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16 Global Hubs on the Move: Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs as Spaces of Imagining the World

China, and India, and Egypt, and Algiers, and Africa, to the Cape of Good Hope; and Persia, and Turkey, and Italy, and Austria, and Prussia, and Germany, and Denmark, and Russia, and France, and Spain, and Portugal, and England, and Scotland, and Ireland, and America, from Newfoundland to California, and from Bhering's Straits to Cape Horn, and from the Sandwich Islands to Japan and New Holland, are all here represented by their products and their people. It is, indeed, the World Daguerreotyped. What a spectacle!¹

An American observer, William Drew, extolled the "Great Exhibition" in London by declaring that all corners of the world were visible in one place, namely in the glass-and-iron Crystal Palace that had been specially erected in Hyde Park in London. The 1851 exposition in London as well as subsequent events in cities such as Paris, Vienna, and Chicago were temporary hubs on an epic scale. They were often described as condensed representations of the world. The Crystal Palace exposition, described by Drew, attracted some 6 million visitors during its half-year existence. The peak attendance for such an event was achieved in Paris in 1900 with over 50 million visits.²

The *raison d'être* of the expos was to display, assess, and accelerate the much-cherished notion of progress in relevant fields of life, ranging from science, technology, and industry to art, culture, and morals. The main emphasis in expositions was on the most up-to-date achievements, but they also contained ambitious retrospective displays with a long temporal arch as well as captivating glimpses of the future.³ The aim was to improve the overall education of the attendees and to

1 W. A. Drew, *Glimpses and Gatherings, during a Voyage and Visit to London and the Great Exhibition, in the Summer of 1851*, Augusta & Boston: Homan & Manley, Abel Tompkins, 1852, p. 336.

2 These numbers refer to the total number of visits. As it was common to visit a huge fair over more than a single day, the number of individuals who visited the fairs were lower.

3 On the history of international expos see, e.g., P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000; P. Greenhalgh, *Fair World. A History of World's Fairs and Expositions from London to Shanghai 1851–2010*, Winterbourne: Papadakis, 2011; J. E. Findling and K. D. Pelle, *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990; A. C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

simultaneously offer the most up-to-date information to specialists.⁴ In practice, the agendas of expositions promoted multiple political and economic interests: they were arenas for competition between nation-states and peoples aspiring to sovereignty, for presenting imperial projects as well as spaces to capture new clients and markets for companies.

A key method for producing this global spectacle was to exhibit material objects that had been transported from all the continents. Thus, expositions consisted of a record-breaking number of exhibits that were displayed in extravagant, temporary constructions for the benefit of millions of visitors. They were ephemeral nodes of the flow of things and people, whose routes intersected for a moment and then soon diverged. Hence, expositions epitomized the revolutionized forms of mobility of the era: new transportation and communication technologies and a drastic increase in the volume and speed of travel and transportation.⁵ They contemporaneously promoted the all-encompassing belief in progress by seemingly verifying – and eulogizing in grand style – the human capacity to overcome what had previously seemed like insurmountable challenges.⁶

In their ephemerality and constant movement, expositions differed from sedentary institutions of display, such as museums and department stores. A single expo typically lasted for six months, after which time not only were the collections dismantled and dispersed but also the pavilions were usually demolished. Different organizers were employed at each exposition, and no international body was established in the nineteenth century in order to coordinate the activities. For this reason, it was always far from certain where and when the next expo would take place. Yet, exhibitions did display a certain sense of consistency when understood as a mass medium, which consisted not only of the

4 T. Syrjämaa, “At Intersections of Technology and a Modern Mass Medium: The Engineer Robert Runeberg and Exhibitions, 1867–1900”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 42 (2016), pp. 71–95.

5 J. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 712–724; W. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

6 For a more detailed discussion of the belief in progress in expos, see T. Syrjämaa, *Edistysen luvattu maailma. Edistysusko maailmannäyttelyissä 1851–1915* [The promised world of progress. The belief in progress in great exhibitions 1851–1915], Helsinki: Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2007; T. Syrjämaa, “Experiencing Progress. Technology as Entertainment in World Exhibitions at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”, in: A. Cardoso de Matos, I. Gouzévitch and M. C. Lourenço (eds.), *World Exhibitions, Technical Museums and Industrial Society*, Lisbon: Colibri, 2010, pp. 169–186.

mammoth-sized world's fairs, but also of other more geographically and thematically limited events.⁷ Diverse exhibitions popped up like mushrooms in a large network, which connected different localities that temporarily enjoyed a very special degree of visibility and attention. In addition to those who attended in person, the media, especially the thriving newspapers, as well as stereo images and photographic souvenir albums ensured that the expositions became familiar to a much wider audience.⁸ Thus, their significance and influence on the “Western” imagination of the globe can hardly be overestimated.

William Drew, along with many other contemporaries, had great faith in the comprehensiveness and truthfulness of the spectacles found at the world's fair. His comparison to a daguerreotype is flattering as it was considered to be the most accurate and unerring technology for reproducing the world. Yet, from the perspective of recent times, it is obvious that expos were European visions of the world in which other peoples and cultures had a subordinate place at best. Indeed, world's fairs incarnated the inequality and disparity of the colonial world order.⁹

Yet, at the same time, expositions were focal events in promoting a global dimension into the everyday world views of millions of people, especially in Europe and North America. For example, James Gilbert questions the utterly political and imperial interpretation of expositions that has prevailed in historical research since Robert Rydell's influential book on American expos, published in the 1980s. In his study on the 1904 world's fair in St. Louis, Gilbert shows that visitor experiences and memory were radically different from the official political rhetoric promoted at the event.¹⁰ In a similar vein, in his study on mid-Victorian exhibitions at the Crystal Palace, Alexander Chase-Levenson argues that these presentations of the world were not mere imperial propaganda. He has compared the consumption of foreign cultures to virtual tourism and points

7 M. Filipová (ed.), *Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840–1940: Great Exhibitions in the Margins*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

8 P. Snickars, “Mediearkologi: Om utställningen som mediearkiv” [Media archaeology. Exhibition as a media archive], in: A. Ekström, S. Jülich and P. Snickars (eds.), *1897 Mediehistorier kring Stockholmsutställningen* [Mediahistories of the Stockholm exposition], Stockholm: Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 2006, pp. 125–163.

9 P. Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

10 J. Gilbert, *Whose Fair? Experience, Memory, and the History of the Great St. Louis Exposition*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 57–60, 190–194.

out that such an experience was considered to be instructive and, for example, was thought to improve visitors' taste and skills.¹¹

In this chapter, I examine mobilities that essentially contributed to how the globe and global connections were imagined at a time of rapid change. I examine intersecting flows of things and people that worked together in order to assemble, perform, and eventually dismantle the fairs. I take as a starting point the new mobility paradigm, formulated by Mimi Sheller and John Urry, which focuses on the complex interconnections between mobilities, materialities, and socialities. Whilst social studies have traditionally focused on (seemingly) permanent elements and institutions, Sheller and Urry draw attention to how mobilities play a core role in social life. Their propositions regarding the contemporary world are also inspiring when looking into the history of globality, fluid space, and mass media, such as expositions. In this chapter, I, first, show how such mobility was essential for creating a sense of global reach in these temporary hubs. Second, I explore simulated mobility in expositions from the point of view of virtual tourism, which added an important dimension to the experiences of global connectivity.

(Dis)Ordering the Material World

Most world's fairs took place in cosmopolitan metropolises in which there were already long traditions of transcultural encounters and where many kinds of knowledge, goods, and attractions from distant places were available.¹² Without doubt, London and Paris were major international hubs even without expositions. Furthermore, Paris was the prime example of a modern city, with its huge urban renovation projects that did not simply entail new infrastructure with larger streets, but also included new kinds of sociability. They were fashionable cities with many kinds of attractions, but even in these metropolises, it was far from ordinary to witness such conglomerations of different countries and cultures that were on display in expositions.

The organizers of the expositions proudly boasted about the huge quantity and diversity of objects displayed on the ever-expanding expo grounds whilst commentators overwhelmingly marvelled at the exhibitions. Geoffrey Cantor shows how the vastness and variety of the first world's fair was met with

¹¹ A. Chase-Levenson, "Annihilating Time and Space: Eclecticism and Virtual Tourism at the Sydenham Crystal Palace", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34 (2012), pp. 461–475.

¹² See, e.g., A. Bandau, M. Dorigny and R. von Mallinckrodt (eds.), *Les mondes coloniaux à Paris au XVIIIe siècle. Circulation et enchevêtrement des savoirs* [Colonial worlds in Paris in the 18th century. Circulation and entanglement of knowledges], Paris: Karthala, 2010.

sentiments of wonder.¹³ Although the medium gradually became established and thus more predictable, it is evident that wonder continued to be an essential element and attraction of the world's fairs, as each expo aimed to set new records in terms of size and variety. Wonder was an equally palpable attribute of expos 50 years after the Great Exhibition in London:

What strikes the visitor here immediately is the immensity of the work and the incredible dimensions of the constructions. Never before has an exhibition united so much will and effort or been more cosmopolitan. All the peoples of the Earth have worked there: in grand palaces, in picturesque pavilions, they have accumulated their marvels and their treasures.¹⁴

Faithful to the rhetoric of expositions, a 500-page guidebook for visitors to the 1900 *exposition universelle* in Paris (the fifth held in the city) highlighted the enormity of the expo as well as its global reach. Flowery words were accompanied by a series of maps showing the centrality of Paris. The first map celebrates Paris as the centre of the world (see Map 1), connected with cities and regions situated in all continents, including, for instance, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Zanzibar, Bombay (Mumbai), Sydney, and Yokohama. The following map indicates routes from dozens of “principal European cities” to Paris. It displays a wide conception of Europe, including Astrakhan in the East and Tunis in the South. The third map focuses on itineraries from various French towns to the capital. In each map, place names are accompanied with information regarding the distance to Paris, calculated in three ways: in length (kilometres), duration (days and hours), and price (francs).¹⁵

The new transportation technologies, which had radically changed conceptions of distances, not only made connections speedier, but the duration of journeys also became more predictable. Steamships and trains had much more exact timetables than sailing ships or horse-powered traffic. These new forms of transportation were crucial in enabling the construction of the gigantic mobile hubs; they were able to transport a multitude of objects across borders and, in many cases, across oceans and continents, which were then transformed into exhibits in the heart of metropolises. As Mimi Sheller and John Urry note, any mobility requires immobile infrastructure. To use their concepts, the mobility of the world's fair was based on such “interdependent systems of ‘immobile’ material worlds” as

¹³ G. Cantor, “Emotional Reactions to the Great Exhibition of 1851”, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20 (2015), pp. 230–245.

¹⁴ 1900 *Paris Exposition. Guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* [1900 Paris Exhibition. Practical guide for visitors to Paris and the exhibition], Paris: Hachette & C^{ie}, 1900, p. 171 (own translation).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*



Map 1: Paris as the centre of the globe.
1900 Paris Exposition [1900], p. 171.

railways, telegraph cables, and modernized urban infrastructure, including boulevards and sewage systems. Thus, this mobility was fundamentally based on new “extensive systems of immobility”.¹⁶ The huge construction projects of railways, railway stations, galleries, bridges, port facilities, and canals, for example, made it possible to create the spectacles of the modern world.

The latest achievements in transportation technology and the boldest projects in infrastructure were also featured in the expos. At the 1867 expo in Paris, for instance, the Suez Canal, then under construction, was presented with a pavilion of its own.¹⁷ In some spectacular cases, the transportation of single exhibits was also glorified, such as in the case of the biggest (and heaviest) cannons. The German armament foundry Krupp, for example, displayed its record-breaking cannons on a number of occasions. The transportation of these gigantic armaments was depicted as heroic achievements.¹⁸

¹⁶ M. Sheller and J. Urry, “The New Mobilities Paradigm”, *Environment and Planning A*. 38 (2006), p. 210.

¹⁷ A. Nour, “Egyptian-French Cultural Encounters at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867”, *MDCCC 1800* 6 (2017), p. 35.

¹⁸ *The Columbian Exposition Album Containing Views of the Grounds, Main and State Buildings, Statuary, Architectural Details, Interiors, Midway Plaisance Scenes, and Other*

Conversely, the transportation of ordinary exhibits to and from a world's fair usually remained unnoticed. A glimpse into these practices of mobility is offered by a Finnish commissioner for the 1878 *exposition universelle* in Paris. He complained that nine wagonloads of exhibits had been detained by bureaucratic and logistic challenges in St. Petersburg on their way from Finland to France. The customs procedures were not only expensive but also tortuously pedantic; ultimately the fate of the transportation depended on the availability of bast to wrap up the parcels and pieces of lead used for sealing them.¹⁹ When the cargo eventually arrived in Paris, the Finnish commissioner confessed that handling the exhibits and overseeing their display, which was spread across a total of 42 different localities in the large exhibition ground, exhausted him and took much more time and effort than he had anticipated.²⁰ After the closure of the expo, another arduous task was to dismantle the displays and pack the objects for the homeward-bound journey.

In a manner similar to contemporary scientific principles, which organize and rank flora, fauna, and human cultures, exhibits were classified according to a multilevel hierarchical system. Exhibits at the 1878 *exposition universelle* in Paris (the third one held in the city), for example, were categorized into 9 groups and 90 classes.²¹ In 1900, the expo consisted of 17 groups and 120 classes.²² Classification was a highly cultural and historical practice, but it was perceived as an indispensable technique for producing knowledge, which was, in turn, fundamental for the promotion and acceleration of progress. The practical implementation of displays and the deficiencies of some sections were frequently criticized, but the paradigm of classification and categorization was not questioned. Its fundamental credibility was not undermined, even by a most

Interesting Objects which had Place at the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893, Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1893, p. 61.

19 R. Runeberg, "Från verdensutställningen i Paris" [From the world's fair in Paris], *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 24 March 1878.

20 Syrjämaa, "At Intersections of Technology and a Modern Mass Medium", p. 82.

21 The groups were as following: art, education, furniture, textiles, raw materials, mechanical industries, foodstuffs, agriculture and fishing, and horticulture (see *Guide de l'Exposition universelle et de la ville de Paris* [Guide to the *exposition universelle* and the city of Paris], Paris: Société La publicité, 1878, pp. 45–49).

22 *Världsutställningen i Paris år 1900. Utdrag ur de af franska regeringen för utställningen utfördade allmänna stadgarna. Utdrag ur reglerna för utställare inom ryska afdelningen vid utställningen. Särskilda bestämmingar för Finlands deltagande i utställningen* [World exhibition in Paris in 1900. Extract from the general rules made by the French government for the exhibition. Extract from the rules for exhibitors in the Russian section of the exhibition. Special definitions for the Finnish participation in the exhibition], Helsingfors 1898.

obvious fact: exhibitions had varying classification systems. They shared basic features but differed in many details. The system that was supposed to guarantee the functionality of the universal knowledge production process was anything but coherent.

In the age of nationalism, the scientific taxonomical paradigm was readily connected to categorization by way of national origin. Thus, any exhibit had two fundamental characteristics: a thematic category in a presumably universal system and a national attribute. These two coordinates were considered to be necessary for handling any object as they enabled objects, which ranged from sculptures and searchlights to canned meat and hairpins, to be located and displayed. In principle, both characteristics seemed to refer to self-evident and permanent properties of any given object. However, in practice the boundaries were ambiguous, dynamic, and inconsistent, thereby fostering numerous political tensions. Furthermore, the twofold definition proved to be difficult to manage as a single object could only be displayed in one place at a time. In the 1867 *exposition universelle* in Paris, an ambitious attempt was made to spatially merge the two systems. When walking in a pavilion, it was possible to “read” the very same exhibits in connection to either a thematic category or a nationality. If a visitor walked along the lanes that followed the elliptic shape of the pavilion, he or she could peruse exhibits of different national origins belonging to one and the same thematic category. Otherwise, he/she could peruse one national section at a time, walking from one department to another and could feasibly see all the exhibits of different categories that had been imported from one country at one time.²³ This creative solution, however, did not prove to be successful.

The paths of innumerable objects intersected at the expositions and randomness churned behind the seeming order. As the exhibitions were temporary, it was not possible to arrange systematic or long-term collection projects, or, for example, to replace lost, delayed, or broken objects. There were also no depots to conceal the items that were deemed either unnecessary or ungainly. The journey each object underwent in order to be placed in an expo was long and complicated. In the first place, commissioners seemingly had overwhelming power in constructing displays, but actually they sought to fit available objects into available premises (plus lobbying for better places and prizes).²⁴ Classifications were

²³ *L'Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée. Publication internationale autorisée par la Commission impériale* [The 1867 *exposition universelle* illustrated. International publication authorized by the Imperial Commission]. Redacteur en chef M. Fr. Ducuing. Tome I & II, Paris [1867], t. I, pp. 6–11; t. II, pp. 52–54, 205–206.

²⁴ Syrjämaa, “At Intersections”, pp. 79–82, 84.

published in advance that guided the process of choosing exhibits to some degree, but the end result was uneven. The first step was to recognize a potential exhibit and to submit it. Such decisions were taken far away from the sites of the expositions and long before the gates were opened to the public. This required a diffuse concept of the exhibition medium and exhibits: potential exhibitors had to have an idea of the worthiness of a local or national artefact in the context of a world's fair as well as the desire and means to contribute. The path required of an object before it arrived at an exposition included essential recontextualizations. Ultimately, exhibits that contained items from highly divergent backgrounds and previous functions were temporarily juxtaposed. They were set side by side in physical terms, but there was also a significant, yet more abstract, proximity, such as being listed together in various catalogues and prize lists. In such a context, an object of national and regional origin could be incorporated into a system of apparent global dimensions.

In the ever-enlarging expos, the establishment of a spatially rigid narrative path, such as the chronological itineraries of many museums,²⁵ was unattainable. Yet, the locations of exhibits on the sites as well as in catalogues suggested the context in which they were meant to be interpreted. Instructions contained within guidebooks and catalogues as well as on maps, ground plans, signs, and labels were regarded as an essential feature in order to make comprehensible what could otherwise be perceived as a dizzyingly variegated expo. However, visitors are never passive recipients because they always have agency and act creatively. This situation accords with Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday life and practices. The exhibition ground was an institutional, organized, and regulated space. The administration of expositions put into effect strategies designed to govern the area, which included fencing off spaces, the establishment of opening times, the sale of tickets at entrance gates, and the enactment of various rules for exhibitors and visitors. These were "others" who unofficially and with small banal practices – or tactics as de Certeau calls them – appropriated and transformed the space. Organizers could not create a ready-made expo. Instead, visitors played an important role in producing the expo, for example by choosing what to see and in which order. Visitors could be guided by professional factors, for instance, as well as national and regional bonds.²⁶ As de Certeau notes,

25 T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge 1995, pp. 36, 177–208.

26 On creative practices in general, see M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, pp. xviii–xxii, 30–39. On exhibition visitors, see T. Syrjämaa, "Näyttelypaviljonki uudenlaisena kansainvälisenä toiminnan ja tulkinnan tilana Kaivopuistossa vuonna 1876" [Exhibition pavilion as a new space for

consumption is “another production”.²⁷ In other words, consumers and walkers in a city or, in this case, expo-goers themselves, are able to create something different and new. Expos were characterized by heterogeneity and vastness as they were versatile spaces and could therefore be dotted with divergent paths and agendas. While walking in an expo, visitors were actually able to create a (virtual) collection of their own by directing their attention to certain objects (in differing order) and by ignoring most of what was being exhibited. It was hoped global recognition could be achieved by displaying wagonloads of things in an expo. Yet, attracting attention was anything but guaranteed as the size of expositions grew and a bewildering cornucopia of things were on display.

An Immersive Global Patchwork

The unique attraction of world’s fairs was to see a representation of the world in one city. Expos created a fascinating three-dimensional but rather peculiar global geography. At the 1878 expo in Paris, for instance, visitors were greeted by the following facades that were closely located next to each other: Great Britain, Canada, the USA, Sweden and Norway, Italy, Japan, China, Spain, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Switzerland, Belgium, Greece, Denmark, Central America, Tunisia, Annam, Persia, Siam, Morocco, Luxembourg, Monaco and San Marino, Portugal, and the Netherlands.²⁸ Such a *rue des nations* (street of nations) became an integral part of how expos grew in extent and in extravagance towards the end of the nineteenth century. Although many expositions were held under the shadow of international crises and wars, the rhetoric of each world’s fair emphasized their importance in securing and maintaining peace.²⁹ The densely built street of nations epitomized how expos sought to be peaceful competitions between nations and an embodiment of the fraternity of nations.

Exhibits and premises were essential materialities when knowledge about different countries and cultures was presented. They offered countries an opportunity to define themselves, and this chance was readily utilized. During the heyday of nationalism, the definitions usually stemmed from the past. In the

international activities and interpretation in Kaivopuisto Park in 1876], *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 108 (2010), pp. 29–46; Gilbert, *Whose Fair?*, pp. 153–194; Cantor, “Emotional Reactions”, pp. 230–245.

²⁷ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. xii.

²⁸ *Chromo-guide à l’Exposition universelle 1878* [Chromo guide at the *exposition universelle* 1878], Paris: Librairie de l’Écho de la Sorbonne & Bouillon-Ryvoire et C^{ie}, 1878, p. 17.

²⁹ Syrjämaa, *Edistyksen luvattu maailma*, pp. 125–146.

1878 expo, the British section, for example, consisted of three facades that replicated the gothic Westminster Abbey, a sixteenth-century castle, and a Scottish cottage. The group was complemented by a novelty: a house entirely made of concrete. Indeed, any expo consisted of seemingly contradictory elements that not only hailed from different corners of the world, but also drew on a variety of epochs and styles.³⁰ A supposed sense of authenticity was highlighted but, in practice, accurate replicas were combined with fanciful (re)productions.

Expos created strange neighbourhoods by mixing great and small powers and by ignoring the cardinal points of the compass. They turned geographical positions and distances upside down. There were certainly pragmatic causes for such juxtapositions, yet there is a fascinating contradiction between the oft-repeated praise of verisimilitude in these fantastic spectacles.

In addition to the rows of official pavilions for different countries, numerous expos also had a less official and more commercialized area for foreign cultures. A guide to the 1878 exposition, for instance, ironically notes that a cod lover would have been in seventh heaven as a Norwegian kiosk offered cod and cod liver oil in a great variety of products. If a visitor did not fancy cod, the adjoining kiosk exhibited Sicilian wines. Moreover, nearby it was possible, amongst many other things, to taste Russian horse milk drinks, to purchase Japanese souvenirs, and to buy artefacts and textiles from Portuguese colonies.³¹ The role of gaze in experiencing expositions has been emphasized by both contemporary commentators and by historians,³² but, as this example shows, exhibitions were also multisensory experiences. The palates of the visitors were exposed to new tastes and the ears were treated to the music and sounds of foreign languages.

Whilst virtual travelling has long historical roots, its popularity in the nineteenth century grew rapidly as technologies multiplied. Many different panoramas and dioramas offered the possibility to gaze – spatially and even temporarily – at distant places. Some technologies required massive permanent structures, whilst others were portable.³³ Expositions were the sites where many kinds of virtual travel technology and media came together and merged.³⁴ Furthermore, the inherent idea of the exhibition medium was that each event had to surpass the achievements of the previous expos. In other words, the battle for new ideas and *clous*

30 *Chromo-guide à l'Exposition universelle*, pp. 17–19.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 107–110.

32 Syrjämaa, *Edistyksen luvattu maailma*, pp. 71–95.

33 V. della Dora, “Putting the World into a Box: A Geography of Nineteenth-Century ‘Travelling Landscapes’”, *Geografiska Annaler, Series B. Human Geography* 89 (2007), pp. 287–306.

34 Snickars, “Mediearkeologi”, pp. 125–163.

(highlights) was continuous. At the turn of the twentieth century, the visitors to the largest Paris *exposition universelle*, for example, could enjoy the spectacle of “Le Tour de Monde” (Tour of the world) or “Mareorama”, a panorama that could take spectators on a trip on the Mediterranean Sea or another depicting a railway journey through Siberia. These tours not only consisted of visual and audible elements, but also contained kinaesthetic special effects.³⁵

A London-based entrepreneur of French origin, Eugène Rimmel, was one of the many who marvelled at the global experiences of the 1867 spectacle:

Without undertaking long and perilous journeys, without running the risk of being frozen in the North, or melted in the South; we have seen the Russian drive his *troika* drawn by Tartar steeds, the Arab smoke the *narghilé* or play the *darbouka* under his guilt cupolas, the fair daughters of the Celestial Empire sip their tea in their quaint painted houses; we have walked in a few minutes from the Temple of the Caciques to the Bardo of Tunis, from the American log-hut to the Kirghiz tent.³⁶

To highlight both authenticity and spectacularity, humans were also displayed in addition to objects. Human shows have a long and varied history, but they gained further impetus and massive popularity in expos. From a few individuals and small-scale choreographies, these spectacles gradually expanded to so-called habitat displays, which were professionally arranged and aimed to showcase everyday life in “villages”.³⁷ Curiosity and subordination were justified by trendy sciences: ethnography and anthropology.

Historical research has especially focused on the presentation of colonized peoples, which are shocking from the viewpoint of posterity: the shows reflected and maintained ethnic inequality and produced tragedies. More recently, however, more varied aspects have been proposed by research. Catherine Baglo, for example, challenges the victimization of Sami performers and highlights their agency.³⁸ Eric Ames, in his investigations, notes that the performances actually became moments and places of intercultural encounter. He claims that contrary to the earlier emphasis on difference and separation, they represented moments

³⁵ Syrjämaa, “Experiencing Progress”, pp. 169–186.

³⁶ E. Rimmel, *Recollections of the Paris Exhibition of 1867*, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1868, pp. 1–2.

³⁷ See, e.g., Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, pp. 82–109. On the habitat displays, see E. Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck’s Empire of Entertainment*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 63–102.

³⁸ C. Baglo, *På ville veget? Levende utstillinger av samer i Europa og Amerika* [Living exhibitions of Sami in Europe and America], PhD, University of Tromsø, 2011, <https://munin.uit.no/handle/10037/3686>, accessed February 24, 2018.

that invoked “a powerful sense of commonality”.³⁹ The supposed ideological uniformity of visitors has also been questioned by highlighting the differences in the outlook of the attendees, from keen interest to dislike and from sympathy to repugnance.⁴⁰

Sadiya Qureshi argues that such displays should not be simply and automatically equated with freak shows, but should instead be analysed within the wider contemporary context of human displays.⁴¹ Indeed, the glaring exoticized villages of colonized peoples were not even the only human displays at the expos. European countries and cultures were also presented with ethnographical and anthropological interests. Earlier dioramas of human-sized mannequins were replaced by living human displays towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. At the huge 1900 expo in Paris, for instance, a Swiss village was built in the centre of the city with 300 Swiss in national costume, including shepherds who herded sheep and cows in order to amuse the visitors. The Swiss villagers were presented against a reproduction of the Alps, which was 40 metres high and 600 metres long. The scene also featured a 30-metre-high waterfall, which helped to power a sawmill.⁴² It was in many ways a perfect example of a habitat display, with people depicted amidst their traditional livelihoods, domestic animals, and natural environment.

Yet, there are also obvious and important differences in portraying different peoples. Visitors probably did not expect the Swiss to wear the same costumes and to stay with their cows and sheep all the time. Stricter roles were reserved for non-Westerners. Japanese teahouses and pavilions, for example, were a common and highly praised sight in numerous exhibitions, and they contributed to an outbreak of Japanomania. Women and men in kimonos aroused curiosity and admiration, but those Japanese who moved through the exhibition grounds in European-style clothes were criticized. Adopting Western customs was seen as an inappropriate transgression, in some cases even as a peril.⁴³

³⁹ Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire*, pp. 88–94.

⁴⁰ C. M. Hinsley and D. R. Wilcox, *Coming of Age in Chicago: The 1893 World's Fair and the Coalescence of American Anthropology*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

⁴¹ S. Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp. 4–5.

⁴² H. A. Ring, *Paris och världsutställningen 1900* [Paris and the world's fair 1900], Stockholm: Fröleen & Comp., 1900, pp. 624–628.

⁴³ Deroy et al., *Les merveilles de l'Exposition de 1878* [The wonders of the 1878 exposition], Paris: Librairie M. Dreyfous, 1878, p. 230; A. F. Henningsen, “Producing and Consuming Foreignness. ‘Anthropological-Zoological Exhibitions’ in Copenhagen”, in: A. F. Henningsen, L. Koivunen and T. Syrjämaa (eds.), *Nordic Perspectives on Encountering Foreignness*, Turku: General History, University of Turku, 2009, pp. 63–67.

The many souvenir albums that describe the Midway at the 1893 world's fair in Chicago, which was one of the largest ever bazaar areas of foreign cultures at any expo, show degrees of "otherness" and cultural hierarchies in practice. The Midway was occupied by a wild array of commercial entertainment and an assortment of displays of exoticized peoples. At this point, people from the Middle East were placed on the highest ladder. In this context, a man depicted in oriental fashion, who was resting and smoking, was identified by name. Most other groups, such as Sami or Inuit families, remained anonymous. The most extreme case were the Dahomeians, with an overtly racist caption presenting two young men sitting on a lawn. One is smiling directly at the camera, while the other is placidly looking beyond the photographer:

The Dahomeyans and their village proved to be one of the most attractive features in the Midway Plaisance at the World's Fair. They are an extremely cruel and brutal race, and it is to be hoped that they will carry back to their West African home some of the influences of civilization with which they were surrounded in Jackson Park. The two members of the tribe pictured above are about average specimens. The great height and muscular power they possess is hardly shown in their attitude of repose.⁴⁴

No identity and individuality were recognized, nor was there any sign of respect towards them or their culture. Actually, in this extreme example, it is not the foreign culture that should be studied at the expo; instead, the surrounding fair should be able to provide a positive impetus to enact change and improvement amongst the people on display.

Fear could be aroused not only by people that were being exhibited, but also by the crowd of visitors. In anticipation of the Crystal Palace exhibition, for instance, it was feared that London would become too international. It was assumed that terrifying foreigners would soon arrive from afar, carrying epidemics and endangering the livelihoods of local merchants. Rebels were expected to rush from the European continent – the revolutions and upheavals of 1848 were still fresh in people's memory – and the French were once again blamed for their presumed immorality.⁴⁵ However, more distant visitors were often imagined to be even worse. A humorous fictive story of the exhibition excursion of a British family who meet diverse foreigners at the Crystal Palace, including "Africans", "Bedouins", and "Cossacks", shows a deep level of suspicion and distrust of others. Foreigners

⁴⁴ *The Columbian Exposition Album*, pp. 94–95, quotation at p. 95.

⁴⁵ J. A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851. A Nation on Display*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 187–188.

were depicted as uncivilized and dangerous: the inhabitants of the imaginary Cannibal Islands even dreamt of having little Johnny Brown for their meal.⁴⁶

World's fairs were far from innocent places, but this does not reduce their importance. Millions of visitors were able to imagine and experience faraway places and peoples. A global dimension was unmistakable, albeit in many ways distorted and biased. As one of the visitors to the Midway in Chicago emphasized, he had seen and learned more of the world than he could probably ever do again in one single day.⁴⁷ In his opinion, the foreign bazaar had far exceeded the charm and utility of the official White City, with its pavilions dedicated to industries and arts and with neatly categorized and catalogued exhibits. Virtual tourism greatly added to the fascination of expositions and essentially contributed to a spectacular globality.

Conclusion

The wide geographical and cultural scope of the expos has been highlighted in innumerable visitors' comments and in the official rhetoric of the expositions. The first expo was famously titled the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations", and although the motto of the following ones may not have achieved an equally iconic status, they embraced the same ambition of comprehensiveness. The multitude of objects, edifices, and people seemed to create a condensed world in which visitors could wander from one end to the other.

In his recent magnum opus, Jürgen Osterhammel identifies the increase in the transfer of cultural contents as one of the key characteristics of the nineteenth century, alongside the asymmetry of the process. West-East and North-South interactions were manifold but highly biased. Furthermore, Osterhammel reminds us of the unevenness of power and influence inside the "West" between centres and peripheries.⁴⁸ World's fairs were at the very centre of this epoch, the consequences of which continue to be evident in our own time. As the most spectacular mass medium of their age, they gave forcible impetus to conceptions of globality. They introduced a global dimension into the everyday world views of

⁴⁶ The story, published by artist and illustrator Thomas Onwhyn, was titled "Mr and Mrs Brown's visit to London to see the grand exhibition of all nations. How they were astonished at its wonders, inconvenienced by the crowds, and frightened out of their wits, by the foreigners". The image has been reproduced in Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*.

⁴⁷ "A Yankee's Impressions of the World's Fair", *The Manufacturer and Builder* 25 (1893) 7, pp. 160.

⁴⁸ Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, pp. 911–914.

millions of people, not only by introducing exotic faraway cultures and countries, but also by incorporating visitors' own countries and familiar cultures into a wider – imagined – global context.

World's fairs are an excellent example of a powerful system with no permanent institutionalized space: the geography of expositions consists of a series of points or stops in time and space. Yet, there are also important continuities. Whilst technologies changed and practices were modified, expos continued to merge physical and virtual mobilities in an unprecedented and spectacular manner. Expos were dependent on new transportation and communication technologies, which revolutionized the systems of mobilities of the era. In their turn, however, they eulogized and celebrated new mobile materialities. Mimi Sheller and John Urry emphatically note that “mobility is always located and materialised”.⁴⁹ Expos were ephemeral but essential global hubs, in which the new mobilities of the nineteenth century were manifested. The spectacularity of expos and the high-flown ambitions of representing the globe were, in fact, all based on mobility and materiality. Things and people were continuously departing and arriving, circulating and zigzagging – they were on the move.

⁴⁹ Sheller and Urry, “The New Mobility Paradigm”, p. 210.