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## CONCEPTS AND CATEGORIES IN THE HISTORY OF WORLD EXPOSITIONS: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This collection of essays presents the results of a two-year project carried out in 2012-2013 at the University of Trieste by a group of researchers from various disciplines working under the direction of this author. We hope the variety of approaches and methods that inspired the studies may convincingly illustrate some of the original and interesting perspectives from which national, international, universal and world expositions can be explored.

World's fairs and expositions have aroused increasing interest among scholars in the last two decades. As the authors of a 2006 essential bibliography point out,

research on the history of international exhibitions and world's fairs is burgeoning and [...] sources on the topic have proliferated enormously in recent years. As a consequence, the field has grown tremendously and now involves disciplines as diverse as History, Cultural Geography, Urban Studies, Art History and the History of Architecture, among others.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars now have a growing number of specialized publications and reference texts in several languages at their disposal, including an *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*<sup>2</sup> as well as works on particular expositions, single national experiences or on

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1 A. C. T. Geppert, J. Coffey and T. Lau, *International Exhibitions, Expositions Universelles and World's Fairs, 1851-2005: A Bibliography* (Fresno, CA: Freie Universität Berlin-California State University, 2006), last accessed 1 August 2014, <http://www.fresnostate.edu/library/subjectresources/specialcollections/world-fairs/ExpoBibliography3ed.pdf>. Though somewhat outdated, this is still a very useful aid to researchers, with its nearly 2000 citations arranged on a country- and single-exhibition basis and with a conspicuous Internet section. Another online international bibliography worth citing is *Revisiting the World's Fairs and International Expositions: A Selected Bibliography, 1992-2004*, compiled by B. Burke, C. Serafica and M. Higgins, Smithsonian Institution Libraries website, last accessed 1 August 2014, <http://www.sil.si.edu/sil-publications/Worlds-Fairs/index.cfm>.

2 *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, eds. J. E. Findling and K. D. Pelle, (Jefferson, NC-London: McFarland & co., 2008), the revised and updated version of a previous book also edited by Findling and Pelle, *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851-1988* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990). Some works on the exhibitionary phenomenon in general include, in descending chrono-

specialized aspects of the expositions.<sup>3</sup> Italy is no exception.<sup>4</sup> Seminars, workshops and research projects<sup>5</sup> are being organized in growing numbers, especially as new world's fairs like Expo 2015 in Milan are approaching. Expositions have been the subject of many Italian studies, not just on the history of Italian exhibitions but also on the peculiar phenomenon of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European expositions.

logical order: L. Massidda, *Atlante delle grandi esposizioni universali. Storia e geografia del medium espositivo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012); P. Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai, 1851-2010* (Winterbourne: Andreas Papadakis Pubs, 2011); "Esposizioni in Europa fra Otto e Novecento. Spazi, organizzazione, rappresentazioni", monographic issue of the Italian journal of history *Memoria e Ricerca*, 17 (2004), a c. di A. C. T. Geppert e M. Baioni; J. Allwood, T. Allan, P. Reid and Exhibition Consultants Limited, *The Great Exhibitions: 150 Years* (London: ECL, 2001). Less recent but still important and useful synthesis are R. W. Rydell and N. E. Gwynn, *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994); R. W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); L. Aimone e C. Olmo, *Le esposizioni universali, 1851-1900: il progresso in scena* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 1990); A. Baculo, *Le grandi esposizioni nel mondo, 1851-1900. Dall'edificio città alla città di edifici. Dal Crystal Palace alla White City* (Naples: Liguori, 1988); P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); J. Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions* (London: Studio Vista, 1977).

3 Examples of a more focused interest in single aspects of world's fairs and international expositions include B. Burton, *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Berkeley-London: Lowie Museum of Anthropology-Scolar Press, 1983); the two editions of the famous collection of essays *Zoos Humains*, sous la direction de Pascal Blanchard et al. (Paris: La Découverte, 2002 and 2011); P. Colombo, *Le Esposizioni Universali. I mestieri d'arte sulla scena del mondo (1851-2010)* (Venice: Marsilio, 2012); A. Pellegrino, *Macchine come fate: gli operai italiani alle esposizioni universali (1851-1911)* (Sesto San Giovanni-Milan: Fondazione ISEC-Guerini Associati, 2011); and the recent wonderful book by L. Á. Sanchez Gómez, *Dominación, fe y espectáculo. Las exposiciones misionales y coloniales en la era del imperialismo moderno (1851-1958)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2013).

4 M. Picone Petrusa, *Le grandi esposizioni in Italia, 1861-1911. La competizione culturale con l'Europa e la ricerca dello stile nazionale* (Naples: Liguori, 1988); G. Bigatti e S. Onger, *Arti, tecnologia, progetto. Le esposizioni d'industria in Italia prima dell'unità* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007); I. M. P. Barzaghi, *Milano 1881: tanto lusso e tanta folla. Rappresentazione della modernità e modernizzazione popolare* (Milan: Silvana, 2009); P. Redondi e P. Zocchi, *Milano 1906: l'Esposizione internazionale del Sempione. La scienza, la città, la vita* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2006); *Le esposizioni torinesi 1805-1911. Specchio del progresso e macchina del consenso*, a c. di U. Levra e R. Rocca (Turin: Comune di Torino Archivio Storico, 2003); S. Massari, *La festa delle feste. Roma e l'Esposizione Internazionale del 1911* (Rome: Palombi Editore, 2011).

5 See for instance the British Society for the History of Science April 2013 seminar on "Modernity on Display: Technology, Science and the Culture Wars at International Expositions circa World War II" at the University of Westminster and the ensuing, forthcoming collection of essays. At the congress of the European Network in Universal and Global History (ENIUGH), Paris, 4-7 September 2014, a special session has been devoted to "Expositions internationales confrontées aux déchirures du siècle, 1850-1950". Other examples include the workshop "The World's Fair Since '64", organized by the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation of the Smithsonian Institution and scheduled for October 2014; and the international conference "World Exhibitions in Europe. Players, Publics, Cultural Heritages between Metropolis and Colonies 1851-1939" to be held at the University of Padua in November 2014.

Interestingly, junior historians and new online history journals are also increasingly attracted by this beguiling and potentially mesmerizing topic.<sup>6</sup> The enduring interest may be explained not only by the fascination exercised on researchers but also by the simple and obvious fact that world's fairs, under the aegis of the "Bureau International des Expositions" (BIE),<sup>7</sup> are part of a contemporary phenomenon that takes place in a global economic and cultural setting dominated by marketing, appearances, images and representation. To understand how significant international expositions have been to the modern history of the West, consider that 55 international expositions have been officially 'registered' and 'recognized' by the BIE. Of these, 33 were held in the sixty years following the 1851 Great Exhibition in London and 22 have been held in the 70 years since WWII, with three more to be held between now and 2020 (including Expo 2015 in Milan). Since the late twentieth century we have therefore been witnessing a revival of the frequency enjoyed by the expositions early in their history. Furthermore, if we count all the different national and international expositions not sponsored by the BIE, we arrive at figures that are even more remarkable. In addition to Yeosu 2012, Milan 2015, Astana (Kazakhstan) 2017 and Dubai 2020, the aforementioned *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions* lists 106 expositions that took place in more than 20 countries between London 1851 and Shanghai 2010. Most of the host countries are Western or have Western origins, with some Asian twentieth-century latecomers and Africa still excluded. The sheer number and frequency of world expositions prove that they continue to be events of undeniable interest and prestige attracting hundreds of thousands of international visitors. Their constant, almost ritual recurrence also shows that they can adapt to variable, erratic global economic dynamics, power relations and international political priorities. Indeed, we can see that the world's financial, economic and environmental plights and increasingly insecure international circumstances may have affected world expositions, but they have not stifled them.

Leaving aside their latest transformations and importance to contemporary history, world expositions – as either unitary subjects of historical research or events to analyze according to specific thematic aspects – have recently received a lot of attention from scholars in many distinct research areas because of the complexity and multiplicity of

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6 The most recent example is the monographic issue of the Italian online journal of history *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* on *Le esposizioni: propaganda e costruzione identitaria*, a c. di F. Evangelisti e A. Pes, 18, 2 (giugno 2014), open access, last accessed 1 August 2014 <http://www.studistorici.com/2014/06/29/sommario-numero-18/>. The sixteen essays collected in this issue exemplify an attempt to apply a cross-thematic dissection technique to mainly European national case-studies from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

7 Official Site of the "Bureau International des Expositions", last accessed 1 August 2014, <http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/>.

their structure, elements and components. As mentioned above, these fields include economic, social, political and cultural history; the history of art and architecture; the history of science and technology; media and communication studies; sociology; anthropology; ethnology; migration studies; literature and linguistics; gender studies; urban studies; and the performing arts. The scholars in these fields have been stimulated and spurred by various aspects of the expositions and have proposed interpretations based on characteristics congenial to their particular disciplines. The vast majority of fields based on social enquiry have benefited from studying world, international or national expositions. Their relevance to history in general and various aspects of transnational and global history in particular – an obvious consequence of their nature – has also been widely acknowledged. As triumphal pageants and secular collective rites displaying phantasmagorias of the real and invented economic, scientific and artistic resources of the most advanced Western powers, they have attracted all the world's countries – be they members of formal/informal empires or nations and peoples aspiring to be gradually integrated into the network of global relationships shaped by the progress of capitalistic modernization. The recurrent key theme of the 'triumph' is well symbolized by the centrality that in all expositions have had great, high, magnificent, technologically ground-breaking buildings: worth mentioning in this regard are renowned examples as the London Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition, 1851, the Tour Eiffel in Paris 1889, the Rotunde in Vienna, 1873, the Grand Palais and Petit Palais in Paris, 1900, but also less famous cases as the "Faro" (lighthouse) of the Town Aquarium at the Milan "Sempione" Exposition of 1906, the Exploratorium Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, 1915, the Palau Nacional in Barcelona, 1929, the U.S. pavilion and the Havoline Mercury Tower Thermometer at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition in 1933, the Atomium in Brussels, 1958, the Unisphere in New York, 1964-1965, the United States Pavilion, then Biosphère Museum for the Montreal Expo, 1967, the Sunsphere in Knoxville, 1982, the China Pavilion in Shanghai, 2010.

Western exceptionalism and imperialist expansion; the celebration of the market and an affluent society; and the exaltation of economic and scientific-technological progress have been the main *raison d'être* and the deepest ideological motivations for producing these great international exhibitionary events. Expositions have also displayed many other social phenomena tied to capitalist modernization whose development and success the expositions themselves have driven on a global scale: 'commodity culture', consumer and mass-consumer behavior, commercial advertising, fashion and taste, communication tools and techniques; public opinion and the press, leisure, sport and physical activities.

The relationships between the public and the private spheres expressed by and inside the great world expositions have also proved particularly interesting from the standpoint of power strategies and their protagonists. The term 'power strategies' is used here in two

ways. One form of power strategy derives from the disciplinary, regulatory actions carried out by modern nation-states through their political, administrative, economic, military, professional and intellectual elites. The planning, organization and staging of exhibitions represents one way those elites have exercised ‘governmentality’ at the same biopolitical level that has presided over other institutional articulations of power and knowledge – everything from the prison to the museum. From this standpoint, by establishing rules of inclusion and exclusion; by recognizing civil society and professional/cultural organizations; and by establishing criteria, procedures, canons, standards, measures and orthodoxies, thus creating hierarchies of quality and official ranks of merit, the expositions have largely reflected governing systems of order and authority.

Another perspective may be taken with respect to this ‘top-down’ viewpoint, one that considers the individual or the collective members of a society as subject to the identity-building power of the political institutions of the nation-state – be it liberal, authoritarian or totalitarian. This second outlook might be defined, to put it simply, as a ‘bottom-up’ perspective and derives from sociologist Tony Bennett’s 1988 theorization about the “exhibitionary complex”.<sup>8</sup> In Bennett’s view, private persons, groups belonging to civil society, and knowledge, art and culture producers put their own power or market strategies into practice as free agents, with the aim of acknowledging and recognizing their identities in public exhibitions. Publicity is the true, modern dimension through which such social agents can obtain a legitimate existence within a national, international or cosmopolitan community. Regardless of whether the approach is Foucauldian or *à la Bennett*, the key factor is always power: power as monocratic agent structuring the world, down to the individual subjects or citizens; or power as the search for public visibility by social agents acting within an increasingly democratic scenario more and more dominated by public opinion and the collective dimension of cultural communication. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these two standpoints supplement each other, thus proving highly evocative and fruitful sources of inspiration for historical or sociological analysis.

Historians have often considered world’s fairs and universal expositions as unitary objects of analysis, articulated yet homogeneous cultural artifacts to be explained by coherent interpretations relating them to general historical contexts.<sup>9</sup> They have also been analyzed against a background of complex political, institutional and social processes: nation building, imperialism, industrialization, modernization and related

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<sup>8</sup> T. Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex”, *New Formations*, 4 (Spring 1988): 73-102.

<sup>9</sup> P. Ory, *L’Expo universelle, 1889* (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1989); J.-C. Mabire, *L’exposition universelle de 1900* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000) and R. W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

social conflicts.<sup>10</sup> In accordance with this standpoint, interpreters have considered world expositions as special places and occurrences to support national, patriotic, paternalistic and humanitarian projects produced by clear-cut worldviews. By emphasizing the close ties between world expositions and the dynamics of international political and commercial competition or imperial rivalries against the common background of advocating for ‘Western civilization’, these outlooks have proved highly stimulating and rewarding for researchers. Modern European and Western history has oscillated between the dramatic extremes of patriotism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism; war and peace; national sovereignty and international order. International and universal expositions have registered and given expression to this tidal movement that continues to characterize the Western world in an attempt to dominate and discipline it by imposing coherent and self-explanatory worldviews.

Although our contributors have taken this viewpoint into account, we agreed that “these complex events [world expositions] mirror ideological and national rivalries as well as domestic social, economic and political struggles. In short, they are remarkable indices of important historical tensions”.<sup>11</sup> We therefore pursued topics that would highlight plurality, conflict and difference rather than uniformity, harmony and consensus. Our plan was to look at the international and universal expositions as composite stages with various creative players in as many different positions, not just as self-enclosed and self-referential scripts with fixed texts, official discourses and preset meanings. We tried to approach expositions as living, multi-faceted performances rather than as a carefully planned, pre-determined series of dioramas inspired by coherent ideas. What mostly attracted our attention were the peculiar dimensions of ‘movement’, ‘motion’ and ‘mobility’ that characterizes human social and cultural behaviors. We have addressed the expositions as scenarios in which autonomous subjects sought identities and demanded participation; as kaleidoscopes of evolving meanings and creative behaviors to be ‘discovered’ through interpretation, not just ‘taken as they supposedly were or intended to be’.

The use of the term ‘bodies’ in the title of this collection therefore alludes to problematic aspects like temporary and extraordinary mass public gatherings articulated along social, cultural, gender or race lines. We imagined the exposition as a grand happening of bodies in movement, bodies to be transported, exhibited, seen, carefully

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10 J. A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. L. Purbrick (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

11 “Modernity on Display: Technology, Science and the Culture Wars at International Expositions circa World War II”, Seminar at the University of Westminster, 4 April, presentation, last accessed 1 August 2014: <http://www.bshs.org.uk/seminar-modernity-on-display-technology-science-and-the-culture-wars-at-international-expositions-circa-world-war-ii-university-of-westminster-4-april>.

observed and described or just commented upon, but also handled, dressed, lodged, fed, safeguarded, moved, touched. The physicality; the physical presence inside the great, mass expositions of large aggregates of people; their differences in appearance, language and habits; their ability to talk and to act; the traces they left and the ways they helped shape, not just pass through, the events are among the most interesting aspects to be investigated and are particularly central to the so-called living ethno-exhibitions or public expositions of (unusual, strange or never-before-seen) human beings.

Living ethno-exhibitions, the public display of (mostly) non-European living human beings and their habits and cultures continue to represent deliberate, intentional and carefully planned expressions of a hierarchizing exhibitionary impulse. Inspired by a Manichean narrative of civilization-versus-savage-or-barbarous-worlds, they are perhaps the crudest interpretation of the idea of the exposition, making human beings considered ‘other’ the living protagonists of the exhibition itself. According to the latter definition, however, a ‘living human exhibition’ is something more than just the display of non-European anthropological otherness in the context of the great world expositions. In fact, it can be considered the very essence of the exposition. The living exhibition of human beings, after all, ‘is’ the exposition. A nation, with its values, culture, history, arts; the products of a nation’s economic capacities, technology, inventiveness; its military power and its athletic prowess are not the only subjects on display. There are also people’s bodies, individual and collective; a nation’s peoples – a cosmopolitan public, in fact – in all their social and cultural varieties. At the same time, the exposition must also represent the know-how required to keep such a wide variety of human specimens under control: the ability to attract nationals and foreigners to the exhibitionary venues, to organize and schedule their movements and logistics. The exposition represents, finally, the ability to receive, accommodate and put on parade an international gathering of world peoples. This is how the largest and most ambitious European and North American exhibitionary initiatives came to be characterized as large, all-pervading shows – animated spectacles and celebrations where fiction and reality, public performance and personal conduct, image and representation, description and narration continually intersect with and influence each other.

When we talk of physical human bodies in movement within the great expositions, we signify something more than just their ‘mobility’. As an evocative interpretive key, ‘movement’ also alludes to ‘performance’ and ‘emotion’, to events – generally large, collective events related to the great expositions – that are ‘being performed’ and are ‘moving’. These aspects point to three fundamental constituent moments of the expositions. First, people – social classes, groups defined by political, economic, professional or religious identities, ethnic groups and races – must move to go to the exposition from their place of residence, and they need safe and affordable transport to

do it. Indeed, expositions only exist thanks to efficient and dependable national and international transport systems. Several great expositions have even coincided with the introduction or opening of new, futuristic means or lines of transportation, which in turn became their sources of inspiration. Second, the mass of visitors is obligated to move continuously once it is inside the exposition, which cannot exist without such a circulating crowd. Various kinds of transport, routes, guides, signs and new languages for conveying directions had to be invented to facilitate and regulate all such transfers. Third, mobility is more than just the physical condition of human bodies transported from one place to another. It involves a psychological disposition as well. In fact, the idea of 'movement' also refers to the complex psychological sphere of emotions involving 'movements' of the heart, mind and soul. Movement is an act that makes somebody change his or her physical location. Everybody in the expositions is subject to the kind of movement that involves passage from one gallery to another, from one national pavilion to the next, from a particular sector of the expositive area to another one. However, that act of transfer is accompanied by a sequence of ever-changing emotions; transfer 'moves' because it triggers and at the same time is activated by emotive reactions or passions and generates an emotional form of understanding. Through movement, the exposition becomes the realm of individual and collective emotions.

Moving inside an exposition could also be described metaphorically as a form of network navigation. Visitors navigate networks such as the connected national or regional marketplaces arranged logically and geographically, the sea of commodities surrounding them and the gigantic *wunderkammer* of global technological wonders through which they pass. Visitors find themselves at the center of the biggest market in the world where international, imperial, global capitalism exhibits its potential. Furthermore, expositions require visitors to navigate a world recognizable for its recreated, artificial and symbolic geographies and peoples. According to one of the most popular and widely circulated metaphors in official exposition propaganda and literature, visitors can 'tour the world' within a limited, planned and controlled space. Finally, an exposition is a living, moving experience that generates a rich range of visual impressions and sensorial/emotional knowledge. It involves the temporary practice of getting a 'walking education' and learning through unprecedented ways of observing the world from original, technological viewpoints – a practice often continued in museums as permanent legacies of the expositions. Ferris wheels; panoramas; toboggans; watch posts; towering steel structures, buildings and symbolic monuments; captive balloons; elevators; funicular railways and monorails; balconies and stands for mass spectacles, including historical or ethno-anthropological reenactments or artistic performances: all of these exceptional vantage points have allowed people to watch, from above or behind barriers, what and how they have never seen before.

Such movement must of course be directed, organized, planned and properly staged. Horseraces; military parades; gymnastic displays; boat races; solemn entries and pageants of sovereigns and statespersons; political gatherings; scientific or academic congresses; religious assemblies; and grand choreographies offer collective occasions for identities, roles, skills, functions and doctrines to be publicly exhibited and recognized. Moreover, expositions are locations where new identities emerge, both in reality – as with political movements or scientific paradigms – and in fiction – as with all the forms of representation inspired by the events, including literary (everything from chronicles and short stories to romance novels and thrillers); figurative (artworks of different kinds); and performative (theater, music concerts, parades, ballets, circuses).

Considering all this, we came to think of the expositions primarily as ‘generative’ performances. We therefore sought out the different expressions of this generative power not only as clues to help us understand the history of world expositions but also as aspects that continue to characterize these events today.

Such premises may illuminate why ‘bodies’, ‘movement’, ‘race’ and ‘gender’ have worked alongside ‘nations’ as inspirational concepts for our enquiries. Race and gender continue to represent the dividing line between inclusion and exclusion in Western processes of nation-building in a more persistent and resistant way than class and ideology, especially now that the religious barriers inside the Christian world have been relatively overcome – or at least reduced to the fundamental opposition of Christian vs. non-Christian. Our decision to observe the expositions from the vantage points of race, gender and ethnicity (including the latter’s ‘orientalist’, ‘exoticist’, ‘primitivistic’ or ‘racist’ variations) came out of our desire to explore, on a case-study basis, the tensions and contradictions of the apparently coherent world that the expositions intended to celebrate. We have tried to uncover bugs in the software that drives how the expositions have been structured. We wanted to determine what these bugs could tell us about how Western societies themselves have been structured – much more effectively than all the catalogs, guides, manifestos, broadsides and advertisements for progress, modernity and civilization that have accompanied all the expositions and helped shape their official, institutional message. By adopting this approach, we were able to consider a wide variety of social and political actors outside the elites: African Americans; women; migrants; national, regional and peripheral minorities; freaks; colonial subjects; and human ‘others’. We intended to explore how to turn these subjects into protagonists and agents who pursue subjectivity by way of being ‘in’ and speaking through the expositions. Using the testimonies of artists, fiction writers, journalists, performers and common eyewitnesses, we looked into case-studies that disclose the tensions, fissures, personal anxieties and contrasting outlooks resulting from the complex design of the expositions.

Based on these methodological reflections, we addressed literary, artistic, socio-political and ethno-anthropological topics related to select North American, French, Habsburg, Italian and international fairs. We also tried to develop each analysis both chronologically and geographically well beyond the single event by taking the expositions as starting points for examining more complex, enduring phenomena. The 1893 Chicago's World's Fair, or Columbian Exposition, for example, has usually been interpreted in light of the concomitant process to consolidate and nationally revive the United States in a period of economic crisis and a troubled search for identity. In his essay, Leonardo Buonomo analyzes some lesser-known literary works issued from or inspired by the 1893 exposition. He shows how various kinds of literary fiction, varying in both genre and quality, drew inspiration from the exposition for having given a voice to all the social, cultural and racial anxieties and contradictions accompanying the invention of the American soul during this crucial period of American history. His enquiry also highlights how the beauty, harmony, ethnic authenticity and disorderly vitality presiding over the erection of the White City and the Midway Plaisance – the two main symbolic locations of the Chicago Fair – motivated the work of his writers. Finally, Buonomo shows how the scenes, plots, gazes, emotions, characters and language in these texts served to define the limits and conditions of participation and inclusion in the Nation for various categories of 'Other' in an unequal society.

The attendance of Afro-Americans to the Chicago's World's Fair in 1893 and subsequently the Paris Expo in 1900 forms the core of the essays by Elisabetta Bini and Elisabetta Vezzosi. Bini focuses on the great Paris Exposition, one of the most important ever held in the Western world both for its ambitious scale and for the symbolic significance of its date. This circumstance lent historic significance to the first official participation of African Americans in an international exposition – after representation had been denied to them at the 1893 Chicago Fair. "The American Negro Exhibit" would be followed by a series of successive participations in North American expositions and therefore represented a turning point in the history of African American movements. Bini's analysis underlines not only the role played in Paris by such prominent African American figures as W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and Thomas J. Calloway, but also the opportunity that participating in the Paris Exposition offered in terms of boosting anti-racist African American activism, even if there were clashes and strategic divergences between the promoters. Bini's contribution convincingly shows how a typical triumphal celebration of Western society and economy could be used for discussing race relations and advancing the cause of black Americans on a transnational scale.

Vezzosi enriches this point by exploring how African American women's movements managed to successfully exploit world expositions to promote Pan-Africanism, especially at the Chicago and Paris fairs of 1893 and 1900 respectively. By looking at all the ways

African American women were active within the international community at large and the expositions in particular helps us understand how profoundly the Western capitalist eulogistic constructions of the expositions could be used to promote the social, political and cultural causes of minorities. In relation to these kinds of initiatives, the expositions did not just showcase a coherent image of progress. They gave voice to influences and debates that would lead to the creation of a global community of the ‘darker races’ and, through this, to the launch of anticolonialist, social justice and human rights movements.

An interesting and relatively unknown case in which expositions gave a particular social and cultural community the opportunity to promote its contributions to its nation’s progress was that of the Italian national colonies of emigrants overseas – consisting predominantly of numerous groups of people (13 million in 1880-1915 alone) transplanted to far-off countries in Europe and the Americas. Interestingly, these were white ‘colonial’ subjects voluntarily putting themselves on display in their mother country – a decidedly paradoxical yet instructive example when compared to the African villages where the often-no-less-voluntary presence of black colonial subjects on exhibition simply confirmed the enormously alluring power of the exhibitions. Matteo Pretelli’s essay is devoted to “Italians abroad” and “Italian work” overseas as represented in twentieth-century Italian expositions. Pretelli focuses on the years when the issue of fully integrating emigrated communities into the patriotic discourse about the nation and the construction of national values was recognized more intensely than ever before: 1922-1952, from the beginning of the Fascist period to the early Republican years. During both these moments there was a need to consolidate all the nation’s components within the new political and institutional regimes, and the expositions represented particularly appropriate showcases for patriotic discourse that could connect the histories of emigrants to national historical traditions – e.g. the Italians as fearless overseas travelers, discoverers, merchants and colony-founders, from time immemorial – and to celebrate the contribution of Italian emigrants to national accomplishments and greatness. Pretelli aptly stresses that during both periods – Fascism and the Republic – the inclusion of Italian emigrants in Italian national expositions or Italian pavilions in international expositions abroad responded to political strategies and projects, with instrumentality as their common feature. The author concludes that, apart from obvious differences in public rhetoric, language and images, “the representation of Italian migrants was instrumental to Fascist imperial ambitions, as well as to the pursuit of newfound international legitimization by post-war centrist governments”.<sup>12</sup>

As mentioned above, our project sought to encourage the study of world’s fairs and international expositions by assuming ‘peripheral’ viewpoints, so to speak, and by

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12 See below, p. 195.

observing the exhibitionary events not so much through the official, ostensible messages they wanted to convey but rather through the eyes of particular marginal, foreign or minor participants. Roberta Gefter, Cristiana Baldazzi, Maria Carolina Foi and Anna Zoppellari all responded to this solicitation by selecting very original topics: early-twentieth-century Ireland during the ‘Celtic Revival movement’; Arab (North African) visitors in Paris in 1900; the participation of the culturally Italian Habsburg seaport of Trieste in the Vienna Exposition, right after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Ausgleich*) and the birth of the dual imperial monarchy; and, finally, the interplay between travel, writing, painting and the practice of the Parisian expositions in the work of a French Orientalist painter. All four of these contributors looked at the expositions not as single, fixed events, located in given static times and places. The 1907 Dublin International Exhibition; the 1900 Paris Expo seen through the eyes of distinguished Tunisian and Egyptian visitors; the “Wiener Weltausstellung 1873”; and the 1867 Paris Exposition perceived through literary and artistic descriptions all appear as structured, subjective sets of meanings that are themselves products of national, cultural, linguistic or psychological strains, anxieties or outright conflicts rather than peaceful, ecstatic, lively public displays of progressive, modernizing success, self-identification and complacency. Original outlooks and meanings have been discovered by observing the content of certain important international expositions and categories of participant through, for example, the artistic experience of a journalist-painter like Gustave Guillaumet, whose texts and images helped shape and put on display French colonial Northern Africa at the 1867 Paris Expo; or through the literary creativity of James Joyce, in whose *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* the “exhibitionary complex” was variously textualized in its different expressions, thus releasing a powerful inspirational energy. The case of the Arab visitors analyzed by Baldazzi is even more illuminating in that it illustrates how differing, intersecting identity-building processes, involving both Arab national pride and admiration for the West, were at work at the successive Parisian expositions that took place during the second half of the nineteenth century; as well as how those experiences of traveling and visiting were interpreted in the light of Arab literary traditions and contemporary cultural and political priorities. Finally, by making use of the *Triester Zeitung* – one of the most relevant but neglected voices of the German-speaking press in late-nineteenth-century Trieste – Foi shows how the interplay between the local economic and social realities and the centralizing impulses of the recently restructured Austro-Hungarian empire conditioned the attitude and participation of the peripheral Italian seaport of Trieste in the 1873 Vienna Universal Exposition.

Finally, Sergia Adamo has analyzed in her essay a particularly meaningful case and a very instructive one when talking of expositions from the point of view of the ‘moving bodies’. The importance of the great Italian artifact of the *Ballo Excelsior* – one of the most

important and successful phantasmagorias in the history of modern dance spectacles – lies not just in the fact that it was first performed in 1881 in coincidence with the Milan National Exposition. What is most relevant for both dance history and cultural studies is that its aesthetics and ideological implications drew substantial inspirational elements from the Milan Exposition. And Adamo convincingly shows how the great ballet was conceived for staging the idea of human diversity in the context of world progress and the primacy of Western civilization; and how its successive performances and re-editions revealed an impressive capacity to respond to the need of articulating the national and the global.

I will permit myself a conclusive word concerning my own contribution to the collection, the last in the book. This article could be read as a supplement to my book *Umanità in mostra. Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia (1880-1940)* (Humans on Display: Ethnic Exhibitions and Exotic Inventions in Italy, 1880-1940), which resulted from several years of research on the exhibition of living human beings and was published in late 2013. Not only did the completion of that book largely coincide with the implementation of the research project that led to the present publication but it was also the project's source of inspiration in several ways. Many of the ideas and suggestions for our program came from specific viewpoints and issues addressed in *Umanità in mostra*, including the focus on the expositions (observed in the book through the living ethno-exhibitions) as hierarchical representations of world societies and cultures; the power of words and images to shape reality; the appraisal of different expressions of agency in and through the expositions; the expositions as the result of the interplay between plans, ideological discourses and official descriptions; and the daily, factual and discursive or performative construction of the events.

In this contribution, I return to the theme of alien bodies on show but with a greater focus on contemporary expositions, the actions and movements of the subjects on display and the emotions they both stirred and felt themselves. I also address the unexpected twists and turns that certain ethno-exhibitions have experienced when the movement and transportation have involved not savage peoples brought to Europe from overseas but white Western tourists traveling to distant lands eager to observe the human and animal remnants of savage life (from a safe perspective). First, I briefly discuss the consistency and complexity of Italian 'colonial culture' as addressed in recent books on Italian colonial policy and public opinion. By analyzing the shabby, amateurish living ethno-exhibitions of late-nineteenth-century Italy from a historical perspective, I challenge the idea that an appreciable 'colonial culture' existed in Italy before the early twentieth century. I go on to examine how the continued persistence of human exhibitions around the world – not just in Western countries – implies the existence of a sort of deep, unrestrainable drive, impossible to eradicate, to publically display the

physical body of the 'other', thus helping us to understand some crucial and enduring aspects of the exhibitionary complex.

Of course, the study of world's fairs and international expositions allow for many different approaches. It is like digging into an inexhaustible mine of meanings, images, words, acts and actors. In fact, it is almost impossible to reduce phenomena like the expositions, whose most relevant peculiarities may be multiplicity, ambiguity, instability and fluidity, to a simplistic interpretation. The aim of the research collected in this book has been to contribute to the specialized scholarship some evidence of what results from this critical outlook.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Trieste's research program "FRA 2011", which funded a substantial portion of this research. Dr. Giulia Iannuzzi carried out the painstaking work not just of copy-editing but also of coordinating the entire publishing process. EUT-Edizioni Università di Trieste supervised the production of this book with their usual expertise and cooperation. All the essays herein were submitted to public critique in a workshop that took place in Trieste in February 2014. For their careful reading and critical comments I would like to thank the five commentators from Padua, Genoa, Rome and Palermo who convened on that occasion: their observations contributed significantly to improving our work and helped these essays arrive at their final form.

Turin, August 2014

Acknowledgment: this text, originally written in English, has been most competently revised by Michelle Tarnopolsky, to whom I would like to address my heartfelt thanks.