

Tagungsbericht

Liz Carlton

Cold War Museology. How Museums Shape our Understanding of the Cold War (Edinburgh, 12.6.–14.6.2023)

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Abb. 1: Cold War Museology – Panel 3 (Quelle: Liz Carlton)

The Cold War affected all points on the global compass, not just East and West, but also North and South. The clash between rival capitalist and communist systems showed how the world was at odds with its future in the wake of the Second World War and impacted all walks of life from governance to popular culture. Though war never officially broke out between the Western and Eastern Blocs, many of the wars across world in the second half of the twentieth century bore some link to the Cold War. For all it was 'imaginary' within the West and East, the Cold War perpetuated the need to be prepared and fearful of the nuclear threat. Its legacy and conclusion have continued to frame the present geopolitical climate, for example through recognisable artefacts such

as pieces of the Berlin Wall, or through the evocation of memory by speaking of a ‘new Cold War’ when referring to the current conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and the United States and China. Scholars across the disciplines have begun to ask how a war that was never physically fought manifested materially and how we collect, present and engage with this material culture in our museums.¹

The Cold War Museology conference was hosted at the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) in Edinburgh. It was part of a major research project on ‘Materialising the Cold War’ led by the NMS, the University of Stirling and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The conference aimed to ‘explore the challenges of conceptualising the Cold War in a museological context’ and welcomed speakers from multiple disciplines.

The first panel, thematically entitled ‘Cold War Material’ examined a variety of Cold War objects through their object biographies, layered meanings, and usages, and their museal lives. HOLGER NEHRING (University of Stirling) spoke about the multifaceted ways in which objects linked to telecommunications – in particular, an undersea telephone cable and a machine that created artificial sounds – were and were not connected to the Cold War and, how they, literally and metaphorically, connected Scotland to the Cold War. Conceptually, Nehring emphasised the importance of seeing artefacts less as individual objects and more as parts of constellations and explored what that meant when objects were moved out of that context during their museal lives. SARAH HARPER (Finders International) compared how Cold War objects of the Royal Observer Corps (ROC) are collected, stored, and displayed between the NMS and restored ROC post sites in the UK. Harper argued that museums can show the transferable nature of objects outside of their original context. They added that the personal connections of veterans involved in the amateur-run ROC posts add a layer of authenticity of experience for their visitors. SAM ALBERTI (NMS), focussed on the ‘multiple meanings’ of the XM597 Avro Vulcan displayed at the National Museum of Flight, Scotland. Alberti explored the object biography of the XM597 by considering its ‘use life’ and ‘museum life’ and the challenges this presents. Alberti highlighted that the Vulcan’s use life is more associated with the Falklands War and is now a ‘tool of death that became beloved’. The panel was concluded by JOHANNES-GEERT HAGMANN (Deutsches Museum, Munich) who focussed on the multiple dimensions of the Travelling-Wave Maser, a predecessor of laser technology, housed at the Deutsches Museum. Hagmann stated that the Maser was originally interpreted as a ‘one dimensional object’ focusing on its military usages, but recent curatorship has highlighted its scientific aspects: linking the military and civilian usages of the artefact together.

Day 1 finished with a keynote speech from RHIANNON MASON (Newcastle University) who focused on ‘silence’ in museums. Mason explored how trauma and

¹ See <https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/science-and-technology/materialising-the-cold-war/> and <https://mcw.stir.ac.uk/>; Samuel J.M.M. Alberti and Holger Nehring, ‘The Cold War in European Museums: Filling the “Empty Battlefield”’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 28, no. 2 (2022), pp. 180–199.

terrorism are publicly remembered and illuminated different types of silences in the museum space. Mason's lecture spoke to the fundamental question of how scholars and museum professionals could use and understand this framework for identifying silence in relation to displaying the Cold War inside and outside of the museum.



Abb. 2: Hunterston A, Control Panel
(Quelle: Dr. Sam Alberti)



Abb. 3: Polaris Nuclear Missile (Quelle:
Dr. Sam Alberti)

Day 2 of the conference commenced with the 'Challenges and Contentions' of presenting the Cold War. The panel began with MILKA IVANOVA (Leeds Beckett University) who identified challenges for the curatorship of UK Cold War bunkers from a Tourism Studies perspective. Ivanova noted how UK Cold War heritage sites present the conflict in 'military terms' and as part of a Western 'victory' narrative. By contrast, many Eastern European sites, she argued, use a socio-cultural lens and focus on trauma and nostalgia, curated for Western curiosity. NATAŠA JAGDHUHN's (Independent Researcher) paper turned away from Cold War museology towards the ways in which museum practice during the Cold War took shape. She viewed the Non-Aligned Movement as a clear example of how a decolonised discourse on the Cold War is possible in Eastern Europe, particularly in the case of Yugoslavia and its Gallery of the Non-Aligned Countries. PETE MILLWOOD (University of Hong Kong) encouraged museums to engage with a historiographical approach to represent China's Cold War experience. Millwood argued that China's Cold War challenges the narrative of clear-cut allegiances and low levels of national agency which highlights the global ascendancy of capitalism and the development of international relations. ADAM R. SEIPP (Texas A&M University) outlined the challenges faced at the Point Alpha Memorial at the former German-German border. Seipp emphasised how 'politics matter' when funding and presenting Cold War heritage. Seipp expanded on this by showing how the Point Alpha Memorial's interpretations of the 'two Germanies' and reunification have been challenged by the shifts in German politics from the centre-right, to the left. BERND VON KOSTKA (Allied Museum, Berlin) then moved the focus of contention to object display

speaking on the curation of an exhibition of 100 Cold War objects from Berlin. This presented artefacts in a 'linked but separate' display with detailed texts for each object, showing a deviation from typical museum practice of limited words per object. Finally, ULLA EGESKOV & BODIL FRANDBSEN (Cold War Museum REGAN Vest) gave an insight into the approaches adopted to create a new museum in a top-secret government bunker in Skørping, Denmark. They explored the work taken to maintain the authenticity of the bunker, alongside the immersive visitor experience in the exhibition which conveys the themes of 'Fear, Hope and Identity'.

The third panel switched its attention to how temporality and periodisation are presented in Cold War exhibits, domestic settings, and the landscape. CECILA ÅSE & FREDRIK KROHN ANDERSSON (Stockholm University) focused on a well-defined temporal framework of Swedish military heritage displays of the Cold War. They identified a 'mono masculine' approach to displaying conflict in Sweden; critiquing the lack of feminised descriptions and arguing that should change to provide opportunities for more democratic discussions. GRACE HUXFORD (University of Bristol) added to the discussion of private experiences and their materialisation by focusing on oral histories of the British forces' families in Germany which highlighted experiences of fear, loneliness, and boredom. Huxford explained that oral testimonies conducted in domestic settings help to access these recollections as many people have kept objects in their homes from the period which provide material and sensory memories of the conflict. KARL KLEVE (Norwegian Aviation Museum) took a different approach to the temporal theme by looking at how the Cold War affected the North-Norwegian landscape and impacted the identity of the town of Bodø. Kleve examined how Bodø's military developments and close links with the U-2 spy plane has been used as a 'brand' of local and regional identity since the 1990s. ROSANNA FARBØL (Lund University) discussed how the Cold War affected the Danish landscape by examining the typology and historization of bunkers and how they are presented as museums. Farbøl argued that the Cold War is often presented as a 'hot war' with a 'heroic masculine' narrative, demonstrating the use and misuse of history.

The fourth panel consisted of 4 short papers shining the spotlight on specific museums and their approaches to display and engaging their audiences. TOM HOPKINS (Royal Air Force Museum, Cosford) examined how the museum has reinterpreted their Cold War collections by creating a more cohesive narrative which interlinks civilian and military objects. Hopkins also remarked upon the museum's issues with triumphalism. CARINE LACHEVRE & CHRISTOPHE POMIER (Musée de l'Armée, Paris) also highlighted the importance of contextualising the conflict for younger audiences by referencing both French diplomatic relations, and the global political and military backgrounds to the conflict. Following this, BEN DE VRIES (Dutch Heritage Agency, RCE) explored the historical contexts of the Dutch IJssel Defence Line. De Vries evaluated how its bunkers have been transformed into museums despite their loss of significance in the 1960s after the Netherlands joined NATO. Finally, ANNA SLAFER (Spy Museum, Washington DC) gave a whistlestop tour of the Spy Museum's attempts to create meaningful displays on the Cold War and wider espionage through artefacts, popular culture references, exhibit design and interactive displays and media.

The final day of the conference began with a panel on ephemeral and intangible aspects of a Cold War museology. PETER JOHNSTON (Imperial War Museum) placed the spotlight on the under-representation of British Forces in Germany in national institutions. Johnston emphasised the value in collecting Cold War objects as they help people to resonate with the experience of a grey area between war and peace. CHARLOTTE YELAMOS (King's College London) demonstrated the benefits of utilising archaeology to understand how military uses of the landscape. They argued this helps to contextualise objects by focusing on the experience BRIXMIS, a British military liaison mission in East Germany. JESSICA DOUTHWAITE (University of Stirling) concluded the panel by presenting a highly innovative analysis on what various respondents thought about the colour of the cold war. Douthwaite compared the answers she gained through ethnographic research with museums professionals. She argued that the display of unexpected colours can destabilise the conventional narratives and contribute to re-interpretation.

The conference's second keynote speech was delivered by ODD ARNE WESTAD (Yale University). Westad gave a poignant insight into the memory and materiality of the Cold War in the twenty-first century by critiquing history, historiography, and memory practices and by encouraging museums to adopt decolonised approaches to the Cold War. Westad called for museums to display the conflict through lenses other than Western militarisation – and by grasping militarisation through material and material culture: the production of weapons, the material bases of society and culture, and the importance of material for mobilisation.

Westad concluded by arguing that the contemporary geopolitical situation required a concerted effort by Cold War experts to make connections between past and present-day issues so that young people have more knowledge and tools to navigate the world. Museums have a crucial role to play in these efforts.

Conference Schedule

12.6.2023

10:00 Optional Tour of the National Museum of Scotland

14:00 Conference Start

14:00 Welcome Sam Alberti & Holger Nehring

14:10 Panel 1: Cold War Material

Chair: Sarah Laurensen

Holger Nehring, Cable, Link Analyser, Synthesiser: Connecting the Cold War in the Museum

Sarah Harper, Readiness for Red Alert: Engaging with the Royal Observer Corps Material Culture

Sam Alberti, The Vulcan's Voice: Multiple Meanings of a Cold War Artefact

Johannes-Geert Hagmann, Beyond Janus-Faced Narratives: Object Lessons from the Travelling-Wave Maser

16.10 Break

16.40 Keynote

Chair: Sam Alberti

Rhiannon Mason, Silences in Museums: What is not Publicly Remembered

17.40 Close

18:15 Conference Dinner

13.6.2023

09:00 Arrival

09:15 Panel 2: Challenges & Contentions

Chair: Christian Ostermann

Milka Ivanova, Competing For Authenticity, Nostalgia and Visitor Revenue: Challenges for Curatorship in UK Cold War Bunkers

Nataša Jagdhuhn, Musealizing Nonalignment: The Gallery of Art of the Non-Aligned Countries (1984–1991)

Pete Millwood, Representing the Complexity of China's Cold War in Museums

10:45 Break

14:10 Panel 2 (Continued): Challenges & Contentions

Chair: Christian Ostermann

Adam R. Seipp, Looking Out from Point Alpha: Cold War Memories in the German Borderlands

Bernd von Kostka, 100 Objects. Berlin during the Cold War

Ulla Egeskov & Bodil Frandsen, Considerations on How to Make a New Cold War Museum Experience

12:45 Lunch

13:30 Panel 3: Temporality & Periodisation

Chair: Carl Warner

Cecilia Åse, Fredrik Krohn Andersson, The Politics of Cold War Temporality: The Case of Contemporary Military Heritagization in Sweden

Karl Kleve, Putting Bodø on the Map: How the U-2 Spy Plane Shaped North-Norwegian Cold War Identity

Grace Huxford, 'There Can't Be Any Wall Left': Nostalgia, 'Domestic Museums' and the Search for a British Cold War

Rosanna Farbøl, Between Memory and Materiality: Cold War Civil Defence as Cultural Heritage

15:30 Break

16:00 Panel 4: Spotlight on Museums Featuring:

Tom Hopkins, Royal Air Force Museum, Cosford

Carine Lachevre & Christophe Pommier, Musée de l'Armée, Paris
Ben de Vries, IJssel Defence Line Bunkers
Anna Slafer, The Spy Museum, Washington

17:00 Close

14.6.2023

09:00 Arrival

09:15 Panel 5: Intangibility & Ephemerality

Chair: Meredith Greiling

Peter Johnston, A War That Never Was: Locating, Collecting, and Exhibiting the Experiences of British Forces in Cold War Germany

Charlotte Yelamos, The Material Culture of Cold War Intelligence: Presenting the Archaeology of BRIXMIS

Jessica Douthwaite, What Colour Was the Cold War?

10:45 Break

11:15 Keynote

Chair: Holger Nehring

Odd Arne Westad, Cold War Legacies: Memory and Materiality in the 21st Century

12:15 Close

13:15-16:30, Optional Tour of the NMS National Museums Collections Centre

Dieser Beitrag wurde redaktionell betreut durch Daniel R. Bonenkamp und Alexander Reineke.

Zitierempfehlung

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