Two Exhibitions at the End of the Twentieth Century: Seville '92 and Lisbon '98

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ABSTRACT:

Studies that engage with the ideological aspects of international exhibitions highlight the connections between the worldviews promoted by such exhibitions and colonialism. The fact that world fairs have continued to be successful events throughout the 20th century and even into the 21st century speaks of persistent representational practices that reproduce and reinforce imperial world orders.

The two last exhibitions of the 20th century in the Expo series set out to commemorate two landmarks in European colonial history: Expo '92 in Seville marked the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas, and Expo '98 in Lisbon celebrated the (also) 500th anniversary of Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route from Western Europe to India. With Expo '92 and Expo '98, both Spain and Portugal attempted to assert their position in modern Europe, as well as an unequivocal European identity, by trading on their seminal roles in the context of the development of European imperialism and expansion, which, according to these commemorations, at the end of the twentieth century, was still perceived as vital to the construction of Europe's identity.

In a time when cultural theorists emphasise the importance of transnational paradigms with which to read the world, international exhibitions[2] continue to operate on a model that closely

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mirrors a world order based on the centrality of the nation-state. Several studies have highlighted the connections between the type of world views promoted by international exhibitions and colonialism, one of which, an iconic study in this area, 'The World as Exhibition' by Timothy Mitchell, going as far as to state that 'the age of the exhibition was necessarily the colonial age' (Mitchell 1989: 226). The fact that world fairs have continued to be successful events throughout the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first century – that is, well after what we might term 'the colonial age' – does not so much contradict Mitchell's assertion as it speaks of persistent representational practices that systematically both reproduce and necessarily reinforce imperial world views.[3] They do this by way of their largely uncritical assessment of the past, their political positioning in the present, and the triumphalist vision of the future they promote.

The two last exhibitions of the twentieth century in the Expo series are cases in point: they both set out to commemorate two landmarks in European colonial history: Expo '92 in Seville marked the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas, and Expo '98 in Lisbon celebrated the also five-hundredth anniversary of Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route from Europe to India. With Expo '92 and Expo '98, both Spain and Portugal attempted to assert their position in modern Europe, as well as their unequivocal European identity, by trading on their seminal roles in the context of the development of European imperialism and expansion. Judging by these commemorations, at the end of the twentieth century, such exhibitions were still perceived as vital to the construction of a European identity.

This article accordingly proposes a reading of Expo '92 and Expo '98 that engages with Spain and Portugal's re-assessment of their colonial pasts at public events with international visibility. In order to carry this out, two different lines of enquiry will be pursued: one related to the mode in which two former colonial powers have officially represented the world order in a so-called postcolonial time, and what that may say about both their perceived and their desired roles in that world – a question related to the stated purposes of the exhibitions and

[2] Since 1931, the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) – the organization that supervises and regulates World Expos – started to make a distinction between International Recognized Exhibitions (i.e. international expos: specialized theme, three months long) and International Registered Exhibitions (i.e. world expos or universal expos: general theme, six months long). The differences between these two types of exhibitions are not relevant for this article, and for the sake of readability, "international exhibitions", "world fairs" and "universal expositions" are used interchangeably.

[3] Their popularity has indeed declined when compared to the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth in terms of the number of expositions held, but not so much in terms of investment and attendance. For information relating to these indicators in recent Expos, see http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/.

the discourses around those purposes. The other line of enquiry involves the crucial dispute of whether nationalistic ideology is embedded in the very fabric of world fairs. This is an apparently more form-oriented question, relating to the material existence of international expositions. These two thematic areas will be discussed simultaneously. Brief reference will be made to two earlier exhibitions held in Seville and in Lisbon in the first half of the twentieth century, when both Spain and Portugal were under fascist dictatorships, in order to see whether they provide a precedent or contexts for the exhibitions held later in the century, as well as to posit continuums and ruptures in the way official narratives of history and identity shaped these events.

Two exhibitions under dictatorships

Albeit at a smaller scale, both Seville and Lisbon had already hosted important exhibitions earlier in the twentieth century: in 1929 Seville held the Exposición Ibero-Americana [Iberoamerican Fair], and in 1940 Lisbon put on the Exposição do Mundo Português [Exposition of the Portuguese World]. Already in the choice of the words for the names of the exhibitions – 'Iberoamerican' and 'Portuguese World' – a preoccupation with the wider reach of the Portuguese and Spanish nations is visible. In fact, both these exhibitions were held during dictatorships that were concerned with the maintenance of their regimes and their colonies, and saw in these exhibitions opportunities to legitimise their imperial policies, among others.

The 1929 Iberoamerican Fair was planned in the long aftermath of the loss of Spain's last colonies in the 'New World' (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, in 1898) and held during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, 'when the ideas of pan-Hispanism and the integrity of the nation state of Spain were increasingly prevalent' (Gristwood 1999: 157). At the time, Spain was also having to deal with the added challenges to the integrity of the nation-state provoked by Catalan and Andalusian claims to different degrees of independence from the central government, which undermined the dogma of national unity from within. The exhibition had hoped to promote a notion of pan-Hispanism by capitalising on the notion of a shared culture and a shared language, a strategy that ironically accentuated the existing strained domestic and international relations rather than projecting an image of a modern, unified nation. As noted by Anthony Gristwood:

> [i]n reconstructing the mythology of the foundation of the nation state of Spain in terms of a specifically Western modernity and imperialism, the fair [highlighted] the tensions within the category 'Spanish' between notions of purity and hybridity, reflected in the representation of Spain's Moorish past and the representational strategies adopted by Latin American participants (Gristwood 1999: 157).

One of the consequences of these representational strategies was the fact that the casting of Spain as 'Motherland' and the Spanish language as symbol and materialization of Spanish culture 'reinforced the idea of imagined communities at these different scales, and thus of the interconnection of regional, national and, indeed, international spaces.' (Gristwood 1999: 157). This was at odds with the ideological frame of the exhibition, for which the concrete centrality of Spain and the materiality of the wider reach of Spanish culture was essential for the national historical narrative of wholeness.

Notwithstanding the fact that the concept and even the design of the Iberoamerican Fair dated back to the first decade of the twentieth century, about twenty years before it came into existence (Gómez 2006: 1047-48), the fact that it immediately precedes the fall of Primo de Rivera in January 1930, apart from seeming ominous, is further proof that the identitary narrative proposed by the regime, and therefore by the exhibition did not find support with the majority of people that the exhibition supposedly reflected and spoke to. According to Penelope Harvey in *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the nation state and the universal exhibition*, the timing of the exhibition was also unfortunate in economic terms:

> On the eve of the European depression of the 1930s, Spain was unable to capitalize on this event. Ironically the event was made possible because many of the Latin American economies were experiencing a buoyancy as a direct result of the European crisis. Franco came to power soon after and the 1929 fair in many ways marked the beginning of Spain's long isolation from Europe. (Harvey 1996: 62)

This failure to profit from the event is even more flagrant when one bears in mind that, as noted by Sánchez Goméz in 'África en Sevilla: La Exhibición Colonial de La Exposición Iberoamericana de 1929', there were also economic and social reasons for holding the exhibition, such as the need to create modern infrastructures in Seville and the need to employ a large number of builders who were, at the time, unemployed (Gómez 2006: 1048).

Eleven years after the Iberoamerican Fair, in Lisbon, the 1940 Exposition of the Portuguese World marked the Dual Centenary of National Independence (1140 / 1640 [Duplo Centenário da Independência Nacional 1140 / 1640]). It was a celebration put on by Salazar's fascist regime meant to commemorate 1140 and 1640, respectively the independence from the kingdom of León in the twelfth century, and the restoration of independence, in the seventeenth century, after sixty years of Spanish rule. Ellen W. Sapega shows how Portuguese colonial interests in Africa and Asia were articulated in a continuum with other events in Portuguese history by the dictatorship to fuel the myth of the nation's 'imperial destiny':

> From [the late 1920s], to the moment of decolonization (or even after), this concept of imperial destiny was then embedded in the collective imaginary of both the colonies and the metropolis through the deployment of a series of discursive practices and performances whose goal was to ensure and administer the consent of the national populace in regard to the State's conservative political, economic and cultural programs. (Sapega 2007: 150)

Not only was the Exposition of the Portuguese World focused on reinforcing a historical narrative of the unity of Portugal and its colonies by insisting on Portugal's supposed exceptionality and singularity, and therefore distancing itself from other European countries in similar political situations, but with the exhibition, the regime wanted to 'give the world "the vigorous spectacle of a surprising and exceptional vitality" within a Europe that was "convoluted, agitated, revolutionised'" (Acciaiuoli 1998: 107, my translation).

Specific contexts aside, records of and commentators on the 1929 Iberoamerican Fair and the 1940 Exposition of the Portuguese World indicate that, overall, these were very much what

one would expect from official celebrations commissioned by fascist regimes for their citizens and for the rest of the world: an exaltation of past glories, an extolling of the present situation and an exhortation to the future: a way to both reassure and garner the support of the population for their political projects. In doing so, both Spain and Portugal distanced themselves from the rest of Europe, a position both countries had come to feel they should backtrack on with Expos '92 and '98.

In 'Festivals of Nationhood: The International Exhibitions', Graeme Davison summarises the importance of world expositions by comparing them to other global competitions with similar textual and symbolic power:

> Until the mid-twentieth century, when they were supplanted by the Olympic Games, the World Cup and the General Assembly of the United Nations, the international exhibitions were the most important of the symbolic battlegrounds on which nations demonstrated their prowess and tested the strength of their rivals. (Davison 1988: 158)

Scholarship on international exhibitions has gone on to emphasise their importance as texts in which to read colonial violence, whether in the shape of misrepresentation, under-representation or in the power they hold to deny or concede representational agency. Nicholas Thomas describes them as an example of 'the uneven entanglement of local and global power relations on colonial peripheries, particularly as these have been manifested in capacities to define and appropriate the meanings of material things' (Thomas 1991: xi). And indeed both the 1929 Iberoamerican Fair in Seville and the 1940 Exposition of the Portuguese World in Lisbon re-enacted the peripheral part the colonies played in the historiographic discourse of both Portugal and Spain by having the colonies represented as somewhat homogenous and generally devoid of individual characteristics, an amorphous elsewhere that served as the stage for these two empires to play out their desires for grandeur and international recognition (Gristwood; Sapega; Acciaiuoli).

The 'Postcolonial Age': Seville '92 and Lisbon '98

Great exhibitions are extraordinarily effective in the process of defining and appropriating material things. In 'The World as Exhibition', Mitchell establishes three characteristics that work towards this purpose: first, their aesthetics of sureness: 'the apparent certainty with which everything seems ordered and organized, calculated and rendered unambiguous – ultimately, what seems to be its political decidedness' (Mitchell 1989: 226); second, the fact that they present themselves as a representation of reality, but because there is limited or no other access, on the part of its audience, to the reality that the exhibition is trying to represent, the exhibition effectively *becomes* that reality; third, that the golden age of world fairs was inevitably the colonial age, as they reproduced an imperial world order (Mitchell 1989: 226). This third characteristic is the issue that this article tries to address.

In the shape of the Expo series that has survived to the present, international exhibitions today continue to attract millions of people and great amounts of public and corporate investment, but their popularity has decreased considerably since the mid-twentieth century. Some of the causes that have been pointed out for that decline are the increasing ubiquity of images, the democratization of tourism, and the proliferation of museums, but before these factors became relevant, exhibitions were often one of the few chances people had to be acquainted with things that were not geographically close, from which derived their power as authoritative representations of the world.

According to Harvey, '[t]he tension between romanticism and positivism, between images of an enduring past and an innovative future, between the nation as cultural entity and the state as rationalizing bureaucracy, has been central to the image and conceptualization of the nation state at universal exhibitions since 1851' (Harvey 1996: 55). To a certain extent, the creation of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) has reduced these tensions, in the sense that its rules establish themes and preoccupations that should be addressed by universal exhibitions, and in doing so, straightforward nationalistic agendas are more likely to be toned down.

The BIE was created, in 1928, as an intergovernmental organisation that would take bids for the holding of international expositions, assess their feasibility and monitor the adherence of each host country to basic principles of trust, solidarity and progress. Until very recently, on the BIE's official website, Expos were defined as 'the intersection of cultural diversity and innovation, where civilizations share their know-how with the goal to identify, together, the

best prospects and the best solution to face the major challenges for humanity'.[4] Considering the abundant evidence of the instrumentalization of world fairs,[5] and the fierce competition to be granted the authorization to stage one, the BIE's description of Expos struck a rather simplistic chord. Dispersed through the website there were also references to other important aspects of Expos, such as advantages for corporate participants and the opportunities for economic development and cooperation between participant countries, as well as the prestige associated with hosting such an event, but generally speaking, the emphasis was put on a harmonious gathering and knowledge sharing between different cultures for the sake of the world rather than on a jockeying between countries and covert political and economic agendas. However, the BIE has very recently updated and reorganized its webpage, and today, a search for the web page referred to will result in a 'page not found' message[6]. The overall look of the current webpage is more professional, and the information to be found there is more complete and polished. The way the BIE now describes Expos has altered:

> An Expo is a global event that aims at educating the public, sharing innovation, promoting progress and fostering cooperation. It is organized by a host country that invites other countries, companies, international organisations, the private sector, the civil society and the general public to participate. Due to the diversity of its participants, from top decision makers to children, Expos offer a multifaceted event where extraordinary exhibitions, diplomatic encounters, business meetings, public debates and live shows take place at the same time.[7]

[4] http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/home/values-symbols, accessed 6 June 2014.
[5] An iconic example would be what came to be known as "the kitchen debate" between the then Vice-President of the United States Richard Nixon and the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during the former's visit to the American National Exhibit in Moscow, on July 24 1959. In a conversation that oscillated uncomfortably between diplomacy and threat, as they were walking past the model kitchen in the model American house, Nixon offered the all-electric kitchen as an example of the US's technological superiority over the Soviet Union, and by extension of the virtues of a democratic and capitalist society, and suggested the two countries competed over domestic rather than nuclear technology. Khrushchev, unwilling to be drawn into Nixon's gestures towards the demotic, nonetheless kept insisting that Russian housewives had all the gadgets Americans had, not wanting to admit to being inferior in any way. http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-kitchen-debate/, accessed 6 June 2014
[6] Full message: "**We've Recently Upgraded Our Website** Since we implement the new design of our website we have had to change numerous pages. Since that has happened some of bookmarks, google links and other links to our website probably have changed. Please update your bookmarks" http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/home/values-symbols, accessed 15 March 2015.
[7] http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/expos/about-expos/what-is-an-expo, accessed 15 March 2015.

The stress on harmony, cooperation and amicability remains in the BIE's discussion of different aspects of Expos, but there is now a recognition of other factors at play, in which a competitive edge in the diplomatic world and in business are openly stated as positive outcomes of these events.

Expo'92 in Seville had as its theme 'The Era of Discovery', and set out to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas. In 'Commemorating empire in twentieth-century Seville', Gristwood notes that '[t]he legacy of the Spanish empire was recast by Expo '92 in two senses: first, as a narrative of imperial history in which "discovery" was re-imagined in terms of technological process and the modernist project of knowledge gathering; second, in terms of contemporary multiculturalism, with the city of Seville itself as an intercultural "bridge" or meeting place"' (Gristwood 1999: 166). A successful event by most standards,[8] the insistence on the polysemic nature of the word 'discovery' did not distract from its colonial associations, and it faced severe criticism and boycotting from some groups which considered it an escapist manoeuvre that diverted from more pressing questions such as '[f]iscal reforms, new employment policies, and long-term financial commitment to social programmes' (Harvey 1996: 63) that would address social inequalities.

Harvey also suggests that the participation of different countries in Expo'92, and which can also be said to be true in most events of this type, was conceived in terms of the 'promotion of images which expressed the relationship between their particular nation state and Western European capitalism' (Harvey 1996: 67). She offers examples of European Community nations, which 'all projected themselves as strong, assertive, autonomous partners engaged in a common enterprise' (Harvey 1996: 67); of other European countries, which tried to position themselves within 'the history that has produced economic possibilities for this set of twelve western nations, and who simultaneously sought to promote their national territories, resources and skills as grounds for the continuation and expansion of western prosperity' (Harvey 1996: 67), possibly with a view to enjoying a more active part in and profit from that prosperity; of the presence of South American countries requested by the Spanish Government 'as support for the cultural and historical edifice through which it hoped to address it [sic] own population and the governments and business concerns of the wider European Community' (Harvey 1996: 68); and of the presence of at least some African

[8] 112 states represented; attendance: 41,814,571 visits (15,540,628 visitors).

countries essential for the exhibition to be considered universal (Harvey 1996: 68). As a trade-off,

> The South American and African states … could look to find in this event possibilities for investment, for the promotion of tourism, even for the small-scale business activities of particular entrepreneurs who used the pavilions as venues for the sales of artefacts and meals marketed as products of their respective 'national cultures'. Larger companies could use the pavilions as novel sites for corporate entertainment. (Harvey 1996: 68)

These uneven trade-offs can be read in terms of wider economic and political relationships that reproduce themselves in the microcosmos of the exhibition.

Expo'98 in Lisbon had 'The Oceans, a Heritage for the Future' as its theme.[9] Apparently less focused on the country's colonial past than Expo '92, like its Spanish counterpart it also celebrated a landmark in Portuguese imperial history: the five-hundredth anniversary of Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route to India. As with the Seville Expo six years earlier, there was a nostalgic nod to the past, and in this particular case, obvious connections with the dictatorship's idea of the 'imperial destiny' (achieved via the sea).

In an article entitled 'The Impacts of Mega-events: the case of EXPO'98 – Lisbon', Jonathan Edwards, Miguel Moital and Roger Vaughan contend that the hosting of mega events such as international exhibitions functions as a boost to the appeal of a tourist destination. Expos attract tourists by creating infrastructures and through the international exposure that the media give them. Though this is not the only area that benefits from mega-events, tourism can be seen to benefit from them both in the short and the long run. In the particular case of Expo'98, an area of 340ha of urban space on the eastern side (waterfront) of Lisbon was rehabilitated, an area which had been previously occupied by degraded industrial buildings, and that since the Expo has acquired an important role[10] in the urban makeup of the city.

[9] May to September 1998; over 150 countries and NGOs represented; 11 million visitors.

[10] An exemplary role, according to Jean-Paul Carrière and Christophe Demazière, "Urban Planning and Flagship Development Projects: Lessons from EXPO 98, Lisbon", in *Planning Practice & Research*, vol. 17, nº 1 (2002). In contrast, the site for Expo '92 in Seville, which was also developed to rehabilitate the space in and around Isla

Edwards, Moital and Vaughan discuss the context for Portugal's bid to host an Expo, and they suggest two distinct, but correlated influential circumstances: the achievement of a Parliamentary majority in 1987, which meant political stability under a democracy for the first time since the Revolution in 1974, and the admission of Portugal to the European Union in 1986, which allowed access to funding for infrastructural development. As a consequence, according to the article, '[a]s a relatively under-developed country Portugal was anxious to make progress toward the standards of well being and prosperity of developed European countries' (Edwards et al 2004: 199). This, among other things, meant hosting an Expo. In the same article, the authors list the stated objectives of the exhibition, as described in an official, if unpublished, document: '(1) reassertion of a national vocation, (2) repositioning of the country in the new European context, (3) urban regeneration, (4) celebration of the discoveries, (5) tourism promotion and (6) economic stimulus' (Edwards et al 2004: 200).

A recognition that the centres of empires had been changed by the experience of colonialism was, for the most part ignored in favour of the visibility of the supposed civilizing influence of Europe, something that has not gone unnoticed by observers who have remarked that '[Expo '98] drew upon imaginative geographies of exploration and discovery' (Power and Sidaway 2005: 866) by

> [occluding] other geographies that were intrinsic to the 'Discoveries'. Such critical thinking about Expo '98 (in the context of prior Portuguese expositions earlier in the twentieth century) is thus suggestive, for Portuguese historical and geographical narratives continue to claim a pioneering European and original Portuguese role in exploration and discovery and, hence, in the making of a putatively Western-centred modernity. (Power and Sidaway 2005: 866)

Graeme Davison's summary that 'the most persistent paradox of the exhibition movement – that its promoters were usually more interested in cultivating an image of modernity than absorbing the spirit of modernity itself' (Davison 1988: 173) indicates that the crucial flaw of both Expo '92 and Expo '98 is, in fact, symptomatic of world fairs in general. In this sense,

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de la Cartuja, has been abandoned and stands derelict with most structures and artwork commissioned for the exhibition in ruins.

the exhibitions held at the end of the twentieth century in Seville and in Lisbon were in fact not so ideologically distant from their predecessors after all.

Another way to further theorise Expo '98 is in relation to Boaventura de Sousa Santos's crucial study of Portuguese colonialism and identity, 'Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Inter-identity'. Santos advocates here that Portuguese colonialism was a 'subaltern colonialism' (Santos 2002: 9), that this was a consequence of the semi-peripheral position Portugal has occupied in the capitalist world system since the seventeenth century and that it 'has continued to reproduce itself in the way in which Portugal has become part of the European Union' (Santos 2002: 9). Other Portuguese social critics such as Eduardo Lourenço (Lourenço 1988) and José Gil (Gil 2004) sustain that Portuguese identity issues are focused on national images or modes of representation, as the aspects that tend to characterise a nation, or indeed divide it – such as territory, language, shared myths and ethnic background – have been fixed in Portugal for over 800 years. Both Lourenço and Gil trace the current difficulties in creating a positive self-image to the right-wing dictatorship (1926-1974), which particularly under Salazar worked towards a dilution of any sense of a forward-looking national project in favour of occupying symbolic identificatory locations that were supposed to be timeless and intrinsic to the nation.

The insistence in many areas of cultural life, at the end of the twentieth century, on representing Portugal as a country looking out to sea and forever focused on its so-called historical maritime vocation has kept the country with more than its metaphorical back turned to the rest of Europe, translating into, to borrow from Boaventura de Sousa Santos's conceptualization, Portugal's 'subaltern Europeanism', of which the country's present relationship with/dependence on the International Monetary Fund is an example. With Expo '98 however, Portugal rehearsed a new modern master narrative as the event

> offered a signal, visible occasion for the country's political and economic elites to promote new definitions of Portuguese modernity; to confirm the country's new European status; to extend the state's post-colonial nation-building project, including attempts to reinterpret past imperial relationships with its former colonies (…); and to evaluate the quality and success of the nation's relatively young democracy. (Sieber 2001: 552)

The exhibition, nonetheless, was severely criticised for effectively camouflaging a long history of colonial violence under the promotion of supposedly beneficial cultural encounters and exchanges. One example of this is the fact that, according to Sieber, 'pavilions of all the ex-colonies at the world's fair focused favourably on the Portuguese presence in their countries and were oriented toward the promotion of investment, trade, and tourism from Portugal and Europe more widely' (Sieber 2001: 573). One can imagine these ex-colonies were making severe concessions in the staging of their histories so that they too could participate in the same circuits of the capitalist economy that Portugal sought to be part of by hosting an international exhibition. Such instances of neo-imperialism, the representational anxiety over Portugal's modernity and the exclusion of immigrant communities at the event (despite the fact that they were heavily present in the building process as day labourers) signal that Portugal was following the lead of other Central European countries to, in Sieber's words, 'reassert influence over former colonies, place greater restrictions on immigration from these same peripheral regions, and question the status and rights of immigrant communities resident in Europe' (Sieber 2001: 576).

The future of exhibitions

Perhaps it is inevitable that the very nature of expositions will reproduce colonial structures, as relations of power are necessarily reinforced by visual representations. It is widely accepted that along with world fairs,

> [m]useums and anthropology are undeniably part of a western philosophical tradition, embedded in a dualism which becomes problematic as a conceptual framework for addressing issues of representation. Entrenched oppositions between 'self/other', 'subject/object', 'us/them' inevitably leave power in the hands of the defining institution. (Cruikshank quoted in Hallam 2000: 260)

No wonder then that, as Tony Bennett points out, '[s]ince the late nineteenth century' museums, galleries and exhibitions 'have been ranked highly in the funding priorities of all

developed nation-states and have proved remarkably influential cultural technologies in the degree to which they have recruited the interest and participation of their citizenries' (Bennett 1999: 338). Historically, they have contributed to a collective sense of national identity through identification with shared symbols and goals, they have attempted to work as educative and civilizing agencies, and today, despite having been decreed a dying form, international expositions still attract large attendances and they still attract a large amount of public and corporate investment which is not prepared to relinquish established national myths and narratives so easily. In this sense, world expos seem to correspond to the flags that are raised in Peter Hitchcock's formulation of his thesis regarding the concept of nation:

> Nation seems like the anachronism of anachronisms: it parades its habitual out-of-timeness by raising flags in the face of transnationalism, regionalism, economic and political blocs, and continental integrity. But it does this in both senses of the phrase 'raising flags'; it celebrates its longevity in the ritual of nationalistic display while also serving as a warning to all those who believe its fictive assemblage somehow negates the material substance of its collectivity. (Hitchcock 2010: 6)

In the last chapter of *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States*, Robert Rydell, John Fidling and Kimberly Pelle discuss the different roles played by international exhibitions in the US and elsewhere according to the historical and cultural moment in which they were put on, and conclude that '[i]n addition to transferring technologies and allegories of imperial triumph across national boundaries, world's fairs generated powerful feelings of technological utopianism that shored up sagging public confidence in the capacity of industry and technology to solve social and political problems' (Rydell et al 2000: 134-35). In the 1970s, however, the focus changed to include a concern over environmental issues which, along with sustainability, remain the most popular themes these days. Having served as a promoter of capitalism and globalization, expositions have recently tried to detach themselves from 'the older ideology projected by earlier fairs that equated economic and industrial growth and scientific and technological advances with progress' (Rydell et al 2000: 140). But as seems to have continued to be the case with Expos '92 and '98, embedded in the very shape of

international exhibitions is a worldview in which the host country is inevitably at the centre and other participants assume a peripheral position, thus necessarily reproducing and promoting, unwittingly or otherwise, a hierarchy that is akin to an imperial world order.

These days the emphasis is on sustainability and on how an Expo can aid a city to rebrand itself and gain a competitive edge. This development can be seen throughout the statements on the BIE's website, and particularly in a speech by the Secretary General of the BIE, Vicente González Loscertales, 'Cities and Universal Expos' in June 2008, where he states that 'The legacy of the great Expos of the past century has the stamp of time – a lingering memory of an old world order. The legacy of recent and current Expos is far more forward looking – in these Expos legacy translates into sustainability and sustainability translates into the position of the world cities in the competitive landscape.'[11] The caveat here is, of course, the double bind of sustainability and sustainable practices which, more often than not, run counter to the immediate need to create wealth quickly, a position with which many countries are confronted in this time of economic crisis. In this way, countries that are already struggling in the economic arena have yet another indicator – that of sustainability – working to keep them at a lower ranking than more well-off countries.

National identities, like all identitary typologies, are in a constant state of becoming, and more so in times of crisis such as the deep economic crisis that Europe is facing at the moment. With the shift of emphasis in great exhibitions, from the display of political, military and industrial might to a more naked link with economic power (notice how all Expos have been hosted either by established or emergent economies), it will be interesting to see how long the fictional domain of the past holds as the main narrative for former colonial countries to represent themselves and others.

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