over-quoted aphorism about the machine à habiter will be fascinated by the excellent display from the Le Corbusier archive of the early work in his home town, Chaux-de-Fonds, his travel sketches, and the first essays in furniture and pattern design, whose relevance to his later work he played down and even denied. The other side of his activity, which is conspicuous here, is his participation in the avant-garde movements of his time: those familiar with him only as a “rational” architect forget that l’Esprit nouveau, the review he edited with the poet Paul Dermé and the painter Amédée Ozenfant between 1920 and 1924, was a leading periodical for the avant-garde during that period, and it included articles on science, literature, music, and dance as well as the visual arts. Among the many films that form an integral part of the show, it was good to see René Clair’s more or less Dadaist Extr’acte—a joke within a joke, since it was the interval entertainment for a ballet called Relâche, “No performance”—in which Corbusier appeared (I think white-suited) at a mock funeral, and it includes as well a short sequence showing Dali (in black tie) descending the spiral staircase with Gala in the Surrealist De Beistegui apartment, which is also shown as it was finally camped up by its owner.

The display of his vast range of publications—it is sometimes forgotten that Le Corbusier gave his profession as homme de lettres on his identity card—testify to the sheer energy of the man, as well as to his attraction, since his writings did, all of them, find publishers. There are many of his own paintings, and there is throughout the show reference to artists he admired, particularly to his close friends Jacques Lipchitz and Fernand Léger, as well as to the objects that he passionately collected and that inspired him: the shells and marine skeletons—his objets à émouvoir. But then Le Corbusier’s rationalism always went in tandem with his lyricism; they were the two sides of his protean personality. In the church at Ronchamp the two sides came scandalously together, inviting the ire of old-style rationalists as well as of ecclesiastical “traditionalists.” It is represented here by photographs and drawings as well as by the well-worn wooden model from the rue de Sèvres atelier, which is also recalled by the large painting that he placed on one of the short walls of the long, quasi-monastic studio space. The models are of course a capital part of the show, and it is wonderful that a number of time-worn, patinated ones have come from various sources. They form a sharp contrast to the stark, white plaster-and-board recent additions, which do not always measure up to the richness of the projects.

The curators have put together a volume of essays to accompany the exhibition, some of which rightly stress the duality of Le Corbusier’s personality. The essays, it is worth noting, are of an unusually high order for such a publication, and this makes up for the absence of an itemized catalogue, which would presumably have been difficult in view of the variety of the venues.

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Related Publication

Cold War Modern: Design 1945–1970
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
25 September 2008–11 January 2009

MART (Museo d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento), Rovereto, Italy
28 March–26 July 2009

National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania
2 October–7 December 2009

Successor to those V&A exhibitions that brilliantly integrated high and popular arts to give a vivid, visceral picture of dominant movements within a given period—Art Nouveau, International Arts and Crafts, Art Deco, and Modernism (all reviewed in the JSAH)—Cold War Modern: 1945–1970 disappointed by its contrived and somewhat incoherent presentation. Purportedly a sequel to Modernism (although the interpretation of that complex and contradictory concept during the postwar years was never convincingly explored), it was long on labels referencing the political rivalry between two hegemonic ideologies and relatively sparing when surveying the architecture of this era. Rather than being generated by a body of work that deserved interpretation, the exhibition was driven by the premise that competition between East and West determined creative activity. Examples not conforming to this polemic were overlooked, which resulted in a rather skewed picture of Western architectural practice during this period.

To be sure, the organizers spared no effort in fashioning a dramatic display to demonstrate that design entered a new phase after World War II, a response to technological breakthroughs and the battle to win hearts and minds through alternative visions of modernity. Slanting walls painted in dark hues, together with crimson ambient lighting, created a shadowy, labyrinthine son et lumière that evoked the clash between capitalism and communism, recapturing the anxiety and hubris stirred by discoveries that occasioned both fear of annihilation and hopes for a Brave New World. The impact on fine and applied art, urbanism, film, architecture, clothing, and consumer products was illustrated by astronaut suits, the Trabant auto, plywood and plastic furniture, models of Sputnik and geodesic domes, videos of Nixon’s and Khrushchev’s Kitchen Debates, and cinematic snippets from Dr. Strangelove. The intended audience of post-boomers doubtless received a sensational introduction to Cold War history and Space Age discoveries, but your reviewer (old enough to have been an eyewitness to the period) found many of the connections made to design culture questionable and the selection of objects often arbitrary.

Equally problematic was the tendency to seek coverage at the expense of depth. Instead of the variety of representations necessary to make palpable the essence of a building or project, for the most part the viewer was offered sections of one build-
Henselmann et al., begun 1952) was paired with the Interbau exposition (begun 1956) in the Hansa quarter on the other side of the Wall, where pioneers like Aalto and Gropius were employed to flaut sophisticated solutions to the post-war housing crisis. Film clips gave glimpses of each scheme’s differing construction methods, but the only building explored in any detail was the Unité d’Habitation, so altered in execution that it was repudiated by Le Corbusier.

The strength of the exhibition lay in its revelation of events on the “other” side of the Iron Curtain, a territory well understood by curators David Crowley and Jane Pavitt. One of the more successful segments, which in addition to stunning models provided drawings and photos, was devoted to a building type in which the East excelled: the telecommunications tower. Prominent were the Ještěd tower and hotel in Liberec, Czechoslovakia (Karel Hubáček, 1968–73), and the Fernsehturm and restaurant in Berlin (H. Henselmann, 1968), each of which incorporated innovative structure, broadcasting functions, viewing platforms, and spaces for public enjoyment.

Further, Crowley and Pavitt disclosed a more subtle picture of Soviet architecture than has usually been supplied. Examples of Socialist Realism (a term characteristically employed for the figurative arts, which the curators used as well to denote eclectic architectural styles), such as arcaded proletarian dwellings, as well as rare, fascinating, and obscure filmic images of nuclear threats and architectural salvation, appears more effectively conveyed through symposium, electronic media, and in print; the effects of the Cold War on design may be one of these. Do read the excellent catalog, which fills major gaps in the exhibition, and view the admirable video clips on YouTube (for the first time the V&A worked with Google to create a website with additional images and information). But lament not the exhibition’s passing, nor many of the products and buildings tied specifically to the Cold War. The cul-

The action Walls Turned into Ground from the exhibition Actions: What You Can Do with the City, enacted by John Rooney (Montreal’s parkour group PK 514) at the Olympic Stadium, Montreal, 2007. Parkour Montreal, 2007 © Rachel Granofsky