the USSR than an exhibition of fine art and should not be seen as a substitute for one.\textsuperscript{161}

The British Council were keen to gauge the amount of diplomatic importance attached to the project as its scope was outside ‘normal resources’ and external researchers would be needed to prepare it properly.\textsuperscript{162} Kosygin’s swiftly arranged state visit provided the necessary diplomatic importance and the British Council was persuaded to double its funding to £8000, predominantly to provide for the services of a professional exhibition designer.\textsuperscript{163} The exhibition was organised on the Soviet side by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with assistance from the Soviet State Archives, and Soviet Ministry of Culture. Arrangements were led by Igor N. Zemskov, Head of the Historic Diplomatic Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who came to Britain with a team of six Soviet experts in the middle of January 1967.

\textsuperscript{159} TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office ‘The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967’

\textsuperscript{160} Indeed, the British Council thought that the exhibition was ‘a non starter’ and stated that they should ‘give no encouragement to the Foreign Office or Zemskov that any major exhibition will be possible’. TNA BW/64/66 Minute R Duke, Deputy Controller Books, Arts and Sciences to I H Williams, Director East Europe 7 July 1966

\textsuperscript{161} TNA BW/64/66 Minute John Hulton, Fine Arts Department D/Controller, Books, Arts and Sciences 27 August 1965

\textsuperscript{162} TNA BW/64/66 Minute EN Gummer, Controller, Books and Sciences to Brenda Tripp, Director East Europe Dept 8 September 1965.

\textsuperscript{163} It was decided that a lack of such professional assistance would have not only resulted in an ‘unattractive’ visual display, it would have hampered the need for a ‘swiftly mounted’ exhibition. TNA BW/64/66 ‘Russian Exhibition—Summary of a meeting held on Wednesday 28 December 1966 in the Committee Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum’ 2 Jan 1967 and Exhibition on Anglo-Russian Historical Relations. Note of a meeting held at the Victoria and Albert Museum on 28 December 1966
Given the short timescales and politicised nature of the exhibition, the 'complex and hurried negotiations' with the Soviet authorities were dealt with by the Foreign Office and diplomatic representatives in Moscow; ordinarily, such practical arrangements for an art exhibition would be carried out by the Arts Council of Great Britain. In common with the majority of Soviet and Eastern European exhibitions of this period in Britain, the Arts Council took charge of the main organisational workload in Britain. Because the British Council was only responsible for implementing 'outgoing' British exhibitions, the Arts Council worked directly with the Foreign Office to bring 'imported' exhibitions to fruition. The Arts Council's more recognised purpose was to support national culture by providing public arts funding in Britain for artists, music, drama and exhibitions, and to bring 'art to the people'. It also acted as an 'exhibitions service': its Art Department assembled, mounted and toured exhibitions of both domestic and international origins. Most existing histories of the Arts Council neglect to explore its activities in this 'direct provision' of exhibitions, much less its role in receiving and organising exhibitions from overseas. In the context of the Cold War, these responsibilities for 'importing culture from abroad' took on a new significance. When bringing exhibitions to Britain, the Arts Council's usual duties included organising transport, unpacking and hanging the show and preparing the catalogue. Unusually, as Great Britain: USSR was a collaborative exhibition and not a simple loan show, they were required to source a large number of British artefacts with connections to Russia for display. In 1967 they were headed Gabriel White who had held the post

164 TNA FCO13/255 CRS 4/2 Foreign Office to Sir Geoffrey Harrison, Moscow, 1 March 1967
165 There are exceptions where the host venue worked directly with the foreign authorities, for example Bohemian Glass (1965, Victoria and Albert Museum). Also, the series of Soviet 'industrial exhibitions' at Earls Court were outside the scope of cultural contracts and arranged directly with commercial bodies in the UK.
166 Andrew Sinclair, Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), 76
169 TNA BW2/250 Minute RML, Controller Arts and Science Division, British Council to Brenda Tripp, Secretary of the SRC 12 May 1955
170 TNA BW64/66 "Russian Exhibition - Summary of a meeting held on Wednesday 28 December 1966 in the Committee Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum" 2 Jan 1967
of Director of Art for almost ten years and had previously worked with the Soviet authorities in organising the 1959 Royal Academy exhibition of Russian Painting (which will be discussed in Chapter 3). 172

Agencies both Soviet and British, governmental and cultural, assumed collaborative responsibility for the 1967 historical show. Organising Eastern Bloc exhibitions could cause tensions between the main bodies involved on the British side as political and cultural aims came into conflict. In staging such exhibitions, the Arts Council, British Council and Foreign Office all played major roles, in addition to the staff of the museums and galleries which hosted the shows. Whilst they all aimed to facilitate exhibitions from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the politicised nature of these shows, coupled with practical requirements for staging these exhibitions meant that preparations did not always run smoothly.

In 1955, the Arts Council strongly stated its opinion that it did not 'get involved in politics' as a 'matter of principle'. 173 The 1955-56 Arts Council Annual Report proudly stated its independence from the political sphere:

The Arts Council is not a Government Department and bears little resemblance to those Ministries of Fine Arts which exist in many other countries. No Minister directs its policies or decides how, and to whom, its grants shall be made. 174

However, in the 1960s the implementation of reciprocal Eastern Bloc exhibition programmes, with their inevitable two-way 'cultural interchanges', demanded that the Arts Council take on a more politicised role. 175 The British Council viewed the Arts Council's role in presenting


173 TNA FO371/116823 NS1756/17 'Submission on the proposal that the Arts Council should hold an exhibition of Soviet Art during the visit of the Soviet Leaders' November 22 1955.


these exhibitions in Britain as essential. Not only did the British Council lack the resources to stage reciprocal shows in Britain (although they did financially subsidise incoming communist exhibitions, ‘given the advantage which they derive abroad’), ideologically, it would contradict one of the key objects of such exchanges which was to establish normal working relations directly between the Eastern European authorities and British exhibition sponsors. Additionally, there was perceived to be a ‘cachet’ in exhibitions sponsored by the Arts Council, which was missing in a British Council exhibition ‘at home’.

The requirement to accept incoming exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc proved problematic for the Arts Council. The Foreign Office noted that the ‘role of the Arts Council in connexion with incoming exhibitions is very important’. But there were ‘inevitable problems’: at a 1966 meeting the Department of Education and Science noted that in staging reciprocal shows, ‘the Foreign Office and the British Council priorities might well and in practice often did differ materially from those of the Arts Council’. Under normal circumstances, suggestions for exhibitions usually arose from a variety of sources; each was assessed by the Arts Council’s Art Panel in relation to artistic quality, previous and forthcoming exhibitions and budgeting issues. Interviewed after her retirement, Joanna Drew of the Arts Council described how two thirds of all exhibition suggestions were turned down by the Arts Panel. Arts Council exhibitions were usually scheduled two or three years ahead, and the imported Eastern

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177 Brash went on to comment that “This would be to our overall advantage since exhibitions in Eastern Europe achieve much more impact than Communist exhibitions in London” TNA FC013/80 Minute from R Brash to Mr Stewart 14 February 1968
178 TNA FC013/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office ‘The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967’
179 TNA FC013/80 John Hulton, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, British Council to Richard Auty, British Ambassador in Budapest, 12 December 1966
180 TNA FC013/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office ‘The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967’
181 TNA FC013/80 ‘Note of a meeting Friday 25 November 1966 at the Department of Education and Science to consider problems of mutual concern to the British Council and Arts Council’

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Bloc exhibitions – some perceived to be a lower quality than would normally be approved - had to be incorporated into this programme. As a consequence, the Arts Council was said to be 'somewhat irritated by the existing type of agreement with Communist countries.' The British Council was anxious to ensure that the Arts Council did not feel that particular 'embassy exhibitions' were forced on them for diplomatic reasons. It was against the principles of the Arts Council to accept an exhibition 'blind'. As far as possible, the British Council tried to involved the Arts Council in 'guiding the choice of exhibits' for the sake of 'goodwill and future co-operation' over Eastern bloc exhibitions. In 1967, the British Council urged that the Hungarians should receive Joanna Drew, the Arts Council representative, and heed her guidance in 'as to what is more effective for the London public' when selecting exhibits. As later chapters will show, this imagined 'British public' was often called upon as a criterion for selection so that such British input could be 'a real working visit and not simply a rubber stamp operation'.

In the early days of the Arts Council (1946-7), a joint policy with the British Council had been worked out. This defined the scope of the two Councils and suggested practical plans for collaboration in the UK and abroad, including regular meetings of a joint committee composed and agreeing their respective financial and administrative responsibilities. Nevertheless, the division of responsibility in relation to East-West exchanges remained unclear. A series of meetings was held in 1967-8 to address these issues. The Foreign Office believed that because the

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184 White, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 180
185 TNA FO924/1589 Minute by R Cecil, 8 March 1966
187 This had happened in 1965/6 exhibition of 20th Century Romanian Art at the RCA which was 'virtually a fiasco'. It 'turned out to bear little resemblance to the works shown to the Principal of the college...when he visited the country in question.' TNA FO924/1662 CR12110/11C Letter John Hulton, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, British Council to Richard Auty, British Ambassador in Budapest, 12 December 1966
188 Both East and West could have trouble in guessing its intended audience's tastes. The Arts Council could mis-judge too, as the 1964 exhibition in Czechoslovakia showed. TNA FO924/1662 CR12110/11C Letter John Hulton, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, British Council to Richard Auty, British Ambassador in Budapest, 12 December 1966
189 The Arts Council of Great Britain: 2nd Annual Report 1946-7
190 TNA FC013/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'
‘Communist countries insist upon sending exhibitions to London before they agree to take British Council exhibitions themselves’, the essential problem was ‘one of internal British organisation and of getting the Arts Council and the British Council to work together.’

The existence of an official intergovernmental agreement did not guarantee that the exchanges detailed within would take place. In the case of the Anglo-Soviet cultural agreements, the historian John Morison has noted ‘the extent to which its provisions have been implemented had been significantly influenced by the political climate, in addition to other factors such as financial stringencies and Soviet bureaucratic inefficiency’. Unexpectedly shifting political relations could directly impact upon cultural exchanges, as Richard Speaight, the Foreign Office’s Director of East-West Contacts, chronicled in 1966:

> Until recently, Hungary was one of our more promising fields, but we now find out work there more difficult than anywhere else. On the other hand Bulgaria has moved from the bottom to near the top of the list. We find the situation in Czechoslovakia getting progressively easier. With the Soviet Union we seem to move neither backwards nor forwards.

Such unpredictability also caused problems for the British Council, whose financial arrangements were ‘somewhat rigid’. Good relationships at a governmental level usually meant that the mechanics of cultural exchanges worked more smoothly. But each side used the threat of the suspension of artistic contacts, indicating how the presence or absence of high profile cultural events could potentially be seen as important markers of the temperature of international relations. Soviet aggression in Hungary in 1956 was condemned: Britain suspended the activities of the SRC and the cancelled high profile events such as the Sadler’s Wells

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191 TNA FCO13/80 Minute R Brash to Mr Stewart 14 February 1968  
192 Morison, "Anglo-Soviet Cultural Contacts since 1975." 168  
193 TNA FO924/1601 CR6113/5 Speaight ‘British Experience in East-West Cultural Contacts’ June 1966  
194 TNA FCO13/228 Sir Alexander Morley, Budapest to CE King, Foreign Office 10 March 1967  
196 Morison, "Anglo-Soviet Cultural Contacts since 1975." 168
Ballet visit to Moscow.¹⁹⁷ A 'cautious and small-scale' resumption of contacts with the Soviet Union began in May 1957.¹⁹⁸ This initially concentrated on 'unobtrusive exchanges' such as student visits; large 'cultural manifestations' such as exhibitions were seen as too politically sensitive.¹⁹⁹ Just as the 1956 condemnation had been co-ordinated with Britain's NATO allies, so was the international reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.²⁰⁰ Britain took a 'firm line' in demonstrating disapproval.²⁰¹ The USSR was singled out as the aggressor.²⁰² There was 'continued Moscow readiness, even eagerness, to pursue commercial and cultural relations' with Britain,²⁰³ but it was seen as 'wrong' to use 'official machinery or money' for cultural contacts with the Soviets.²⁰⁴ Major cultural events such as the USSR: Great Britain reciprocal historical show in Moscow were cancelled. In contrast, official policy was to maintain and strengthen links with Eastern Europe. The Foreign Office stated:

We regard these exchanges of persons as contributing to the flow of ideas and consider their continuance in present circumstances as more important than ever.

'Particular significance' was given to continuing cultural exchanges in both directions with Czechoslovakia.²⁰⁵

Disruption to the agreed cultural programmes could also occur for more prosaic reasons, seemingly out of step with political events. Duncan Wilson, British Ambassador to the USSR (1968-71) commented on this parallel narrative of cultural contacts that 'seemed to occur quite apart

¹⁹⁷ TNA BW2/532 Letter Brenda Tripp, SRC to GM Warr, Cultural Relations Dept Foreign Office. 6 February 1957
¹⁹⁸ TNA CAB21/3217 HMG telegram to HM's Representatives May 1957
¹⁹⁹ TNA BW2/532 '21 February 1957: Cultural Relations with the USSR' SRC (57)2
²⁰⁰ TNA BW2/532 NS1041/54 Letter FGK Gallagher, Foreign Office to E Youde, British Embassy Washington, 2 September 1957
²⁰¹ TNA PREM13/3491 ·Soviet Union 1968-1970·
²⁰² TNA FCO34/24 Minute Mr Peck to Mr Hayman concerning cultural exchange with the Warsaw Pact countries 24 October 1968
²⁰³ TNA FCO34/24 'Outgoing Major Cultural Manifestations / Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe'
²⁰⁴ TNA FCO34/24 Minute Mr Peck to Mr Hayman concerning cultural exchange with the Warsaw Pact countries 24 October 1968
²⁰⁵ TNA BW27/31 Letter R Brash, East-West Contacts Department FO to HD Mitchell, DFC, Prague 4 September 1968
Exhibitions were often planned years in advance and were susceptible not only to sudden changes in the political climate but also more mundane delays. The 'time-lag' involved in planning exhibitions meant that an absence of cultural contacts did not automatically indicate poor international relations at that time; more likely, it indicated earlier difficulties. Anglo-Hungarian relations were 'much improved' in 1967, and the 'political climate [was] favourable for cultural operations'. Nevertheless, it was a 'barren year' for major cultural events because of disruption and cancellations (a Henry Moore exhibition and the Royal Festival Ballet) caused by previous poor relations in 1966.

Arranging cultural manifestations across the 'Iron Curtain' could be a particularly difficult and long-winded business, involving protracted negotiations and bureaucratic hold-ups. The British Council was viewed with suspicion and communist bureaucratic controls prevented visitors travelling freely and interacting with the local populations. Although some cultural exchanges could run smoothly, and produce valuable and long-lasting professional friendships, it was not unusual for cultural exchanges to be characterised by periods of frustration and misunderstanding. This was seen as inevitable when dealing with 'the middle level of the communist bureaucracy which handles these matters'. An SRC report of 1956 noted how Soviet delegations were frequently 'difficult to handle', making 'brusque demands' for alterations to the programme. One of the main difficulties encountered early on in organising Anglo-Soviet cultural exchanges was due to the 'fundamentally different organisation of the Arts in the two countries': in the USSR, they were 'centrally controlled' by the Ministry of Culture, which used the Arts as a 'weapon of propaganda', with 'little regard to expense'. Conversely, in Britain 'state patronage' was

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206 Duncan Wilson was British ambassador to the USSR 1968-71. Wilson, "Anglo-Soviet Relations: The Effect of Ideas on Reality." 386
208 TNA FC013/22 Letter Sir Alexander Morley, British Embassy, Budapest to CE King, Foreign Office. 27 January 1967; King to Morley, 28 February 1967
209 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
210 TNA BW2/532 CF/FTB/460/48H Note on Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council. [September 1956]
'limited' and 'commercial considerations' often governed what was possible culturally.\textsuperscript{211}

Since the mid 1950s, a 'heavy emphasis upon reciprocity in virtually all fields' characterised the official programmes of cultural exchanges between Britain and the Eastern Bloc. The term referred to the 'balance' between incoming and outgoing cultural exchanges for each country: what the Foreign Office referred to as a 'quid pro quo'.\textsuperscript{212} Reciprocity was treated ambivalently by the British authorities who complained about its restrictive nature, and the need to receive incoming cultural events that may be of a propagandist nature or poor quality. During the 1930s, reciprocity had been the preferred method of the British Council, but they had avoided working with the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany because they did not want to grant their ideologies legitimacy by engaging in reciprocal cultural relations.\textsuperscript{213} Because the Cold War was conducted in part via culture, it brought a realisation that reciprocity with communist nations was essential. However, reciprocity also benefited British aims to use 'exports of culture' make a 'major impact' in Communist countries and could help to improve East-West relations.\textsuperscript{214} Of the reciprocal British exhibitions held in the Eastern Bloc, the Foreign Office viewed the 1964 exhibition of British Industrial Design in Moscow and the 1966 Henry Moore exhibitions held in Prague and Bucharest as particularly successful. The former was praised for showing Muscovites 'how far their country lags behind the West in this field'; the latter allegedly making it difficult for the Czechoslovakian and Romanian regimes to 'turn the clock back towards 'socialist realism'.\textsuperscript{215} Through the patronage of the British Council, Moore was singled out as a 'Cold Warrior' his work promoted as representing ideas of Britishness, democracy and the modern in a divided Europe

\textsuperscript{212} TNA FC013/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'
\textsuperscript{213} Taylor, The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939. 174
\textsuperscript{214} TNA FC013/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'
\textsuperscript{215} TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
overshadowed by the USSR. In 1967 the British Ambassador in Budapest emphasised this great impact a British cultural event could have on the Hungarian population: a return visit of Hungarian culture in Britain would inevitably fail to cause such a stir: ‘even when the motions of reciprocity can be gone through, there can be no true reciprocity of impact.’

The British Council’s eagerness at participating in the historical exhibition Great Britain: USSR rested in some measure on the prospect of the reciprocal joint showing in Moscow, to be called USSR: Great Britain. It was partly this opportunity to make contact with the Soviet population that influenced the British authorities’ willingness to accede to the Russian demands. It was hoped that this never-realised historical show, while not showing present-day Western life, would demonstrate the growth of British institutions, seen to be illustrative of Western freedoms, to the Russian people. By cooperating with the Soviet authorities over the London exhibition, the British hoped they would receive similar co-operation and concessions over the version of history they wished to present at the Moscow show.

The demand for reciprocity and the insistence on listing ‘specific exchanges’ in the agreements - ‘at the insistence of the Communist side’ - partly reflected the different systems of government on each side of the Iron Curtain. The centrally planned communist governments preferred to commit to specific events in advance, allocating finances and resources. In contrast, the British authorities were working with a mixture of commercial and state institutions, galleries, museums, theatres and impresarios over which they did not have direct control. This was especially problematic if the cultural ‘manifestation’ was unlikely to be a

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217 TNA FO13/228 Letter Sir Alex Morley, British Ambassador in Hungary to CE King, Foreign Office 10 March 1967
commercial success. During the early years of official agreements, the communist governments found difficult to appreciate that HMG could not 'commit British impresarios' at will.\textsuperscript{219}

The principle of reciprocity was particularly significant and problematic for exchanges of exhibitions, with the communist countries demanding 'exact reciprocity'.\textsuperscript{220} In 1963 the British Council listed reasons why reciprocal East-West exhibitions were 'unsatisfactory'. These included the impossibility of finding equivalent displays in terms of size, value and artistic standards, the difficulties in obtaining suitable galleries in Britain (which were often booked years in advance), and the problem of persuading the main London galleries to show material selected by the various Ministries of Culture which was 'not normally of interest' to them.\textsuperscript{221} Despite post-war expansion in the 'art support system' of galleries, education and patronage, and a 'rapid growth in the nation's appetite for visual satisfaction'\textsuperscript{222} in the 1950s, there remained a dearth of suitable gallery spaces in Britain for much of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{223} Until the opening of the Hayward Gallery in 1968, the lack of suitable exhibition space in London remained a constant problem for the British authorities in arranging exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc.\textsuperscript{224} In the earlier 1960s, minor Eastern European embassy exhibitions – perceived as having 'no attraction' to the British public or being of lower quality – could be accommodated 'perfectly satisfactorily and quietly' at smaller galleries like the Arts Council space at St James Square, 'without creating any great waves'.\textsuperscript{225} However, major displays were dependent on the close co-

\begin{footnotesize}\begin{center}
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\item \textsuperscript{219} TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office ‘The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967’
\item \textsuperscript{220} TNA FCO13/80 GEN/687/64 Letter S George West, Controller Overseas ‘C’ Division, British Council, to Robin Cecil, Cultural Relations Dept, Foreign Office 4 February 1967 from TNA FCO13/80 F/GEN/646/3 Report by Robin Duke on ‘East-West Cultural Exchanges’, 11 March 1963
\item \textsuperscript{222} The Arts Council of Great Britain: 15\textsuperscript{th} Annual Report 1959-60. “The Priorities of Patronage”, 48
\item \textsuperscript{223} Garlake, New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society, 4, 22
\item \textsuperscript{224} Joanna Drew explains how exhibitions during the 1950s were much simpler, and the Arts Council staff frequently worked on 6 exhibitions simultaneously at different stages of preparation, staging 2 or 3 a year at venues like the Tate, another one or two elsewhere in London and a changing programme of shows at the Arts Council’s own small gallery, in addition to a touring programme of exhibitions. BLSA, NLSC Artists Lives Series, Interview with Joanna Drew (2002) part 16
\item \textsuperscript{225} Drew’s archive is lodged at the Tate, but is currently uncatalogued. BLSA, NLSC Artists Lives Series, interview with Joanna Drew (2002) part 29
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operation of venues like the Tate, the Royal Academy and the Victoria and Albert Museum.  

In 1966, the Foreign Office, in tacit acknowledgement that Eastern Bloc countries were given special 'privileges', stated that:  

'Our major museums and galleries cannot be expected to accept exhibitions of limited artistic value in order to satisfy the political requirements of the Foreign Office.' 

These difficulties were exacerbated by Eastern European governments frequently demanding that exhibitions – deemed in Britain to be of little interest or poor quality - be housed in prestigious London venues. The Foreign Office complained how difficult it was to convince Eastern European authorities that their cultural artefacts did not hold widespread appeal for the general British public. The Victoria and Albert Museum, for example, refused to hold a proposed exhibition of Hungarian ceramics in 1962 because the institution would be 'seriously embarrassed if they agreed to present an exhibition which was thought by the public and critics to be of insufficient interest'. The British Council had to maintain good relations with the Museum, recording that 'there can be no question of applying pressure' because they were 'extremely helpful' to them in 'all sorts of ways'. 

Despite this, if the quality was high enough, or the exhibition significant enough diplomatically, museums like the V&A were 'sympathetic' to these requests. In the case of Great Britain: USSR, it appears that the

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226 'London is by no means so well endowed with art galleries as many other capital cities and without this constant and willing co-operation of the Tate authorities it would be very difficult indeed to maintain out programme of visiting exhibitions. The Tate Gallery, moreover, lends us its rooms and services without charge and thereby reduces the considerable cost to the Council of providing these special exhibitions..." The Arts Council of Great Britain: 9th Annual Report 1953-54. "Public Responsibility for the Arts", 20

227 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"  
228 e.g. in 1965 the Polish authorities, were keen to stage a Tate exhibition; the Arts Council recommended a smaller show at the AC gallery or RCA instead, which became 'Six Painters From Poland' (1968) but the failure to secure the Tate, was, according to Gabriel White, a 'bitter blow' for the Poles. (see discussion in AAD ACGB121/845). The exhibition which became Cubism from Czechoslovakia was only staged at the Tate after being revised following initial rejection by the Arts Council's Art Panel. See AAD ACGB121/223

229 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"  

231 V&A VX.1965.003 Letter DH Leadbetter, Ministry of Education to R Cecil, Cultural Relations Dept, Foreign Office, 19 August 1963
museum was happy to accede to the Foreign Office’s appeal. There were cultural motives: the exhibition offered a rare opportunity for the British public to see works of art that were normally inaccessible outside the USSR, notably some of the extensive collection of priceless Tudor and Stuart silver held at the Kremlin and Hermitage, given as diplomatic gifts or sold by British rulers [Fig. 2.3]. Due to the actions of Cromwell, very few examples of this priceless silver remained in British collections. John Morgan, Cultural Attaché in Moscow, enthused that:

There is no doubt that it we were able to arrange this exhibition during the Kosygin visit we would have the pick of Soviet collections.

Yet political incentives remained overwhelming. The Director of the V&A, John Pope Hennessy, has been described as relishing the role of ‘cultural diplomat’ taking an active role in such exhibitions. His autobiography discusses in detail his involvement in shows such as 


Nonetheless, some critics objected to the use of major British museums to stage exhibitions that were not only political but also perceived to be of a low quality. Apollo’s Denys Sutton found it ‘especially regrettable’ that the V&A ‘through no fault of its own’ should be involved with Great Britain: USSR, an exhibition that ‘does not reflect its otherwise high sense of standards.’ Accommodating reciprocal exhibitions perceived to be of insufficient quality or of ‘limited and specialised appeal’ to the British public remained a ‘constant headache’. This problem was seen to apply more to Eastern European countries than to the USSR, whose exhibitions and artistic shows were more commercially viable:

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232 TNA BW 64/66 Telegram 2929 Foreign Office to Moscow 29 December 1966
233 TNA BW64/66 18631 Letter JAL Morgan, British Embassy Moscow to R Brash, Cultural Relations Dept, FO 22 December 1966
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...one or two Communist countries can offer something acceptable, but others, which have little, are nonetheless keen to display their national achievements abroad and are correspondingly insistent that every British exhibition should have a counterpart. They often put prestige before practicability and seek to force HMG to underwrite projects which would have no attraction in this country.

The Foreign Office lamented that 'the countries whose art and music is little known in London are most likely to appeal for reciprocity'. It was seen as fortunate that there was 'some indication' that the Bulgarian authorities, (described as 'one of the most backward' Eastern European nations), had 'some indication...that they have no cultural manifestation likely to appeal to the British public'. Britain was not alone amongst the NATO countries in having difficulty in 'placing' incoming exhibitions from East Europe. The Foreign Office even mooted the creation of a dedicated gallery for reciprocal embassy exhibitions, where 'East Europeans (and others)' could 'display their cultural wares without having to compete for space with the rest of the world'.

Over the 1960s, the nature of the cultural agreements changed. The Eastern European countries' demand for reciprocity in cultural agreements became less strict. There was a shift from 'absolute' or 'exact' parity in the early years of official cultural agreements – in 1962, there were worries that the Hungarians would insist on an 'exact balancing out of every item' - towards a broader reciprocity. When the 'Agreed Programmes' had been renewed a number of times, the British Council noticed with satisfaction that the Eastern European states were 'increasingly, if reluctantly, willing to admit that changes may be negotiated on the basis of global reciprocity.' This more general reciprocity was thought by the

238 TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'
239 Other countries, for example Norway, reported problems with 'return' exhibitions. TNA FO924/1602 "Report on the 7th Meeting of the Working Group of East-West Cultural Contacts, 1966"
240 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office "East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66"
242 TNA FCO13/80 GEN/687/64 Letter S George West, Controller Overseas 'C' Division, British Council, to Robin Cecil, Cultural Relations Dept, Foreign Office 4 February 1967
Foreign Office to be the next best thing to a 'free flow in either direction without any questions of reciprocity'.243 Both the British organisers and the lending nations wanted high attendance figures for their exhibitions. Particularly because bodies such as the Arts Council were using public money, the increasing costs of transporting, insuring and mounting such exhibitions made attracting the largest possible audiences essential.244 It was in British interests to make the exhibitions a success by doing ‘what we can to ensure that Satellite countries only send what is likely to be of interest here’.245 It appears that issues over exhibition quality were starting to be overcome by the end of the 1960s. Sounding somewhat surprised, Foreign Office noted that, ‘the exhibitions which the Communists are sending these days, such as the Yugoslav Medieval Art and the Czech Cubists, are really quite acceptable.’246

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND CURATORIAL CHOICES

In addition to being a piece of cultural diplomacy, Great Britain: USSR also narrated a selective tale of centuries-old Anglo-Russian ‘friendships’. The rhetoric of friendship was ubiquitous: in the curatorial processes that brought the exhibition into being and in the content of the exhibition itself. Rather than each side presenting ‘their’ history to the population of the other country, this show was a result of the Soviets and British working together to present a joint vision of their supposedly cordial history. But such an exhibition was inevitably founded on compromise. Although both the British and the Soviet organisers were supposed to have equal rights – for example over the selection and potential veto of exhibits - frequently the British organisers compromised in favour of their Soviet counterparts. The result was an intrinsically pro-Soviet exhibition. The diplomatic

244 The report continued - "Gone are the days when one or two profit-making exhibitions in a year helped to finance others very expensive. We are fortunate if an occasional exhibition can be made to pay for itself". The Arts Council of Great Britain: 15th Annual Report 1959-60 "The Priorities of Patronage" p48
246 TNA FCO13/80 Minute R Brash to Mr Stewart 14 February 1968
message of collaboration – a positive concept, denoting friendship and co-operation despite the animosity of the Cold War – was interpreted negatively by some critics as collusion with a repressive communist regime that actively censored its history. This section examines how the cultural diplomatic messages of Great Britain: USSR were constructed and responded to.

Alongside the rhetoric of friendship at exhibitions like Great Britain: USSR, real friendships could also arise. The development of personal friendships between museum and arts staff from East and West was a feature of many of the exhibitions resulting from cultural agreements, particularly with Eastern Europe. One of the British aims of the exhibitions was to encourage working relationships on a professional level between experts from each country.247 Like the exchanges of scholars, academics and scientists organised by the British Council, such contacts were intended to counteract the isolation of artists, museum workers and intellectuals in the Eastern Bloc and to connect them with developments and ideas in the West. Official invitations from British galleries were needed in order for them to be permitted to leave their country, and these exhibitions could provide the perfect opportunity.248 Artists from Eastern Europe were keen to have their work shown in Britain and museum staff took the opportunities afforded by a rare trip to Britain to visit the national collections.249 As Sidney Hutchison, Secretary of the Royal Academy, recalled, curators and directors of museums in the Eastern Bloc were ‘desperate’ to visit the West:

...often we had to provide their rail tickets etc, and frequently we were asked to provide them so that they came, let us say, via Vienna, or via Rome or via Paris, to London. In other words, they

248 e.g. During the organisation of the exhibition of Polish Puppetry (Bethnal Green Museum, 1963), it was recorded that the secretary of UNIMA ‘would dearly love to visit England, but owing to the conditions in his country this is only possible if he receives an official invitation from some competent body to pay a visit on official business’. See V&A VX.1963-BGM.001
249 e.g. Dr Ladislav Kesner, the Deputy Director of the National Gallery in Prague took the opportunity to visit numerous galleries in Britain during 1959’s Masterpieces of Czech Art. Masterpieces of Czech Art comprised 110 works spanning 600 years from 5 galleries in Prague. It was shown at the Edinburgh Festival (21 Aug - 20 Sept 1959) and also in Leeds (4 Oct - 1 Nov 1959) See AAD ACG121/191
were making an art history trip of it, and I don't blame them for that.250

Frequently, cordial and lasting friendships resulted.251 During the preparations for 1000 Years of Art in Poland (1970, Royal Academy), Hutchison reported a 'happy friendly atmosphere all the time' saying 'we are now largely on Christian-name terms.'252 John Pope Hennessy recalled the development of a 'cordial and lasting friendship' with Jiří Kotalík, the Director of the Narodní Gallery, and other members of his staff during the organisation of Baroque in Bohemia (1969, Victoria and Albert Museum). Pope Hennessy believed that the 'warm and lasting relationships' that were 'built up between the beleaguered staffs of the museums involved and the free world' were, alongside the quality of the exhibits, the key to the exhibitions' importance.253

Quality and suitability for the 'British public' or 'London public' were often cited by the British authorities as their main criteria in guiding the selection of exhibits for exhibitions from the Eastern Bloc.254 Shows should be as 'well chosen as possible'.255 But the curatorial power of the Arts Council to influence the choice of artefacts was often limited; the 'main principles' were usually decided by the lending nation in advance.256 Unusually, because Great Britain: USSR was an explicitly collaborative tale of two nations, each side was expected to contribute artefacts. The Arts Council held multiple meetings with the V&A, British Council and Foreign Office in early January to co-ordinate arrangements. Lists of suggested exhibits had to be approved by both sides. Because arrangements happened so rapidly, it was imperative to obtain a suitable range of British exhibits quickly to balance the Russian contribution,257 and the collaborating

250 BLSA NLSC Artists Lives Series, interview with Sidney Hutchison (n.d. c. 1996-8)
251 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Letter Hutchison to CR Budd, British Embassy Warsaw, 31 March 1970
252 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Letter Hutchison to Henderson, Ambassador in Warsaw 6 January 1970
253 Pope Hennessy, Learning to Look: My Life in Art. 187
255 AAD ACGB/121/500 Letter Lilian Somerville British Council to Gabriel White, Arts Council, 4 May 1966
256 TNA FO924/1662 CR12110/11C Letter John Hulton, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, British Council to Richard Auty, British Ambassador in Budapest, 12 December 1966
257 Preliminary investigations on 7 December, when the exhibition was thought to be years away, had suggested that there was only a 'moderate amount of interesting material' available in Britain -
organisations called on the advice of experts and advisers in museums, libraries and archives around the country. 258

Although time was incredibly short, both sides managed to accumulate too many potential exhibits to fit in the available exhibition space. 259 The final total was approximately 617 artefacts, of which roughly two thirds were documents, letters and photographs. 260 The basic categories of objects proposed by the Russians formed the backbone of their contribution to the show. These included 'original letters of English kings, queens and ambassadors', 'original treaty documents', 'documents concerning cultural and scientific relations', 'Russian publications on English authors', 'photographs illustrating Anglo-Soviet relations' and, finally, 'works of art from the collections of Soviet museums'. 261 This final category contained pieces of British craftsmanship held in Russia, including miniatures, silver, cameos and illuminated manuscripts [Fig. 2.4] including an ancient Bede manuscript of the Ecclesiastical History. Although manuscripts did not relate directly to relations between the two countries, predating diplomatic contacts by centuries, they were included on the basis that they were British historical artefacts currently housed in the Soviet Union.

On the surface, this seemed to be a balanced picture of relations with each side given freedom to contribute. From the outset, the British Council

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TNA BW64/66 CR1386/40 R Brash, Cultural Relations Department, Foreign Office to JAL Morgan, Moscow 7 December 1966.

British lenders were numerous and varied, including private individuals and institutions such as the National Portrait Gallery, the Royal Collection, V&A Museum, British museum, Imperial War Museum, National Maritime Museum, Bodleian Library, Beaverbrook Foundation, Goldsmiths Hall, Central Library, Eccles, Manchester, Lewisham Borough Council, the Public Record Office and Royal Holloway College. Russian lenders included the Kremlin, the Pushkin Museum, the Bolshoi, and the Hermitage in Leningrad. Catalogue: Great Britain: USSR An Historical Exhibition (1967)

The V&A originally provided 500m² of exhibition space for the show, which was increased to 600m² in mid January in response to Russian requests by ‘encroaching on the permanent exhibition space.’ The show was predominantly in rooms 45 and 47D; room 47 C was the additional space. V&A VX.1967.001 ‘Russian exhibition: Summary of meeting on 12 January 1967 held to welcome the first of the Russian delegates’

It is difficult to establish precisely how many items were shown. 223 items were listed in the catalogue whilst a document in TNA FCO13/256 lists an additional 394 documents and photographs that were exhibited but not listed in the catalogue.

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decided that "If the exhibition is to make any appeal to the public it must be presented well".\textsuperscript{262} A 'first class exhibition designer',\textsuperscript{263} Michael Brawne, was appointed to create an installation based around the broadly chronological layout suggested by the Arts Council.\textsuperscript{264} Few exhibitions at the V&A were completely designed by professional designers at that time, indicating the significance of the show.\textsuperscript{265} Preliminary plans were quickly drawn up based around half-assembled lists of potential exhibits.\textsuperscript{266} However, the British desire for a high quality, visually striking exhibition was soon rebuffed by the Soviet contributions which leaned heavily towards text-based documentary material. This troubled the British organisers: Pope Hennessy in particular was concerned that a lack of 'artistic' objects would lessen the show's visual appeal.\textsuperscript{267} The Arts Council, too, were keen not to 'overload the exhibition with documentary material' and the Soviets were asked to prune down the number of documents in the final show. However, constrained by tight timescales, the exhibition remained heavily textual. In Brawne's simple, modern layout, pale grey with red and gold accents, all the exhibits were presented behind glass. Rows of documents and paintings were mounted in linear displays along the walls,\textsuperscript{268} occasionally punctuated by larger triangular corner cases showcasing more visually exciting exhibits such as the Hermitage silver. But the sheer volume of documentary material in the exhibition overwhelmed the few visually striking pieces that were included. The non-documentary objects that were approved to be shown were predominantly

\textsuperscript{262} TNA BW64/66 USSR/700/2 Minute J Hulton, Deputy Director Fine Art Dept to Assistant Controller BAS 29 Dec 1966
\textsuperscript{263} V&A VX.1967.001 ‘Russian exhibition: Summary of meeting on 12 January 1967 held to welcome the first of the Russian delegates
\textsuperscript{264} Brawne had been involved in displaying a number of reciprocal exhibitions from Eastern Europe and would go on to create the innovative installation for Art in Revolution (1971). V&A VX.1967.001 ‘Points for discussion at meeting of 5 January 1967’
\textsuperscript{265} Exceptions to this include Finlandia in 1961-2, which, with the exception of Britain Can Make It, was the first exhibition to be through-designed by a professional designer Timo Sarpaneva. It was not until 1970 that the V&A appointed an in house designer, Ivor Heal. See Burton, Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum. 213, 218.
\textsuperscript{266} Although there is no diagram extant showing exact placing of objects, sketch plans of the order of the sections exist, and the catalogue lists the non-documentary exhibits in each section. AAD ACGB121/459 Box 2 General File
\textsuperscript{267} Some at the Foreign Office implied there had been tensions between selecting 'historical' and 'artistic' objects, though others vigorously denied this. TNA FCO13/255 Response by IJM Sutherland 23 Feb 1967 to minute from Brash 20 Feb 1967
\textsuperscript{268} E.g. an additional 23 feet of wall showcase was requested. AAD ACGB121/459 Box 2 General File ‘Extras to Original Contract – the arts council, Anglo-Russian exhibition, Victoria and Albert museum’ [n.d.]
portraits of rulers and merchants, cameos, watercolour scenes of each country and architectural drawings such as those by Charles Cameron. Three-dimensional objects were in the minority: these included items like the Wedgwood Russian Imperial service, a feathered Swan dress designed in 1905 by Leon Bakst for Pavlova, a uniform of the 9th Hussars and a clock-watch made in 1697 for Peter the Great [Fig. 2.5].

The British aim to select appealing, high quality artefacts to interest the British public was subsumed by a deluge of documentary material.

The collaborative, historical image of Great Britain: USSR was inevitably founded on compromise. Although the British and the Soviet organisers claimed equal rights – for example over the selection and potential veto of exhibits - frequently the British organisers backed down in favour of their Soviet counterparts. The historical narrative of the exhibition, both in its structure and in what artefacts were included or excluded, conformed to a politicised and selective Soviet version of history.

The exhibition was located on the ground floor of the V&A in Room 45, the museum’s principal temporary exhibition gallery at that time. At the Arts Council’s suggestion, the show was constructed as a series of chronological periods arranged in linear fashion, enabling the visitor to walk through successive phases of Anglo-Russian relations. The initial sketch plans, showing series of interlocking areas arranged from the Middle Ages through the times of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great and others until the present day (1914-1967), were modified at the insistence of the USSR. They asked that the Soviet section should form the entrance to the exhibition, thus placing their 'history' within a Soviet framework.

Additionally, at the request of the Soviets a 'little shrine' to Lenin.

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269 Catalogue: Great Britain: USSR An Historical Exhibition (1967)
270 Burton, Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 212
271 "...a good many changes were made at the Russians request. For example, the actual lay-out of the exhibition...was amended to meet a Soviet suggestion that the entrance area to the exhibition should be devoted to the Soviet period." TNA FC013/255 No 21. CRS 4/2 Letter Brown Secretary of State Foreign Office to Sir Geoffrey Harrison, Moscow, 1 March 1967
272 This was reported in the press as being described in this way by one Russian Embassy official. "Anglo-Russian exhibits" Yorkshire Post, 4 Feb 1967
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focused on his experiences and writings in England, was added by expanding into what was usually permanent exhibition space.

Whilst the broad chronological structure would have been familiar to British visitors, Soviet history re-framed the past in a highly selective way to make a version of historical events acceptable at that particular moment. Although Roger D. Markwick has argued that revisionist Soviet historians not controlled by the Party were able to operate in the 1950s and 1960s, major intergovernmental exhibitions like this would have presented an officially approved version of the past.273 The historian Evgeny Dobrenko has examined how this process worked, conceptualising Soviet history as a 'process of ceaseless cultural erasing and re-writing'.274 The story of ancient Anglo-Russian relations presented at the V&A in 1967 was characterised by these omissions and revisions. Although named after the Soviet state, Great Britain: USSR projected this title back onto the story of imperial Russia. This pre-revolutionary past, which made up the majority of the exhibition was a 'warehouse of 'tradition' which was selectively drawn upon by the Soviet Ministry of Culture and Department of State Archives in curating the display.

The final choice of objects had been a joint decision agreed by the British with the six Soviet experts and Zemskov upon their arrival in the UK in mid January. However, this was not a straightforward process given the diplomatic significance of the show. In theory, each side had the power of veto over potential exhibits: they had to be 'approved by both sides' and descriptions 'jointly agreed'. All exhibits were supposedly relevant to the theme of 'Anglo-Soviet relations'.275 Despite the Foreign Office's official verdict was that there had been 'an exceptional spirit of co-operation, which enabled the very complicated and detailed negotiation to reach a

275 TNA FCO13/253 Letter Morgan British Embassy to Brash CRD Foreign Office 29 Dec 1966
successful conclusion', the result was a highly selective historical show. Any item which the Soviet organisers deemed ‘not acceptable’ to their version of history was removed. The British organisers, with one eye on the future reciprocal showing in Moscow, frequently yielded to the Soviet side’s wishes in order to ensure that the exhibition would be realised.\textsuperscript{276} \textit{The Observer} reported that:

Anglo-Russian relations were saved only by the determined though often bewildered cordiality of our side. In fact, more light is thrown on Russian attitudes by what you don’t see at the show.... It was all done with smiles. But the Russians were as firm as we were pliant...\textsuperscript{277}

Whilst the Arts Council generally chose not to omit any of the Soviet items except on the basis of lack of space, or to attempt to reduce the number of ‘flat’ textual exhibits, there were a number of artefacts put forwards by the British that were refused outright by the Soviet organisers.\textsuperscript{278} In the constructed historical narrative of ongoing diplomatic friendship there were a number of obvious omissions. The Soviets were particularly prickly about any prospect of offending the French, given de Gaulle’s recent withdrawal from NATO and efforts to encourage European independence from Washington;\textsuperscript{279} thus, any item recalling the Napoleonic Wars was classed as ‘not politically acceptable’.\textsuperscript{280} Four caricature jugs from Brighton Museum’s Willett collection depicting scenes such as a Russian bear hugging Napoleon and ‘Jack Frost attacking Boney’ were amongst the exhibits removed.\textsuperscript{281} These items remained in the catalogue which had already gone to print at the time of the withdrawals.

\textsuperscript{276} TNA FCO13/255 No 21. CRS 4/2 Letter Brown Secretary of State Foreign Office to Sir Geoffrey Harrison, Moscow, 1 March 1967
\textsuperscript{277} “Russians veto Boney’s war” \textit{The Observer} 19 February 1967
\textsuperscript{278} ‘...if you managed to get to the opening you will have seen that every inch of space was taken up’ AAD ACGB/121/459 (192) Box 1 File 1, Lenders A-G Letter Elizabeth Davison to Mr Carman, National Army Museum 14 Feb 1967
\textsuperscript{280} AAD ACGB/121/459 (192) Box 1 File: Correspondence ‘Objects which are to be omitted owing to objections from Soviet Officials’ 16 January 1967
\textsuperscript{281} AAD ACGB/121/459 (192) Box 1 File 1 Lenders A-G. Letter Gabriel White to Clifford Musgrave, Director, Brighton Art Gallery 15 Feb 1967
Drawing on the Russian 'warehouse of tradition', a surprising amount of this supposedly Soviet exhibition celebrated imperial Russia. Some 'acceptable' aspects of the old regime were permitted by the Soviet authorities in order to lend historical legitimacy to the present call for closer Anglo-Soviet ties. Portraits including Kneller's Peter the Great from the Queen's collection and the priceless Wedgwood imperial service belonging to Catherine II promoted an image of contemporary international friendship built on ancient diplomatic and commercial connections.

However, the Soviet selectors displayed an ambivalent attitude to their Tsarist past. Some objects were censored: any artefact relating to the 'not acceptable Tsar' Nicholas II was refused by the Soviets. The Arts Council again made concessions to these Soviet demands and removed them, writing apologetically to the British lenders of such items to explain that:

> Had the exhibition not been organized for the Foreign Office our attitude might have been rather different but I feel sure that you will understand the delicacy of the situation.

The delicate compromises made by the British organisers are vividly demonstrated in an anecdote concerning one particular imperial treasure.

John Pope-Hennessy recalled in his memoirs that:

> One Faberge Easter egg caused endless trouble. It had a gold-enamelled imperial monogram and was lent by Her Majesty the Queen. It must be withdrawn, the Russians said. I explained that since it belonged to the Queen this was not possible. For the opening by Kosygin, however, it was reversed so that only the white back was visible. It was reversed once more, exposing the imperial monogram, when the Queen visited the exhibition.

Strangely, one object that the Soviets might have been expected to veto, Camilla Gray's 1962 book on constructivist art, *The Great Experiment*, was exhibited. The book was banned in the Soviet Union, and coveted

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282 In this, the display harked back to the 1935 exhibition of the Art of Imperial Russia at 1 Belgrave Square, London which also included a room of Russian-British links alongside pictures, sculpture, textiles, silver, icons, china, glass, ballet costume designs and books.

283 AAD ACGB/121/459 (192) Box 1 File: Correspondence, 'Objects which are to be omitted owing to objections from Soviet Officials' 16 January 1967

284 AAD ACGB/121/459 (192) Box 1 File 1, Lenders A-G Letter from G White to Norman Cook, Guildhall Museum 19 January 1967


286 'The influence of the Russian experimentalists of the 'Suprematist' and Constructivist' phase on modern art in Britain, as elsewhere in the west, has reference only in the inclusion of an English
there by critics, artists and scholars.\textsuperscript{287} Gray herself gave guided tours of the historical exhibition twice weekly and would later be heavily involved in the organisation of \textit{Art in Revolution} (Hayward Gallery 1971). The subsequent chapter investigates the Soviet vetoed abstract fine art at that exhibition.\textsuperscript{288}

The careful editing of the past to create an historical narrative acceptable to the Soviets in 1967 included the omission of any reference to Stalin or Stalingrad. Thus, one wartime Low cartoon from the Beaverbrook Foundation which referenced the city had to be omitted as the Russians objected to the ‘political implication’.\textsuperscript{289} The celebrated and popular Stalingrad Sword, which made its first return visit to Britain since it was presented to the Russian people by King George VI in 1943, appeared in the exhibition under the name its city had been given since 1961 - the Volgograd Sword – though the British press generally continued to refer to it by its emotive original title [Fig. 2.6]. One lone, iconic image of Stalin was permitted: the positive ‘Wartime Alliance’ context of the photo of the Allied leaders at Potsdam overshadowed any negative political connotations in the eyes of the Soviet organisers.

This was an historical narrative in which the Second World War took centre stage, eclipsing the more recent Cold War story. The political and emotional import of this ‘Great Patriotic War’ in the USSR was so great that it has been described as a ‘founding myth of the Soviet system’.\textsuperscript{290}

Aiming to resurrect the spirit of the Anglo-Soviet ‘Wartime Alliance’, the composition of the second Soviet sections of the exhibition (1941-1967) was carefully handled and brought to the fore within the exhibition structure. Although the majority of the exhibition was chronological, the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item critical study, Miss Camilla Gray’s \textit{The Great Experiment}. ‘Anglo Soviet Retrospect by our Museums Correspondent’ \textit{The Times} 9 Feb 1967
\item Caute, \textit{The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War}. 598
\item ‘Fabulous riches of Russia’ Terence Mullaly, \textit{Daily Telegraph} 11 Feb 1967 looks at GB USSR in conjunction with a concomitant exhibition of Russian art at the Grosvenor Gallery in London and points out that ‘a great Constructivist Exhibition’ is still needed.
\item AAD ACGB/121459 (192) Box 1 File 1:GB-USSR Lenders A-G, letter from Gabriel White to Lady Low, 19 Jan 1967
\item Stuart Morcom, “Review Article: The Second World War in Russia,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 32.3 (2007). 525
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
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opening section addressed Anglo-Soviet relations in recent decades, prioritising it within the exhibition narrative:

Entering beneath the flags of the two countries, the visitor is greeted by views of England, both watercolours and drawings, by Russian artists. They are supported by photographs illustrating cultural and other links [...] Next comes a section devoted to "The Wartime Alliance". The centrepiece here is the sword presented by King George VI in 1943 to the defenders of Stalingrad, now Volgograd.291

The second Soviet section's heavy emphasis on the 'Wartime Alliance' - in the form of cartoons by Low showing solidarity between British and Russian soldiers, and the emotive Stalingrad Sword, which still held great meaning for the British public292 - telescoped the period 1940-1967 [Fig. 2.7]. It presented an image of uniform friendship and co-operation, glossing over periods where the relationship was less cordial. Other than the objects described above, the Soviet period material was generally quite 'thin', comprising mainly documentary and photographic exhibits. These included letters relating to Lenin's stay in London, a photograph of Yuri Gagarin visiting Marx's grave, and designs for theatre productions. The 'thinness' of this section was due to blatant absences. There was no overt reference to the political events of the Cold War, which for most visitors would have eclipsed other notions of the Soviet Union. Such exhibits had no place in this constructed narrative of 'friendship' which aimed to be a Cold war antidote, reframing historical artefacts and using them to illustrate international co-operation and negate ideas of ideological and political opposition. The one exhibit closest to telling an expressly Cold War story - the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 – presented an image of growing détente, not international hostility.

291 Terence Mullaly "Kremlin Treasures in London" Daily Telegraph 9 Feb 1967
292 Headlines about its return included 'Stalingrad Sword Comes Home' (The Times, 2 February 1967) which described the 'glittering blade' and 'giant weapon in its red and silver scabbard and bearing the royal arms'. It was also the subject of a number of letters written to the press and exhibition organisers, including poems and reminiscences of how one viewer had been 'deeply impressed by the vision of the flood-lit sword of Stalingrad suspended over the altar steps' in Winchester Cathedral before being given to the Soviets - see for example V&A VX.1967.001 file 1 Letter to V&A from Rosalie K Millar 6 Feb 1967
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However, it was not only the Soviet side which exercised selectivity in choosing objects from the twentieth century. In order that the hasty preparations ran smoothly, the British organisers practiced self-censorship both to conform to what they imagined the Soviet side wanted and also to omit events and documentation which in their eyes challenged the story of 'friendship'. In asking the 'Russians' to 'trust' them to select appropriately, they could be over-cautious. Documents that were quietly omitted by the British, but which were in the original request lists from the Russians included unratified treaties. Examples included the 1921 Trade Agreement, which had 'better be ignored' and, tellingly, given the focus of the Soviet section on co-operation during the War, the 1942 Treaty of Alliance which had been denounced in 1955. Whether the emphasis on the wartime alliance would have influenced the British public is debatable; although this period would have been well within living memory for many visitors, the more antagonistic times of the early Cold War would have undoubtedly loomed large in popular consciousness.

In writing the catalogue, similar compromises and omissions were apparent. The Foreign Office was heavily involved in the preparations for this publication and self-censored the British contribution in an effort to conform to a smooth, conflict-free Soviet-friendly version of events. Time had been too short to produce a fully illustrated catalogue, so both sides agreed to produce a booklet listing the main non-documentary exhibits augmented by a preface giving the historical overview and brief introductory sections describing the background to the relations between Britain and Russia in each chronological period. The task of writing the preface was given to Rohan Butler, the Foreign Office Historical Adviser, whilst Dr LV Anderson of the London School of Economics was appointed to complete the introductions. The Foreign Office was particularly

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293 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Letter from Robin Campbell to John Field, Moscow Embassy, 20 August 1970
294 TNA BT11/5931 Anglo-Soviet Five Year Trade Agreement – Third Annual Review: Commercial Treaty General Brief, STT (62) 31 - Note from the Board of Trade, 1962
295 TNA FCO13/253 Letter R Brash, FO to JAL Morgan, Moscow 4 January 1967
296 Early meetings had suggested that a high profile historian such as E.H. Carr (Exhibition on Anglo-Russian Historical Relations or respected writer like Lord Snow should write the foreword. TNA BW64/66 'Russian Exhibition-Summary of a meeting held on Wednesday 28 December 1966
concerned not to cause offence with the content of the booklet on pragmatic grounds:

We must try to ensure that the introductory passages are non-controversial, since time does not allow us to clear this in Moscow and it would be a major misfortune if the Russians requested withdrawal of the catalogue.

This resulted in the British side voluntarily censoring their own historical texts, in particular Anderson's section on the Soviet period which raised too many awkward details. Robin Cecil of the Foreign Office complained that an early draft 'seems to me to be beyond minor modification and to require re-writing completely'. He suggested that Anderson:

...should not attempt a summary of the political characteristics of the period but should confine himself to a few broad general statements, explaining that the events of this period are too numerous to pass any review and are in any case within the memories of many still living. 297

Similar caution was applied to Butler's text and the Soviet authorities only requested some 'relatively minor' amendments. 298 The careful way in which it was written was praised by the Soviets: Mr Kulikov told Robert Brash that 'it had been much admired in the Soviet Embassy, where some of the references to delicate periods in Anglo-Soviet relations had been regarded as masterly'. 299 Nevertheless, Butler was pleased that his text still retained a few 'lessons' regarding 'traditional freedoms' (such as the political freedoms enjoyed by Marx and Lenin when in England) that the Soviets either did not notice, or decided not to object to. He also successfully incorporated 'four dots' at the beginning of certain sections to indicate the forced omission of controversial sentences relating to events such as the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939. 300 However, this was very subtle: a minor 'victory' that would have passed unnoticed by all but the most observant.

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297 TNA FC013/253 Minute R Cecil to Mr Sutherland, Northern Dept 13 January 1967
298 TNA FCO 13/253 CRS 4/2 'Minutes of a meeting held Wednesday 18 January to discuss indemnity and other questions concerning the GB-USSR Historical Exhibition.'
299 TNA FC013/254 Minute R Brash to Mr Cecil 18 Jan 1967
300 TNA FC013/255 Confidential 'minute' by Rohan Butler, Foreign Office Historical Adviser dated 27 Feb. 1967, on luncheon on 21 Feb 22 March 1967
How believable was the narrative of Great Britain: USSR as a piece of cultural diplomacy? Did the critical response reflect the intended message of Anglo-Soviet diplomacy, friendship and peace? In terms of visitor numbers, the organisers were surprised that it attracted almost three times as many attendees as were forecast: over 43,000 people compared to a forecast attendance of 15,600.\(^{301}\) In summing up the comments on the exhibition, the Secretary of State wrote to the British Ambassador in Moscow that '[a]lthough there was some criticism of the exhibition, it was proved to be popular with the general public. There is also little doubt that it made a contribution to the success of the visit of Mr Kosygin.\(^{302}\)

A minority of journalists took the rhetoric of friendship at face value, enthusing about the spectacle of rarely-seen British treasures and describing a ‘grand’, ‘opulent’ and ‘well conveyed’ exhibition, but the more usual response was one of caution to the message unbridled diplomatic friendship.\(^{303}\) It was those items that had travelled from the Soviet Union which commanded the greatest critical and public response.\(^{304}\) The ‘temporary return’ from the Russians of the earliest manuscript of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History was seen as ‘an event’ and the Stalingrad Sword celebrated.\(^{305}\) However, the general lack of visual exhibits aroused complaint, and those that were displayed were criticised either for being of insufficient significance or for not being properly cared for by the Soviets. And although the organisers attempted to make the Cold War an unspoken absence, politics pervaded the exhibition. Some critics were offended by the use of artistic and historical objects as Soviet propaganda. Denys Sutton criticised the failure of this ‘historical exhibition’ to be ‘sufficiently historical’; that is, impartial. He continued:

\(^{301}\) 42,000 was the figure excluding the private view which was another 1,500-2000 people. AAD, ACGB/121/459 box 2 general file Art Exhibitions Final Weekly Summary for week ending 3 April 1967'. The Foreign Office described this as 'a very high attendance figure for this kind of exhibition'. TNA FC013/255 Letter from Brash to Morgan in Moscow 12 May 1967

\(^{302}\) TNA FC013/255 No 21. CRS 4/2 Letter Brown Secretary of State Foreign Office to Sir Geoffrey Harrison, Moscow, 1 March 1967

\(^{303}\) Stella Newton – 'Imperial Grandeur, Russian Flavour' Guardian 9 February 1967

\(^{304}\) 'since the British contribution was assembled at a month’s notice it will be found that most of the more important pieces come from Russia.' Charles Oman, 'Great Britain: USSR: An Historical Exhibition', Burlington Magazine, Vol 109, No 768, March 1967 pp180-81, 183

\(^{305}\) "London Day by Day" Daily Telegraph, 6 Feb 1967
Arranged so as to avoid giving offence, it did just this. Shows mounted as to further good relations between countries are only worth-while if they are objective; otherwise they smack too much of propaganda. 306

Rather than forwarding Anglo-Soviet cultural diplomacy and co-operation, some critics accused the British organisers of being complicit in these 're-written', Soviet-biased histories.

The speed with which the exhibition was assembled was remarkable, but this was all too apparent to some observers who noted how the text-heavy exhibition 'failed to have any sort of artistic...presentational personality' and could have been presented with 'tremendously more imagination'. 307

Whilst the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum thought the exhibition itself 'looked quite smart', he described its public success as 'undeserved'. 308 Despite Michael Brawne's 'wholly new design' for the installation, 309 consisting predominantly of pale grey glass fronted cases with red felt linings and gold lettering, the lack of visual interest of the majority of exhibits undermined the impact of the show. 310 Brawne claimed that it had been a 'complex' installation, probably because he had not know what many of the exhibits would be until they arrived. 311 But The Observer commented that it was a 'primarily informative' show with 'limited artistic appeal'. The exhibition 'showed signs of being hastily assembled'. 312 Some critics charitably suggested that the relative absence of visually striking objects was an inevitable result of the character of historic cultural exchange between Russia and Britain, which had mainly been focused on literature and dance. Press comments that 'a good deal of reading is needed to understand what is going on', indicate the

308 Pope Hennessy, Learning to Look: My Life in Art. 187
309 AAD ACGB/121/459 Box 2 Great Britain – USSR General File Letter Gabriel White to Michael Brawne, 11 January 1967
310 AAD ACGB/121/459 Box 2 Great Britain – USSR General File 'Extras to Original Contract – the Arts Council, Anglo-Russian exhibition, Victoria and Albert museum' [n.d.]
overwhelming amount of treaties, letters and books exhibited.\textsuperscript{313} This was a show that relied on the persuasive cumulative effect of hundreds of dry historical documents – and the impossibility of giving enough attention to every written paper, letter and treaty – to convey an imprecise notion of 'friendship'.

Preparations for the unrealised reciprocal show, intended to take place in Moscow in September 1968, give an indication of how the British Council would have approached the selection process given more time and greater freedom. They aimed to steer the exhibition away from the heavily text-based approach used in London. In organising that show they had not had the time to conduct a 'complete survey of material in provincial British museums'; the rushed exhibition been constructed from whatever pieces were to hand.\textsuperscript{314} The Arts Council acknowledged that there had been an 'inevitable bias' towards documents in an historical show based on diplomatic contacts. It urged for 'more works of decorative value' to be included at the planned Moscow showing.\textsuperscript{315} The British Council concurred that both sides' contributions had lacked:

...exhibits with a strong visual appeal such as would make the exhibition look more immediately attractive as a whole. In London there was very little of this kind of thing apart from the magnificent silver sent by the USSR.\textsuperscript{316}

This 'magnificent' silver was one of the most remarked upon items in the British press. This comprised twelve hugely valuable English Tudor and Stuart silver pieces from the Kremlin including a magnificent 'Leopard Flagon' standing two feet tall and dated 1600-1 [Fig. 2.8].\textsuperscript{317} This 'large and very imposing' collection of British silver from the collections of the

\textsuperscript{313} Ian Dunlop 'Hands Across Europe' Evening Standard 9 Feb 1967
\textsuperscript{314} TNA FCO13/256 USSR/646/3 Letter JDK Argles, British Council to J Morgan, Cultural Attaché, British Embassy Moscow 16 October 1967
\textsuperscript{315} TNA FCO13/256 USSR/646/3 Letter from Lilian Somerville, Director Fine Arts Dept, British Council to various museums in the UK [n.d.]
\textsuperscript{316} TNA FCO13/256 USSR/646/3 Letter JDK Argles, British Council to J Morgan, Cultural Attaché, British Embassy Moscow 16 October 1967
\textsuperscript{317} The final total value of the Soviet exhibits, with the addition of items such as the Bede manuscript, was £4.6 million, an enormous figure which almost jeopardised the staging of the exhibition when the Soviets insisted that the British provide insurance and refused to send the exhibits until the indemnity was guaranteed at the end of January 1967. TNA FCO13/254 Minute from R Cecil to Mr King 17 Jan 1967 re draft letter to His Excellency Mikhail N. Smirnovsky
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Kremlin and Hermitage was roundly praised as nothing similar survived in Britain. However, some experts remarked how despite being the 'most sensational part of the exhibition', this section 'merely skimmed the collections' of the USSR. Writing for the *Burlington Magazine*, Charles Oman bemoaned the absence of the 'very large' and 'most important' pieces in Leningrad:

> Without the throne of the Empress Anne and the four splendid wine-coolers, the contribution from the Hermitage Museum appears commonplace.\(^{318}\)

The refusal of the Soviets to clean the silver caused consternation amongst some commentators who complained that it 'robs their priceless collection of some of its splendour'.\(^{319}\) The *Evening Standard* agreed that it was unfortunate that:

> ...the Kremlin silver makes a poor showing, and looks as if it has not been cleaned since first acquired....Deep down [the Russians] probably think it is bourgeois to make things glitter.\(^{320}\)

Some of the other visual pieces were of such poor quality that critics wondered about the rationale for their inclusion. One journalist complained that some of the show was 'decidedly trivial ('Drawing of a Rope Tarring Machine') and much of it is horribly ugly.'\(^{321}\) Others found it neither 'informative' nor 'entertaining', with 'horrible' works of art such as Pavlova's 'dead swan in a glass case' dress 'put together at random' [Fig. 2.9].\(^{322}\)

But it was the politicisation of the exhibition – its selective rewritten tale of Anglo-Soviet friendship, its inaccuracies and absences – which aroused the greatest complaint from critics. They found this very smooth' narrative of amity completely unconvincing.\(^{323}\) Whereas some writers took

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\(^{319}\) This failure to clean the silver was noted by a number of writers, such as Ian Dunlop 'Hands Across Europe' *Evening Standard* 9 Feb 1967. Pope Hennessy also commented upon it in his memoirs.

\(^{320}\) *Editorial Evening Standard* 9 Feb 1967

\(^{321}\) "ART: Anglo-Russian Connections" by Nigel Gosling, *The Observer* 12 February 1967 28

\(^{322}\) V&A VX.1967.001 transcript of 'The Critics', BBC Radio programme broadcast 19 February 1967 comments by Margaret Drabble.

\(^{323}\) "A Little History" by Denys Sutton, Editor of Apollo, *Financial Times* 14 February 1967
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'historical' to mean an unbiased story of factual truth, uncritically responding to this 'absorbing record of historical relationship in culture and trade', others were less convinced.\textsuperscript{324} Despite the overwhelmingly cordial image presented at the exhibition and conceding the 'irresistible fascination' of the subject, \textit{The Observer} noted that historically it had been a 'challenging relationship' maintained predominantly by 'vital political and commercial interests' between the British and Russians.\textsuperscript{325} Those alliances there were had -like the exhibition itself - been conducted for pragmatic purposes, not through any sense of mutual friendship. Denys Sutton was particularly incensed by the exhibition, calling it 'devious' to exclude 'records of earlier, even if less harmonious, phases of our relationship with Russia.' He saw the display as a more general warning against cultural diplomacy:

The exhibition provides a telling example of the dangers that arise when governments, of whatever political colour, seek to use the arts for their purposes.

Sutton's opposition to any political interference in matters of culture was vehement, seeing it as one step away from the Soviet state's intervention in the arts.\textsuperscript{326}

The selection of exhibits – issues of vetoes and censorship in particular – generated comment on the degree of control of the show's subject matter exercised by the Soviet authorities. The show's emphasis on the Wartime Alliance between Britain and the USSR dominated discussions; the conspicuous absence of reference to periods of political tension, most notably the Cold War itself, did not escape the attention of critics.

Although it caused much less of a public outcry than the 1971 exhibition \textit{Art in Revolution}, at which the banning of certain 'unacceptable' art exhibits caused major uproar in the British press, a few newspapers picked up on the vetoes that had been exercised during the curatorial process:

\textsuperscript{324} "Anglo-Soviet Retrospect by our Museums Correspondent" \textit{The Times} 9 February 1967

\textsuperscript{325} "ART: Anglo-Russian Connections" by Nigel Gosling, \textit{The Observer} 12 February 1967 28.

\textsuperscript{326} Denys Sutton 'Editorial: The Flies of a Summer' \textit{Apollo}, Vol 882, October 1965, 270-1
The climax came when we were asked to omit material illustrating the Napoleonic Wars...apparently the Russian delegation felt this part of the show might stir up painful recollection of the Retreat from Moscow and so give needless offence to de Gaulle.327

These compromises featured in critics' discussion of the show's 'bland' diplomacy.328 Outspoken on the topic, Sutton discussed what the catalogue called 'a mutual give and take' over the choice of exhibits, arguing that the choice of Fabergé was deliberately 'edited' to display pieces less 'sumptuous' than the Russian Imperial Easter Eggs. The show lacked impact for non-political reasons too, as 'no one theme was treated in depth'; there were unexplainable absences, such as 'the immense and fruitful impact' made in Britain by the Russian ballet, theatre and opera just prior to 1914.329 Overall, it was an exhibition that showed all too clearly 'the spirit of compromise' and was, as a result 'without salt': a flavourless piece of cultural diplomacy.330

CONCLUSION

British efforts in cultural diplomacy during the Cold War had always been focused more on obtaining a greater impact abroad than their effects in Britain. So the fact that Great Britain: USSR, though well attended, quickly slipped from historical view, would not have been troublesome. The British Council and Foreign Office's efforts were focused on the intended reciprocal showing in Moscow, and as such were largely content to concede freedom over selection in the London display to the Soviet side. The fact that critics could opine of the V&A show that "it is moonshine to pretend that Anglo-Russian relations have always been cordial" was to an extent irrelevant.331 It was the chance to demonstrate British freedoms in the USSR, via the sometimes beneficial, sometimes frustrating

327 Observer "Russians veto Boney's war" 19 February 1967
328 V&A VX.1967.001 transcript of 'The Critics', BBC Radio programme broadcast 19 February 1967 comments by Edward Lucie Smith
mechanism of reciprocity inherent in the formalised bilateral programmes of inter-governmental cultural exchange that was the key. The Foreign Office believed that such exchanges generated a ‘deep and lasting’ impression of the British ‘way of life’ abroad. Although conducting East-West cultural exchanges in the 1960s was tricky, hampered by constraints both political and pragmatic, Speaight’s report suggests that these were outweighed by the more positive consequences of promoting contacts. Funding remained a problem: throughout the 1960s, repeated calls for additional resources were made in order to continue to exploit the ‘opportunities’ that had arisen during the expansion of cultural contacts. And the short-lived SRC’s aims to ‘squeeze out’ the Communist front or ‘fellow travelling’ organisations were not wholly successful: they continued to organise minor cultural exchanges alongside the more prestigious ‘official’ programmes agreed by the British Council and Foreign Office. Nonetheless, the work of the Foreign Office in establishing East-West cultural exchanges, was, by 1966, described as a ‘record of considerable achievement’. It was a growing programme, with ‘fresh opportunities’ developing for contacts in East Europe. As the epitome of cultural diplomacy – in its motivation, its purpose and its content – Great Britain: USSR was unusually explicitly politicised. Yet as the following chapters will demonstrate, other exhibitions in Britain during the Cold War – of Soviet fine art, Eastern European applied arts and the Soviet ‘way of life’ also took on political hues of varying intensity in their organisation and reception. Especially in the case of Soviet art, the subject of the next chapter, responses could be both greater and highly politicised than they

332 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office “East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66”
333 By the late 1960s, the BSFS activities were diminished in size. The programme of events organised by the BSFS in October 1967, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the USSR was unusually large. Plans included a major rally and concert by Soviet artists at the Albert Hall and an exhibition in London documenting 50 years of UK-USSR relations, in addition to the usual events of ‘Soviet Weeks’. To the Foreign Office, these occurrences harked back to the more extensive cultural activities of the BSFS in the 1950s. Such major, high profile events were ‘something that hasn’t been a feature of friendship work since the 1950s...Leading figures from all walks of life are being asked to take part’. TNA FCO13/267 Minute from Sutherland, FCO to Mr Champion, IRD re: British/Soviet Friendship Society, 23 May 1967.
334 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Director of East-West Contacts, Foreign Office “East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66”
had been for the allegedly 'historical' tale of Anglo-Soviet friendship, *Great Britain: USSR.*
CHAPTER 3: CONTESTED VISIONS OF SOVIET ART IN BRITAIN IN 1959 AND 1971

In 1959 and 1971, the British press published two similar cartoons, each depicting visitors at an exhibition of Soviet art. In the first, [Fig. 3.1] one man knowingly remarked to another about the large, blank space on the wall before them: 'It's been withdrawn – Pasternak must have praised it.' The second [Fig. 3.2] featured a shady figure in a Russian fur hat, lurking furtively behind a statue of Lenin and enticing a visitor to purchase a postcard of 'a banned exhibit'. The cartoons referred to two exhibitions – a 1959 exhibition of *Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Century* at the Royal Academy (RA) and the 1971 show *Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design since 1917* at the Hayward Gallery – both of which were remarked upon in the press not merely for the objects which were displayed, but also for those which were absent. Although all exhibitions are by the nature of the curatorial process selective, it was the particular type of selectivity exercised by the Soviet authorities – using censorship, historical re-writing and the attempted erasure of 'inappropriate' parts of art history – which aroused the concerns of observers in Britain. In 1959, the display was one of officially approved art. For the galleries that documented the Soviet period, this meant socialist realism. The absence of abstract art was accounted for in the catalogue by claims that this style did not exist in the USSR. It was 'formalist' art that again caused controversy twelve years later. Whilst the Soviet Ministry of Culture conceded that the Arts Council's display of avant-garde applied arts could be shown, it insisted upon the withdrawal of some abstract fine art, most notably a reconstruction of El Lissitzky's *Proun Room*. The wider political context of the Cold War, in which the USSR was regarded as a vaguely hostile 'other', lent weight to outcries in the British press about the censorship of art. In becoming associated with an image of a repressive Soviet Union, these exhibitions were interpreted as the opposite of the aims of those British exhibitions sent to Moscow and Leningrad. Such
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British exhibitions were intended to demonstrate Western 'freedoms' of thought and artistic expression, and by association broader social freedoms.

This chapter focuses on these two exhibitions, the historical survey of fine art *Russian Painting* (1959) and *Art in Revolution* (1971), which showcased applied art and design of the Russian Revolution. The first was an explicit piece of cultural diplomacy where the British authorities were largely content to receive an exhibition of paintings selected almost wholly by the Soviet Ministry of Culture; the second, in contrast, was an Arts Council exhibition which became embroiled in issues of cultural diplomacy when ownership of the *Art in Revolution* project was challenged by the Soviet authorities. Each exhibition was subject to strict selection procedures. Some British critics attributed any artistic omissions which resulted from Soviet selectivity to the dangerous and repressive Soviet regime. These temporary exhibition spaces presented collaborative or conflicting concepts of the arts and design of the USSR in a British setting. The Soviet authorities sought to control the content of these exhibitions, but they were unable to control their reception. This chapter investigates how they were organised, and the responses of the British press, governmental bodies and – where possible – the public to the different visions of the USSR presented at each show.

This discussion focuses on these contested visions of Soviet art and culture in Cold War Britain. Exhibitions of American art functioning as Cold War cultural diplomacy had been well probed by scholars. Although the 1959 exhibition has been discussed briefly in the existing literature, it has not yet been investigated in any depth. *Art in Revolution*, in comparison, had yet to be researched academically: this chapter uses the extensive archival material surviving from this show, supplementing it with oral

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testimonies from some key participants. After an overview of *Russian Painting* and *Art in Revolution*, this chapter moves to a discussion of the position of art in the Cold War looking specifically at Soviet art: issues of socialist realism, official art and the suppression of 'formalism' and the avant-garde. Whilst these exhibitions demonstrate the use of art internationally in the cultural Cold War for political gain by the Soviet government – criticised somewhat disingenuously by British critics – they also played a crucial cultural role in the developing British awareness of Soviet art history. The different processes of organisation and selection are examined to ascertain what the cultural diplomacy messages of each exhibition were, and to discover where curatorial power lay. Finally, it analyses the critical responses to both exhibitions. Despite one journalist's suggestion that the best way to enjoy the show of *Russian Painting* was to 'try to forget one's political feeling vis-à-vis the USSR', such an artificial separation was easier said than done in a world coloured by Cold War politics. The default for most British responses, underlying what could be more measured discussions of the art itself, was to assume 'the Russians' were vaguely aggressive, and that the forced absences of 'censored' artworks were typical of the repressive Soviet Union. Even by 1971 despite previous periods of détente, such Cold War tropes were entrenched: the press easily slipped into an antagonistic 'East vs West' position. The controversy aroused by *Art in Revolution* was exacerbated by the seeming collusion by the Arts Council with the Soviet authorities in their re-written, censored art histories. Such complicity over suppressing art seems to have been more contentious than the - arguably more dangerous - mis-representations of political and diplomatic history analysed in the previous chapter at *Great Britain: USSR* (1967).

**THE EXHIBITIONS**

The Royal Academy exhibition *Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Centuries* was not only the first and most comprehensive survey of

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2 Derek Stanford, 'Russia at the Royal Academy', *Church of England News*, 16 Jan 1959
Russian art to be held in the West;³ it was also one of the first major official cultural exchanges between Britain and the USSR, predating the first official Cultural Agreement between the two countries.⁴ After a lengthy planning process it was finally held in the opening months of 1959, the traditional ‘Winter Exhibition’ slot. This Soviet government-sponsored show was conceived as a ‘representative’ survey of Russian art intended to promote ‘mutual understanding’ between Britain and the Soviet Union. Not only artistic, but also political expectations were high: the forthcoming exhibition was heralded as a potential ‘turning point in Anglo-Russian cultural relations’.⁵

It comprised a chronological display of paintings ranging from gilded icons of the 13th and 14th centuries, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the socialist realism of the Soviet period. 122 pieces were shown in total, a relatively small number for a supposedly major historical survey of 700 years⁶: the Academy lamented that the Soviet authorities ‘could not be persuaded to send more pictures’.⁷ These realist paintings, sometimes small in size, were sparsely distributed between 11 galleries so that the threadbare grey fabric of the Academy’s walls remained prominent [Fig. 3.3].⁸ Almost a third of the exhibits (38) were drawn from the Soviet period. Works included those by Arkady Plastov, Vladimir Serov, Aleksander Deineka and Sergei Gerasimov depicting scenes such as the

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³ Brussels Expo had shown a few of the contemporary pieces in 1958; otherwise, this was the first occasion the majority of the artworks had been seen outside the USSR. Opening day for the Russian Art Show Yorkshire Post 12 Dec 1959
⁴ The first cultural Agreement between Britain and the USSR was signed in March 1959. It was not only the first of the post-war period, but the first ever exchange of art exhibitions between Britain and the USSR. "Ikons Best of Russian Art – Unrepresentative Exhibition" by Frederick Laws Manchester Guardian 31 December 1958 “Treasures from Russia”, Berghoorn, The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy. 239
⁵ Terence Mullaly, ‘Russian Art Exhibition’, Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1958
⁶ Previous national surveys of art at the RA, such as Italian art 1200-1900 (1930) contained over 600 paintings. Haskell, The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition. 123. The first post-war loan exhibition at the RA, ‘The King’s Pictures’, in winter 1946-7, again consisted of over 500 paintings from various Royal Palaces and attracted 366,000 visitors, eager to see art in the aftermath of the War. Sidney C Hutchison, The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1968). 183-4
⁷ Hutchison, The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968. 195
⁸ Hutchison’s official history records that the ‘content was disappointing. There was a fine group of icons and a strong representation of the work of artists of the last thirty years but examples of the art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were sparse, and for the most part, small in size.’ Ibid.,195
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supposedly happy lives of Soviet farm workers, Lenin’s revolutionary activities and Russian landscapes. The selection, controlled by the Soviet side, was intended to illustrate that ‘the central development of Russian painting has taken the form of realism, and realism with a social and political connotation’. This was clearly spelt out in the catalogue introduction which claimed that ‘works analogous to widespread tendencies in the West, such as tachism, surrealism, abstract painting, etc’ were absent due to the ‘non-existence of such tendencies in Soviet art’. This tidy explanation failed to convince the British press who challenged claims that it was a ‘representational’ show and highlighted biases and omissions.

Prior to the opening, the exhibition received immense and positive publicity in the national and provincial press, and there was a great desire in Britain to view the hitherto unseen art of the communist superpower. However, the initial unusually high attendance diminished swiftly following press reports detailing the limitations of the ‘disappointing’ display. The final attendance numbered around 77,000. The ‘didactic’, propagandist motive of the show was accepted as a given by the majority of British art critics. Of greater concern was the show’s failure to be ‘fully representative’ of Russian art by omitting ‘unacceptable’ artists, thus criticising the lack of freedom and artistic restrictions operating in the USSR. Frequently cited criteria of ‘good taste’ and ‘modernity’ were usually thinly disguised value judgements of the socialist realism on display, partly coloured by writers’ political opinions of the Soviet Union.

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9 Catalogue: Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Century: An Exhibition of Work by Russian and Soviet artists (Arts Council of Great Britain, London 1959)
10 Denys Sutton, ‘Russian Painting’ Financial Times, 6 January 1959
11 Catalogue: Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Century: An Exhibition of Work by Russian and Soviet artists (Arts Council of Great Britain, London 1959)
12 Hutchison, The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968, 195
13 76,928 saw the exhibition in total. Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the Year 1959 Appendix. 43,000 saw it in the first month. Almost half of these, 20,000, visited the show in the first ten days. ‘From London – Visitors at Burlington House’, Glasgow Herald, 14 January 1959 and ‘London Letter – Russians invite criticism’, Scotsman, 30 January 1959. "Not since 1946 has a winter exhibition at the Royal Academy attracted so many people in its first few days" – more than 10,500 saw it the first 5 days; 2000 saw the exhibition in a 4-hour opening on a Sunday. "Russian Art Show Booms" Evening Standard 7 January 1959.
14 Denys Sutton, “Russian Painting” Financial Times, 6 January 1959
15 Neville Wallis "Russian Painting in Piccadilly: Art for the People" The Observer, 4 January 1959
However, the British critical reaction was not one of fear towards an incoming ideological threat. Rather, the overwhelming response of the press was to treat the show as a warning against the state control of artists, and, by extension, the communist system.

Unlike Russian Painting where the Soviet authorities were intrinsically involved from the outset, Art in Revolution was initially conceived by the historian of Soviet art Camilla Gray and the Arts Council as a British exhibition, with a belated Soviet contribution. As such, the organisation and staging of this exhibition explicitly challenged the Soviets’ ownership of their cultural history and the display of contentious works of art. The show focused on the activities of the revolutionary artistic avant-garde of 1917-1927 in the USSR, in particular the work of the Constructivists. It aimed to demonstrate the application of revolutionary ideas in art, principally through examples of avant-garde work in architecture, theatre design, posters, typography, industrial design and film. It also intended to display a small selection of fine art in order to present the sources of revolutionary principles.16

Art in Revolution was an ambitious exhibition, and probably the most complex that had yet been attempted by the Arts Council.17 Presenting the concepts that the Constructivists had contributed to the modern movement demanded innovative exhibition design. The challenge was answered by approaching the theme on several levels: ‘as a spectacle to be enjoyed, as a re-creation of history on a social and historical level and as a chapter of art history.’18 Thus, between 26 February and 18 April 1971, the Hayward Gallery was transformed by architect Michael Brawne’s groundbreaking installation for the show [Fig. 3.4]. Taking Melnikov’s Soviet Pavilion for the Paris Exhibition of 1925 as its inspiration [Fig. 3.5],19 the architect

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16 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Advance Press Information on an Exhibition Provisionally Entitled 'Art in Revolution' c. October 1970
17 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Papers for ‘Special Meeting 12 February 1971’
18 Camilla Gray-Prokofieva, ‘Introduction’ Catalogue: Art in Revolution
19 Braun, Edward. Personal Interview 21 July 2008
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transformed the brutalist concrete interior of the Hayward, creating a 'total impression' of the revolutionary period.\textsuperscript{20} Brawne's design – which included the use of film, soundtracks, huge photomurals up to 35 metres in length and multiple posters - was combined with large-scale reconstructions including theatre sets and architecture, and some original works.\textsuperscript{21} The installation was key to the exhibition, resulting in a 'kaleidoscopic' show rather than a 'politely ordered one'.\textsuperscript{22} The combination of the installation, reconstructed models and original exhibits was intended to show relationships between different art forms at that time.\textsuperscript{23}

In the course of the 1000m\textsuperscript{2} installation\textsuperscript{24}, the visitor moved through a darkened entrance showing documentary films of the exhibition on three screens, compiled by the filmmaker Lutz Becker,\textsuperscript{25} into an 'agit prop' room filled with strident propaganda:

> Revolutionary posters flow in continuous strips from revolving presses, and hang like paper streamers from the ceiling; walls covered in photomontages engulf the spectator in a kaleidoscope of technological imagery.\textsuperscript{26}

After the murals of agit trains and public festivals came the theatre gallery, co-ordinated by Edward Braun, an expert in Soviet theatre. It addressed new ideas in design and production, such as those of Meyerhold, via a number of striking large scale moving reproductions of theatre sets including Popova's \textit{The Magnanimous Cuckold} [Fig. 3.6]. Architecture and planning followed, again with arresting models including Melnikov's house, the Leningrad \textit{Pravda building} and outside, on the sculpture court, a 40

\textsuperscript{20} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 2.8 Brawne's original Design Notes quoted in Notes on the graphic scheme for 'Art in Revolution' exhibition, Edward Wright, 2 November 1970
\textsuperscript{21} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Letter Norbert Lynton to Monsieur Mathey, Musée Des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, 2 February 1971
\textsuperscript{22} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Letter Norbert Lynton to Edward Fry, Guggenheim Museum New York, 30 September 1970
\textsuperscript{23} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Michael Brawne 'Design Notes for the 'Exhibition of Post-Revolutionary Soviet Art'\textsuperscript{24} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 2.4 Documents on exhibition installation,
\textsuperscript{25} Becker went on to use the exhibition installation and models to illustrate an Arts Council documentary film about Soviet Revolutionary art also called Art in Revolution, produced later in 1971. The film was narrated by Edward Braun.
\textsuperscript{26} David Dickson, Review: 'Art in Revolution' \textit{Scientist and Science Journal} 4 March 1971
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feet tall wooden reconstruction of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, painted red. A section on art and design documented the transfer of formal inventions from the sphere of pure art into various design disciplines: typography (including Lissitzky and Rodchenko), furniture, textile design (Stepanova and Popova) and ceramics (Suetin).27 The bold red, black and white installation was complemented by Edward Wright's graphic designs for the poster, catalogue and a lapel button - which had been suggested as an appropriate souvenir by Lynton after he noticed how popular badges were on his visit to Moscow.28

Yet the final room of the exhibition was a stark contrast to the lively spaces created by Brawne: the Soviets' own gallery added at the last minute. It illustrated 'art and design after 1930' and allegedly showed how the innovations of the 1920s had been developed up to the present day.29 This had agreed to by the Arts Council as a measure to ensure Soviet cooperation, but the figurative work it contained was tucked away at the end of the exhibition. Lynton called these post 1930 displays sent from USSR 'very poor and incomplete'.30 The British cultural attaché in Moscow described this Soviet attempt to show the 'continuing' revolution after 1930 as a 'failure'.31

Whilst the applied art in the exhibition posed no problems for the Soviet authorities, they forced the Arts Council to withdraw certain offending abstract exhibits. Despite the tentative beginnings of Soviet academic research into these art works, such 'formalism' was anathema to official view of the USSR presented abroad by the Soviet Ministry of Culture. Although the remaining exhibition was overwhelmingly what the Arts Council had planned, the British press seized on the Soviets' suppression of a few pieces with old-fashioned Cold War rhetoric. Bernard Levin led

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27 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 'Leaflet for Press or other use at Hayward Gallery February 1971'
28 Lynton thought this would be an unusual and fun way to advertise the exhibition, in-keeping with the subject of the show. BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004
29 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 'Leaflet for Press or other use at Hayward Gallery February 1971'
30 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Letter from Norbert Lynton to Edward F Fry, Guggenheim Museum 13 March 1971
31 TNA FCO 34/106 Report John Field, Cultural Attaché, British Embassy, Moscow 13 April 1971
the condemnation of the Arts Council’s decision to comply with the
Ministry of Culture’s demands, claiming that a ‘major British gallery had
been handed over to the Soviet authorities to do what they like with, and
the exhibition is doctored to suit their ideological taste’.32 But despite the
controversy, the fact that the Soviet authorities had agreed to co-operate
at all with the exhibition – it was the first time they had been involved in an
exhibition of this sort – was a victory.33

SOVIET ART AND THE COLD WAR

Exhibitions of fine arts occupied a highly politicised role during the Cold
War, employed by East and West alike. While British and American
exhibitions were sent abroad as propaganda demonstrating some of the
many Western ‘freedoms’ – rhetoric that had been appropriated by the
West since the early days of the Cold War as an ‘interpretive framework’
for the ideological confrontation34 - the exhibitions received in Britain with
official Soviet input were interpreted as the opposite. The absences of
‘formalist’ art were taken as evidence of the lack of artistic freedom,
freedom of thought and expression and by extension, a demonstration of
the restrictive and repressive Soviet system. Like the selective vetoes of
particular historical exhibits at the V&A’s Great Britain: USSR (1967), the
versions of art history officially promoted in the Soviet Union depended on
re-written histories, subject to erasures, modifications and omissions.35 In
reinterpreted Soviet art histories, Western contemporary art was
‘bourgeois’ and the narrative of art history re-imagined as a struggle
between ‘realistic’ and ‘anti-realistic’ styles.36 During the Khrushchev
period, the artworks themselves, in particular Soviet history paintings,
could also be subject to manipulation by cropping and removing unsuitable

32 Bernard Levin, ‘Keeping an Exhibition Ideologically Germ-Free’ The Times 2 March 1971
33 John Stuart, ‘Camilla Gray – Obituary’ Design April 1972 81
34 Sinfield, Literature. Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain. Chapter 6 ‘Freedom and the Cold
War’
35 Dobrenko, "Between History and the Past: (Post-) Soviet Art of Re-Writing," vol.
36 Golomshtok, ‘Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union’ in Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer,
individuals such as Stalin (although the extent of this practice was only revealed later as archives were opened).37

Since 1934, socialist realism had been the only legitimate artistic style recognised by the Soviet authorities. Any stylistic deviation into non-figurative art that departed from illusionistic naturalism was deemed 'formalism' and condemned.38 Instead, the work of the 'Wanderers' (Peredvizhniki), a group of progressive realist artists formed in 1870 was taken as the starting point for officially approved realism in the Soviet period.39 Their work – some of which was displayed at Russian Painting – was adopted in opposition to the endeavours of the avant-garde. In the second half of the 1920s, the Constructivists, Cubists and Futurists were accused of 'formalism' and prevented from working, their art being either hidden away or destroyed.40

During the 1950s, 60s and 70s, three institutions closely tied to the Central Committee of the Communist Party tightly regulated all artistic activity in the USSR: the Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Arts and the Union of Soviet Artists.41 There were fluctuations in the approved version of socialist realism. The 'sketchiness' of Impressionism, viewed in the Stalinist purge of the late 1940s as subversive and Western, became more accepted with the wider interpretations of realism that arose during the mid-1950s Thaw.42 One painting shown at the Royal Academy Russian show, Plastov's Collective Farm Threshing (1949) had originally been accused of 'impressionist painterliness' but by 1959 was rehabilitated and

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37 e.g. Vladimir Serov's Lenin Proclaiming Soviet Power at the Second Congress of Soviets (1947). Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War, 519
40 Golomshhtok, 'Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union' in Golomshhtok and Giezer, Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union, 84
41 Ibid., 91
included in this Soviet controlled representative exhibition of art. The death of Stalin also coincided with the development of nonconformist 'unofficial' art which was quietly permitted as long as it was not publicly exhibited. In the late 1950s and early 1960s there was a period in which the ideological pressure slightly relaxed in the USSR, but this 'Khrushchev liberalisation' was to be brief. It culminated in December 1962's the much-discussed Manège exhibition in Moscow where the work of young progressive artists and some of the more moderate artists of the revolutionary period were shown and subsequently denounced in a colourful tirade by Khrushchev. The Manège exhibition was far from being an exhibition of abstract art, but it led to a 'witch hunt' against the modernists and the condemnation of 'formalist errors' was renewed. 'Unofficial' artists continued to paint privately and sell work to foreigners and diplomats into the 1970s and beyond, but were not permitted to stage public exhibitions.

Both Russian Painting and Art in Revolution were culturally as well as politically significant: milestones in the display of Russian and Soviet art in Britain. The 1959 exhibition was the first major officially sanctioned exhibition of Soviet fine art in the West, whereas in 1971, the Soviet governmental involvement in an exhibition of the avant-garde art of the revolutionary period was unprecedented. In the 1950s, with the exception

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43 Caute notes that by 1954, the journal Isskustvo was changing its opinion on impressionism; by 1955, French art including Matisse, Gauguin and Cezanne was exhibited at the Pushkin Museum. Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 515, 529
45 The term 'unofficial' is used by Golomshtok and Glezer to indicate 'nonconformity with official prescriptions and a preference for individual judgement, but not necessarily adherence to any alternative ideology, nor unanimity as to the kind or degree of independence desired.' Michael Scammell, 'Preface' in Golomshtok and Glezer, Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union. viii
46 Ibid., 87-8; Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 591-3
47 See Reid for an excellent detailed discussion of the Manège affair. Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited."
48 Glezer, 'The Struggle to Exhibit' in Golomshtok and Glezer, Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union.
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of those artists and critics who had been fortunate enough to visit the USSR, very few had had the opportunity to see any Russian or Soviet official art at first hand. The British population in general had almost no access to Russian art of any kind. British public galleries contained only a few icons. Previous British art shows connected with Russia had been very limited in scope. Occasionally, historical works were seen: the Soviet Union had loaned some Byzantine icons for an exhibition held in Edinburgh and London in 1958. Contemporary art was even less accessible. In 1945 there had been an exhibition of contemporary graphic work by Soviet War Artists at the Royal Academy. Those Britons fortunate enough to travel in 1958 might have been able to view contemporary Soviet art in Venice or at the Brussels World Fair, but they were in a minority. British publications had occasionally featured Soviet art, especially in the pre-war period: a 1935 special publication by The Studio in conjunction with VOKS, the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, illustrated the 'distinct character in State-guided art' termed 'Soviet Realism'. But Soviet art remained obscure and little known to most in Britain.

That there was very little public awareness of Russian art in Britain is confirmed by the Arts Council's requests to the Soviets for 'introductory' essays to be submitted for the 1959 Royal Academy catalogue. During the exhibition showing, various regional and national newspapers ran educational illustrated articles introducing the readership to the history of

49 Wilma Moy Thomas ‘This Russian art’s an eye-opener – The modern stuff is 50 years out of date’ News Chronicle 31 December 1958
50 The Byzantine exhibition was shown at the Edinburgh Festival during the summer, then at the Victoria and Albert Museum, finishing in November 1958. Terence Mullaly, “Russian Art Exhibition”, Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1958
51 Munnings commented that this had been a ‘fine’ show of ‘realistic and noble work’. Sir Alfred Munnings: ‘Exchanging Views with the Russians’ Letter to The Times 2 January 1957
52 “Russian Paintings in London”, Times Weekly Review, 8 January 1959
54 ‘Little is known in this country about the contents of Soviet museums and art galleries, and still less is known about Soviet contemporary arts and Soviet taste’. TNA BW2/532 ‘Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council: Report on Activities: April 1955 to December 1956’ by Brenda Tripp, SRC Secretary December 1956 Paragraph 57
55 The Arts Council requested that the Soviets contribute an introductory essay, biographical details and explanations of subjects to the catalogue because the British public was believed to be ‘largely ignorant’ of such matters. RAA/SEC/24/52 Letter WE Williams, Secretary General of the Arts Council to Mr V Bogatyrev, Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy, 1 August 1958.
Russian art. Consequently, an opportunity for the British public and artistic community to see such a supposedly 'comprehensive' historical survey of Russian art was at once thrilling, educational and fascinating. The eventual opening of the 1959 show was a fashionable social occasion documented in Tatler, who asserted that 'the chief topic of conversation at parties since the New Year has been the Winter Exhibition of Russian painting at the Royal Academy.'

Art proscribed by the Soviet Union – such as the works of the revolutionary avant-garde displayed at Art in Revolution - had been investigated in the West but remained obscure to many who were not specialists. From the early 1960s, such works attracted burgeoning interest. The publication of Camilla Gray's lavishly illustrated The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922 (1962) was vital in raising awareness of Russian revolutionary art. Such art became celebrated in the West as the products of a short-lived but glorious period of artistic creativity, which was contrasted sharply with the restrictive socialist realism which was to follow. A number of exhibitions were held in Britain from 1959 onwards: the first English exhibition of Malevich at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1959, and exhibitions focusing on the work of Goncharova and Larionov (Arts Council, 1961) and Kandinsky. Private galleries also exhibited work from the revolutionary period, notably the Annely Juda Gallery and the Grosvenor Gallery's 1960s displays of Constructivism, Suprematism and Abstraction: 'qualities that would enrage any good Soviet citizen.'

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56 e.g. AP Maclure "Realism in Modern Works", Yorkshire Post [n.d.]. Thomas Bodkin in the Birmingham Post, also Charles Morris in the Daily Worker wrote articles including 'The Spring of Soviet Painting' and 'The Art of a New Society' There were also heavily illustrated articles in the Illustrated London News (which had 31 illustrations) and the Children's Newspaper.

57 'The town turns out for Russia's paintings' Tatler 14 Jan 1959

58 Tamara Talbot Rice's book had a brief section on contemporary Soviet art, praising the socialist realist style. Tamara Talbot Rice, Russian Art (West Drayton, Middlesex: Penguin, 1949).


60 Caute. The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 12

61 Gray prepared the catalogue. John Stuart, 'Camilla Gray – Obituary' Design April 1972 81

62 Nigel Gosling 'Reflections of a Soviet Dream', The Observer, 28 February 1971

63 Exhibitions at London's Grosvenor Gallery included Two decades of experimental Russian art (15 March-14 April 1962) and Aspects of Russian Experimental Art 1900-25 (November 1967) showcasing the 'remarkable generation' of artists which emerged during the Revolution. See James Burt, London Galleries: The Honesty of a Painter' in Apollo, vol 86, October 1967, 312-3; Nigel Gosling 'Pioneering Russians', The Observer 29 October 1967 and 'Exhibitions' in Design vol 227, November 1967, 22 The Grosvenor Gallery had also been the venue for a number of shows of
was also a vague awareness of the existence of 'unofficial' contemporary art in the Soviet Union, described in the British press as 'Pictures that Never Leave the Studio' and 'Art's Forbidden Fruit', and complemented by a few exhibitions of such works at the Grosvenor Gallery in the mid 1960s.64

However although these addressed aspects of the art of the Soviet revolutionary period, these had been small in scope and there was no question of involvement by the Soviet authorities. International galleries in the West were interested in staging exhibitions of the still relatively unknown Soviet avant-garde but those that had been held were constructed entirely from Western sources.65 In contrast, the Hayward show was planned as a broad retrospective with Soviet contributions: initially material gleaned by Gray from her personal Soviet contacts, but later material negotiated with the Soviet authorities. It was intended to be 'an unconventional show, made up of films, models, blow ups and so forth' showing material which was 'revolutionary in every sense'.66

Nevertheless, despite this Soviet involvement, avant-garde art remained proscribed by the USSR. Despite Camilla Gray's pioneering research, the subject was still 'enveloped in mystery and myth' and 'beyond the pale' in Soviet Russia. Soviet art historians sidestepped the 'formalist' art of the revolutionary period, portraying it as a misguided, artistic dead end.67 Western scholars were at an advantage in overcoming the 'formidable' bureaucratic hindrances to researching such art.68 Gray had been able to

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work by 'unofficial' artists from the Soviet Union such as the Oscar Rabin and Neizvestny. Glezer, 'The Struggle to Exhibit' in Golomshotch and Glezer, Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union. 91, 108 and Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 555, 598

64 Edwards Crankshaw 'Pictures that Never Leave the Studio' Guardian Jan 4 1959; 'Art's Forbidden Fruit' The Observer February 1960

65 e.g. An exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in the later 1960s had included a small-scale reconstruction of Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, but nothing on the scale proposed for Art in Revolution.

66 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Camilla Gray to Ben Whittaker, MP, House of Commons, 7 October 1968.

67 Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo. 1945-1962. 17

68 Bowlt had been a graduate student of Russian culture in Moscow in the 1960s. Of interest is his mid 1990s conversation with the art historian Sarab'yanov which gives insights into the difficulties experienced by Soviet art historians wishing to publish around the time of Art in Revolution. John E
piece together fragmentary information about the period by contacting surviving artists, their families, and viewing works hidden in family archives. It was such contacts that Gray hoped to exploit in order to bring previously unseen avant-garde material to London. This picture of the distinction between what was permitted in unofficial and official Soviet circles is supported by Gray’s colleagues who visited the USSR in the 1960s. In 1968 she believed that since 1956, ‘Constructivism had gradually been rehabilitated in the Soviet Union’, and that it would be possible to bring such artworks from the USSR and display them in Britain. She sought to draw upon this unofficial ‘opening up’, initially arguing that it would be possible to get the material they wanted for the exhibition from unofficial and semi-official sources in the USSR.

Until Art in Revolution, no Western gallery had collaborated with the USSR in an exhibition of the art and design of the Revolutionary period, although for years attempts had been made to involve the Soviet authorities and in order to obtain works and information about the period not available by any other means. The prospect of Soviet involvement aroused international interest: during the planning of Art in Revolution, the Guggenheim and MOMA both eagerly corresponded with the Arts Council’s new Director of Exhibitions, Norbert Lynton, for information on how the negotiations with the Soviets were progressing, and news of any

69 “Her visit to Russia was at precisely the right time. A few years earlier it would have been impossible for her as a foreigner to make contact with Soviet citizens, and a few years later many of the characters vital to her story were no longer living.” John Stuart, ‘Camilla Gray – Obituary’ Design April 1972 81
71 Edward Braun, who like Gray was fluent in Russian, contrasts the artistic and cultural conservatism of the official Ministry of Culture with ‘a lot of very very lively experimentation and criticism’ in unofficial circles. The Moscow periodical ‘Decorative Art’ was a platform for new ideas, opening up previously proscribed periods of Soviet culture and allowing formerly unacceptable figures such as Meyerhold to be discussed and written about for the first time. Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July
72 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Camilla Gray, ‘Russian Constructivist Exhibition’ 21 February 1968
73 Norbert Lynton ‘Exhibition of Russian Art’ Letter to The Times 3 March 1971
possible touring show. But the subject was a complicated and sensitive one, and remained so even after Art in Revolution. The distinction was one between what was officially permitted and what took place quietly and unofficially. Following the showing of Art in Revolution, Lynton commented that although artists such as Malevich were beginning to be recognised and studied in Russian institutes, 'the Ministry of Culture, as a Government body, is not yet able to countenance abstract art as a Soviet manifestation'.74 In 1971, the critic John Russell was still able to assert that much of what happened in Soviet art between 1917 and 1930 remained 'obscure'.75

Post-war socialist realism also remained obscure in the West, but for very different reasons. Whereas figures such as Tatlin, Popova, Malevich, Kandinsky and Larionov were increasingly celebrated, Soviet figurative art was dismissed as mere propaganda and denigrated as lacking in artistic integrity.76 Boris Groys, the art theorist, has noted how this official Soviet art:

...has remained until the present day suspect for an aesthetic consciousness raised in the tradition of modernism. Such art lacks any established position in the history of twentieth century art.

He convincingly argues that even their 'status' as works of art is 'rejected through this silence': largely excluded from Western art histories and museum collections to this day. This was for moral and aesthetic reasons: partly the association with totalitarianism but more for its 'premodern' or 'antimodern' character, manifested in the use of realism, naturalism and classicism.77

But although there was a strong cultural motive to see artistic works from the USSR, political imperatives were also important for the British organisers of Russian Painting. The 1959 exchange of exhibitions with the Soviet Union was not a simple example of a one-way communist 'cultural

74 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Letter Norbert Lynton to Mr Gwyther, 18 May 1971
75 John Russell 'Such Works are Dangerous'. Sunday Times, 28 February 1971
76 Lindsey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962, 17, 33
77 Groys, "The Art of Totality." 98-9
offensive'.78 A great deal of the preliminary impetus for the London exhibition of Russian Painting came from the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council, in part to ensure the smooth organisation of a reciprocal survey of British painting to be held in Moscow and Leningrad in 1960.79 As has been shown in Chapter 2, the Foreign Office also promoted the idea of reciprocity, believing that the British exhibition would be a 'useful political exercise'.80 However, meetings during the organisation of the 1959 show suggest that the Soviet side was keener to confirm that a British exhibition in Moscow would be forthcoming than to organise one of Russian painting for London.81

The British Council's priority was to achieve the greatest possible impact with the reciprocal British show in Moscow; as such they were prepared to concede the selection of the Royal Academy show to the Soviet authorities. Free selection of British art works was viewed as essential: the Chairman of the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council thought it vital that the British authorities should not 'jeopardise our right' to exhibit the pictures they wanted to show in the USSR 'in order to produce the desired impact on the Russians.'82 The critic Terrence Mullaly agreed that a British art exhibition in Moscow could have 'widespread repercussions'. He had been 'astonished' at the degree of Soviet interest in British art whilst in Moscow, believing that modern British works -his examples were Augustus John and Henry Moore - would be a 'revelation' to the Russians.83 Golomshtok confirms Mullaly's impression of the impact of art

78 This challenges the politically charged view of the contemporary American commentator, Frederick Barghoorn, who attributed an aggressively propagandist role to all the USSR's cultural activities. He asserted that the Soviet Union 'while professing reciprocity...practices, in so far as possible, a unilateral dissemination of Soviet influence'. Barghoorn, The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy. 13
79 British Painting 1720-1960, prepared by the British Council, opened 4 May 1960 at a Pushkin Museum, Moscow, then moved to Hermitage mid June, then Leningrad for another month. 141 paintings from 66 museums and private owners.
80 TNA FO 371/116823 NS1756/14 'Asks whether HMG would have any objection to an exhibition of Russian art being held in 1956-57'
81 The Soviets would only send an exhibition to Britain through the Arts Council on the understanding that a "comparable exhibition of British art" be sent to the USSR as soon as possible. AAD ACGB/121/906 RA minutes: Russian Art Exhibition 1958-59. Notes on Meeting of 20th November 1957 at 10.30am
82 AAD ACGB/121/906 Minutes of the 11th Meeting of the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council, 5 December 1957
83 Terence Mullaly, 'British Art Exhibition for Russia' Daily Telegraph 17 November 1958
shows and the interest surrounding foreign exhibitions in Moscow at the end of the 1950s, noting that thousands would queue all night in a state of excitement comparable to an important football match. Therefore, the selection for the British painting exhibition in the USSR was very carefully made. The critic Terence Mullaly warned of the need to choose 'with an appreciation of the Russian attitude to art': balance was needed between the desire to demonstrate British freedoms, and the need to ensure that the show did not instantly alienate the Soviet viewer. But there was also concern that this balance could tip in the 'wrong' direction: fears were expressed to the organisers that if works such as those of Sir Alfred Munnings and Dame Laura Knight were sent to the Soviet Union, such 'superficial and indeed incompetent artists' would bring 'discredit' to the UK.

The exhibition, eventually held in 1960, was comprised 141 paintings from 'Hogarth to the present day' (1720 to 1960). Strangely, a handlist of the exhibits was not distributed in Britain until after the exhibition had opened in Moscow. Nevertheless British critics accepted that the choice of British artists, including Gainsborough, Reynolds, Turner and Constable in addition to a number of 'abstract and near-abstract works' had been generally 'sensible'. The only minor controversy, according to the Burlington Magazine was the 'inclusion of Munnings and the exclusion of Wyndham Lewis'. In contrast to Mullaly, it criticised the selection committee for having 'its Russian public in mind', rather than making

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84 In particular, he notes the art show at the 1957 Sixth World Festival of Youth at Sokolniki Park of Culture. The 4500 works of art by young people from all over the world — including abstract and neo-expressionist works— became one of the catalysts for the 'unofficial art' movement. Golomshtok, 'Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union' in Golomshtok and Glezer, Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union. 89
85 Terence Mullaly, 'British Art Exhibition for Russia' Daily Telegraph 17 November 1958
86 Hendy to Mayhew, cited in Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 564-5. One Munnings picture - Derby Day at Epsom Downs 1921 – was eventually sent.
87 AAD ACGB/121/906 USSR/646/3 Chairman of the Arts Council to Yakov A. Malik, Soviet Ambassador, 30 November 1957
88 It was intended to 'represent all the major names in the history of British painting and also the more important living artists.' It was chosen by a selection committee under the Chair of Sir Philip Hendy, Director of the National Gallery. AAD ACGB/121/906 Christopher Mayhew (SRC) to Mr Danielov 26 April 1958; AAD ACGB/121/906 GB.641/132 John Hulton, British Council to David Thomas, Arts Council, 8 December 1958
judgements independently of the recipients. The show seems to have been received with enthusiasm in the USSR. In addition to allowing for a freer British choice at their own exhibition, by conceding the 1959 exhibition selection process to the USSR, the Academy was also able to deflect criticisms of Russian Painting. They could claim that it was 'the Russians' own exhibition' and 'the way they wanted it'.

**CURATORIAL POWER AND SOVIET ART HISTORY**

Both exhibitions were organised at the highest political level, with the involvement of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, the agency that controlled all Soviet art museums and exhibitions. Looking first at Russian Painting, then Art in Revolution, this section examines the often convoluted organisational processes behind each exhibition and the lengthy negotiations necessary to stage such shows with official Soviet involvement. It investigates the struggles over the selection of exhibits as curatorial power shifted, both between the two nations and also within the British side, which was not homogenous. In 1959, the British authorities were largely content to receive an exhibition of paintings selected almost wholly by the Soviet Ministry of Culture. Conversely, in 1971 the Arts Council strongly asserted its ownership of their Art in Revolution project but was challenged by the Soviet authorities who believed they should control how Soviet art was presented. Despite conflicts – some ideological, some due to practical and bureaucratic hold-ups - the British side was more prepared to compromise than the Soviet side, and this could lead the press to accuse the Arts Council of being complicit with the Soviet regime in re-written art historical narratives.

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89 Benedict Nicolson 'Editorial: Soviet Painting at the Royal Academy' *The Burlington Magazine* No. 671, Vol CI, February 1959 43
90 Sir Charles Wheeler, PRA quoted in 'London Letter - We see a dream of happiness..." *The Scotsman*, 31 December 1958
91 Golomshtok, 'Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union' in Golomshtok and Glezer, *Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union*, 92
As the official report from the Royal Academy indicates, the realisation of *Russian Painting* was plagued by delays and difficulties: 'Barely a month previously the arrangements had still been uncertain'. It was largely through the sustained efforts of the eventual British organisers that the exhibition 'almost miraculously' took place. It fell largely upon the Arts Council of Great Britain to arrange the reception of reciprocal international exhibitions in Britain. Under its Director of Art – first Philip James, then from mid-1958 onwards, Gabriel White – the Arts Council worked closely with the Royal Academy to bring the exhibition to fruition. The British Council also took on an unfamiliar role in preparing for the incoming exhibition through their Soviet Relations Committee. Despite the fact that, as discussed in the previous chapter, ‘incoming Soviet manifestations’ should have been the sole remit of the Arts Council this was altered to include a British Council input because ‘HMG attaches special importance to the promotion of exchanges with the USSR at the present time.’

The earliest proposals for the show appear to date back to 1948; the Royal Academy attributed calls for 'a great Russian exhibition' to its former President, Sir Alfred Munnings. This was envisaged as a successor to previous RA exhibitions held since the 1920s that presented historical surveys of the art of one country. By the 1950s, a number of artists and critics were calling for a Russian show. It took until mid 1955 for the British authorities to begin serious discussions with the Soviet Embassy. Following an SRC-organised visit to the USSR comprising representatives of the Arts Council, British Council and Council of Industrial Design, a proposed date of winter 1957-8 was set for the Russian show.

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92 RA Annual Report for the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associated for the Year 1958 14-15
93 AAD ACGB/121/906 Sinkler Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council to Williams, Arts Council 18 June 1956
94 AAD ACGB/121/906 Humphrey Brooke, Secretary of the RA to Philip James, 3 October 1956
95 Countries who had previously been represented at national RA Winter exhibitions included Italy (1930), Holland, Spain (1920-21), France, India (1947-8) and China. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy 1768-1968*.
96 e.g. RAA/SEC/24/52 Carel Weight to Sir AE Richardson, RA 18 April 1955; Notes from John Russell c 2nd June 1958
97 This 12 day visit in July 1956 was undertaken by Professor William Coldstream of the Slade (in his role as Chair of the Art Panel of the Arts Council) and Philip James, Director of Art at the Arts Council. They were accompanied on their trip by 'experts' tasked with organising reciprocal exhibitions of British art and design in Moscow: Mrs Lilian Somerville of the British Council, and Sir
Art in Revolution, too, was subject to a lengthy and hesitant organisational period, interrupted by political events and hindered by caution and anxiety from various parts of the Arts Council and Foreign Office. However, in contrast to the 1959 show, it was not part of a bilateral Cultural Agreement with the USSR. Originally a wholly British project, initiated at the suggestion of the British art historian Camilla Gray to the Art Panel in January 1966, the Arts Council chose to approach the Soviet authorities for assistance in order to obtain information and artefacts not available in the West. The Arts Council saw the show as a 'collaboration'; the Soviet Ministry of Culture viewed it more as a 'one sided imposition'.\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Papers for 'Special Meeting 12 February 1971' on Art in Revolution} There were tensions between the need for Soviet collaboration in order to produce a thorough exhibition, and the amount of control the Soviet side wished to exercise over the vision of Revolutionary Russia that was presented. This was bound up with issues of art and in particular abstract art, which was still viewed – on an official level - as 'unacceptable' by the USSR. Whilst applications of abstract forms, in the areas of theatre design, architecture and textiles were permitted to be shown, abstract painting and sculpture was forbidden.\footnote{BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004} Although such abstract art made up only a very small proportion of the proposed show in comparison to the applied arts, its suggested inclusion generated an enormous amount of conflict. The biggest struggle for ownership of the project was between the British and Soviet organisers, but there were also significant disagreements on the British side between old and new styles of arts administration, between governmental and cultural bodies, and between different key personalities. These individual personalities, in particular Camilla Gray, played a greater role in the 1971 exhibition than they had in 1959. Gabriel White of the Arts Council had played a role in the preparations for Art in Revolution prior to his retirement, but it was the former art critic Norbert Lynton, in the newly created Arts Council post of
Director of Exhibitions who took charge of the show under the (also new) Director of Art, Robin Campbell.

The proposal for the Royal Academy exhibition of Russian art had direct support from the British Government.\(^{100}\) The possibility of linking the exhibition to a political visit concerned the Arts Council’s normally non-political position: it was ‘a matter of principle not to get involved in politics’.\(^{101}\) However, suggestions that it might ‘desirable’ for the display to coincide with the April 1956 visit of the Soviet leaders Bulganin and Khrushchev to Britain were ultimately dismissed by November 1955.\(^{102}\) The project began to gain serious momentum in mid 1956 as the newly formed Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council (SRC) embarked more fully upon its programme of encouraging and regulating cultural exchange between Britain and the Soviet Union.\(^{103}\) As the previous chapter demonstrated, the SRC, until its dissolution in 1959, was ultimately responsible for co-ordinating all official cultural contacts between Britain and the USSR.

The anticipation leading up to the 1959 show had been heightened by the delays and postponements that had hampered its organisation. In 1956, both the proposed show of Russian art and its ‘quid pro quo’ British exhibition became the victims of wider political events. The Warsaw Pact invasion of Hungary completely ‘hamstrung’ the operations of the SRC and all cultural contacts with the Soviet Union were suspended. Chairman of the SRC, Christopher Mayhew, argued that events in Hungary had obliterated the necessary ‘goodwill’ towards the Soviet Union that had been present in British academic and cultural institutions, and which was

\(^{100}\) RAA/SEC/24/52 Harold Macmillan, Foreign Secretary to Professor Richardson, 28 November 1955  
\(^{101}\) TNA FO371/116823 NS 1756/17 Proposals for exchange of art exhibitions between UK and Soviet Union 1955 November 22 1955  
\(^{102}\) It was thought that co-ordinating the exhibition with a state visit would ‘maximise public interest’ in the show. AAD ACGB/121/906 Philip James, Director of Art, Arts Council to Timofeev, 3rd Secretary at the Embassy of the USSR in London, 1 November 1955  
\(^{103}\) The SRC had been established in May 1955; their ultimate aim was to secure ‘free contacts’ between Britain and the Soviet Union, but in the mean time it chose to regulate those contacts that were there in order to sideline communist front organisations in Britain.  
\(^{104}\) AAD ACGB/121/906 William Coldstream Report on a visit to the USSR at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture 10 August 1956, Executive Note 179
deemed essential for the effective operation of the SRC’s programmes.\textsuperscript{105} This postponement of the Royal Academy exhibition was not supported by everyone – Munnings penned a lengthy plea to the Times calling for the show to go ahead – but his view seemed to be in the minority.\textsuperscript{106} More typical were responses claiming that holding the exhibition in the light of the political situation would ‘betray’ the Hungarians, and calls to boycott the show if it took place.\textsuperscript{107}

The post-Hungary British embargo on official cultural relations with the Soviet Union was gingerly lifted in May 1957.\textsuperscript{108} The ‘deep freeze’ that had befallen the activities of the SRC cautiously began to thaw, and ‘unobtrusive’ exchanges such as those of delegations were resumed; large scale, highly visible exchanges, such as exhibitions, were still too sensitive and were only resumed later.\textsuperscript{109} By this point, however, the RA had had to cancel the proposed Russian exhibition for winter 1957-58.\textsuperscript{110} Hopes to stage a future show at the Royal Academy, now pencilled in for winter 1958-9, remained, despite concerns that negotiations with the USSR may now be more ‘tricky’ in the light of the events of 1956.\textsuperscript{111} Following friendly and successful meetings with a Soviet delegation an Arts Council press release of December 1957 indicated that the exhibition could be expected in a year’s time.\textsuperscript{112} In May 1958, lists of potential exhibits from the Soviet authorities that had been expected in January had still not arrived. Concerned that there was no sign that the ‘Russians mean business’ and that cancellation was increasingly likely, Philip James had been forced to contact the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Patrick Reilly for assistance.\textsuperscript{113} The Royal Academy was not simply the venue for

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\textsuperscript{105} Christopher Mayhew, Chair SRC ‘Cultural Exchange with Russia’ Letter to The Times January 1957
\textsuperscript{106} Sir Alfred Munnings: ‘Exchanging Views with the Russians’ Letter to The Times 2 January 1957
\textsuperscript{107} e.g. Juliet Mansel letter to The Times 7 January 1957
\textsuperscript{108} AAD ACGB/121/906 Note Chair of Arts Council to Philip James, Director of Art 21 May 1957
\textsuperscript{109} AAD ACGB/121/906 WR Owain-Jones, SRC of the British Council to Philip James, Arts Council 21 May 1957
\textsuperscript{110} AAD ACGB/121/906 Press Statement from Humphrey Brooke, Secretary of the RA, 1 February 1957
\textsuperscript{111} AAD ACGB/121/906 Humphrey Brooke, Secretary of the RA to Philip James, Arts Council 22 May 1957
\textsuperscript{112} AAD ACGB/121/906 Arts Council Press Release 2 December 1957
\textsuperscript{113} Reilly promised to keep up ‘pressure’ on the Ministry of Culture for the lists (AAD ACGB/121/906 Philip James, Arts Council to Sir Patrick Reilly, British Ambassador in Moscow, 9 May 1958).
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the show. Its staff, notably the RA Secretary Humphrey Brooke, were
intimately involved in the organisational meetings and hanging of the
Russian art. The Royal Academy and Arts Council agreed to split any
profit 50:50.114

Very early in the protracted planning process, it seemed as though the
British organisers would have an input in the selection of exhibits. In 1955,
the artist Kenneth Green paid an 'extremely cordial' informal visit to the
Soviet Union to view potential artworks and meet museum staff. Following
this, he warned Wheeler, the President of the Royal Academy of the
necessity to:

...avoid the kind of mass exhibition of bad 19th Century and awful
Soviet modern painting which the authorities have been freely
sending out to the satellite countries, and which would be received
in England with hardly disguised ridicule.116

In order to avoid such a disastrous response from the British public, Green
recommended a broad approach, both historically and geographically. He
envisioned an exhibition which showcased some of the 'marvellous things'
of 'extraordinary beauty' that he had seen at the Hermitage, including the
best Russian 'objets d'art' ranging from tapestries, woven fabrics, images,
stone and ivory carving and pottery, in addition to paintings and drawings,
believing that such an exhibition would be a 'red-letter day' for the Royal
Academy.117 Although Green's visit did not have any ultimate bearing on
the realised RA exhibition, representatives of the Arts Council and Royal
Academy concurred with this call to make the exhibition as

James' assessment of the situation was backed up by the critic John Russell, who had long been
an advocate of bringing an exhibition of Russian art to the UK. He wrote to James concerned that
on his visit to the USSR very few of the Soviet officials he met had heard of the exhibition. Russell
believed that this was in part due to issues of reciprocity: the lack of a 'firm promise' from the British
that they would send a 'comparable exhibition' of their own art as soon as possible. See AAD
ACGB/121/906 John Russell to Philip James, Arts Council; AAD ACGB/121/906 Royal Academy
minutes: Russian Art Exhibition 1958-59. Notes on Meeting of 20th November 1957 at 10.30am
116 The exhibition was profitable; income was £18,096 5s 2d against £13,623 17s 11d expenditure.
The share to the RA was £2,793 4s 5d and the Arts Council accrued £1,679 2s 10d Annual Report
from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates
for the Year 1959 Appendix 2
115 TNA FO 371/116823 NS 1756/7 Patrick O'Regan, British Embassy Moscow to Harry Hohler,
Northern Dept, Foreign Office 16 September 1955
116 On his visit, Green met with Mr Lebedev, the Director of the Tretyakov, and Mr Stepanov, the
deputy Minister of Culture. RAA/SEC/24/52 Kenneth Green to Sir Charles Wheeler, PRA, 28
September 1955
117 RAA/SEC/24/52 Kenneth Green to Sir Charles Wheeler, PRA, 28 September 1955

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'comprehensive' as possible and to maintain high standards of quality.\textsuperscript{118} This was to be achieved in part by steering the weighting away from contemporary Soviet art. Philip James specifically requested that the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century sections should be 'as full as possible'.\textsuperscript{119} The exhibition's location at the Royal Academy also seemed to dictate to the British authorities that the twentieth century works should comprise only a 'token' amount.\textsuperscript{120} Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan concurred that a display of 'Russian art of all periods' would be more 'appropriate' in the traditional setting of the RA than Soviet contemporary art.\textsuperscript{121} These sentiments aligned the Russian show with previous 'national' exhibitions at the Academy and were intended conveniently to steer the selection away from ideologically charged pieces.\textsuperscript{122}

Indications that the selection of the show would be carried out jointly were bolstered on the British delegation's trip to the USSR in July 1956.\textsuperscript{123} However, it became apparent that British preferences were only to have a minor influence on Soviet choices. Preliminary lists of the content received in July 1958 comprised 130 paintings, of which 50 were 'post-revolution'. Following written advice from artists, experts and critics such as William Coldstream\textsuperscript{124} and John Russell\textsuperscript{125} and a meeting in September 1958 between the Arts Council and Royal Academy to discuss the preliminary lists, the Secretary General of the Arts Council wrote to the Soviet Embassy with counter suggestions to increase the overall number of paintings and reiterating the need to expand the eighteenth and

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  \item \textsuperscript{118} AAD ACGB/121/906 RA minutes: Russian Art Exhibition 1958-59. Notes on Meeting of 20\textsuperscript{th} November 1957 at 10.30am
  \item \textsuperscript{119} The Arts Council called for some earlier 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} century icons to be included if possible. AAD ACGB/121/906 Arts Council Minutes of Meeting at the RA 20 November 1957
  \item \textsuperscript{120} AAD ACGB/121/906 Humphrey Brooke, RA Secretary to Philip James, 3 October 1956
  \item \textsuperscript{121} RAA/SEC/24/52 Harold Macmillan, Foreign Secretary to Professor Richardson, 28 November 1955
  \item \textsuperscript{122} AAD ACGB/121/906 Humphrey Brooke, Secretary of the RA to Philip James, 3 October 1956
  \item \textsuperscript{123} The Arts Council and British Council representatives had been asked by the Soviet authorities what types of painting and sculpture they would prefer in the exhibition. AAD ACGB/121/906 Executive Note 179: Report on a visit to the USSR at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture – William Coldstream, 10 August 1958.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Arts Council Archive ACGB/121/906 Coldstream Report on the Russian lists 28 July 1958
  \item \textsuperscript{125} The critic John Russell offered written suggestions to the meeting in a note of 2 June 1958. He had already contributed articles to the Sunday Times indicating the 'intense public interest' in the show and the 'desirability of widening its scope' to include archaeological exhibits such as the Scythian remains, armour, swords, Russian porcelain, furniture and sculpture. RAA/SEC/24/52 Notes from John Russell c 2nd June 1958
\end{itemize}
nineteenth century sections. It also requested more paintings from the *Mir Iskusstva* ('World of Art') movement due to its 'important influence outside Russia', and the inclusion of theatre and ballet designs, such as those by Diaghileff. However, although the Arts Council commented privately on how 'the complete absence of origins of modern art' – particularly Malevich, Kandinsky and Chagall – detracted from the 'completeness of representation', such views were not expressed publicly to the Soviet authorities.

The Soviet response to these British suggestions was that they would be 'considered'. But when the revised versions arrived in October 1958, it was apparent that they had been disregarded. Following the opening, the Secretary of the Royal Academy explained that this was an unusual situation:

There has been a good deal less consultation than usual. We only had one meeting with the Russians a year ago, and had to take what we were given. Generally, we have many meetings to decide what we would like.

By the time the exhibition was shown, the Royal Academy and Arts Council had conceded that they were unable to influence the content, and seemed more concerned to have free hand in their own exhibition in Moscow and Leningrad. Although *Russian Painting* was staged at a moment when there was relative 'relaxation' in the Soviet art world – between the Thaw and Khrushchev's Manège outburst – such openness was not displayed in the selection of works on display at the Royal Academy. William Coldstream's private lament of 1958 had come to fruition:

...it is a pity that there seems to be no question of showing the early work of Kandinsky or of the constructivists of the 1917 to 1920 period. I wish that we could see it.

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126 More large paintings were requested to form a focal point: the 19th century section comprised a mere eleven small paintings in one large gallery. RAA/SEC/24/52 WE Williams, Secretary General of the Arts Council to Mr V Bogatyrev, Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy, 1 August 1958
127 AAD ACGB/121/906 Handwritten note, Gabriel White, Director of Art, Arts Council c. July 1958
128 AAD ACGB/121/906 Translation of letter V Bogatyrev, Soviet Embassy to Sir William Emrys Williams, Arts Council, 28 August 1958
129 Monica Furlong, 'Interview with Humphrey Brooke, Secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts' Tatler 11 Feb 1959, 250, 257
The 1971 exhibition *Art in Revolution* at last offered an opportunity to see this prized early Constructivist work in Britain. The intention behind the Arts Council's selection processes was to show how the Constructivists put their art to 'utilitarian purposes', abandoning abstract painting for posters, typography, industrial design, theatre sets, textiles and architecture. In this, it demonstrated the 'abandonment of fine art's segregation from everyday life'.\(^{131}\) Although intended not to focus on fine art, some critics thought this decision to underplay painting, and the concomitant absence of Kandinsky, Gabo and Pevsner was 'curious'.\(^{132}\) Although it began as an Arts Council show supplemented by works of art collected in private by Soviets, it became apparent that it would be helpful to involve the Soviet authorities in order to gain access to pieces never before seen in the West. The Foreign Office were apprehensive from the start about Camilla Gray's intentions to do this, noting in 1967 that:

> ...the Russian authorities were not going to co-operate in her proposed Constructivist exhibition, that they would not look kindly on anyone who might seek to come out to Russia to look for possible objects to the exhibition.\(^{133}\)

Although the exhibition could be assembled entirely from Western sources, 'there remained the dream of co-existence, and the Russians seemed genuinely interested'.\(^{134}\) However, the responsibilities of each party in organising *Art in Revolution* were never clearly defined, resulting in confusion and contests over ownership not only between the USSR and Britain, but also within the British side.

Camilla Gray was a passionate young art historian, the daughter of Basil Gray, curator of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum.\(^{135}\) She had previously worked with the Arts Council on their Goncharova and Larionov exhibition. Originally trained as a ballerina, Camilla had visited the Soviet

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131 Robin Campbell and Norbert Lynton 'Preface' Catalogue: *Art in Revolution* (1971) 7
132 Robert Melville 'Around the Sealed Room', *New Statesman* 12 March 1971
133 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 AR Maxwell-Hyslop, Department of Education and Science, re conversation with Robin Cecil, Foreign Office 12 May 1967
134 John Russell 'London' *Art News*, April 1971
135 John Stuart, 'Camilla Gray - Obituary' *Design* April 1972 81

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Union on numerous occasions, researching the avant-garde art of the revolutionary period. Western art experts had been aware of names such as Malevich, Tatlin and Lissitzky, but it was the publication of Gray's seminal survey of Russian art, *The Great Experiment* (1962) which had alerted the West to the scope of the avant-garde work of the Russian revolution. 136 Sadly, she was to die from hepatitis at the age of 35 in the autumn of 1971, shortly after the showing of *Art in Revolution*. 137

From the outset, there had been disparities between what the Arts Council, working in conjunction with Camilla Gray, perceived the exhibition to be, and what the Soviet authorities' aims were. The Arts Council wanted an innovative and educational exhibition that would introduce the British public to 'how new ideas in art were put to work in a revolutionary social context'. 138 They aimed to produce a wide-ranging show which captured the excitement of the revolutionary period, presenting little known artworks to a Western audience. Brawne's kaleidoscopic, experimental installation was to be an integral part of a show which was explicitly intended to be of 'real interest to the British public'; the Arts Council had to spend their funding responsibly in creating an appealing and successful exhibition without political scandal.

There were also conflicts within the British side. Organising the exhibition took place over many years: Camilla Gray had to negotiate fiercely with a series of Arts Council officials, each with different styles of working, in order to keep the exhibition on the agenda. 139 Norbert Lynton, an art critic who efficiently took on the new role of Director of Exhibitions for the Arts Council from May 1970, also played a crucial role in ensuring that the

136 Later revised and reprinted as 'The Russian Experiment'.
138 ACGB/121/40 File 1.3 Press Release February 1971
139 Gabriel White, the Director of Art from 1959 until 1970 was broadly supportive of the show, but cautious about its potential political implications. Lynton describes him as 'charming' and 'civilised' but 'not the boldest of men', preferring not to mix art and politics. In contrast, his successor, Robin Campbell, a 'very cultured man', was entirely supportive of the Art in Revolution project. BLSA NLSC interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004; Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
exhibition came about. The central team of Gray, Lynton and Edward Braun, an expert on Russian Theatre, were dedicated to achieving the Art in Revolution project. Gray's role was a key one, not only as an academic adviser, but also as the originator and constant advocate for the show, but her ambivalent status with regards to the exhibition — a mixture of official and unofficial - could cause problems for the Arts Council and Foreign Office. She viewed herself as the driving force behind the project; this could bring her into conflict with the organising bodies both in Britain and the USSR. Gray's passionate attachment to the exhibition project, and her 'determined' character could cause friction with the establishment. Her friend John Stuart recalled her 'remarkable gift' for making contact with people. But her single-mindedness did cause problems: even the supremely 'tactful' Joanna Drew, Assistant Director of Exhibitions, had 'regular rows' with Gray over the stressful project. Although she was a recognised authority on Soviet art, as a young woman in her early thirties she came into conflict with the more old-fashioned members of the Art Panel. Her marriage to Oleg Prokofiev and subsequent status as a Soviet citizen intensified these problems.

140 Lynton recalled in 2004 that it had been one of his favourite exhibitions. The subject was 'very close to [his] own heart'. BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004
141 In addition to her 'unofficial' status, in dealing with the Soviet Union, Gray's contacts with the USSR - particularly her long-awaited marriage to Oleg Prokofiev, son of the composer, in December 1969, and her relocation to Moscow - were problematic. The Arts Council were uneasy about her new status as a Soviet citizen, thinking this could cause additional diplomatic misunderstandings. These problems did not materialise but the concerns were real. Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
142 Following the marriage, Gray moved to Moscow. Her relationships with the Ministry of Culture could become 'somewhat strained' but she was still allowed to continue researching towards the exhibition. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Patrick Jackson, British Embassy in Moscow to Robin Campbell, Arts Council, 10 April 1970
143 e.g. One report of her character by a civil servant at the Department of Education and Science, corroborated by the Foreign Office, describes her as 'attractive' with 'a frightening kind of single-minded-ness' capable of battering down the 'defences of bureaucracy', This particular observer also illustrates how such an attitude was a breath of fresh air: he concluded that he enjoyed her company, and in particular her 'readiness to talk about all manner of things'. AAD ACGB/121/40 box 1.1 AR Maxwell-Hyslop, Department of Education and Science, to Gabriel White, Director of Art, Arts Council, 12 May 1967; AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 AR Maxwell-Hyslop, Department of Education and Science to Robin Cecil, Foreign Office 18 May 1967
144 John Stuart, 'Camilla Gray - Obituary' Design April 1972 81
145 BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004
146 Minute from Joanna Drew to Gabriel White, 25 October 1968 ACGB/121/40 file 1.6
147 Braun describes how some of this old guard resisted her and attempted to 'sideline' Gray from the project because, he asserts, of her sex and age. He recalls how he was often taken up 'as a man' in preference to Gray, 'when in fact he was 'simply one of her collaborators'. (Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008.) She came into personal conflict with John Pope Hennessy, the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Chair of the Art Panel of the Arts Council on a number of occasions. He was keen to reduce the importance of Gray's personal role to the exhibition as a whole, particularly after she made personal attacks on a number of officials whilst
In the months following the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, a decision was taken to postpone *Art in Revolution* for a year from its proposed January 1970 showing and revisit the idea in the summer of 1969. The then Director of Art, Gabriel White, wrote that the decision was based 'partly on principle and partly on expediency'; the later months of 1968 were not deemed an appropriate time to open negotiations with the Soviets over the exhibition.149 The Arts Council had 'enunciated no policy as a Council about artistic links with Russia and the other countries involved in the Czechoslovakian tragedy'.150 However, the decision to cancel was a complex one. Notwithstanding political events, the exhibition project and its timing had always been viewed cautiously both by the Arts Council and the Foreign Office. Financially, the show was 'extremely expensive' for the Arts Council.151 A postponement had already been discussed in depth during the summer of 1968, and the events in Czechoslovakia proved to be the final straw. It was feared that the exhibition would be too 'risky' and unlikely to be a success with the British public given the political mood post-August 1968.

Gray was 'extremely upset' at Exhibition committee's decision to postpone, accusing the Arts Council of using political circumstances as a

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Deeply upset in the aftermath of the exhibition's postponement in 1968. Pope Hennessy was keen to set up an alternative committee to organise the exhibition in which Gray would be 'no more than a single voice'. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Confidential letter from Pope Hennessy to Lord Goodman 18 October 1968

148 Pope Hennessy stated 'I should favour telling her in writing that i) she has no status whatever in relation to the exhibition since she is now a Soviet citizen, and ii) that we welcome official Soviet intervention in the exhibition and will deal direct with the Ministry of Culture or its representatives'. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 John Pope Hennessy to Robin Campbell, Arts Council 21 April 1970

149 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 from Gabriel White, Arts Council to R Brash, East-West Contact Dept, Foreign Office 21 November 1968

150 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Lord Goodman to Mr Milner-Gulland, 28 October 1968

151 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6. Arts Panel's view in discussions over postponement, reported in confidential letter from Pope Hennessy to Lord Goodman 18 October 1968. An initial budget of £21,000 (ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Gabriel White, Arts Council to Sir Robert Sainsbury, 23 July 1968) had been allocated (a figure which was to grow to £38,000 in the course of bringing the exhibition eventually to fruition). (ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Minute from Norbert Lynton to Robin Campbell 28 January 1971) Although money had already been committed by the second half of 1968, the combination of financial fears and worsening political relations with the USSR served to crystallise the decision to postpone.
smokescreen to avoid proceeding with the complex exhibition.\footnote{Gray claimed that there was no official British cultural policy to cancel cultural relations with the USSR. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Gray to Ben Whittaker, MP, House of Commons, 7 October 1968} She tried desperately to persuade the Arts Council to reconsider, contradicting her earlier assertions by suggesting that the exhibition could still be assembled entirely from Western sources.\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 White to R Brash, East-West Contact Dept, Foreign Office, 21 November 1968; AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Gray to Pope Hennessy, 23 September 1968} But the Arts Council believed that this would 'not be what we had all hoped for' as an exhibition.\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 White to Gray, 4 October 1968} The project was resumed in early 1969, and after months of 'neurotic anxiety' at the Arts Council, \textit{Art In Revolution} was finally staged.\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Joanna Drew, Assistant Director of Exhibitions, Arts Council, to Brian Dunce 6 August 1970}

\textit{Art in Revolution} was not part of an official bilateral Cultural Agreement; it was only 'facilitated' by a general clause in the current agreement encouraging collaboration in exhibitions. This put the show in an ambiguous position regarding Soviet collaboration: until the final months before the show, no written agreement covered each side's areas of responsibility, leaving the purpose and leadership behind the exhibition open to misinterpretation.\footnote{TNA National Archive FCO 34/106 Briefing paper for Adjournment Debate on the Anglo-Soviet Cultural Agreement 25 March 1971,} Gray's original exhibition proposal had been approved on the basis that it would potentially be possible to assemble the exhibition through Western and non-official Soviet channels.\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 White to Gray, 4 October 1968} She argued that there was an unofficial, partial rehabilitation of constructivism that she could tap into through her personal contacts.\footnote{e.g. All –Union Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics was built in Moscow in 1960 – had theoretical section – interest shown in 'the heritage of the Soviet Avant-garde of the Twenties' – the journal Decorative Art in the USSR 'even contrived to print a few articles about the theories of the early Russian Constructivists and Productivists.' Golomshtok, 'Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union' in Golomshtok and Glezer, \textit{Unofficial Art from the Soviet Union}. 100} However, the Foreign Office stated that an 'unofficial' Soviet exhibition was an impossibility. Soviet Galleries and museums required the approval of the Ministry of Culture before they could give any advice or help.\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 White, Arts Council to Sir Robert Sainsbury, 23 July 1968} Others thought that the subject matter was too controversial: John Morgan, the cultural attaché in Moscow, reported that in 1967 Constructivism was 'still
a very sensitive subject to the Soviet authorities and that we would be well advised not to pursue it with them.'\textsuperscript{160} The Foreign Office was equally cautious about organising an exhibition on such a sensitive subject. They stated that 'constructivism was not the kind of approach to art favoured in the Soviet Union' and advising that the exhibition should be postponed until the 'climate' was 'more favourable'.\textsuperscript{161}

The Foreign Office's wariness of the project intensified in the light of further controversy concerning Gray's Soviet visa requirements in May 1967. They warned the Arts Council that they were unable to 'give any support at the present time...to the proposed exhibition'.\textsuperscript{162} When the exhibition project threatened to fall apart in the period following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Gray's 'unofficial' negotiations and research carried out between 1966-68 – such as conversations with the Soviet ambassador, Sofinsky, and her dealings with friends in the USSR – carried little weight.\textsuperscript{163} In the aftermath of the Czech crisis, the possibility of staging the show without any Soviet input was discussed but rejected. Braun thought that an exhibition without Soviet contributions would be 'impossibly thin' and 'merely a repeat of Stockholm and other shows': its significance was conferred by its collaborative nature.\textsuperscript{164}

The exhibition project was cautiously revived in early 1969. The Foreign Office took a greater role in closely monitoring the now-official dealings with the USSR.\textsuperscript{165} They were concerned that 'official sponsorship' of the Soviet design exhibition might 'strengthen the Russian power to influence the content of the exhibition in an undesirable way'. Still uncertain about the value of the show, they warned the Arts Council that on a practical level:

\textsuperscript{160} Morgan's opinion is quoted in AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Cecil to White 16 May 1967
\textsuperscript{161} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Cecil to White 16 May 1967
\textsuperscript{162} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Cecil to Maxwell Hyslop, 31 May 1967
\textsuperscript{163} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 ref CL/USSR/6801H Confidential Notes from Meeting to Discuss Arts Exchanges with the USSR 1969-71 6 January 1969,
\textsuperscript{164} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1. Note from Robin Campbell of conversation with Prof Edward Braun 3 April 1970
\textsuperscript{165} In 1968, the Foreign Office became the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO); it continues to be referred to as the Foreign Office in this thesis for brevity.
...the Russians will only co-operate with the exhibition if they consider it as serving their present purposes....to promote a favourable view in this country of the present Soviet Union. 166

The first Foreign Office approved approach to the Soviet authorities in March 1969 received what was seen as a positive 'guarded approval' from the Soviet Ministry of Culture. 167 At around the same time, the Deputy Soviet Minister of Culture, Popov, met with Lord Goodman, Chairman of the Arts Council at the Anglo-Soviet Consultative Committee in London, informally agreeing in principle (though not the details of the implementation) that their respective organisations should work together towards the exhibition. 168 However, official confirmation from the USSR took longer to receive. 169 By February 1970, a year before the exhibition was proposed to take place, the Art Panel of the Arts Council were uncertain whether or not to cancel the show as they had still not received official confirmation from the USSR. It is speculation whether this was deliberate obstruction given the exhibition’s subject matter or a symptom of the inherent bureaucratic inefficiency of the USSR. 170 Similar delays were experienced in obtaining lists of exhibits from the USSR following visits to Moscow in May and September 1970: the Assistant Director of Exhibitions at the Arts Council complained of how all dealings with the Soviet Ministry of Culture were ‘desperately slow’. 171

Given that ‘Soviet and Western experts’ approached the art of the 1920s from ‘different and indeed contradictory standpoints’, how did the

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166 The Foreign Office insisted on seeing all Arts Council letters before they were sent to the Ministry of Culture, so that a ‘careful consideration’ of tactics could be made. In particular, the Foreign Office was worried that the Soviet side would insist on a greater ‘ideological content’ in the exhibition and wanted to avoid making ‘a firm commitment which would be used later by the Russians to apply pressure over the content of the exhibition’. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Brash, Foreign Office to Campbell, Arts Council, 12 February 1969
167 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 White, Arts Council to Mikhail N Smirnovsky, Soviet Ambassador, 11 March 1969; Minute from Joanna Drew to Gabriel White after speaking to Brash 3 April 1969
168 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 K Kirby, FCO, to Drew, Arts Council 22 April 1969
169 No further news had been forthcoming from the Ministry of Culture by December 1969. Concerned at the delay, the British Ambassador in Moscow was approached to press the Soviet authorities for a definite commitment. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Campbell, Director of Art, Arts Council to Sir Duncan Wilson, Ambassador in Moscow 3 February 1970
170 Braun says it is important not to underestimate the inefficiency of the USSR. He asserts that the Brezhnev period ‘wasn’t so much a period of violent confrontations and major incidents, but...a question more of fighting this very deadening and conservative bureaucracy.’ Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
171 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Drew to John Bowlt, 3 December 1970
negotiations over content work in practice? From the outset, the Arts Council recognised that bringing such an exhibition to fruition with the involvement of the Soviet Union would be problematic. The success of the collaboration would depend on how the show was presented to the USSR. Caution was exercised over the exact wording used in approaches to the Soviet authorities in order to cast the proposal in an acceptable light and avoid the 'unfortunate ideological connotations' of Constructivism: 'As the word 'Constructivist' is anathema to the Russians, we have changed the title to Soviet Design of the 20s.'

It was less actual exhibits that were needed from the USSR, than access to information: plans and data to assist with the reconstruction of architectural and theatrical models. Gray suggested that with 'tactful negotiation' it should be possible to obtain the material they needed from the USSR. She recommended keeping abstract painting and sculpture separate, as an antecedent to Constructivism, in order to 'encourage Russian cooperation'. But once cooperation was assured, the Soviet Ministry of Culture considered themselves the curators of Art in Revolution, not only controlling their contribution but also attempting to influence the models and exhibits amassed by the Arts Council. In a series of statements from March 1970 the Soviet side confirmed that the 'Ministry's intention is to supervise rather than just help with the exhibition'. The 'ownership' implied in this statement alarmed the Foreign Office who alerted the Arts Council that the Soviets:

...consider themselves responsible for the organisation of the Soviet Design Exhibition and while they are ready to accept [Gray's] suggestions they will themselves make all the final decisions about the themes and choice of materials for the Exhibition.

172 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Comment by Supagin at the Soviet Ministry of Culture recorded in James Bennett, Cultural Attaché in Moscow to Gabriel White 2 April 1969
173 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Gray to White 20 September 1967
174 The Art Panel had approved the suggestion for the exhibition on 25 January 1966. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 White, Arts Council to Sir Robert Sainsbury, 23 July 1968
175 Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
176 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 'Russian Constructivist Exhibition - Notes for Mr John Pope-Hennessy, July 18 1968' by Camilla Gray
177 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Soviet Note of Confirmation received 5 March 1970
178 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Kirby, Foreign Office to Campbell, Arts Council 25 March 1970
The Arts Council had been 'prepared' for some degree of Soviet 'supervision', 'behind the scenes if not openly'. However, this amount of control was far removed from the Arts Council's original request for 'co-operation in research and permission to work in the archives'. The issue of whether there was 'any degree of loaded supervision that would be unacceptable to us?' was debated at the Arts Council. When the delegation finally arrived from Moscow to supervise the setting up of the exhibition, Gray thought it was 'ominous' that Shvidkovsky's official title was given as 'Director of the Exhibition'.

Despite claiming ownership, the Ministry of Culture was incredibly slow in contributing to Art in Revolution. By the autumn of 1970, the Arts Council's concerns about the non-arrival of Soviet lists and data needed for construction of models were acute. Campbell approached the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Duncan Wilson to ask him to press the Soviet authorities for a definitely commitment. The lists were 'desperately needed' and 'alternative arrangements' would have to be made unless the Soviet side adhered to the agreement. In the meantime, Lynton had set about these 'alternative arrangements': sourcing loans from Western institutions and private collectors, and proceeding with commissioning and building the models. The idea that Western loans would supplement the Soviet contribution was not a new one. Such a move became imperative in the light of the Soviet delays over lists of exhibits.

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179 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Handwritten note by Campbell concerning letter 25 March 1970 from Kirby, Foreign Office.
180 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Minute from Drew to White, Arts Council, undated c, 1967
181 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Handwritten note by Campbell concerning letter 25 March 1970 from Kirby, Foreign Office.
182 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Gray to Norbert Lynton, 3 January 1971
183 e.g. AAD ACGB 121/40 File 1.7 Telegram to John Field, Cultural Attaché, Moscow from Arts Council 18 Nov 1970; Norbert Lynton, Arts Council to Mr V Karyagin, Soviet Embassy London 20 November 1970
184 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Campbell, Director of Art, Arts Council to Sir Duncan Wilson, Ambassador in Moscow 3 February 1970
185 Western loans included the Proun Room from the Stedelijk Museum, Eindhoven, Tatlin Reliefs constructed by Martyn Chalk AAD ACGB/121/40 File 1.5 List of Western Lenders
186 When the Arts Council were trying to make the Soviet assertion of ownership over the exhibition 'workable' in March 1970, the question of adding 'Western loans and Western interpretation / installation without offending' the Soviet side had been raised. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Handwritten note by Robin Campbell concerning letter 25 March 1970 from Kirby, Foreign Office.
The Arts Council attempted to work within the Soviet Ministry of Culture's perception that they controlled the exhibition. Two official visits to Moscow were made by Lynton, Gray and Braun in May and September 1970 to discover what material was available and possible to obtain, to establish contacts with critics and surviving artists,\(^{187}\) and to reach agreement on an outline scheme and lists of exhibits.\(^{188}\) Braun and Lynton had been briefed by Gray on how the Soviet conception of the period 1917-27 was 'likely to differ unacceptably' from her plans for the show, so that they could be prepared to 'counter any suggestions that would weaken the exhibition'.\(^{189}\)

The visits were difficult: although both Gray and Braun could negotiate fluently in Russian, negotiations were a 'thankless' task.\(^{190}\) The struggle for ownership of the exhibition was unspoken but ever-present during the visit: Lynton believed that the Soviet authorities were 'doing their best to run away with the exhibition without actually challenging us to a contest'. He correctly anticipated that 'battles' would have to be fought over the content of the lists.\(^{191}\)

The Arts Council was willing to compromise if the Ministry of Culture would be similarly flexible. In July 1970, Lynton accepted the first lists of exhibits suggested by the Soviet side 'as a step towards warmer collaboration' with the intention of trying to 'persuade them to be a bit more generous in certain directions'.\(^{192}\) The Arts Council continued to 'press for the inclusion of material not mentioned now but mutually agreed during our May talks'. This included such 'essential' exhibits as the typography of Rodchenko, and theatre pieces, which had been 'almost totally excluded' from the Soviet lists.\(^{193}\) However, there were some 'surprises' at the amount of 'difficult material' the Soviets appeared willing to include.\(^{194}\)

\(^{187}\) Braun recalls that on the first visit they met Melnikov in his House, and also Costakis, the collector of Soviet avant-garde works. Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
\(^{188}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Campbell, Art Council to Jackson, Moscow Embassy, 7 April 1970
\(^{189}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.4 Lawrence Gowing to Gray, 28 April 1970
\(^{190}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Lynton to John Field, Moscow Embassy 26 November 1970
\(^{191}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Handwritten letter from Norbert Lynton in Moscow, to Joanna Drew, 18 May 1970
\(^{192}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Lynton, Director of Exhibitions to Edward Fry, Associate Curator of the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, 8 September 1970
\(^{193}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Campbell to Field, Moscow Embassy 20 August 1970
\(^{194}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Lynton to Michael Brawne 27 August 1970

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secretly hoped that the Ministry of Culture could bring 'out of museum cellars the originals whose existence they usually deny', in practice, he was aware that this was highly unlikely.\textsuperscript{195} In negotiating the revised lists on the September visit, the Arts Council delegation was again accommodating: the Ministry of Culture insisted on the inclusion of figurative Soviet art post 1930. Agreeing to these figurative works was the 'price we are paying' for the Arts Council to access to the material they wanted.\textsuperscript{196}

This willingness to compromise was not without boundaries. Prior to the second official visit to Moscow, Campbell wrote that the Arts Council:

...will not agree to the Ministry's designing or arranging the exhibition, nor to its preparing the catalogue. They will have to trust us in this respect, as they trusted us over the Russian exhibition of 1967 at the Victoria and Albert Museum...Popov himself said at the final meeting in May that, while the concept of the exhibition would have to be the Ministry's the organising of the exhibition was the Arts Council's task.\textsuperscript{197}

That such a letter setting out clear demarcations of territory was necessary illustrates that the Ministry of Culture was seeking to take over aspects of the show which the Arts Council were desperate to retain control of. In January 1971, Lynton was forced to reiterate the boundaries again: "We are happy to credit the Ministry with its loans, and to thank them for their collaboration, but it is not a Ministry exhibition."\textsuperscript{198}

Nevertheless, in December 1970 'completely spurious\textsuperscript{199} revised exhibit lists arrived from the USSR. Lynton was alarmed: items jointly approved on the July version had been replaced with 'zeros':

Tatlin has disappeared; Lissitzky almost entirely omitted; ditto Rodchenko; no typography at all. Instead totally unsuitable material such as two 1970 sculptures.\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{195} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 2.4 Lynton to Dr Sarajas Korte, Department of Exhibitions, Helsinki 22 April 1971
\textsuperscript{196} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Lynton to Fry, Guggenheim Museum New York, 30 September 1970
\textsuperscript{197} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.1 Campbell to Field, Moscow Embassy, 20 August 1970
\textsuperscript{198} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Lynton 'Art in Revolution – Basic Debating Points (in case they are needed)' n.d. (end December1970-beginning January 1971)
\textsuperscript{199} Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
\textsuperscript{200} AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Lynton 'Art in Revolution – Basic Debating Points (in case they are needed)' n.d. (end December1970-beginning January 1971)
This was a 'substantial departure' from the lists jointly agreed in Moscow, to the extent that it was 'unacceptable'; Lynton wryly commented that: 'we bought a horse in September 1970, but they are sending us the wrong horse'.

It was apparent that the Ministry of Culture intended to assert control over the final choice of exhibits displayed. Gray had alerted the Arts Council in confidence about what the Soviet delegation coming to London in early 1971 would be tasked to do:

Not an iota is to be let up on the idea that the Ministry of Culture is the sole organiser of this exhibition and expects to control every aspect of it: contents, design, catalogue. A firm insistence to be shown on including all the later works which are being sent. Every attempt to be made to reduce the importance of the early period, in particular the Constructivists. Such I gather is the brief!

A month before the exhibition, Gray confidentially warned Lynton that the 'trickiest' items scheduled for display in the exhibition – Lissitzky's *Prouns*, Malevich's *Architectonics* and the Tatlin *Reliefs* – were on a 'separate list awaiting special permission' from the Soviets. The controversy which arose from these actions threatened to overshadow the entire exhibition.

However, Gray was hopeful that the staff at the Soviet Embassy would be more 'lenient' in discussions over content than the Ministry of Culture had been. Additionally, she claimed that the two Soviet representatives, Oleg Shvidkovsky and Nina Dubovitskaya, who were coming to assist with the exhibition would be relatively sympathetic to the Arts Council's views: they were 'both interested in obtaining as much as possible what we want without causing a scandal which would rebound on them'. The assertion that the Soviet representatives were somewhat reluctantly complying with the Ministry of Culture's instructions is supported by Lynton's anecdote concerning one particular monumental Stalinist-style sculpture intended

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201 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Lynton to Field, Cultural Attaché Moscow, 29 January 1971
202 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Lynton to Robin Campbell re Ministry of Culture lists Undated c. December 1970
203 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Confidential Gray in Moscow to Lynton, 17 January 1971
204 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Confidential Gray in Moscow to Lynton, 17 January 1971
for the room showing works from the 1930s onwards, which, by mutual consent, remained in its crate out of sight at the Hayward [Fig. 3.8].

Nevertheless, the hoped for ‘special permission’ for the ‘trickiest’ exhibits was not forthcoming. Immediately prior to the opening of the show, the Soviet Ministry of Culture demanded that certain pieces of ‘irrelevant’ abstract art be removed. These included original works such as Malevich’s abstract paintings, in addition to reconstructions, for example Tatlin’s Reliefs recreated by the British sculptor Martyn Chalk. It was another reconstruction, of Lissitzky’s Proun Room, that was to arouse the greatest controversy. The Proun Room was a 12-feet square cell containing abstract works on its walls. Designed in 1923, it was intended to give observers a new sense of space as they stood within. The Arts Council had been able to commission the Stedelijk Museum in Eindhoven to construct a replica version especially for Art in Revolution. The abstract room – described by Lynton as a ‘very, very beautiful thing’ – was immensely challenging to the Soviet officials. These works were construed as fine art, and as such did not comply with the Ministry of Culture’s view of the exhibition as demonstrating ‘the active part played by Soviet artists…in the transformation of the old world’. They argued that as abstract works they were not relevant to the subject of the exhibition. Additionally, these pieces had been obtained from Western sources: the Ministry of Culture asserted that they had no place in an official Soviet exhibition.

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205 “Shvidkovsky and co arrived 3 days before the exhibition. I remember, in his presence we opened up enormous crates of a 12 foot figure …erm…in aluminium, I think, of a woman, a standing female figure from some minor Russian city, with an arm raised, and sort of a flock of birds emerging from her arm, almost like a sort of like an unfortunate accident. Erm…and we stood looking at her, and we just shook our heads, you know, the Russians too! (laughs). But it was listed… at the last moment we had to make a printed catalogue of Russian, of things from Russia, so they could go back to Russia and say ‘look! This was shown’. And she’s in there, of course. But she never left the crate, she stayed downstairs in the Gallery.” - BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists’ Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004

206 Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008

207 Peter Hopkirk ‘Russians Censor Room Full of Art’ The Times 26 February 1971

208 The Stedelijk had already made its own reconstruction some years previously which was unavailable for Art in Revolution. Thus, they offered to build a new version for the Hayward show. Incidentally, the Stedelijk’s original model was the one used for the touring exhibition of Art in Revolution.

209 BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists’ Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004

210 Soviet Ministry of Culture’s statement quoted Peter Hopkirk ‘Russians Censor Room Full of Art’ The Times 26 February 1971
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The Ministry of Culture demanded that the works be removed or else they would withdraw their other contributions to the exhibition, causing a diplomatic scandal and a financial disaster for the Arts Council.\textsuperscript{211} The exhibition team wanted to oppose the Soviet demands. Edward Braun wanted the Arts Council to 'dig its heels in' and stand by its decision to display the art; Lynton felt that it was the 'core' of the exhibition, demonstrating how abstract art had evolved and then been applied in various fields of design, and should be included. But despite 'personal appeals' by Lord Goodman, Chairman of the Arts Council, to Popov, the Soviet Deputy Minister of Culture, the Soviet demands were agreed to and the works were withdrawn.\textsuperscript{212} The \textit{Proun Room}, a freestanding structure in the middle of a gallery, remained in situ but was sealed up [Fig. 3.9]:

Workmen have painted over the doorway. Only a vague outline indicates where...the door was.\textsuperscript{213}

Braun says the team working on the exhibition felt 'betrayed' by the Arts Council hierarchy, led by Lord Goodman, and supported by Lord Eccles, Minister responsible for the Arts who 'didn't think it was worth the scandal' of risking a diplomatic incident.\textsuperscript{214} To many critics, it appeared that 'among the Arts Council's overlords no one was anxious to face the consequences of offending the Russians'.\textsuperscript{215}

\textbf{CRITICAL REACTIONS TO SOVIET ART IN COLD WAR BRITAIN}

As the selection processes demonstrate, both the 1959 and 1971 exhibitions were intended by the Soviet authorities to present a closely managed, positive image of the arts of the USSR. But the same ambiguity that makes art a 'powerful weapon in cultural diplomacy', both innocent of and entwined with wider politics, also ultimately made these exhibitions

\textsuperscript{211} BLSC NLSC Interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004
\textsuperscript{212} Bernard Levin, 'Keeping an Exhibition Ideologically Germ-Free' \textit{The Times} 2 March 1971
\textsuperscript{213} Peter Hopkirk 'Russians Censor Room Full of Art' \textit{The Times} 26 February 1971
\textsuperscript{214} Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
\textsuperscript{215} John Russell 'London' in \textit{Art News}, April 1971
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unmanageable. The reactions of various British agencies - press, critics, government bodies and, in 1959, public - demonstrate that these displays of art were disobedient. They did not exist in a vacuum, and responses were informed by broader perceptions of art, culture, society and politics in the Soviet Union.

Such responses were not inevitably negative despite the prevailing political atmosphere of the Cold War. In 1959, the preparations for Russian Painting had been surrounded by enormous press and public excitement and anticipation. There were favourable reactions to the exhibition; however, most were let down by the quality and quantity of paintings on display. In part, the disappointment expressed by audiences was a result of dashed hopes for a comprehensive celebration of Russian art history.

Particularly prominent in the discourses which followed each show was the idea of banning or suppressing particular exhibits, styles of art or artists. Commentators frequently equated ideas of 'disappearing' art to 'disappearing' persons; hidden art was seen as symptomatic of a repressive, secretive society. The selective re-writing of historical narrative, shown at the 1967 historical exhibition Great Britain: USSR, was demonstrated again in the Soviet-controlled stories of artistic development on display in 1959 and 1971. Especially in 1971, press responses to the exhibition used more space discussing what was not seen rather than what was. Some critics tried to redress the balance, noting that 'it seems foolish to lament over the absent exhibits when so many important works are shown.' The stories of censorship that surrounded each exhibition could be more influential than the exhibitions themselves, creating a British narrative of Cold War art, overlying the Soviet message. The implication by many British critics was that it was wrong to use art for political gain, although the idea that art was not used in this way in the

216 Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s." 97
217 Andrew Causey 'Art in the Russian Revolution' Illustrated London News 20 March 1971, 29
West was a myth.\textsuperscript{218} Although the USSR's promotion of politicised art was castigated, other nations, notably the USA, were equally implicated in such tactics during the Cold War. These exhibitions were generally presented in the British press as validating preconceived ideas about the totalitarian Soviet Union. This section examines each exhibition in turn, analysing the British responses.

1959's \textit{Russian Painting} generated an extraordinarily detailed and broad range of press coverage. As such, it is possible to analyse the critical response in some detail. Unusually, there are also opportunities to investigate the usually elusive and transient public opinions of the show.\textsuperscript{219} At the request of the Soviet authorities, a visitors' book was placed at the exhibition to record comments, be they complementary, 'derogatory', 'rude' or 'silly' [Fig. 3.10].\textsuperscript{220} Visitors' books are not straightforward records of what the audience 'really thought'; however, when their contents are used cautiously, can be lively and illuminating sources.\textsuperscript{221} Although the book was returned to the Soviets after the exhibition, British journalists were fascinated by these public comments and recorded them in a number of articles.\textsuperscript{222} These articles give an idea of the international audience drawn by the rare opportunity of seeing Russian art: comments were made in a variety of languages and alphabets.\textsuperscript{223} \textit{The Times} noted that the range of opinions expressed in the visitors' book made it difficult to form a coherent summary: 'absolute praise alternates with absolute condemnation'.

\textsuperscript{218} Sinfield has noted how from the late 1940s Western culture was 'good' culture whereas any political purpose was identified with the political cultural theories of Stalin and Zhdanov. Sinfield, \textit{Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain}. 103
\textsuperscript{219} As Garlake has recorded, 'The compound of rumour and prejudice known as public opinion is notoriously difficult to assess....this collective voice was seldom heard directly, since though people flocked in their thousands to important exhibitions, they were rarely invited to record their reactions'. Garlake, \textit{New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society}. 34
\textsuperscript{220} One visitor wrote to the Arts Council demanding that the book be withdrawn as many of the comments were rude towards the Soviets. The writer did not approved of the Soviet art itself, saying she found the 'Tractor Driver's Supper School nauseating', but was instead horrified by the lack of manners of the visitors. AAD Arts Council Archive ACGB/121/906 MBL Gerakis to White 2 March 1959; White to MBL Gerakis, 4 March 1959.
\textsuperscript{221} Susan Reid has analysed in some detail the complicated issues surrounding the use of comments in Soviet visitors books as historical sources. See Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited." And Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959."
\textsuperscript{222} E.g. 'Russians invite criticism', \textit{The Scotsman} 30 Jan 1959
\textsuperscript{223} 'Visitor's Book' \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 20 January 1959
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The visitors' book also revealed a mixed response: there were both positive and negative comments about the artworks. *The Times* suggested that enthusiastic remarks came mainly from 'the layman, the visitor who knows nothing about art' whereas 'adverse criticism' came from 'the more expert visitor, such as the art student or painter'.224 Reactions tended to focus on the Soviet section: one believed this provided a 'good example of how not to paint'. Other comments were more political, highlighting the artists' lack of freedom with slogans such as 'Art cannot be chained but you have chained it' and 'I should like to see the ones that did not leave the studio'.225 However, some visitors approved of the absence of abstract styles, seeing it as a victory for common sense:

Thank goodness that the Russians have remained sane, that we have had no 'abstract' or 'tachist' or 'action' paintings in this most stimulating and interesting collection.

Another expressed relief that at least there were 'no surrealists'.226 Such comments support Lindey's argument that popular Western taste in the Cold War demonstrated a strong preference for figurative and realist art.227 Relatively low public attendances at the USA's abstract expressionism show *New American Painting*,228 which overlapped with the showing of *Russian Painting*, also reinforce this view.229

Both public and press alike judged the exhibition on whether it fulfilled the high standards that had been expected after the long period of excited anticipation: 'Clearly, people have long wanted to see Russian art and many of their comments are influenced by whether the exhibition has lived

224 'Serious Approach to Soviet Art – Visitors air their opinions' *The Times* January 1959
225 Visitors responses recorded in AAD ACGB/121/906 MBL Gerakis to White 2 March 1959
226 Comment in visitors' book recorded in 'Serious Approach to Soviet Art – Visitors air their opinions' *The Times* January 1959
228 Entry to this Tate exhibition, which ran for four weeks from 24 February 1959, was free. It was seen by 14,718 visitors; Caute points out that the Russian exhibition ran for 9 weeks and attracted around 5 times as many visitors, despite an entry charge, claiming that this was due to the type of art on display. Whilst there may be other factors which affected attendance – such as the usual inaccessibility of Soviet art – some assumptions about the attractiveness of abstract art to the public in general may be inferred. Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War.* 555
229 This exhibition was held from 24 February-22 March 1959. For more on this, see Garlake, *New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society,* 24; Krenn, *Fall out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War.*
up to their expectations.\textsuperscript{230} In general, the show did not. Yet of the comments that were recorded, automatic condemnations along political lines were mixed with more considered responses. Reactions to the realist art of the USSR were by no means uniformly unfavourable: some complained of the small number of exhibits or the particular choice of socialist realist works, but did not automatically condemn the style.

There could be a genuine desire to see and to understand, and positive and negative responses were certainly not necessarily divided neatly along political lines. Professor Bodkin, a 'vociferous right-wing critic' was immensely supportive of the art displayed in the show.\textsuperscript{231} This pro-realist writer asserted that visitors 'will be privileged to enjoy a unique experience' on visiting the exhibition.\textsuperscript{232} His supportive stance towards the display of Russian painting was shared by the left-wing critic John Berger who attacked the 'assumed superiority' and the 'defensiveness' of public and press comments about the show.\textsuperscript{233} Unsurprisingly, the \textit{Daily Worker} was almost wholly supportive of the show, running a series of articles on the history of Russian art and countering claims made against the exhibition in the mainstream press.\textsuperscript{234}

It was difficult objectively to evaluate the 'virtual photography'\textsuperscript{235} of socialist realism from a Western standpoint, and the responses to \textit{Russian Painting} confirm that political views frequently underlay the judgements made of the typical array of portraits, history paintings, and genre paintings of workers and collective farmers that barely filled the Royal Academy.\textsuperscript{236} Some commentators were overtly political; others used issues of 'bad taste' and complaints of the 'old fashioned' nature of the art to register their disapproval.\textsuperscript{237} Responses to certain paintings in the 1959

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{230} 'Serious Approach to Soviet Art - Visitors air their opinions' \textit{The Times} January 1959
\item \textsuperscript{231} Garlake, Garlake, \textit{New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society}. 23
\item \textsuperscript{232} Professor Thomas Bodkin 'Russian Art Exhibition' \textit{Birmingham Post} 31 December 1958
\item \textsuperscript{233} John Berger, \textit{New Statesman} 7 Feb 1959
\item \textsuperscript{234} Charles Morris in the \textit{Daily Worker} wrote articles including 'The Spring of Soviet Painting' and 'The Art of a New Society'
\item \textsuperscript{235} Groys, "The Art of Totality." 110
\item \textsuperscript{236} Caute, \textit{The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War}. 516
\item \textsuperscript{237} Nicholas' study of Soviet dance troupes' visits to the UK in the mid 1950s comments on a similar phenomenon where British dance critics complained of the 'vulgarity' of Soviet steps and ballet lifts
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
exhibition – most notably the Kukryniksy depiction of Hitler – used such value judgements, implying ideological and political disapproval. Western reactions to Soviet socialist realism could also encompass a moral judgement about the society from which it came. Critics warned how the ‘dream of happiness’ presented in such sunny images was no more than an illusion. Yet as a whole the socialist realism shown was not feared for its insidious ideological content; instead, the press reports depicted it more as a ‘warning’ against communism. Russian Painting was interpreted as a clear demonstration of the lack of freedoms of the Soviet artist, and by extension, the USSR as a whole.

Issues of poor presentation and bad taste were conflated with political criticisms by press and visitors alike. Because there were comparatively few paintings on display in such a large area – 122 works in 11 spacious Academy galleries – a number of press comments focused on the poor state of the walls, ‘bare expanses of grey fabric riddled with nail holes’. Although complex exhibition installations were not used in the 1950s – one Arts Council commentator later described how ‘you put them on the walls and that was it’ - this ‘bleak’ effect was criticised for being inadequate for such an important exhibition. It detracted from the works: only ‘dazzling masterpieces’ could compete against the setting. The Academy was criticised for not honouring their visitors more ‘graciously’. However, they attributed both the ‘sadly shabby’ presentation and the sparseness of exhibits to the Soviet authorities, who had been ‘offered

in contrast to Western styles. Nicholas, "Fellow Travellers: Dance and British Cold War Politics in the Early 1950s." 89
238 Groys, "The Art of Totality." 99
239 ‘London Letter- We see a dream of happiness...” The Scotsman, 31 December 1958
240 Neville Wallis, ‘Russian Painting in Piccadilly / Art for the People’, The Observer, 4 January 1959
241 Interestingly, although it was interpreted by some commentators as being particularly 'Russian', such shabby presentation was not exclusive to the Russian exhibition. Spanish critics at the 1920-21 Winter Exhibition of Spanish Old Masters at the RA had been similarly shocked by the condition of the walls, then ‘bull’s blood’ in colour and ‘covered in holes from previous exhibitions’. Haskell, The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition. 108
242 ‘The West Gets its first view of Russian Painting’ from Our Art Critic, The Times 31 December 1958
243 Neville Wallis, ‘Russian Painting in Piccadilly / Art for the People’, The Observer 4 January 1959
244 Frederick Laws ‘Ikon Best of Russian Art – Unrepresentative Exhibition’ Manchester Guardian 31 December 1958
much more space than they took up'.  

Some approved: one journalist was told by the RA that the Soviets 'liked what they called the elephant-hide grey of the walls left bare': he approved of the 'rightness' of that choice. The idea that the Soviets intrinsically preferred meagre and tarnished objects was later resurrected in discussions about their failure to clean the magnificent Kremlin silver at Great Britain: USSR (V&A, 1967). The Daily Telegraph also praised the sparse presentation, preferring it to the crowded summer Academy shows and using the opportunity to comment that the grubbiness was evidence of the Academy's 'honorable poverty...no disgrace'.

The sixteen glittering icons on show were roundly praised as 'the best paintings there'. The Listener said that 'these are revealed as major works of art, both radiant and subtle in colour, the glory of Byzantine painting miraculously sustained while elsewhere the Renaissance ran its course'. However, the majority of press dwelt on the politically charged 20th Century section of the exhibition, in particular the Soviet paintings.

Lindey had highlighted how the didactic, idealised style of socialist realism depended, in Western eyes, upon an 'outdated' artistic style that was 'irrelevant' in the post-war period. She notes how such views, while containing some truth, disclose much about Western high art judgements and anti-Soviet sentiments. Reactions to Russian Painting followed suit. The mainstream press tended to focus on how 'old fashioned' an exclusively realist show appeared to many British eyes in 1959. The Yorkshire Post believed it to be so out of date that the Academy's first President, Sir Joshua Reynolds, would approve. Stylistically, the show

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246 Editorial Daily Telegraph 31 December 1958
247 'London Letter- We see a dream of happiness...' The Scotsman, 31 December 1958
248 'Russia on Munnings' Daily Telegraph 1 Jan 1958
249 Frederick Laws 'Ikons Best of Russian Art - Unrepresentative Exhibition' Manchester Guardian 31 December 1958
250 Lindey makes a pertinent point: the degree of realism is in the eye of the beholder. To a 'Ukrainian peasant' accustomed to folk arts, such paintings may have appeared the 'height of modernity' because of their sophisticated, 'perfect, polished illusionism.' Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962. 61
251 'Opening day for the Russian art show' Yorkshire Post 12 Dec 1958
was construed as harking 'Back to the Czars': it echoed styles of fifty years previously, which one elderly critic recalled seeing in pre-revolutionary St Petersburg. The Star was slightly more favourable in its measurement of how out of fashion the paintings appeared. It noted how the 'products of the Communist era' bore 'an extraordinary resemblance to the sort of painting that filled Royal Academy summer exhibitions thirty years ago'. In its editorial, the prestigious Burlington Magazine spluttered:

We are amazed to discover that some bear dates after the end of the Second World War, and we can only suppose that a collection of musty art periodicals dating from the turn of the century and a few later ones still paying safe, have been finding their way through the iron curtain.

The writer was shocked that one painting, dated 1950, seemed stylistically 100 years old, 'a kind of fusion of Wilkie and the pre-Raphaelites'. One commentator raised a rhetorical puzzle: 'Why is modern Russian art so old fashioned?'. Such criticisms were particularly timely, given that the self-consciously modern New American Painting was being displayed in the same city. These accusations of 'time-lags' and 'outdatedness', whilst understandable from a British perspective, were themselves part of a Cold War rhetoric by which Western art critics negotiated Soviet art.

It was the realism of the Soviet paintings that seemed alien and old fashioned to many British critics, yet realism remained popular in Britain. Understandably, the location of the show led a number of critics to conflate the Soviet promotion of realist painting with popular opinion — often unfavourable - of the Royal Academy. Around the time of Russian Painting, the Secretary of the RA remarked in an interview that the institution was not necessarily hostile to contemporary trends in painting.

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254 Hannen Swaffer, "Back to the Czars", Daily Herald 31 December 1958
255 Hitler in the Bunker – as Soviet Artists See it” by Star Art Critic The Star 13 December 1958
257 Wilma Moy Thomas ‘This Russian art’s an eye-opener – The modern stuff is 50 years out of date’ News Chronicle 31 December 1958
258 Lindey notes a New York critic saying that such paintings suffered from 'a time-lag of fifty years'. Quotation from Milton Gendel, 'The Iron Curtain in the glass factory', Art News, September 1956 in Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962. 62
and tried to 'encourage the best in different kinds of painting'. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that 'the public tends to judge us by the more explosive remarks of our presidents': 259 (This was a reference to Munnings' famous 1949 outburst against modernist art. 260) He was correct: one comment in the visitors' book asserted that the exhibition was 'roughly on a par with the annual Royal Academy summer exhibition' before adding that this was 'no compliment'. 261 Bernard Hollowood's series of cartoons in Punch also noted that Churchill would approve of the Soviet show, and that there must be 'Munningses' in the USSR  [Fig. 3.11]. 262 The News Chronicle commented that paintings such as AP Levitin's A Warm Day were 'quite at home' on the Academy's walls 'being in a style we know well here'. 263 Others could see the rationale for a realist exhibition, but complained that the selection was so poor: not only were there few exhibits, but they were not the best examples. 264

Some complained that the 'realism' of Soviet art was not realistic at all. The Burlington Magazine claimed that the paintings looked back to a 'reactionary' style of the first decade of the twentieth century that, by 1910, was already derided as 'unrealistic'. 265 More pertinently, others located the lack of realism in the idealised and propagandist images on display. For many Western observers, the ideas of 'propaganda' and 'true art' were mutually exclusive, and thus the Soviet pieces were dismissed. 266 By portraying an optimistic, idealised image of life as it should be rather than as it was, Russian Painting was perceived not only to censor dangerous 'formalist' works, but also deliberately to omit any negative elements.

259 Monica Furlong, 'Interview with Humphrey Brooke, Secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts' Tatler 11 Feb 1959, 250, 257
260 Garlake, New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society, 23
261 'Serious Approach to Soviet Art – Visitors air their opinions' The Times January 1959
262 Punch, 14 January 1959. The Telegraph commented that in Russia, Munnings is considered the greatest British painter, 'an opinion they expressed strongly to members of the Arts Council committee that went to Russia to make the arrangements for the present exhibition'. 'Russia on Munnings', Daily Telegraph 1 January 1958
263 Wilma Moy Thomas "This Russian art's an eye-opener – The modern stuff is 50 years out of date" News Chronicle 31 December 1958
266 Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962 67-8
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of reality.\textsuperscript{267} The promotion of a seemingly ‘false’ realism went hand in hand with the suppression of non-figurative works in the eyes of British critics:

The Russians conveniently forget that they themselves moved away from realism at the same time as we did (though they have done their best to conceal this fact in the exhibition) and produced a more vital art along the lines of abstraction than they have along any other time since the Revolution...\textsuperscript{268}

The deliberate omission of certain varieties of painting, coupled with claims that they had never existed, led British journalists to emphasise what was absent in their commentaries:

No collection can be judged fully representative which omits such pioneers as Malevich, Kandinsky or Chagall.\textsuperscript{269}

Critical debates over issues of propaganda, realism, censorship and taste were centered on two artists, both shown in Gallery IX: Alexander Deineka and the group known as Kukriniksy.

Comparisons made between two paintings by Deineka crystallised serious discussion over realism and lack of freedom in Soviet art for the British press and public. The first, the Defence of Petrograd (1928) [Fig. 3.12] was a dramatic, experimental and stylised work, praised for being ‘simple, direct and impressive’.\textsuperscript{270} Alongside it, Deineka’s later work, the sun-lit Moscow Relay Race of 1947 painted under Stalinist restrictions [Fig. 3.13], could not have been more different. It was derided for being ‘an exercise in chocolate-box realism: every dimple in place’.\textsuperscript{271} For many visitors, this contrast acted as both proof of and a warning against the Soviet system.

To Western eyes, ‘trained to see progressions away from rather than towards illusionism’, Deineka’s transition towards realism seemed topsy-turvy and confusing.\textsuperscript{272} One query in the visitors’ book asked ‘What happened to make him paint the ‘Relay Race’ picture?’; beneath, another

\textsuperscript{267} Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962, 65
\textsuperscript{268} Benedict Nicolson ‘Editorial: Soviet Painting at the Royal Academy’ The Burlington Magazine No. 671, Vol CI, February 1959 43
\textsuperscript{269} Neville Wallis “Russian Painting in Piccadilly / Art for the People” The Observer, 4 January 1959
\textsuperscript{270} Frederick Laws “Ikons Best of Russian Art – Unrepresentative Exhibition” Manchester Guardian 31 December 1958
\textsuperscript{271} “Russia in Oils” Evening Standard 1 Jan 1959
\textsuperscript{272} Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962, 22
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member of public hinted at the pressures applied to artists by the communist authorities: ‘Perhaps it is to easy to guess’. The usual critical response was to assume that some ‘sinister’ business had resulted in the ‘remarkable artist’ who produced ...Petrograd descending nineteen years later to the ‘banality’ of the Relay Race. But again, this reaction - that a naturalistic style was inevitably the result of official coercion - reveals more about the British perceptions of the Soviet artistic system and of the development of modern art. The art historian Christina Kiaer has challenged this view of Deineka’s stylistic movement towards a more realistic style, arguing that the shift was rather the result of changes in what the artist viewed as ‘appropriate revolutionary art’. She presents a more balanced picture, where artists such as Deineka could be ‘creators as well as victims of Socialist Realism’.

Most critics made great play of the discrepancies between the two paintings, which had conveniently been displayed side by side. ...Petrograd was praised by many as one of the best paintings in the Soviet section of the exhibition, where ‘passion and propaganda for once fuse’. The Burlington Magazine described it as the ‘only...work of real artistic merit’ in the entire exhibition, claiming that it ‘could hold its own in the company of Wyndham Lewis or even of Léger.’ In fact, had the exhibition been held earlier, it was unlikely that the striking Defence of Petrograd would have been chosen by the Soviet authorities. It was only in the late 1950s that such works from the 1920s and early 1930s were subject to a ‘partial rehabilitation and reassessment’ that resulted in them being ‘proudly exhibited, published and praised.’ Without this painting, British critics would have only seen the ‘poster’-like image of Deineka’s

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273 ‘Serious Approach to Soviet Art – Visitors air their opinions’ The Times January 1959
274 Benedict Nicolson ‘Editorial: Soviet Painting at the Royal Academy’ The Burlington Magazine No. 671, Vol CI, February 1959 43
276 Denys Sutton, “Russian Painting” Financial Times, 6 January 1959
278 Lindey, Art in the Cold War: From Vladivostok to Kalamazoo, 1945-1962. 42
Relay Race – which they condemned as exemplifying ‘almost every known view of colour, composition and sentiment’.279

That the later Deineka painting was a much poorer work seemed indisputable to British observers, even those who sought to defend the USSR. But although the British communist press conceded that the later work was of a lesser quality, they did not attribute this to the restrictions imposed on artists by the Soviet authorities. The Daily Worker asserted that both paintings were examples of ‘socialist realism’, and that the Relay Race painting was not bad simply because it was ‘state directed’. Instead, the artist was at fault: ‘one is a powerful work of art and the other an inefficient coloured drawing in which no single problem has been solved’.280 The critic John Berger also argued against claims that ‘state interference’ was to blame for this ‘poor’ art. He accused visitors and the press of ‘confused thinking’: not only, he claimed, was the Relay Race not propaganda, he also criticised what he saw as the mistaken – but widespread - belief that ‘propaganda equals bad art’.281

The propaganda of socialist realism did not merely equal ‘bad art’ to many British observers: it also equalled ‘bad taste’. Many of the Soviet paintings were accused of being throwaway graphic art: Deineka’s Relay Race was condemned as ‘a bad poster for Butlins’282, whilst another visitor suggested that such artists could find gainful employment designing ‘British Railways posters’ or ‘advertisements for savings stamps’.283

There was a serious political purpose behind such accusations: one journalist thanked the Academy for presenting the show because its ‘dullness’ was a ‘timely warning’ of ‘forcing communistic fetters on the muses’.284 This was artistic propaganda which had the opposite effect in

279 Frederick Laws ‘Ikons Best of Russian Art – Unrepresentative Exhibition” Manchester Guardian 31 December 1958
281 John Berger, New Statesman 7 Feb 1959
282 Visitors responses recorded in AAD ACGB/121/906 MBL Gerakis to White 2 March 1959
283 ‘Serious Approach to Soviet Art – Visitors air their opinions’ The Times January 1959
284 Pierre Jeannerat ‘These Russian Artists are So Provincial’ Daily Mail 31 December 1958
Britain to the one intended, alerting visitors to the terrible effects of Stalinist repression on art. Such warnings were re-iterated by the Daily Telegraph:

No political or sociologist should miss it, if only to see what happens when a country cuts itself off from the mainstream of European culture – and its leaders have the gall to dictate to its artists.285

The Listener vividly imagined a looking-glass Britain where Soviet-style restrictions had been imposed. In this contrary vision, Victorian history paintings such as When Did You Last See Your Father? were the crowd-pullers, whilst:

...under lock and key in the deepest cellars would be the Camden Town Group, the vorticists, Paul Nash and so on; only if you were a close and trusted friend of Sir John Rothenstein would you be allowed a glimpse of a Matthew Smith....286

Rather than promoting the Soviet system, the Evening Standard believed that a 'stroll round the four galleries devoted to Soviet art [was] more effective in deflating Communism than any polemical denunciation'.287

The painting which aroused the most press anticipation and also the most vitriolic comments for its perceived low-brow content was The Last Days of Hitler's Staff in the Reichschancellory Bunker, also referred to as The End [Fig. 3.14]. This large canvas had been painted in 1948 by a collective of three artists known as Kukryniksy, famous for their satirical wartime anti-Nazi caricatures. It was sent directly to London following its display as part of the exhibition of Soviet contemporary art at the Brussels Worlds Fair in 1958. Probably due to its subject matter – not only emotive in its own right, but which was undoubtedly intended to arouse recollections of the alliance between Britain and the USSR against the Nazis – the painting captured the attention of both press and public. Before its arrival, the Beaverbrook press eagerly described it as an 'extraordinary' painting, 'perhaps the most dramatic painting ever shown at the Academy'. It depicted 'a raving

285 Editorial Daily Telegraph 31 December 1958
286 Alan Clutton-Brock 'Russian Painting at Burlington House' The Listener, January 1 1959, 287 'Russia in Oils' Evening Standard 1 Jan 1959
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Fuehrer clutching at his throat, while round him, drunk and hopeless, his few remaining followers await the inevitable end.\(^{288}\)

However, any hopes of reviving nostalgia for the British-Soviet alliance were soon dashed. Critics correctly predicted that it would both draw crowds and divide audiences.\(^{289}\) Not only was it accused of being 'bad in composition, blatant in melodrama' it also had 'that slick capability of draughtsmanship suitable for back-page illustration in a pulp magazine.'\(^{290}\)

Although Munnings praised the piece,\(^{291}\) the bad-taste excesses of the painting were roundly mocked: the *Architects Journal* commented that it was too much like something from a television Goon show to be taken seriously.\(^{292}\) Some even accused it of being smaller than the Soviets had claimed prior to the exhibition, as it the exaggeration of its size mirrored the exaggerated claims of the USSR.\(^{293}\) The 'so called macabre, horrible, sensational picture' was in reality 'tame': Hitler looked more like Charlie Chaplin's Great Dictator, with 'eyes popping'.\(^{294}\) Even members of the Academy staff were unable to resist commenting on the bad taste of the painting. Mr Rushbury, Keeper of the RA claimed it was 'pure Hitchcock – at his worst'.\(^{295}\)

Conversely, critics found much to praise in *Art in Revolution*. Most remarked upon was Brawne's innovative installation: this 'lively design'\(^{296}\) was celebrated for capturing the excitement and 'euphoria' of the brief revolutionary period.\(^{297}\) Although surviving press photographs convey some of the striking nature of the design, they do not capture the bold colour scheme [Fig. 3.15]. Brawne recreated some of the display

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\(^{288}\) "Russia Sends Painting of Hitler's Last Day", *Daily Express* 16 December 1958


\(^{290}\) Jon S Munro, 'Unique Exhibition of 122 Paintings from Russia" *Glasgow Herald*, 31 Dec 1958

\(^{291}\) Cauta, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, 532

\(^{292}\) "The Russian Paintings' *Architects Journal* 8 Jan 1959

\(^{293}\) The painting noticeably 'shrank' in relation to its dwindling popularity with the press. When the papers were full of anticipation, estimates of its size ranged from 8ft by 10ft to 11ft by 13ft. One wholly unfavourable review after the opening said the 'tame' picture was a mere 6ft 6in by 8ft 2in. *Daily Mirror*, 31 December 1958

\(^{294}\) Quoted in "Soviet Paintings in Piccadilly / Moscow Would like Our Turners", *Daily Worker*, 31 December 1958

\(^{295}\) Paul Overy, "The Light That Failed" *Financial Times* 2 March 1971

\(^{296}\) Review of Art in Revolution by David Dickson, *Scientist and Science Journal* 4 March 1971
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techniques current at the time of the Russian revolution, when the avant-garde created audacious art to influence a largely illiterate, rural population. The Illustrated London News described how, inside the ‘vast’ Hayward:

Old newsreels are projected, and wall-length photo-montages recreate some of that sense of urgency, the dynamism, and the feeling for the heroic stature of heavy industry that the Bolsheviks so deeply felt. These are not only propaganda, they are also the projections of a genuine idealism. An attempt has been made to recreate the flavour of the agit-prop campaigns, the trains and boats painted all over with slogans that toured the countryside...

The extensive use of film – in particular, a montage created by Lutz Becker entitled The First Years of the Soviet Union, compiled from original Soviet documentary footage (1917-25) – was unusual. Becker’s film was deliberately edited ‘in the manner of the period’, but was intended for synchronised projection onto three screens, so that ‘concurrent historical events can be shown simultaneously and can be allowed to comment on each other.’ In conjunction with the Hayward exhibition, the National Film Theatre screened a programme of early Soviet films. This type of ‘environmental exhibition’ was a rare sight in Britain at that time.

The dramatic architectural and theatrical models, many of which were constructed with the assistance of architectural students, were also singled out for particular praise. Outside the Hayward, the 40 foot high ‘lovely red Tatlin tower’ leaned out over Waterloo Bridge, an ‘impressive symbol of the exhibition’ [Fig. 3.16]. Even those who did not visit the gallery could see that something unusual was happening:

298 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Brawne – Design Notes for the ‘Exhibition of Post-Revolutionary Soviet Art’
299 However, the reviewer claimed that this attempt to recreate the spirit of revolutionary Russia was not fully successful: ‘One poster in an exhibition is not as effective as the same poster on every street corner.’ Andrew Causey ‘Art in the Russian Revolution’ Illustrated London News 20 March 1971, 29
301 For those few who had visited the Soviet Union, the innovatory design also highlighted the gulf between contemporary exhibition design in the USSR and the experimental installations of the revolutionary period 1920s, in particular Lissitzky’s new conceptions of space in the Proun Room. Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
302 Brawne’s specialist architectural knowledge was also invaluable in the architectural display and model making. Preface, Catalogue: Art in Revolution (1971) 7
303 Evan Anthony, Spectator 13 March 1971
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From all over town the Tatlin Tower could be seen. Painted bright red, it stood on the museum’s balcony. For the first time it was possible to imagine the inner structure of separate inhabitable buildings.\(^{304}\)

This extraordinary sight transformed the skyline of that part of London for the duration of the show. It was celebrated by journalists of all political persuasions: the *Evening Standard* complimented this ‘Russian castle in the air on [a] London river’\(^{305}\) whilst the *Morning Star* lauded it as a ‘Monument to the Future of Humanity’.\(^{306}\) The *New Statesman* thought that there was ‘something loveable and very touching’ about the ‘remarkable reconstruction’, claiming that it was ‘perhaps the only truly poetic work in the exhibition.’\(^{307}\)

However, responses to *Art in Revolution* were dominated by discussion of the perceived Soviet ‘censorship’ of a British show. Both Houses of Parliament were concerned at the level of intervention allowed by the Soviet government. There were concerns that British public funds were being used for an event where the USSR could ‘lay down terms’ and dictate the content. In the upper House, Lord Eccles had to defend the Arts Council’s decision to accept the Soviet demands.\(^{308}\) In the Commons, MPs enquired whether future cultural exchanges would be permitted where the Soviet Union could exercise a right to censorship.\(^{309}\)

Most of the British press presented the Arts Council’s actions as a complete capitulation to Soviet demands. One paper stated that the Arts Council ‘should have said no to this nonsense’ over withdrawals.\(^{310}\) Using Cold War tinged language of repression and exaggerated reporting of the Soviets’ actions, some journalists complained of how ‘a complete room’

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304 John Russell ‘London’ in *Art News*, April 1971
305 *Evening Standard*, 25 February 1971
306 ‘Monument to the Future of Humanity’, *Morning Star*, 26 February 1971
308 AAD ACGB/121/40 box 1.3 Question concerning Art in Revolution Hansard 17 March 1971
309 Answer: the ‘terms in which they take place in this country are entirely a matter for the organisations such as the Arts Council which arrange them’. TNA FCO 34/106 Parliamentary Question 8 March 1971 from Mr Bruce-Gardyne, South Angus to Mr Anthony Royle, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
310 Paul Overy, ‘The Light That Failed’ *Financial Times* 2 March 1971
had been ‘rendered invisible’ at an ‘order from Moscow’. \(^{311}\) This story of a room ‘papered over’ as if it had never existed appealed to the British public’s mental image of a totalitarian Stalinist USSR. \(^{312}\) The scale of the Soviet contribution that could potentially have been withdrawn was expanded. \(^{313}\) Lynton countered that the withdrawals were ‘small’ items from one section of the exhibition, and to have refused the Soviet demands to remove them would have put the exhibition at risk. \(^{314}\)

The banned \textit{Proun Room} also grew out of all recognition in the minds of critics and press: starting as a ‘room full of art’ sealed off for ‘ideological reasons’, \(^{315}\) reports gradually exaggerated its size, imagining it as a whole gallery full of abstract pieces. Lynton complained about such ‘careless and negative press’ comments: ‘yesterday I actually read a commentator’s description of how he stood watching workmen seal up a gallery containing works by Lissitzky, Malevich and Tatlin.’ \(^{316}\) Whether as a result of a misunderstanding about the nature of the \textit{Proun Room}, lazy, sensationalist journalism or lingering Cold War resentments, Lynton was concerned about the effect this publicity would have on the success of the show. He was anxious that the public did not think that ‘all the important works have been omitted’ and decide not to visit the show. \(^{317}\) Nonetheless, more considered critical responses took issue at the deception implicit in hiding the exhibits: the Lissitzky room was concealed ‘so cunningly that many visitors must be totally unaware that a large piece of the second floor has been closed off.’ \(^{318}\)

\(^{312}\) Bernard Levin, ‘Keeping an Exhibition Ideologically Germ-Free’ \textit{The Times} 2 March 1971
\(^{313}\) ‘Russians Censor Room Full of Art’, Peter Hopkirk, \textit{The Times} 26 February 1971
\(^{314}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 ‘Telephone Conversation with Mr Thom’ 11 March 1971 summarised by Lynton, to Secretary General of the Arts Council
\(^{315}\) Peter Hopkirk, ‘Russians Censor Room Full of Art’, \textit{The Times} 26 February 1971
\(^{316}\) ACGB/121/40 file 1.5 Lynton to Mr Leering, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 26 March 1971
\(^{317}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Lynton to Evan Anthony, \textit{The Spectator}, 10 March 1971
\(^{318}\) ‘Around the Sealed Room’, Robert Melville \textit{New Statesman} 12 March 1971
Articles such as Levin’s searing attack on the exhibition, which implied that the Arts Council was a ‘passive recipient of a ready made show’ of Soviet propaganda were rebutted by Lynton. He countered that the majority of the exhibition – some 80% in terms of visual impact - was assembled by the Arts Council, and that the ‘installation itself is a major element in the exhibition’. Levin’s picture of a major British art gallery handed over to the Soviet authorities without question was ‘totally unjustified’. According to Lynton, this was still the Arts Council’s show; indeed ‘to some extent we have imposed our conception of the theme of the exhibition on the Ministry of Culture.’ In his eyes, it was still a ‘very worthwhile exhibition’. However, even to those journalists who took a more considered response, one of the Arts Council’s actions were ‘unforgivable’: suppressing works of art from European collections, such as the Proun Room and Malevich paintings. A ‘devious note of apology’ slipped into the British version of the catalogue was not deemed sufficient for one reviewer.

Following the attacks in the press, some critics rallied to the Arts Council’s side. The Illustrated London News asserted that the British organisers acted correctly in responding to Soviet demands: the alternative would be ‘no exhibition at all’. The New Statesman took issue with Levin’s outraged and disgusted article which ‘takes no account of the fact that the

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319 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.7 Telephone Conversation with Mr Tom 11 March 1971 summarised by Lynton, to Secretary General of the Arts Council
320 MD FCO 34/106 ref FCO 6 April 1971 from Kirby CED, FCO, to Whitwell, Bullard and Orchard
321 Lynton’s concerns were recorded in TNA FCO 34/106 ref PW6/303/3 Minute from Kirby CED, FCO, to Whitwell, Bullard and Orchard
322 'Around the Sealed Room', Robert Melville New Statesman 12 March 1971
323 The note read: ‘It has been found necessary to omit some items from the exhibition and others have been added. The fifth section, here described under the heading Art and Design, now lacks some of the works of art listed.’ Explain about 2 versions of catalogue: 2 catalogues were made - one was a plain Soviet pamphlet listing their contribution with Shvidkovsky essay, other was AC version, a ‘boldly designed booklet in red, white and black’. It was more a booklet on Soviet art and design than a catalogue as there was uncertainty what the Soviet exhibits would be until they arrived. (AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Lynton to Mr Paine 6 April 1971) The Arts Council catalogue sold about half; the rest went to the touring shows. The Soviet pamphlet, on the other hand, ‘hardly sold at all’. AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Lynton to Gray 15 April 1971; AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.2 Lynton to Campbell 26 January 1971
324 Andrew Causey ‘Art in the Russian Revolution’ Illustrated London News 20 March 1971, 29
bulk of the exhibition is exactly as planned by the Arts Council’, focusing on theatre, architecture, agit prop and cinema rather than fine art.326

Despite this controversy, many areas of the exhibition were praised in Britain. There was an awareness of the achievement of the Arts Council in managing to stage such an ambitious show whilst under Soviet pressure. In Britain, the show was praised for presenting such an innovative show of Constructivism.327 Back in Moscow, Gray reported that among her Soviet friends the exhibition was ‘considered of immense significance and everyone is agog for information on how the crafty British managed to pull off such a coup’.328 It was the first time that the Soviet authorities consented to be involved in an exhibition of the revolutionary avant-garde, and its influence was widely felt. As a consequence, many British reviewers called for the movement to be more fully re-integrated into histories of Modernism.329 The Arts Council archive contains numerous letters from Western scholars and lecturers requesting photographs and slides of the previously inaccessible exhibits for research and teaching.330 Although attendances only reached 58,000 – a figure Lynton claimed was a little ‘disappointing’ at the time331 - organisers were buoyed by the large proportion of young people who visited the show. Lynton roughly estimated that about three quarters of the audience had been under the age of 30.332 Braun surmises that the ‘groundbreaking’ exhibition, with its talk of revolution and experimentation and addressing issues of the social role of art and protest, appealed strongly to a youthful – perhaps radical - audience, the ‘generation of ’68’.333

Nevertheless, despite its influence, the controversy over the Soviet banning of particular exhibits and the omission of any narrative explaining

326 ‘Around the Sealed Room’, Robert Melville New Statesman 12 March 1971
327 Nigel Gosling ‘Reflections of a Soviet Dream’, The Observer, 28 February 1971
328 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Gray to Lynton, 2 May 1971
329 Keith Dewhurst, Guardian, 24 February 1971
330 See correspondence in AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3
331 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Report on Exhibitions: Art in Revolution, Arts Council Panel Meeting Thursday 29 April 1971
332 AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Lynton to Gray 15 April 1971
333 He still claims today that it was ‘groundbreaking’ and made such an impact on people that they still ask him about it, over 30 years later. Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008
the fates of the avant-garde artists would not fade. Levin's Times article made the connection between the disappearing Proun Room and disappearing persons explicit, complaining that the exhibition failed to explain how the Stalinist period had obliterated the experimentation of the revolutionary artists, and in some cases, the artists themselves: he cited the lack of discussion in the exhibition of the imprisonment and execution of Meyerhold as more evidence of Soviet intervention in the exhibition content.\footnote{Edward Braun wrote to the Times to challenge Levin's assertions, saying that the Arts Council had decided to focus on the revolutionary period itself, and not what followed, which was not relevant to the show. Bernard Levin, 'Keeping an Exhibition Ideologically Germ-Free' The Times 2 March 1971} This lack of discussion of subsequent persecutions troubled even those who praised the exhibition as a whole. In the *Burlington Magazine*, Keith Roberts praised the 'exceptionally vivid' presentation but criticised the show for failing to reflect what was to come after the 1920s. John Russell, too, called the depiction of a 'tiny elite of great men' a 'great experience' but was concerned at the 'lacunae':

\begin{quote}
Stalin was nowhere mentioned and no one could have guessed that Meyerhold, for instance, was done to death at his hands. \footnote{John Russell 'London' in *Art News*, April 1971}
\end{quote}

But these critics overlooked the fact that the final part of the exhibition demonstrated that the 'future' of the avant-garde was not vigorous and experimental. The inclusion of a room of officially approved figurative art from the 1930s to the present day, which the Soviet authorities had insisted upon, worked against them in much the same way as the contrast between the two Deineka paintings shown at *Russian Painting*, twenty-two years earlier.\footnote{A 1964 replica of Deineka's Defence of Petrograd was one of the exhibits sent by the Soviets to be displayed in this room, but here it failed to arouse much critical comment. See Art in Revolution catalogue, Soviet version; Keith Roberts 'London', *Burlington Magazine* vol 113 no 817 April 1971 pp226, 228-232} Gray had been worried that the 'dreadful' later works would be a 'gift' to anti-Soviet critics,\footnote{AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.6 Confidential Gray in Moscow to Lynton, 17 January 1971} but it appears that the press response was more one of empathy for the repression of Soviet artists and condemnation of the Soviet authorities [Fig. 3.17].
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Lynton wrote to the Guggenheim that this self-condemnatory display showed that the Soviets were 'capable of letting themselves down more badly than one might imagine'.\(^{338}\) Firstly, the small upstairs room it was easy to overlook at the end of a dramatic exhibition: 'So insignificant was it that its function and even existence seems to have escaped the notice of the critics'.\(^{339}\) For those who bothered to look inside, the distinction between this room and the rest of the show was stark:

> The gallery tingles with confidence, dash, imagination and vitality, right through till the last room. There, suddenly, we feel the current being switched off. We are back in a provincial Russian backwater...the dream is over.\(^{340}\)

For other critics, this room fulfilled the function of an epilogue to the avant-garde narrative, telling 'what we know already - that it was not to be'.\(^{341}\) The organisers who had been pressurised into including this figurative art were aware that the Soviet plan had backfired: 'It served really to emphasise just how radical all the rest of it was'.\(^{342}\) The Foreign Office verdict, typically, was damning:

> The Soviet Ministry of Culture must have realised by now that they have only done themselves a disservice by staging an exhibition which has underlined in the most graphic way the gulf between the early promise of the revolution in the field of the arts and the obscurantism in many branches of culture characteristic of the Brezhnev era.\(^{343}\)

Russell's *Sunday Times* piece made this distinction between Soviet vision and British perception clear. Whilst the preface to the Soviet version of the catalogue castigated the avant-garde works as ‘utopian and premature’, from the post-1930s display, ‘the static society could not be more clearly indicted.’\(^{344}\) Indeed, some commented that the censorship ‘deal’ the Arts Council had made with the ‘Russians’ was worth making because ‘the official painting and sculpture is self-condemnatory and bad propaganda for the Soviet.’\(^{345}\)

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\(^{338}\) AAD ACGB/121/40 file 1.3 Lynton to Fry, Guggenheim Museum 13 March 1971  
\(^{339}\) TNA FC034/106 Field, Cultural Attaché, British Embassy, Moscow 13 April 1971,  
\(^{340}\) Nigel Gosling ‘Reflections of a Soviet Dream’, *The Observer*, 28 February 1971  
\(^{341}\) Peter Campbell, ‘Collective Vision’ *The Listener* 4 March 1971 p285  
\(^{342}\) Braun, Edward. Personal interview 21 July 2008  
\(^{343}\) TNA FC034/106 GGH Walden to Mr Bullard 23 March 1971,  
\(^{344}\) John Russell ‘Such Works art Dangerous’, *Sunday Times*, 28 February 1971  
\(^{345}\) ‘Around the Sealed Room’, Robert Melville *New Statesman* 12 March 1971
CONCLUSION

Much changed in perceptions of Soviet art and politics between 1959 and 1971; but much also remained the same. These shows were valuable as cultural events, bringing little-seen art works to Britain and enhancing knowledge of Soviet art history. But despite *Art in Revolution* being the first Western exhibition to focus on the Russian avant-garde with the involvement of the Soviet authorities, this victory was marred by the politicised response to the exhibition. Although it was a groundbreaking show, it was overshadowed by the press outcry about heavy-handed Soviet intervention in what was originally intended to be a wholly British exhibition. As the two introductory cartoons demonstrate, the familiar tales of Soviet aggressors banning and censoring art exhibitions remained a constant. Later Soviet exhibitions, such as 1974’s *Landscape Masterpieces from Soviet Museums* at the Royal Academy were largely disregarded and seen as failures by the institution, perhaps a consequence of press and public fatigue at the Soviet Union’s stance over art. But in contrast to these heavy politicisation that surrounded Soviet art exhibitions, cultural diplomacy shows from Eastern Europe were received with much more ambiguity. Despite the division of the Iron Curtain, they were not perceived in such an antagonistic and aggressive manner and as such were distinguished from the Soviet Union. It is to an analysis of these exhibitions that the next chapter turns.
CHAPTER 4:
PRICELESS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF EASTERN EUROPE

In a speech of January 1970, Sir Thomas Monnington, President of the Royal Academy opened a 'priceless autobiography of a nation': 1000 Years of Art in Poland. This was a sumptuous, popular and wide-ranging exhibition of almost 500 pieces: wood carving, metalwork, paintings, tapestries, stained glass, weapons, china, armour and gold, documenting in chronological order a millennium of culture in Poland. The exhibits were selected from eight Polish national collections with the sponsorship of the Polish Government and the assistance of the Polish Cultural Institute in London.¹ Monnington's memorable epithet, with its echoes of the Festival of Britain's 'autobiography of a nation,' implied that the exhibition could condense Poland's turbulent history and complex national identity to a single, straightforward narrative. The Secretary of the Royal Academy wanted the exhibition to provide audiences, assumed to be British and generally unfamiliar with Polish culture, with an easily-comprehensible impression of the 'character and past history' of Poland. He suggested that the addition of typical examples of Polish furniture and folk art such as paper cuts would better illustrate this assumed idea of 'Polishness.'³ But despite British efforts, this could never be a straightforward narrative. A major government-sponsored exhibition which came to Britain from one of the 'people's democracies' during the Cold War could not be a politically neutral display of decorative artefacts. 1000 Years... sought to challenge the image of Poland as part of an isolated 'Eastern Bloc' by presenting its history and culture as fully integrated with Western Europe.⁴ The image of Polish national identity presented was a multi-faceted and hybrid one –

¹ As has been described in Chapter 2, unlike the other countries of Eastern Europe, cultural exchanges with Poland were not carried out under a formally signed cultural programme.
³ RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Brooke Secretary of the RA to Prof O Achmatowicz, Polish Cultural Institute 15 December 1966
⁴ The title referred to 'art in Poland', not 'Polish art', allowing for the inclusion of art from elsewhere in the continent: for example, pieces thought of as German or Italian which had been created for Polish patrons. Works by the German artist Viet Stoss and by Canaletto's Italian nephew Bellotto were included in the show, to the confusion of some critics.
'polyphonic' in Hungarian ethnographer Tamás Hofer's phrase\textsuperscript{5} – which encompassed a much wider scope than typically 'Polish' artefacts: 'Eastern' and 'Western', peasant and aristocratic, ancient and modern. This complex Polish character ran counter to the impression of some British critics that Eastern Europe was a homogenous and one-dimensional entity.

Although many of the exhibitions from what was referred to generically as 'Eastern Europe' held in Britain in the 1960s and early 1970s were presented as straightforward 'autobiographies' of their respective nations, these were politicised pieces of cultural diplomacy: government sanctioned national life stories, instigated by the bilateral cultural agreements of the Cold War and intended to display each nations' prestigious cultural achievements.\textsuperscript{6} On the surface, there was a 'seeming absence of politics' in these displays of predominantly historic objects.\textsuperscript{7} Unlike exhibitions from the Soviet Union, their Cold War context was largely downplayed by organisers and critics alike. But they were not politically neutral. As the curator and critic Brian Wallis argues, 'selling nations' via exhibitions is a specifically political act:

Their unabashed purpose is to transform negative stereotypes into positive ones and, in the process, to improve the political and economic standing of their country.\textsuperscript{8}

This chapter examines a number of such national displays held in Britain, focusing predominantly on exhibitions of applied arts: historical and religious treasures from Romania and Hungary, shows of ancient and modern glass from Czechoslovakia and the aforementioned 1000 Years of Art in Poland. It was these, in contrast to exhibitions of Eastern European

\textsuperscript{5} Tamás Hofer, ed., Hungary between 'East and West' (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994).
\textsuperscript{6} Although this chapter uses British archival sources, it is possible to infer the meanings intended by the eastern European state authorities from the exhibition catalogues, statements made by curators and cultural ministers and from correspondence between eastern European officials and British organisers.
\textsuperscript{8} Wallis' examples are focused on the late twentieth century but his argument can be retrospectively applied to these exhibitions from Eastern Europe. Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy." 267
fine arts of the twentieth century, which were interpreted by British critics as demonstrating more fully the alleged distinctive national identities of each country. These external manifestations of national character were intended to be viewed by populations that were not only foreign, but were also on the other side of the 'Iron Curtain'.

These exhibitions were sites where three different sets of views and aims interacted: the official image of the lending nation, the objectives of British hosts, and the responses of British critics.9 Exhibitions such as Hungarian Art Treasures (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1967), Rumanian Art Treasures (a touring show, Edinburgh, Cardiff and London, 1965-1966) and Treasures from Rumania (1971, British Museum) aroused debates about whether there were 'distinctive' Eastern European national identities located in ancient historical and religious treasures. 1965's Bohemian Glass (Victoria and Albert Museum) prompted discussions over the presence of a 'modern' Eastern European character in prestigious and progressive Czechoslovakian glassware, in addition to furthering commercial motives. And 1000 Years of Art In Poland (Royal Academy, London, 1970) challenged some British critics' stereotypes of a generic Eastern Europe, presenting a 'polyphonic', many-layered and unexpected autobiography of a nation fully integrated into (Western) Europe.

Although British critics and organisers were multifarious, certain reactions recurred. Preconceived ideas of a generic 'Eastern Europe' made up of inaccessible, minor 'satellites' of the USSR could be reinforced or challenged by the displays.10 Though by no means all were affected by these stereotypes the patterns of responses indicate a strong tendency to

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9 In the case of these exhibitions, no records of public reactions, save visitor numbers, was kept. This chapter analyses critical responses to gain an insight into how these displays were received.
10 The terminology 'Eastern Europe' is of importance here. Many of these nations have been redefined as 'Central Europe' in the post-1989 period. Nevertheless, to western eyes the distinction has remained an indeterminate one: the 'disputed markers of the Central European identity might be closely intertwined with those of Eastern Europe' and often be 'largely indistinguishable', despite their differing religious heritages (Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Islam). Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Distinguishing White from White: Images of East Central European Difference after the Fall of the Wall," The Contours of Legitimacy in Central Europe: New Approaches in Graduate Studies, (European Studies Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford: 2002), vol.
make assumptions about what 'Eastern Europe' should be: small nations, largely 'unknown' to the British public, and mistakenly characterised as a culturally homogenous group. It was presumed that their strengths lay not in the fine arts, often described as pale copies of Western originals, but in the decorative and applied arts, where their 'national' character could more fully be demonstrated. In part, these Western views of an imagined or invented 'Eastern Europe' were grounded in artificial cultural constructs that, it has been argued, date back to the Enlightenment.\(^\text{11}\) The historian Larry Wolff suggests that this was the result of an intellectual process of 'demi-Orientalisation', in which Enlightenment writers portrayed Eastern Europe as the 'backwards', semi-barbarous counterpoint to civilised Western Europe.\(^\text{12}\) Due to the isolation of nations such as Hungary, Romania, Poland and Czechoslovakia behind the Iron Curtain, it was simple to overlay Cold War cultural perceptions onto this longstanding 'invention' of a less-developed 'Eastern Europe'.

This chapter examines not only at the way in which such identities were displayed via exhibitions, but also at how these constructed identities were received and responded to – or 'imagined' and 're-imagined' - by the British organisers and critics in a Cold War context. It investigates the discrepancies and similarities between what British organisers and critics expected to see, and what was actually presented of Eastern European cultures at these exhibitions. Despite the opposing positions of the Cold War, and in contrast to the portrayal of the Soviet Union, 'Eastern Europe' as a whole was not perceived to be a political or ideological threat. The political emphasis in these exhibition was generally low key, revolving mainly around their organisation and the need to facilitate these 'embassy exhibitions' in Britain in order to stage reciprocal displays of British culture on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Some critics reacted negatively to the smell of cultural exchange that pervaded these exhibitions, but such complaints were rarely as vociferous or venomous as those objections to

\(^{11}\) Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment. 3
\(^{12}\) Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment. 7
Soviet political intervention in exhibitions like *Russian Painting* (1959) and *Art in Revolution* (1971) detailed in the previous chapter.

These exhibitions usually proclaimed to demonstrate individual Eastern European national identities. The chapter investigates what such changing ideas of nationhood meant in the context of socialist Eastern Europe. Negotiations over their content and critical responses indicate that these identities were thought to be located in the applied arts more than the fine arts. But the type of national character located in these applied arts was assumed by many British critics to be generic and one dimensional: often they preferred an easily comprehensible, 'monophonic' vision of an Eastern Europe based largely around historical pieces and folk arts. That this was largely the case is shown through a discussion of exhibitions of historical 'treasures' from Hungary and Romania, typical exhibitions staged in Britain as part of bilateral cultural programmes. However, this one-dimensional image was challenged by other exhibitions, which revealed a more progressive and culturally expansive vision of Eastern Europe. In looking at these 'polyphonic' images of Eastern Europe, the argument turns to two detailed case studies to examine more closely how these displays challenged or supported existing opinions of Eastern Europe in Britain. The chapter firstly examines exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass – in particular the V&A's exhibition *Bohemian Glass* (1965) – in order to investigate how the combination of historic and unashamedly contemporary artefacts was received in Britain, and what vision of Eastern Europe this proposed. Finally, the chapter returns to the 'priceless autobiography' that was *1000 Years of Art in Poland*, analysing the 'polyphonic' and multi-faceted, European-integrated vision it presented of the 'uncommon culture' of the Poles.

This chapter contributes not only to the literature on the presentation of national identities via exhibitions, but also presents an analysis of how they were negotiated and received under particular political circumstances. By looking at examples from the various nations of Eastern Europe, it provides a wider and richer view of Cold War cultural exchanges.
that are more frequently distilled to Western dealings with the Soviet Union. It suggests that the conduct of cultural diplomacy with the 'satellites' reveals a more subtle, less overtly politicised picture of relations with the Eastern Bloc. Initially perceived as victimised 'satellites', the nations of Eastern Europe as a whole were not conceived of as hostile entities in the way the USSR had since the early Cold War. It also offers an analysis of Cold War cultural relations from the 1960s, after the more extensively analysed 1950s period.

A 'PERVASIVE SMELL' OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE?

These exhibitions were political in origin and as such they had unconcealed diplomatic motives. *1000 Years of Art in Poland* was the largest in a series of imported 'embassy exhibitions' from the Eastern Bloc that mushroomed in Britain from the early 1960s following the signing of bilateral cultural programmes discussed in Chapter 2. These exhibitions, unprecedented in Britain, proclaimed that their contents demonstrated distinctive 'national' characteristics: their titles indicated that the artefacts displayed within were particular to Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary or Romania.¹³ Prior to the 1960s, such cultural diplomacy displays from Eastern Europe were relatively rare.¹⁴ Only Poland, in the exceptional position of having constant post-war relations with the British Council and historically closer cultural links with Britain, regularly staged shows in Britain before the 1960s. Typically, these were small exhibitions of traditional folk arts, such as historic limewood carving and papercuts, or contemporary graphic arts.¹⁵

¹³ Archival material consulted used a variety of spellings of 'Romania(n)'; Roumania and Rumania. 'Romania' is used throughout this chapter, except when quoting directly, to indicate all variations.

¹⁴ e.g. 1948 saw an exhibition of Hungarian Art, partially organized by the Arts Council, whilst the 1959 Edinburgh Festival hosted the display Masterpieces of Czechoslovak Art.

¹⁵ Usually organised with the assistance of the Polish Cultural institute in London, these exhibitions took place across Britain. For an indicative list, see note 83, Chapter 2.
The majority of such exhibitions can be positioned in a wider framework of other government-sponsored cultural relations across the Iron Curtain.\textsuperscript{16} As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, bilateral agreements facilitated the Foreign Office's and British Council's attempts both to maintain and to widen the Eastern Bloc's cultural contacts with Western culture and 'freedoms'. Their ultimate aim was a 'free flow' of unrestricted cultural exchange intended, in the Foreign Office's words, to 'promote understanding'.\textsuperscript{17} But as this was not immediately possible, reciprocity was accepted as a condition that enabled British artistic, cultural and academic exchanges to take place on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In a report of 1967 analysing the practical problems that had arisen around such exchanges, the Cultural Relations Department (CRD) of the Foreign Office stressed that accepting incoming exhibitions was essential in order for British displays of culture to be shown in the Eastern Bloc, even if accommodating such exhibitions proved 'awkward': '...it is particularly in this field that we can hope to export our culture only if we are willing to accept imports.'\textsuperscript{18} Thus, political circumstances meant that for each 'exported' exhibition of British art spreading Western 'freedoms' in the Eastern Bloc, a balancing 'import' of Eastern European culture was staged in Britain.\textsuperscript{19}

A large proportion of the exhibitions from Eastern Europe were branded as displays of sumptuous ancient 'treasures'. This section gives a general overview of these 'embassy exhibitions' and also compares three with similar content more closely – \textit{Hungarian Art Treasures from the Ninth to the Seventeenth Centuries} (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1967) and two from Romania: \textit{Rumanian Art Treasures} (1965-6; a touring show) and \textit{Treasures from Rumania} (1971, British Museum) - to analyse how political their organisation and reception were: what were their diplomatic

\textsuperscript{16} Frequently, these exhibitions came to Britain in a modified form after showings in other Western countries, such as France e.g. \textit{Hungarian Art Treasures, 1000 Years of Art in Poland}.

\textsuperscript{17} See discussions in TNA FC0924/1413

\textsuperscript{18} TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'

\textsuperscript{19} 'British Council Calls For Another £55,000' \textit{The Guardian} 23 October 1956, 2
messages, how 'pervasive' was this 'smell of cultural exchange' and how did critics react to it?  

Hungary had been a political priority for British exchanges since cultural relations were first 'put on an official footing' in 1962. From the outset the Hungarian government 'made it quite clear that there is a direct connection between cultural and political relations'. However, unpredictable relations with the Hungarian authorities meant that it was not until 1966 that the first exchange of exhibitions as part of the cultural programme was staged. Two more exhibitions swiftly followed in 1967: *Twentieth Century Hungarian Art,* and *Hungarian Art Treasures from the Ninth to the Seventeenth Centuries.* Hungarian demands for reciprocity for a proposed Henry Moore exhibition in Budapest had resulted in these two displays in return for one of Moore: the British Council, concerned to avoid the 'serious setback' of this being cancelled without a 'definite promise of a date' for the Hungarians in London, agreed to both shows. Finding themselves in receipt of a surplus of Hungarian shows, it was the 'Medieval' exhibition of art treasures – 'likely to be of much higher quality and interest to the art-loving public' - which the British authorities focused their efforts upon. The 250 exhibits at *Hungarian Art Treasures,* dating from the end of the ninth century to around 1696, were described in the catalogue as the 'most comprehensive survey of Hungarian paintings, sculpture, metalwork and textiles ever shown outside Hungary.'

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20 AAD ACGB121/920 'The Critics', transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
1 TNA FO924/1413 Comments on minutes of meeting of Eight Power Working Group on East-West Cultural Contacts by Ivor Pink, 11 June 1962
22 Birmingham City Art Gallery receiving Hungarian folk Art in 1966. This exhibition, which ran from 1 April to 30 April 1966 was organised by the British Council and the Institute of Cultural Relations in Budapest. TNA FO924/1492 'Programme of Cultural Exchanges between the UK and Hungary April 1964-March 1966'
23 At the Royal Institute Galleries, 4 May-29 May 1967. AAD ACGB121/500
24 V&A VX.1967.010 Gabriel White, Arts Council to Trenchard Cox, V&A 25 March 1966
25 'We ought to try and make a special fuss of one of these occasions [Hung 20thC or medieval] as did the French last year at the opening of the big Hungarian exhibition...The Hungarians habitually pay more attention to these matters than we do ourselves and failure to do so on our part will be taken amiss. It seems clear that we should reserve our main fire for the Medieval Exhibition, which is likely to be of much higher quality and interest to the art-loving public'. TNA FO924/1663 Alex Morley, Embassy in Budapest to R Cecil, Cultural Relations Dept, Foreign Office 14 December 1966
26 John Pope Hennessy 'Foreword' Catalogue: Hungarian Art Treasures 3
Organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum (in conjunction with the British Council) and the Institute of Cultural Relations in Budapest, the exhibition was critically praised as 'rich and varied without being overwhelming.' The exhibits, which included illuminated manuscripts, monstrances, reliquaries, armour, ceramics, swords, altarpieces, embroideries, jewellery and wooden honey-cake moulds, were installed in a display created by 'that excellent exhibition designer Michael Brawne.'

Romania, too, had been one of the Foreign Office's targets for official cultural exchanges. Initially formalized by the 1963-5 cultural exchange programme, relations had shown a 'marked growth and improvement' by the end of the 1960s. By 1971, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council were able to report good working relations with Romanian Embassy officials in London, aiming to encourage their growing independence within the Warsaw Pact nations. In common with the Hungarian exhibition, the Romanian exhibitions also showed works described by British museum staff as 'medieval'. This was not a large show: the Arts Council's Art Director Gabriel White described it as a 'lovely, small' exhibition. Only around 70 objects were displayed, mostly ecclesiastical: manuscripts, icons, embroideries, metalwork, woodcarving and ceramics. Like the Hungarian show of 1967, Rumanian Art Treasures was the first occasion since the war that such an exhibition had been seen outside Romania. This touring display started at the Edinburgh Festival in August 1965 (Royal Scottish Museum), before heading to the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff and then a final

28 'Norbert Lynton 'Cosmopolitan marvels' The Guardian 20 October 1967, 9
29 Brawne had also been responsible for the historical display Great Britain: USSR at the V&A earlier that year and would go on to create the celebrated installation for Art in Revolution. 'Norbert Lynton 'Cosmopolitan marvels' The Guardian 20 October 1967, 9
30 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was particularly interested in the fact that the Romanians had, since the end of the 1960s 'adopted an independent position within the Warsaw Pact and COMECON, based firmly on national self-interest' with Ceausescu being 'particularly outspoken in his criticism of the invasion of Czechoslovakia' in 1968. TNA FCO34/107 'Romania: General Background' 7 February 1971
31 One commentator thought that it was small, too few objects (69) to do 400 years of Romanian culture justice. AAD ACGB121/920 'The Critics', transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
32 AAD ACGB121/920 Press Release, Rumanian Art Treasures, 12 January 1966
London showing at the Arts Council's St James Gallery in early 1966. Although critics remarked upon differences in the display at each showing – the London setting was more spacious but less atmospheric than that in Scotland - the content remained the same: 'treasures' from between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, most of which were described as being in the Byzantine tradition. Attendance figures bear out the small size of the show: in London it attracted 3176 visitors, with an average daily attendance of 113. According to Gabriel White, this was high for the small St James Gallery, a typical location for an 'embassy exhibition'. He reported many appreciative repeat visitors; the Arts Council was 'enormously pleased' with the exhibition.

A similarly-titled exhibition, Treasures from Rumania proved to be much larger in size and chronological scope. This 'Special Exhibition' was held at the British Museum between 30 January and the end of March 1971 with the assistance of the British Council. Like the Hungarian Art Treasures (1967), this exhibition came via a Parisian showing. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office urged that 'we should do all we can to indicate that we regard the exhibition as an important event in Anglo-Romanian relations'. It encompassing approximately 500 objects ranging from Neolithic times to the eighteenth century, a few of which had been seen in 1965. Amongst the works of art on display, the star exhibit was the priceless Petrossa Treasure dating back to the fourth century AD [Fig. 4.1]. This gold hoard, which comprised cups, an ewer, brooches, a collar and two neck rings had been sent to Russia in 1916 and only

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33 Edinburgh showing: August 1965 – 19 Sept 1965; Cardiff showing – [n.d.]; London showing – 26 January-26 February 1966. Following the London exhibition, the show was sent to Paris in March 1966.
34 AAD ACGB121/920 White to Monsieur Cain, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, 5 November 1965
35 TNA FC031/107 'Romanian Treasures Exhibition' [n.d.]
36 AAD ACGB121/920 White to Lilian Somerville, British Council, 3 March 1966
37 TNA FC034/107 '1971 Romanian exhibition', February 1971
39 TNA FC034/107 SJ Whitwell, Foreign Office, Report on 'Romanian Treasures Exhibition: Problem' 8 January 1971
40 TNA FC031/107 'Romanian Treasures Exhibition' [n.d.]
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returned to Romania in 1956. 'Seldom has the word 'treasures' been more aptly used' commented The Telegraph's art critic.\(^{41}\)

These exhibitions were celebratory and propagandist.\(^{42}\) Lending nations were eager to counter their perceived isolation and to benefit from the cultural and political prestige of being shown in national British galleries and museums.\(^{43}\) This could cause tension if the exhibition was of poor quality or likely to be unpopular: British authorities complained that the countries of Eastern Europe 'often put prestige before practicability', in consequence forcing the British government to 'underwrite projects which would have no attraction in this country.'\(^{44}\) Low attendances caused anxiety and expense for the Arts Council and could offend the lending government, potentially jeopardising future British exhibitions abroad. The formidable Lilian Somerville, Head of Fine Art at the British Council (1947-1970)\(^{45}\) regretfully remarked:

Nothing can be more upsetting to foreign sponsors than an exhibition which is completely ignored, as we have found to our embarrassment.\(^{46}\)

The low-key reception of Six Painters from Poland (1968, Royal College of Art) led the Polish authorities to accuse the British organisers of a lack of publicity; the Arts Council countered:

If the Poles cannot understand why so few people are going to the exhibition the simple truth is that it has not caught the public's imagination.\(^{47}\)

Not all of the reciprocal 'embassy exhibitions' from Eastern Europe were unwanted and lacking in quality. Although some attracted barely a

\(^{41}\) Terence Mullaly, 'Rumanian Treasures have rare beauty' Daily Telegraph 1 February 1971

\(^{42}\) Frequently, the Eastern European nations insisted upon the presence of high-level political guests at the opening ceremonies. Jennie Lee was often called upon to counterbalance the various Eastern European Ministers of Culture who visited Britain for these occasions and came to be highly regarded by them.

\(^{43}\) Sidney Hutchison, Secretary of the RA recalled how the 'communist dominated countries' were rather desperate to get their works and their culture better known in what we might call ordinarily the Western world. BLSA NLSC Artists Lives Series, Sidney Hutchison interview (n.d. c. 1996-8)

\(^{44}\) TNA FCO13/80 Cecil King, Foreign Office 'The Problems of Reciprocity in East-West Cultural Exchanges, 3 March 1967'

\(^{45}\) Norbert Lynton later described her as 'amazing, tough, bright, very friendly woman....she was a very dictatorial person...as well as kind...but she knew what she wanted and she went for it.' BLSA NLSC Interview: Artists' Lives, Norbert Lynton 2004 Tape 8 Side B

\(^{46}\) AAD ACGB/121/92 Lilian Somerville, Director of the Fine Arts British Council to Professor David Talbot Rice, C/o British Embassy Bucharest. [n.d. c. May 1964]

\(^{47}\) AAD ACGB/121/845 Hugh Evans to Mrs Laws, 7 March 1968
thousand visitors, others were highly regarded by critics and museum staff and attracted relatively large audiences: around 55,000, in the case of 1000 Years of Art in Poland.

The organisation of Hungarian Art Treasures (1967) had been dogged by setbacks and longwinded negotiations, total attendance figures were lower than had been hoped and the British Council bore 'heavy costs' for the exhibition. Nevertheless, Lilian Somerville still believed it was one of the few exchanges of exhibitions with Eastern Europe to have been 'worthwhile'. Writing to John Pope Hennessy, Director of the V&A to express her gratitude to the Museum for providing a venue, she explained why: not only did it prove to be 'popular and had a good press', it also generated goodwill, with the Hungarians reportedly 'very pleased'. The exhibition fulfilled the aims of the institutions on both sides – the British Council in particular was pleased that it worked as a model of direct co-operation between cultural bodies in East and West. The British Ambassador in Budapest, Alexander Morley wrote that the enthusiastic reaction in the London press gave 'great satisfaction to the Hungarians'; he thought it would leave 'a lasting mark on our relations with them'. Somerville and Morley's letters indicate how important it was to the British authorities that such exhibitions were popular and well received.

48 Twentieth Century Hungarian Art, Royal Institute Galleries, Piccadilly from 4 May 1967 – 29 May 1967 attracted only c. 43 per day, 1052 in total over the month long exhibition showing. AAD ACGB/121/500 Admission Sheet

49 The exhibition was open from 3 January – 1 March 1970 (c. 8 weeks) Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the year 1970 p9-10

50 By November 1966, the British Council recorded that they had been in negotiations over the contemporary art and the medieval exhibitions for 'eighteen months' and 'still have to proceed warily'. (AAD ACGB/121/500 Somerville to Gabriel White, Arts Council, 16 November 1966). December 1966 saw 'a phase of rapidly improving cooperation not only on the exhibitions issue but on the cultural front in general', with the British Embassy anxious not to cause difficulties that would dispel the current 'goodwill', which contrasted sharply with the previous poor relations. TNA FO9244/1662 RM Auty, British Embassy, Budapest to John Hulton, British Council 1 December 1966

51 Visitor numbers were around 17,500 compared to the expected 25-30,000. VX.1967.010

52 Somerville was Director of Fine Art at the British Council 1948-1970, a rare woman in the male dominated art establishment. Garlake, New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society. 18

53 V&A VX.1967.010 Somerville, British Council to Pope Hennessy, 9 February 1967

54 The British Council's aim was to establish 'normal working relations direct with exhibition sponsors' in Britain. TNA FO9244/1662 John Hulton, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, British Council to Richard Auty, British Ambassador in Budapest, 12 December 1966

In all of these exhibitions, the East European authorities asserted that the historical artefacts demonstrated in material form the existence of distinct national identities. Museum collections can be a 'potent force in forging self-consciousness', playing important roles in 'creating national identity and promoting national agendas'.\(^{56}\) Dr Endre Rosta, the President of the Hungarian Institute of Cultural Relations, acknowledged that since the advent of Christianity, 'the same spiritual and stylistic influences made themselves felt in Hungarian art as in the art of other countries' of Europe. But he also firmly stated that there was a 'specifically Hungarian' flavour to the exhibits, which 'could be created only on Hungarian soil':

Thus we are showing how the Romanesque, the Gothic and Renaissance styles became 'Hungarian'.\(^{57}\)

Similarly, the content of *Romanian Art Treasures* was cited as evidence of the tenth century 'emergence of Rumanian art, resulting from the fusion of the Byzantine element with the native Romano-Dacian style'.\(^{58}\) The catalogue asserted that although

...history prevented the simultaneous development of art in all the Rumanian lands....the great lines of the stylistic evolution are unitary.

It claimed that the 'whole of Rumanian medieval art constitutes an original creation, peculiar to the Rumanian people'.\(^{59}\) By showing such treasures, the socialist regimes attempted to demonstrate that they were culturally informed and respectful of their populations' individual historical traditions.

Such exhibitions would have been impossible in the post-war Stalinist period when differences between individual nations were subsumed to a 'fraternal socialist Europe'.\(^{60}\) The modern nation states of Eastern Europe

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\(^{57}\) 'Introduction' Dr Endre Rosta, Institute of Cultural Relations Catalogue: *Hungarian Art Treasures* 5


\(^{59}\) AAD ACGB121/920 'Introduction' Professor George Oprescu, Catalogue: *Rumanian Art Treasures* 5

had been fairly new national creations prior to the advent of Soviet influence. Although each country had very different histories, in all cases their national borders had been fluid and their modern statehood a twentieth century development, usually occurring in the aftermath of the First World War. The Polish kingdom had been subsumed into Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire by partition in 1795, and it was only in 1919 that a Polish state re-emerged; even so, ethnic Poles were spread over a wide area of Europe. Similarly, the modern states of Czechoslovakia and Hungary were only created in 1918 and 1920 respectively. Romania, in a smaller form, had gained its independence in 1878, but it was not until 1918 that it acquired territories including Transylvania; during the Second World War, it lost land to the Soviet Union and Bulgaria. Although these states had not been a constant presence in the preceding centuries, these exhibitions drew on artefacts and past glories from these regions in order to bolster the prestige of the present-date people’s republics.

Benedict Anderson has remarked on how it is frequently the ‘newest’ nations which lay claim to the longest histories:

If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical’, the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future.

Nations have been described as symbolic or ‘imagined communities’, artificial constructs suitable for cultural analysis. The extent to whether nations and their traditions can be conceptualised as mythical and modern social constructs, as suggested by Hobsbawm and Ranger, or as perennial ancient entities is a matter for debate; however, in both cases, myth – defined by Anthony D Smith as a dramatised and exaggerated tale

62 Such actions were also common to cultural exchanges from non-communist countries but took on a particular political significance in the context of the Cold War.
of 'heroic past which serves the present' - plays a role in building and maintaining national sentiment:

We may readily concede the role of invention and imagination in the formation of particular nations, without regarding either nations or nationalisms as largely constructs of the imagination.66

Wallis has noted how 'the nation' is a flexible, historical concept: 'an empty and elastic container into which can be fit any variety of art objects'.67 Comparable license with timescales and geography was taken by the organisers of exhibitions from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania which displayed artefacts fabricated long before the creation of the modern nation states. Shifting ethnic and geographical boundaries meant that exhibitions such as 1000 Years of Art in Poland could draw upon diverse traditions and territories to assert a constructed narrative of an unbroken, millennial national identity. Hungarian Art Treasures, too, called upon the historic traditions of the Byzantine and Holy Roman Empires.

The individual national identities of Eastern Europe changed in the context of the Cold War. As these nations fell under Soviet influence in the years immediately following the Second World War, the Stalinist dictum that culture should be 'socialist in content and national in form' was extended to these new 'satellite' states.68 As the academic Tony Judt comments:

Soviet power appropriated national myths for its own ends, banned all reference to uncomfortable or conflictual moments save those which retroactively anticipated its own arrival and enforced a new 'fraternity' upon the eastern half of Europe.69

66 Anthony D. Smith, Myths and Memories of the Nation (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
67 In his investigation into US-staged Turkish and Indonesian 'cultural festivals' of the 1980s and 1990s, Wallis records: "Thus, Indonesia, a republic founded in 1945, can suddenly boast a three-thousand-year history. Or... the boundaries of the modern country can be swelling to fill the expanse of a far earlier empire, as in the Suleyman exhibition, in which the contemporary Turkish republic took credit for cultural achievements throughout the vast sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire." Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy." 272
69 Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." 172
Thus, in the late 1940s the past was reinvented to comply with enforced Soviet ‘socialist internationalism’. In the case of Poland, the political historian Frances Millard has observed how it became:

...impossible openly to articulate a concept of the Polish nation different from the official version, which presented the USSR as the saviour and guarantor of Poland’s national and state sovereignty against a resurgent threat from (West) German imperialism.

It was only after 1956 that a ‘Polish’ road to socialism was no longer seen as an unforgivable ‘nationalist deviation’. In Hungary, too, in 1948-9 the official ideology had initially stated that the ‘nationality question’ was a ‘non-existent issue between brotherly socialist states’. In the generally less repressive period that followed the Thaw, ideas of nationhood could be mobilised by both the governments and people of Eastern Europe. The Foreign Office noted in 1966 how ‘nationalist sentiment is indulged in equally by Party officials and the non-Communist intelligentsia. In most of post-Stalinist Eastern Europe, individual paths to socialist culture began to develop under less repressive regimes.

Exhibitions have long been used as a method of publicly demonstrating and asserting distinctive national characteristics. These ‘meaning making’ cultural forms and practices assist in the creation and recreation of concepts of the nation, giving ‘tangible and symbolic forms’ to these

71 Hofer, ed., Hungary between ‘East and West’. 39, 38-9
imagined groups. Penelope Harvey has detailed how, from the nineteenth century onwards, institutions like national museums and world fairs have played a 'crucial role' in 'demonstrating the enduring presence of what were in fact very recent social entities'. She argues that this 'shared cultural history' of a community was used to impart a 'particular spirit to the nation':

This spirit was expressed in a nation's particular genius, in its language and cultural production, in what were understood as the external manifestations of essential racial characteristics.

A 1960s exhibition manual describes exhibitions of national identity, similar to those under examination here, as 'living textbooks'. The Cold War had intensified and politicised the presentation of national identities via exhibitions epitomised by the Soviet and American pavilions at the Brussels Expo and the 1959 American exhibition in Moscow.

These touring visual representations were not intended to symbolise and sustain the communal bonds of their individual populations. They were events by which 'nations seek to construct their national identity for foreign audiences'. Seen by outsiders – British organisers and critics - they were filtered through any preconceived imaginings of what these national characters should be. Larry Wolff's analysis of the 'invention' of Eastern Europe by the intellectuals and authors of the West during the Enlightenment suggests that this longstanding vision of the East as the less developed, demi-orientalized counterpoint to 'civilized' Western Europe underlay many of the Western attitudes which persisted during the Cold War division of Europe and beyond.

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75 Such practices also include - monuments, museums, traditions and ceremonies - Evans, Jessica, 'Introduction' in David Boswell and Jessica Evans, eds., Representing the Nation: A Reader, Histories, Heritage and Museums (London / New York: Routledge, 1999), 1-3
76 Harvey, Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition, 56
77 Hans Neuberg, Will Burtin and Hans Fischli, Conceptions of International Exhibitions (Zürich: ABC Verlag, 1969), 70
78 Hixson, Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War 1945-1961.
79 Walls, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy." 266
Exhibits were predominantly selected by the relevant Eastern European museums and Ministries of Culture. However, the British authorities often negotiated changes to the content, especially to augment the quality of exhibits. This was done for both artistic and political reasons. Like many 'embassy exhibitions', 1967’s Hungarian Art Treasures was a variation upon a preceding exhibition, in this case a 'small' exhibition that had already been shown in Paris, which incorporated a display of nineteenth and twentieth century paintings. The exhibition as it appeared in Britain was altered at the request of the British authorities, who saw their curatorial role as a supplementary one, 'not to choose but to help guide choice', usually by negotiating the quality upwards. Trenchard Cox, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum (1955-66), corresponded with Lilian Somerville. Both felt that the original Hungarian exhibition was 'too provincial' and did not contain enough loans of 'first rate quality'. The London showing was agreed on the basis that the Hungarians would offer some more important loans which were 'known to exist' in Hungarian museums so that it would become 'fit to counterbalance' the outgoing display of Moore, the 'greatest living sculptor'. Such negotiations also underlay the preparations for the Romanian exhibitions of 1965-6: Somerville requested that the British organisers 'encourage them to make their medieval exhibition as splendid as possible'. This letter makes it clear that these requests for tighter quality control were not altruistic. The British authorities would suffer as well if an Eastern European exhibition was unpopular; more importantly, such failures would hamper efforts to send British exhibitions in the future.

81 The official cultural policies of the communist countries of Eastern Europe were based on a system of Marxist-Leninist values and governed by the principle that there was 'an indissoluble link between politics, economics and culture', all of which were subject to unified control by the Party. Cultural Policy in Poland, Stanislaw Witold Balicki, Jerzy Kossak and Miroslaw Zulawski, UNESCO, Paris, 1973
82 V&A VX.1967.010 White, Arts Council to Trenchard Cox, V&A 25 March 1966
83 V&A VX.1967.010 Hulton, British Council to Pope Hennessy, V&A 20 October 1966
84 AAD ACGB/121/500 Hulton, British Council to Cultural Attache, British Embassy Budapest 7 December 1966
85 V&A VX.1967.010 Cox, Director V&A to Somerville, British Council 28 March 1966
86 AAD ACGB/121/92 Somerville, British Council to Professor David Talbot Rice, C/o British Embassy Bucharest. [n.d. c. May 1964]
Why were there fears that the quality of Eastern European exhibitions would not match that of British exhibitions? Such concerns were informed by preconceived Western attitudes to Eastern Europe, that – however sympathetically presented - are generally in accordance with Wolff's observations. 'Eastern Europe' as a whole was seen to be a 'monophonic' entity, minor in importance and composed of homogenous states rather than Hofer's 'polyphonic' mix of cultures. Many of the organisers and critics of these exhibitions, including the Romanian and Hungarian displays, perceived it to be an isolated region, largely unknown in Britain and most likely of little interest to the British public. Although part of the Soviet Bloc, Eastern Europe was conceptualised as less aggressive than the USSR. Since the late 1940s they had been portrayed as the victims of Soviet repression.87

The marginalised status of the Eastern European states was indicated by the persistent use of the Cold War terminology 'Soviet satellite'.88 Joanna Drew of the Arts Council recalled having to assist with displays of 'Bulgarian tatting, or whatever, promoted by some minor European country'.89 An offhand written comment by Ivor Pink, the British Ambassador to Hungary – 'I hope we shall be spared any folk dancing' – indicate how these cultures could be joked about as predictable and old-fashioned.90 Eastern Europe was often perceived to be an indistinguishable mass, perhaps more through ignorance than deliberate prejudice: the Arts Council archives record confusion over whether a particular rejected exhibition had been from Romania or Bulgaria.91 As the historian Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius has observed, from the perspective of the Western spectator 'Eastern Europe' had long appeared to be a homogenous and confusing territory, a trend intensified by the

87 Given their subjugation to the Soviet Union, it was perhaps poignant that many of these exhibitions displayed the swords and armour of these nations' heroic warrior pasts.
89 TNA FO924/1413 Comment on minutes of meeting of (NATO) Eight Power Working Group on East-West Cultural Contacts by Ivor Pink, 11 June 1962
90 'I am afraid I was confused in my Balkan atrocities this morning'. AAD ACGB121/920 Minute from Secretary General to Gabriel White 21 April 1961
division of Europe by the Iron Curtain and their grouping in the Soviet bloc. This view of ‘Eastern Europe’ as minor and generic was not universally accepted – Speight’s more enlightened Foreign Office report of 1966 speaks of the need for a different and flexible approach for each Eastern European country because they ‘differ widely from each other’ – but it was widespread.

The image of an Iron Curtain also enhanced the belief that Eastern Europe was an isolated, remote and unknown region. Populations were described as ‘closed off’ and ‘eager for a glimpse of the outside world’. That there was a great deal of truth in this perception is suggested by the eagerness of curators from Eastern Europe to take the rare opportunities available to visit the galleries and museums of the West in the course of planning British exhibitions [Fig. 4.2]. The ‘little known’ culture of Eastern Europe was a constant theme in discussions by British organisers and critics alike. Although there was some variation amongst the states of Eastern Europe in this respect – Poland, for example, was more accessible – there was still ‘general western indifference’ and uncertainty surrounding how to accommodate these familiar but different styles of art. As a consequence, British curators were sometimes impressed and surprised by the range and quality of the cultural artefacts that they saw on visits to the Eastern Bloc. During the organisation of the 1959 exhibition of Masterpieces from Czechoslovakia, an Edinburgh Festival representative commented to the Czech curator that ‘[w]e had no previous conception of

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92 Her analysis of British cartoons in Punch from the 1930s to the 1950s which depicted the states of Eastern Europe as an indistinguishable group of immature children bullied by their superiors indicates that this imposed collective identity predated the Cold War. Murawska-Muthesius, "On Small Nations and Bullied Children: Mr Punch Draws Eastern Europe." See also Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "1956 in the Cartoonist’s Gaze," Third Text 20.2 (2006). 199
93 TNA FO954/1595 Speaight, ‘East-West Cultural Contacts’ 31 October 1966
94 This was a comment recorded by the British Ambassador in Bulgaria, likely to be more aware of the realities than the average member of the British public. TNA FO924/1615 W Harpham, British Embassy, Sofia to R Speaight, CRD, Foreign Office 15 March 1966
95 These were a comment recorded by the British Ambassador in Bulgaria, likely to be more aware of the realities than the average member of the British public. TNA FO924/1615 W Harpham, British Embassy, Sofia to R Speaight, CRD, Foreign Office 15 March 1966
96 These close friendships that some developed with their British counterparts, have been discussed in Chapter 2.
97 This was partly due to the lack of English language scholarship on these cultures. See Hall, Art in Exile; Polish Painters in Post-War Britain. 12
98 Hall, Art in Exile; Polish Painters in Post-War Britain. 17
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the richness of the Czech national school, and were deeply impressed. However, 'unfamiliar' contemporary art could also leave British audiences nonplussed. In response to a 1955 exhibition of graphic art from Czechoslovakia, one reviewer commented that 'one cannot help being taken aback by the extraordinary artistic conservatism of these Communist countries', noting that they were more like 'travel posters' from the 1920s and 'not contemporary in our sense of the term at all'. The 1967 exhibition of Cubist Art from Czechoslovakia, held at the Tate, prompted calls for a 'broader view' of cubism: one critic commented that many of the paintings on display would seem to have only the 'flimsiest' connection with cubism (or even 'none') to a purist. For some, it was too familiar, ending up 'disappointing and entirely derivative'. Norbert Lynton, in the guise of critic, saw a positive reminder of old links with the Parisian avant-garde. Interestingly, whereas a show of 'modern' art could be promoted by the Czechoslovakian government, just four years later, Lynton would tangle with the more repressive Soviet authorities over Art in Revolution's attempt to show Russian abstract art of the same period. Despite critical complaints, the relative freedom of the arts in Czechoslovakia prior to the suppression of the Prague Spring was palpable.

Being ‘unknown’ and politically isolated often blurred with the perception that Eastern European culture was of little interest to the British public. The Foreign Office’s 1966 report on East-West exchanges noted that ‘East European art, drama and literature has on the whole a limited and specialised appeal here’. Particularly in the area of the fine arts, when compared to the art historical canons of the West, there was a general view that Eastern European works could not compete with this high style: they were ‘second rate’ or ‘derivative’ of Western art, without their

99 TNA ACGB121/191 David Thomas, Assistant Director of Art to Dr Novotny, 1 February 1959, ACS ‘Graphic Art from Czechoslovakia: Exhibition at Bolton’. The Guardian 17 January 1955, 5
100 Nigel Gosling ‘A compendium of Cubists’ The Observer 17 September 1967
102 Norbert Lynton ‘Cubism from Prague’ The Guardian 16 September 1967, 4
103 TNA FO924/1595, CR6111/27 Speaight, Foreign Office “East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66”
own distinct 'personality'. It has been suggested that there was a 'tunnel vision' that excluded East Europe from the standard Western histories of modern art and that terms such as impressionism and expressionism were used differently there. Certainly, from the flurry of Eastern European exhibitions which took place in Britain in the 1960s, it was those which presented twentieth century fine arts which consistently attracted the lowest audiences. Changing exhibition-going preferences in Britain may also have mitigated against the success of these shows. Exhibitions of historical treasures and applied arts from Eastern Europe were not guaranteed success: *Baroque in Bohemia*, held at the V&A in 1969 did not draw the expected crowds in sympathy with the recently suppressed people of Czechoslovakia, even after entrance fees were reduced. Nonetheless, they usually aroused greater public interest than those of Eastern European modern painting and sculpture.

Critical responses generally tallied with these views. Some were suffused with a sense of the perceived inferiority of Eastern European culture in comparison to the West. There was a perception that Eastern Europe was less developed than rest of the continent. Some observers picked up on the term 'medieval', used by the organisers to refer to Hungarian and Romanian works from as late as the eighteenth century. Even organisers like John Pope Hennessy and the British Council referred to

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106 It the catalogue and the curator, if Dr Ladislav Kesner had not gone on so about the national content of Czech art, its absence would not bother us.' SL 'A Czech Spirit in Art? Doubts at an exhibition' The Guardian, 24 August 1959, 5
107 Neville Wallis 'At the Galleries: The Middle Ages' The Observer 30 August, 1959, 12
108 Hall, Art in Exile: Polish Painters in Post-War Britain, 13-14
109 See for example *Hungarian Twentieth Century Art* (Royal Institute Galleries, London 4 May - 29 May 1967) which attracted 43 people per day (AAD ACGB121/500); *Six Painters from Poland* (RCA, 21 Feb-22 March 1968) which attracted 26 people per day (AAD ACGB121/845)
110 Gabriel White had confessed to John Hulton (British Council) in 1965 that: "The public interest in general surveys of national art has very much declined while there is great enthusiasm for what younger experimental artists are doing in all countries." Comment recorded in letter AAD ACGB121/223 from Hulton, British Council to Wesley, Cultural Attaché, Prague 5 November 1965
111 'As to the poor attendance in London, we had hopes that quite apart from the artistic merit of the exhibition a Czech exhibition would draw a large attendance because of the political situation where the sympathy of the British public had shown itself to be so strongly on the side of the Czech people. This was a supposition which members of your Fine Art Department shared with us when we drew up the estimate. Alas, we were wrong.' AAD ACGB121/123 Draft letter by Gabriel White from the Secretary General of the Arts Council to Sir John Henniker, Director General of the British Council12 May 1970
112 Jacques Brunius questioned why this term was applied to these artefacts, believing that in conventional 'Western' histories of art, the medieval period had finished in the fourteenth century. AAD ACGB121/920 'The Critics', transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
the Hungarian Art Treasures as the ‘Hungarian medieval exhibition’, despite it covering the renaissance and baroque periods. British praise for the exhibitions also concealed a tacit recognition that the ‘East’ had developed more slowly than the ‘West’, describing a ‘late flowering’ of Byzantine art in Romania dating ‘only from the sixteenth century’.\textsuperscript{113} Not only were they seen as secondary to Western Europe, The Eastern European cultures on display were mentally positioned as being less significant than those of the Soviet Union. Edgar Anstey commented that he had seen ‘infinitely better’ Russian icons than the ‘second-line work’ exhibited from Romania.\textsuperscript{114}

In negotiations, the British hosts frequently encouraged displays of decorative and applied arts in preference to those of fine art. Not only were these thought to be more attractive to the British public and likely to be of a higher quality, such artefacts – ranging from valuable treasures to folk art pieces - were neutral, ‘diplomatic’ objects. They could project multiple identities: images of cultured, long-established European nations or safe stereotypes of an historic ‘East’ that was not modern or progressive. Although largely non-controversial, the mainstream British press presented the arrival of such object as a political drama: news features emphasised the Cold War intrigue and mystery which surrounded the arrival of a ‘sealed treasure wagon’ coming to Britain from Hungary.\textsuperscript{115}

However, these politicised responses were the exception. They were less apparent in the dedicated arts criticism that tended to focus on the cultural value of the precious artefacts. Mentions of the Cold War were largely absent in discussions of what were seen as educational cultural events. Gosling marvelled at the revelations provided by the applied arts at

\textsuperscript{113} Cordelia Oliver ‘Rumanian Art’ The Guardian 23 August 1965, 7
\textsuperscript{114} AAD ACGB121/920 ‘The Critics’, transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966. The Arts Council agreed in private that the icons were ‘frankly very disappointing and not very good’. AAD ACGB121/920 White to Monsieur Cain, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, 5 November 1965.
\textsuperscript{115} V&A VX.1967.010 Press cuttings
Hungarian Art Treasures.\textsuperscript{116} He thought that the ‘craft-products’ were ‘[e]specially rewarding and new’, listing in detail the:

...gigantic jewelled Byzantine brooches, embroidered chasubles with whole bas-relief facades of silk and golden thread and seed-pears, chunky medieval stove-tiles, a saddle of carved bone, the Emperor Sigismund’s gorgeous drinking horn and huge sword...\textsuperscript{117}

Whilst the precious nature of the decorative artefacts was praised, the fact that many of them - particularly at the 1965 Romanian exhibition - were of religious origin could have been problematic for the atheist communist regimes.\textsuperscript{118} However, this was not seen as an issue by critics. Pope Hennessy frequently referred to the 1967 Hungarian show as ‘an exhibition of Hungarian religious art’\textsuperscript{119}. The Romanian ecclesiastical content was clearly discerned in Britain: the Archbishop of Canterbury was invited to open the London showing, [Fig. 4.3] and the exhibition was reported with interest in the Christian press.\textsuperscript{120} The design of the Edinburgh display emphasised the precious and holy nature of the exhibits. Planned by the British-based architects Stefan Buzás\textsuperscript{121} and Alan Irvine, the silver-gilt vessels and reliquaries, illuminated manuscripts, icons and glittering embroideries were shown in a deliberately darkened space, described as ‘very effective’ in giving ‘the feeling of being in a monastery’.\textsuperscript{122} Cordelia Oliver gave an evocative description of this ‘collection of precious, sumptuous objects’:

...go into the gallery which is darkened like a catacomb but hushed with deep carpeting and stand still to allow the strange barbaric visual atmosphere to have its way ...each collection of precious church vessels is lit individually to glow in the darkness so that every vestige of life and colour in the room is concentrated in the exhibits.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{116} Nigel Gosling ‘Pioneering Russians’ The Observer 29 October 1967 25
  \item\textsuperscript{117} Nigel Gosling ‘Hungarian Treasures’ The Observer, 15 October 1967 25
  \item\textsuperscript{118} Many of the exhibits were of ecclesiastical origin, including the 16 icons, a pair of fifteenth century doors carved from wood, a fourteenth censer, elaborate silver-gilt repoussé caskets and intricate book covers.\textsuperscript{119} The Arts Council considered the main attraction to be the ‘very fine’ embroideries, depicting religious scenes in precious threads and pearls. AAD ACGB121/920 White to Monsieur Cain, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, 5 November 1955
  \item\textsuperscript{119} Pope Hennessy, Learning to Look: My Life in Art 187
  \item\textsuperscript{120} See discussion in AAD ACGB / 121/920 “Rumanian Art Treasures” 1965 – 1966
  \item\textsuperscript{121} Buzás was an émigré of Hungarian origin who had arrived in Britain in 1938. Obituary: Stefan Buzás, The Guardian 23 October 2008
  \item\textsuperscript{122} AAD ACGB121/920 ‘The Critics’, transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
  \item\textsuperscript{123} Cordelia Oliver ‘Rumanian Art’ The Guardian 23 August 1965, 7
\end{itemize}
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This ecclesiastical atmosphere was lacking at the London showing, which was arranged in a larger space. Critics who had seen both responded less positively to the later display. There was little comment on the communist governments' attitudes to religion: the exhibitions used religious artefacts to show individual nations' differing cultural heritage, rather than making a statement about contemporary religious situations.

However, it was less the valuable or ecclesiastical 'treasures' from Romania and Hungary that were perceived to be national in style by British critics than the traditional 'peasant' or folk-art pieces. These 'minor' applied arts such as Hungarian embroideries, ceramic stove tiles and wooden honey-cake moulds were perceived as a better vehicle to convey national identity: they displayed 'a more essentially Hungarian quality'. These applied arts, with their ambiguous cultural status were perfect for conveying the uncertain and shifting national sentiments of the people's democracies in a seemingly un-politicised way. Revivals of folk arts and vernacular styles, particularly in architecture, had been used to assert a sense of individual nationhood in Eastern Europe since the nation-building days of the late nineteenth century.

Craft objects were ideologically slippery and difficult to classify. The applied arts were used by both communist governments and those resisting the regime: in Hungary, 'attractive, easily appreciated, entertaining elements' of peasant culture were used in attempts to create

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124 The Arts Council argued that in Edinburgh the Romanian icons has been 'much too crowded', grouped together in one large glazed case. AAD ACGB121/920 White to Monsieur Cain, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, 5 November 1965
125 AAD ACGB121/920 'The Critics', transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
126 Religion was frequently used as a marker of individual eastern European nationalities. Judt, *The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe.* 176
127 'Norbert Lynton 'Cosmopolitan marvels' The Guardian 20 October 1967, 9
129 The potential to project meanings onto ideologically hard to classify, frequently overlooked craft objects meant that they could become an outlet for banned practices, as in the creation of abstract studio crafts during the Stalinist period. David Crowley, *Stalinism and Modernist Craft in Poland,* *Journal of Design History* 11.1 (1998).
a mass national identity, whereas other forms of folk art - such as dance and music in the 1970s - could also be politicised by the people as a sign of resistance.\textsuperscript{130} The workings of the state craft organisations in Poland and Romania highlight the conflicting interests of those involved who sought to use the crafts: the Communist authorities, ethnographers, designers and makers.\textsuperscript{131}

With the exception of the catalogues and press releases which stated the communist governments' involvement in these exhibitions (usually in familiar Cold War rhetoric of 'strengthening the cultural and artistic relations between the two countries' or 'promoting mutual understanding'), their political significance in the Cold War tended not to be noticed or commented upon.\textsuperscript{132} In part, this was due to the historical focus of the exhibitions that ostensibly drew attention away from contemporary politics. But the historical could also be the servant of contemporary politics. Eager to promote good relations with an Eastern European state seemingly growing in independence from the Soviet Union, Foreign Office notes which informed the press release for the 1971 Romanian exhibition suggested that there was a common cultural history between Romania (formerly Dacia) and Britain: both had been subject to the 'same strong Celtic influences' and despite the geographical distance between them, both were 'frontier provinces' during Roman times.\textsuperscript{133}

Nevertheless, a few British critics complained that the political motives of these shows as part of a 'cultural exchange' were all too evident. Edwin Mullins enjoyed the 1966 London show of \textit{Rumanian Art Treasures}, claiming that it 'taught me something about a very mixed culture and a

\textsuperscript{130} Hofer, ed., \textit{Hungary between 'East and West'}, 39, 38-9
\textsuperscript{132} Catalogue: \textit{Rumanian Art Treasures}, (1967)
\textsuperscript{133} TNA FCO34/107 '1971 Romanian exhibition', February 1971

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little known country'. But he was also 'infuriated' by the pervasive smell of 'cultural exchange'. Such blatant diplomatic motives tainted the exhibition:

Stamped all over the show were the words 'cultural exchange'. We got it in fact because Bucharest is getting Henry Moore. It's a package deal, and my, doesn't it look like it? Did anyone, here or in Rumania, stop and ask what it was actually for? Surely not.

Yet even here, the outrage was less directed at British dealings with the Eastern Bloc than with what he saw as the pointlessness of the display. Despite his enjoyment of the show, he was infuriated that public money was being spent on an exhibition that he claimed 'nobody wanted'. In the same discussion, his colleague Edgar Anstey was less bothered about the politics and more about the quality, remarking, 'I don't think there's anything wrong with the idea of cultural exchange, but this is a poor cultural exchange.'

Although there were occasional politically unambiguous reviews that described Romania as 'an oppressed nation', in general the Cold War was largely absent in the discourse surrounding the Hungarian and Romanian shows. Whereas exhibitions involving the Soviet Union, notably Art in Revolution, aroused strong political comment from critics, shows from the countries of Eastern Europe were much less contentious.

In part, critics were distracted from the 'smell' of politically motivated cultural exchange by the glitter of ancient treasures. The fine workmanship and gold and silver exhibits appear to have had a universal appeal with audiences. They presented the lending nations as culturally generous and valuing their own heritage, thus detracting from the potentially awkward Cold War context which brought the displays to Britain. At the British Museum in 1971, the Romanian exhibits were hailed as 'extraordinary works of art from neolithic cultures to the Middle Ages'. Critics conveyed a sense of privilege at being permitted to see 'objects of such richness and

134 AAD ACGB121/920 'The Critics', transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
135 'Rumanian Art Treasures', Sunday Times 6 February 1966
fragility’. In 1965, the richness and emotion of the Romanian show dazzled in comparison to the other art exhibitions at the Edinburgh Festival:

There are moving icons, sumptuous silver, noble carving. The ritual of Byzantine art has turned quietness into emotion and splendour. There is more passion in a square-inch of silver thread in one of these Moldavian embroideries than in the whole of Corot’s Salon sell-outs. The ‘great size’ of these embroideries – sometimes more than seven feet in length - rendered them ‘monumental and impressive’. The word ‘treasure’ was usually appropriate, as many of the exhibits incorporated precious metals or were of great rarity. The Hungarian artefacts were described as ‘fine jewels in a lavish hoard’ and ‘sumptuous’. At the 1966 Romanian show, the embroideries were singled out for particular praise as ‘perhaps the finest treasures on show’, consisting of ‘gold or silver-gilt thread and silks, sometimes with pearly, on faded satin or velvet’ showing Biblical scenes with ‘remarkable intensity and beauty of design’ [Fig. 4.4]. In 1971, the Romanian exhibits resulted in a British Museum gallery that ‘glitter[ed] with gold and silver’.

The unfamiliarity of the artefacts and the cultures from which they came, as much as their richness, enthralled British critics. Their ‘character, strangeness and variety’ was striking. [Fig. 4.5, Fig. 4.6] Audiences were given the opportunity to see pieces that had been largely unknown in Britain. Both the objects and the literature about them were difficult to access in the West. The catalogue for the 1971 Romanian exhibition, intended to appeal both to the public and archaeologists, included a guide to relevant, and hitherto largely inaccessible, Romanian literature. The catalogue for Hungarian Art Treasures remarked upon the general unfamiliarity of Hungarian culture in Britain, suggesting that ‘the exhibition

136 ‘Rumanian Treasures’, The Guardian 10 Feb 1971, 16
137 ‘Hit-and-miss hoard at the Festival’ by Nigel Gosling The Observer 22 August 1965, 20
138 Cordelia Oliver ‘Rumanian Art’ The Guardian 23 August 1965, 7
139 Terence Mullaly ‘Rumanian Treasures have rare beauty’ Daily Telegraph 1 February 1971
140 ‘Hungarian Treasures’ by Nigel Gosling The Observer, 15 October 1967, 25
141 AAD ACGB121/920 Press Release, Rumanian Art Treasures, 12 January 1966
142 ‘Rumanian Treasures’, The Guardian 10 Feb 1971, 16
144 Cordelia Oliver ‘Rumanian Art’ The Guardian 23 August 1965, 7
145 Terence Mullaly ‘Rumanian Treasures have rare beauty’ Daily Telegraph 1 February 1971
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will form a revelation of the Hungarian cultural heritage’.\textsuperscript{146} Gosling’s review concurred on the new discoveries that could be made in Britain, noting how both Russia and Eastern Europe were ‘one of the least trampled-over and most alluring art territories’.\textsuperscript{147} Knowledge of Romania prior to the exhibitions was equally vague: Edward Lucie Smith commented on his general ignorance of Romanian culture - only ‘Count Dracula’ and ‘Rupert of Hentzau’ sprung to mind.\textsuperscript{148} There was also an awareness among critics that this was a rare opportunity to view the ‘treasures’: they may not be allowed to travel outside the Eastern Bloc again, both for reasons of fragility and - implicitly - politics.\textsuperscript{149}

Debates revolved around whether there were ‘distinctive’ national identities located the exhibits, as the titles and catalogues led audiences to expect. The degree to which this was perceived was often subjective: critic Norbert Lynton was particularly sensitive to questions of national difference in such exhibitions,\textsuperscript{150} complaining that even if the exhibits themselves might ‘refute geographical separatism’, the exhibitions ‘forced’ audiences to look for a special Czechoslovakian or Hungarian character.\textsuperscript{151} Some reviews took the organisers’ assertions of national difference at fact value. \textit{The Times} echoed the press release of the 1966 Romanian exhibition, seeing the ‘interplay of Byzantine and Western influences’. The unknown reviewer stressed the national ‘individuality’ of the priceless artefacts through which (s)he could ‘feel the personality of a particular people gradually transforming the strict dictates of an international style.”\textsuperscript{152} \textit{The Tablet} agreed, perceiving ‘uniquely national qualities’ in the Romanian show.\textsuperscript{153} The ‘national’ claims of each show rendered the historical treasures contemporary and politicised.

\textsuperscript{146} It suggested that the only way to access these objects prior to the exhibitions have been through publications such as those of Corvina Press. Foreword to Catalogue, John Pope Hennessy, \textit{Hungarian Art Treasures 1967} 3
\textsuperscript{147} ‘Pioneering Russians’ by Nigel Gosling \textit{The Observer} 29 October 1967 25
\textsuperscript{148} AAD ACGB121/920 ‘Rumanian Art Treasures’ by Edward Lucie Smith, \textit{Arts Review}, [n.d.]
\textsuperscript{149} ‘Rumanian Treasures’, \textit{The Guardian} 10 Feb 1971, p16
\textsuperscript{150} It can be speculated that this interest in European may have stemmed from his family history in central Europe: he had fled Germany as a child in 1935. ‘Obituary: Norbert Lynton’ \textit{The Times} 6 November 2007
\textsuperscript{151} Norbert Lynton ‘Victoria and Albert: Baroque in Bohemia’ \textit{The Guardian} 12 July 1969
\textsuperscript{152} ‘Individuality of Rumanian Medieval Art’ by Our Art Critic \textit{The Times} 26 January 1966
\textsuperscript{153} ‘Treasures from Romania’ by Winefride Wilson, \textit{The Tablet}, 12 February 1966

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Others were confounded by the exhibitions' pleas to construe the exhibits as 'specifically Rumanian', being different from Russian and Byzantine art. Edward Lucie Smith stated that '[n]o one would dream of calling Rumanian art an important national school'. The Hungarian exhibition also aroused queries as to whether its content was 'particularly Hungarian'. Lynton failed to see a distinctive Hungarian style, asserting that 'the most impressive exhibits, at any rate, indicate nothing more specific than that they were created east of France and north of Italy.' He wryly commented that '[p]erhaps it takes a mother's loving eye to tell this sort of brood from her neighbours'. Instead, despite the Hungarian authorities' efforts, it was the cosmopolitan and remarkably similar nature of central European culture at that time that he saw highlighted by the chosen exhibits. He argued that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, cultural internationalism was particularly strong, as evinced by the common Christian heritage of the 'international Gothic' style of the supposedly Hungarian limewood carvings and altarpieces [Fig. 4.7].

Claims to distinct national characters by the Hungarian and Romanian organisers were challenged by some critics who asserted that such identities were nebulous. They were conscious of the shifting geographies of Eastern Europe, and the difficulties of constructing linear national histories from these fluid entities. Via the prism of eight centuries of Hungarian history presented at the Art Treasures exhibition, Lynton perceived 'Hungary' as a 'more than usually abstract and variable unit'. He found stylistic continuity difficult to discern amid the combination Christian culture, the diverse tribes of Tartars, Turks and Austrians and the 'vagueness' of its geography. Edward Lucie Smith perceived the 1966 Romanian exhibition in comparable light. He stated that it was difficult to

154 AAD ACGB121/920 'The Critics', transcript of BBC radio show broadcast Sunday 13 February 1966
155 AAD ACGB121/920 'Rumanian Art Treasures' by Edward Lucie Smith, Arts Review, [n.d.]
156 Norbert Lynton 'Cosmopolitan marvels' The Guardian 20 October 1967, 9
157 Eight centuries was 'the period from the Magyar Conquest to the formation of the modern Hungarian state'. Dr Endre Rosta, President of the Institute of Cultural Relations, 'Introduction' Catalogue: Hungarian Art Treasures (1967) 5
158 Norbert Lynton 'Cosmopolitan marvels' The Guardian 20 October 1967, 9
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make generalisations about Romanian art because 'the country itself is a modern creation', located within the 'traditional storminess of Balkan politics'. Another critic noted how Romania had been a country at a 'political and cultural crossroads'. But although for some, this mixing of cultural influences was problematic in the light of assertions of national distinctiveness; other observers enjoyed the 'rich flavour' it created, similar to Hofer's 'polyphonic' concept of national character. At the Hungarian exhibition, one critic praised 'this sumptuous collection [that] shows the many influences – French, German, Italian and occasionally Oriental – which have left their mark on this embattled culture.'

This suggestion of a more multi-faceted Eastern European character was taken further in other exhibitions. As the following sections demonstrate, exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass challenged Eastern European stereotypes by promoting the elements of modernity and progressiveness in their national culture. And Poland was to present a polyphonic national identity at odds with a supposedly isolated Eastern Bloc country: expansive, open and Western.

'BEAUTIFUL, SURPRISING AND FUNNY': BOHEMIAN GLASS

These Hungarian and Romanian art treasures exhibitions utilised historic artefacts in their discourse of a Cold War nationality; in contrast, exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass in Britain used a mixture of antique and post-war artefacts. This was a progressive, prestigious Eastern European identity located not merely in the dusty objects of the past, but in the contemporary, commercial world, challenging assumptions that the culture of the 'satellites' was generic, traditional and 'monophonic'. The fascination surrounding the exposure of contemporary Czechoslovakian

\[\text{AAD ACGB121/920 'Rumanian Art Treasures' by Edward Lucie Smith, Arts Review, [n.d.]}\]
\[\text{Rumanian Art Treasures', Sunday Times 6 February 1966}\]
\[\text{Hungarian Treasures' by Nigel Gosling The Observer, 15 October 1967, 25}\]

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glass at international exhibitions the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s has been reported in design history literature, but the display of such glass in Britain has not yet been examined. At the exhibition Bohemian Glass, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1965, the British public were presented with both ancient and modern artistic glass objects intended to indicate a longstanding Czechoslovakian cultural national identity building on traditional skills leading to contemporary innovations [Fig. 4.8]. Centuries-old, valuable pieces produced in the central European region of Bohemia were displayed alongside internationally award-winning and challenging contemporary glass artworks produced in state-owned factories. Of 242 exhibits, just over a third were twentieth century pieces, whilst slightly more than a quarter were made after 1947. Traditional identities linked to delicate, valuable and skilfully produced Bohemian glass were conflated with the modern and experimental Czech identities symbolised by glass pieces by artists such as Pavel Hlava, René Roubíček and Stanislav Libenský. This Eastern European national style portrayed was simultaneously grounded in an ancient lineage and also fresh and innovative, challenging the preconceptions in the West.

It may have appeared outwardly apolitical, but this display of six centuries of glass was a small part of a broader programme of triumphal overseas exhibitions in which glass from Czechoslovakia took on the role of a ‘subtle weapon’ in the ideological conflict of the Cold War. The long-established Czechoslovakian glass industry, made up of hundreds of independent factories and centred primarily in the historic glass-producing region of Bohemia, had been nationalised by the new communist government in 1948. This unique set of political, commercial and artistic circumstances promoted a ‘renaissance’ in glass design, with designers...

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162 V&A VX.1965.003 Hugh Wakefield, Circulation Dept V&A to H Hickl-Szabó, Assistant Curator and the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, 18 October 1965
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innovating new techniques and styles in experimental glass that, in turn, fed into developments in mass-produced glass. Following acclaimed international successes in the field of contemporary glass – numerous prizes won at the 1958 Brussels Expo and Milan Triennales from 1957 onwards – Czech glass became the ‘perfect instrument for visualising socialist national pride’ and was widely promoted internationally. The Czech state was more industrially developed than the other nations of ‘Eastern Europe’ and under the centralised socialist system a massive export trade was developed. Through the state body promoting the sale of glass abroad – Glassexport (Skloexport) - exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass also served commercial motivations.

The idea of Czechoslovakian socialist state as the sole heir of traditions of central European, ‘Bohemian’ glassmaking was widely promoted in the post-war period, conveniently overlooking the Germanic traditions which had also fed into Bohemian glassmaking. Whilst some have levelled accusations of a ‘deliberate falsification’ of history portraying this tradition of glassmaking as an ‘independent Czech development’, this was more a consolidation of historical developments under the communist regime. In promoting sales of Czech glass in Britain, the slogan ‘Bohemian Glass Only From Czechoslovakia’ was inescapable, emblazoned on advertisements and at trade exhibitions. This ‘reinvention of Bohemian glass’ was convincing, simultaneously looking back at history and forwards to the future in order to project Czechoslovakian identity and legitimise the communist regime. Commercially, the slogan ‘only from Czechoslovakia’ protected the ‘genuine’ Czech glass brand and its sole identification with that nation, emphasising the continuity from historic tradition, through inter-war Czechoslovakian nationhood, to modern communist present [Fig. 4.9].

167 Ibid., 87
168 Vitrea slogan, 19605: see frequent advertisements in Czechoslovak Glass Review
169 Wasmuth, “Czech Glass in the Limelight: The Great Exhibitions Abroad,” 90
170 ‘Selfridges Again’ in Czechoslovak Glass Review, no. 9 1967, Vol XXII p266, 275
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glass helped to promote mass-produced glass, which, by association, was thought to be of the same quality. Symbolically, these glass artefacts, old and new, represented the Czech socialist state.

Taken at the opening of Bohemian Glass at the V&A in 1965, [Fig. 4.10] demonstrates the curious hybrid historic and modern socialist national identity inherent in Czechoslovakian glass. A group of men and women from the British-Czechoslovak Friendship League – a British Communist front organisation172 – attired in traditional Czechoslovak dress stand admiringly alongside a progressive display of ‘abstract creations’ by René Roubiček.173 Despite the contrast between the folk culture of their dress and the strange modernity of the sculptural pieces, the link is made explicit: historic and contemporary ideas of Czechoslovak national identity were not only compatible, they sprung from the same source of national style. Contemporary Czechoslovakian glass – produced under a Communist regime – could lay claim to the prestige of an admired historic lineage as well as demonstrating that it was worthy of acclaim in its own right. This ‘interdependence of tradition and modernity’ has remained at the heart of many concepts of the nation state.174 The Cold War saw the development of a new role for Czech glass. The Czechoslovakian emphasis on exhibiting glass as their iconic national product was not a new development.175 However, as Wasmuth has documented it was only in the post-Stalin period of the mid 1950s onwards that there was a shift towards modern glass. These works, ‘purely artistic in intention and not required to be suitable for mass production’ began to be promoted at events such as the Milan Triennales from 1957.176 Such large scale, experimental pieces of state-commissioned ‘art’ glass - typified by

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171 Wasmuth, "Czech Glass in the Limelight: The Great Exhibitions Abroad." 87
172 The British Czechoslovak Friendship League had been started during the Second World War to foster good relations between exiles from Czechoslovakia and their ‘comrades in arms’ in Britain. However, in 1949, the elected president William Lawther resigned, complaining that the League had become a ‘stooge of the Cominform’. The Czechoslovakian Embassy denied these accusations. ‘British-Czech Friendship League’ – The Guardian March 19, 1949, p5
173 ‘Exhibition of Bohemian Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London’ by J Bribram Czechoslovak Glass Review. (henceforth CGR) No. 7 1965 Vol XX 206-8
174 Harvey, Hybrids of Modernitv: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition. 58
175 Pre-War Czech exhibitions were also ‘invariably centred on glass’. Wasmuth, "Czech Glass in the Limelight: The Great Exhibitions Abroad." 86
176 Wasmuth, "Czech Glass in the Limelight: The Great Exhibitions Abroad." 86
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the creations of Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová [Fig. 4.11] - were presented at international Expos to demonstrate Czechoslovakian skill and innovation and generate international prestige.\textsuperscript{177}

But this image of the modern content at the V&A exhibition was not widely circulated in Britain. It appeared prominently only in the specialist journal \textit{Czechoslovak Glass Review}, in an article written by J Bribram of Vitrea, an agency of Glasssexport intimately involved in the exhibition and in the retail of Czech glass abroad.\textsuperscript{178} The images of this exhibition seen more widely in the British press focused on the historic glassware – in particular the fine Bohemian glass of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whilst the Czechoslovak organisers laid great emphasis on the modern glass, British critics tended to favour discussions of the whole chronological survey of glass presented at the V&A. When it was specifically commented upon, the modern glass was greeted with admiration and delight by British critics. \textit{The Guardian} called the exhibition 'beautiful, surprising and funny' – the implication being that it was surprising that a supposedly 'Eastern European' nation could produce innovative, 'beautiful' and humorous pieces of glass. This 'delight to the eye' demonstrated the 'extraordinary' skill of the glassmakers.\textsuperscript{179}

This section examines how this national identity based around displays of Czechoslovakian glass was constructed and how it was received by British critics, looking in particular at the relationship between tradition, modernity, commercial motives and the Cold War. It uses the 1965 exhibition of \textit{Bohemian Glass} at the V&A as a starting point, but also places this in the context of the numerous other exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass held in Britain around that time, particularly in commercial environments.\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{178} In the 1960s, Vitrea had glass showrooms on Clerkenwell Road in London. CGR
\textsuperscript{179} Frederick Laws, 'Bohemian Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum', \textit{Guardian, Manchester and London} 6 April 1965
\textsuperscript{180} These include exhibitions staged in regional department stores, glass showrooms in London and a Design Centre exhibition, which are discussed later in the chapter.
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These visions of Czech identity, particularly those constructed via the experimental contemporary glass, were 'polyphonic', challenging the idea that Eastern European culture was predictable and one-dimensional. Industrially produced Czechoslovakian glass was also a more familiar and accepted product in Britain than other goods from the other side of the 'Iron Curtain'.¹⁸¹ This familiarity was in contrast to the idea that Eastern European culture was usually alien and unknown.

Initially conceived outside of the formal cultural programme between Britain and Czechoslovakia, the 1965 exhibition of Bohemian Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum became part of these reciprocal exchanges by chance. It arose following an approach in July 1963 from the import agency Vitrea to the Museum to stage an exhibition of historic glassware.¹⁸² Foreign Office advice was sought by the cautious V&A Director who believed that the exhibition 'might raise certain 'Iron Curtain' implications'.¹⁸³ However, the Foreign Office welcomed the proposed exhibition which arrived at what they saw as an 'opportune moment', filling a gap in the reciprocal exchanges. Bohemian Glass was slotted into the existing programme, to balance British Painting in Prague, due winter 1963.¹⁸⁴ The exhibits were considered to be of a high quality, so the V&A was happy to accept the proposed show.¹⁸⁵

The methods of organisation at the 1965 exhibition were seen as a breakthrough by the British Council in their aim of establishing 'normal working relations' with cultural bodies in Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁶ In this instance, intermediaries like the Arts Council were not involved. Instead,

¹⁸¹ Some critics reminisced about the cheap Czech wine glasses that they used to buy pre-war. Frederick Laws, 'Bohemian Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum' The Guardian 6 April 1965
¹⁸³ V&A VX.1965.003 Trenchard Cox, Director of V&A to Mr Neylan, Department of Education 15 August 1963
¹⁸⁴ The previously scheduled 'quid pro quo' exhibition coming to Britain from Czechoslovakia had fallen through. V&A VX.1965.003 Speaight, Foreign Office to DH Leadbetter, Ministry of Education, 12 September 1963
¹⁸⁵ 'they would not, of course, be sympathetic unless they were expecting an exhibition of very high quality' V&A VX.1965.003 DH Leadbetter, Ministry of Education to R Cecil, Cultural Relations Dept, Foreign Office, 19 August 1963
¹⁸⁶ TNA FO8244/1662 John Hulton, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, British Council to Richard Auty, British Ambassador in Budapest, 12 December 1966
V&A staff such as Hugh Wakefield, Keeper of the Circulation Department who supervised the exhibition,187 and Trenchard Cox, the museum’s likable Director (1955-1966), worked closely with Czechoslovakian museum curators like Dr Libuše [Liba] Určsová of the Uměleckoprůmyslové (Decorative Arts) Museum in Prague. The V&A administered the show on behalf of the British Council, regularly informing it of their progress. This was the first Eastern European exhibition in Britain to exemplify the British Council’s ‘ideal of direct co-operation’ between museum experts in each country.188 Close friendships developed between the V&A staff and the Czechoslovakian curators and designers, and a visit by leading Czech glassmaker Pavel Hlava resulted in his subsequent teaching placement at the RCA organised by the British Council.189

However, the V&A was less concerned about the political implications of staging an exhibition of glass from a communist country than about commercial repercussions.190 They were quick to recognise that the exhibition was motivated by trade as well as ideology, something which was viewed with mistrust at the museum. The curator Christopher Wilk has documented how the V&A’s reluctance to collect twentieth-century pieces until the 1970s was in part a consequence of the museum’s longstanding fear of being accused of using public funds for advertising and engaging in commerce.191 Like other Western exhibitions which could be open to ‘trade’ connotations – 1961’s exhibition of Scandinavian design *Finlandia* and 1970’s *Modern Chairs* (which was distanced from the V&A

187 Wakefield had published on 19th Century British glass. V&A VX.1965.003 Cox, Director of V&A to Mr Neylan 15 August 1963
189 Hlava visited London for the opening of the 1965 V&A exhibition and was later invited to the RCA to teach. At the opening of Bohemian Glass he presented the Director of the V&A with a modern glass vase utilising a new technique of decoration where silver was ‘sandwiched’ between two layers of glass. See ‘Pavel Hlava in England’ *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* May 1965 545
190 The V&A did not ‘foresee any difficulties’ of a political nature, although they consulted the Department of Education as a precaution before accepting. V&A VX.1965.003, Cox to Neylan 15 August 1963
191 This reluctance dated back to a report of 1914 by the Director Cecil Harcourt Smith. Wilk also attributed to matters of taste, the need to maintain a dispassionate civil service environment and British ambivalence about modernist design. Christopher Wilk, *Collecting the Twentieth Century,* A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum, ed. Malcolm Baker (London: V&A, 1997).
premises by being staged at the Whitechapel Art Gallery), the museum's Circulation Department took charge of Bohemian Glass. The Circulation Department, which specialised in organising travelling exhibitions of the museum’s collections, was more open to modern design than the rest of the V&A. 192

In contrast with the exhibitions of Hungarian and Romanian decorative arts, the high quality of Czechoslovakian glass was never in doubt. Instead, negotiations sought to control the trade aspect: the V&A thought it was 'quite obvious' from the outset that the Czech authorities ‘hope that it will provide some commercial propaganda for their modern glass industry’ and sought to downplay this aspect. 193 Vitrea, as a commercial export company had the backing of the Czech government and glass industry. 194 There was continuing tension between the commercial and artistic impulses of the exhibition, with the Czech side wanting to include a greater proportion of contemporary pieces. The Czechoslovak ambassador had asserted in May 1965 that he wished to see Czech glass 'treated more as an art form similar to sculpture rather than merely a commercial commodity'. 195 And yet as the Czech authorities aimed to promote their glass as an art form, staff at the Victoria and Albert Museum were concerned that the inclusion of the modern artistic glass would result in a show which would be too commercial in tone. During preliminary discussions in 1963, Trenchard Cox, the museum's Director commented on the need to ensure that displays of innovative modern design were not business-related:

We ourselves are always extremely cautious about mounting any exhibition here which might be considered as a trade show and it is for this reason that we have made it clear to the Czechs that not more than 25% of the exhibition should be devoted to modern glass. We do not wish to exclude modern glass completely since

193 V&A VX.1965.003, Cox to Neylan 15 August 1963
194 V&A VX.1965.003 Leadbetter, Ministry of Education to Cecil, Foreign Office, 19 August 1963
195 Draft minutes of lunch with Czech Ambassador and Cultural Attaché 10 May 1965, East Europe Committee: Czechoslovak Group BW2/711
the Czech glass industry has been producing some interesting work in recent years.\textsuperscript{196}

As a consequence, the V&A sought, with the Foreign Office's approval, to restrict the exhibition to 'mostly of historic examples' which would provide 'as balanced a representation as possible of the finest work of past centuries'.\textsuperscript{197} As the organisational process progressed, the need to keep the proportion of modern glass at a quarter was again reiterated.\textsuperscript{198} The V&A proposed that of the bulk of the exhibition – around 65% - should be made up of baroque and nineteenth century pieces.\textsuperscript{199} However, in March 1965 the Czech curator informed Wakefield that they had added more modern pieces to the show, including a lampwork piece by Věra Lišková (1965), a number of pieces of pressed glass by Rudolf Junnikl (1963) and cut and etched glass by Adolf Matura.\textsuperscript{200} Wakefield's worried response was that these extra pieces, which were not listed in the already-printed catalogue, would 'overload the modern section' and prevent the exhibition from being a 'balanced historical review'.\textsuperscript{201} But it seems that the V&A's real concerns lay with the danger that the exhibition may become a trade show. Especially at this particular museum, the lines between trade and culture in exhibitions of Czechoslovakian glass remained blurred.

What were the similarities and differences between Bohemian Glass and the more commonplace Czechoslovakian glass trade shows? The 1965 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum was the most prestigious in a series of Czechoslovakian glass displays that took place in Britain from the late 1950s onwards.\textsuperscript{202} Organised with the involvement of the Czech glass industry, the majority of these displays took place in retail or trade environments, frequently department stores in London and regional

\textsuperscript{196} V&A VX.1965.003, Cox to Neylan 15 August 1963
\textsuperscript{197} V&A VX.1965.003 Wakefield, V&A to Bribram, Vitrea, 3 October 1963
\textsuperscript{198} V&A VX.1965.003 Kaufmann to Carol Hogben, 24 February 1964
\textsuperscript{199} Provisional proportions suggested by the V&A were 4 medieval, 12 renaissance, 79 baroque, 90 19th century, 55 early 20th century and 20 contemporary pieces. V&A VX.1965.003 Kaufmann to Charleston and Wakefield, 24 May 1964
\textsuperscript{200} V&A VX.1965.003 Liba ŠUresová to Wakefield, 4 March 1965
\textsuperscript{201} V&A VX.1965.003 Wakefield to ŠUresová 12 March 1965
\textsuperscript{202} Palata suggests that it was Khrushchev's approval of the Moscow exhibition of Czech glass in 1959 which opened the way for an explosion of foreign exhibitions and visits by Czechoslovak glass designers to the West. Palata, "Czechoslovak Glass: A Subtle Weapon in the Superpowers' Ideological Struggle. The Czechoslovak Glass Exhibition, Moscow, 1959." 108
towns. They were part of a wider programme to project Czechoslovakian achievements in glass abroad via touring exhibitions, and as such there was much recycling of exhibits and displays. Industrially produced glass from Czechoslovakia had been well known in Britain before the Second World War, but it was not until the end of the 1950s that it started to re-establish itself in Britain. A 1959 British article heralded the 'return of Bohemian glass' and praised the Czech successes at the Brussels Expo. It noted the persistence of the pre-war reputation of the high standards and long-standing traditions of Bohemian glass under the new centralised system of industry and commented how the new simple, clean lines of modern Czech glass could compete with those of Sweden and West Germany. Glassexport's push for British markets is demonstrated in the publication of the Czech produced English language trade journal Czechoslovak Glass Review from the late 1950s. This publication claimed in 1960 that the English public 'has not forgotten... than Bohemian glass has been exported to England for many centuries'. One 1964 edition by CGR comprised an entire special issue devoted to promoting trade in Czech glass with Britain.

1959 saw a glass exhibition of over 400m² at Selfridges in London, which then travelled to Lewis's department store in Manchester. This show combined commercial and artistic motives. Whilst 60% of the exhibition comprised commercial glassware, exhibits also included prize-winning sculptural pieces from international exhibitions. Subsequent Selfridges exhibitions followed in 1961 [Fig. 4.12, Fig. 4.13] - with striking window displays and photographic panels showing glassblowers at work - and in 1967, when Czechoslovakian glass again occupied a number of the department stores' windows and glass engraving demonstrations were

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203 Wasmuth also notes how much of the art glass from state owned factories was not presented in a museum context, but rather in the framework of 'competitive trade fair with emphasis on crafts', co-ordinated by Skloexport (Glassexport). Wasmuth, "Czech Glass in the Limelight: The Great Exhibitions Abroad." 86
204 J.E. Mc "The Return of Bohemian Glass" The Guardian 2 October 1959 8
205 Bohemian Glass in England", CGR, Jan –Feb 1960, Vol XV
207 CGR No. 5 1961 Vol XVI 171
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Please refer to the original text to see this material.
given as part of the exhibition of a variety of consumer goods *From Czechoslovakia.*\(^{208}\) Despite a similar exhibition at Harrods in 1967, such exhibitions were by no means confined to London, and the 1960s saw glass displays in department stores in Manchester, Leeds, and Derby, amongst others. Their significance is evident from the attention given to them by the Czech authorities: frequently, the Czech ambassador was present to open the exhibitions.\(^{209}\) Public figures from mayors to Miss Great Britain were invited and presented with pieces of ‘Bohemian Glass Only from Czechoslovakia’.\(^{210}\) These displays and events positioned Czech glass as a modern, celebrated and familiar product within the UK, distancing it from any potential political connotations.

Czech glass was also a feature of trade fairs in Britain throughout the 1960s, including regularly held ‘Labex’ exhibitions of industrial and laboratory glass, gift-ware shows such as *Giftex* and the *Blackpool International Gift Fair*. A one-off Czechoslovakian trade fair, organised by the Czechoslovak Chamber of Commerce, was held at Olympia for two weeks in July 1962.\(^{211}\) This was the first wholly Czechoslovak national exhibition to be held in Britain, and although its emphasis was on engineering and electrical machinery, it also included traditional crafts, modern paintings and food and drink – and, inevitably, glass.\(^{212}\) Vitrea also had a permanent showroom in London, which used sophisticated modern display techniques to promote the glass.\(^{213}\) A more design-based exhibition of Czechoslovakian commercial products, held in September-October 1967 at the Design Centre, Haymarket in London included examples of industrially produced glassware as well as Věra Lišková’s

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\(^{208}\) ‘Selfridges Again’ *CGR*, no. 9 1967, Vol XXII 266, 275

\(^{209}\) See for example ‘Czechoslovak Glass Exhibition at Lewis’s Ltd, Leeds, Yorkshire, England’ in *CGR* No. 2 (Feb) 1965, Vol XX 59

\(^{210}\) For example, at the 1967 Selfridges exhibition *From Czechoslovakia*, celebrity guests invited to a reception at the Czechoslovak Embassy included Miss Great Britain and Sir Alf Ramsey, England’s World Cup-winning football manager. *CGR* no 1 (Jan) 1968, Vol XXIII 16

\(^{211}\) EC Official Catalogue, Czechoslovak Trade Fair 1962, Box 46; ‘Czechoslovakia on Show in London’ *Board of Trade Journal* 20 July 1962 Vol 183 No 3409 137, 9

\(^{212}\) ‘Czech Fair’ *The Observer* 15 July 1962 3

\(^{213}\) ‘Bohemian Glass in New Showroom’ *Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* August 1961 948-9
delicate glass spheres produced using lampwork techniques and recommended for decorative use.\textsuperscript{214}

Thus, the non-commercial, prestigious museum setting of \textit{Bohemian Glass} was unusual. In Britain, the majority of exhibitions wholly comprised of Czechoslovakian glass had taken place outside of the museum environment. Those that were held in museum settings often included only a token amount of glass. The 1959 exhibition \textit{Masterpieces of Czechoslovak Art}, shown at the Edinburgh Festival and later in Leeds, comprised mainly painting and sculpture from the previous 600 years, plus a last minute ‘additional glass selection’.\textsuperscript{215} In 1969, the V&A show \textit{Baroque in Bohemia}, held under the programme of cultural exchange, displayed a small selection baroque Czech glass alongside other applied arts, sculpture and painting.\textsuperscript{216} A nine-day exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, organised by Glassexport and held almost simultaneously to \textit{Bohemian Glass} in 1965 had more in common with retail displays of Czechoslovakian glass in British department stores.\textsuperscript{217} Because it coincided with the V&A’s show, the scope of the exhibition Newcastle was reduced in size from ‘Six Centuries’ to ‘Three Centuries’ of glass as some exhibits were sent to London. This exhibition shared much in common with the commercial shows at Selfridges, not least its content and display. These would have been familiar to those who had visited similar exhibitions at British department stores and was designed by professional architects from the Brno Exhibitions and Trade Fair Corps [Fig. 4.14].\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{215} The exact items displayed are not known, but one review mentions the present of examples of ‘old and modern glass’. SL ‘A Czech Spirit in Art? Doubts at an exhibition’ \textit{The Guardian} 24 August 1959 5. See also AAD ACGB/121/191
\textsuperscript{216} Exhibition files are located at AAD ACGB/121/123
\textsuperscript{217} The reviewed, Johnson, had seen the Czechoslovakian glass at the Brussels Expo in 1958. WE Johnson ‘Bohemian Glass exhibition at Newcastle upon Tyne’ \textit{The Guardian} 28 June 1965, 7
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Why did the exhibition take place at the Victoria and Albert Museum? The Czechoslovakians' eagerness to mount an exhibition at a national British museum seems to have been part of a wider policy to promote Czech glass as an art form. Although many of the exhibits were similar to those shown at commercial displays of Czechoslovakian glass, it was the placement of these objects in the cultural context of a prestigious national museum, rather than a retail or trade environment which was significant. This resulted in a differently 'charged zone where spectator and art object meet.' The V&A's Bohemian Glass exhibition was part of a broader project to bestow greater artistic recognition and prestige on artistic Czech glass – in particular the modern glass pieces. Not only was the location important; the high level of guests at the opening ceremony, including Anthony Crosland, the British Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Czechoslovakian Ambassador, Dr Zdeněk Trhlík, indicated the political significance of the occasion.

Bohemian Glass was prominently placed - in the Recent Acquisitions Court near the entrance of the Victoria and Albert Museum - and free to enter. Wakefield reported that it had been a 'very popular' show causing the duration was extended by one month, but because the area where it was held was open to all museums visitors, no attendance figures were kept. The Recent Acquisitions Court was approximately 50 feet square and surrounded by draped, dark green curtains. Within this space were arranged sixteen showcases, approximately 5' x 2', and four additional smaller vitrines, 1' square. [Fig. 4.15]. This space was seen by the Czech visitors Mr Bribram and the glass artist Mr Matura on their visit to the V&A, and they had judged it 'very suitable'. The glass cases were supplied from the V&A's own stock; the space was not professionally designed as the V&A had no budget to mount exhibitions which did not belong to the

219 Newhouse, Art and the Power of Placement, 38
220 J Bribram 'Exhibition of Bohemian Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London' CGR July 1965 206-8
221 The show was held from 1 April – 1 August 1965. V&A VX.1965.003 Hugh Wakefield, Circulation Dept V&A to H Hickl-Szabó, Assistant Curator and the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, 18 October 1965

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museum. Although the display had lacked the gloss and sophistication of a professional designer, such as the Selfridges shows, commentators were impressed by the exhibition techniques. The use of silhouette lighting at the V&A exhibition – similar to that used at the Vitrea showrooms - was singled out by Art News and Review:

...display has played an important part, shining light directly through translucent colouring on to the enamel painted figures, the diamond point illustrations, the two stained-glass windows (one ancient, one modern), and specifically the sculpture of two lovers sharing a ruby heart.223

But the exhibition stood in sharp contrast to the Laing’s progressive show, which concentrated on the more modern glass and drew heavily on commercial innovations in display:

Setting a new standard in museum presentation by transforming the whole of one gallery into a powerfully lit, open show-cased departmental store...

The Laing show had been arranged by Glassexport, using a professional trade fair designer.224 The V&A conceded that their more staid and traditional display techniques might not have been entirely suitable for the glass, particularly the contemporary pieces. After the exhibition, Wakefield confided that he believed that both the space available and the number of vitrines had been ‘insufficient for the most effective display of the glass’.225

The later exhibition of Czechoslovakian designed products at the Design Centre broke new ground in displaying Věra Lišková’s innovative glass baubles – specially requested by the Council of Industrial Design organisers and proclaimed by Czechoslovak Glass Review as symbolising ‘the modern’ – suspended in a rotating, kinetic display [Fig. 4.16].226

222 The Czechoslovakian side provided all the costs of transport, insurance and packing. V&A VX.1965.003 Wakefield, V&A to Bribram, Vitrea, 3 October 1963
223 Ann Philip ‘Bohemian Glass’ Art News and Review, 17 April 1965
224 WE Johnson ‘Bohemian Glass exhibition at Newcastle upon Tyne’ The Guardian 28 June 1965, 7
225 Hugh Wakefield, Circulation Dept V&A to H Hickl-Szabó, Assistant Curator and the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, 18 October 1965
226 ‘Designer Věra Lišková has a New Idea’ Glass Review [formerly CGR] No. 2 Vol XXIII 1968 47-9
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The responses of British critics give some indication of how the V&A's display of glass was received. This was one of the first major opportunities to see modern Czechoslovakian glass in Britain. Alongside more familiar twentieth century sets of drinking glasses, pieces such as Vladimir Jelinek's tall slender vase engraved with a modern line decoration, Roubiček's 'fat, bubble-like sputniks' and Hlava's 'Apple' were exhibited for the first time. Post-war objects made up just over 25% of the total number of exhibits. The Czechoslovakian organisers intended that the contemporary pieces should be at the forefront, and at the opening ceremony the designer Pavel Hlava presented the amiable Trenchard Cox, Director of the V&A with 'one of his own creations, a glass case produced in the latest modern style of shape, decorated with silver between layers of glass'. [Fig. 4.17] Uršová's catalogue text, though predominantly on the historical background of Czech glass, included a small contemporary section which emphasised Czech successes post-1957. It listed international awards won at, amongst others, the Milan Triennales and Brussels Expo: 'Contemporary Bohemian glass has again become a symbol of the highest values'.

Despite the presence of modern glass, the exhibition as a whole was perceived to be an historical survey, where old and new pieces should be considered together. The majority of reviews discussed the historical glassware in great detail, describing pieces and informing their British audiences, presumed to be unaware of the greatness of Bohemian glass. Design magazine, illustrating the exhibition with an iridescent art nouveau vase from 1900, referred to the V&A exhibition as one of 'historic glassware'. The historical and the modern were seen as a continuation.

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227 Hugh Wakefield 'Seven Centuries of Bohemian Glass' Country Life 1 April 1965
228 WE Johnson 'Bohemian Glass exhibition at Newcastle upon Tyne' The Guardian 28 June 1965, 7
229 Contemporary pieces were numbered 176-232, i.e. 66 items c 27% from 242 in total. V&A VX.1965.003 Lists of exhibits
230 J Bribram 'Exhibition of Bohemian Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London' CGR July 1965 206-8
231 Uršová Catalogue: Bohemian Glass, Victoria and Albert Museum 14
232 Design June 1965
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of each other, not incompatible. The Daily Telegraph noted how 'Old traditions of technical excellence, and a feeling for balance and symmetry have been preserved and have been married to the needs of 20th-century living'. The Guardian, too, commented on the 'extraordinary' skills of the glassmakers of all periods. The reviewer urged readers not to miss the exhibition, encouraging British manufacturers and designers in particular to view the more modern glass. The Times thought that the contemporary glass was 'all of distinguished quality', in particular the examples of 'abstract fantasy in modern glass sculpture'.

Charleston, writing for the art history periodical Apollo, interpreted the development of a Czechoslovakian national style in the glass produced following the nation's independence in 1918, which he saw continued in the contemporary pieces: 'the style tends to be rather a national than a personal one, and the work of one artists is often deceptively similar to that of another'. But this view was not universal. In Country Life, the V&A’s Wakefield speculated on the 'effect of the centralised organisation of design on the development of a national style in glassware'. The Guardian thought that the many such recent pieces 'could have been from any country, acceptable by international taste and saleable only to the rich or to museums'. Although some of the historic glassware was produced before the modern Czechoslovakian state existed, it was seen by some British critics as more 'national' in character than the internationalism of the modern glass. This view of the modern Czech glass was supported by the comments of Pavel Hlava on his visit to England, itself a sign of the relative freedoms afforded by the Czech regime to celebrated glass artists. He commented on the openness of Czech artists to broader European art currents:

The world has become small, remarked Mr Hlava; and movements tend to be universal rather than restricted to one country.

233 Terence Mullaly 'Glass Renaissance' The Daily Telegraph 8 April 1965
234 Frederick Laws 'Bohemian Glass' The Guardian 6 April 1965
235 '240 Examples of the Use and Beauty of Bohemian Glass' The Times 7 April 1965
236 RJ Charleston 'Bohemian Glass', Apollo Vol 81 June 1965 488
237 Hugh Wakefield 'Seven Centuries of Bohemian Glass' Country Life 1 April 1965
238 Frederick Laws 'Bohemian Glass' The Guardian 6 April 1965
239 Pavel Hlava in England' in Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review May 1965 p545
Whether the modern glass displayed discernable 'national' characteristics was linked to the discourse referred to in the first section of this chapter: was Eastern European national style located more fully in the applied arts than in the fine arts, especially those of the twentieth century, which were seen as more international in style? Comparable exhibitions of twentieth century Eastern European painting in Britain were described as being 'so similar all over the world', partly due to the rapid development of communications that national character was now no longer visible. The 1967 exhibition of twentieth century Hungarian art was described as a 'characterless amalgam', lacking in excitement and individuality. Czechoslovakian efforts to re-define their modern glassware as fine art works brought about a similar re-definition of their pieces as 'international' in style.

Another problem with the 'national' identity of the glass exhibited at Bohemian Glass lay with the 'national' region being defined. As has already been shown, the Bohemian glassmaking tradition had been claimed by Czechoslovakia, who proclaimed themselves to be the 'only' true heirs to the name Bohemian. But the term 'Bohemian', though known in Britain, was subject to some confusion. The almost-simultaneous Laing exhibition encountered problems in explaining the historical significance of Bohemia and its position within the modern Czechoslovakian state: a critic needed to inform readers that Czech glass making is 'scattered through the four provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia; and the greatest of these is Bohemia'. Wakefield's explanatory piece for Country Life prior to the opening of the exhibition noted that the term Bohemian...
Glass was ‘well known’ but ‘somewhat vague in meaning’. He stated that the V&A exhibition was an ‘attempt to define it’. 245 How successful was the exhibition in aligning the Bohemian glass tradition with the modern state-run Czech glass industry in the minds of critics, and was this manipulation of history problematic? One commentator put it very simply for her readers: ‘Bohemia (alias Czechoslovakia).’ 246 The Times, too, was accepting of the conceptual amalgamation of Bohemia and Czechoslovakia, noting a consistently high level of design and craftsmanship through the centuries in Bohemia, now the ‘westernmost province of Czechoslovakia’. The anonymous critic praised the ‘technical mastery’ and ‘artistic feeling’ of the pieces, which he felt to be homogenous in the skill displayed over the years. 247

These ‘beautiful, surprising and funny’ displays of Czechoslovakian glass added a richness and variety to commonplace assumptions about the character of the nations of countries in the Eastern Bloc. Such ‘exquisite’ semi-historic, semi-modern displays of glass could be both ‘historically interesting’ and ‘quite silly and a delight to the eye’. 248 The Czechoslovakian displays created a vision of national identity where extraordinary contemporary pieces of glass were placed against a backdrop of tradition and historical continuity, but these were portrayed as wholly Czechoslovakian creations. The exhibition 1000 Years of Art in Poland went still further, imagining Poland as an open nation fully integrated with mainstream Europe and able to incorporate works by ‘foreign’ artists into its inclusive identity.

245 Hugh Wakefield ‘Seven Centuries of Bohemian Glass’ Country Life 1 April 1965
246 ‘The Glass of Fashion’ Ideal Home April 1965
247 ’240 Examples of the Use and Beauty of Bohemian Glass’ The Times 7 April 1965
248 Frederick Laws ‘Bohemian Glass’, The Guardian 6 April 1965
'A MANY-COLOURED PRISM': THE 'UNCOMMON WAY' OF THE POLISH ARTIST

The Royal Academy's major exhibition from Poland in 1970, like the exchange exhibitions from Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia before it, was an exhibition that sought to display national identity through a collection of artistic treasures. In common with Bohemian Glass, it incorporated ancient and contemporary objects to demonstrate how traditions had helped to build modern cultural identities. However, unlike its predecessors, this was a much more complex and multifaceted image of national identity. As the introduction of this chapter suggested, Sir Thomas Monnington's description of 1000 Years of Art in Poland - the 'priceless autobiography of a nation' - implied that the exhibition related a simple, single-strand Polish national life-story. In fact, the exhibition presented not an isolated tale of Polish identity, but an intricately woven tapestry that claimed to demonstrate not only the distinctiveness of Polish culture, but also its intrinsic relation to wider - specifically Western - mainstream European culture, involving artists and artistic movements from across the continent. The press release described this multi-faceted identity as the 'uncommon way' of the Polish artist. Two separate ideas were conflated in the show: the expected exhibition of 'Polish art' and a more expansive concept of 'art in Poland'. This 'enormous' exhibition aimed to position Polish culture as an integral part of Europe over the past millennium.

Whilst each nation of Eastern Europe had its own individual history and character, Poland especially had maintained a strong sense of nationhood throughout the communist period that was 'firmly rooted in the myths of a glorious history of resistance to oppression and rich political and cultural traditions.' The Royal Academy exhibition aimed to illustrate this strongly defined national identity. However, in contrast to previous
exhibitions, it did not seek to show a linear tale of an isolated Eastern European national culture. It presented instead a complex, expansive vision of an outward-looking nation fully integrated into Europe: a 'polyphonic' identity. Jerzy Banach, the Director of the National Museum in Cracow explained in the introduction that:

Poland...has always been open to new trends in art, and the bonds which had linked Poland with the great centres of art, especially France and Italy, have been many and fertile.252

During negotiations for the show, great care was taken by the Polish authorities to ensure that the title was not misleading and indicated that non-Polish artists who had worked for Polish patrons, such as the German Viet Stoss, and the Italian Bernardo Bellotto, Canaletto's nephew, were included.253 Recent commentators have asserted that Poland and other nations such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia were, culturally, never part of 'Eastern Europe': '[f]rom the very beginning they have taken part in the great adventure of Western civilisation, with its Gothic, its Renaissance, its Reformation...'. Instead, the 'East' meant Russia, the separate, hostile other.254

However, the panoramic image of Poland presented at the exhibition proved to be challenging for British organisers and audiences alike. Whilst the majority were impressed by the quality and range of the exhibition, praising its 'immense scope' not only chronologically but also in its broad definition of art,255 some found it difficult to reconcile the image of Poland as part of mainstream Europe with their preconceived stereotypes of what a nation on the other side of the Iron Curtain country should be.

252 Jerzy Banach 'Introduction' Catalogue: 1000 Years of Art in Poland (1971)
253 The working title had been 'Treasures from Poland' 1100-1969. The painter Eugeniusz Markowski, director of the Ministry of Culture was especially worried that the title should indicate the inclusion of non-Polish work. Similar care was taken in titling the RA exhibition's precursor, held at the Petit Palais in Paris so that viewers 'would not be puzzled' by the inclusion of non-Polish art. RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Notes from urgent meeting (Seidler, Markowski, PRA, Lib, Clerk, Registrat) 26 September 1969; RAA/SEC/24/86/1 TF Stones, British Council, Paris to Lilian Somerville, British Council 30 May 1969
255 Guy Brett, 'Range of Polish Gothic' The Times, 2 January 1970
Negotiations were generally consensual, but there were differences between the lending and host sides. The Royal Academy sought to create a comprehensive display of what they perceived to be a distinctively Polish character via the addition of folk arts; in contrast to the Polish organisers' aimed to use a much wider range of exhibits to position Polish culture in a broader European context, coherent with Poland's many historical shifts in geographical area. For some commentators, placing Polish arts within an international context led them to question whether there was anything 'distinctively Polish' about these objects on display, and whether such an identity existed. One review, entitled 'Poland in Search of Herself', charted periods in which Polish national identity had been prominent and had been hidden, stating that the Poles were a people 'for whom over the long centuries the struggle for identity has become a necessity'. Yet the messages presented by the exhibition – particularly the 'Westernness' of some Polish art and tales involving the rescue of masterpieces and treasures from Nazi oppressors – resonated with British audiences in their depiction of a shared historical past.

This exhibition's attempt to chart a 'polyphonic', dynamic Polish identity was not straightforward. The historian of foreign affairs, Riccarda Torriani, in her analysis of Swiss national exhibitions suggests that national identity is dynamic and changing. She posits that 'the way nations are imagined is related to the wider economic, political and social structure'. Changes in these fields 'lead to changes in the way the nation is imagined'. But the problems of expressing a more complex national identity via an exhibition were twofold: firstly, as Wallis identifies, the tension of trying to 'reconcile a static 'essence' of the nation with an actual history of dynamic change.' And secondly, in the case of 1000 Years of Art in Poland, the difficulty of conveying this complex 'imagined' nation to foreign audiences, many of

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256 There were areas of overlap; it appears that both wanted to show twentieth century works like film, posters etc.
257 Terence Mullaly 'Poland in Search of Herself Daily Telegraph 3 January 1970
258 Switzerland has been seen as an exception to the usual 'rules' of building national identities. Riccarda Torriani, "The Dynamics of National Identity: A Comparison of the Swiss National Exhibitions of 1939 and 1964," Journal of Contemporary History 37.4 (2002). 56
whom may have preconceived ideas of what that 'Eastern Bloc' nation should be, based on their own economic, political, cultural and social backgrounds. There was a danger that attempting to cover a millennium of culture in around 500 objects would result in an over-simplified rather than a multi-faceted vision of Poland: one critic thought that the exhibition had fallen into this trap:

But, as with a distant map of the world, the definition is low, the picture of life at other periods is vastly oversimplified, and emphasis tends to fall on objects polished and spot-lit in lonely eminence.\textsuperscript{260}

This was the largest of the exhibitions considered in this chapter, and considered to be of great significance to both the Polish and the British authorities.\textsuperscript{261} Poland was a vital location in Cold War cultural exchanges, as has been demonstrated in Chapter 2. The British Council viewed Poland as 'an important bridge into the communist world; perhaps the only really important one after the events in Czechoslovakia.'\textsuperscript{262} Monnigton's speech at the opening noted how this was 'an exhibition important to Poland and to us all.'\textsuperscript{263} The British Ambassador in Warsaw described it as the Poles' 'most ambitious exhibition abroad ever', and thought it was 'thoroughly justified' in terms of impact on 'the promotion of Anglo-Polish relations'.\textsuperscript{264} The Polish authorities requested ministerial presence at the 'Official Opening', and it was presented by both sides as an 'event of major importance in cultural relations between our two countries'.\textsuperscript{265} Attendances were described as large – around 55,000 including the private view – and high numbers were maintained throughout the eight-week showing.\textsuperscript{266} The 498 exhibits filled the whole of the main galleries at

\textsuperscript{260} Guy Brett, 'Range of Polish Gothic' \textit{The Times}, 2 January 1970
\textsuperscript{261} It was allegedly the largest and most comprehensive exhibition from Poland ever shown outside that country. RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Press Release "Facts About the Exhibition" 29 December 1969
\textsuperscript{262} TNA BW 51/26 PG Lloyd, British Council representative in Poland 11 December 1969
\textsuperscript{263} Michael Webber '1000 Years of Polish Art' \textit{East Anglian Daily Times} 1 January 1970
\textsuperscript{264} RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Henderson, Ambassador in Warsaw to Hutchison, 15 January 1970
\textsuperscript{265} RAA/SEC/24/86/1 PRA to Jennie Lee, Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, 14 November 1969
\textsuperscript{266} The exhibition was open from 3 January – 1 March 1970. The Royal Academy Annual Report notes the total paying admissions as 48,610; a letter of 4 March 1970 put the paying audience at 49,908, with an overall total of 55,000 admissions including the private view. Admission was 6s / 3s concessions. \textit{Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the year 1970} 9-10; RAA/SEC/24/86/1
the Royal Academy. All but two items came from public and private collections in Poland. Many object types were familiar from previous treasure spectacles: paintings, tapestries, illuminated manuscripts, drawings, engravings, stained glass, carvings, examples of goldsmiths’ work, glass, china, weapons and armour. Highlights singled out by the Royal Academy included three Polish-made treasures: the wooden sculpture of the ‘Fair Virgin of Krużlowa’, an ‘embroidered Renaissance Tent Roof’, and the ‘Chalice and Paten of Prince Conrad of Mazovia’ which were all alleged to ‘display a superb material richness and courtly sophistication combined with a straightforwardness in design and charming naïve feeling.’ The oldest object was a carved stone ox dating from the tenth century. The broad scope of the exhibition’s chronology also permitted the inclusion of contemporary sculpture, up-to-date graphic arts and experimental tapestries: one Polish poster exhibited was dated 1970. A programme of recorded music played and there were showings of Polish films. Drawn predominantly from the ‘great national museums of Poland’, it was ‘a museum of national treasure that the Polish culture authorities have proudly transported abroad’. It was widely considered to have been one of the ‘most stimulating exhibitions to have been held at the Academy’.

The official Royal Academy Annual Report of Art in Poland states that the exhibition was largely conceived by a Polish team that ‘undertook the selection of objects and the organisation in Poland and produced the material for the catalogue’. However, archival material indicates that the Academy was closely involved in curating the show via a series of meetings and visits, and many of its suggestions were incorporated into the final display. Both sides worked together to present this polyphonic

268 Two additional items were contributed by the Bodleian and the British Museum.
269 Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the year 1970 9-10
270 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 ‘Press Release: 1000 Years of Art in Poland’
271 Guy Brett, Range of Polish Gothic’ The Times, 2 January 1970
272 Denys Sutton ‘Treasures from Poland’ Financial Times 6 Jan 1970
273 Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the year 1970 9-10
vision: the Royal Academy was sympathetic to the Polish authorities' conception and suggested additions to make the display more comprehensive. This collaboration was a happy one; although both sides inevitably viewed 'Polishness' differently, they were both committed to creating an expansive and comprehensive vision of Poland.

Because British cultural relations with Poland were not governed by a bilateral cultural agreement, this exhibition was not restricted by the need for reciprocity. The Polish Cultural Institute in London had made the initial approach to the RA about the exhibition, and continued to liaise directly with the Academy (who drew upon Foreign Office and British Council advice) throughout the organisation process. Professor Stanislaw Lorentz, Director of the Muzeum Narodowe in Warsaw led the 'organising committee' made up of museum experts from all over Poland. Lorentz and various members of his team made a number of visits to London as part of the exhibition preparations; Sidney Hutchison, the Secretary of the RA, made a visit to Poland in July 1969. Unlike, for example, the 1959 exhibition of Russian Painting at the Academy, there were few tensions or disagreements between the two sides. Negotiations went 'perfectly smoothly' with little need to involve British diplomats in Warsaw. Working relationships between the Academy and the Polish museum committee were 'happy' and 'friendly'. The Academy praised the Polish side for being well organised and efficient.

Initially, British organisers had stated that the exhibition was seen to be an exclusively Polish vision of their culture. The Academy stressed to the Polish Cultural Institute that '...the important thing is for the Polish exhibits

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274 Members of the committee were drawn from national museums all over Poland: Łódź, Gdańisk, Poznań, Warsaw and Cracow. RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Banach to Hutchison, 18 November 1969
275 The position of Secretary was one of the main roles at the RA, with responsibility for 'running the shop' and organising exhibitions. Humphrey Brooke held the post during the early planning of the Polish exhibition, with Hutchison, the former RA Librarian, taking over in 1968 after Brooke was forced to resign due to illness.
276 The RA only had to contact the British Ambassador in Warsaw, Mr JN Henderson with an 'update' in November 1969. RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Hutchison to Henderson, British Ambassador in Warsaw 13 November 1969
277 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Hutchison to Henderson, Ambassador in Warsaw 6 January 1970
to be selected by the competent Polish authorities entirely. But as the preparations continued, the British side decided to intervene in the curatorial role, suggesting amendments to the content. In similarity with earlier embassy exhibitions, such as those at the V&A, the President of the Academy 'strongly recommended' that quality and not quantity should be the primary consideration in selecting exhibits. The Academy also requested changes to make the character and history of Poland more understandable for British audiences who lacked an awareness of the country's culture. The Secretary suggested that the addition of typical examples of Polish furniture and folk art such as paper cuts would better illustrate 'Polishness'.

A scheduling change during the planning process allowing the content to be expanded. It was moved to the 'traditional period' for the RA's 'main winter exhibition', becoming the 'sole attraction' at the Academy, increasing its importance and scale. This permitted the suggestion of supplementary exhibits: both sides wanted the display to be as 'comprehensive' as possible. The Academy reiterated its requests for folk artefacts and also contextual cultural material to frame the little-known Polish works:

...for instance, the Academy would greatly welcome the inclusion of the tapestries and folk art for which there might not be room in the smaller-scale exhibition. In addition, we could allocate a room for the showing of films which deal with your national culture and traditions.

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278 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Secretary of the RA (Brooke) to Prof O Achmatowicz, Polish Cultural Institute 8 February 1968
279 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Notes from meeting 26 September 1969 (Seidler, Markowski, PRA, Librarian, Clerk)
280 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Secretary of the RA (Brooke) to Prof O Achmatowicz, Polish Cultural Institute 15 December 1966
281 This was a prestigious slot which had formerly been occupied by the 1959 exhibition of Russian Painting, as Chapter 3 describes.
282 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Secretary of the RA (Hutchison) to Achmatowicz, Polish Cultural Institute 29 January 1969
283 Jerzy Banach 'Introduction' Catalogue: 1000 Years of Art in Poland.
284 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Secretary of the RA (Hutchison) to Achmatowicz, Polish Cultural Institute 29 January 1969
In the process, it grew from its smaller Parisian precursor, *Mille ans d'art en Pologne* (1969). However, the Academy also requested twentieth century and contemporary exhibits. By October 1969, the Secretary claimed that although the show remained 'similar' to its Parisian predecessor, the Academy had persuaded the Poles to reduce the nineteenth century section and include some twentieth century material, absent at the Paris display. In stark contrast to the British experience, the French organisers of *Mille ans...* had found they were unable to make any input into the curatorial process, which had been closely guarded by the Polish authorities.

The exhibition as chosen was on the surface the by-now familiar show of historical treasures, but on an expanded scale. Polish-designed colour posters, depicting the carved and brightly painted 'Fair Virgin of Krużlowska' heralded its arrival [Fig. 4.18]. The British press took their familiar stance on what they perceived to be a Cold War drama. Forewarned of the coming exhibition, wrote enthusiastically of the 'security-cloaked' police-escorted 48-hour journey from beyond the Iron Curtain as seven articulated trucks carrying priceless artefacts valued at between £3-4 million arrived at the Academy. This was rumoured to be the only time that many of these objects, drawn from major museums, great churches, religious institutions and private sources, would be displayed in Britain.

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285 25 April–21 July 1969 at the Petit Palais. There had also been similar, smaller 'Treasures of Poland' exhibitions in Chicago, Philadelphia and Ottawa (1966-7). RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Drozdowski (Vice Director of the Polish Cultural Institute) to Hutchison, 23 April 1969
286 The French showing had ended in 1914. RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Hutchison to Mile Cacan, Musée du Petit Palais 6 October 1969
287 Mile Cacan, the Curator of the Petit Palais told a British Council representative that 'a team of Polish display experts accompanied the exhibition and that she only took it out of their hands with the greatest difficulty. Evidently she wanted this statement to be taken as a warning that if the exhibition should evidently be sent to London and be shown in a museum, those in charge of display would have to make a similar stand if the exhibition was not to be taken out of their hands entirely.' This message was passed to Hutchison at the RA who agreed to 'heed the warning'. RAA/SEC/24/86/1 TF Stones, British Council in Paris to Lilian Somerville, British Council 30 May 1969
288 Arguably, the scale of this exhibition indicates that it was a precursor to the cultural 'blockbusters' of the mid 1970s onwards – for a discussion of these, see Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy."
289 Peter Hopkirk, "Treasures under guard" *The Times* 4 Dec 1969; 'Polish Art Treasures are Here' *Evening Standard*, 3 Dec 1969; '£4m Polish art treasures guarded' *Daily Telegraph* 4 December 69; *The Sun*, 4 Dec 1969.
290 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 'Press Release: 1000 Years of Art in Poland'
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Organisers warned that due to their age and fragility many of these artefacts would not be allowed to travel again. However, these 'treasures' were not exclusively made by Polish artists; rather, they reflected the fluidity of European national boundaries over the past millennium, and emphasised the international stylistic interactions. This was a vision of Poland as an open nation which acknowledged her own individual style, but which simultaneously emphasised the integral position of Poland within mainstream European cultural developments.

The narrative structure of the exhibition enhanced Polish claims to an integrated European nationhood. Following a chronological format, the display moved through conventional Western art-historical periods: Middle Ages and Renaissance, Baroque, the Age of Enlightenment and Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. However, there was no mention of the historically significant Jewish population, and no distinctively Jewish artefacts were displayed. Instead, the story was one of a wholly Christian (and predominantly Catholic) nation: numerous ecclesiastical treasures were shown. Also unmentioned was the Polish diaspora: although some of the contemporary artists in the catalogue had lived abroad, the only ones covered in the exhibition were those who had returned to live and work in Poland. The Cold War, too, was ostensibly absent from an exhibition whose main twentieth century historical touchstone was the Second World War.

These riches from the 'treasure houses' of Poland were arranged in chronological order through the Academy's numbered galleries. But although this format was conventional, the display techniques were in sharp contrast to the inflexible 'vast rectangular rooms' expected at 'traditional' Academy shows. For the Polish exhibition, the display, layout and poster artwork were handed over entirely to an architect from Cracow, Adam Młodzianowski. Whereas the Academy was usually known for its...

291 Peter Hopkirk 'Treasure Nazis Missed Comes to London' The Times 1 January 1970
292 Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the year 1970 9-10
293 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Hutchison to Sir Robin Darwin, RCA, 15 December 1969
'refusal to accept new exhibition techniques', British critics were impressed by these unexpectedly 'ambitious' displays and praised his 'flair' which 'goes some way towards counteracting the cavernous gloom of the Academy's galleries'. Two devices that were particularly commented upon were the suspension of a large Persian-style tent roof – under which the press conference took place – from the ceiling of one gallery [Fig. 4.19], and the use of a false ceiling of painted boards from a sixteenth century church in another [Fig. 4.20]: these installations were so successful that they 'transformed the Academy'. Critics marvelled at the six Jagiellonian Tapestries on view, made in sixteenth century Brussels: 'beautiful tapestries and fabric-lengths, lavishly displayed' and also 'saddles, swords and armour...': The layout was also precisely planned by the Poles. Młodzianowski's detailed blueprints [Fig. 4.21, Fig 4.22] show the exact position in which each artefact was to be placed. All the stands and cases were brought from Poland, supplemented by British plexiglass, 'practically unobtainable' in Poland. At the entrance to the exhibition, a sculptural representation of the Polish national symbol – the eagle - stood proudly but in its modified socialist form without crown and cross. [Fig. 4.23]

The exhibition also included twentieth century artefacts – posters, film, painting, weaving and sculpture - which appear to have been negotiated jointly between the two sides [Fig. 4.24]. The RA Architectural room became a temporary cinema, used for film showings of 'Polish arts subjects', it was also hung with twentieth century Polish posters.

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294 Outsider 'In the Picture - a new column of fact and opinion about the Arts' in The Observer 2 December 1962 23
295 Richard Cork 'Poland puts 1000 Years of Treasures on Show', Evening Standard 6 January 1970
296 Terence Mullaly 'A Thousand Years of Polish Art on View at Royal Academy' Daily Telegraph 2 January 1970
297 AP Maguire, 'Polish Treasure' Yorkshire Post 5 January 1970
298 RAA/SEC/24/86/3 Plan for Installation
299 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Meeting Hutchison and Drozdowski 6 November 1969
300 Millard, "The Failure of Nationalism in Post-Communist Poland 1989-95." 207
301 RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Press Release 'Facts About the Exhibition' 29 December 1969
302 Annual Report from the Council of the Royal Academy to the General Assembly of Academicians and Associates for the year 1970 p9-10
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These unusual additions were not listed in the catalogue in detail: the catalogue only listed one piece by each artist in the twentieth century graphic arts display, although a much larger array was on show.\textsuperscript{303} In stark contrast to exhibitions from the Soviet Union, the catalogue explicitly discussed the 'lively' influence of modernism on the graphic arts in Poland in the early twentieth century, and the inclusion of contemporary abstract works in the exhibition.\textsuperscript{304} These abstract works by 'important' young graphic artists 'familiar with current trends' were described as endeavouring to 'create an art corresponding to modern life'.\textsuperscript{305} This autonomy was not lost on British critics: Mullaly noted, in conjunction with the experimental weavings of Abakanowicz, how Polish artists had a 'freedom not generally permitted in Eastern Europe and Russia'.\textsuperscript{306} But this was not complete liberty: Norbert Lynton noted the absence of abstract fine art from the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{307} Additionally, the contemporary works were seen by some critics as only paying 'lip service' to the twentieth century, claiming that 'habitués of Mr Grabowski's gallery in Chelsea will have seen more and better paintings than are shown here.'\textsuperscript{308} Despite comparative freedom, this was still an exhibition sponsored by the communist regime.

British and Polish flags fluttered on the Piccadilly frontage and a 50-minute recorded programme of Polish music ranging from the fifteenth century medieval works to Sielenski, Chopin and Penderecki was played every hour on loudspeakers in the central hall.\textsuperscript{309} Other proposals from the Academy included a fact-sheet on Poland for visitors, 'large 'blown up' photographs of important buildings and monuments in Poland' and folk art

\textsuperscript{303} Catalogue: \textit{1000 Years of Art in Poland} 148
\textsuperscript{304} Reid has argued that art from Central and Eastern Europe 'expanded the horizons of legitimate socialist art' permitting the development of a 'contemporary style' of figurative modernism. Reid, 'The Exhibition \textit{Art of Socialist Countries}, Moscow 1958-9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting.' 101; Graphic Arts: Helena Blum Curator of Polish Modern Art, Cracow Catalogue: \textit{1000 Years of Art in Poland} 126
\textsuperscript{305} Graphic Arts: Helena Blum Curator of Polish Modern Art, Cracow Catalogue: \textit{1000 Years of Art in Poland} 128
\textsuperscript{306} Terence Mullaly 'A Thousand Years of Polish Art on View at Royal Academy' \textit{Daily Telegraph} 2 January 1970
\textsuperscript{307} Norbert Lynton, 'The Art of Poland' \textit{The Guardian} 12 January 1970 6
\textsuperscript{308} RA Press Cuttings Comment by Mr Rosenthal in Transcript of 'The Arts This Week', Radio 3 programme 14 January 1970
\textsuperscript{309} RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Hutchison to Henderson, Ambassador in Warsaw 6 January 1970
such as cut-paper patterns ‘for colour and atmosphere’ in the vestibule.\textsuperscript{310} These were in line with Monnington’s suggestions made early on in the organisation process to incorporate a few characteristic examples of Polish furniture and specimens of folk art ‘such as children’s cradles’ into the exhibition. Monnington believed from the outset that ‘the exhibition as a whole should give an impression to the visitor of the character and past history of your country’.\textsuperscript{311} While it is not clear whether these latter suggestions were executed, as a whole, the Academy’s amendments tended to emphasise the distinctive ‘other-ness’ of Polish culture by bringing its ‘character’ to the fore, rather than stressing its place in the European mainstream. By using suggestions drawn from ‘peasant’ culture and folk art, the Academy indicated how Poland was expected to be perceived by British audiences unfamiliar with Eastern European cultures: its character was perceived to be located in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{312}

But significantly the audience for this exhibition was not exclusively British and unaware of Polish culture. Sidney Hutchison, the Secretary of the Royal Academy recorded in a later interview that there was a substantial Polish audience in evidence:

\begin{quote}
...what we did not anticipate was that there being so many Polish émigrés in this country, who were dead against the then Polish Government, that we had to walk very warily between these two facets of people.
\end{quote}

The Polish population in Britain, many of whom settled in the country in the years following the Second World War and chose not to return to the communist Polish state, was significant in number. Their reactions to the exhibition have largely been lost: they are not mentioned in the critical responses or the Academy’s written archive. Only Hutchison’s later oral testimony gives some indication of the emotional strength of their response. He remarks how those who came to see \textit{1000 Years of Art in}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{310} RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Hutchison to Banach, 28 July 1969
\item \textsuperscript{311} RAA/SEC/24/86/1 Secretary of the RA (Brooke) to Achmatowicz, Polish Cultural Institute 15 December 1966
\item \textsuperscript{312} Crowley, ed., \textit{National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Poland were deeply moved by the images and sounds of their homeland presented at the Academy:

...indeed, when the exhibition was on and we had soft Polish music playing in the background, many émigré Poles came daily and sat there and wept. Tears were in their eyes...they were seeing things from their home country which they thought they would never see again in their lives...313

This strong direct Polish-British link was, however, generally downplayed at the exhibition, contrasting with the 1967 exhibition Great Britain: USSR’s strident claims to longstanding Anglo-Soviet friendship. This was surprising, given the relatively greater historic links between Britain and Poland. Although Professor Stanislaw Lorentz gave a free talk on the historic development of cultural relations between Britain and Poland on the eve of the exhibition’s opening,314 one reviewer lamented the absence in the exhibition of a special section on the ‘particularly close links’ forged by Polish émigré artists seeking sanctuary in Britain and their influence on younger artists.315

Despite the presence of Polish émigré culture in Britain, and previous exhibitions of Polish folk arts, graphic arts, tapestries and contemporary posters,316 the British critical response yet again reiterated the unfamiliarity of ‘Poland’. The country was assumed ‘not likely to be a very clear concept in the minds of most British’.317 Despite being relatively accessible for an Eastern European country - the British Council thought that contacts between Poland and Britain had been ‘very considerable and very varied’ in the late 1960s318 - it was still portrayed as being behind the Iron Curtain and ‘generally not in tourist brochures’.319 Poland’s ‘geographical and

313 BLSA NLSC Artists Lives Series, Sidney Hutchison interview (n.d. c. 1996-8) part 13
314 ‘Professor to Speak on Link with Poland’, Morning Star 2 January 1970
315 Michael Webber ‘1000 Years of Polish Art’ East Anglian Daily Times 1 January 1970
316 There were two other exhibitions of Polish art at the same time as RA show (1970) in Lancaster/Oldham and Sheffield/Liverpool. The Grabowski Gallery in London frequently featured Polish art throughout the 1960s and beyond.
317 Norbert Lynton ‘Missing Years in Poland’s Millennium’ The Guardian, 12 January 1970
318 e.g. in February-March 1967 an exhibition of 18th and 19th century British paintings was held in Warsaw; British artists’ prints 1948-66 were exhibited in Warsaw; the Royal Ballet visited Warsaw in October 1967; Birmingham Symphony Orchestra performed in Warsaw in May 1968. TNA BW51/26 British Council Archive summary of British Council activities in Poland, February 1969
John Peck to JN Henderson, Ambassador in Warsaw 24 July 1969
319 ‘Polish Art Treasures in London’ Nursery World 15 January 1970
cultural context' was described as 'largely unfamiliar'\textsuperscript{320}. In Poland, too, reports on the Academy show noted the 'still small knowledge of our culture in Britain both in its historic and contemporary aspects and the variety of its forms'.\textsuperscript{321} Nevertheless, critics acknowledged that the exhibition was a long overdue attempt to give Poland 'the attention which has been due to it', describing it as a 'richly rewarding' exhibition giving a 'tremendous panorama of the art of a country'.\textsuperscript{322} Not only was the exhibition 'overdue', it was also perceived to be a unique opportunity to envisage the broad historical scope of Polish culture. Critics warned that the many ancient and fragile objects in the displays might never travel abroad again: 'This is therefore the last time that it will be possible outside Poland to learn so much about her arts, and gain so clear an insight into the Polish character'.\textsuperscript{323}

For some commentators, placing Polish arts within an international context led them to question whether there was anything 'distinctively Polish' about these objects on display, and whether such an identity existed. One review was entitled 'Poland in search of herself', and suggested that the continued effort involved in 'being Polish' had left the people with 'little time to develop idiosyncratic styles of their own' – the implication being that they had undergone so many changes of borders that they had not had time to create their own artistic innovations.\textsuperscript{324} The Guardian's art critic, Norbert Lynton – once again taking a particular interest in European identities - questioned how it was possible that the Polish identity had survived at all, mainly sustained by linguistic bonds:

\begin{quote}
The gathering of West Slav peoples that from the tenth century on made itself known to the world as Polonia has suffered such a fateful millennium since that one marvels how their national identity survived. In fact there does not seem to be a more tenacious nation than the Poles – held together, I fancy, more by their language than by any other factor.\textsuperscript{325}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{320} Jeffrey Daniels 'Art in Paris' The Times 14 June 1969
\textsuperscript{321} RAA/SEC/24/86/1 'Polish Art in Piccadilly' by Ewa Boniecka, Zycie Warsawie No 310, 30 December 1969
\textsuperscript{322} Michael Webber ‘1000 Years of Polish Art' East Anglian Daily Times 1 January 1970
\textsuperscript{323} Terence Mullaly 'A Thousand Years of Polish Art on View at Royal Academy' Daily Telegraph 2 January 1970
\textsuperscript{324} Terence Mullaly ‘Poland in Search of Herself', Daily Telegraph 3 January 1970
\textsuperscript{325} Norbert Lynton, 'The Art of Poland' The Guardian 12 January 1970
As a consequence, Lynton continued, the art of Poland as presented at the RA 'is not notably a national product', rather springing from shared, borrowed and imitated European artistic styles: 'Poland's medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and Neo-classical phases are not really separable from the others.' The art historian and editor of Apollo Denys Sutton agreed, unable to identify a 'national strain' within international styles such as the Romanesque. He suggested that the Gothic carvings were the only period when Polish art could 'hold its own'. Lynton also highlighted the overlapping cultures of Poland and the Germanic states and debates over whether Viet Stoss / Wit Stwosz belonged to Germany or Poland. During a radio debate, one critic noted that if he had not been told that it was a Polish exhibition, he would have thought it simply 'European'. But unlike the exhibitions from Hungary and Romania that have already been analysed, these broader European visions could be seen positively: less the absence of a distinctive Polish culture and more the integral positioning of Poland within European culture. In doing so, it fulfilled its cultural diplomatic mission to present an international 'Polishness'.

The Polish identity envisioned in the 1970 exhibition did not only draw on wider Western European movements; it also took cultural inspiration from its trading partners described as being in the 'East': Turkey, Persia, Hungary and Russia. The implication was that Poland was influenced by but separate from these 'Eastern' territories. Strange artefacts that drew on 'oriental' influences aroused special interest amongst British critics, in particular costumes and weapons. The striking and unusual seventeenth century Polish Hussar's armour, complete with wings of turkey feathers designed to 'whirr' when the wearer charged, thereby frightening enemy horses, drew enormous interest from press photographers and writers alike. [Fig. 4.25] The opening press conference was held under the

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327 Denys Sutton Financial Times 6 January 1970
329 RA Press Cuttings Transcript of 'The Arts This Week', BBC Radio 3 programme 14th January 1970
330 Daily Express 1 January 1970

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'magnificent seventeenth century Persian style tent'.³³¹ This baroque tent had been thought to be Persian 'but has recently been shown to be Polish emulating similar tents brought from Persia.'³³² Yet critics felt that there was an 'essential Polishness' present in these Eastern influences.³³³ Although the Eastern influences fascinated British observers, reviewers emphasised the 'Western'-ness of the artefacts and of Polish culture. Poland was described as the most Easterly Western country, which historically had looked towards the gothic and Rome rather than Eastern Byzantine traditions.

There were also artefacts claimed as natively 'Polish' and less international on display at the exhibition. One critic noted how this gave the exhibition a 'special flavour': '[in] the visual arts Poland gives a good idea of how a national identity became apparent and can be appreciated.'³³⁴ The press release explained that the 'uncommon genius' of the Polish artist ranged from the 'aristocratic and western forms' which were part of the 'lavish and sophisticated taste of the Polish nobility' to the 'peculiar strength and simplicity' of Polish folk art and traditional peasant dances.³³⁵ Of the aristocratic traditions, the 'characteristically Polish 'Sarmatian' portrait' was singled out as being exclusively Polish without foreign influence.³³⁶ The exhibition showed how the 'Sarmatii', an 'ancient martial breed' who ruled Eastern Europe were drawn upon by the Polish nobility in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries deliberately to promote 'distinctively Polish customs, attitudes and art forms'.³³⁷ These included hexagonal coffin portraits painted on metal, a 'unique genre' specific to Poland which surprised the critic from The Times [Fig.4.26].³³⁸

³³¹ Peter Hopkirk, 'Treasure Nazis Missed Comes to London' The Times 1 January 1970
³³² Terence Mullaly, 'Poland in Search of Herself' Daily Telegraph 3 January 1970
³³⁴ 'National Character in Art' the Times 3 January 1970
³³⁵ RAA/SEC/24/86/1 'Press Release: 1000 Years of Art in Poland'
³³⁶ 'National Character in Art' The Times 3 January 1970
³³⁷ Terence Mullaly, 'Poland in Search of Herself' Daily Telegraph 3 January 1970
³³⁸ 'National Character in Art' The Times 3 January 1970
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The image of the 'Sarmatian' noble did not displace the stereotypical 'Eastern European peasant' from the minds of British visitors. The seriousness of the emotional response of weeping Polish émigrés at the exhibition was in sharp contrast to the frivolity of a 'peasant' style fashion photoshoot that used the exhibition as a backdrop [Fig. 4.27]. Like the Royal Academy staff who had requested additional Polish folk artefacts, British critics too emphasised the applied arts and crafts which they felt sure embodied most fully the Polish national character. Searching for the elusive Polish national identity, critics were disappointed when looking at the paintings: 'There are pictures that please, but there is nothing outstandingly Polish about them.' It was in crafts such as weaving and woodcarving that 'the Polishness of the works becomes more apparent'. Of such folk arts on display, it was the religious objects – carved Madonnas, illuminated manuscripts and 'the simple wooden figure of Jesus on a donkey' (c. 1470) [Fig. 4.28] - which were described as 'impressive, moving and memorable', indicating 'faith abiding through centuries'.

Lynton also noticed absences in the field of fine art, regretting the omission of 1920s and 1930s abstract art to which 'Poland made a particular, important and quite unpublicised contribution' via the paintings of Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemieński. The political nature of this comment was echoed in Mullaly's review that claimed that the twentieth century resurgence of national identity in Polish art is 'doubly noticeable, for her artists have been able to experiment with a freedom not generally permitted in Eastern Europe and Russia.' In particular, Mullaly singled out the contemporary graphic arts, and also of the experimental weavings of Magdalena Abakanowicz for praise, claiming they united 'elements of the refinement and the passion and the sophistication at the heart of the Polish character.' However, although the display of such

339 Serena Sinclair 'Peasants Are Coming to Town' Daily Telegraph 12 January 1970
340 AP Maguire, 'Polish Treasure' Yorkshire Post 5 January 1970
342 Terence Mullaly, 'Poland in Search of Herself' Daily Telegraph 3 January 1970
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contemporary arts was welcomed, some complained that this government organised display was not of as high quality as the weavings and paintings regularly displayed in London's Grabowski Gallery.343

Yet amongst these varied visions of aristocrats and peasants, ancient and modern artefacts, it was the unexpected 'Western-ness' of much Polish art that was remarked upon by British critics whose assumptions about 'Polishness' were perhaps coloured by contemporary expectations of an isolated Eastern Bloc. Because 1000 Years of Art in Poland included works by European artists produced for Polish patrons, it stressed Poland's historic links to the mainstream of Western Europe. Reviewers were surprised how far the exhibition showed the 'broad historical changes which affected the whole of Europe', reminding readers that celebrated figures like Copernicus were Polish.344 The Illustrated London News, whilst commenting that the early period of the exhibition was 'surprising and unknown', found himself on much more familiar territory in the eighteenth century, when:

...Poland was closely linked with Western Europe, borrowing its court painter Bellotto from Italy and two of its major landscape architects from Britain...altogether there is a more home-from-home feeling of Warsaw as another of the great European capitals.345

Another critic concurred that '...it seems clear that Canaletto must have roamed the art centres of Europe just as 'Capability' Brown made his way around the gardens of England', adding that some works from the 'turn-of-the-century' 'might have come from Paris studios'.346 A radio discussion held by critics even suggested that the show emphasised European unity, claiming that they would not have known it was Polish unless informed prior to seeing the exhibition.347 The sense of a common European heritage was reinforced by stories of how Bellotto's paintings of eighteenth

343 Many of the Grabowski Gallery catalogues are accessible at the NAL. Norbert Lynton, 'The Art of Poland', The Guardian, 12 January 1970
344 Guy Brett, 'Range of Polish Gothic', The Times, 2 January 1970
345 'Poland shows her Treasures in London' by Andrew Causey, Illustrated London News, 10 January 1970
346 AP Maguire, 'Polish Treasure', Yorkshire Post, 5 January 1970
century Old Warsaw served a practical purpose in aiding the reconstruction of the devastated capital after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{348}

The political messages presented by the exhibition – particularly tales involving the rescue of masterpieces and treasures from Nazi oppressors – resonated with British audiences in their depiction of a shared historical past focused on wartime experiences. The British press was enthralled by the story of how Professor Stanisław Lorentz, the Director of the National Museum in Warsaw, who was involved in curating the exhibition and who came to London for the opening. Lorentz, then 71, had been a member of the ‘secret Polish underground Cabinet’ during the war, and had hidden many of the treasures being shown at the Royal Academy – including the Bellotto paintings and a ‘magnificent gold cross, studded with diamonds, rubies and sapphires and made from two thirteenth century crowns’ from the ‘official Nazi art looting teams’ [Fig. 4.29]. The Times praised his ‘courage and enterprise’ in saving many of the treasures from being ‘lost for ever’.\textsuperscript{349} Numerous articles praised the Poles for sheltering priceless treasures from a common enemy, portraying them as the guardians of European culture versus the totalitarian Nazis. The underlying assumption by journalists seemed to parallel Polish resistance to German aggression with their present position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Additionally, the resurrection of tales of wartime solidarity and comradeship between Britain and Poland allowed for the retelling of familiar anti-Nazi stories and glossing over more recent Cold War politics. Although the exhibition Great Britain: USSR (1967) had attempted something similar in its narrative of wartime friendship and shared sacrifice, the Polish tale was more warmly received in the British press.

\textsuperscript{348} RAA/SEC/24/8611 Press Release “Facts About the Exhibition” 29 December 1969 This was picked up upon by The Studio (January 1970) and the Daily Telegraph (2 January 1970)
\textsuperscript{349} Although the Bellotto paintings were discovered by the Nazis in the basement of the museum and seized, they were recovered after the war. The gold cross was successfully hidden from looters behind bricks in the cellars of Cracow cathedral. Peter Hopkirk, ‘Treasure Nazis Missed Comes to London’ The Times 1 January 1970
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CONCLUSION

These exhibitions, from the varied nations of Eastern Europe, presented multi-faceted identities. Whilst some were received as confirming British preconceptions about the cultures of the Eastern Bloc, others, like those from Czechoslovakia and Poland refused to have their national identities pigeonholed, instead presenting 'polyphonic' exhibitions. In doing so, they challenged organisers and critics in Britain alike: the variety of responses discussed in this chapter indicates the ambivalence with which the countries of Eastern Europe were viewed. Though ambivalent, the mood was usually more amicable towards these countries than it could be in the case of Soviet exhibitions. Although some critics complained of the 'faint whiff of politics' surrounding exhibitions like 1000 Years of Art in Poland, these 'priceless autobiographies' were rarely objected to on political grounds. Despite the ongoing Cold War, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia were not conceptualised as hostile nations; rather, like the aims of the British cultural diplomacy discussed in Chapter 2, the mood was more one of support and encouragement towards peoples oppressed by Soviet-imposed regimes.

The discussion of Soviet 'way of life' exhibitions which follows in the next chapter indicates how the messages from these ostensibly commercial shows could sometimes be absorbed without political outcry; however, as will be demonstrated, this was more due to public scepticism about the mythical dream-image of Soviet life they presented.

350 RA Press Cuttings Comment by Mr Rosenthal in Transcript of 'The Arts This Week', BBC Radio 3 programme 14th January 1970
CHAPTER 5: 
THE SOVIET ‘WAY OF LIFE’ IN COLD WAR BRITAIN 1961-1979

Approaching London’s Earls Court exhibition centre in the summer of 1968, visitors would have been struck by these prominent additions to the familiar art deco façade: the bold initials ‘USSR’, heralding the arrival of a vision of the Soviet Union in the heart of 1960s London. This was the second of three Soviet ‘Industrial Exhibitions’ held at Earls Court in 1961, 1968 and 1979, which brought striking Soviet cultural propaganda to London on a vast scale. The 1961 exhibition comprised 10,000 exhibits and received well over half a million visitors. Originally conceived as a trade show to expand Anglo-Soviet commercial contacts, it had a secondary purpose: to give a ‘picture of the conditions in which the Soviet people work and live’. Although not conceived as part of the inter-governmental programmes of cultural diplomacy, they served the same function: as Philip M Taylor has noted, commercial and cultural propaganda are not entirely separate but are instead ‘mutually complementary’. For the majority of the British public, this was their first opportunity to see directly a presentation of the achievements and ‘way of life’ of the Soviet superpower. Exhibits ranged from gleaming space satellites to welding equipment; from fashions to model sanatoria; and from cars and planes to handicrafts.

2 The letters ‘USSR’ were displayed on the Earls Court frontage in 1961, 1968 and 1979. The façade does not seem to have been noted in the press. For a discussion of the impact and meaning of a similarly impressive façade, see Marla Stone, “Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,” Journal of Contemporary History 28 (1993).
3 In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the complex had held a number of national exhibitions of industry and culture. But there was no precedent for a Soviet or Russian show in Britain. By the 1940s and 1950s, Earls Court focused on large-scale trade events and family entertainments. The Soviet exhibitions of 1961, 1968 and 1979 are anomalies in the fixture lists. See John Glanfield, Earls Court and Olympia: From Buffalo Bill to the ‘Brits’ (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2003).
4 In 1968, the entry fee was 5 shillings.
5 ‘USSR at Earls Court’ Design 154 October 1961, 42
6 Taylor, The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939. x
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The first two Soviet Industrial exhibitions had reciprocal British counterparts: trade fairs staged in Moscow in 1961 and 1966, organised in conjunction with private commercial bodies in the UK. But whereas the corresponding British exhibitions at Sokolniki Park, Moscow were strictly based on commercial interests and eschewed blatant propaganda, the USSR’s shows proudly presented eye-catching ‘prestige’ displays of the communist ‘way of life’: space technology, engineering, education, fashion, housing, transport, art and consumer goods. As a consequence of seeing this ‘way of life’ – so the official publicity claimed – these exhibitions would promote ‘mutual understanding between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Great Britain’. But the responses of British government agencies and press indicate deep discrepancies between the projected socialist utopia and the image that was received by British observers.

This chapter examines the series of Soviet exhibitions at Earls Court, focusing predominantly on the organisation, content and reception of the 1961 and 1968 shows. The first section investigates the Cold War political and cultural background of the exhibitions. It examines the concept of a ‘way of life’ as a type of illusion or myth – to use Buck Morss’ term, a ‘dreamworld’ - perceived differently by Soviet organisers and filtered through the preconceptions of receiving British audiences about the quality and availability of Soviet material culture and consumer goods. The second section addresses the content and press reception of the Soviet ‘dreamworlds’ created at Earls Court, analysing responses to both the objects exhibited and how they were displayed in some detail. It suggests that the reception of USSR at Earls Court was coloured by existing British stereotypes – both those arising from the Cold War, and those more longstanding - about the Soviet Union, and ideas of what types of things comprised an ‘ideal’ Soviet object in British eyes. It also suggests that whereas in 1961, the image of the Soviet ‘dreamworld’ could be separated from the political realities of the Cold War and received as a child-like fantasy, by 1968, this illusion of a separation between politics and the mythical Soviet

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7 e.g. Industrial and Trade Fairs Ltd (ITF)
8 TNA FCO 28/436 ‘Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968’
way of life could no longer be maintained. In conclusion, the chapter examines the 1979 exhibition where the discrepancy between the Soviet illusion of their way of life – as a dream of a certain future to come – had become further distanced from British myths of a perceived Soviet reality.

In investigating the USSR at Earls Court exhibitions, this chapter utilises hitherto unexamined material from the National Archives and from the Earls Court archive, in addition to a wide range of contemporary press sources. These are used to focus on British reactions to the presence of Soviet ‘way of life’ propaganda in London in the context of the Cold War. But who was the British audience for these shows? No breakdown of the types of attendees exists. The impressive attendance at the first exhibition in 1961 – around 600,000 - suggests that it had a broad appeal to the public at large, curious to see how people lived in ‘Russia’ or to catch a glimpse of Yuri Gagarin. However, this was large audience was probably diverse, so it is impossible to make generalisations about their views on the exhibition based on the press response. As audiences decreased in 1968, and even more so in 1979, it is likely that the Soviet exhibitions at Earls Court became more of a minority interest, attended by those still sympathetic to the USSR or those with commercial engagements in the country. Anecdotally, these exhibitions seem to have consistently appealed to left-wing visitors. Phil Cohen, writing about his communist upbringing in Britain, described the experience of working in the ‘Russian Shop’ selling souvenirs at the 1968 exhibition.

Recent research has indicated that responses to these ‘way of life’ exhibitions in the context of the Cold War were rarely straightforward. Academic responses, too, have been susceptible to assumptions based on hindsight. In the absence of any visitors’ books recording the views of the British public,

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9 When obtaining copies of the literature distributed at the 1961 exhibition, anecdotally sellers mentioned how they had belonged to relatives sympathetic to the USSR.

10 Here, the Earls Court exhibitions are placed in the context of a seemingly typical British communist upbringing, which also included visits to see Soviet films, the Red Army Choir, the Bolshoi Ballet and the Moscow State Circus. Phil Cohen, Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997). 25-6

11 Reid uses the complexity of Soviet visitors’ comments to challenge de Grazia’s conclusion that the USA had ‘won’ with their national exhibition at Sokolniki Park in 1959. Reid, “Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959.” 855
it is impossible to conduct an analysis similar to that by Reid of the Russian population's complicated reception of the 1959 American exhibition.\textsuperscript{12} Instead, this chapter relies on the reactions of the press (including mainstream, specialist and design oriented), business and governmental bodies.\textsuperscript{13} As such, the exhibitions are viewed from a number of angles, including political, commercial, personal, journalistic, apolitical and aesthetic. Whilst direct comparisons cannot always be made between these attitudes, their range indicates the scope and variety of responses to \textit{USSR at Earls Court}. As shall be seen, the Foreign Office reactions, both official and unofficial, were highly politicised, using language typical of the Cold War. In contrast, press responses in general were less explicitly political, accepting the 'dreamworld' of the USSR on display, but in the knowledge that it was an imagined vision.

Whilst some left-wing press took the exhibitions at face value, most mainstream commentators were fully aware of the illusory nature of the 'way of life' presented in the shows. This separation from reality allowed some to react to the exhibitions in a sometimes surprisingly positive and playful manner, joking about pre-existing assumptions about life in the Soviet Union and to some extent negating wider Cold War political tensions. However, this 'dreamworld', as one newspaper referred to it, was fragile: the illusion constructed at Earls Court could easily be shattered, most notably during the 1968 exhibition when Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia.

\textbf{A SOVIET 'DREAMWORLD'}

The phrase 'way of life' is vital to an understanding of how the Cold War was fought. Rather than being a conventional 'hot' war, the Cold War has been explained as a conflict between the rival political, cultural and ideological systems of East and West. With the decade-long phase of 'peaceful

\textsuperscript{12} Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959."
\textsuperscript{13} Similar methods are used by Castillo to analyse the responses to the Marshall Plan exhibitions in Germany. Castillo, "Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany."
coexistence' which followed the 'Thaw' of the mid 1950s, competing representations of the standard of living under each system became vital propaganda. As a consequence, the real and the represented material culture and living environments of the two blocs have become an important area for Cold War cultural analysis.14

Displays of an idealised, modern 'everyday life' were presented at politically charged exhibition locations in both East and West.15 In the Soviet Union, Stalinist austerity had been gradually supplanted by a socialist version of consumerism. By 1959, a high standard of daily life had become an official prerequisite to 'full communism'.16 In the famous 'kitchen debate' between Khrushchev and Nixon at the 1959 American fair in Moscow, the Soviet leader admitted that the USA was currently ahead in the battle for the most advanced way of life, but also warned that the USSR would not only catch up, but also overtake, the States in seven years.17 But although such exhibitions and exchanges could be confrontational, their stated aim was to promote 'peaceful coexistence'. On his 1957 visit to the USSR to study the current standard of and level of interest in 'Russian' industrial design, the then deputy Director of the Council of Industrial Design in Britain, Paul Reilly noted how his hosts, Gvishiany, Soloviev and Lvov repeatedly commented on the value of such non-political exchanges between the Soviet Union and the West: 'They referred to industrial design and Peace in the same breath'.18


15 As Castillo has shown, this was particularly acute at locations where 'East' and 'West' intersected, such as the divided, pre-Wall Berlin of the 1950s. Castillo, "Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany."

16 'Introduction' - Reid and Crowley, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe.* 12

17 Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War 1945-1961*. 179

18 TNA BW2/532 'Supplementary Impressions and Recollections', Paul Reilly, 17 September 1957
Although the USA's efforts to stage foreign exhibitions which promoted their culture abroad in the 1950s have been the subject of much academic study in the West, less attention has been paid their counterparts from the Eastern Bloc. Academic focus has been predominantly on the USA's promotion of a vision of 'progress and material abundance' that would result from the creation of a 'global consumer economy on the US model'. The Americans depicted this as the only effective means to counteract the threat of communism. Haddow has demonstrated how the USIA used both explicit 'way of life' shows of a 'dazzling' modern consumer lifestyle at world's fairs and more implicit representations of liberty and consumerism at international trade fairs to showcase the advantages of an American-led, capitalist democratic system. The Brussels Expo, held between April and October 1958 was a significant location for such propaganda. As the first post-war World's Fair, it attracted almost 42 million visitors, and is chiefly remembered as the location for a Cold War confrontation between the neighbouring USA and USSR pavilions, representing rival political, cultural and ideological systems.

The Soviet Union also staged 'Way of Life' exhibitions, which became a key location for East-West cultural contact during the Cold War. Even more so than with the American exhibitions, the distinction between trade shows and 'national prestige' exhibitions was blurred: all were state organised and contained analogous pro-Soviet propaganda. In addition to the Soviet presence at major international Expos such as Brussels in 1958 and Montreal in 1967, the USSR also staged national exhibitions worldwide, most notably at the New York Coliseum in 1959 as a counterpoint to the American National Exhibition in Moscow. In addition to promoting the Soviet way of life, the New York show also had a secondary economic imperative: to fulfil 'the vast

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19 Haddow, Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s, 2, 15-16. For a detailed memoir of the USIA's Cold War exhibition activities, see Masey and Lloyd Morgan, Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War.

20 The US Pavilion has been the subject of in depth investigations by American scholars, and is seen to elucidate the nature of the USA's Cold War fears and anxieties, and their strategies for combating the Soviet threat. Rydell argues that the Brussels exposition as a whole 'rapidly acquired broader significance as tensions of the Cold War increased and doubts deepened about the validity of the longstanding Western habit of equating progress with science and technology.' Robert W. Rydell, 'Brussels 1958: Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles (Expo '58)' in John E. Fridling, ed., Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions 1851-1988 (New York, Westport Connecticut and London: 1990), 311
possibilities existing for the development of Soviet-American trade. And in the periodical Art and Industry a contemporary British response to the USSR pavilion at Brussels painted the propagandist display in commercial terms:

It is an enormous shop window for everything that the USSR wants to 'sell', form the father figure of Lenin to the cone of the second Sputnik (without dog), to motor cars (a la Detroit) and to vast amounts of food and drink that can be bought on the spot.

Trade fairs were also utilised as propaganda vehicles by the Soviet authorities. The distinction between trade shows and propaganda exhibitions was hazy at best; this caused consternation for the British organisers at Earls Court.

The Soviet exhibitions at Earls Court were the latest in this series of international fairs and exhibitions that had became, in the words of the USIA, 'an arena of economic competition and co-operation of the two social systems'. The USIA – no stranger itself to 'propagandizing' American life - stated that the aim of these Soviet shows was 'propagandizing their way of life and the success of their system'; however, it also conceded that such displays served a practical purpose in informing the West about life in the USSR:

...in the light of scarce and sometimes biased information about the Soviet Union its exhibitions give millions of people an insight into the Soviet way of life, its advances in science, technology, culture and the well-being of the Soviet people.

But although the USIA document claimed an educational role for these displays, they were far from realistic, presenting instead a specially constructed, idealised vision of life in the USSR. Those held in London were typical in that they aimed to present what Andrej Ikonnikov has described as a 'promising and reassuring myth' of the Soviet Union. Terms such as 'dreamworld' were used by the press to describe the fantastical 1968 Earls Court.

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22 Rene Elvin, 'Fair enough or fair too much?' Art and Industry, Vol 65 no 387, September 1958 74-83

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Court exhibition\textsuperscript{25}, and this theme has also been utilised in academic theories of utopias during the Cold War. Susan Buck-Morss has applied philosophy and critical theory to images from both East and West to unpick how these ‘dreamworlds’- two correlated visions of progress and modernity - shaped both sides’ understandings of life prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain. She utilises Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘dreamworlds’ as an analytical tool to explain not merely the ‘collective mental state’ of a population encountering the constant shifts of modern life towards a hoped-for improved future, but also the modern phenomenon of a mythic, ‘mass-utopian’ dreamworld, and its opposite – ‘mass-utopian’ catastrophe.\textsuperscript{26} Buck Morss claims that these dreamworlds were not only imaginary constructs; they were also:

\ldots assertions of the human spirit and invaluable politically. They make the momentous claim that the world we have known since childhood is not the only one imaginable.

The Soviet exhibitions in London can be seen as the USSR’s utopian vision of the future made physical. But this dreamworld had a dual function: it was not only a mass utopian illusion of how the USSR officially viewed itself, but also provided a space for British viewers to negotiate their Western ‘dream’ of the USSR. As Buck Morss points out, this was the ‘dream that each side had about the other’ during the Cold War.\textsuperscript{27}

In creating this mass-utopian vision, the exhibitions were part of the lineage of Soviet shows such as the Exhibition of the Achievements of the People’s Economy of the USSR (VDNKh), which had the purpose of the ‘creation and maintenance of a Soviet identity’.\textsuperscript{28} Dobrenko quotes Mikhail Ryklin, who said that this exhibition was:

\ldots planned to be a gigantic, agitational, theatrical operation realized by architects, builders, directors, actors and tour guides supervised by the

\textsuperscript{25} ‘Into Dreamland’ \textit{The Guardian} 22 August 1968 8
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 238
Communist Party, which would not only create a joyous mood but would also liquidate the irreconcilability of reality with the image.  

Dobrenko argues that the purpose of this exhibition was not simply an illusion of plenty; rather, that the ‘imagery of abundance’ was a means by which ‘real abundance’ could be created. 

Thus, in the Soviet Union, such exhibitions provided an aspirational space in which Soviet visitors could witness a new, utopian reality of the near future. In contrast, Western audiences witnessing exhibitions such as the 1959 Soviet exhibition in New York were more conscious of the ‘irreconcilability of reality with the image’. Alistair Cooke noted how this display showed the Soviet Union ‘not as it is, but as it wishes to be’; and which, by implication, it could never be. Each side had different constructions of what the purpose of a Soviet ‘way of life’ exhibition was; in the USSR, the dream showed the future certain to come whereas in the West such dreams seemed unreal.

**WESTERN ‘DREAMS’ OF SOVIET LIFE**

How was the 'dream' of the Soviet 'way of life' received by British observers at Earls Court? Did they, like Cooke’s reaction to the Soviet exhibition in New York, treat it an illusion, separate from political 'reality'? The British 'dreams' of Soviet life at Earls Court were placed within existing discourses of what life was supposed to be like in the USSR. In the decade following World War 2, there was minimal direct contact between the peoples of the UK and USSR. This slowly began to open up in the Thaw period from 1956 that followed the death of Stalin, but contacts remained patchy. As a consequence, in the British popular imagination the Soviet Union was a 'mysterious', 'half known' place. The British press and public had preformed ideas of the standard and character of Soviet life informed by a combination of sources including Cold War narratives.

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30 Dobrenko, "The Soviet Spectacle: The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition." 189
31 Alistair Cooke, Manchester Guardian. 1 July 1959 quoted in Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 41
War-tinged news reports, literature and pre-cold war assumptions.\textsuperscript{32} The attitude of a Pathé newsreel of November 1965 is typical of how the Soviet people were portrayed as the fascinating but unknowable other. Documenting a National Theatre visit from Britain to Moscow at which Lawrence Olivier and Lynn Redgrave performed Othello, the narrator poses the question about the Soviet population: 'How do they live, these mysterious human beings, once our wartime allies but always an unknown quantity to us?'.\textsuperscript{33} That they were once British allies, less then twenty years prior to the first Earls Court exhibition was significant; yet the Cold War politics of the intervening years had led to a more ambivalent position. Norledge and Wells have argued that there have always been mixed relations between Britain and the Soviet Union, who could be described as 'neither enemies nor friends'.\textsuperscript{34} The 'mystery' surrounding 'the Russians', combined with the tendency of the Cold War to obscure political realities could also mean that the British public lacked awareness of the 'subversive and repressive aspects of the Soviet regime'. In June 1968, months prior to the Czech invasion, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Michael Stewart lamented this 'ignorance' which encouraged 'a generally false picture of the Soviet Union and its intentions' which he argued endangered the security of the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{35}

In conjunction with growing cultural links to and interest in the USSR, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw burgeoning light-hearted travel literature on the Soviet Union. British journalists and writers who took a rare trip to the country wrote of their encounters with Soviet bureaucracy, characters and culture.\textsuperscript{36} Despite their loaded nature, such sources can be highly revealing of cultural preconceptions and perceptions. As the artist and academic Svetlana Boym has rightly noted, ‘Travelers’ [sic] accounts, while quite unreliable as historical documents, are exemplary texts of cross-cultural mythology.\textsuperscript{37} Chapter 4 has already shown how longstanding Western cultural preconceptions of Eastern

\textsuperscript{32} James Morris 'Stranger in Sputnik Russia' The Guardian 7 April 1960
\textsuperscript{33} Pathé newsreel entitled 'Moscow 1965' 18 November 1965 CP 569 film ID 345.04 accessed at www.britishpathe.com
\textsuperscript{34} Norledge and Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution.
\textsuperscript{35} TNA CAB/148/37 OPD (69) 45 Memorandum by Michael Stewart. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 17 June 1968
\textsuperscript{36} e.g. Fred Basnett, Travels of a Capitalist Lackey (Watford: Companion Book Club, 1965).
\textsuperscript{37} Boym, Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia, 24-5
Europe as the less developed counterpart of the West – themselves informed by the travellers' tales originating during the Enlightenment\(^{38}\) - underpinned the reception of historic artefacts and decorative arts from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania. The responses to the Soviet exhibitions at Earls Court, too, need to be positioned within a context of British conceptions of the USSR.

It seems likely that simplified stereotypes partially gleaned from 'travellers tales', amongst other cultural forms, informed general attitudes towards life in the Soviet Union for many in Britain. However, somewhat paradoxically, these published travellers tales in books and the press frequently pointed out the contrasts between the detailed complexities of life in the 'real' USSR they experienced and the simplified expectations of their audiences. The 1962 revised edition of American journalist John Gunther's 1958 publication *Inside Russia Today* warned that:

> Russia is never easy to write about. It is an extremely complicated country, which moreover is not at all like what many people think it to be, and which is apt to stir up passionate partisan feelings in the observer.\(^{39}\)

These partisan feelings often manifested themselves as the obstacle of 'preconception on the part of his readers':

> People are shocked, I do not know why, even by such a simple fact as that the Soviet Union has produced, and consumed in a single year, 27,000,000 bottles of champagne – good champagne too. In New York I met an educated, sophisticated lady who could not believe it when I told her that Russians make automobiles that run...\(^{40}\)

It is significant that such preconceptions revolved around the perceived unavailability of modern artefacts and low quality of consumer or luxury goods. These objects were an essential part of the American consumerist self-image during the Cold War; thus, they were assumed to be absent in the


Eastern Bloc, the 'mirror opposite' of the West.\textsuperscript{41} At the USA exhibition in Moscow in 1959, one Russian woman indigantly wrote in the visitors' book that they were being shown 'pots and kettles, frying pans and shoes, as if we were savages.'\textsuperscript{42} These stereotypes of a 'backwards' and underdeveloped Russia were often qualified by 'real' travellers tales, which gave a more considered picture of life in the USSR, yet in the West the popular, static stereotype remained.\textsuperscript{43} Such stereotypes were related to the longstanding preconceptions expressed by British critics towards the cultures of Eastern Europe, discussed in Chapter 4.

British audiences, too, shared these persistent preconceptions about the low quality or unavailability of material culture in the USSR. Soviet consumer goods, for example, were often stereotyped as difficult to obtain, poorly designed and faulty. Michael Frayn commented in his \textit{Guardian} newspaper column in 1959 on many westerners' 'unreasonable surprise' that the Soviets had buses, shoes and electric razors.\textsuperscript{44} These stereotypes were so ingrained that never having actually visited Russia was not an impediment to writing about life there. One invented 'travellers' tale' poked fun at the imagined USSR as seen through British eyes. This humorous imaginary journey, serialised in Punch magazine and entitled \textit{By Rocking Chair Across Russia'} (1960), gently mocked both Soviet life and Western ideas of the inferior nature of Soviet material culture. The fabricated adventure, written by Alex Atkinson and illustrated by Ronald Searle, resonated because it was grounded in a popular Western notion of the backwardness of life in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{45} One

\textsuperscript{41} 'Mirror imaging' is now more frequently being used as an analytical device with which to compare the many similarities between East and West during the Cold War. Boym notes, in the context of Western intellectuals who placed their faith in a utopia located in the East, and vice versa, that both East and West were 'frightened by their own uncanny mirror images'. Boym, \textit{Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia}. 24. See also recent calls for a more comparative Cold War cultural history, e.g. Major and Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War."

\textsuperscript{42} Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959." 895

\textsuperscript{43} Interestingly, Reid, using Wolff's analysis of how the 'East' came to be construed as 'backward', notes how the Soviet discourse surrounding the American exhibition of 1959 'rejected' and 'reversed this developmental hierarchy', portraying the Socialist East as the advanced and civilised bloc, and the USA as 'regressive'. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959." 899

\textsuperscript{44} Michael Frayn 'Material Progress – Victorian Taste: Russia after two years' \textit{The Guardian} 7 April 1959

\textsuperscript{45} Alex Atkinson and Ronald Searle, \textit{Russia for Beginners: By Rocking Chair across Russia} (London: Perpetua Books, 1960).
excerpt from the satirical serialisation centred on an extensive list of useless Soviet artefacts ranging from the mundane to the military, worth quoting at some length to convey its ridiculousness:

....Sugar basins are made of some strange, soft metal, and will not bounce. Glue is not sticky enough. Men's hats are a different shape from men's heads: they make your ears stick out. The telephone in my hotel room smelt of acacia on Fridays. Ladders tend to wobble. Local newspapers burn sluggishly. If you leave a kopeck in a basin of water overnight it goes rusty. Once when I jumped on a bus, the step fell off into the road. The spokes of bicycles looked pretty flimsy to me, and middle C sharp sounded flat on most of the pianos I tried. The only inter-continental ballistic missile I saw was made partly of stiff cardboard, and would very likely blow inside out in a high wind. Soap in Moscow has a funny taste....

The list continued in much the same vein, building a montage of Western ideas of Soviet objects, before countering with a wordy montage of diverse, mostly useless, ludicrous Soviet 'triumphs', exaggerated but strangely redolent of some of the bizarre exhibits which would be heralded by the Soviet at Earls Court the following year:

On the other hand it should be remembered that when it comes to false hair, wooden ink-wells, sound-proofing, currant bread, half-inch cast-iron ball-bearings, jig-saw puzzle replacements, tortoiseshell earrings, ready reckoners, sand, two-way retractable flange compressors in laminated termite-proof lignite, plastic egg-separators and home-repair boot and shoe outfits, the Soviet Union is probably far ahead of its nearest rival, Moravia. As for Russian ice-cream, it comes in forty flavours, ranging from soused herring to strawberry.

As a 'first hand report by a man who has never been there' – like most of the British population - these humorous tales resonated because they were grounded in a popular Western myth of life in the Soviet Union, not the Soviet Union itself.

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46 Ibid., 26
47 Ibid., 27
48 Atkinson and Searle also compiled a fake US travelogue ('USA for Beginners'), ridiculing American excesses: both superpowers were fair game in the eyes of these Britons.
This is not to say that these myths were not grounded in some truths about life in the USSR. A report by the British Ambassador in Moscow, Patrick Reilly, on his 'First Impressions of the Soviet Union' in 1957 detailed the privations of life for many under the planned economy of the socialist system:

Certain things such as television sets and cameras are in good supply, although one still hears of absurd errors of planning, like the failure to produce spare needles for a new record player. But many simple things which are much more necessary are still unobtainable or very scarce.

However, he also noted that this was not a simple or static picture, and that in the six months he had been there he had witnessed some improvements and changes, for example in architecture and interior design which, in some cases, was gradually moving from 'heavy classical ornament' to more 'straightforward', 'simple' and 'elegant' styles. Transport was also experiencing similar changes in design, commenting that the most recent Tupolev aeroplane '...seems to have escaped from the heavy Victorian furnishings which caused so much amusement in the first version'. He recorded that things like television sets and cameras were in 'good supply'. In fashions, he noted that the 'general drabness' and 'absence of colour' in Muscovites' clothing was slowly being ousted by 'the first beginning of an attempt at elegance and taste'; similarly, this improvement was visible in 'consumer goods of all sorts': 'the latest cars, in window dressing' and in 'unexpected' displays of 'neon lighting' and advertising. 49

Such unexpected normality shocked British visitors to the World Youth Festival in Moscow in August 1957. Reilly's report on this visit highlighted how the non-communist members of the delegation

...at first displayed a 'general perplexity, which sometimes bordered on indignation, at the apparent contrast between Soviet reality and the accounts of it they had read and heard. It was a surprise for them to find Moscow such an apparently bright and attractive city and its life superficially quite normal. There was nothing fundamental they could see which distinguished everyday life here from that at home, apart from a lower standard of living (and that at first sight not as low as they had expected).

49 TNA CAB21/4630 NS101560 Confidential: 'First Impressions of the Soviet Union' Sir Patrick Reilly, Ambassador to Selwyn Lloyd, 14 August 1957

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Nevertheless, these young Britons' initial impressions were soon altered by the 'clumsy interference' of the Soviet authorities: their rooms were searched and they were not allowed to travel outside Moscow or communicate freely with the general population.  

Patrick Reilly also warned against exaggerating the extent of the changes he had witnessed: '[t]he gulf between the Soviet Union and the West in general standard of living and in the ordinary amenities of life may be diminishing, but it is still very great.'

At Earls Court in 1961, 600,000 visitors' preconceptions – positive and negative - encountered a different, idealised, self-imagined illusion of the Soviet Union. The exhibitions were intriguing, fascinating and popular spectacles, widely covered in all sectors of the press. The Daily Worker regarded the 1961 show as the 'next best thing to a visit to the Soviet Union' whilst The Sun newspaper described the 1968 exhibition as a 'powerful advert for the Soviet way of life'.

COLD WAR COMMERCE

Notwithstanding the improvements in East-West relations during the Thaw, the late 1950s and early 1960s were far from being a period of uniform 'peaceful coexistence'. The first show was organised against a political backdrop of high profile summits and tense moments in the Cold War. May 1960 saw Macmillan's unsuccessful Paris Peace summit; April 1961, the abortive US invasion of the Bay of Pigs. As the Earls Court exhibition approached, anxiety over Berlin grew, culminating in the vain Kennedy-Khrushchev attempt to resolve the crisis in June. By August 1961, a matter of weeks after the exhibition closed, construction of the Berlin Wall had begun.

The Earls Court exhibitions took place at a time when the British government

50 TNA CAB21/4630 171/252 Sir Patrick Reilly to Selwyn Lloyd, 23 August 1957 on 'Sixth World Youth Festival'
51 TNA CAB21/4630 NS101560 Confidential: 'First Impressions of the Soviet Union' Sir Patrick Reilly, Ambassador to Selwyn Lloyd, 14 August 1957
52 'Sputniks and Sideboards coming to Town' Daily Worker 15 Feb 1961,
53 I am grateful for Professor Stephen Wagg's observation that The Sun was initially a left-wing newspaper (1964-69), originating from the demise of the Daily Herald. 'Russia Today – Tomorrow' The Sun [n.d.] 1968
was committed to fighting the Cold War at home and abroad and devoting significant financial resources towards this aim. Yet the Soviet Union was still permitted to stage major propaganda displays in London. How and why did these exhibitions happen, and what were the relationships between commercial and political imperatives?

Unlike, for example, the reciprocal Soviet and American national exhibitions, there was very little direct involvement from the British government in either the Earls Court shows or their British counterparts in Moscow. Whereas dealings on the Soviet side were state-organised by the All-Union Chamber of Commerce, on the British side they were negotiated by private commercial groups: Industrial Trade Fairs Ltd (ITF), a subsidiary of the Financial Times and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. A revealing 1958 paper by Thomas Brimelow at the Foreign Office set out the pros and cons of the ‘proposed industrial exhibitions in London and Moscow’ in 1961. He noted how a British Trade Fair in Moscow had been put forward by the Russian section of the London Chamber of Commerce, and gained the approval of both the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office; however, the Soviet authorities agreed provided that they could hold a similar display in London. In debating whether or not to allow the exhibition, Brimelow noted many factors ‘strongly in favour’ of the reciprocal exhibitions: it would allow the British show in Moscow to take place depriving Britain of the possibility of ‘making a considerable impact on the Soviet people by an effective display of British consumer and other goods’; to turn it down would result in resentment in British business circles; and besides, the USA was already planning its show in Sokolniki Park. The only factor against the show was that it was unlikely to cause a significant expansion of Anglo-Soviet trade, and would ‘merely be used as an occasion for Soviet propaganda’, in particular that relating to trade

54 Hopkins, Kandiah and Staerk, "Introduction." 4
55 'Britain and Russia Plan Trade Fairs: Moscow Delegation in London' TES(?), 12 December 1959. See Earls Court archive [henceforth EC, box 1501 for further undated press cuttings.  
56 As a subsidiary of the Financial Times, the company was well placed to promote issues of Anglo-Soviet trade to the business community. Large advertisements and supplements promoting the Earls Court fairs in the Financial Times seem to have been the norm. See comment on the special supplements in the Financial Times and Board of Trade Journal, 1961 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/47A Letter from Commercial Dept, British Embassy Moscow to Foreign Office, July 12 1961' TNA FCO28/436 no. 2054 from Foreign Office to Moscow c.5 August 1968
restrictions. Additionally, the paper noted that HMG was 'not in a position to prohibit the holding of a Soviet exhibition here.' As this was a private trade event, the Soviet authorities could always 'make arrangements through normal commercial channels' in Britain. Consequently, the Foreign Office recorded that they had 'no objection' to the exchange of trade fairs. 57

What was the history of trade with the USSR, and was it as unproblematic as this Foreign Office paper implies? Britain had a relatively long history of trading with the Soviet Union and Russia prior to the first Earls Court exhibition, although Anglo-Soviet trade had never made up a large proportion of Britain's world trade. 58 Traditional imports were raw materials such as wood, cotton, furs and iron. 59 Britain had become dependent on these commodities in the pre-war period, exchanging them for exports of equipment, electrical goods, textiles and machinery. 60 Trade was conducted in sterling: the USSR and Eastern Europe had been a 'highly profitable' supply of non-dollar trade before the Second World War. 61 However, there had been a 'consistent British deficit' in trade to the USSR since 1948. 62 Consequently, there was enthusiasm amongst British businesses for the reciprocal Soviet exhibitions: it was hoped that they would help to achieve a healthier balance of trade by diversifying exports. 63

Against the backdrop of high-level Cold War politics, trade – the British motivation for an exchange of exhibitions - occupied an ambiguous and complex position. On the one level it was a practical necessity; on the other, an ideological and political issue with deep Cold War significance. Curtis Keeble, a former British Ambassador in Moscow claims that in the early 1960s, British-Soviet relations were conducted on two different levels: on the

57 TNA FO317/135405 NS1861/6 (1958) Thomas Brimelow 'Proposed industrial exhibitions in London and Moscow' 25 September 1958
58 Anglo-Soviet trade has normally been less than 2% of Britain's world trade. Clarke, "British Perspectives on the Soviet Union." 73
62 Kaser, "Trade Relations: Patterns and Prospects." 199
63 TNA FO371/159501 no. 829 Moscow Embassy to Foreign Office 21 May 1961

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one hand, the 'routine bilateral exchange of delegations and the development of political, cultural and commercial contacts' which had developed since the later 1950s; and on the other, an East-West agenda dominated by 'the military security requirements of the two nuclear superpowers'. Whilst he asserts that the main issue for British diplomats in this period was to bring these two strands of activity together and use bilateral cultural and trade contacts not merely for their own merit but to influence political events, he concedes that the majority of British-Soviet relations – trade included - were 'normal' or 'routine' bilateral contacts which, for the most part, continued largely unaffected by Cold War political crises.

Both Britain and the USSR cited 'trade' as a means to promote 'mutual understanding' between cultures and ease political tensions. At the 1961 British trade fair in Moscow, Khrushchev asserted that trade was an 'excellent ambassador, contributing to peace'. In 1950 had been the nadir of the USSR's trade with the West, but according to the Russo-British Chamber of Trade in the UK, exports to the USSR more than doubled from £10 million in 1954 to almost £23 million in 1955. In 1959, Prime Minister Macmillan's signed the 1959 five-year bilateral trade agreement to expand and diversify Anglo-Soviet trade. Although engaging in business with the planned economy of the USSR posed problems for private

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64 Keeble claims that event the Cuban Missile Crisis 'had remarkably little effect on the course of Soviet-British relations' and that within months 'normal bilateral relations' had recommenced. Curtis Keeble, "The Historical Perspective," Soviet-British Relations since the 1970s, eds. Alex Pravda and Peter J. S. Duncan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). 37-38

65 The separation of commercial issues from political suspicion of the USSR is also indicated by the continuation of vital trade in softwoods with the Soviet Union at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939). See Paul W Doerr, "Frigid but Unprovocative": British Policy Towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939," Journal of Contemporary history 36.3 (2001). 423-5

66 Kaser, "Trade Relations: Patterns and Prospects." 193

67 TNA FO371/158802 NS1861/27 no 962 British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office May 1961

68 But within this small share of 15% of USSR turnover, UK had was the USSR's leading trading partner among Western nations due to the near disappearance of the USA and Germany. Conversely, the Soviet Union took only 0.6% of UK exports and sold to the UK 1.3% of imports in 1950. Kaser, "Trade Relations: Patterns and Prospects." 197-198

69 Ibid., 199

70 This had been negotiated by Macmillan on his visit to Moscow in Feb 1959. The treaty was part of a series of talks with Khrushchev which agreed formally both to revive and expand Anglo-Soviet bilateral trade and regulate growing programmes of cultural exchanges. Originally negotiated for five years, it was extended until 1969. Keeble, "The Historical Perspective." 37; Kaser, "Trade Relations: Patterns and Prospects." 198
British companies, by 1967, the UK was the second largest Western importer from and second largest Western exporter to the Soviet Union.

But Anglo-Soviet trade was also politically contentious. It was a favourite cause of groups sympathetic with the USSR and communist 'fellow travellers', who produced pamphlets and articles with titles such as 'Let's Trade!'.

There were strategic restrictions on trade in goods that could potentially be used for military purposes, which were imposed by the USA since the 1948 on a number of countries receiving aid as part of the European Recovery Programme (Marshall Aid). Although this embargo only covered a small percentage of trade, there was parliamentary and commercial pressure for these controls to be relaxed. In 1958, Macmillan wrote to Eisenhower about the 'economic threat' from the USSR, commenting that the Soviet Union's new, non-military methods were 'diplomatic pressure, subversion and of course economic infiltration.' He asserted that the last method 'should be the field in which we would want to meet, and defeat, the communist challenge.' A 'Secret Brief' for Macmillan later that year warned that 'economic encroachment and political subversion' were the most dangerous threats from Russia. And although it was generally welcomed by the government and in the press, the 1961 USSR Exhibition at Earls Court provoked resignations in some trade circles. Lord Birdwood, Richard Goold-Adams and Mrs RT Bower resigned from the European-Atlantic Group, a pro-NATO trade organisation.

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71 In truth, the Soviet market is extraordinarily difficult to break into.... The inflexibilities of five-year planning, the conditions under which Western companies operate, and the initial outlays required, all tend to debar other than large, established companies from operating.” Clarke, “British Perspectives on the Soviet Union.”

72 TNA FC028/436 'Draft Speech for the Prime Minister in Connection with the Soviet Exhibition, Earls Court' 2 August 1968

73 e.g. British Soviet Friendship magazine Issue 1: April 1956, 6 which coincided with Khrushchev and Bulganin's visit to Britain.

74 TNA PREM11/284 'United Kingdom Policy on Trade with Eastern Europe and implications of the United States Battle Act (Mutual Defence Assistance Control Act)'

75 TNA CAB21/3223 'Brief on Strategic Controls: Controls on Trade with the Soviet Bloc. Possible Soviet Arguments' c. April 1956

76 In 1954, the Churchill government had used Britain's influential position in CoCom [the multilateral export control coordinating committee] to revise the lists of embargoed goods to include only 'highly strategic' military items and thereby promote wider east-West trade. Ian Jackson, “Waging the Economic Cold War: Britain and CoCom, 1948-54,” Cold War Britain, 1945-1964: New Perspectives, eds. Michael F. Hopkins, Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerk (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).42, 53

77 TNA CAB 21/3258 Telegram no 3272 Macmillan to Eisenhower 31 May 1958

78 TNA CAB21/3258 brief for Macmillan on 'The Economic Threat' 9 June 1958
over the ideological implications of the promotion of British-Soviet trade. Of his reasons for resigning, Birdwood stated that:

Leninism is still valid. It is quite unrealistic and indeed misleading to imagine that one can discuss trade with the Soviet Union as though it were divorced from the political motive. One has only to visit the Soviet trade exhibition to realize that.79

Why did the British authorities expect a non-propagandist trade fair from the Soviet Union? In March 1959 – the same time as Macmillan’s visit to meet Khrushchev - a trade delegation led by Lord Drogheda from ITF Ltd and Scott from the Russian Section of the London Chamber of Commerce went to Moscow to discuss the proposed Soviet-British trade fair exchanges.80 Resulting from this 1959 agreement, the reciprocal British and Soviet exhibitions of the 1960s were conceived, on the British side, as a ‘straight commercial venture, and nothing else’.81 The main aim of this private commercial exercise was ‘to sell more British goods’ in the USSR.82 In British eyes, the trade motives of the exhibitions had been made explicit from the beginning. At the time of signing the contract for the 1961 exhibition, the British press reported that:

Apart from some national prestige exhibits – the Russians will show full-scale models of sputniks and luniks, and the Board of Trade will have a stand in Moscow – both sides will show goods which they hope to sell under the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement [1959].83

GA Zhukov, Chair of the Soviet State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, seemingly confirmed that the exhibitions should exclude the ‘way of life’ propaganda that he alleged had made the US fair in Moscow ‘unsuccessful’ could not have been more plainly stated: ‘There was no point in presenting the virtues of the communist system in London and of the capitalist system in Moscow’.84

79 “Lord Birdwood Quits Office Over Trade” The Times July 31 1961
80 ‘Anglo-Soviet Trade Fairs Plan: Delegation’s Task’ in The Times, 4 March 1959; TNA FO371/143576
81 TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 no. 1608 British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office 17 November 1960
82 TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 Confidential Minute ‘Soviet Exhibition in London’ by RH Mason 2 March 1961
84 TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 no. 1609 Sir Frank Roberts, British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office 17 November 1960
The British trade fair held in Moscow in May 1961 stuck largely to this anti-propaganda brief. Responsibility for organising and administering the 1961 British fair at Sokolniki Park - the first large-scale British trade exhibition held in the Soviet Union since the war - and the British side of the Soviet fairs at Earls Court lay with Industrial and Trade Fairs Ltd [ITF], a company formed to arrange commercial exhibitions in Britain and abroad. When the agreement to stage the first Soviet exhibition was signed in 1959, ITF was newly formed, with no experience in organising national exhibitions. At the outset, ITF outwardly anticipated that the Soviet exhibition would be business-orientated. One post-1961 fair confidential minute from the Foreign Office wryly noted that:

ITF have confessed to us privately, that, although they may have 'kidded themselves' at the time, they never had any serious expectation of being able to hold the Russians to their word on this point. ITF are not too happy about becoming the instrument of a large-scale Soviet propaganda jamboree, but at present they have no plans for trying to prevent this from happening. They are a commercial firm, and there is no commercial reason for them to make a fuss on this point.

Reporters described the British displays in Moscow as 'a purely commercial venture costing half a million pounds with no subsidy from the British government'. For the British, it was the 'largest foreign fair ever staged in Russia' with 650 British companies participating. Opening speeches were given by Soviet deputy premier Mikoyan, and Reginald Maudling, the president of the Board of Trade. Khrushchev made a jovial 'surprise' visit.

British products on display ranged from toys, clothes, synthetic and wool textiles and surgical instruments to whiskey, heavy machinery, model hovercrafts, radio telescopes and aircraft and 'a complete working laundry'.

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85 There had been a previous small-scale exhibition in Moscow in 1960, arranged by the Chemical Division of ICI, which had been visited by Khrushchev. TNA FO371/159600 NS1861/4 RH Mason, Foreign Office, 23 January 1961
86 ITF had only staged its first exhibition, the Industrial Photographic and Television Exhibition at the Albert Hall, in April 1959. 'The Financial Times Limited: Earnings Well Maintained. Lord Poole on Continued Development' The Times, 24 June 24 1959
87 TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 RH Mason 2 March 1961; AD Wilson, Foreign Office to Sir Frank Roberts, British Embassy Moscow 20 March 1961
89 TNA FO371/159602 NS1861/27 "Moscow Trade Fair - Report on visit of Mr Khrushchev to Fair" Confidential Cypher no 962 from Sir Frank Roberts, British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office May 19 1961
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[Fig. 5.2]. It was largely absent of 'way of life' propaganda. 600,000 leaflets which addressed questions on British life were distributed from the COI stand, but otherwise the British artefacts were left to speak for themselves.91 This approach contrasted sharply with the organisation of the French-Soviet reciprocal exhibitions which occurred almost concurrently with the British-Soviet shows.92 Organised directly between the two governments, the French show in Moscow was described by the British Embassy – perhaps ruefully, given the British failure to use its own show as a propaganda platform - as a 'full-dress national exhibition' at which 'ambitious cultural and general information pavilions' were intermixed with 'straight technical and commercial' displays.93

The official British report on the Sokolniki Park fair placed a positive gloss on the absence of overt British propaganda. In its verdict, the trade show could be regarded as:

...a subtle publicity exercise which succeeded in projecting British achievements and raising British prestige more effectively, perhaps, than any 'Way of Life' exhibition could have done. The serious commercial object of the exhibition gave Soviet propagandists little opening for counter-publicity.

It claimed that the million-and-a-quarter visitors were left 'free to absorb the implied message of the exhibition'. However, it noted that many Soviet visitors had actually expected the show to consist of more propaganda: the report notes that many were 'disappointed at the absence of the cultural shop-window, of 'typical' British dwellings and household goods, a bookstall, a souvenir shop, a popular guide to the exhibition, even a British restaurant'.94

In a Foreign Office report on the fair, Khrushchev was recorded as making private comments in which he praised the British for presenting an 'industrial fair with no 'way of life' propaganda'. This was described as being was

91 The addition of this booklet seems half-hearted. Misleadingly called Great Britain Today it was an illustrated and revised version of the Prime Minister's address to the Soviet people, originally broadcast by Moscow television some two years' previously on March 2 1959. 600,000 copies printed and distributed. TNA BW 64/66 'Information Work at the Moscow Trade Fair' May 19 – June 4 1961
92 The French show in Moscow was held in August 1961.
93 TNA FO371/15/9603 NS1681/158 HW King, British Embassy, Moscow to Fife Clark, Central Office of Information 21 August 1961
94 TNA BW 64/66 'Information Work at the Moscow Trade Fair' May 19 – June 4 1961
'exactly right' and in accordance with what he called 'the traditionally 'realistic' British approach'. To emphasise his point further, he contrasted the American exhibition which had been held there in 1959 as having been "wrongly conceived 'with too many ugly modern statues'. Other top-level Soviets espoused the same line, placing a division between the British approach and the 'wrong' American exhibition which was full of 'mistakes'. According to M Gudov at the Soviet Embassy in Bonn their primary mistake – avoided by the British commercial fair – was:

to try to force upon the Russians their own mode of life and of thinking"...The Americans would do better to remember that there is no such thing as a compromise between the Russian and the American conception of such matters.\textsuperscript{96}

In a handwritten minute, one member of the Foreign Office thought this Soviet response was somewhat 'disingenuous':

Bosh. The Russian people would be delighted to have more lipsticks, nylons etc if only their Government would let them.\textsuperscript{97}

It was believed that Soviet show would be a reciprocal response to the strictly defined British trade fair. However, there was a slippage of definitions as the 'trade fair' became a more ambiguously titled 'Soviet Industrial Exhibition'.\textsuperscript{98}

By February 1961 it had become apparent that the Soviet exhibition would cover a greatly enlarged scope than had been previously agreed, including substantial non-trade oriented sections on culture, science, public welfare, space, and education:\textsuperscript{99}

Ours is a trade fair with a few side-shows; the Russians are mounting a full scale national exhibition. It is said to be one of the biggest ever arranged by the Soviet Union abroad, bigger even than the Soviet section at the Brussels Fair in 1958.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{95} TNA FO371/159602 NS1861/27 no. 962 from British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office May 19 1961
\textsuperscript{96} TNA FO371/159602 NS1861/33 'Record of a conversation on Trade Fairs and Exhibitions with M Gudov of the Soviet Embassy at Bonn' May 30 1961
\textsuperscript{97} Handwritten notes on the cover of the file, Bullard's response to the Soviet assertion that Russians would not respond to the Western way of life being forced upon them TNA FO371/159602 NS1861/33 'Record of a conversation on Trade Fairs and Exhibitions with M Gudov of the Soviet Embassy at Bonn' May 30 1961
\textsuperscript{98} TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 RH Mason 2 March 1961 (in response to press cuttings)
\textsuperscript{99} 12,000 items in Russian Exhibition: Space Science, Industry and Culture The Guardian 15 February 1961; 'Suits to Sputniks' at Russian Trade Fair in London, Financial Times 15 February 1961; 'Russian Industrial Fair for Earl's Court: Oil Lamps to Earth Satellites' The Times 15 February 1961; 'Next Best Thing to Visit to Russia: Sputniks and sideboards coming to town' Daily Worker 15 February 1961; 'The USSR's Biggest Fair Ever' Soviet Weekly [undated], TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11
\textsuperscript{100} TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 RH Mason 2 March 1961
Nevertheless, Macmillan and the Board of Trade had agreed in 1959 that the scope of the British exhibition 'should not be widened', and this decision was upheld. RH Mason at the Foreign Office regretfully noted:

..the impossibility of securing strict reciprocity between a private British fair and an official Soviet one, which follows from the difference between the soviet and British economic systems.\textsuperscript{101}

In 1966, too, the second British Industrial Fair in Moscow retained its commercial focus as part of an 'export drive to Russia'.\textsuperscript{102} Like the realisation achieved by the negotiators of the bilateral cultural exchanges discussed in Chapter 2, exact reciprocity in exchanges of commercial exhibitions was unachievable.

The 'full scale national exhibition' comprising Soviet 'way of life propaganda' should not have been a surprise. During the later 1950s and early 1960s, government-sponsored Soviet exhibitions became an increasingly regular occurrence in the West.\textsuperscript{103} Many of these were bilateral exhibitions occurring under headings of 'industrial', 'trade' or 'national' fairs; in reality, all such shows comprised broadly similar 'way of life' exhibits. The Soviet pavilion at the Brussels Expo of 1958 had set the model for subsequent prestige exhibitions. Its thematic divisions – always beginning with science, industry, agriculture and transport before moving on to themes such as children, education, food, arts and fashion – are almost identical to the form of the Earls Court exhibitions in 1961 and 1968.\textsuperscript{104} It, too, had 'machines galore' and 'overblown photos showing the reconstruction of Moscow'.\textsuperscript{105} Even the exhibits themselves went on to be re-used: a visitor to bilateral Soviet exhibitions in New York (1959), Mexico (1959), Norway (1960), Japan (1961) and London (1961) could be forgiven for experiencing déjà vu, repeatedly coming face-to-face with displays including a model of the first atomic

\textsuperscript{101} TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 RH Mason 2 March 1961
\textsuperscript{102} 'Sterling Crisis' Pathé Newsreel 1966 Footage shows of Harold Wilson visiting the 1966 exhibition in Moscow. Goods on display include clothes, textiles, razors, ceramics, cars, industrial weaving machines, home drills, Marconi TV and radio equipment, food products, Hammond organs, handbags, and car engines. www.britishpathe.com
\textsuperscript{103} TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/17 'Review of the Soviet press' Soviet News
\textsuperscript{104} Private Collection Guide to the USSR Pavilion, Brussels 1958
\textsuperscript{105} 'Fair enough or fair too much?' Rene Elvin, Art and Industry, Vol 65 no 387, September 1958 74-83
icebreaker ship 'Lenin' and ubiquitous bleeping model sputniks. This trend continued at the 1968 exhibition, where duplicate exhibits from the Soviet pavilion at the 1967 Montreal Expo reappeared at Earls Court.

THE SOVIET ‘WAY OF LIFE’ AND ITS RECESSION IN BRITAIN

The Soviet dreamworlds at Earls Court were composed of a diverse and, for some, overwhelming array of objects, displays and demonstrations. Two broad categories of exhibit can be discerned. On the one hand were the products of science and technology, including space hardware, scientific research and the application of this knowledge in industrial machinery and capital goods; on the other, consumer goods, cultural artefacts and other exhibits intended to convey the Soviet 'way of life'. In this section the content and responses at the shows in 1961 and 1968 will be analysed. The first section examines the display techniques used, and the reactions expressed towards them. A second section looks in detail at the two types of exhibit identified above: firstly, scientific and technological objects, and then 'consumer' goods and objects which impacted upon Soviet lives, from which viewers hoped to extrapolate an idea of the Soviet 'way of life'. In doing so, it delineates the concept of an 'ideal' Soviet object in the eyes of those who responded in the British press, informed by preconceptions similar to those expressed in familiar tales of life in the USSR. With the exception of the space technology, this 'ideal' Soviet object should not be modern; similarly, it should not 'copy the West' (an accusation levelled at many of the more 'modern' exhibits); and ideally, it should bear some relation to a Western idea of a Russian 'folk heritage'. Exhibits which did not meet these criteria were denigrated in the British press.


107 e.g. The TU144 aeroplane and space exhibits at Earls Court 1968 appear the same as those at the USSR pavilion Montreal Expo 1967. The 'Lenin' ship also made a reappearance at Earls Court in 1968 following its showing seven years previously.
The Soviet exhibitions at Earls Court arrived fully formed with no British input into their design. Most of the 1961 Soviet exhibition was designed and manufactured in the USSR, though some British firms such as Beck and Politzer were contracted to assist with building and assembling the stands at Earls Court. Even less British assistance was needed in 1968 when the 'prefabricated maze' of the exhibition and its stands eventually arrived, transported ready-made from the Soviet Union in 'three enormous container ships' along with '300 Russians' who even 'brought their own nails'.

Although visitors were eager to see individual exhibits, methods of display were central to the exhibitions' potential propaganda impact. Propaganda techniques were part of the 'Cold War myth' in which 'neither side fully understood the other's approach'. In the West, the Soviet government associated with a vague idea of mind control, thus implicitly exaggerating the extent of their of 'psychological skills'. The publication of books such as The Assault on the West in 1968 indicated that the perceived threat of Soviet propaganda remained strong throughout the 1960s. However, recent historical analyses have suggested that the Soviet propaganda machine could be remarkably 'crude and inefficient', particularly in the late 1940s. The 'special kind of language' used by the Soviet press did not automatically translate for British audiences: one Soviet agent in London commented that 'such propaganda becomes shooting with blank charges'. The British response was divided over the successfulness of the Soviet display techniques at Earls Court in 1961. Display techniques seen in Britain as clumsy, old fashioned or blatantly propagandist could undermine the effectiveness of the illusion of a Soviet 'dreamworld'. Some commentators –

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108 A lack of communication and bureaucratic delays on the part of the USSR in 1968 alarmed ITF; fearing Soviet accusations if the show was not a success, the directors wrote detailed letters to keep the Foreign Office and Soviet Ambassador informed of the 'frightful mess' due to 'Russian inefficiency' TNA FCO28/436 Correspondence IC Trafford, ITF and Howard Smith, Foreign Office May – July 1968
109 David Wedgwood Benn, Persuasion and Soviet Politics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 228
mainly the Foreign Office, and knowledgeable design practitioners – compared them unfavourably with modern Western displays.

The 1961 Earls Court show was enormous: at over 23,000m², even larger than the Soviet pavilion in Brussels or the 1959 display at the New York Coliseum. This immense size was seen by the Soviet organisers as a measure of the power and progress of the USSR. Rudolph Kliks, the chief Soviet designer of the exhibition in 1961 and 1979 claimed that 'even the huge Earls Court exhibitions halls cannot provide a really comprehensive picture' of the Soviet Union:

The main task of the designers and artists, therefore, is to show simply, but eloquently the giant scope of the development of the leading branches of the Soviet economy. We had to portray progress in science, technology and culture and to describe the life and work of Soviet peoples in minimum space with maximum effect.\(^\text{113}\)

This 'simple eloquence' was easier said than done. The enormity of the exhibition and proliferation of 10,000 exhibits seems to have posed problems for the designers. The thousands of exhibits were arranged in a warren-like maze that didactically guided the visitor through twenty-two halls in a pre-ordained sequence [Fig. 5.3]. Unsurprisingly, this layout was overwhelming and tiring. Whilst the Soviet organisers may have intended the 'cumulative weight' of exhibits to indicate a growing material and consumer wealth in the USSR, in their proliferation they became meaningless and bewildering: in Design magazine, the art critic Lawrence Alloway described 'profusion shading into confusion... the halls were crowded together, leaking into each other, so there was no respite, no breathing space.'\(^\text{114}\) He complained that there were no vistas or vantage points from which to survey the entire exhibition.

The 1968 exhibition was also organised on 'a truly heroic scale' with 8000 exhibits.\(^\text{115}\) Comparisons were made between the 1968 show and the Soviet Pavilion at Montreal Expo in 1967 which was on the 'same colossal scale.'

\(^\text{113}\) TNA FO371/159601 NS1861/11 'The USSR's biggest fair ever' Soviet Weekly [n.d. c.15 Feb 1961]
\(^\text{114}\) USSR at Earls Court: The Image' Lawrence Alloway, Design 154 October 1961, 44-6
\(^\text{115}\) 'Russia on Show' Evening Standard 6 August 1968
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However, press photographs support Design magazine's prediction that the design of this new show would be even more sophisticated than its 1961 and Expo predecessors, displaying 'a far lighter touch...in breaking the various exhibition areas up into manageable proportions'. Contemporary British newsreels also confirmed that the 1968 design, by the Soviet architect BV Vorontsov,\(^{116}\) was an improvement on that of 1961: 'a very polished presentation of Soviet achievement'.\(^{117}\) Fig. 5.4 shows the large central space, 200 feet in diameter, and containing the prized space hardware, around which a series of interlinking exhibition halls, set on three different levels, were grouped.\(^{118}\) Space was also a linking stylistic motif throughout the exhibition, as every area was illuminated by the same distinctive 'vast saucer shaped downlighters' which resembled booster rockets.\(^{119}\)

It is clear from the reactions of British observers that the display methods used at the 1968 exhibition were more 'advanced' – that is, more acceptable to modern Western eyes - than those of the 1961 show. The official internal Foreign Office report had harshly criticised almost all aspects of the 1961 Soviet exhibition, not least its overall design. It condemned the aesthetic as too 'serious, not to say priggish', 'old fashioned' and lacking in taste, typified by the display in the entrance hall. This consisted of 'unsightly' emblems and 'garish' constructions, against a large photographic backdrop of the Kremlin towers, and in the centre 'fragments of the Soviet constitution in off-white foam plastic letters formed a wall which terminated, sphinx-like, in a gigantic profile of Lenin' [Fig. 5.5]. More plastic letters, above a bank of red geraniums, formed one of many 'capitalised statements of platitudes' that read 'Above All They Treasure Peace'. The Foreign Office was unsurprised at the tone of the show, which they judged to be 'exactly like the Soviet Union', and thus a bad thing.\(^{120}\) But perhaps the theatricality of Soviet exhibition design – the enormous letters 'USSR' at the entrance, the huge Lenin, the

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116 'Bumper Russian display at Earls Court', Design 236 August 1968 p13
117 Pathé newreel 'Russian Exhibition' Film ID: 2069.11 accessed at www.britishpathe.com
118 NA FCO 8/436 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968'
119 'Bumper Russian display at Earls Court', Design 236 August 1968 13
120 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
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bold proclamations of 'peace' and 'friendship' – did not translate well for British observers who saw it as tasteless and not modern. Schmid's research on the VDNKh exhibition centre in Moscow – a reference point for Soviet international exhibitions such as those in London - notes how 'explicit theatricality' as one of its main characteristics.121

Other viewers remarked upon the statistical onslaught of upward pointing graphs that punctuated the exhibition. It was in the 1961 agricultural section that this obsession with performance and standards was at its height, as figures and slogans proclaimed Soviet superiority in grain production over the USA [Fig. 5.6]. Such presentations of statistics claimed to prove Soviet 'Progress', demonstrating the USSR's rapid transformation from a underdeveloped agricultural nation to one engaged with the latest science, industry and with a high standard of living. An acute concern with issues of economic efficiency, production statistics and technological advance had been characteristic of the Soviets since the Five Year Plans of the 1930s, but this had intensified in the post-1945 period.122 Allowy wryly noted that these triumphant graphs were usually 'extrapolated into the future': 'all graphs pointed UP' and their assertion of rising levels of consumption was undermined by this 'illusion' of plenty that had not yet been attained.123 In both 1961 and 1968, this was a future-dreamworld of the Soviet 'Way of Life' as it wished to be; nevertheless some British journalists accepted it uncritically as a vision of the future.124

However, although some believed that the 1961 display lacked sophistication - *The Observer* newspaper thought that such 'chunky' presentation lacked 'the gloss of the familiar western style exhibition'125 – photographic evidence reveals that some parts of the exhibition could be visually arresting. The Hall of Science [1961] was one of the more strikingly designed parts of the exhibition, featuring large spiked structures and molecular models against a

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121 Schmid, "Celebrating Tomorrow Today: The Peaceful Atom on Display in the Soviet Union." 334
122 Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, 35
123 Lawrence Alloway 'USSR at Earls Court: The Image', *Design* 154 October 1961 44-6
124 'Russia Today – Tomorrow' *The Sun* 1968
125 John Davy 'From Space to Murals' *The Observer*, 9 July 1961

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curved mural backdrop illustrating Soviet scientific breakthroughs [Fig. 5.7]. In 1968, the central scientific-space display was again strong: the walls of the central hall were composed of 'suspended square panels, carrying an abstract design superimposed on to the historical details of Russian scientific achievement.'\textsuperscript{126} Soviet claims of superiority in scientific matters had long been mocked by the Western press who were accustomed to 'hyperbolic Soviet claims to have invented the world and everything in it'.\textsuperscript{127} Nevertheless, these displays prompted comments that there had been progress in Soviet display techniques by 1961, indicating that they had moved on from the 'depressingly heavy handed' styles at Brussels.\textsuperscript{128} The Guardian's verdict on the 1961 show noted that since 1958 the Soviet Union had 'clearly mastered the skills of modern display'.\textsuperscript{129} With the exception of Lenin's head, the mixture of 'eye catching' displays and 'glamour girls' began to challenge some British stereotypes of a dour, old-fashioned USSR.\textsuperscript{130}

The display technique of a 'show' or 'model' homes became 'a powerful form of public communication' from the early 1950s onwards at 'way of life' exhibitions in both East and West, conveying ideas of domesticity and the politicised role of the home.\textsuperscript{131} The USSR exhibitions at Earls Court followed this established trend. Both the shows of the '60s featured model homes: in 1961 a modern-style flat for a young family suspended above a model city plan; and, in 1968, a 'two-room bungalow', a 'chalet-type house' and 'two small prefabricated garden houses'.\textsuperscript{132} These dwellings proved fascinating for a curious British public who, in 1968, explored the 'log built dacha' eager to find out the essential facts of Soviet life:

\textsuperscript{126} 'Bumper Russian display at Earls Court' Design 236 August 1968 13
\textsuperscript{127} From 1947 onwards, the USSR had accused of the West of having stolen inventions from Russian science. Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War. 36
\textsuperscript{128} 'Fair enough or fair too much?' Rene Elvin, Art and Industry. Vol 65 no 387, September 1958 74-83.
\textsuperscript{129} 'Soviet Display' The Guardian 8 July 1961
\textsuperscript{130} Michael Moynihan 'Russia Brings Sputniks and Glamour Girls' The Observer 2 July 1961
\textsuperscript{131} Floré and De Kooning, "The Representation of Modern Domesticity in the Belgian Section of the Brussels World's Fair of 1958." 320
\textsuperscript{132} TNA FC028/436 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968'
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The wardrobes of the dacha were opened and closed. The smallest room, which turned out to contain nothing at all, was investigated by family after family.\textsuperscript{133}

Even the Foreign Office conceded that the 'typical Soviet worker's flat' was 'neat and cheerful' despite its 'small' size and 'flimsy' fittings.\textsuperscript{134} The symbolic status of the model home within the 'dreamworld' vision of the exhibition was brought to the fore at the 1968 Soviet show when the wooden chalet was set alight in protest at the USSR's invasion of Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{135}

Despite the Foreign Office and Design magazine's verdicts on the 1961 show, some display techniques seem to have been quite elaborate - even experimental - utilising a variety of modern media presentational devices including film, sound and lighting. One hall contained a multiscreen display with 15 continuous projectors\textsuperscript{136}; other areas imaginatively used colour closed circuit television, resulting in what one journalist described as an 'atmosphere of discovery and movement'.\textsuperscript{137} [Fig. 5.8] Sophisticated exhibition techniques were employed in the 'Hall of the Cosmos', a key area of the 1961 exhibition which housed the Soviets' star space exhibits. According to the preliminary press conference:

In the Hall of the Cosmos, 'visitors will imagine themselves in the grip of cosmic space as they enter'. Besides the displays of models of sputniks and space ships with containers, films will be shown simultaneously on five screens... In the darkened hall, built in the form of a cylinder some 100ft high, a globe will be revolving above the heads of the visitors and, in conjunction with the projection of films, the orbits of sputniks and trajectories of space ships will flare up round the globe. A narrative with musical accompaniment will heighten the effect and 'to complete the cosmic picture visitors will be given recorded highlights of Major Yuri Gagarin's historic space flight.\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{133} Byron Rogers 'People's Guide to Russia: Mr Wilson toasts Peace and Trade' \textit{The Times} 7 August 1968
\bibitem{134} TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
\bibitem{135} 'Soviet exhibition attendance slumps', \textit{The Guardian} 23 August 1968; TNA FO28/436 NS6/10 I Trafford, ITF to PT Hayman, Foreign Office, 30 August 1968
\bibitem{136} 'Films at the Soviet Exhibition' \textit{British Kinematography} Vol 39 No 3 September 1961 80
\bibitem{137} 'Propaganda by Caviare, Wines and Sputniks: 10,000 exhibits in Soviet Show' \textit{The Guardian} 7 July 1961 5
\bibitem{138} 'Sputniks 'In Orbit' At Exhibition: Soviet £1m drive in London' \textit{The Times} June 30 1961
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The Foreign Office conceded that this had been 'an ambitious project' but implied that in practice this display was 'somewhat spoiled by vulgar presentation and mechanical breakdowns'.\textsuperscript{139} However, this contrasts with press reports expressing wonderment at the display of space technology.

Less high-tech were the many Soviet pamphlets distributed to visitors to the exhibitions. In 1961, these booklets included 'Fifteen Million new Apartments', 'Soviet Man in Space', 'Art for the People' and an introductory greeting from Khrushchev. The Foreign Office noted that 'none of these contained any direct criticism of this country, or of the West, although criticism could often be inferred' through comments such as the Soviet 'economy without crises'.\textsuperscript{140} They were portable propaganda; these pamphlets could be taken home, and their propaganda could arguably have been more long lasting than the exhibition itself. However, reports indicate that the practical, instructive leaflets such as plans of the exhibition ran out quickly whereas the more propagandist booklets were less popular, left behind in 'vast heaps'. One complaint did arise from an MP that the pamphlets gave a free platform to the USSR, but they were informed that the official position was that there was 'no political censorship of literature entering this country' and there was no indication that the British government approved of their contents.\textsuperscript{141} After the event, the Foreign Office believed that the Soviet literature seemed 'to have been accepted by the British public with its usual phlegm'.\textsuperscript{142}

The 'dreamworlds' presented at the Earls Court exhibitions were constructed from an accumulation of Soviet exhibits. Particularly in 1961, British audiences were driven by curiosity about the little-known lives on the other side of the Iron Curtain. They were keen to extrapolate a picture of Soviet life and evaluate differences in standards of living from the thousands of

\textsuperscript{139} TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
\textsuperscript{140} TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
\textsuperscript{141} TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/51 Foreign Office to Lloyd Jones, Private Secretary to the duchy of Lancaster from 24 July 1961 in response to complaint about literature at the Soviet exhibition
\textsuperscript{142} TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
consumer goods and displays of homes, education and culture on view at Earls Court. There were broad similarities in the types of objects displayed in 1961 and 1968 at the Soviet shows. The *Daily Worker* summed up the content as 'sputniks and sideboards' — that is, technology and consumer goods [Fig. 5.9]. The second category included electrical appliances, cameras, watches, porcelain and glassware, footwear, food and alcoholic drinks, 'handicrafts and fancy goods', knitted goods, musical instruments, toys, handicraft ware, furs, carpets, foodstuffs and books'. But unlike the USA, which had exclusively concentrated on consumer goods to present an image of the American Way of Life at its National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, both industrial / technological objects and everyday goods played their part in constructing an illusion of the Soviet Way of Life. As Susan E Reid has shown in her analysis of Soviet comments in the visitors books at the American exhibition, Soviet visitors had been puzzled by the absence of what they saw as the 'reality' of productive machine tools, space technology and heavy industry in favour of a way of life defined by consumption: one even asserted that for the Soviet people 'Sputniks are our Soviet life'. So not only the 'sideboards', but also the 'sputniks' represented Soviet projections of its way of life.

Yet how these exhibits were intended to be viewed and how they were actually received were two separate things. The reception of the 'sputniks and sideboards' was conditioned by preconceived ideas of what an 'ideal' Soviet object should be, located in a British 'dream' of the USSR. This was informed by perceptions gleaned from popular ideas of what life was like in the Soviet Union or informed by the travellers tales discussed earlier in the chapter. Whilst the spaceships and satellites were almost universally celebrated in both 1961 and 1968 as Soviet objects par excellence, the consumer goods received a more mixed response. Although viewers expecting a low standard could be surprised at the quality or modernity of these commodities, often

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143 'Sputniks and Sideboards coming to town' *Daily Worker* 15 Feb 1961
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what they saw bolstered already-held perceptions of material culture in the Soviet Union. Frequently, exhibits were criticised for emulating Western originals. Whilst this was sometimes with good cause – Hawkins has noted how by the 1970s and 1980s objects which comprised the Soviet ‘world of things’ were often substitutes copying ‘forbidden products from the west’146 – the British response to this at Earls Court was to emphasise the inferiority of these imitations. Parallel to complaints that the USSR was creating poor fakes of modern Western goods ran a discourse of what an ideal Soviet object should be, often drawing on notions of traditional folk and craft cultures.147 And underlying all this were constant reminders from journalists and reviewers that the way of life at Earls Court was a myth, an illusion, and that these objects were impossible to obtain: prototypes, difficult to obtain or beyond the means of ordinary Soviet people.148 This section examines British reactions to these two types of exhibit: firstly, ‘sputniks’ and other scientific and technological goods, and secondly the ‘sideboards’: what would have been recognised in Britain as the commercial objects of everyday life.

The importance of science and technology to the Soviet-imagined ‘dreamworld’ was apparent at all the Earls Court shows, but to the greatest extent in 1961. Whereas the 1968 exhibition was less didactic, structured around a huge display of spacecraft around a central hub off which visitors could explore the exhibition – including, if they so chose, welding equipment, tunnelling shields, blast furnaces and an ‘Atoms for Peace’ display with a ‘working model of a hypothetical thermonuclear reactor using ordinary water as fuel’149 - the precisely ordered layout of the 1961 event clearly indicated which aspects held most significance to the Soviet ‘way of life’. At that show, over half the exhibition area was occupied by science, technology, engineering and industry.150 Space technology was the star exhibit,151 but a

149 TNA FC028/436 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968'
150 EC Box 1009 'The USSR Industrial Exhibition in London" July 7 – 29 1961
huge proportion of the display was given over to machinery such as tractors, lathes and drilling equipment, and visitors were guided through these as a priority. Actual pieces of equipment, including an extremely complex 'self-propelled grain combine harvester' were shown along with detailed models of architecture, town plans and engineering projects such as the Bratsk hydroelectric power station. Only after negotiating the maze of exhibition spaces which contained these exhibits could visitors gain access to halls including culture, fashion, education, and public health. Some female visitors interpreted the mechanically-biased layout as a negation of the Soviet pledge to gender equality promulgated in the exhibition. Yet this method of arrangement had much in common with previous Soviet national exhibitions, notably the USSR's display at the New York Coliseum two years previously. At this 1959 show, the British journalist and broadcaster Alistair Cooke complained that, after negotiating his way through the endless machines and industrial items 'We recognise the human scale only in the stuffy furnishings of the model flats, and in the appalling textiles the women are supposed to wear.' These responses suggest that the preponderance of heavy machinery in the visions of the Soviet way of life alienated some British viewers searching for a more human connection.

In contrast to this emphasis on technology and machinery, the role of the fine arts was a relatively minor one. At the 1961 exhibition, the display of paintings and sculpture was barely mentioned in the press; it seems to have been

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151 Pathé newsreel 'Russia Opens Trade Fair' 1961 Film ID: 1730.24 accessed at www.britishpathe.com
152 Fred Ashford 'USSR at Earls Court: Products' Design 154 October 1961 47-49
153 'Russia displays her industrial skills' The Times 7 July 1961
155 In spite of this pledge of equal rights, however, we have to plough our way to the essentially feminine sections of the exhibition through a maze of science and oceanology, energetics, coal, and chemistry, hydro-electric power stations (in 6-metre models, fortunately); atomic ice breakers; sputniks and spaceships launched simultaneously in film on five screens — all these abound....With a sigh of relief, one stumbles at last on the lighter side of Soviet life: homes, education of children, the position of teachers, holidays and recreation, food, toys, books, art and, finally, the section dealing with women's clothes. 'New and Old From Russia' The Times July 10 1961
156 Alistair Cooke, Manchester Guardian 1 July 1959 quoted in Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War.
somewhat lost amidst the more fascinating sputniks and thousands of other exhibits, occupying only a minor part of the 'culture' section in hall 19 of 22. Those who chose to comment on the display were uniformly negative. The Foreign Office mockingly noted a 'tiny corner devoted to art featured only the most laughable products of social realism', such as version of Vera Mukhina's sculpture Worker and Collective Farm Woman. Unsurprisingly, Alloway's opinion was not much better. He saw the art as an anomaly in the exhibition as a whole, harking back to the old USSR of Stalin and consisting of 'out-of-date images of heroic workers and patriotic mothers...the rest of the exhibition, however, belongs to a phase of trade and co-existence'.

This prioritisation of the technological was not surprising; in the competitive arena of the Thaw, both East and West used scientific advances such as space technology, domestic appliances and nuclear power as 'potent symbols' of their superiority. Yet there were different conceptions of technology in East and West, and different expectations over what would be shown at a 'way of life' exhibition. For the USA, the exhibition of domestic consumer durables became an important indicator of difference from the USSR: as Buck-Morss states, 'unlike the arms race and the race to outer space, commodity production was an area in which the Soviet Union was not yet close to catching up.' But, as has already been noted, Soviet viewers at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow were disappointed at the 'paucity of technology' (that is, heavy machinery) on display in comparison to the 'abundance of consumer goods'. Reid has suggested that Soviet audiences wanted more emphasis on how things were produced and how they worked rather than finished products. As technical progress and the

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157 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961

158 This sculpture was already famous from its position atop the Soviet Pavilion opposite the Nazi German structure, at the Paris World Fair of 1937. The monumental steel structure was later moved to the entrance of the 'Exhibition of the Achievements of the People's Economy of the USSR' in Moscow (VDNKh SSSR). Schmid, "Celebrating Tomorrow Today: The Peaceful Atom on Display in the Soviet Union." 331

159 Lawrence Alloway, 'USSR at Earls Court: The Image' Design 154 October 1961, 44-6

160 Introduction Reid and Crowley, eds., Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe. 9

161 Buck-Morss, Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West. 204

production of capital goods was the focus for the Soviet Economy between 1959-65 – alongside 'proper regard' to 'improving the standard of living' – it was not surprising that this, too, was the focus at the 1961 exhibition. The image and practice of academic science, too, remained fundamentally important despite changes in its functions and role in a socialist society post-Stalin.

But despite the Soviet emphasis on science and technology, some British observers were confused by the display of unsophisticated artefacts. In Design magazine, Fred Ashford, attempting to comprehend the vast array of machinery and engineering noted that the some of these exhibits were so poorly designed as to appear to be a 'pre-revolutionary scientific relic' that evoked 'early electrical equipment in museums'. The gap between industrial design education in Britain and the USSR had already been noted in 1957 by the then deputy Director of the Council of Industrial Design and cousin of the British ambassador in Moscow, Paul Reilly, on his visit to the USSR. His companion on that trip commented how the 'very idea of design' proved 'difficult to convey' to their Soviet hosts, with no adequate translation being forthcoming. Reilly was to make at least six visits to the USSR in 12 years and develop a friendship with Soloviev. Even by 1970, he remarked upon the absence in the USSR of a school of industrial design 'properly geared to the requirements of a modern industrialised society'. Back at the 1961 Earls Court exhibition, Fred Ashford highlighted this lack of design education. One console of a weld-testing machine, dated 1959, was 'just baffling to the Western eye...the crudity of manufacture and finish and brutalist treatment of detail had to be seen to be believed...each component is

163 TNA CAB21/4630 NS1102/81 Sir Patrick Reilly to Mr Selwyn Lloyd ‘Announcement of a new plan for the Soviet Economy 1959-65’ 7 October 1957
164 Ivanov has shown how the administrative reorganisation of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1961 was symptomatic of a broader shift in the understanding of what science meant in a socialist society. Although there were conflicting opinions, a new concept of 'fundamental science' (pure science) which did not necessarily have a practical orientation (in stark contrast to the science of the Stalinist period) came to be established. Konstantin Ivanov, 'Science after Stalin: Forging a New Image of Soviet Science,' Science in Context 15.2 (2002). 317-319
165 Fred Ashford ‘USSR at Earls Court: Products’ Design 154 October 1961 47-49
166 TNA BW2/532 'Supplementary Impressions and Recollections', Paul Reilly, 17 September 1957
167 TNA BW2/532 Comments by Mr R Hutchings of the British embassy in Moscow 21 Sept 1957
168 Paul Reilly 'Russia's Design Schools' in 'Comment' Design 28-7 January 1970
170 Paul Reilly 'Russia's Design Schools' in 'Comment' Design 28-7 January 1970

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mounted slightly askew, with switches designed for vertical presentation laid on their sides, together with their designations'. 171 [Fig. 5.10]

Nevertheless, one of the main scientific areas of the 1961 and 1968 exhibitions was able to cross cultural boundaries more successfully. The 'gleaming' space exhibits were the primary attraction for a British public newly captivated by the exploration of the cosmos. Prior to the launch of Sputnik in October 1957, space had been a minority interest with only specialist appeal, but with the success of the first space satellite fascination with all things outside the earth's orbit became widespread in popular culture. 172 This enthusiasm would have been at a peak during the first Earls Court Soviet exhibition: Yuri Gagarin's historic space flight occurred mere weeks prior to the 1961 show. 173 Even before the exhibition had opened, the British press eagerly seized upon the forthcoming opportunity to see life-size replicas of the Soviet Sputniks and Luniks. One commentator called them 'splendid space age fun', seemingly negating any Cold War anxieties surrounding the space race. 174 Another reviewer stated that 'The British public... should find it a thrilling experience'. 175 It was interpreted as enjoyment and entertainment, not fear of any underlying nuclear threat posed by rocket technology.

Whereas the Americans had greeted the launch of the first Sputnik with anxiety over its implications for a nuclear attack 176 and a fear that the 'reds' were overtaking them with their 'dreaded earth satellite' - the British reaction, though wary, seems to have been much less sensationalist. 177 The potential threat posed by Soviet rocket technology - 'science fact' - was overridden by

171 Fred Ashford 'USSR at Earls Court: Products' Design 154 October 1961 47-49
172 Consequently, the 1960s have been described as a time when new developments were followed avidly and 'the look of space hardware was familiar to everybody' Jones contends that this phase was 'followed by one of 'boredom' in the 1970s and then 'disbelief as accusations of faked moon landings arose. Robert A Jones, "They Came in Peace for All Mankind: Popular Culture as a Reflection of Public Attitudes to Space," Space Policy 20 2004 (2004). 45-47
173 New and Old From Russia 'The Times' July 10 1961
174 John Davy 'From Space to Murals' The Observer 9 July 1961
175 'Propaganda by Caviare, Wines and Sputniks: 10,000 exhibits in Soviet Show' The Guardian 7 July 1961 5
176 Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War 38-39
177 Haddow, Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s 207
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the ‘science fiction’ of the space exhibits at Earls Court, where the Hall of the Cosmos – a feature of 1961 and 1968 - presented a wonderland of space exploration.\textsuperscript{178}

Major Yuri Gagarin's unexpected and extremely popular visit to Britain to attend the Soviet exhibition in 1961 heightened the favourable reception of the Soviet space exhibits as representing a thrilling and fantastical dreamworld [Fig. 5.11].\textsuperscript{179} On his first visit to Western Europe, the grinning Gagarin was granted a hero’s welcome, boosting attendance at the exhibition.\textsuperscript{180} Following his space success earlier that year, Gagarin had toured many Eastern European countries, but his British visit was a rare three-day trip to the West.\textsuperscript{181} The public response was overwhelming: thousands lined the streets to congratulate the first man to orbit the earth as his Rolls Royce, complete with registration plate YG1, passing through the streets of Kensington and Hammersmith. Every aspect of his visit was followed attentively in the press and on television, including his press conference at the Earls Court exhibition.\textsuperscript{182} At the exhibition, he was 'mobbed by a great surge of admirers':

Thanks to a ring of police, who dwarfed the diminutive major, he was more or less carried out of the Cosmos Hall. Behind him, as a testament to space worship, a model sputnik tottered dangerously on its plinth, and it took half a dozen men to keep it from falling.\textsuperscript{183}


For more on the British response to the Soviet space achievements see also Jones, “They Came in Peace for All Mankind: Popular Culture as a Reflection of Public Attitudes to Space.” 46

\textsuperscript{179} Rumours of a Gagarin visit were unconfirmed on 30 June, according to the Times. The London visit took place on 11 July, followed by a trip to Manchester and then tea with the Queen at Buckingham Palace on the 13\textsuperscript{th}. “Sputniks 'In Orbit' At Exhibition: Soviet £1m drive in London' The Times June 30 1961

\textsuperscript{180} News of Gagarin’s forthcoming visit made the front pages: he was billed as the 'prize attraction' The Guardian 8 July 1961 1.

\textsuperscript{181} Other countries visited by Gagarin include Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, Japan, Italy and Australia; Britain was his first Western outing.

\textsuperscript{182} It was reported that the spaceman was given a 'hero's welcome'. See for example, Pathé newsreel, 'Welcome Gagarin' (13 July 1961); Reuters newsreel 'UK: London hails Soviet Spaceman Gagarin' (11 July 1961), 'Hail Gagarin'; in the printed press, typical articles include "Cheering Crowds Hall Major Gagarin in The Times, 12 July 1961.

Cheering Crowds Hall Major Gagarin' The Times 12 July 1961
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Gagarin's visit did succeed in promoting a positive vision of the Soviet Union. He received a hero's welcome and was granted celebrity status in Britain, becoming an enormously valuable representative of the Soviet regime: 'never has Moscow sent a finer ambassador' commented one newsreel. This favourable illusion informed attitudes to the first Earls Court exhibition, as the Foreign Office noted:

Although nothing to do with the Exhibition (he would have been followed as rapturously if he had stationed himself at Battersea Power Station or the Albert Memorial) his appearance contributed enormously to the success of the fair, both by symbolising the Soviet 'presence' in London and by attracting hundreds if not thousands who would otherwise never have thought of going near the Earls Court Road.

But, like the 'dreamworld' image presented at the Soviet exhibition, a degree of separation between political reality and the smiling embodiment of a fantastical space future was maintained. The official view of the British government was that the Major's visit transcended political considerations. Similarly, some journalists felt it necessary to warn that this enthusiastic response did not 'refute the Cold War'.

The fascination with space was still running high by the time of the 1968 exhibition: the Evening Standard described the central 'Hall of the Cosmos' display as 'dazzling' and the 'star attraction' [Fig. 5.12]. 13 space vehicles were on show, with emphasis on the practical and beneficial aspects of space exploration, such as weather and communications satellites. The 1968 exhibition attempted to recapture some of the earlier popular enthusiasm via the display of an authentic spaceship: the blackened and 'fire-scorched' spherical Vostok 1 capsule that had carried Gagarin into orbit in 1961 [See

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185 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 ‘Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition’ Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
186 Mr Julian Amery, Secretary for Air said ‘Of course, I wish I had been welcoming a British astronaut today, but this is something that transcends politics’ ‘Cheering Crowds Hail Major Gagarin’ The Times July 12 1961
187 'Cheers to the End for Gagarin' The Guardian 16 July 1961
188 ‘Russians send dazzling space display’ Evening Standard 2 August 1968
189 Pathé newsreel 'Russian Exhibition' Film ID: 2069.11 accessed at www.britishpathe.com
190 ‘The Russians send dazzling space display’ Evening Standard 2 August 1968

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Fig. 5.4. In part, this backward-looking move reflected the USSR's relative lack of space progress in comparison with the USA at this time. There were also suggestions that the exhibit, complete with model cosmonaut inside, was in bad taste as Gagarin had perished in a MiG test flight less than four months previously. Some were bemused; The Times observed visitors knocking the blackened surface to ascertain whether it was made of wood.

Responses to the other scientific exhibits in 1961 and 1968 were less favourable. While there was a general consensus that the displays were impressive, the lack of clear explanations of experiments and mysterious machinery caused consternation. In part, this was the fault of the Soviet organisers, who presented a range of seemingly bizarre gadgets and experiments, such as a pamphlet on the 'Effect of heterogeneous blood transfusion on the heredity of hens' accompanied by a sad, static flock of stuffed poultry. The social scientist Sonja D. Schmid has attempted to understand the term 'propaganda' in the context of the popularisation of Soviet science at exhibitions in the USSR from the 1950s onwards. She has argued that this scientific communist propaganda had an explicit task: to educate, enlighten and mobilize the population in the 'practical fight for socialism and communism'. This meant that political neutrality was irrelevant to Soviet science popularisers: 'scientific objectivity' was seen as a bourgeois concept whereas a 'proletarian bias' whereby science was used to promote socialism was explicitly encouraged.

Given that there was a strong scientific and technical bias in the USSR's displays at Earls Court, coupled with the evident promotion of the idea of the USSR as progressing towards a socialist utopia, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of these beliefs and display methods were transplanted to the London exhibitions. But these scientific displays did not seem to translate well in Britain in either 1961 or

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191 TNA FC028/436 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968'
192 Byron Rogers commented that 'The blistered black shell of Vostok 1 was endlessly, appraisingly rapped ("It can't be wood, can it?")' Byron Rogers, 'People's Guide to Russia: Mr Wilson toasts Peace and Trade' The Times 7 August 1968
193 'Space Highlights at Soviet Exhibition' Daily Telegraph 7 August 1968
194 'Space Highlights at Soviet Exhibition' Daily Telegraph 7 August 1968
195 Schmid's analysis centres around a study of the scientific displays at the Exhibition of the Achievements of the People's Economy of the USSR in Moscow (also known as the VDNKh SSSR). Schmid, "Celebrating Tomorrow Today: The Peaceful Atom on Display in the Soviet Union." 338
1968. In 1968, the British press ridiculed alleged Soviet medical breakthroughs as 'equipment for the reanimation of patients in a state of 'clinical death' and an 'electronic sleep machine'. But there were also useful technical innovations which appealed to modern Western lives: a miniature transistor radio called the 'Micro', designed to be worn like a badge, aroused favourable press response.

British visitors showed keen interest in the consumer goods, fashions, architecture and transport. Particularly in 1961, audiences were curious to see first hand the other side of the Iron Curtain, to evaluate differences in standards of living in homes, education, work and culture from the thousands of exhibits. These objects ostensibly offered an insight into the lives of ordinary Russians – though most British newspapers stressed that the fashions and electrical appliances were frequently prototypes and unavailable to the population at large. Pre-existing expectations of Soviet goods as scarce and shoddy could colour responses. Even a sixth form school visit to the 1961 exhibition remarked on the 'badly finished' machinery, noting that even though some consumer goods were of high quality, 'they are still for the few in the Soviet Union' and not available to the majority of the population.

The general reaction to both the 1960s exhibitions was that the consumer goods tended to look 'sturdy rather than elegant'. As Haddow's verdict on the post-war US economic system – a 'highly developed consumer society in which the style and glamour of objects were becoming as important as their availability' - demonstrates, such sturdiness as antithetical to capitalist goods which prioritised style and 'elegance' – as well as planned obsolescence.

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196. According to the press release, this involved electrodes being placed on the head, following which 'a pulsing current passes through and soothes the patient off to sleep' TNA FC028/436 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968'

197. 'The Russians Send Dazzling Space Display' Evening Standard 2 Aug 1968

198. Boym's analysis of the previously untranslatable experiences of how objects were negotiated in Russian communal apartments provides a counterpoint to EC exhibitions. Boym, Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia. 158


200. 'Russia Today – Tomorrow' The Sun 1968

201. I am grateful to Lesley Whitworth for this suggestion about the value judgements in the term 'sturdy'. Haddow, Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s. 5
The Foreign Office confidential report of 1961 condemned a vast swathe of the china, glass, textiles and carpets as being of 'inferior standard and poor taste'. Similarly, *Design* magazine's overall impression of the present state of Soviet product design and manufacture was of a 'chaotic collection of poorly designed and...badly produced articles'. However, it praised some exhibits, notably a 'delightfully clean and satisfying design' for a Moscow cinema, an unusual but 'superior' reflecting telescope and some 'simple' and 'restrained' children's furniture. And unlike the Foreign Office, the commentator was also hopeful for the future of design in the Soviet Union, citing the recent appointment of Yuri Soloviev as Director of the All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Industrial Design, Moscow as a positive step towards the organisation and improvement of design education in the USSR.

British responses indicate a belief in a characteristic Soviet style or type of ideal Soviet object, defined in opposition to the products of the West: in the eyes of many British commentators, artefacts from the USSR should reflect this identity and not try to imitate Western goods. In addition to 'sub-standard' modern items, this notion of the Soviet object was often conflated with ideas of traditional folk arts and crafts. The stock of the Russian Shop— which had a permanent retail space in Holborn and temporary stalls at the Earls Court exhibitions — emphasised 'typical' Soviet goods such as decorative folk objects, similar to the 'ideal' exhibits envisaged by exhibition visitors [Fig. 5.12].

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202 TNA FC371/159603 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
203 Typically, Design also noted that more improvements were likely to follow given recent reforms in Soviet design education, in which the ColD played a part. Fred Ashford 'USSR at Earls Court: Products' Design 154 October 1961 47-49
204 The Council of Industrial Design confirmed this view: in discussions concerning a proposed ColD exhibition in the USSR to impart British knowledge of product design, the Earls Court exhibition was referred to as demonstrating how far behind Britain the Soviets were. But it also cautioned that the proposed ColD exhibition in Moscow could potentially improve the USSR's products to such an extent that they could become a threat to British exports at British expense. Design Council Archive, Council Meetings, Agendas, Papers and minutes 1961, The Council of Industrial Design: minutes CM (61)4. Friday, 21 July at 2.15pm
205 The December 1968 edition of Homes and Gardens still carried advertising for the Russian Shop - 'Unusual gifts for Xmas from Russia'— alongside an illustration of Matryoska dolls, the shop sold toys, costume, textiles, watches and 'typical' Russian folk goods

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It was where the USSR was portrayed as having copied the West that the British press were most critical. In 1961, televisions and cars were condemned for copying dated stylistic devices from the USA and Italy.\(^{206}\) One of the most popular exhibits, a supposedly affordable ‘baby’ car from the Ukraine called the Zaporozhets was accused of imitating the Fiat 600. Similarly, in 1968 the 12m long model of a prototype Soviet supersonic airline, the TU 144 drew attention but for the wrong reasons [Fig. 5.13].\(^{207}\) It was later nicknamed ‘Concordski’ in the West amid accusations of industrial espionage.\(^{208}\) As Reid points out, ‘Reverse engineering was an established, efficient way for Soviet Industry to leapfrog a stage of development.’ At the American exhibition in Moscow in 1959, the Soviets expected that the exhibition would provided a chance to ‘study and copy’ American technical innovations.\(^{209}\) Such reverse engineering had a history that pre-dated the Cold War. Buck Morss describes the processes of technology transfer which took place between the USA and USSR in the 1920s and 1930s. These transfers, funded by the Soviet government’s sale of antiques and artistic masterpieces, included Ford automobile factories and mining and metalwork complexes. That the USA at that time had no diplomatic relations with the Soviets was not an obstacle.\(^{210}\) But the press and public image of Soviet science in Britain was far from uniformly positive. With the exception of periods such as that immediately following the launch of the first Sputnik, the USSR’s technology was presented as lagging – albeit marginally - behind the West. This was a gap which the USA was keen to maintain via the strategic embargo of newly developed technologies such as computers.\(^{211}\)

\(^{206}\) Lawrence Alloway, ‘USSR at Earls Court: The Image’, Design 154 October 1961, 44-6

\(^{207}\) TNA FC028/436 translation of article ‘At Earls Court’ Izvestia, 2 August 1968

\(^{208}\) The story of this plane remains controversial. Designed by Aleksei Tupolev, son of the air pioneer Andrei, its maiden flight was on 31 December 1968, 2 months ahead of the Anglo-French Concorde (2 March 1969): a major Soviet propaganda coup. However, it later crashed numerous times.

\(^{209}\) Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959." 888

\(^{210}\) Buck-Morss notes that ‘The fact that Stalin’s First and Second Five Year Plans amounted to the largest technological transfer in Western capitalist history was not something either side advertised, nor did they care to remember this collaboration during the Cold War years.’ (168) Buck-Morss, Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West, 164-172

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Consequently, the Soviet Union was keen to acquire advanced scientific and technological information from the West, both via authorised exchanges and by spying.\textsuperscript{212}

Such accusations of plagiarism were by no means confined to machines and appliances. A women's column in \textit{The Times} asserted:

\begin{quote}
Many other exhibits – the china and glass for example, as well as the wireless sets, perfumes, fabrics - are not so impressive. When the Russians are themselves, it seems, their designs are excellent. But in things feminine, at least, when they too plainly copy the West, the West still does best.\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

These views extended to the 90-minute Soviet fashion shows, which were held daily in 1961 and 1968 on the first floor of Earls Court. In 1961, they were viewed by 45,000 people [Fig. 5.14]. The Foreign Office once again belittled the display of clothes which were, grudgingly, 'agreeable enough at the Marks and Spencer or C and A level'.\textsuperscript{214} However, other responses were more favourable, taking the shows as a face value display of what Soviet women wore: a 1961 Pathé newsreel expressed 'surprise' at the fashion shows 'clearly Russian women have become dress conscious to a surprising extent'.\textsuperscript{215} The Earls Court catwalk shows were typical of recent developments in Soviet fashion. The dress historian Djurdja Bartlett has described how, from the late 1950s, the socialist countries exhibited their collections 'at the catwalks of socialist fashion congresses or domestic and international trade fairs', often showing designs such as 'long evening taffeta dresses' and 'serious day ensembles' which 'transmitted the very traditional idea of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[212] In promoting cultural exchanges, Khrushchev set as a deliberate Soviet aim the systematic acquisition by this means of advanced scientific and technological information and the stimulation of Soviet science and technology through direct contact between Soviet scientists and their Western counterparts.' Morison, "Anglo-Soviet Cultural Contacts since 1975." 171
\item[213] New and Old From Russia The Times July 10 1961
\item[214] The C&A reference is also interesting for harking back to the minor diplomatic crisis in 1956 when a Soviet sportswoman called Nina was accused of stealing 5 hats in C&A. TNA F0371/159603 Folder NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
\item[215] Pathé newsreel 'Russia Opens Trade Fair' 1961 film ID Film ID: 1730.24 accessed at www.britishpathe.com
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luxury’. Such styles borrowed heavily from the West: Bartlett has suggested that the socialist systems ‘never evolved their own repository of distinctive symbolic goods’ – which were supposed to be ‘modest’, ‘suitable’ and ‘worthy’ - and so had to take and re-code from those of ‘decadent’, ‘irrational’ and ‘impractical’ ‘bourgeois culture’. By the late 1950s, Parisian fashions, for example, had been redefined in official socialist attitudes and were now judged to display the socialist qualities of ‘modesty’, ‘simplicity’ and ‘elegance’.

Bartlett’s investigations into official Soviet and Eastern Bloc attitudes to fashion reveal the complex and shifting relationship between the regime and fashion – originally seen as a feature of capitalist societies. She demonstrates how, in the period 1958-1968, a phenomenon which she calls ‘official socialist dress’ appeared, tied to the development of a socialist middle class. This ‘encounter between socialism and Western fashion’, which resulted in the traditionally feminine, ‘simple’ and ‘moderate’ styles of what Bartlett calls ‘socialist good taste’ was in evidence at the 1961 Earls Court exhibition. As she points out, this style was an ‘ideological construct’ – another illusion of the Soviet way of life - which bore little relationship to the ‘reality’ of everyday dress for the vast majority of Soviet women:

The glamorous official socialist version of fashion existed as an ideological construct undisturbed by the shortages and poor quality of clothes available in everyday life.

Crowley and Reid, too, identify a similar phenomenon in their analysis of the search for an appropriate style with which to express socialist modernity in the countries of the Eastern Bloc during the post-Stalin Thaw.

Conversely, those artefacts perceived by British observers as typically Russian were widely praised. Responses to the daily fashion shows at the

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220 Ibid., 134
221 Reid and Crowley, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*. 3

350
1961 exhibition regarded ‘traditional designs’, especially those with a peasant influence, such as fringed and braided skirts, embroidery and furs as ‘beautiful’ and ‘new’. Folk inspired embroideries and fur had traditionally been praised at Soviet fashion shows, but in Britain the reasons behind this acclaim were different. It was those items that looked to a Western idea of ‘Russian’ traditions that won the greatest approval:

Like many other items in the consumer goods sections, Russian clothes have the most to offer when they are made in fabrics based on traditional designs. Fringed and braided skirts; machine embroiders on plain fabric dresses, traditional rose designed printed on feather weight wools, dark exotic jersey prints recalling the pattern of an oriental carpet; crudely contrasting stripes – all these recall the gay colourful clothing of the peasants of the Ukraine or the Uzbek and please especially because they seem different and beautiful and new.

This comment indicates a degree of awareness of the existence of the other republics of the USSR, but equally fails to distinguish between them, drawing upon an anachronistic myth of standardised simple and jolly peasants. At the 1968 exhibition, other ‘traditional’ Soviet fashions which gained particular approval were full-length furs. The fashions on display at the 1968 exhibition came from a variety of fashion houses in ‘Moscow, Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius’, though most British press discussion simplified the picture by not mentioning the Baltic states, referring instead to ‘Russian’ fashions.

The degree of surprise at ‘smart, attractive, up to date clothes’ and ‘unexpectedly frivolous hats’ indicates how startling they were to British expectations. One writer commented that this should challenge existing Western stereotypes of dowdy Soviet women ‘miserably clad in out-of-date dresses and suits’, but took pains to stress that the majority of Russian

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222 New and Old From Russia The Times July 10 1961
223 At the Leipzig Fair in 1961, for example, the East German response praised these types of items. Bartlett, “Let Them Wear Beige: The Petit-Bourgeois World of Official Socialist Dress.” 134
224 “New and Old From Russia” The Times July 10 1961
225 Haddow’s analysis of Brussels Expo USSR pavilion: “The ethnic styles emphasised a respect for the many cultures in the USSR. In their pavilion, up-to date sheaths were displayed next to more traditional or folk outfits such as a white silk dress-suit trimmed with traditional Ukrainian embroidery.” Haddow, Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s. 148
226 Alison Adburgham ‘The Russian Look Comes to London’ The Guardian 5 August 1968
227 TNA FCO23/436 ‘Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968’
228 Some journalists noted that such views were ‘coloured by what the commentators expected in the first place’ ‘The Soviet Exhibition – the Fashions’ by Katherine Whitehorn The Observer 9 July 1961
women would be unable to obtain or afford such fashions. Anglo-Soviet contact in the field of fashion appears to have been characterised throughout the 1950s and 1960s by the 'sophisticated' British fashion world looking down on Soviet fashions as a curiosity. Contact was not limited to exhibitions such as Earls Court. In May 1967, a 'swinging Soviet fashion spectacular' was held at the Talk of the Town, Leicester Square. Although chains such as Marks and Spencer and BHS were present, the British buyers 'did not feel the Soviet fashions were sufficiently sophisticated' for the British market.

Stereotypes of dowdy Russian women continued to inform judgements at the 1968 exhibition: the Daily Mail commented in surprise that the clothing was 'decidedly feminine, very much in fashion'. As Bartlett has argued, it was not until 1968 that the Soviet Fashion Journal declared the classicism of Coco Chanel 'old fashioned'; the end of the 1960s saw 'ideological shifts towards fashionability' in the socialist countries. Like 'official socialist dress', this was a discourse with little grounding in what was really worn in the USSR. But according to the press release in 1968, the fashion shows at Earls Court gave the opportunity for the British to 'see for themselves what today's well dressed Soviet woman is wearing'. They displayed a similar blend of the modern and the traditional: this time, there were a few 'space age' jumpsuits [Fig. 5.15] - which one British communist newspaper, the Morning Star, described as 'out of this world'—mixed with clothing which many reporters thought mimicked Western clothing: '[O]nly the modest hemlines gave the game away'. But fashions which harked back to Russian traditions also remained popular: Izvestiya reported that many of the fashions on display would be of the 'Cossack' type.

229 'New and Old From Russia' The Times July 10 1961
230 Alison Adburgham 'The Russian Look Comes to London' The Guardian 5 August 1968
232 'The Modest Revolutionaries put Moscow on the Fashion Map' Daily Mail 5 August 1968
234 TNA FCO28/436 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968'
235 'Out of This World', Morning Star 6 August 1968
236 'The Modest Revolutionaries put Moscow on the Fashion Map' Daily Mail 5 August 1968
237 Izvestiya, 'At Earls Court' 2 August 1968
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Ideas of the past and traditional life-styles informed British opinions of the other Soviet republics. Despite the 1968 press release claiming that the products from the Baltic states would range from 'precision made machine tools to woollens, silks, foodstuffs and furniture', when discussing other parts of the USSR it was the hand-crafts such as embroidery and dolls in peasant dress that were usually remarked upon. The organisers did encourage this view. The press release goes on to state that handicrafts 'will be a popular buy at the exhibition' including 'objects made of wood, ceramics, metals, semi-precious stones, bone and other materials.' Crafts included 'hand-woven carpets from Daghestan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenia and Armenia' and 'Russian' fabrics from Uzbekistan, the Baltic and the Caucasus. Where these traditional activities were being demonstrated, they seem to have been very popular. In 1961, '[c]rowds gathered to watch the craftsmen at work (making lace, carving wood and painting tableware).'

'DREAMWORLD' MEETS REALITY

Reactions to the displays and exhibits at the Soviet exhibitions indicate that the Soviet 'dreamworld' on display could be enjoyed for their mere spectacle. But what happened when this mythic vision was directly challenged by the reality of Cold War political events? How did observers reconcile the dream of the Soviet way of life with reality?

The 1961 display at Earls Court did 'radically transform' the familiar interior of the exhibition hall. The theatricality of the massive 'USSR' signs at the entrance - particularly in 1968 - formed a striking opening to the exhibition, claiming the building as the Soviets' own in the manner of a World's Fair pavilion: a slice of the USSR in the heart of 1960s London. This theatrical introduction to each exhibition cannot have failed to make an impression on

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238 Salmond, "Reviving Folk Art in Russia: The Moscow Zemstvo and the Kustar Art Industries."
239 TNA FCO28/438 'Press release: The Soviet Exhibition Comes to Town: Massive Display for Earls Court 6-24 August 1968' 240 TNA FO371/159803 NS1861/60 "Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition" Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961 241 Lawrence Alloway 'USSR at Earls Court: The Image', Design 154 October 1961 44-6

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visitors approaching the building.\(^{242}\) That the exhibition was a 'make-believe' place is indicated by the press responses in 1961 and 1968. British commentators on the Soviet shows frequently returned to themes of dreaming, fantasy and childhood. In 1968, the Times stated that 'this is a child's exhibition, with its avenues of glittering, incomprehensible machines.'\(^{243}\) The entertainment value of the exhibitions for children was regularly mentioned in news reports of the 1961 and 1968 shows. A Reuter's newsreel of July 1961 commented, "There is a great emphasis on children throughout the exhibition.... A glittering fairyland of dolls and toys, which will enchant the small visitors", noting in particular an enormous nested doll containing twenty-seven smaller dolls.\(^{244}\) Reviews of the Russian Shop also commented that it contained 'plenty to interest children': toy animals, ornaments and aeroplane models.\(^{245}\) The Sun described the 1968 Hall of the Cosmos as 'a schoolboy's paradise' \([\text{Fig. 5.16}]\).\(^{246}\) The Soviet organisers also played upon the 'child' theme distributing a book of children's paintings called 'Through the Eyes of Children' in 1968.\(^{247}\)

In suggesting that the imagined 'way of life' on display at Earls Court was suitable for children, British commentators deprived it of its political power, emphasising its illusory nature. The Soviet dream was not merely a fantasy, it was a child's fantasy: naïve and unthreatening. Although, as Dobrenko has demonstrated, the USSR used a similar 'fairy-tale' discourse at the Exhibition of the People's Achievements – a 1954 Soviet article in Art (Iskusstvo) called the abundant agricultural splendours a 'magic tablecloth'\(^{248}\) – this was seen as a fairy tale that could come true. In Britain, the vision of Soviet life was well

\(^{242}\) The VDNKh exhibition centre in Moscow also displayed 'explicit theatricality' as one of its main characteristics. Schmid, "Celebrating Tomorrow Today: The Peaceful Atom on Display in the Soviet Union." 334

\(^{243}\) Byron Rogers, 'People's Guide to Russia: Mr Wilson toasts Peace and Trade' The Times 7 August 1968

\(^{244}\) Reuters ref BGY504090073 6 July 1961 www.itnsouce.com accessed 10 June 2007

\(^{245}\) Reuters newsreel ref BGY504080281 'UK: Russian Shop Opens in London' 23 June 1961 www.itnsouce.com

\(^{246}\) 'Russia Today – Tomorrow' The Sun 1968

\(^{247}\) This book purported to contain 'ordinary drawings by ordinary children' from the different regions of the Soviet Union. The children's visions of themes including the future and space travel were placed alongside the usual Soviet statements on peace and how 'friendship makes the world more beautiful' ‘Through the Eyes of Children' Earls Court Archive, Box 1014

\(^{248}\) "Slava narodnomu trudu!" (editorial), Iskusstvo, no. 5 (1954):3 quoted in Dobrenko, "The Soviet Spectacle: The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition." 194
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received in the press precisely because it was imaginary. The press had a
tendency to qualify comments on the delights of the shows with a warning that
they were not real. Some reports simply encouraged visitors to disregard the
‘propaganda nowadays inseparable from prestige exhibitions of national
achievements’.249 The British government asserted that no sensible Briton
would take this vision at face value. Soviet pamphlets distributed at the 1961
exhibition were deliberately not censored, the Foreign Office stating:

We believe the British public are intelligent enough not to be swept off
their feet by the obvious fallacies and half-truths which are contained in
the literature being distributed at Earls Court.250

Nevertheless, in 1961 there were some concerns that the fairy-tale might be
believed. As a precautionary measure the Information Research Department
(IRD) of the Foreign Office distributed a document to politicians and press,
advising them on how to counteract the Soviet propaganda inherent in the
exhibitions. It advised stressing trade motives, and emphasising the fallacy of
Soviet claims to ‘peace’, freedom and high living standards. But this
document, too, portrayed the average member of the British public as ‘mature’
enough to ‘see through any extravagant claims’ put forward at Earls Court.251

Although this IRD document aimed to counter any possible press accusations
that the government had given the USSR free rein in presenting a show of
Soviet mis-information, the exhibitions generally escaped this accusation. The
1961 Soviet exhibition at Earls Court attracted surprisingly little controversy
given the political context of the time. Such ‘way of life’ exhibitions could
frequently become targets for demonstrations in the highly charged
atmosphere of the Cold War: the 1959 Soviet exhibition in New York had
been picketed by ‘young Russian speakers’ who tried to stop people going
in.”252 There had been warnings about possible protests from émigré groups at
Earls Court, but these failed to materialise.253 And despite the fact that trade
fairs and national exhibitions could also be valuable sites for intelligence

249 'New and Old From Russia' The Times July 10 1961
250 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/51 Foreign Office to Lloyd Jones, Private Secretary to the duchy of
Lancaster from 24 July 1961 in response to complaint about literature at the Soviet exhibition
251 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/48 IRD document INTEL No 81 ‘The Soviet Exhibition – its scope and
effect – points to keep in mind’ 4 July 1961
252 Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War, 43
253 TNA FO371/159602 NS1861/35 JL Bullard 9 June 1961 ‘Soviet Exhibition in London’
work— as Geraint Hughes has described, it was common practice for both the East and the West to use embassies and trade delegations as a means to obtain military, economic, political and industrial intelligence — there was only one brief moment of espionage scandal at the 1961 exhibition.

However, any illusion of an unthreatening socialist utopia was destroyed during the 1968 show. The opening of this second exhibition was received excitedly and cordially in Britain, though attendances were lower than they had been in 1961. Although both 1960s exhibitions had shared the familiar Soviet rhetoric of ‘Peace’ and ‘Friendship’ — which had been revisited most recently as the theme of the 1967 Great Britain: USSR Historical Exhibition at the V&A — it was most blatantly displayed in the entrance hall of the 1968 show where the words were imposed on a design of interlocking British and Soviet flags [Fig. 5.17]. The ‘messages of greeting’ from Khrushchev and Kosygin distributed in booklet form in 1961 and 1968 respectively were also suffused with claims of friendship and peace. ‘Friendship’ events were also organised to coincide with the 1968 exhibition. But these statements were undermined by the invasion of Czechoslovakia in the final week of the exhibition prompted demonstrations outside Earls Court and vandalism within. Attendances, which had already been around half of those in 1961, dropped dramatically. Suggestions of ‘Peace’ and ‘Friendship’ inside the exhibition could do little to counteract news reports of actual Soviet aggression.

'Considerable demonstrations' started outside Earls Court and at

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254 e.g. American agents observed activities and photographed exhibits at the USSR pavilion in Brussels. Haddow, Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s. 207-8
255 On account of the ‘special relationship’ with the USA and her role in NATO, the UK was one of the primary intelligence targets for the Soviets. Both sides carried out such intelligence work ‘violated the 1961 Vienna Treaty on diplomatic protocol’. Geraint Hughes, "Giving the Russians a Bloody Nose": Operation Foot and Soviet Espionage in the United Kingdom, 1964-71," Cold War History 6.2 (2006).
256 A British businessman, Greville Wynne, had used the fair as a venue to meet Oleg Penkovsky, a Soviet double agent who was passing secrets to Britain. Although subsequently imprisoned, this took place years after the Earls Court fair. Dominic Sandbrook, Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles 1956-1963 (London: Abacus, 2005 (2006 edition)). 604-5
257 'Into Dreamland' The Guardian 22 August 1968
258 'Friendship Day' was held at Earls Court on 17 August 1968. Mayors from across Britain, the Soviet Ambassador Mikhail Smirnovsky and members of various British-Soviet Friendship societies attended. Reuters Newsreel Ref: BGY507030321 7/08/1968 UK Mayors Visit Soviet Exhibition accessed at www.itnsource.com
259 Prior to the invasion, attendances were 11,103 per day compared to 25,688 per day in 1961. Attendances following the invasion averaged 6,415 per day, with a low of 4,347. TNA FO28/436 NS6/10 I Trafford, ITF to PT Hayman, Foreign Office, 30 August 1968 See also 'Soviet exhibition attendance slumps', The Guardian 23 August 1968
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the Soviet Embassy in London on 21 August.\textsuperscript{260} It was estimated that the public demonstrators outside Earls Court numbered 1,500 at their height.\textsuperscript{261} The demonstration attracted a wide variety of groups: the crowd comprised a mixture of Czechs singing folk songs, pacifist student groups who sought to distance themselves from violent anti-Vietnam Grosvenor Square demonstrations of March 1968, ‘Maoist and Trotskyite groups’ claiming solidarity with Czech workers, and ‘veteran demonstrators’ such as Tariq Ali, Pat Arrowsmith and the Committee of 100. The demonstrators were generally described as ‘orderly’ though as the days progressed the ‘quality of the demonstrators’ became ‘obviously poor’.\textsuperscript{262} One protestor inside the exhibition halls painted red swastikas on a wall and some youths set fire to and partially destroyed a model Russian house.\textsuperscript{263} Despite the protests, the exhibition remained open to the planned closing date of 24 August.

ITF wrote to the Foreign Office after the show had closed, noting the Soviet’s displeasure at the protests surrounding its final week and blaming ‘the British side for closing an exhibition which was by then quite useless to them anyway’.\textsuperscript{264} The child-like ‘dreamworld’ of the USSR at Earls Court had been ruptured. Even some British attendees who had been brought up in communist households saw their illusions about the Soviet Union shattered. Phil Cohen records, how, while heading to work at the Russian Shop outlet at the exhibition:

One morning I walked the gauntlet of demonstrators protesting at the Soviet tanks rumbling into Czechoslovakia to crush the Prague Spring. Inside there was a strange atmosphere, with protestors rushing around shouting at us; one log cabin was set on fire. I suddenly felt uneasily that I was in the wrong place. I stopped going after that.\textsuperscript{265}

Ultimately, the separation between the reception of the utopian vision of life in the USSR at Earls Court, and the political realities of Soviet aggression could no longer be maintained.

\textsuperscript{260} TNA FO28/436 File NS 6/10 Letter from I Trafford, Industrial and Trade Fairs Ltd to PT Hayman, Foreign Office, 30 August 1968.
\textsuperscript{261} The protests can be viewed on Newsreel ‘Russians Invade Czechoslovakia’ Ref: T21066801 accessed at www.itnsource.com
\textsuperscript{262} TNA FO28/436 NS6/10 Letter from I Trafford, ITF to PT Hayman, Foreign Office, 30 August 1968
\textsuperscript{263} ‘Soviet exhibition attendance slumps’, The Guardian 23 August 1968
\textsuperscript{264} TNA FO28/436 NS6/10 Letter from I Trafford, ITF to PT Hayman, Foreign Office, 30 August 1968
\textsuperscript{265} Cohen, Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain, 25-6
CONCLUSION

The 1961 Soviet exhibition had been a rare and popular ‘glimpse of a contradictory and fascinating country’.\footnote{John Davy ‘From Space to Murals’ The Observer, 9 July 1961.} Life in the mysterious USSR – known to most only through media such as travellers’ tales – had been brought to Britain in a fantastical presentation of space technology, socialist consumer goods and grandiose displays. However, the illusion of the 1968 exhibition was spoilt in its final week by Soviet military aggression. Although the British government’s formal condemnation of the Czech invasion was later replaced by ‘business as usual’ in dealing with the USSR, the potency of the Soviet ‘way of life’ exhibitions in Britain had been lost.\footnote{Hughes. “British Policy Towards Eastern Europe and the Impact of the ‘Prague Spring’ 1964-1968.” Exhibitions International June-July 1979} By the time of the final, much diminished and poorly attended exhibition of 1979, these shows had faded from well-attended spectacles to a minor diversion for a limited audience. The playfully positive reaction to the illusory, idealistic ‘way of life’ exhibition had evaporated.

At the 1979 Soviet exhibition, what limited press response there was indicated that the ‘dreamworld’ was no longer tenable even as an entertaining, child-like fantasy of the USSR [Fig. 5.18]. A brief look at this final exhibition, held again at Earls Court, is helpful to illuminate the shift from the political and cultural world of 1961 and to contrast the British responses to the shows of the 1960s. Held in May 1979, eleven years after the previous show, the old, familiar themes were present: posters proclaimed ‘Peace and Progress Through Cooperation’ and it was designed to ‘strengthen trade links and give an insight into the ‘way of life’ in the USSR. The Telegraph described a ‘guarded welcome for Russia’ at what was now, perhaps more accurately, called the USSR National exhibition. This was a much smaller affair than its 1960s heyday, using 11,000m$^2$ of floor space, less than half of the 23,000m$^2$ of 1961. Its appeal to the public was also reduced: one press headline punned that there was ‘Nobody ‘Russian’ to See the Show’.\footnote{Exhibitions International June-July 1979}
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Space exhibits again played a major role in the shape of the Salyut space station, though unusually these were positioned at the rear of the exhibition. Instead, historical exhibits took the fore: a display of artefacts relating to Anglo-Soviet contacts through the centuries including the celebrated Stalingrad Sword (which bore marked resemblance to the exhibition *Great Britain: USSR* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1967); and the supposed star exhibit, a mummified baby mammoth called Dima, valued at £8 million. The poor creature was mocked by the British press for being small, shrivelled and resembling a 'deflated rugby ball' [Fig. 5.19]. It is difficult not to draw comparisons between the proud Soviet displays of the 1960s which looked to the future and the backward-looking content of the 1979 show.

As in 1968, the 1979 exhibition aroused protests. It was picketed by crowds handing out leaflets informing visitors about the persecution of Soviet Jews, the prisoners of conscience and Soviet lies about their peaceful motives. But the exhibitions of the 1960s seemed to have been forgotten: press articles spoke of the clichés such as 'lifting of the Iron Curtain' and some even suggested that this was the first exhibition of its kind to be held in Britain. Newspaper reports tended to return to clichéd stereotypical images of the USSR and its people in describing the show. The press response was also characterised by a more cynical approach to the USSR. In the face of half-hearted displays of a frozen baby mammoth, Georgian folk dancers and the Salyut space station, the Evening Standard perceptively commented that:

> ..all exhibitions of national triumphs are instructive in their selectivity....paradoxically, the constant propaganda only serves to remind visitors of the jarring disparity between the image and reality.

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269 It was claimed by the designer, Kliks, that this would illustrate progress through the exhibition to the pinnacle of space achievements.
270 *The Listener* 7 June 1979
271 'Fashioniski!' *Luton Evening Post* 23 May 1979
272 *Evening Standard* 23 May 1979

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The Soviet Earls Court shows had aimed to present a ‘promising and reassuring myth’ of life in a utopian socialist USSR. This ‘dreamworld’ had been accepted by the British press under the proviso that it was simply that: an illusion, intended to entertain and amuse audiences. Conveniently, this illusion could easily be integrated with pre-existing British ideas of what the mysterious Soviet ‘way of life’ was like. By 1979, this had undoubtedly failed: greater knowledge of political realities meant that the gap between the ‘reassuring myth’ of socialist life and the political realities of the USSR was too wide to be accepted by British observers. Yet even in 1961, despite positive responses to this ‘dreamworld’, it remained just that: a short-lived fantasy to be visited for a day. The Foreign Office, in its private report on the outcome of the 1961 show thought that it did little to challenge existing British attitudes towards the USSR:

...it is hard to be definite but we do not believe that it made any significant impression on the public attitude towards the Soviet Union in this country, which would be defined as one of rueful scepticism.

In 1961, the British press and public had been prepared to overlook this ‘constant propaganda’ in order to marvel at the products and lifestyles of a world largely closed off to them. By 1979, the Soviet exhibition at Earls Court had acquired an anachronistic, slightly ludicrous air; its propaganda was no longer seen as a potential threat and its exhibits were no longer exciting glimpses of an imagined different way of life.


274 TNA FO371/159603 NS1861/60 “Assessment of the impressions made by the Soviet Trade Exhibition” Northern Dept, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 8 September 1961
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The presence of Eastern Bloc culture on the British Cold War home front was received, by British organisers and critics alike, with a degree of caution and an eye on the broader political situation. Like the ambassadorial exhibitions that were to follow, Khrushchev and Bulganin's 1956 ambassadorial visit to Britain had also been received ambivalently. Illingworth's cartoon [Fig. 1.1], a pastiche of Holbein's sixteenth century painting, portrayed the Soviet leaders' visit as a warning of their true intentions. They appeared to come bearing diplomatic offerings including vodka and (in an echo of Mayhew's gifts) gramophone records singing songs of 'Peace'. But the globe on the table prickled with flags bearing the hammer and sickle; beneath the table was an ominous ball and chain; and the skewed anamorphic skull grinned its deathly reminder of the Soviet threat behind the messages of 'peaceful co-existence'.

Nonetheless, despite this caution and mistrust - directed primarily towards the USSR rather than the countries of Eastern Europe - the fact that the Thaw was brought closer cultural contacts between Britain and the Eastern Bloc was inescapable. Although there were political motivations behind the exchanges, this did not preclude the many and varied cultural benefits on both sides. The Eastern Bloc exhibitions were as much about culture as diplomacy, frequently bringing new and previously unseen culturally significant objects to Britain. They offered opportunities for museum staff on both sides to form close professional friendships and to travel. The Eastern Bloc was not entirely isolated: cultural collaboration, though tricky, was not only possible but came to be encouraged within limits as a consequence of the Cultural Agreements. The workings of these cultural contacts reveal the range of varied and subtle British attitudes to the 'other side'.

Much changed in the period between the mid 1950s and the late 1970s. Prior to 1956, the presence of Soviet and Eastern European cultural
events in Britain had been rare. That year marked the beginning of a shift towards culture being increasingly used by both Britain and the USSR to wage the Cold War by ulterior means. In the years that followed this visit, cultural exchanges including exhibitions made their journeys in both directions across the Iron Curtain. Beginning with the Anglo-Soviet contract in 1959, cultural ties were extended to encompass most of the countries of Eastern Europe. ‘Exports’ of culture co-ordinated by the British Council aimed to expose the Eastern Bloc populations to a wide range of cultural experiences intended to demonstrate the ‘freedoms’ of the West. And those reciprocal ‘imports’ which travelled in the opposite direction, from East to West – including the exhibitions that have been the subject of this thesis – came to Britain in numbers which would have been unprecedented in 1956. In the 1960s and early 1970s, government-sponsored exhibitions from the countries of Eastern Europe were more numerous in Britain than at any point before or since. Although political in origin, in their organisation and reception such considerations were often secondary to their cultural impact.

Official cultural events involving the Soviet Union had been anathema before the Second World War, yet paradoxically the cultural combat zone of the Cold War brought a number of major Soviet exhibitions, commercial and artistic, to Britain. Most interestingly, exhibitions like USSR at Earls Court (1961) demonstrated that their politicised content was not necessarily received in a default mode of Cold War antipathy. Under specific circumstances, such displays could be treated as entertainment by the British press: an enjoyable fantasy of what the Soviet Union claimed was its ‘way of life’. Though this was still inescapably a ‘Cold War’ sentiment – highlighting that these visions of life in the Soviet Union were mere myth - such frivolity would have been unthinkable in the anxious days of the ‘high Cold War’ prior to the death of Stalin.

Yet particularly in the case of attitudes towards the Soviet Union, much continued along similar lines between 1956-1979. A latent hostility and mistrust of the USSR proved persistent, as a comparison of the British
critical reception of *Russian Painting* (1959) and *Art in Revolution* (1971) demonstrates. The default reaction of British critics – to read messages of censorship, repression and aggression into Soviet actions – was familiar in the responses to both exhibitions, and was arguably more intense in 1971 in protest at Soviet interference in what was supposed to be a British exhibition. On a practical level, engaging in cultural collaboration with the Soviet Union continued to be difficult, hampered by bureaucratic restrictions and delays and subject to the whims of the prevailing political situation. And as the reaction to the later Earls Court Soviet exhibitions demonstrates, the 'dreamworld' created by the displays proved an ephemeral vision, rapidly dispersed by harsher political realities.

What insights has the analysis of these Eastern Bloc exhibitions given into Britain’s position in and attitudes to the cultural Cold War between 1956-1979? It is difficult to generalise about these exhibitions as a whole: as the chapter structure implies, the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe were, to an extent, treated as separate cases. British involvement with cultural exchanges from Soviet Union had the potential to generate much more impassioned responses than those with Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania. British attitudes towards exhibitions from Eastern Europe were perceptibly different from those towards the USSR. Whilst all these exchanges were carried out under the same rhetoric of 'friendship' and 'mutual understanding', in the case of the Eastern European exhibitions these sentiments seem to have resounded with a more genuine tone. Conversely, although such sentiments could be genuine in the organisation of Soviet exhibitions, the veneer of this rhetoric was much thinner and susceptible to fracture, quickly revealing underlying political antagonisms.

Addressing each research question in turn, this concluding chapter brings together the different types of Eastern Bloc exhibitions staged on the British 'Cold War home front'. Overall, these exhibitions reveal a hitherto downplayed degree of subtlety in the types of critical response to the Eastern Bloc. By investigating links between the countries of Eastern
Europe and Britain as well as between Britain and the USSR, this study brings a wider scope to the conventional image of the Cold War as a purely hostile binary struggle between the USA and USSR. These are instances of collaboration and co-operation that, although sometimes forced and frosty, nevertheless give a greater sense of the extent to which the Iron Curtain could be permeable. Such insights are rarely apparent in politically focused literature of the Cold War. At all the exhibitions under examination, there were discrepancies between the intended visions of the Eastern Bloc presented as cultural diplomacy, and those received by British critics. These were frequently coloured by pre-existing ideas about the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, some of which related to the Cold War and others that were more long-held. There was a range of complicated political, cultural and commercial motivations fuelling British involvement in facilitating these exhibitions. The overall image is one of an intricate cultural Cold War in which collaboration and conflict were not mutually exclusive but in which pervasive ideas of what the 'Eastern Bloc' meant continued to colour responses.

Chapter 2 explained why the majority of these Eastern Bloc exhibitions came to Britain during the Cold War: predominantly as necessary reciprocal 'imports' of culture in return for British 'exports'. It demonstrated how this cultural diplomacy came to be seen as mutually beneficial and how, during the Thaw, it was increasingly regulated at government level via the signing of bilateral Cultural Agreements. The differences in the perception of the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe at governmental levels were brought to the fore in discussions over these arrangements: whereas the former was a vaguely hostile entity, the 'satellites' were perceived by the Foreign Office to be the victims of Soviet aggression. In both cases, their populations were thought to be in need of the support and inspiration of demonstrations of Western 'freedoms' could provide. British eagerness to stage manifestations of Western culture in the East, and thereby implicitly promote reform, led inevitably to the reception of the reciprocal events in Britain analysed here. Museum exhibitions usually followed the pattern of being negotiated as part of the
Cultural Agreements; however, as Chapter 5 illustrated, commercial exhibitions like the Soviet shows at Earls Court operated outside of this framework. Trade held an ambivalent position in the context of the Cold War. Like culture, it was claimed that it could generate East-West 'mutual understanding' and to an extent commercial considerations could operate outside of the political framework of East-West conflict. However, it could also be politically contentious, and strategic embargoes on the export of certain types of goods continued throughout the period under investigation.

In answering the question of how Eastern Bloc exhibitions came to Britain, the political, the practical and the cultural intersected. The involvement of the Foreign Office was, given the Cold War context, a given. The British Council, too, was carrying out a familiar role in promoting the 'quid pro quo' manifestations of British culture abroad. Only the Arts Council was required to act out of character by the demands of the Cold War. Despite its ostensibly 'non-political' character, it was required to accommodate reciprocal displays from the Eastern Bloc within its regular programme of exhibitions. Whilst much about these exhibitions could be a-political and in-keeping with more usual Arts Council activities – for example, the opportunity to bring unusual, culturally significant objects to Britain for the first time, as at 1000 Years of Art in Poland – there does seem to have been some unease at the Arts Council with these arrangements. Accommodating reciprocal Eastern Bloc exhibitions could also be affected by more pragmatic concerns. Despite the presence of planned Cultural Agreements ostensibly facilitating the exhibitions, arrangements could be longwinded and delays commonplace. This study has demonstrated that it should not be automatically assumed, due to the wider Cold War context, that such hindrances were wholly political in origin. Often the pragmatic circumstances of staging exhibitions in Britain, such as availability of gallery space, and cultural criteria, such as concerns over the quality of exhibits had as much influence over whether or not an exhibition was staged. Although they stemmed from Cold War cultural diplomacy, the Cold War was just one of a number of influences on these exhibitions.
What were the cultural diplomatic intentions of the Eastern Bloc exhibitions which came to Britain and how were these messages revealed through the selection of exhibits and type of display? In general, the Cold War was frequently noticeable by its absence in these exhibitions. Some exhibitions, like *Great Britain: USSR* (1967) deliberately erased it from a historical narrative of Anglo-Soviet friendship. In other cases, such as the exhibitions of ancient historical treasures from Hungary and Romania, it appeared to be absent simply by not being mentioned explicitly. The Earls Court Soviet exhibitions proclaimed ‘Peace’ and ‘Friendship’ writ large. But these were not attempts to negate the Cold War; rather to modify it. The alternative Cold War narratives promulgated in the exhibitions were ones of collaboration between West and East – specifically between Britain and the Eastern Bloc - of the cultural and national prestige of the countries of Eastern Europe and of the importance of East-West commercial contacts.

The reciprocal exhibition programmes, by their nature, implied to the lending nation a degree of parity between the status of British culture and the cultures of the Eastern Bloc that was not usually conceded in Britain.

Especially in the cases of the exhibitions of art and historical treasures from Eastern Europe, the intention was partly to gain political and cultural prestige in the West for the communist regimes. The greater degree of political significance attached to these exhibitions by the governments of Eastern Europe remained a problem in Britain: the British Council was aware that countries such as Hungary set great store by the success of their exhibitions in Britain. But if such exhibitions were poorly attended or badly received, the British organisers too were disadvantaged. These exhibitions could be mutually beneficial, or mutually damaging: it was in British interests to ensure that Eastern Bloc exhibitions in Britain were successful.

Demands for showings at London’s internationally renowned galleries were common from countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Hungary. The reciprocal nature of these agreements meant that there was
an implication of equality between the two sides. By exchanging reciprocal exhibitions with British institutions, their culture was placed on the same international footing and granted sometimes wide exposure in the British press. These exhibitions made great play of promoting their individual national origins, boosting the cultural status of their regimes. In the case of Bohemian glass exhibitions, this quest for prestige was commercial as well as cultural.

The types of objects and displays chosen for this cultural diplomacy are significant. As the examples in this thesis show, they were predominantly historical artefacts: painting, glassware, applied arts. Such objects, sometimes centuries-old, were re-framed in the light of Cold War politics through their inclusion in these exhibitions. Their meanings were not static, and they could take on a new political character. On occasion this could be blatant: Great Britain: USSR deliberately employed a mass of historical documentation and a smaller selection of artefacts to generate an alternative historical reality of longstanding amity. At other times, these objects told tales of an integrated Europe where the Iron Curtain did not exist: at 1000 Years of Art in Poland, a panoply of historical objects narrated the story of a multi-faceted Polish culture fully amalgamated with those of more Western nations. More rarely exhibited, modern artefacts, such as Czechoslovakian glass or exhibits claiming to demonstrate the contemporary Soviet way of life could be either incorporated into a broader historical narrative of Bohemian glass production or treated as a playful fantasy of communist existence.

What the lending nation wanted to send, and what the British authorities wanted to receive could be mis-aligned, resulting in curatorial struggles between the British side and the Eastern Bloc side over content. Frequently, cultural reasons were given – the quality or quantity of the exhibits needed to be improved – but these could also be tempered by political considerations. The organisational bodies in Britain seem to have encouraged the countries of Eastern Europe to concentrate on exhibitions of applied arts in preference to modern fine arts, for example when the Art
Treasures exhibition from Hungary in 1967 was given preferential treatment over the one of fine art held the same year. There are numerous instances of the British authorities encouraging the sending of what they perceived to be the 'traditional' types of art from the Eastern Bloc. In part, these applied arts objects were much less politically contentious than fine art: their meanings were more fluid and open to interpretation. Fine art proved more awkward. In the case of exhibitions from Eastern Europe, exhibitions of painting – particularly twentieth century shows - seem to have held little attraction in Britain and were discouraged by the British authorities. Conversely, fine art from the USSR proved highly problematic. Both Russian Painting and Art in Revolution aroused controversy with organisers and critics alike. In part this was due to the highly charged nature of exchanges with the Soviet Union. However, the fact that Soviet exhibitions of consumer goods and design, like the Earls Court shows, caused a much less strident response indicates that the obvious political use and censorship of art was anathema to many British critics.

How were these exhibitions received, and what do these responses add to existing knowledge about the Cold War in Britain? Collectively, these shows provided a series of temporary public spaces in which cultural artefacts from the Eastern Bloc – perceived generally as an unfamiliar, isolated and rival territory – could be displayed and responded to. The views of both those organising the exhibitions and those who wrote critically about the displays are revealing. One common theme in the extant responses is that of an imagined 'Eastern Bloc' which draws on existing myths of Eastern Europe and Russia, mingled with more recent Cold War perceptions. Such myths were also in part fuelled by and a reaction to the particular constructed ideas of nationhood and 'dreamworlds' of the Soviet 'way of life' promulgated at these exhibitions by the lending nations. Both sides used these ways of thinking about culture in dealing with these exhibitions.

These were spectacles intended to create a particular image of the Soviet Union or Eastern European nation in question. However, the obvious
impossibility of controlling the reception of these exhibitions could provide fascinating and unexpected responses from British critics; equally it could demonstrate the longevity and pervasiveness of Cold War tropes. Whilst 1959's *Russian Painting* was intended to promote Soviet culture in the West and educate the British public about Russian art, the critical response was overwhelmingly coloured by the wider Cold War context. There were some seemingly a-political responses, but generally the content of the exhibition – and the perceived absences of certain types of art – were taken as a confirmation of pre-existing views of the USSR as a repressive regime. However, the response was not one of fear, rather one of pity for the plight of the Soviet people and artists. Many took it as a warning of the dangers of political involvement in art. More heated were the critical reactions to *Art in Revolution*, perhaps in part because this was an Arts Council exhibition which had become subject to Soviet interference. Again, concerns revolved around issues of censorship and the control of art; the USSR was condemned by many writers for its role in banning the *Proun Room*. Critics easily slipped into familiar Cold War language.

More surprising were the responses to the Soviet Earls Court exhibitions and the more measured responses given to the exhibitions from Eastern Europe. In these discussions, the Cold War could be much less apparent. Perhaps it was taken for granted in the context of the Earls Court shows that readers would be aware of the wider political situation; nonetheless, reading some of the enthusiastic critical descriptions of the delights of the 1961 exhibition without prior knowledge of the Cold War, one might be pushed to recognise the USSR as an aggressor. Inevitably, others stuck to a familiar line intended to counteract the propaganda claims at the 'Way of Life' show. Similarly, in critical responses to the exhibitions of glass, historical treasures and applied arts from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, explicit mention of the Cold War – for example, talk of 'oppressed populations' was rare. Though, as the discussions of the national characters interpreted by British organisers and critics in Chapter 4 have shown, there was an implicit nod to contemporary politics in terms
of the underlying perception of these nations as 'Iron Curtain' countries, these attitudes could be attributed in part to longstanding Western conceptions of Eastern Europe such as those analysed by Wolff.

Is it possible to detect any patterns of change in these responses over time? During the 1960s and early 1970s, when the majority of these exhibitions were held, critical opinions of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as expressed in relation to the exhibitions seem to have been surprisingly static. The 1959 and 1971 exhibitions involving Soviet fine art are a case in point: the majority of critical perceptions of the USSR seem to have been built around a default perception of a totalitarian regime, with Soviet actions being interpreted within this framework. Responses to Eastern Europe, too, followed familiar and well-worn patterns, seeing the countries as homogenous, minor, isolated and unfamiliar. Even the challenge of modern and experimental Czechoslovakian glass or the claims to a wider European nationhood stated by Poland failed to make a long term impression on this myth of the Eastern Bloc. Most of these exhibitions slipped from view historically; even those involving the USSR, which had been high profile events at the time, have since been largely forgotten.

It seems that such ideas of the Cold War and Eastern Bloc had, by the 1960s, become so familiar and well-worn that the cultural diplomacy of these exhibitions could ultimately do little to challenge them. The Foreign Office’s view that the British public’s opinion of the USSR was one of ‘rueful scepticism’ gives some indication why the messages of these exhibitions generally failed to convince critics. Despite these exhibition settings allowing visitors to experience a 'direct encounter' with the object itself, this 'unique sense of immediacy' between the viewer and the viewed item may have had a short term impact but did not challenge preconceived notions of the Eastern Bloc for much longer than it took for these temporary exhibitions to be dismantled and returned.¹ Both the Soviet

¹ Brawne, The New Museum: Architecture and Display. 7
Union and Eastern Europe continued to be seen as isolated and unfamiliar in Britain during the 1970s and beyond.
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APPENDIX

INDICATIVE LIST OF EASTERN BLOC EXHIBITIONS IN UK 1945-1979

For some of these exhibitions, very little documentation survives. The case studies in this thesis have in part been selected on the availability of archival material.

SOVIET UNION

Exhibitions from the Soviet Union were relatively rare in Britain, usually occurring on a major scale.

1945  Soviet Graphic Art, Royal Academy 26 January-18 March
1946  Soviet Graphic Art, Whitechapel Gallery, 28 February-30 March
1959  Russian Painting from the 13th to the 20th Century, Royal Academy, 1 January-1 March
1959  Exhibition of Soviet Books and Periodicals, Royal Festival Hall, London
[n.d.]  USSR at Earls Court 7 – 29 July
1967  Great Britain: USSR – An Historical Exhibition, V&A Museum, 9 February – 2 April
1967  Soviet Paintings for Sale, Royal Academy Diploma Gallery [n.d.]
1968  USSR at Earls Court 6 August - 24 August
1971  Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design since 1917, Hayward Gallery 28 February-18 April
1979  USSR at Earls Court 23 May -10 June

POLAND

This list is far from comprehensive; there were many exhibitions involving Polish arts throughout Britain during this period, and this list can only give a flavour.

1949  Folk Art of Poland / Folk Sculpture in Poland, RBA Galleries 11 October - 5 November (Arts Council)
1950  An Exhibition Illustrating the Conservation of the Historical Treasures of Poland, RWS Galleries, c. July
1950  Polish Book Illustration and Book Covers, V&A Museum
1956  Polish Folk Art, RWS Galleries, 3-24 May
1960  Contemporary Polish Graphic Art, Arts Council Gallery St James Square 19 February – 19 March (also shown in Swansea, Nottingham, Cambridge, Maidstone)
1963  Polish Puppetry and British Puppets Past and Present, Bethnal Green Museum c. July
1964  Polish Graphic Art, V&A Museum
1967  Polish Folk Art, V&A Museum, 4 May – 11 June
1968  Primitive Art From Poland, South London Art Gallery Camberwell (n.d.)
1968  Six Painters from Poland RCA Galleries, 22 February – 23 March
1969  Polish Primitive Art, Manchester City Art Gallery (also Sheffield, Lancaster, Birkenhead, Liverpool)
1970  1000 Years of Art in Poland Royal Academy 3 January-1 March
1971  Contemporary Theatre Art in Poland, V&A Museum 10 March -5 April
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
Again, this list gives an indication; there were many commercially motivated displays of Czech glass in Britain in this period.

1959 Masterpieces of Czech Art, Edinburgh Festival August
1961 Bohemian Glass, Selfridges Department Store September
1962 Czechoslovakia Industrial Exhibition, Olympia, London 16-29 July
1965 Bohemian Glass, V&A Museum 1 April – 27 July
1965 Bohemian Glass (different exhibition) Laing Art Gallery and Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne
1966 A Week of Czechoslovak Cut Glass, Midland Drapery Store, Derby, November
1966 Glass exhibition, Harrods (included Czechoslovakian Glass)
1967 Cubist Art From Czechoslovakia, Tate Gallery 5 Sept-29 October
1967 Designed in Czechoslovakia, Design Centre London 27 September -21 October
1967 From Czechoslovakia, Selfridges Department Store 12-23 September
1969 Baroque in Bohemia, Victoria and Albert Museum 9 July -14 September / Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

HUNGARY

1948 Hungarian Modern Painting, Arts Council [n.d.]
1967 20th Century Hungarian Art, Royal Institute, May
1967 Hungarian Art Treasures from the 9th to the 17th Centuries, V&A Museum, 10 October -14 January
1967 Photos of Recent Archaeological Excavations in Hungary, V&A Museum, 10 October - 14 January
1980 The Hungarian Avant Garde: The Eight and the Activists Hayward Gallery, 27 Feb - 7 April

ROMANIA

1965 Twentieth Century Romanian Art, RCA [n.d.]
1965 Romanian Art Treasures Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh Festival, August
1966 Romanian Art Treasures, London 26 January-26 February (from Edinburgh; toured to Cardiff)
1971 Treasures from Romania, British Museum 30 January – 28 March

BULGARIA

1970 Bulgarian National Exhibition, Olympia 18 August -2 September
1978 Icons From Bulgaria from the 9th to the 19th Centuries, Courtauld Institute, c. October

YUGOSLAVIA

1953 Yugoslav Medieval Frescoes (replicas), Tate Gallery 23 October-13 December (Arts Council)
1970 Contemporary Yugoslav Sculpture, Hayward Gallery 30 April-31 May