

Trophying human ‘otherness’. From Christopher Columbus to contemporary ethno-ecology (fifteenth-twenty first centuries)

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I.

In the history of the European perception of human otherness there is a phenomenon, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak of a multifaceted category of phenomena, which can go under the description of ‘live human exhibitions’, ‘ethno-exhibitions’, ‘ethnic shows’ or simply ‘human zoos’. Over the last ten years this category has attracted a considerable quantity of research, albeit more from the standpoint of social history and of the history of collective representations or *mentalités* than from that of intellectual history, exploring its manifold manifestations, forms, meanings and persistence into the present day. The aim of this essay is to delineate a wider historical and scientific context within which to place – and hence also to redefine – this reality. While none of these descriptions adequately synthesizes all their features, these phenomena undoubtedly share one basic characteristic: they have represented in European societies and culture a particularly widespread form of viewing, dealing with and ‘spectacularizing’ the human ‘Other’. Specialized literature tends to consider them as a typical product of the age of mature colonialism and imperialism, starting from the central decades of the nineteenth century and persisting up to the eve of World

War II. Mainstream interpretation maintains that these phenomena played a fundamental role in the shift from 'scientific' to 'popular' racism – to use two highly controversial notions – reinforcing those racial stereotypes which contributed to the construction of national and racial identities in many European countries. I would argue that, even if this approach to nineteenth- and twentieth-century 'live ethno-exhibitions' does admit the existence of much older precedents, they can only be fully appreciated if they are viewed over a considerably longer period of time and against the background of a more varied series of historical phenomena. In other words, I advocate a deeper, retrograde historical enquiry. The lack of an adequate historical perspective surely makes it harder to understand the deepest motives and their relationship with a whole set of precursors – attitudes, impulses, performances, undertakings – which provided them with a behavioral pattern, a common language and a symbolic framework. Moreover, this approach can also reveal its utility in elucidating other phenomena that have taken place over the last few years, removing them from the realm of newspaper reporting and connecting them to a much more significant and compound narrative.

By 'live ethno-exhibitions' I mean the practice of capturing or alluring human beings – individuals, but more usually small contingents or families – belonging to non European ethnic groups (typically but not exclusively aboriginals of Africa, the Americas or Australasia), transporting them to Europe and exhibiting them in public spectacles designed to parade human diversity, often accompanied by objects, practices and occasionally recreated 'natural' environments. These were in fact anthropological and ethnographic shows contrived to reproduce the thrill of the encounter with human otherness for Europeans who could not otherwise experience the natural world overseas. Their actual effect was to depersonalize the protagonists, reducing them, on the one hand, to mere components of the natural world, 'types' or 'specimens' of its infinite variety; and on the other, to ingredients, raw materials, merchandise of the transnational show business. In this form live ethno-exhibitions reached the peak of their commercial success and organizational refinement in the second half of the nineteenth century, when they were no doubt the product of interaction between capitalism, the rise of leisure and mass entertainment and the ideologies of imperial colonialism and racism. While such a description is entirely acceptable, it is surely not inappropriate to gain a better understanding of some of the possible historical backgrounds for these phenomena. Rather than seeking, as historians generally do, to identify the specificity of individual facts in particular historical moments, I shall try to highlight fundamental, structural recurrences in the long term. This will involve taking three specific approaches: first I go back to the beginning of European expansion overseas

¹ The standard reference book is the international collection of essays *Human Zoos: From the Hottentot Venus to Reality Shows*, eds. Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Eric Deroo, Sandrine Lemaire, Charles Forsdick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009, 1st French edition, Paris: La Découverte, 2002).

and related anthropological and cultural encounters; then I go further back to ancient Rome; and thirdly I come up to the present, drawing on news reporting to lay bare the nature of some contemporary cases and the language of scandal and protest which they provoked.

II.

From the first Portuguese expeditions to the coast of Guinea, Spanish voyages to the Canary Islands and above all Columbus's first ventures overseas, European encounters with human beings in the New World were regularly accompanied by acts of seizure in which the European newcomers sought to lay hands on, get physical possession of, capture and abduct members of the African and American peoples. This description may be considered as just a euphemism for the time-honored practice best known as enslavement. And certainly from the mid-fifteenth century onwards the prime motive for bringing home foreigners, 'Moorish captives' from Africa and later natives of America, was to exploit forced labor of male and female slaves². However, undue focus on this aspect leads one to lose sight of other motives for the 'abduction practices' – an expression which can usefully distinguish a whole category of actions from 'enslavement' proper. With regard to slavery, it should be remembered in the first place that the Spanish carried out actual mass enslavement of native populations on American territory, while importing Indian slaves into Europe remained a relatively small-scale phenomenon; and secondly that, while this importation of slaves was an immediate sequel to discovery and settlement, the Spanish monarchy sought to check the *conquistadores'* power by limiting this practice and in general Amerindian slavery, especially after the *Nuevas leyes* (1542) entitled American natives with the same rights as Spanish subjects. Even before 1542 the *conquistadores* were instructed not to disturb pacific, especially female natives, and a distinction was soon introduced between *indios* who were to be considered Spanish subjects, and thus could not be taken into slavery, and enemy *indios* who refused 'commerce', religion and civilization and were to be killed or taken captives in just wars. Different provisions were made in royal instructions for one category of *indios*: natives could be abducted for use as interpreters, but only temporarily – and I shall return to this point shortly. It was felt advisable to let natives return to their communities fully fed and clad, because this helped good relations with local populations. Distinct kinds of actions concerning the physical location and 'use' of American natives were envisaged, and it made a substantial – although certainly ambiguous – difference whether the natives were intentional or unintentional participants, voluntary or forced, aware or unaware.

² See for example Gomes Eanes De Zurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896, 2 vols., 1st ed. about 1453), vol. I, 61, 100, 115.

I am referring to the particular symbolic meaning of what I call ‘abduction practices’ (in French ‘enlèvement’), which were the immediate outcome of a sense of superiority, awareness of greater strength and the ability to seize and appropriate human ‘others’. Not of course that capturing strangers and making them captives for many purposes were exclusive prerogatives of evil Europeans. Nor perhaps such was the practice of parading a captive in front of one’s own ‘tribe’ in order to reinforce one’s authority and prestige as a warrior and chief. As a matter of fact all the European navigators, without exception, took pains to seize and carry off American Indians, just as the Spanish conquerors had done with the native Guanches at the time of the conquest of the Canary islands. The impulse to take physical possession of ‘other’ human beings has given rise to various interpretations. Tzvetan Todorov attributed the European acts of seizure of savages to two conflicting reactions: one involving assimilation – you seize somebody different in order to cancel out the difference and render them your equal, teaching them your language and your religion on the assumption of their capacity to become fully your like; the other involving confinement in extreme alterity – you seize the ‘other’ as a slave in order to keep him/her irreducibly diverse from you on the assumption of his/her incapacity for civilization and of his/her irredeemable diversity as the precondition of his/her employment as an enslaved worker³. Stephen Greenblatt, while accepting the contradictory European tendency to consider the *indios* as both alike and different at the same time, views the act of seizing the ‘diverse’ as dictated by the need to fill a communication gap: “kidnapping language” means that cancelling physical distance can lead to reciprocal understanding⁴. Both these scholars and still others⁵ have also pointed to a third motive (or series of motives) for capturing the savage. The act of seizing *per se* is tantamount to declaring the possessor’s own (superior) identity, his capacity to offer his compatriots back home a very special present: both a gift, as symbolic acknowledgement of the receiver’s authority, and the tangibly exhibited evidence of the amazingly different nature of the discovered object and of the truthfulness and uniqueness of the donor’s endeavor.

Travel literature in the age of the European discoveries in the New World abounds with evidence of recurrent abductions, frequently, of course, (since the

3 T. Todorov, *La conquête de l’Amérique La question de l’Autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 50-55.

4 S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1991), 86 ff.

5 M. T. Hogden, *Early Anthropology in the 16th and 17th centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 111 ff., P. Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World: 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), A. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), *Indians and Europe: an interdisciplinary collection of essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, 1st German edition, 1987), Dagmar Wernitznig, *Europe’s Indians, Indians in Europe: European perceptions and appropriations of American native cultures from Pocahontas to the present* (Lanham, MD: The University Press of America, 2007).

explorers were exclusively male), of women, with an aura of sexual license and absence of restraint on acts perpetrated far from the reach of European morals and religion. In fact sex, involving body and language, acts as a third level of communication capable of bridging the gap between difference and similarity. Michele da Cuneo (1448-1503), a companion of Columbus on his second voyage, left a famous description of one episode in which male physical violence seems to transform the appropriated “camballa” (‘cannibal’) into nothing less than a well-trained “bagassa” (Italian vernacular vulgar for ‘whore’)⁶.

In the first two decades of its discovery natives were repeatedly carried off from the New World in one form or another – as slaves, interpreters, informants, negotiators, guides – mostly but not exclusively to Europe. Columbus, Vespucci, Sebastian Cabot, Magellan, Thomas Aubert, Ponce de Leon, Fernando de Soto, Panfilo de Narvaez, Hernan Cortéz, Francisco Pizarro, Jacques Cartier, Walter Raleigh – to name just a few – are all reported to have abducted natives for reasons which did not necessarily have anything to do with procuring forced labor. The physical presence of natives among Europeans came to fulfil an evolving list of functional roles, connected in one way or another to multi-direction communication requirements: they acted as guides, informants, interpreters, mediators, catechumens, apprentices, hostages, witnesses, specimens, natural objects, living advertisements, skilled or artistic performers, actors or figureheads, symbols, prey and trophies. Their undertaking the role of diplomatic envoys in later times falls under quite a different category in which the full, conscious participation of willing exotic travelers or visitors invalidates the very concept of ‘abduction’. Abductions for these purposes continued at an increasing rhythm and in ever more diversified forms, as the European presence, settlement and colonization developed not only in the Americas, but also in Asia, Oceania and finally in Africa. As far as the New World is concerned, some recent studies on “transatlantic visitors” in Europe, dating mainly from the early 1990⁵ and regarding England in particular, have started to place a range of case-studies in a broader framework, rendering a previously neglected subject more comprehensible and at the same time opening up a more general perspective for re-interpreting later phenomena that have emerged over the last two centuries.

There was a close connection between seizing on the spot and taking physical control of aliens (whether temporarily or not) and the subsequent act of abduction, removing them from their native context and transporting them to distant countries, which involved transferring eastwards both the ‘encountered’ people and the fact of ‘encountering’ itself. Here again difference and similarity represent the dual poles of the overseas experience. Savages have to reside in Europe for a while if the purpose is to teach them language, religion and the

6 Michele da Cuneo, *Lettera 15-28 ottobre 1495 a Gerolamo Annari*, in *Nuovo Mondo. Documenti della storia della scoperta e dei primi insediamenti europei in America, 1492-1640*, serie diretta da Paolo Collo e Pier Luigi Crovetto (Torino: Einaudi, 1990-1992), 3 voll., vol. II, *Gli Italiani, 1492-1565*, a cura di Paolo Collo e Pier Luigi Crovetto, 1991.

fundamentals of civilization, that is to say, to explore their capacity for similarity. But they must also be kept in Europe if the purpose is to exhibit them as an embodiment of alterity or otherness. Their difference can be interpreted as an addition to the catalogue of the natural, in this case anthropological varieties: it belongs to the collection of wonders and curiosities assembled by the natural scientist, the antiquary and the amateur collector. But at the other extreme it was radicalized in freakery, a concept which is worth dwelling upon briefly.

In ancient and medieval Europe freaks were phenomena representing monstrous deviations from the regular course of the natural world. Curiosity, bizarre entertainment, commercial purposes, the appeal of anomalies, and medical interest in anatomical rarities and human deformities made human freaks collecting and exhibiting established practices in different environments of late medieval and early modern Europe, featuring in markets, fairs (in England St. Bartholomew's and Greenwich fairs), taverns, scientific cabinets and the printed book (for instance in Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum Historia*, 1642 or Thomas Bartholin's *Historiarum Anatomicarum Rariorum Centuria*, 1654)⁷. These practices stretched from the Renaissance to the age of the scientific revolution, from the Enlightenment to the Victorian era and the *belle époque*. A vivid illustration for the eighteenth century can be seen in Sir Henry Sloane's collection of handbills on "natural prodigies which interest London from the days of Charles the Second to those of Queen Anne" and on the "strange and wonderful creatures from most parts of the world, all alive"; and in John Evanion and John Johnson's collections of printed ephemerals, for later periods⁸. The extraordinary gallery of human freaks on display included, in early modern England alone, the "Northumberland Monster", the "Siamese Twins", the "Indian prince", the "Black Prince", the "Little woman from Prester John's Country", the "Beautiful Spotted Negro Boy", "The Tyrolese Minstrels", Daniel Lambert the "Human Colossus", and the "pretended Mermaid"⁹. From the dwarfs and buffoons of the Renaissance courts and the "sauvage gentilhomme" Pedro Gonzales (ca. 1537-ca. 1618)¹⁰ to the "sauvages de la Louisiane", the "Maure blanc" and the African albinos of Voltaire, the "nègres blancs" of Maupertuis,

7 Nadja Durbach, *The Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), Ricky Jay, *Journal of Anomalies* (New York: The Quantuck Press, 2003).

8 Henry Sloane's and John Evanion's collections are in the British Library; John Johnson's *Collection of Printed Ephemera regarding everyday life in Britain in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and a digital selection of it is available online by subscription at the address <<http://johnjohnson.chadwyck.co.uk/marketing/index.jsp>>.

9 *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. R. Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), R. Bogdan, *Freak Shows. Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

10 Roberto Zapperi, *Il selvaggio gentiluomo. L'incredibile storia di Pedro Gonzales e dei suoi figli* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005).

the “negresse Geneviève” of Buffon, the Tahitians Aoutourou in Diderot’s Paris and Omai in Dr. Johnson’s London, the “Hottentot Venus”, as well as, much later, John C. Merrick the “Elephant Man” (1862-1890), recounted, among others, by the anthropologist Ashley Montague¹¹, there was a whole succession of embodiments of the European taste for the monstrous, extraordinary and exotic. At the turn of the eighteenth century in England they provided the material for exhibitions in London locations ranging from inns, coffee houses and pubs to dedicated halls like the Albert Palace and that “sort of Ark of exhibitions”, the Egyptian Hall, or, later on, the Crystal Palace at Sydenham¹².

Beside whetting the European public appetite for exotic human ‘others’ over at least three centuries before the golden age of the ‘human zoos’, these “cultural spectacles of the extraordinary body” represented a profitable sector for entrepreneurship¹³. Profit and amusement stepped in very soon alongside scientific curiosity, collecting and a relish for the marvelous. The very early appearance of these phenomena in European literary works from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, from Ben Jonson and Shakespeare to Jonathan Swift, Wordsworth and Chateaubriand, is evidence of their role in the history of society, culture and customs in the early modern epoch. To give just one instance: when Gulliver is described as a midget on display among the inhabitants of Brobdingnag (*Gulliver’s Travels*, pt. II, ch. 1-3), to be transported in a box to a nearby market town and exhibited on an inn table and then taken on tour specifically to make money “in eighteen large towns, besides many villages, and private families”, Swift is obviously referring to a particular type of the social practices here alluded to.

I have mentioned one more specific motivation for exotic abductions which is now worth further consideration. Seizing, taking away and bringing back to Europe representatives of alien peoples could serve to exhibit them as witnesses, evidence, prey or trophies. Live exotic strangers, in other words, can become signs, metaphors, symbols or non verbal, visual translations of acts such as discovering something or someone new (never previously seen or heard of), succeeding in an arduous enterprise and demonstrating one’s superior abilities. Columbus was particularly explicit about this. In his journals he makes frequent reference to the Indians, although they are not mentioned at all in the documents preceding the voyage: in the prior negotiations that took place between the navigator and the Spanish monarchs the Indians merely figure as potential converts. Columbus is well known for bringing back seven Indians and presenting them to the Spanish monarchs in 1493 – an episode we shall return to – and subsequently he often

11 A. Montague, *The Elephant Man. A Study in Human Dignity* (Lafayette, LA.: Acadian House Publishing, 2008, 1st ed. 1971).

12 R. D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978).

13 *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Garland Thomson, and Bogdan, *Freak Shows*.

resorted to captives but also to volunteers as native interpreters, as shown by his later journals and letters. During his first voyage he talks alternatively of “his Indians”, his “captives”, his “interpreters”, the people who “accompanied” or “followed” him, who “were with him”, who “were on board his ship”, whom he “took with him” and, more explicitly, as the “seven [Indians] whom I had seized in order to take them with me, teach them our language and then let them go back home”¹⁴. Later on, writing to a high-ranking Spanish official on his way back to Europe, Columbus spoke explicitly of the Indians he had “captured” and “seized by force” in order to teach them Spanish and obtain information from them. He adds that it will be easy in the future to send back more of them as “slaves”, and he finally refers to them as “witnesses”: “porto meco *indios* in guisa di testimoni” (I take *indios* with me as witnesses)¹⁵. We find confirmation of this in Pietro Martire d’Anghiera’s account: Columbus took objects and men with him on his return voyage as “evidence of the new land that had been discovered”, adding that thanks to the captured Indians, “it became clear that the language spoken in all those islands can be written without difficulty in our Latin letters”¹⁶. Captured, abducted and exhibited savages, or strangers, then, constitute much stronger evidence than a written report. On his arrival back from the New World, in March 1493, Columbus must have been struck by the powerful effect of his alien witnesses when “many people convened today from Lisbon to see him and to see those *indios* [...] and everybody expressed their astonishment [...] today numberless people came to the caravel and many knights and among them the Kings’ ministers”¹⁷. We know of one very utilitarian way in which the Indians were called to act as witnesses. In March 1493, in front of King Joao II of Portugal, they were seen to look very unlike the people of Africa, thereby dashing the Portuguese monarch’s hopes of laying claim to Columbus’s discoveries on the basis of a treaty and papal bull¹⁸. Herrera and subsequent authors were very clear in this respect: “the Admiral [...] ordered some Indians to be taken to be carry’d into Spain, from several parts, that every one might give an account of his own country, as witnesses of the discovery”¹⁹. It may be noted that Columbus in his

14 Colombo, *Gli Scritti* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 28 (my translation); previous citations from 35, 39, 41, 52, 67, 71, 79, 80, 90, 91, 115.

15 Letter to Luis de Santangel [Finance Minister of the Aragonese court], 4 March 1493, *ivi*, 139 sgg.; last quotation at 145. Likewise, in his “Relazione del quarto viaggio”, addressed to the Spanish monarchs on 7 July 1503, Columbus will refer again to the *indios* as witnesses of what he was saying (*ivi*, 339).

16 Pietro Martire d’Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo Decades*, I, 1 (Genova: 2005), 49.

17 *Scritti*, 135 (my translation).

18 Rui de Pina, *Crónica D. João II*, in *Colecção de livros inéditos da historia portugueza dos reinados de D. João I, D. Duarte, D. Affonso V e D. João II*, publicados de ordem da *Academia de Ciências*, ed. José Corrêa da Serra (Lisboa: na Ofic. da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1790-1824), 5 vols., now re-edited as *Crónica de El-Rei D. João II. Nova edição com prefácio e notas de Alberto Martins de Carvalho* (Coimbra: Atlantida, 1950).

19 Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Mas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano que llaman Indias Occidentales* (Madrid: 1601-1615, 4 vols.): I am quoting from *The*

subsequent voyages continued to kidnap and abduct Indians for many different reasons, predictably earning the stern censure of Las Casas²⁰.

Thereafter the usefulness of exotic witnesses was clear to a great number of voyagers of many nationalities who brought back members of the different ethnic groups they encountered. Just one single instance will suffice: the chronicler of the first voyage of Martin Frobisher – the late sixteenth-century English explorer of the Northwest Passage – reports the captain’s desire “to bring some token from thence of his being there” and his consequent effort to capture an Inuit alive, whom he explicitly defines a “witness” as well as a “prey”²¹. The accounts of Frobisher’s and indeed of all the explorers’ expeditions provide most interesting details of the practice of alien abductions, including the stratagems, traps, allurements, negotiations and open acts of violence. Irrespective of the different behavioral strategies suggested by the kind of relationships entered into or desired with the native populations, one constant objective was to take possession of live captives. These were then subjected to the “initiation experience” of the Ocean crossing, assuming the new role of witnesses and prey in exhibition ceremonies. Columbus himself, whose exhibition of the seven Indians taken to Spain was the first of its kind after the discovery of the New World, was in fact following a well established practice among Portuguese and Spanish explorers and merchants who for decades had been returning home from Africa or the Canary islands.

Witnesses of diversity and, correspondingly, of a specific identity, the abducted exotic humans could also be valuable gifts or objects of homage. Their bodies exhibited overseas were a testimony not only of who they were but also of what they were able to do. Thus the Indian boy servant brought to Spain by Juan de Ribera, Hernan Cortés’s secretary, performed a dancing and ritual pantomime before high-ranking guests in Pietro Martire’s house in 1523; a contingent of Aztec acrobats and jugglers transported by Cortés himself

General History of the Vast Continent and Islands of America, commonly call’d, the West-Indies, from the First Discovery thereof [...] Collected from the original relations sent to the kings of Spain [...] Translated into English by Capt. John Stevens (London: printed for Jer. Batley, 1725-26, 6 vols.), vol. I, chapt. XV, 57 ff.; this passage is rendered thus by Prévost: “dans le dessein qu’il [Columbus] avoit d’en [the indios] transporter plusieurs en Espagne, il vouloit qu’ils fussent de divers Païs, pour rendre un témoignage plus certain du nombre & de la variété de ses découvertes. Il en prit douze, d’âge & de sexe différens”, *Histoire générale des voyages, ou Nouvelle collection de toutes les relations de voyages par mer et par terre* (Paris: Didot, 1746-1761, 20 vols.), XII, 17.

20 “The Admiral did this unscrupulously, as did he many other times during his first voyage, it not appearing to him that it was an offense to God and his neighbors to take free men against their will, separating fathers from sons and wives from husbands [...] a mortal sin of which the Admiral was the efficient cause”, English quote in S. E. Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea. A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1942), 545.

21 “with this newe pray (which was a sufficient wnesse of the captaines farre and tedious travell towards the unknowne parts of the world, as did well appeare by this strange Infidel [...]) the saide Captaine Frobisher returned homeward” (*The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher*, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1867, 74).

some years later performed at Charles the Fifth's court and were presented as a homage to Pope Clemens VII in 1526; Tupi Indians staged an inter-tribal conflict in 1550 in Rouen; and Inuits displayed their rowing and harpooning skills in Bristol in 1577²². Examples like these, which could be multiplied, are direct progenitors of the ethno-shows staged by professional impresarios in the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century in exhibitions and theatres all over Europe and North America.

In conclusion, a long sequence of abductions and exhibitions since the early phases of discovery, with a great variety of motives, intentions and purposes – ranging from the merely utilitarian to cognitive or symbolic – gradually accumulated and made available to the European public a repository of conventional behavior and a rich archive of signs, actions, attitudes invariably based on and pointing to the reification of the human 'other', forming an extremely rich historical background ready to be exploited and transformed in those particular later performances we refer to as 'live ethno-exhibitions'. Within such a repository of practices, habits, ceremonies and symbols I have not yet mentioned another distinct tradition of public ceremonial which, as the definition of the abducted captives as 'prey' mentioned above suggests (alluding also to the term 'trophy'), provided later ethno-exhibitions with a framework of reference which is seldom recalled but should not be underestimated: the triumph.

III.

The direct connection between what has been called the "Roman triumphal culture" and early modern forms both of exotic ethno-exhibitions and of public political ceremonials has been recently suggested by Mary Beard, the historian who has best analyzed the Roman triumph in terms not only of its political interpretation but also of its symbolic meanings and its forms, actors and effects²³. This is particularly interesting as previous scholars of the Roman triumph and of modern public ceremonials and triumphal rites²⁴ have barely taken notice of the

22 Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo Decades*, V, 10, vol. II, 693 sgg.; Howard F. Cline, "Hernando Cortes and the Aztec Indians in Spain", *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, 26 (1969): 70-90; *C'est la déduction du sumptueux ordre plaisantz spectacles et magnifiques theatres dressés et exhibés par les citoyens de Rouen ville Metropolitaine du pays de Normandie à la sacrée Maiesté du Treschristian Roy de France, Henry second...Entrée. 1550, 1-2 octobre, à Rouen, chez Robert Le Hoy, Robert et Jehan dictz du Gord, 1551, in quarto*; Ferdinand Denis, *Une Fête brésilienne célébrée à Rouen en 1550; suivie d'un fragment du XVIe siècle roulant sur la théogonie des anciens peuples du Brésil, et des poésies en langue tupique de Christovam Valente* (Paris: J. Techener, 1850); A. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters*, 6-7.

23 Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, Mass.-London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

24 Henry Versnel, *Triumphus. An Enquiry into the Origin, Development, and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), Tanja Itgenshorst, *Tota illa pompa. Der Triumph in der römischen Republik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), David M. Bergeron, *English Civic*

exotic component – particularly the participation of exotic human beings. Even scholars of ethno-exhibitions have failed to recognize the classical triumph as one of the sources of the symbolic language of specific aspects of modern ethno-exhibitions. Both ancient triumphs and modern exotic exhibitions involved, in Beard's words, "displays of success and success of display" and re-enactments of victory which "brought the margins of the Empire to its centre". The analysis of the forms and protagonists of the Roman triumph, with their different roles, pays attention to the viewers of a mass spectacle but also to the captives: their "foreignness" or barbarism, figuring among the triumphal spoils of victory, with ambiguous identities that tended to shift from victim to victor and from strangers to Romans. All these elements can foster a better understanding of modern ethno-exhibitions, providing analytical clues and revealing their classic ascendancy²⁵. The close affinity Beard herself suggests between Roman triumphs and the French King Henry II's solemn entry into Rouen in 1550 draws on the "recognizable Roman style" of the latter, reinforcing the awareness of the survival of classical paradigms in the early modern representation of power and authority. Henry II's entry was the occasion for an open air theatrical display involving fifty Brazilian savages expressly imported to animate the reconstruction of a Tupinamba village on the banks of the Seine and taking part (with 250 whites disguised as Tupinambas) in a spectacular battle staging the triumph of civilization over savagery. The celebration of exoticism, spectacular ferocity and the successful beginning of French overseas ventures surely all go to corroborate Beard's intuition²⁶.

If the "Roman triumphal culture" can help to interpret not only medieval and early modern celebrations and rites but also features of later ethno-exhibitions, it is also true that the ceremonies celebrating geographical discoveries, a safe return home, success and final victorious apotheosis overtly adopted triumphal forms and incorporated the abducted savages as trophies and characters on display. Columbus and Cortés are two cases in point.

The returns of both men to Spain were greeted in distinctly triumphal forms and on both occasions the display of Indian savages as trophies was of central importance, even if more as objects of curiosity, witnesses and 'spoils' in the broadest sense than as prisoners of war, symbolizing conquest and military victory. The descriptions of these returns given by chroniclers, historians and biographers, whether contemporary or recent, leave no doubt as to the sources of

Pageantry: 1558-1642 (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), Barbara Wisch and Susan Munshower, eds., *"All the World's a Stage": Pageantry and Spectacle in the Renaissance and Baroque* (University Park, 1990); Anthony Miller, *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave, 2001).

25 *The Roman Triumph*, 31-32, 53-61, 328-330.

26 Michael Wintroub, "Civilizing the Savage and Making a King: The Royal Entry Festival of Henri II (Rouen, 1550)", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 29, n. 2, (Summer, 1998): 465-494, and by the same author, more recently, *A Savage Mirror: Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), esp. 142 ff.

inspiration and ritual paradigms, which were explicitly referred to as “triumphs”. A converging representation has been transmitted by the historiography of the New World’s discovery and conquest and by Columbian scholarship, ranging from Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, “testigo de vista” and “primer cronista del Nuevo Mundo”²⁷, Bartolomé de Las Casas, another eyewitness, and then Pietro Martire d’Anghiera, López de Gómara, Antonio de Herrera and Girolamo Benzoni²⁸, Pierre-Francois-Xavier de Charlevoix and William Robertson, to such nineteenth- and twentieth-century biographers as Washington Irving, William Prescott, Salvador de Madariaga and Samuel E. Morison²⁹. All these writers have contributed to perpetuating the image of the Admiral’s triumphal reception along the road from Portugal to Palos, “recibido en Palos con grande procesión y negocijo de toda la villa”, his progress to Seville making a sensational entrance in grand parade, the cortege’s cavalcade to Barcelona preceded by “his Indians, his gold and his parrots”, with people rushing to see the “hombres de nueva forma, color y traje”³⁰, and finally the solemn ceremony in the presence of Fernando and Isabella immortalized in Lazzaro Tavarone’s seventeenth-century Genoese frescos. This is, for example, how Las Casas narrates the Admiral’s departure from Seville for Barcelona:

Tomó comienzo la fama á volar por Castilla, que se habian descubierto tierras que se llamaban las Indias, y gentes tantas y tan diversas, y cosas novísimas, y que por tal camino venia el que las descubrió, y traía consigo de aquella gente; no solamente de los pueblos por donde pasaba salia el mundo á lo ver, pero muchos de los pueblos, del camino por donde venia, remotos, se vaciaban, y se hinchian los caminos para irlo á ver, y adelantarse á los pueblos á recibirlo³¹.

Las Casas’s report on Columbus’s reception at the royal court in Barcelona, although imbued with religious elements ranging from praise of the “miraculous” discovery and the blessing of the divine Providence to the performance of the *Te*

27 Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdez, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y Tierra-Firme del mar Oceano* [1535] (Madrid: Impr. de la Real academia de la historia, 1851-1852, 3 vols.), I, 27-29: “è ví allí venir al almirante, Don Chripstobal Colom, con los primeros indios que destas partes allá fueron en el primero viaje é descubrimiento [...] no hablo de oydas en ninguna destas quatro cosas, sino de vista”.

28 B. de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1875, 2 voll.), I, 455-495; Girolamo Benzoni, *La historia del mondo nuovo [...] laqual tratta delle isole et mari nuovamente ritrovati, et delle nuove citta da lui proprio vedute, per acqua, et per terra in quattordeci anni* (Venetia: Pietro et Francesco Tini, fratelli, 1572, 1st ed. 1565), 16 e 16v.; López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias* [1552] (Madrid: Calpe, 1922), 45, Herrera, *General History of the Vast Continent and Islands of America*, I, 92-93.

29 Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de l’Isle Espagnole ou de Saint-Domingue* (Amsterdam: chez François L’Honoré, 1730-1733, 1st ed. Paris: J. Guérin, 1730-1731, 2 vols.), Washington Irving, *History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1841, 2 vols.), I, 173-177, Salvador de Madariaga, *Christopher Columbus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939, 1st transl., Milano, 1966, 249, 252-255), Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, 357-358.

30 López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias*, I, 45.

31 Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, I, 477.

Deum and the Indians' baptism, portrays scenes of rejoicing, pomp and solemnity which also resonate with Roman reminiscences:

mandáronle hacer un solemne y muy hermoso recibimiento, para el cuál salió toda la gente y toda la ciudad, que no cabían por las calles, admirados todos de ver aquella veneranda persona ser de la que se decía haber descubierto otro mundo, de ver los indios y los papagayos, y mucca piezas y joyas, y cosas que llevaba, descubiertas, de oro, y que jamás no se habían visto ni oído. Para le recibir los Reyes, con mas solemnidad y pompa, mandaron poner en público su estrado y solio real, donde estaban sentados, y, junto con ellos, el Príncipe D. Juan, en grande manera alegres, acompañados de muchos grandes señores, castellanos, catalanes, valencianos y aragoneses, todos aspirando y deseosos que ya llegase aquel que tan grande y naucha hazaña, y que á toda la cristiandad era causa de alegría, habia hecho. Entró, pues, en la cuadra donde los Reyes estaban acompañados de multitud de caballeros y gente nobilísima, entre todos los cuales, *como tenia grande y autorizada persona, que parecía un Senador del pueblo romano*, señalaba su cara veneranda, llena de canas y de modesta risa, mostrando bien el gozo y gloria con qué venia.

The final christening of the Indians under the monarchs' supervision can perhaps be seen as corresponding to the Romanization of the captive barbarians following on the triumph (capital executions were not so frequent as is often supposed), just as the capacity for receiving Christ's word may correspond to the attainment of Roman citizenship as another way of achieving full human dignity. In both cases we are dealing with a rite of passage³².

Las Casas's final lines – “en muchos de los tiempos pasados, cosas tan nuevas y diversas festivas, ni de tanta solemnidad, nunca fueron imaginadas” – may have inspired the French Jesuit Charlevoix in 1730. Nobody has given a more explicit evocation of the Roman classical model:

On n'avoit encore rien vû en Espagne [...] qui représentât mieux le triomphe des anciens Romains que son entrée dans cette grande ville [Barcelona]³³.

The Jesuit's account is particularly interesting for his remarks on the Amerindians' part in Columbus's triumph. They figured in procession together with the profusion of riches the Admiral exhibited, not just as the booty of the conquerors' avidity but as a true show of novelties and wonders. They certainly played a much more dynamic role than their unfortunate counterparts, the chained Roman captives:

Les sept Indiens paroissoient les premiers. Ils ornoient d'autant mieux son triomphe, qu'ils y prenoient part; au lieu que les Triomphateurs Romains fondoient une partie de leur gloire sur le malheur de ceux qu'ils traînoient après leur char³⁴.

³² Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 140-141.

³³ Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'Isle Espagnole*, I, 140.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

It must be said that Charlevoix had little to say about what happened to the seven Columbian *caciques* during their stay in Spain, and never seriously questioned whether it was all as pleasant as he made out. We actually know that the seven Indians were the survivors of a contingent of ten, three of whom died during the crossing and two more within two years of their arrival in Spain, while of the five who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, only two completed the journey alive³⁵.

William Robertson's account recalls Plutarch's description of Pompey's triumph in 61 BCE and depicts an elaborate procession exhibiting the Admiral himself. It merits extensive quotation for its emphasis on the display of human otherness:

When the prosperous issue of it [Columbus's enterprise] was known [in Palos, March 1493], when they [Palos inhabitants] beheld the strange people, the unknown animals, and singular productions brought from the countries which had been discovered, the effusion of joy was general and unbounded. The bells were rung, the cannon fired; Columbus was received at landing with royal honours and all the people in solemn procession accompanied him and his crew to the church, where they returned thanks to Heaven [...] During his journey to Barcelona, the people crowded from the adjacent country, following him everywhere with admiration and applause. His entrance into the city was conducted, by order of Ferdinand and Isabella, with pomp suitable to the great event, which added such distinguishing lustre to their reign. The people whom he brought along with him from the countries which he had discovered, marched first, and by their singular complexion, the wild peculiarities of their features, and uncouth finery, appeared like men of another species. Next to them were carried the ornaments of gold, fashioned by the rude art of the natives, the grains of gold found in the mountains and dust of the same metal gathered in the rivers. After these appeared the various commodities of the new discovered countries, together with their curious productions. Columbus himself closed the procession and attracted the eyes of all the spectators, who gazed with admiration on the extraordinary man, whose superior sagacity and fortitude had conducted their countrymen, by a route concealed from past ages, to the knowledge of a new world. Ferdinand and Isabella received him clad in their royal robes and seated upon a throne, under a magnificent canopy³⁶.

Certainly not everything in Columbus's return to Spain and reception at the royal court would fit neatly into a classic triumphal pattern. After all, in Roman practice the triumph, although formally awarded by the Senate, was an act of self-celebration claimed, accurately planned and staged by ambitious generals and governors pursuing a political career³⁷. This was not the case for Columbus, whose subsequent troubles undoubtedly derived from the envy he attracted for the unprecedented honors and favors loaded on him by the monarchs. Nonetheless the perceptions of contemporaries and later historians invariably

35 Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, 422.

36 W. Robertson, *History of America* (London: Strahan, Cadell and Balfour, 1783, 3 vols., 1st ed. 1777) book II, I, 155-156.

37 Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 190-194, Miller, *Roman Triumphs*, 2-15.

refer the Admiral's glorification back to ancient Roman models, in a mental association that the presence of the alien human trophies may have encouraged.

As "Roman triumphal culture" continued to thrive in imperial Spain and elsewhere in Europe, it is not surprising that, some years after Columbus's enterprise, Hernan Cortés underwent a similar experience, interesting as an evidence both of the triumphal use of exotic human trophies and of ethno-shows, or, as it has been described, of "Indians playing Indian"³⁸.

In 1520 Cortés sent four male Indians and two females to Spain, as we know from several testimonies³⁹. Of much greater significance with regard to the persistence of a "triumphal discourse" and the live exotic component in it – through which the court discovered the New World⁴⁰ – is Cortés' return to Spain in 1528, when "he came like a mighty Lord"⁴¹. On this occasion he brought with him a much richer booty than before, including some Aztec Indians selected not just for their 'otherness' but for their peculiar abilities in dances, games and tricks which made them suitable for public display. These Indians – the same who were subsequently transported *en tournée* to Rome as an imperial homage to Clemens VII – figured in the triumphal processions ordained by Charles V himself in celebration of the *conquistador*. As in a Roman triumph, these alien human figures were paraded as live exhibits together with a profusion of natural products, treasures, animals and a whole assortment of marvels from the New World. William Robertson gives a description redolent with allusions to ceremonial devices, political apprehensions about the victor's ambitions and speculations about the value and allocation of the booty, which Mary Beard identifies as descriptive features common to many written accounts of Roman triumphs:

Cortes appeared in his native country with the splendor that suited the conqueror of a mighty kingdom. He brought with him a great part of his wealth, many jewels and ornaments of great value, several curious productions of the country, and was attended by some Mexicans of the first rank [...] His arrival in Spain removed at once every suspicion and fear that had been entertained with respect to his intentions⁴².

38 Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe", *Folklore*, 99, 1 (1988): 30-55.

39 Informations are given by Pietro Martire (V, 10), López de Gómara (*Historia general de las Indias*, chapt. 39), Díaz del Castillo (chapt. 54) and Herrera (III, 1-3), on Ruffo see Marcel Bataillon, "Les premiers Méxicains envoyés en Espagne par Cortès", in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, n. s., 48 (1959): 135-140. On the following expedition, in 1528, see Howard F. Cline, "Hernando Cortes and the Aztec Indians in Spain", *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, 26 (1969): 70-90.

40 Marcel Bataillon, "Plus outre: la Cour découvre le Nouveau Monde", in *Les fêtes de la Renaissance. II. Fêtes et cérémonies au temps de Charles Quint* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1975), 13-27.

41 Herrera, *General History of America*, IV, 21-22 (Decade III, book IV, ch. III), Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The True History of the conquest of Mexico, by Captain Bernal Diaz del Castillo [...] Written in the year 1568. Translated from the original Spanish, by Maurice Keatinge Esq.* (London: printed for J. Wright, 1800), 455 ff.

42 *History of America*, book V, II, 449-451; on booty allocation see note XCVI, vol. II, 540.

William Prescott's later narrative (1843) presents an elaboration on the theme of the triumph with particular insistence on the display of the Indians:

The houses and the streets of the great towns and villages were thronged with spectators, eager to look on the hero, who, with his single arm, as it were, had won an empire for Castile, and who, to borrow the language of an old historian, "came in the pomp and glory, not so much of a great vassal, as of an independent monarch" [...] His train was now swelled by the Indian chieftains, who, by the splendours of their barbaric finery, gave additional brilliancy, as well as novelty, to the pageant⁴³.

The Indians were indeed part of the treasure of wonders brought back from across the Atlantic and mention of them was made while presenting the catalogue of the trophies of the *conquista*, unusual animate and inanimate objects intended to be admired. Bernal Díaz del Castillo recounts how, in preparing his return to Spain, Cortés collected a great quantity of multicolored birds unknown in Castile, together with casks of *liquidambar* and other kinds of balms, two tigers and

cuatro indios maestros de jugar el palo con los pies, que en Castilla y en todas partes es cosa de ver; y otros indios grandes bailadores que suelen hazer una manera de ingenio, que al parecer como que buelan por alto estando bailando, y llebó tres indios corcobados de tal manera que era cosa mostruosa, porqu'estavan quebrados por el cuerpo y eran muy enanos; y también llebó indios e indias muy blancos que con el gran blancor no vían bien [...]⁴⁴.

Cortés was therefore assembling items for a true ethno-exhibition staging a whole variety of 'otherness': the unknown, the extraordinary, the monstrous, the abnormal, the skilful and remarkable, the precious and glittering, and the representative. And, again on Castillo's testimony, once in Spain he did indeed manage to provoke "the astonishment of the spectators" and to impress both the Castilian and Papal courts. Prescott successfully rendered the full import of the display:

He also took with him several Aztec and Tlascalcan chiefs, and among them a son of Montezuma, and another of Maxixca, the friendly old Tlascalcan lord, both of whom were desirous to accompany the general to Castile. He carried home a large collection of plants and minerals, as specimens of the natural resources of the country; several wild animals and birds of gaudy plumage; various fabrics of delicate workmanship, especially the gorgeous feather-work; and a number of jugglers, dancers, and buffoons, who greatly astonished the Europeans by the marvellous facility of their performances, and were thought a suitable present for his Holiness, the Pope. Lastly, Cortes displayed his magnificence in a rich treasure of jewels, among which were emeralds of

43 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1843), digital online edition University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 2000, book VII, chap. 4. The "old historian" is Vincencio Blasco de Lanuza's *Historias Eclesiásticas y seculares del Reino de Aragon* (Zaragoza: 1622), book III, ch. 14.

44 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (Manuscrito Guatemala). Edición crítica de José Antonio Barbón Rodríguez (México: El Colegio de México, 2005), 721.

extraordinary size and lustre, gold to the amount of two hundred thousand pesos de oro, and fifteen hundred marks of Silver⁴⁵.

But Cortés' Aztecs, as we recalled above, were much more than just figureheads or human trophies in a triumphal *cortège*. Like Ribera's young Aztec servant performing dances and pantomimes in the presence of Pietro Martire's distinguished guests, they were displaying ethnic abilities as protagonists of the "rehearsal of cultures"⁴⁶. As a homage to Pope Clemens VII, they repeated the "spectacle of strangeness" in Rome in the presence of cardinals and other dignitaries; the effect of their 'otherness' was amplified by the drawings made by Christoph Weiditz (1500-1559), the talented portraitist of scenes of European daily life and of exotic customs.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries public celebrations such as royal weddings, *entrées royales*, receptions of regal foreign guests, births of princely male heirs, *fasti sollemnes* and thanksgiving for military victories and the conclusion of peaces, and again the return of victorious generals, soldiers or explorers, and even carnivals, continued to be inspired by the "triumphal discourse" of classic, Roman derivation. It is true that triumphal processions, parades or festivities did not always exhibit enemy captives, absent for example from the "Armada triumphs" in 1588⁴⁷. But we know that the exhibition of alien individuals whether as prisoners of war or specimens of exotic 'otherness' was standard practice, for instance in Central Italy in the Renaissance, where Turkish captives figured in parades with a triumphal and an apotropaic function: the terrible but defeated arch-enemies of Christianity were exposed to the view of onlookers, ensuring a frisson of awe, curiosity and fear⁴⁸. It would undoubtedly be worth studying just what part was played in these circumstances by the exhibition of exotic human 'otherness', especially in the case of the numerous "Triumphes, grandes bravetes et magnificences"⁴⁹, mock battles and *naumachiaë* staged in Tudor and Stuart England, the Palatinate court, the Mantua Gonzaga dukedom, the Papal court in Rome, and monarchical France from Henri II to Louis XIV. Here I can only refer to a few examples.

45 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1843), digital online edition University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 2000, book VII, chapt. 4 ("Disturbances in Mexico- Return of Cortes- Distrust of the court-His return to Spain- Death of Sandoval-Brilliant reception of Cortes- Honours conferred on him").

46 Stephen Mullaney, "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance", *Representations*, 3 (Summer 1983): 40-67.

47 For instance in the "Armada triumphs" in Elizabethan England, see Miller, *Roman Triumphs*, 71.

48 G. Ricci, *Ossessione turca. In una retrovia cristiana dell'Europa moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), Bonner Mitchell, *Italian Civic Pageantry in the High Renaissance: a descriptive bibliography of triumphal entries and selected other festivals for state occasions* (Firenze: Olschki, 1979).

49 *Les Triomphes, grandes bravetes et magnificences pour l'Entrée de [...] Charles IX [...] en sa ville de Troyes* (Lyon: Pierre Merant, 1564).

On the occasion of the great festivities held in 1613 in England and Germany for the royal wedding of a Palatine Elector to an English Princess, a spectacular naumachy between Christians and Ottomans culminated as the English naval commander “emmena l’Admiral Turque et plusieurs Baschas en triumphe pour les presenter au Roy et à son Gendre”⁵⁰. The entry of Ann of Austria into Burgos in 1571 featured triumphal chariots, one of which exhibited a *cacique* accompanied by six male and six female Indians and preceded by 24 more Indians in colorful dress, wearing masks overlaid with gemstones⁵¹. Something similar had already been seen in Troyes in 1564 on the occasion of the royal entry of Charles IX. The parade of the city’s representatives and militia “au devant du Roy” was accompanied by a perfectly organized triumphal ethno-exhibition under the armed control of two companies of “l’enfanterie del la Ville” and conceived to celebrate the kingly power in an evocation of the imperial figure of Alexander the Great. Even if we do not know whether it involved real or fake savages, its symbolic meaning was beyond any doubt:

Entre lesquelles marchoient un grand nombre de Sauvages proprement accoustrez, desquels le Capitaine estoit monté sur une Licorne bardée tout à l’entour de l’yerre, avec une hausse de mesme, et un armeur faicte en escaille, tout fort bien approprié. Les Tambourines sonnoient, les Sauvages en bon ordre, les uns montez sur Asnes, les autres sur Chevres et boucs, chose fort plaisante à voir [...] deux Sauvages portoient un Escusson hault eslevé en un rond de l’yerre, dans lequel estoient escript cez mots: ‘Non seulement la France en paix tiendras/Mais accroistras aussi bien qu’Alexandre,/Tant que Sauvages ains que mourir verras/O Puissant Roy, soubz ton pouvoir se rendre/France’ Suivoient deux Sauvages portantz l’enseigne de Taffetas bleu, tenant chacun un baston où elle estoit attaché, au milieu de laquelle estoit un Soleil fait d’or, apres laquelle suyvoient encore quelque bon nombre de Sauvages bravement accoustrez avec leurs arcs, et flesches, et masses fort bien factes⁵².

IV.

Live human exhibitions, in their manifold variants, continued to be a regular part of the European perception and representation of human ‘otherness’, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when their function was reinforced as a permanent form of celebrating European accomplishments and Europe’s

⁵⁰ *Les triomphes, entrees, cartels, tournois, ceremonies, et aultres magnificences, faites en Angleterre, [et] au Palatinat, pour le mariage & reception de Monsieur le Prince Frideric V. Comte Palatin du Rhin, Electeur du Saint Empire, Duc de Baviere &c. et de Madame Elizabeth, fille unique et princesse de la Grande Bretagne, Electrice Palatine du Rhin &c. son espouse* (Heidelberg, 1613), pages not numbered [but 35-36].

⁵¹ *Relación verdadera del recibimiento que la [...] Ciudad de Burgos [...] hizo a la Magestad Réal de la Reyna nuestra Señora doña Anna de Austria* (Burgos, 1571), quoted in C. A. Marsden, “Entrées et fêtes espagnoles au XVI^e siècle”, in *Les fêtes de la Renaissance*, II, 401.

⁵² *Les Triomphes, grandes bravetes et magnificences pour l’Entrée de [...] Charles IX*, full text in Victor E. Graham, “The 1564 entry of Charles IX into Troyes”, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, 48, 1 (1986): 105-120, see 117.

dominant position in the world. In particular these later displays became a regular and integral part of the international, universal, colonial and imperial exhibitions, the great pageants of Western industrial and capitalist civilization with its religious and secular sense of mission. In these new contexts they standardized and developed occasional, scattered features which had been present in the past centuries and added new ones, especially in terms of the “aesthetic of transgression”⁵³. This became all the more the case when a sharper racial view of anthropological and ethnological differences inspired more brutal forms of exhibition of human ‘otherness’. However, all the basic elements – the reification of human beings, their employment as objects of display destined to satisfy wonder, curiosity, amusement and profit, as evidence of ideological, religious or secular, political and scientific discourses, and as trophies and spoils to be paraded in triumphal processions as symbols of power and domination – derived from an ancient tradition of which I have tried to recall the early modern manifestations.

From this standpoint, later, especially nineteenth-century exhibitions of live human trophies re-enacted and systematized early modern practices in a double way. First, they became a more and more important ingredient of such authentic triumphs of modern industrial economy and Western civilization as the national, international and world exhibitions, in which they staged the living contrast between ‘how we were’ (and ‘they continued to be) and ‘what we attained at’, thus serving the triumph of complacency and self-celebration. Second, they took on new commercial, marketable forms which gave them such a popularity and amazing frequency as to make them a regular part of the urban social life of the great European capital cities (London most of all) and to stimulate both the protests of religious and philanthropic circles and the competing claims of ethnological inquiry of utilitarian and scientific inspiration against the use of human beings not as specimen at the “fruitful” service of public information and instruction and the progress of knowledge, but just as “zoological curiosities”, “inanimate objects in a museum”, “objects of curiosity or of unfruitful wonder”, “stimulants” for livening up “deceptive shows”⁵⁴.

This demonstrates how live human exhibitions were variously adapted to the mass public of European capitalist, leisured societies but also to several, new and evolving ideological priorities as these reached a dominant position in the Western market of ideas and attitudes. This was the case of the ideology of scientific progress and of European technological, material and civilizational superiority during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This is also at the present time the case of what I call the ideology of ‘ethno-ecology’, which, often raising the standard of political correctness, has unhesitatingly appropriated

53 Volker Mergenthaler, *Volkerschau-Kannibalismus-Fremdenlegion: Zur Ästhetik der Transgression (1897-1936)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

54 John Connolly, *The Ethnological Exhibitions of London. Read at a Meeting of the Ethnological Society* (London: John Churchill, 1855), 6-7, 11-12, 44.

methods of alien, exotic human exhibitions on behalf of the natural environment preservation and the safeguarding of ethnic minorities.

In so doing, 'ethno-ecology' has rendered human beings symbols, trophies and objects of display, making them again hostages to ideologies, even while loudly repudiating racism and making much of its own mission to counter racism in the name of humanitarianism and ecological concerns.

I define as 'ethno-ecological' those movements, attitudes and specialized competences expressed mainly by the Western scientific, natural and anthropological conservation and heritage culture which combine the protection of the natural environment with the defense of threatened minority peoples belonging to and depending for their survival on those environments. Recent current affairs reporting has offered some astonishing cases of small groups of individuals, generally from Africa or South America, transported to Europe and placed in reconstructed 'natural' environments testifying to Western ecological concern and commitment to preservation. Both humans and nature have been reified and functionalized to support an ideological stance, itself an expression of the claim to exercise control over the non-Western world. Just a few examples will suffice, bearing in mind a fundamental diversity with respect to early modern history: women, men and children involved in contemporary ethno-ecological displays may not be in complete control of all the practical aspects of taking part in the exhibitions, but they are certainly not victims of abduction and forced displacement.

In July 2002 Baaka pygmies from Cameroon were exhibited at Yvoire, in Belgium, in a park usually used for animal expositions. Their presentation as a threatened ethnic group was ostensibly motivated by the humanitarian concern for safeguarding their rights. However, their material conditions were judged unacceptable by an outraged public opinion, finding expression in a press campaign⁵⁵. Both the event and the reaction evoke past experiences of subjection and reification of human aliens, with human dignity being trampled underfoot by Western mass spectacle managers in charge of publicly funded humanitarian projects.

In another example of enduring bad practices, with aims which were certainly less noble, a human live exhibition was put on as part of an ethno-artistic multicultural festival. This at least had the merit of stirring up "a wave of controversy that received widespread media coverage: a global protest

55 Jean-Philippe Petit, "Peut-on exposer des Pygmées ?", *Le Soir en ligne*, 27 juillet 2002, Xavier Van Der Stappen, "Pygmées "exhibés" et débat manqué", *La Libre Belgique*, 16/08/2002, <http://www.cobelco.org/Library/pygmees_debatmanque.htm>; Nzogan Fomo, "L'affaire des Baka en Belgique", *Le Messenger*, Douala, Cameroun, 23 aout 2002, <http://www.wagne.net/messenger/messenger/1404/drame_baka.htm>; "L'affaire des Baka du Cameroun en Belgique", by Berhuse S. Thursday September 12, 2002, *Belgium Independent Media Center*, <<http://www.indymedia.be/news/2002/09/31136.php>>; Hugues Bertin Seumo, "Que sont devenus les pygmées Baka exposés dans un parc animalier en Belgique en été 2002 ?" (*Le Gabonais.com* 18/03/2005) <http://www.africatime.com/afrique/nouv_pana.asp?no_nouvelle=1793136-no_categorie=2>; Nadia Geerts, "Honte sur nous ! des pygmées exposés dans un parc animalier de Belgique !", *Résistances.be*, aout 2002, <http://www.resistances.be/nadia06.html>.

developed”, fuelled by the rapidity of mass media and “e-mail communication, with concern voiced by African-German organizations, rights organizations, academic associations, a Nobel Prize winner, and concerned individuals from many countries”. In July 2005, in a festival of African culture at the Augsburg zoo, several individuals brought from all over Africa were put on show in a fake native village in order to give the public a “taste of Africa”. Not only anti-racist campaigners, as in the Yvoire case, protested against what was readily perceived as a revival of the notorious *Volkerschau* so popular in nineteenth-century Germany⁵⁶, but anthropologists from the Max Planck Institute actively intervened in the debate and, after a four-days visit, drafted a detailed report analyzing the event in all its complexities. Their conclusion was that the initiative, irrespective of the organizers’ intentions, replicated practices dating back to the times of German colonialism and repropose

images dating from those times [which] contribute to contemporary exoticizing, eroticizing, or stereotyping of Africans and are sometimes promoted as multiculturalism.

The Max Planck Institute researchers concluded that they had identified forms of “marketing of cultural difference” which could be considered “incentives toward racialization”; and ended their report with words of clear condemnation:

The racialization processes facilitated by the Augsburg zoo and other zoos are not benign because they can lay the groundwork for discrimination, barriers to social mobility, persecution, and repression⁵⁷.

A curious variation on the theme took place at the London Zoo in August 2005. This time the purpose was didactic or, better, provocative. Paradoxically, the exhibition set out to display not otherness but common origins and identity. The protagonists were not exotic, colored savages. “Caged and barely clothed in a rocky enclosure, eight British men and women were on display beginning Friday behind a sign reading ‘Warning: Humans in their Natural Environment’”. According to the Zoo spokesman, live – white – humans were exhibited to teach zoo-goers that “the human is just another primate”.

Even more recent examples could be cited. At the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, the “Maasai Journey” exhibit, which opened in May 2007, was constructed around the zoo’s permanent “African Savanna” featuring animals indigenous to the East African grasslands, and an “African Village” including four Maasai men as “cultural interpreters”. In this case too academics entered

56 Eike Reichardt, *Health, ‘Race’ and Empire: Popular-Scientific Spectacles and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1871-1914* (no place of publication: Lulu.com, 2008).

57 Nina Glick Schiller, Data Dea, Markus Höhne, *African Culture and the Zoo in the 21st Century: The “African Village” in the Augsburg Zoo and Its Wider Implications. Report to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology*, 4 July 2005, full text at < <http://www.eth.mpg.de/events/current/pdf/1120750934-01.pdf>>. A discussion on the Augsburg case took place in 2007 on H-Africa.

into a discussion of the initiative, relating it directly to the Augsburg precedent and keeping alive a debate on 21st century live human ethno-exhibitions, most remarkably with the direct participation of Maasai cultural representatives and the men taking part in the show⁵⁸. A still more recent case took place at the Zoological Gardens Eberswalde, Berlin, in June 2010. Organized by a humanitarian association, “This event is supposed to support the ethnic group of the San, the ‘last first people’, helping them to help themselves, in terms of a gentle integration into our modern age”⁵⁹. Dancing and drumming, exhibiting handicrafts, drawings by San children, bonfires, barbecues and baking original African food are all on offer, with Namibian protagonists who are intended to benefit from the initiative. Time will tell if here too public opinion will manifest reservations and criticisms.

Are these sorts of exhibitions of live human aliens as trophies to be considered as a typical prerogative of evil white European or American imperialists? Some contemporary reporting suggests a negative answer and reveals an even darker reality. In Thailand, November 2007, the women of a Northern Thai ethnic group known as the Padaung Hill Tribe, refugees from Burma in the 1980s, were put on commercial show by Thai businessmen. The visitors, attracted by tour operators, may have been mostly, although not exclusively, Europeans, but the organizers and profit makers were undoubtedly Thai. Protesters against the exploitation of the Padaung women spoke of people being held captive in villages and evoked the notorious models of the past we have been exploring. “The long-necked women of a popular Thai tourist destination have spoken out about the prison-like conditions they are forced to endure as inmates of what they describe as ‘a human zoo’”⁶⁰. Despite public outcry, press campaigns and the concern showed by the United Nations refugee agency, the long-necked women exhibition has continued in 2009 and 2010, probably on account of its central role in the local tourism industry. Then again at a pan-African Music Festival in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, July 2007, a group of 20 pygmy artists, including 10 women and a three-month-old baby, were given one tent to share in the city’s zoo, instead of being provided with hotel accommodation like the other guest artists. Here they became a visitor attraction as they went about preparing fires and cooking their meals. “They are used to living in close contact with nature” was the official reply to the protests of civil rights militants, and “the organizers say the grounds

58 Karen Furnweger, “The exhibit triangle: animals, habitats, peoples”, 2007, Itohan Osayimwese, “African Village on Display in Seattle Zoo”, *Africa Resource*, 2007 < http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=421:african-village-on-display-in-seattle-2006&catid=136:race&Itemid=351>.

59 Bernd Hensch, Frauke von Versen, “African Zoo-Night ‘Awake the Lions!’”, original in German: <<http://blog.derbraunemob.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Zoo1.pdf>>.

60 “Thailand’s ‘human zoos’”, *Associated Press, Sunday Times*, Nov. 2007 <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/travel/article2837081.ece>>.

of Brazzaville zoo are closer to the pygmies' natural habitat"⁶¹. In fact a pan-African cultural event had failed to safeguard minority ethnic groups against exactly the kind of abuse they suffered at the hands of Western science and show business.

There is also a paradoxical side to these stories. Recent reports (May 2008) from the African independent news agency "Afrol News" have spoken of initiatives by some African national park administrators in Congo, Cameroon and the Central Africa Republic. Supplementary revenue sources have been provided for the most marginalized human groups like Baaka pygmies by inducing them to appear in the context of successful ecotourism projects. Income-generating activities as tourist guides and performers have apparently empowered natives, involving them in nature conservation schemes. In short, in a clear persistence of ancient models, "professional savages" have been recruited (just as they were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) by African impresarios and managers intent on putting human beings, whose indigence begs the question of consent, on display in an ethno-show of pristine nature⁶².

61 "Pygmy artists housed in Congo zoo", *BBC News*, Friday, 13 July 2007, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6898241.stm>>.

62 "Central Africa's 'Pygmies' gain from ecotourism", *Afrol News*, 23 May 2008, <<http://www.afrol.com/articles/29052>>. For a detailed treatment of the phenomenon of "professional savages", see Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).