Abstracts

Leonardo Buonomo
Showing the World: Chicago’s Columbian Exposition in American Writing

This essay examines a representative sample of the substantial body of writing which emerged from Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. This compelling literary legacy is one aspect of that otherwise widely studied event that has so far received only scant critical attention. It is the author’s belief that through a close reading of these texts we can gain precious insights into a defining moment of the American experience, one that signaled the emergence of the United States as a major player on the international stage. The writers under consideration – ranging from canonical (William Dean Howells), to popular (Frances Hodgson Burnett), minor (Julian Hawthorne), and forgotten (Clara Louise Burnham) – had recourse to different literary genres, approaches, and registers to recreate, and comment on, the ways in which the United States presented itself to the world and how it interacted with, and responded to, the foreign delegations participating in the exposition. Although varying greatly from one another in terms of style, scope, and ambition, these works all testify quite eloquently to the significance of the Columbian Exposition as an occasion for national soul-searching and identity construction. They are illuminating interpretations of a crucial phase in American history, one marked by unresolved racial tension (the dark heritage of the Civil War) and massive foreign immigration, when the United States was endeavoring to come to terms with its new role as a political, economic, and cultural power.
Elisabetta Bini

*Drawing a Global Color Line: “The American Negro Exhibit” at the 1900 Paris Exposition*

This chapter examines the role African Americans had in the 1900 Paris Exposition. It focuses on “The American Negro Exhibit”, set up by prominent African American activists and intellectuals, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and Thomas J. Calloway, in order to represent the progress and achievements of blacks in the U.S. in the three decades following the end of the Civil War. Based on research carried out in the Daniel Murray Pamphlet Collection and the Booker T. Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, the Archives Nationales and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, this chapter highlights the ways in which the 1900 Paris Exposition became a way for African Americans of challenging the forms of racism against blacks and colonized people carried out in the so-called “native villages”, and more broadly in society, and establish new forms of solidarity and political activism, domestically and internationally.

At the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in 1893 in Chicago, African Americans had already criticized the U.S. government for denying them fair representations, through the pamphlet, *The Reason why the Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*. In 1900, they demanded the right to be assigned a space where to set up “an exhibit of the progress of the American negroes in education and industry”. “The American Negro Exhibit” presented African Americans’ success in education, literature, industry and commerce, by making wide use of photography, charts and graphs. Its main aim was to challenge the idea that African Americans were “a mass of rapists, ready to attack every white woman exposed, and a drug in civilized society”, and highlighted the achievements of the so-called New Negroes. The images showed middle-class, respectable urban blacks, members of a generation that had not experienced slavery, while at the same time emphasizing the emergence of new forms of racism and violence in the South.

“The American Negro Exhibit” served as a turning point in the history of African American activism. Indeed, in the context of the 1900 Paris Exposition, Washington and Du Bois grew further apart, offering profoundly different understandings of race relations in the U.S. and globally. On the one hand, Washington advanced the idea that the forms of racial integration promoted by the Tuskegee Institute should serve as a model for African colonies, uplifting Africans through work and discipline. On the other hand, in one of the plates displayed at the exhibition, Du Bois introduced the notion that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line”, a statement he later presented at the First Pan-African Conference, held in London in July 1900. For both leaders, the 1900 Paris Exposition allowed for the establishment of
new transnational alliances with activists in Europe and Africa, which flourished after the First World War.

Elisabetta Vezzosi

*The International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy: Pan-Africanism, Decolonization and Human Rights*

The essay focuses on the international activism of African American women between 1893 and 1960 identifying it as an essential area of study, calling for the *longue durée* and stressing the importance of the presence of African American women at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago for understanding the origins of that activism and reconstructing political networks that would endure many decades.

It seeks to respond at least in part to some critical questions: how did African American women use Pan-Africanism as a resource in their battle for racial progress and gender equality? What roles did these women play in the various Pan-African movements? To what extent could they hold leadership positions within these movements, at least during certain phases?

To do this it analyzes the foreign policy views of different African American Women associations – the National Association of Colored Women, the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, the National Council of Negro Women – and the political experience of many of their leaders.

The participation of African American women in universal expositions, especially the one in Chicago in 1893, has rarely been explored from the perspective of Pan-Africanism. Yet this context can reveal much about the life experiences that interwove with international ideas and public speeches and brought together women’s rights, the creation of a global community of the ‘darker races’, anticolonialism, peace, social justice and human rights.

Roberta Gefter Wondrich

*Exhibitionary Forms in Ireland: James Joyce’s Exhibits of Irish Modernity*

The Great Exhibition of 1851 marked the beginning of a bond between capitalism, consumer culture, the emergent advertising and the imperial ideology of England that would consolidate its hold not only economically but semiotically well into the early twentieth century. Within the new ‘scopic’ sense of the Empire promoted by the
International Exhibitions in the British context, the specificity of Ireland as internal colony and emancipating nation is worth considering.

The 1907 Dublin International Exhibition, in spite of its success, failed to elicit a strong interest on the part of Irish artists and intellectuals, at a peak time in the history of cultural nationalism championed by the Celtic Revival movement, with the two notable exceptions of novelist Bram Stoker and, to a lesser degree, of playwright John Millington Synge. The first part of the essay considers the cultural implications of the expositions in Ireland and the 1907 Dublin Exhibition in the light of the defining trope of the core-periphery relationship. The second and main part of this study focuses on what appears to be one of the most interesting and articulate textualizations of the “exhibitionary complex” in Irish – and English – literary culture, which should rather be ascribed, it is my contention, to the work of James Joyce, notably in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. This applies to the distinctively Irish minor expository form of the (Orientalist) bazaar (the Araby and Mirus bazaars, respectively in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*), the phantasmagoria of commodity culture, the ubiquity and the *spectacle* of the imported colonial commodities as an instance of cultural imperialism, the consumption of Orientalist images as an escapist rather than imperialist fantasy, the nexus between the ephemeral expository space and erotic degradation, the museum (“Lestrygonians”), the press and advertising (“Aeolus”), the monumental apparatus of the city (“Wandering Rocks”), the Victorian seaside resort indirectly evoked as a sexualized space of leisure (“Nausicaa”), the pageant of colonial Ireland’s efforts of technical and scientific progress satirised in “Ithaca”, and, finally, the very idea of the modern city as exhibition.

Maria Carolina Foi
*Wiener Weltausstellung 1873. A ‘Peripheral’ Perspective of the Triester Zeitung*

A consideration of the phenomenon of international exhibitions in the political and cultural history of central-European powers as opposed to the models represented by the London and Paris great exhibitions offers relevant insights into this topic. The Exposition organized in Vienna in 1873 – the first in the German language area – should be studied in the light of the strategic urgency which impelled the Habsburg Empire to fashion or redefine a representation of its multinational formation, in the wake of the military defeats it suffered on the French-Piedmont and Prussian fronts. As will become apparent in the later Berlin exhibition of 1879, the *Wiener Weltausstellung* already makes clear its desire to exhibit the network of global relations in which the central-European Empires were also trying to gain prominence, despite the essential irrelevance of their extra-European colonial enterprise, as compared to British and French imperialist ventures.
The essay comprises a critical reassessment of the existing historiographies specifically devoted to the Viennese Exposition (the most significant of which dates to 1989), to be revised in the light of updated interpretive paradigms, and a further analysis which aims at a first systematic taxonomy of the most significant literary and journalistic echoes of this first central-European Weltausstellung. More specifically, the investigation will focus on the hundreds of articles, correspondence and notes which appeared in the Triester Zeitung, the principal newspaper in German in Habsburg Trieste. These textual sources have not as yet received scholarly attention and they make it possible to investigate the reception of the Exhibition within the geographical and cultural context of the multilingual and multicultural port of Trieste which, despite its peripheral position, was, nonetheless, of primary strategic importance to the central Austrian government.

Sergia Adamo

*Dancing for the World: Articulating the National and the Global in the Ballo Excelsior’s Kitsch Imagination*

In the multifarious complexity of discourses opened up by nineteenth century world exhibitions the role of the moving body has a relevance that still deserves to be investigated. In this realm, dance performances of different types stand out as significant moments that not only often accompanied the success and marked the memory of specific exhibitions; they also constructed and reproduced a particular kind of discursivity that lies at the core of the whole world exhibitions “phantasmagoria of capitalist culture” (Benjamin). Among others, the Italian Ballo Excelsior, which premiered in Milan in 1881, is one of the most significant cases, a great global success aimed at spreading the ideology of ‘progress and civilization’ first to the Italian newborn nation and then all over the world. It somehow anticipated the First National Exhibition, introducing the audiences not only to its ideological stances, but also to the forms of reception and perception the exhibition would impose. The essay traces, first of all, the link with the 1881 Milan exhibition, reconstructing the circumstances of the first staging of the ballet and its national reception. Then, the nexus between the ballet’s aesthetic and ideological features is analyzed, both from the specific point of view of dance history and from the broader perspective of cultural studies, also discussing the definition of ‘kitsch’ aesthetics, often mentioned in relation to this work. Thereafter, the essay looks at the global success the ballet had in the years to follow, highlighting the changes it underwent, both at an ideological and formal level, in order to meet the expectations of this new dimension through an articulation of the national and the global. Finally, it proposes some reflections on how this articulation is also an imagination of a
framed diversity, an artifact whose structure frames otherness into a phantasmagoric construction, something which deeply characterizes the kind of Western discursivity world exhibitions are a part of.

Matteo Pretelli

*Italian Migrants in Italian Exhibitions from Fascism to the Early Republic*

Between the 1880s and the outbreak of WWI, Italy experienced an outflow of 13 million migrants who settled in particular in Europe and the Americas. This movement started a couple of decades after the national unification of the country in 1861. In addition, from the late 1800s Italy became a colonial power through penetration into the Horn of Africa and later a full annexation of Eritrea and Somalia, Libya in 1912, and Ethiopia in 1936, the year of proclamation of Mussolini's empire.

From the time of national unity onwards, Italy became part of an international scenario in which the European powers and the United States organised their own national exhibitions, or took part in international fairs where national pavilions raced to affirm each country’s particular economic and nationalist achievements. Late 1800 Italian exhibitions proved to instill a sense of national belonging that was traditionally lacking in the Italian population since Italy had always functioned as a collection of small- to medium-size states.

A small number of scholars has studied how Italian migration has been portrayed in national exhibitions during the liberal era of Italy’s history (1861-1922), but these same scholars have not as yet undertaken a thorough analysis of the fascist period (1922-1943) and the early postwar period, when Italy moved from a dictatorship to a republican political system. Based on an intensive study of primary sources and taking into account certain major national exhibitions — specifically the 1932 Exhibition of Fascist Revolution, organised for the celebration of fascist takeover of power; the 1940 Exhibition of Italian Overseas Lands; the plans for 1942 Rome World’s Fair (never held because of the outbreak of WWII); the 1952 Exhibition of Overseas and Italian Labor in the World —, and even relating to the participation of Italy to main international exhibitions such as the 1939 New York World’s Fair, this essay aims to answer the following questions: what role did Italians outside of Italy have in national exhibitions promoted in Italy by the fascist regime? Were these Italians conceived of as part of a process of fascist nation-building and construction of a totalitarian state? After the proclamation of the Italian empire in the Horn of Africa in 1936, what role did Italians abroad - including both migrants in foreign countries and settlers in Italian colonies - play in events like the Exhibition of Italian Overseas Lands held in Naples in 1940, or
in the plans for the 1942 World’s Fair in Rome? Lastly, after the collapse of the fascist regime, the end of WWII, and return of Italy to a democratic political system how did the perception of Italians outside of Italy change at the 1952 reopening of the Neapolitan exhibition now renamed as the Exhibition of Overseas and Italian Labor in the World? Did Naples’ new exhibition experience fractures or similarities with former events organised under Benito Mussolini’s dictatorship?

All in all this essay aims to reconstruct the depiction of Italian migrants outside Italy in the context of national exhibitions in the crucial period of recent Italian history of the fascist age, WWII, and the period of transition to the new republican system.

Anna Zoppellari
*The Painting and Writing of Gustave Guillaumet*

The article analyzes the orientalist work of Gustave Guillaumet, by means of exhibition of the world similar to that which was implemented in the great nineteenth-century exhibitions. The journalist-painter tends to construct a labyrinthine space, in which the North African reality is exhibited according to realistic aesthetic codes, but with fundamentally colonialist ideological objectives. The narration of the Great 1867 Exposition is inscribed in this view. To this, Guillaumet dedicated one of his articles originally published in the *Nouvelle Revue* and then merged into the posthumous volume, *Tableaux algériens* (1888).

Cristiana Baldazzi
*The Arabs in the Mirror: Stories and Travel Diaries relating to the Universal Expositions in Paris (1867, 1889, 1900)*

The Paris Universal Expositions of 1867, 1889 and 1900 turned out to be such a far-reaching event that it involved the Orient itself. There were numerous illustrious Arabs and intellectuals who did not want to miss the unique opportunity of visiting these exhibitions. Many of the Arab intellectuals in question left first-hand accounts of their experience. These nineteenth-century works, which we can insert into the category of travel literature, revisit and re-enact the tradition of the *riḥla* (journey) according to the new needs of Arab society. Modulated according to the universal structure of the journey – departure, transit, arrival –, the texts highlight the various modes by which an encounter with the ‘other’ came about and contributed to forming the consciousness of a collective identity. The Exposition, therefore, as a destination for the Arab traveler – a
traveler who, in this abstract and transient ‘place’, lives a dual experience, enraptured, on the one hand, by the phantasmagoric atmosphere of the event, and on the other, fascinated by the ephemeral aspect of the representation that it gives of his country – arouses a certain ‘effect of estrangement’ which, however, soon dissolves like the pavilions of the Exposition itself, to leave room for the dominant view which is the image that the West was constructing of the East.

Guido Abbattista

_Humans on Display: Reflecting on National Identity and the Enduring Practice of Living Human Exhibitions_

The study of living ethnic expositions in Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth century allows some additional considerations on two main questions: the contributions of such cultural phenomena to the creation of a colonial culture in Italy; and their continuity in modified and adapted forms whereas current interpretations acknowledge their lesser recurrence and relevance in periods of time marked by globalization and dramatic media revolutions. The first point is analyzed with reference to the most recent historiography. With regard to this the A. criticizes G. M. Finaldi’s 2009 thesis on the pervasiveness of a mass colonial sensitivity in late nineteenth-century Italy on the basis of his comparative studies on Italian and European living ethnic expositions and spectacles. These cultural phenomena in the last decades of nineteenth-century Italy reveal weakness, superficiality, improvisation and amateurish character especially if compared to analogous events in France and Germany, with respect to which the Italian cases do not show comparable racist features. Only on the eve of the Italian-Turkish War of 1911-1912 Italian colonialism and its social-cultural expressions assumed very aggressive nationalistic, expansionist and increasingly racist tones. This was the consequence, since the beginning of the twentieth century and the resumption of Italian colonial programs in Africa after the Adowa disaster in 1896, of the growth of a properly speaking colonial culture, with the birth of colonial societies and institutes, the development of colonial socio-economic, geographical, statistical disciplines and of a scientific anthropological interest in the study of submitted African peoples. These developments had consequences also on the particular way the living exhibition of human colonial diversity continued to occur, making those practices an occasion for publicising not an image of radical and irreducible otherness, but rather a civilizing, assimilationist discourse. The second part of this contribution tackles the question whether the living human exhibitions disappeared in contemporary collective socio-cultural practices. It recalls several, recurring examples after WWII of what could be termed the visual perception of anthropological difference in
support of discourses radically different from the typical ones of the age of colonialism and imperialism. The essay shows that the settings partly remained the same as previously, as in the 1958 Brussels Universal Exposition, and partly changed radically both in their physical locations and in their intended meanings. Several examples of different nature – from commercial publicity to ethno-ecological advocacy, from mass tourism to experimental performing arts – converge in giving support to the idea that all historical ages create and rest on, or remember and reproduce plural visual, or ‘optic’ regimes of representation of human (and cultural) differences, thus suggesting how the construction of (especially public) visual perceptions and representations directly derives from or just implies the exercise of physical submission and acts as a device for reducing to order and control the disturbing human diversities.