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Review by **Linda Risso**, University of Reading

The American National Exhibition in Moscow (ANEM) was a key piece in the development of American cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. Often remembered for the Kitchen Debate between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev, the ANEM was a complex operation that brought together the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Department of State, and the American Embassy in Moscow and it included the participation of several private American companies and businesses. The heterogeneous set of participants meant a heterogeneous set of goals that it was hoped the exhibition would achieve. Pepsi was determined to get a good shot with Khrushchev holding one of its bottles, while the intelligence services planned to use the exhibition to observe the Soviets from up close. Problematic coordination and miscommunication often allowed for mishaps and disorganization. The burning question therefore of whether the ANEM was successful therefore remains a difficult one to tackle.

There is a rather voluminous body of literature on the institutional history of American programs of psychological warfare and cultural diplomacy, which includes of course works by scholars like Walter Hixon, David Caute and Nick Cull. More recently, Laura Belmonte and Kenneth Osgood have looked at the role of President Dwight Eisenhower in supporting all forms of information activities, overt and covert, which for him were at

the very least as important as military and diplomatic operations.¹ There is also quite a rich body of literature produced by practitioners in field like Yale Richmond, who has written extensively on the Soviet-American cultural exchanges that began after the death of Joseph Stalin, and Richard Arndt, who has focused on the USIA's support for international education initiatives.² Several scholars have also examined specific aspects of the exhibition, like contemporary art.³

Despite the substantial body of literature available on the topic, Ellen Mickiewicz's article is a welcome contribution. First of all, this piece has the merit of placing already known archival material along with new information retrieved from interviews with key players and with the memories of the author herself, who was one of the guides at the exhibition. The result is an interesting and vivid portrait of the organizational history of the exhibition and of the day-to-day problems met by the people on the ground.

The aim of the author is to provide simultaneously a bottom-up and top-down study of the ANEM. The most interesting part of the article is of course the author's own recollections of the visitors and of their questions as well as of the organizational problems. Most guides, like the author, were young Russian-speaking men and women. They were the "American face" that the 2.7 million Russians visitors would remember. In the eyes of the American officials, they were indeed the real cultural ambassadors of the United States. Mickiewicz's memories are refreshing and offer an interesting and colorful account of the day-to-day problems faced by the guides both in their encounters with the Russian visitors as well as during the monitoring meetings with senior American officials, who more often than not handed out contradicting guidelines. In this sense, Mickiewicz's article is much more a bottom-up study of the exhibition than she seems to suggest in her introduction.

¹ Walter L. Hixon, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); David Cauter, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle For Cultural Supremacy During The Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold war: Eisenhower's secret Propaganda Battle at home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

² Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchanges and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

³ Marilyn S. Krushner, "Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4:1 (Winter 2002). In July 2009, The "Face-off to Facebook: From the Nixon-Khrushchev Kitchen Debate to Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century" conference brought together State Department diplomats, Cold War scholars, and media specialists to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ANEM. The conference was sponsored by George Washington University's Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication at the school of Media and Public Affairs.

Three key themes emerge from Mickiewicz's article. First, the organizational problems that the ANEM encountered from the planning stage onwards. She provides numerous examples of miscommunication and competition between the various departments involved and explains how this hampered the organization of the exhibition and possibly compromised its success. One issue the author focuses on is the disagreement about the actual role of the guides. Should they simply offer an example of optimistic and friendly American youth or should they feed into the intelligence gathering operation that accompanied the exhibition by keeping a record of the questions the visitors asked? Should they even go as far as eavesdropping on the comments spouses shared during their viewing? There was an overarching agreement that all of these goals should ideally be achieved but each of the agencies had different, and often conflicting, priorities. The result was often one of confusion and disorganization. In this respect, this article offers valuable new information, which adds a new dimension to the history of the ANEM. On a few occasions, however, the author seems to over-rely on her own memories and to indulge in some rather simple statements, as when she rejects the claim that some of the guides could be seen as "malleable instruments of the state" by arguing that because they were university students "they valued their independence and were wary of official mandates" (152). This may well be true but we need more information to support this claim. Just a few pages later, the author suggests that all criticism, embarrassing questions, and rude responses came from government "agitators" and she seems not to contemplate the possibility that some Russians may have genuinely disliked some aspects of the exhibition (157). These minor squabbles aside, this is a genuinely interesting piece.

The second interesting point that emerges from this article is the fact that the preliminary reaction of the Russian visitors was of interest but not of amazement. This was partially due to the choice of the objects put on display. Do-it-yourself items were hardly interesting for a population used to mending their own furniture and to repairing their own cars. In addition, while Soviets looked for size and power, the ANEM promoted "small and beautiful". Thus, the disappointment. Similarly, rather than "inculcating free choice in a regimental system", the exhibition's layout consisting of "unexpected placement of exhibits" (151) left the visitors disoriented and generated a sense of chaos among the Russians, who often thought that the exhibition was poorly organized. What it would be interesting to know more about is how the organizers decided what items should be displayed and whether any sort of analysis of what the Russians' expectations might be had been carried out in preparation to the exhibition. This is an aspect that the existing literature does not investigate adequately and which would in fact be very interesting to explore as it goes at the very core of American identity and self-representation at the time as well as of the American understanding of the average Russian's mentality and priorities.

The key point that Mickiewicz puts forward, and which is probably the most intriguing one for any scholar of cultural diplomacy, is how to measure the success of the ANEM. Building upon the work of Susan Reid, the author puts forward a few indicators (like the number of visitors, comments left at the exit, the kind of questions addressed to the

guides and so on) but at the same time she rightly points out how such data is partial and liable to give a biased result.⁴ The number of visitors, for example, gives us a sense of how popular the ANEM was but it is not necessarily indicative of whether the perception of America was more positive or negative once the visitors left Sokolniki Park. Similarly, the questionnaires that the visitors filled in at the exit are not as helpful as one might expect due to self-censorship and the fear of being watched by the Soviet authorities. The kind of questions used in the feedback questionnaires is itself often prone to entice a certain kind of answer.

Are the problems of measuring impact and qualifying success therefore insoluble? The short answer is: yes, they are. Despite the insightful work of historians like Victoria De Grazia and Walter Hixon and the theories of audience research analysis imported by media studies, the “relevance” question is destined to remain hanging in the background.⁵ Scholars of propaganda, advertising, and cultural diplomacy will always struggle with these issues.

Yet, the significance of a piece of research must not necessarily be determined by the ability of its author to measure the impact factor. Historians are trained to trust documents and data because they see them as more reliable and objective. The temptation is therefore to look for ‘hard evidence’ like surveys, statistics, and documents produced by the information agencies under examination in the optimistic belief that they will provide the final answer. However if such responses are difficult to measure for the historian, they are even more so for the practitioners on the ground and often anecdotal information seems to have been more influential than detailed statistics.⁶ The paucity of such documents and their doubtful reliability to assess the impact factor leave historians of cultural diplomacy in a conundrum, which is usually perceived by the authors as well as by their readers as a dangerous gap in one’s research. However, the inability to measure impact is not necessarily a sign that the research carried out is less meaningful and worth pursuing, rather the opposite.

The analysis of how the information agencies work, how and why they produce certain cultural events, how they liaise with similar agencies within their country, and how they

⁴ Susan E. Reid, “Who will beat whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasia History* 9:4 (Fall 2008).

⁵ Among the most influential works by Victoria De Grazia are: *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); *Irresistible Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁶ Graham Mytton, “Audience research at the BBC External Services during the Cold War: A view from the inside,” *Cold War History* 11:1 (February 2011): 53.

cooperation with others abroad are all important aspects of cultural and diplomatic history that need not be underestimated even if ultimately we do not know exactly how much this really affected people's life. Propaganda is sensitive to changes and such changes are determined by numerous factors like the developing nature of the information agencies themselves, their internal struggle, their funding problems, their national government's changing priorities, the national and international political contexts, and of course the responses of the public. Yet, the reaction of the public is only one of the many variables of the equation. The value of a piece of research cannot not be assessed therefore solely through the lens of 'impact'.

In addition, to quote Chris Andrews and David Dilks, there is indeed a missing dimension here: the link between propaganda and intelligence.⁷ This is something Mickiewicz, like many other scholars, points to but does not develop. Yet, understanding the links between propaganda and intelligence during the Cold War is indeed fundamental to gaining a meaningful insight into the history of public diplomacy itself. During the Cold War, the two fields were very much interconnected. Western secret services regularly provided the content that would be later used by the information agencies to discredit the Soviet bloc. Similarly, cultural exchange programs and other initiatives of this kind were used by the secret services to infiltrate and gather further intelligence. These are important synergies that are still overwhelmingly underexplored and, with a few notable exceptions, scholars of both disciplines rarely engage with these issues.⁸

There are indeed several good reasons to pursue research into the institutional history of the information agencies as well as of cultural diplomacy even if our ability to qualify the ultimate impact of such programs is beyond our reach.

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⁷ Christopher Andrews and David Dilks (eds.) *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984).

⁸ Raymond L. Garthoff, *A Journey Through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).