# Editorial: Response to Issue 31(2) on World's Fairs

## Simplified Authenticity: Anthropological Displays at World's Fairs and Exhibitions

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World's fairs and international exhibitions do not cease to fascinate researchers. Just as the objects, people and ideas on display at these massive events captivated their audiences, many humanities disciplines have studied exhibitions with similar curiosity and interest. A vast number of publications comprising articles, monographs, anthologies and special issues have been written on individual world's fairs, histories of exhibitions in a single country, or the participation of a specific country in the expositions. They are approached from various subject areas, but most commonly and fruitfully from anthropology, ethnography or ethnology, or from my discipline, which is the history of art and design. While all of these have different methods, they often share their study material. Historians of art and design have examined, for example, the architecture of fairs, the design of the grounds, and exhibits of the visual arts, but also performances and displays of native people. And this is where the interests of art history meet anthropology.

Yet one can wonder if there is anything new that can be said about the topic. The short answer is yes. There are still areas, countries and exhibitions that have not been explored, but maybe that is not a good enough reason to expand the already expanded field. The better answer is that there are still many new angles one can use to approach this familiar topic and contribute to contemporary debates across disciplines. Decolonisation would be an obvious one, but other areas are also available. This is also why I welcomed the special issue of *AJEC* on world's fairs, exhibitions and anthropology, edited and introduced by Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, Hande Birkalan-Gedik, Andrés Barrera-González and Pegi Vail, with five contributions on different types of displays.

The articles on aspects of exhibitionary practices that are not directly related to my (or others') own research contained in this issue raise pertinent questions for me that are shared by those interested in visual displays involving Indigenous populations. The scope of the



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special issue is wide, and the articles on displays of Brazilians in London, Balinese performers in 1930s Paris, Argentinian exhibitions of Indigenous people, imperial legacies in the Buenos Aires exposition and ethnographic responses to Pan-Slavism in Moscow in 1867 have a wide geographical and historic span. Their common denominator is people, people on display and people who put them there. And it is the bigger questions and issues they raise that appeal to readers whose knowledge of all the different types of exhibitions across the world may be limited, myself included. Reading the articles, however, allowed me to reflect on my own research and relate it to the broader questions about displays that I share here.

What continues to fascinate me personally about world's fairs is their ability to simplify quite complex ideas for the purposes of visual presentation and ease of communication with their audiences. It is our job as researchers to complicate them again in order to uncover their implicit complexities. In their own ways, all the contributions to the special issue refer to simplification of ideas, whether by discussing the practice of lumping people together under the umbrella term 'Botocudos', constructing the authenticity of Balinese dancers, making Indigenous people into anonymised research subjects, reducing the impact of colonial legacies or promoting the construct of a single Pan-Slavic identity.

Recognising simplification of ideas is crucial in my research too. I focus on interwar world's fairs, but I have looked at other events preceding this period as well. These include the expositions in the USA and the national exhibitions in Prague. I am trying to read world's fairs from the point of view of Czechoslovakia, a state that emerged in 1918 as a new political entity and took part in every single world's fair and almost every international exhibition of the interwar period. Why did a new state exhort itself financially to do this? What image did it present there?

One particular area that interests me is the link between promoting the identity of a young, healthy nation and the theories of social Darwinism and eugenics. There are, I believe, close and uncomfortable parallels in the presentation of the Czechoslovak nation, which can be found, for example, in the way that it placed itself in the hierarchies of other nations and races or the way that it approached its minorities. The special issue addresses issues of racial hierarchy too, although without making explicit links to eugenics. The history of this 'science' is nevertheless intimately intertwined with world's fairs and identity-building. Soon after Czechoslovakia was established, the

use of eugenics was advocated to strengthen the people by putting emphasis on the health of individuals and the entire nation (Haškovec 1923). Presented as a Western and democratic science, eugenics could thus be employed to construct and display the new nation of healthy Czechs and Czechoslovaks. And indeed, at interwar Czechoslovak pavilions, the young nation was visualised by emphasising health and sports facilities, spas and clean, modern housing. In all the visual material, the people are white and mostly young. Such was the picture of the Czechoslovaks, the artificially created identity of two Slavic ethnic groups that in this way formed a majority over the substantial minorities of Germans and Hungarians in the new state. The selective representation of Czechoslovaks could therefore be explained by the attempt to present the nation in simplified, comprehensible tropes that were internationally recognisable.

In her article, Marina Cavalcante Vieira concentrates on shows in England and the USA that had native Brazilians, the Botocudos, at their centre. Their identity was constructed and reduced to easily comprehensible terms that emphasised the Botocudos' links to nature and primitivity. Nearly fifty years later, the Balinese dancers in the colonial exposition examined by Juliana Coelho de Souza Ladeira were highly mediatised, just like the Botocudos. The Balinese performances were to help justify Dutch colonisation, but also exoticised the individuals as well as their country of origin. Moreover, the attractive features of the female performers stressed by the press added to the idealised image of the people and the distant island, making connections between beauty and racial purity.

Idealisation and racial stereotyping were common features in both approaches to native communities and their display. As the articles suggest, one of the main aims of these practices was establishing racial difference. The seemingly homogeneous Czechoslovak nation was also shaped by internal and external hierarchisation. The understanding of the composition of the modern Czechoslovak nation was to a large extent influenced by the anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1943). Born in Bohemia, he moved to the USA and became a curator of physical anthropology at the US National Museum (today's Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History) and a great influence on the formation of the discipline of anthropology in Bohemia before 1918 and Czechoslovakia after 1918. While he and his colleagues from Czechoslovakia were involved in eugenics congresses and exhibits, Hrdlička also contributed to the definition of the Czechoslovaks for a pamphlet of the national pavilion at the Century of Progress in 1933.

He placed Slovaks on a less advanced level than the Czechs because of their historic isolation and political oppression by the Hungarians. Slovak folk culture, nevertheless, remained in his view purer for the same reasons (Hrdlička 1933: 23). Hrdlička's subsequent descriptions of Czechs and Slovaks read like a strange mixture of nineteenth-century rhetoric on national traits informed by the eugenics agenda. For instance, he emphasises the physical features of Slovaks ('strong, well-proportioned body, face more rounded than oval') and derives from them personal characteristics ('cordiality, sensitiveness, idealism, valor') (ibid.: 24).

The authors of the articles in the special issue also scrutinised reductive descriptions of people and their physical traits, so common in presenting ethnic difference or unity. Skin colour and physical features were emphasised as important markers of difference that came to prominence at world's fairs. Many world's fairs and European colonial expositions were considered anthropologists' paradises, for they brought various peoples from distant parts of the world to one place. Hrdlička was also intimately involved in earlier world's fairs, especially the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis in 1904 and the Panama California Exhibition in San Diego in 1915, which set a tone for presentation of humans at world's fairs for several decades. At the St. Louis World's Fair, he infamously retrieved the brains of three native Filipino people who died of pneumonia there for his later research, causing considerable controversy (Krenn and Gates 1998: 273). And at San Diego, Hrdlička co-curated the natural history exhibit, which showcased racial division of people according to technological development, classifying them into stages between savages and civilisation (Bokovoy 2008: 225).

Confined in one place at an exhibition or a show, Indigenous people became an easy target for research, as shown in all the special issue articles. All the while that the Botocudos were performing in London, for instance, they were also used as scientific material by local scientists. In the context of Argentinian exhibits, Diego Ballestero also discusses the anthropological practices of conducting measurements, collecting statistical calculations and taking photographs of Indigenous people, who thereby lost their individuality and became anonymised. In this way the exhibits also confirmed the modernity and supremacy of the anthropologists, like the German Robert Lehmann-Nitsche. The categorisation of people and creation of racial categories by Europeans is well known, but, as Nicolas Freeman points out, it came with a more or less conscious embrace of modernity.

In the case of Buenos Aires, his case study, Argentina's wish to be on a par with modern capitals translated into the organisation of a spectacular exhibition in 1910, but also a continued influence of the Spanish imperial legacy.

Proclaiming modernity in presentations abroad was crucial for my area of research, Czechoslovakia, as well. This was most obvious in the pavilions' architecture, in displays of design and in attitudes towards the folk culture of the countryside, which was placed in sharp contrast to modern, urban culture. Especially at the end of the nineteenth century, when Czech identity was formulated as part of the nation's revival, folk culture was seen as a repository of local identity. The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition held in Prague in 1895 focused on rural culture and the peasants of the Czech-speaking lands, with displays of recreations of rural dwellings, figurines of peasants and live performances of folk customs. Many aspects of this exhibition were similar to the All-Russian Ethnographic Exhibition discussed by Mariam M. Kerimova and Maria V. Zolotukhina. In Prague, the invented Czechoslavic identity was promoted and consciously omitted the German element. The All-Russian exhibition focused on Pan-Slavic unity, even though by the late 1860s, the idea was contested by many, including Czech intellectuals like Karel Havlíček Borovský. Kerimova and Zolotukhina do not talk explicitly about resistance to Pan-Slavic ideology or exclusions from the exhibition, but it may be assumed that the proposed and constructed Slavic unity had political goals of emphasising Slavic supremacy over non-Slavic groups in Russia and Central and Southern Europe.

Exhibitions of any size had the power to legitimise the displayed ideas and transmit them quickly to large audiences. Presenting what were deemed scientifically established facts about racial or ethnic composition and development was a common feature of the fairs and exhibitions, whether they appeared explicitly as eugenics exhibits or more subtly as presenting comparative material and artwork. The question I raised at the start about possible new directions in exhibitions research can have at least two answers, which are already suggested in the articles.

The first is to give agency to those very people that were subjected to scrutiny by anthropologists at the time and continue to be now. The special issue's articles highlight individual cases of the motivated display of humans by exhibition organisers, collectors or anthropologists. We learn mostly about the motivations of the anthropologists, entrepreneurs and academics, as well as the responses to the various

shows and performances in the press. But we only seldom find out about the actual experiences and responses of those who were subjected to anthropological or ethnographic scrutiny. One way of tackling the top-down approach of exhibitions studies would be to give those who were put on display a voice. This, indeed, is a very difficult task, which may not always be possible. Yet looking, for instance, for forms of resistance to or complicity in the colonial displays would open new avenues of research.

The other possible direction is to establish links and connections between individual case studies. It is clear that whether the subjects on display were native Brazilians and Argentinians, the Balinese, or Slavic peasants, they were all subjected to a similar emphasis on the modernity, progress, civilisation and primacy of those who put them there. And as a result, the culture and art of Indigenous people were simplified and reduced for easy consumption, while the people themselves were presented as either noble or savage, but always authentic. But as Henry Louis Gates Jr (1998: 207) reminds us, '"Authenticity" is among the founding lies of the modern age'. Questioning the construction and simplification of authenticity is only one of the many overarching, cross-cultural links and connections between individual case studies that can be drawn out and can fuel the interest and fascination in world's fairs and exhibitions.

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