

Memoria e Ricerca: Special Issue on European Exhibitions

Alexander CT Geppert

Exhibitions

ESPOSIZIONI IN EUROPA TRA OTTO E NOVECENTO:
SPAZI, ORGANIZZAZIONE, RAPPRESENTAZIONI

a cura di Alexander C.T. Geppert e Massimo Baioni

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ABSTRACTS

ALEXANDER C.T. GEPPERT

Brief Cities:

The History, Historiography and Theory of European Exposition Practices, 1851-2000

This article presents an introduction to the history and historiography of nineteenth and twentieth European expositions. Conceptualising large-scale exhibitions as transitory, yet recurrent 'meta-media', as a specific means of communication that encompasses and incorporates other communicative technologies, it suggests three analytical categories, i.e. transience, spatiality, and the chronotope. With the help of these categories only will it be possible, first, to overcome the type of useful, yet not completely satisfying hermeneutic readings for which exhibitions as dense, materialized and completely deliberate textures, stretched over time, inevitably call, and, second, to explain their far-reaching isomorphism, i.e. 'family resemblance', by means of careful chrono-chorological contextualisation.

ANDREA GIUNTINI

Mobility on Display:

Transport and Communication at the Exhibitions of the Second Industrial

Revolution

The world of exhibitions, which had particularly lasting effects on Europe and Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as during the so-called Belle Époque, presents one of the most suitable areas of research to analyse the evolution and the character of the first globalisation, as many scholars nowadays define this period. Means of transport and communication, whose most astonishing achievements - from the most powerful locomotives to the longest submarine cables - were displayed at all major exhibitions, aimed at accurately displaying the world's enlargement a global perspective. Thus, this analysis of the technological goods exhibited all over the continent contributes to further refining the definition of the concept of mobility during the era of the Second Industrial Revolution.

PAOLO BRENNI

From the Crystal Palace to the Palais de l'Optique:
Science at the Universal Exhibitions, 1851-1900

Universal exhibitions held during the second half of the nineteenth century represented one of the most characteristic events of Western society, of its achievements and of its conquests. Science and technology obviously played a significant role in these exhibitions. Science was often represented by instruments and didactic displays. However, if scientific instruments and apparatus could still arouse a certain interest on the part of the fair-going public between the 1850s and the early 1870s, during the last decades of the century exhibition visitors frequently expected to be amused rather than educated. Therefore, science often became the pretext for realizing large-scale, spectacular attractions, reaching their most theatrical manifestation in the Palais de l'Optique erected on the occasion of the 1900 Parisian Exposition universelle. Nevertheless, the role of exhibitions in popularising and diffusing science was far from being anecdotic only. These events constituted ideal arenas for organising important scientific congresses, and also stimulated the foundation of some of the most significant museums of science and technology.

ANGELA SCHWARZ

Transatlantic Transfers at Universal Exhibitions, 1851-1940

From its very beginnings in 1851, the medium of universal expositions claimed to assemble the whole world in one place, thus to be truly global. The more often people from different countries met to see the nations' economic and cultural prowess, the medium exposition itself acquired a canon of standardized elements, a kind of exhibition language that people of different national or cultural origin could easily decode. Where did a specific element originate? How did it re-appear in a following exhibition? Why did organizers and exhibitors incorporate a certain element typical of

a previous exposition in their own event? Thus, this article examines the transfer of such features, as it occurred between the world's fairs in Europe and in the United States, from the 1851 Great Exhibition through the world's fair held in New York at the onset of the Second World War. It delineates the most important characteristics adopted along five main categories: (1) aims and intentions, (2) forms of organisation, (3) architecture, (4) technologies, and (5) persons.

LUIGI TOMASSINI

Images of Universal Exhibitions in the European Illustrated Journals of the Nineteenth Century

The article analyses the ways in which the exhibitions held between 1815 and 1900 were represented in some of the most important European illustrated journals published in Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy. In addition to aiming at a comparative perspective, and hence at the dialectics between the national viewpoint and the international dimension, this contribution examines the specific usage of the iconic message and the ways in which it became integrated into - or developed parallel to - the complex texture of the journals themselves.

URSULA LEHMKUHL

A Reaper as a Catalyst:

The Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Social Construction of Anglo-American Friendship

During the nineteenth century hostile tensions between Great Britain and the United States were continually eased to a point, that at the end of the century both sides could speak of the existence of an Anglo-American "special relationship". Since political transformations of such a fundamental nature are usually accompanied by concomitant mental and normative changes, the article addresses the following questions: Which processes of cultural transfer created the ideational and normative basis of the "special relationship"? How did they contribute to its social and cultural consolidation? And what were the media carrying these transfer processes? Since world's fairs were an important medium of the nineteenth century and constituted global public spaces, the article argues that they also played a significant part in the structuring and transformation of global social and political relations. Through the mechanisms of visualization world's fairs conveyed new modes of interpreting social reality. In their function as communicative or even mediating agencies, they carried the processes of cultural transfer necessary for the social construction of Anglo-American friendship which preceded the birth of the so-called "special relationship".

ANNA PELLEGRINO

The "Great Oblivion":

Labour, Technology and Progress in Reports of Florentine Workers on the Milan Exhibition of 1906

This article deals with the journey of a group of Florentine workers and craftsmen sent - on behalf of the Municipality of Florence - to the International Exhibition held in Milan in 1906. The first section of the essay analyses the public discourses on the event, the formal procedure necessary to select the workers as well as the contradictions that such a kind of intervention entailed, with particular regard to planning strategies of social inclusion and integration. The article's second half then examines the reports which the workers themselves wrote after their return. These writings allow to comprehend different positions inside the working world, in particular those of a group of experienced workers, with a view to the "magnificence" of progress, and the problematic relationship between the world of labour and that of technology and industry, especially at that difficult time when a change from craft to mass production could be observed.

VANESSA OGLE

The Colonization of Time:

Representations of French Colonies at the Parisian Universal Exhibitions of 1889 and 1900

Exhibiting colonized people at nineteenth century world's fairs was a commonly practiced habit which both attracted and excited many visitors. At the two Parisian Expositions universelles of 1889 and 1900, "true" "natives" were to carry on their regular trade, had to continue their habitual daily life, were forced to perform dances, and also acted in theatres and gave concerts in "oriental" style music. In times of political instability during the Third Republic, the major aim of the French exhibition organizers was to display a success story of French overseas expansion. A postcolonial perspective on the representation of French colonies at the two expositions illustrates the ways in which display strategies of the administrators produced an unintended and dangerous vagueness. Due to the multiple ambivalences of colonialism, the important difference between the colonizer and the colonized proved extremely fragile and difficult to maintain.

MADDALENA CARLI

Re/producing Roman Africa:

The Italian Pavilions at the Exposition coloniale internationale, Paris 1931

On May 6 1931, the Exposition coloniale internationale opened in Paris. Among the numerous temporary buildings erected in the Bois de Vincennes for its six months of duration, three pavilions were to represent Italy: first, a replica of the basilica of Leptis Magna, originally built by Septimus

Severus, the first Roman emperor of African origins; second, a pavilion devoted to Italian possessions in the Aegean sea; and a third one simply entitled Italia, inspired by futurist ideas. These buildings, to which Mussolinian dictatorship assigned the task of conveying its colonial vocation to the French public, testify to both the diffusion of the Roman myth during the nineteen-thirties, and its specific position towards a ritual dimension inspired by the "cult of the lictor", as well as to a visual representation of history. From such a perspective, the three pavilions present fitting examples of what American historians have called the "inclination to exhibitionism" of Italian Fascism.

ANDREAS R. HOFMANN

Utopias of Nationhood:

Great Exhibitions in East Central Europe, 1891-1929

At the turn of the century, the multinational empires of East Central Europe - Russia, Prussia, and the Habsburg Monarchy - employed great exhibitions to represent their unchallenged claims for power. At the same time, nations willing to free themselves of that rule were sometimes able to inscribe their programmes of national liberation cryptically into regional exhibitions. During the interwar period, the now independent nations presented their achievements at national exhibitions. These were organized either with respect to the national minorities living within the frontiers of the new states, or they marginalized these minorities and conveyed utopian notions of national homogeneity. The article examines four exhibitions (Prague 1891, Pozna 1911, Brno 1928, and Pozna 1929), thus exemplifying varying exhibition policies and politics in East Central Europe.

TAMMY LAU

The Promise and Perils of the Internet in the Realm of Universal Exhibitions

This is a review of the most noteworthy and useful web sites on international expositions in Europe from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. It also discusses the powerful and unprecedented advantages but also inherent weaknesses of the world wide web as a research tool.

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