

Ethnographic showcases, 1870-1930

Corbey, Raymond

Published in:

Cultural Anthropology: Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology

Publication date:

1993

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Corbey, R. H. A. (1993). Ethnographic showcases, 1870-1930. Cultural Anthropology: Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology, 8(3), 338-369.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- ? Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research
- ? You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- ? You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Ethnographic Showcases, 1870–1930

Raymond Corbey
Department of Philosophy
Tilburg University

Il n'y a ni bourg, ni hameau, ni maison séparée dans l'île; Zamé a voulu que toutes les possessions d'une province fussent réunies dans une même enceinte afin que l'oeil vigilant du commandant de la ville pût s'étendre avec moins de peine sur tous les sujets de la contrée

—D. A. F. de Sade, *Aline et Valcour*

“To see is to know”—this motto was attached to the anthropological exhibits of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, one of the many world fairs during the era of imperialism and colonialism (Rydell 1984:44). At these gigantic exhibitions, staged by the principal colonial powers, the world was collected and displayed. Natives from a wide range of colonized cultures quickly became a standard part of most manifestations of this kind. Together with their artifacts, houses, and even complete villages, so-called savages or primitives were made available for visual inspection by millions of strolling and staring Western citizens. Comparable places of spectacle such as zoos, botanical gardens, circuses, temporary or permanent exhibitions staged by missionary societies and museums of natural history, all exhibited other races and/or other species and testified to the imperialism of 19th-century nation-states.

In this article I will put these ethnographic exhibits into the wider context of the collecting, measuring, classifying, picturing, filing, and narrating of colonial Others during the heyday of colonialism. All these modes of dealing with the exotic, with colonial otherness, functioned in a context of European hegemony, testifying to the successful imperialist expansion of 19th-century nation-states and to the intricate connections that developed between scientific and political practices. Of course, I cannot bypass the historical changes and national differences in exhibitionary practices in the period under study—the last decades of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century—but I will concentrate on the similarities, which in my view are predominant, arguing that it is possible to have a wide range of seemingly divergent modes of dealing with the Other within one single analytic field.

The World on Show

World fairs or international expositions (*exposition universelle, Weltausstellung*) were very large-scale happenings that combined features of trade and industrial fairs, carnival, music festivals, political manifestations, museums, and art galleries. But primarily they were "pilgrimage sites of commodity fetishism," as Walter Benjamin (1984:441) put it rather pointedly. From 1851 onward, when the first international exposition took place in London, an enormous variety of industrial and technological products were exhibited, including steam machines, lawn mowers, elevators, photographic cameras, mechanized weaving looms, and household appliances. In addition, colonial raw materials and products were displayed, along with archaeological artifacts. Various architectural styles were presented, and after 1885 the arts became a recurrent theme. The idea was to show progress in all fields—not only in industry, trade, and transportation, but also in the arts, the sciences, and culture. Meanwhile, there was no mention of poverty, sickness and oppression, or social and international conflicts.

World fairs have been compared to gigantic potlatches, joyous ritual displays of richness and power, where possessions were given away and even destroyed in great numbers in order to gain prestige and to outdo others, as occurred among the Kwakiutl and other Indian cultures of the North American Northwest Coast (Benedict 1983:7 ff). In both cases—world fairs and potlatches—ritualized competition, gaining prestige, and keeping up reciprocity between parties of comparable caliber played important roles. Both kinds of manifestations were large-scale, expensive festivals that—having social, economic, political, juridical, moral, and aesthetic aspects—displayed the character of a *fait social total* in the sense of M. Mauss, and both regulated relationships between rival groups (such as nations and large cities). Economic interests went hand in hand with cultural ones, and nationalistic ambitions were apparent with the international character of the fairs, where each country built its own monumental pavilion in its particular national style. The architecture was meant to impress; it could never be large, imposing, or unusual enough: the Crystal Palace (London), the Eiffel Tower (Paris), the Atomium (Brussels). The first world fair, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, in the Crystal Palace in London in 1851, attracted 6 million visitors; the world fair in Paris in 1878, 16 million; the 1900 Paris fair, still before the era of the cinema and television, 50 million.

So-called colonial exhibitions—such as the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886, the British Empire Exhibition in 1924–25, or the Exposition Coloniale in Paris in 1931—were even more closely associated with the idea and ideal of empire. But even for the 1851 Great Exhibition, the Society of Arts had fanatically developed scenarios for, as one of its spokesmen put it, "promoting and spreading Christianity, civilization and commerce among peoples still steeped in barbarity and idolatry—in terms of quantity nearly half of humanity" (quoted in Haltern 1971:314). World fairs quickly became inseparable from imperialism and nationalism. For the British Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, a historical pageant was staged with fifteen thousand participants that took three days to pass (Benedict

1983:47). With this gigantic spectacle, accompanied by music and texts written for the occasion, and structured like a heroic epos governed by a fundamental opposition between the civilized and the barbaric, the English people, self-consciously and full of pride, presented and represented their newly created world empire. Such manifestations are of interest in the present context, not only because colonial natives had a role to play too, but also because they express the civilizatory idiom that formed the basis of contemporary views of "primitives," tied up with imperialist ideology and social Darwinism.

In covering the Great Exhibition, the German newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung* stressed the prevalent "spirit of encyclopaedism" (Halter 1971:352). In the course of their development, the encyclopedic character of world exhibits—an explicitly stated goal—became increasingly prominent. The history of subjects like the home, labor, and transportation was shown, while an equally panoramic variety of cultures was displayed. An inventory and census of the whole world and the whole history of humankind was constructed in a way reminiscent of medieval maps of the world—*mappae mundi*, offering an encyclopedic survey of the world as creation—or of cabinets of curiosity during the Renaissance. During the same period, journals like the French *Le Tour du Monde*, with their synoptic and panoptic illustrations usually copied from photographs, had a comparable function, as did photography as such, not least as put to use at the world fairs (Favrod 1989; Lederbogen 1986; Theye 1989).

In all cultures, political and religious elites tend to accumulate and flaunt their rare and precious objects from faraway places in order to gain prestige and to display their knowledgeability. Everyone from Renaissance princes and cardinals to Chinese emperors owned collections of exotic animals, objects, and even people. Something similar happened at world fairs, where not individual collectors but states, metropolises, and their elites were involved. Mary Helms offers the analogy of the tribal shaman's medicine pouch holding a collection of strange objects. The more rare and exotic these objects, the more effective they were and the more they contributed to the shaman's prestige and power.

The emperor's zoo and botanical gardens, like the shaman's pouch, contained bits and pieces of the animate cosmos, power-filled natural wonders, examples of the rare, the curious, the strange, and the precious—all expressions of the unusual and the different attesting to the forces of the dynamic universe that by definition lies outside the (again by definition) controlled, socialized, civilized heartland. [Helms 1988:166]

In each of these cases, a microcosm sampled and presented the macrocosm. The world fair can also be read as a microcosm, created by the Promethean Western middle classes, with their unlimited trust in Enlightenment ideas and the rational constructibility of the world—a world made after their own image, to European standards. Here, nature was of only secondary importance, appearing only in the shape of cultivated crops and painted backdrops; here, everything had been fabricated by man. Marx and Engels referred to the Great Exhibition as "a pantheon in modern Rome" where the bourgeoisie class of this world "exhibits with self-con-

gratulatory pride the gods it has created for itself' (quoted in Haltern 1971:314). In high euphoria, the bourgeoisie celebrated progress, the attainment of world power, and the creation of Western middle-class culture by its own efforts—which, in its own eyes, was the purpose to which world history (and indeed cosmic evolution) had been directed from its earliest beginnings. Progress and civilization were the key concepts behind these large-scale representations of middle-class Selves and savage Others. Another prominent theme was the Enlightenment ideal of universal brotherhood, connected with the Christian ideals of peace and love.

World fairs, as Carol Breckenridge (1989:196) remarks, were part of a unitary, though not necessarily uniform, landscape of discourse and practice, providing a cultural technology for situating metropole and colony within a single analytic field, thus creating an imagined ecumene. The fairs told the story of mankind, the very same narrative that accompanied and legitimized colonial expansion. In this epic, staged by themselves, white, rational, civilized European citizens cast themselves in the role of the hero.

Savages on Show

Placed alongside all kinds of objects and products, colonial natives quickly became a standard part of world fairs, for the education and entertainment of Western citizens. Not only the citizens themselves but also the natives figured as categories in Western representations of Self, as characters in the story of the ascent to civilization, depicted as the inevitable triumph of higher races over lower ones and as progress through science and imperial conquest. Often ethnologists were ahead of their times concerning interpretations of other cultures, but Charles Rau, for one, who created the ethnological exhibits at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876 on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution, stated that

the extreme lowness of our remote ancestors cannot be a source of humiliation; on the contrary, we should glory in our having advanced so far above them, and recognize the great truth that progress is the law that governs the development of mankind. [Quoted in Rydell 1984:24]

Two years later, the Paris world fair of 1878 was the first one in which many people from non-Western cultures were exhibited, in specially constructed pavilions and "native villages" (*Village indigène*). The display of 400 natives from the French colonies Indochina, Senegal, and Tahiti met with huge success, as did the exhibits of indigenous peoples from Java, Samoa, Dahomey, Egypt, and North America itself at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.

Native villages were a standard part of world fairs from 1878 onward. Equally popular were the "foreign streets" such as the "Rue de Caire." Around the turn of the century, the International Anthropological Exhibit Company commercially exploited exhibitions of non-Western people in the United States in several settings, including world fairs. At the Dutch "Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel Tentoonstelling" at Amsterdam in 1883, natives from the Dutch East Indies and

West Indies were shown. The Greater Britain Exhibition of 1899 included a “Kaffir Kraal—A Vivid Representation of Life in the Wilds of the Dark Continent,” an exhibit featuring African animals and 174 natives from several South African peoples brought under control only shortly before. They were divided into four native villages, showing their crafts, performing “war dances,” and riding on ponies. Among them were San, who characteristically were exhibited as part of the natural history of Africa, together with baboons (MacKenzie 1984:104). Often the European impresarios traveled from one world fair to another with the same group of people—the Senegalese who constituted the well-known “Senegalese village” (Figure 1), for example—and had them perform at other venues and on other occasions as well.

A brochure commenting on the “Village from Dahomey” at the Imperial International Exhibition of 1909 stressed the violent brutality of indigenous Africa, especially Dahomey with its “bloodthirsty potentates” and woman warriors or “Amazons” who were one of the main attractions of the village; it praised the French intervention in 1892 with the following words:

Order and decency, trade and civilization have taken the place of rule by fear of the sword. France has placed its hand on the blackest spot in West Africa, and wiped out some of the red stain that made Dahomey a byword in the world. . . . Today . . . (the) days of savagery are passing away. [Quoted in MacKenzie 1984:116]

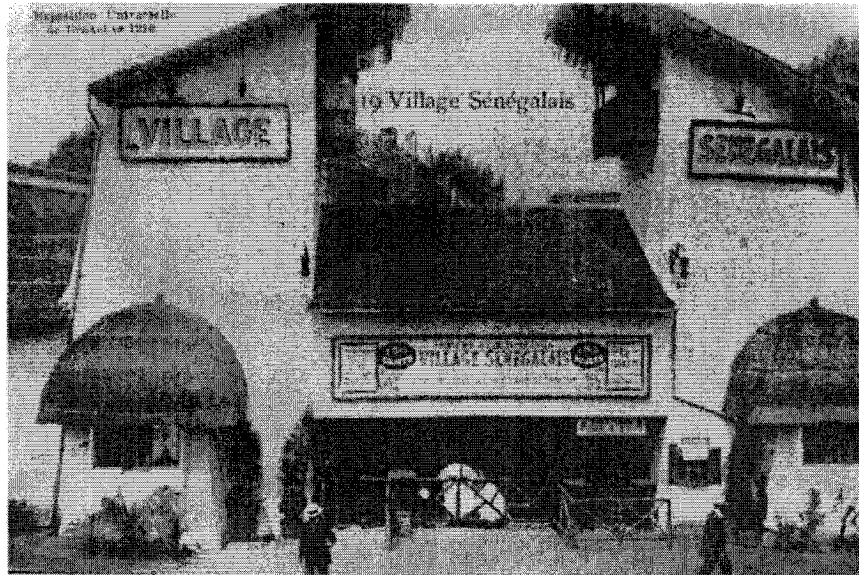


Figure 1

“Senegalese Village” in the Brussels world fair of 1910, the setting of physical confrontation of European citizens with exotic Africans, for amusement and edification. Over the entry—a semiotically highly charged threshold between two worlds, one primitive and one civilized—religion, trades, songs, dances, tam-tam, and a harem are announced. Postcard, collection of P. Faber, Amsterdam.

It was light against dark, order against violence, and a European nation as the bringer of civilization. The exhibited “Amazons”—depicted as both barbarous and alluring, true personifications of the Dark Continent—performed throughout Europe. When they appeared in the Moskauer Panoptikum in Frankfurt in 1899, they were introduced as “wild females”—*wilde Weiber*. A group of women from Samoa (Figure 2), however, was described by the press and in brochures as a breathtakingly beautiful, always cheery, erotically permissive, and lazy people from the paradisiacal Pacific Ocean (Plakate 1880–1914:257). North American Indians were similarly idealized and romanticized.

The 1909 world fair that featured the Amazons also included a native village of nomadic Kalmuks from Central Asia, brought under the control of the Russian empire shortly before. At the Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung of 1896, which led to the foundation of the Deutsches Kolonialmuseum, over a hundred natives from the German colonies were present, each group in its own carefully imitated cultural and natural setting. They had to call “hurrah” at set times in praise of emperor and *Reich* (G. Schneider 1982:167). Governments were keenly aware of the opportunity to publicize their colonial policies and to manipulate public attitudes toward the newly acquired territories. German, Dutch, and Irish villages, among others, with native people in traditional clothing were also (re)presented at the world fairs as part of the



Figure 2

A direct consequence of German colonial expansion. “Our new fellow-countrymen.” *Schautruppe* from Samoa performing in the Berliner Tiergarten in 1900 or 1901. Cabinet photograph, Marquardt Brothers, collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

national exhibits, staged in this case, however, by the exhibited peoples themselves, not their colonizers.

It seems to have been quite usual for visitors to throw money to the performing natives and for the natives to beg for it. The exhibited peoples' behavior and movement was strictly controlled. They were presented as "different" and forced to behave that way. At most—though not all—manifestations, it was unthinkable that they should mingle spontaneously with the visitors, and usually there were few possibilities for contact between parties. The living exhibits had to stay within a precisely circumscribed part of the exhibition space, which represented their world; the boundary between this world and that of the citizens visiting and inspecting them (Figure 3), between wildness and civility, nature and culture, had to be respected unconditionally. All signs of acculturation were avoided as long as the natives were on show. One of my colleagues who grew up in postwar Berlin told me of his astonishment when, as a boy, he came across an African man whom he had seen only hours before in native attire at Castan's Panoptikum, now in European clothes on a tramcar, smoking a cigarette. Primitivity was staged in minute detail.

The desirability of "civilizing" North American Indian peoples was an important theme at the St. Louis fair, as it was at other world fairs in the United States. Their "dull-minded and self-centered tribal existence" had to be replaced by "[the] active and constructive and broadminded life of modern humanity" (Francis 1913:529, quoted in Benedict 1983:50). The imposition of cultural assimilation, as



Figure 3

An imperial encounter. "African Village: Women eating their meal," scrutinized by visitors to the colonial exposition at Antwerp in 1930. The gaze of the visitors is not returned. Postcard, collection of S. Wachlin.

typical of internal colonialism in the United States as it was of French colonialism, was less important in the English colonial regime. English visitors of French world fairs and colonial exhibitions, therefore, often expressed their astonishment when confronted with indigenous people in European clothing. In St. Louis, the living exhibits were typically organized on a scale from civilized to barbaric. The lower a people or race was deemed to be, the further removed it was from the "Indian school" that marked one pole of the scale, that of civilization. Philippine Igorots and African Pygmies were situated near the pole of barbarity at the other end of the scale.¹ At the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, the opposition between wild and civilized and the desirability of civilizing peoples that were still wild was expressed by showing an old Indian in shabby traditional clothing next to his son in a neat new suit (Benedict 1983:49 ff.).

Hagenbeck's *Völkerschau*

Persons from non-Western cultures appeared not only at world and colonial exhibitions, but also at special ethnographic shows called *Völkerschau* in Germany, where this type of manifestation had proliferated since 1874. In that year Carl Hagenbeck, a dealer in wild animals in Hamburg and later director of a zoo and a circus, began exhibiting Samen—Lapps—as "purely natural people" (*reine Naturmenschen*, Lehmann 1955) in several German cities, together with their tents, tools, weapons, and other possessions, as well as reindeer (Figure 4). In 1876, he sent one of his collaborators to Egyptian Sudan in order to bring back Nubians and indigenous animals. This group of savages with their wild personalities, as Hagenbeck describes them in his autobiography (Hagenbeck 1909), was scrutinized by over thirty thousand German visitors on the first day of their appearance in Breslau. Subsequently, the Nubians were exhibited in other European cities, including Paris and London.

When this venture became a success, Hagenbeck extended his profitable activities to include North American Indians, Inuit, people from India, and Zulus (*Zulukaffern*). He and other entrepreneurs also exhibited Sudanese, Bushmen, and *Somalinegerknaben* riding on ostriches; later, Dinka, Maasai, and Ashanti were recruited in Africa and brought to Europe (cf. Thode-Arora 1989:168–178). The supply of natives closely followed the colonial conquests. Tuareg, for instance, were on exhibit in Paris within months of the French capture of Timbuktu in 1894, and natives from Madagascar appeared a year after the French occupation of that island (W. Schneider 1977:101). The new genre quickly caught on, and ethnographic exhibits stayed very popular well into the present century. Hagenbeck presented them to the middle classes with the stated intention of promoting the *Bildung*—the knowledge and culture a civilized person should possess—and stimulating the German people's nationalistic zest for colonial expansion. Often the members of *Naturvölker* ("natural peoples"), more closely associated with living nature than with civilization, were exhibited in local zoos behind bars or wire fences; fairgrounds and public parks served as settings, too. In France, the Paris Jardin d'Acclimatation, created in 1859 for the study and popularization of exotic animals and



Figure 4
Nomadic Samen or “Laplanders” with reindeers, sleighs, and tents, probably in the zoo of Halle, Germany, c. 1927. Photograph, collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

plants, became a popular setting for ethnological exhibits similar to the German ones.

For decades, the German press wrote about the appearance, behavior, and nature of the foreign visitors in a very negative tone, expressing disgust and contempt for them. The general reaction of the public visiting the exhibitions seems to have been the same; but near the turn of the century, press coverage began to change for the better, and more attention was given to ethnographic detail. Another reason for negative reactions to black Africans in particular, apart from deeply ingrained stereotypes of barbarity and primitivity, was the stubborn and often bloody resistance of several African peoples toward the European expansion in Africa, which was covered extensively by the European press. In the eyes of many Germans, a black African was some sort of savage monster. France consciously played on such fears in the French-German war of 1870–71 by putting black *tirailleurs indigènes* trained in Algeria to use against German troops (Goldmann 1985:258). In general, the more an indigenous people resisted colonization, the more ferocity its representatives had to display when staged.

Fear was but one of the mixed feelings German citizens experienced when visiting ethnological exhibitions. Another reaction was sexual fascination and curiosity, as is clear from contemporary press coverage and from preserved posters. Admiration of the supposedly great sexual potency of the scarcely clothed primi-

tives competed with depreciation because of their alleged bestial lust (Goldmann 1985:263–264; Thode-Arora 1989:115–119). Disgust alternated with exalted attention, wonder, and enchantment when Western citizens were confronted with picturesque scenes from savage life.

In the Netherlands, too, ethnological exhibits took place. In the year 1900, for instance, the *Groote Achantees Karavanen* (“Large Ashanti Caravans”) attracted much attention in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and Nijmegen. The Ashanti, usually shown at the Jardin d’Acclimatation in Paris, now toured the rest of Western Europe.² In the Netherlands, they were described on a poster as “old natives from the Gold Coasts of Africa . . . Warriors, Fetish, Priests, Snake-charmer, Women, Girls and Children. The most uncommon human race that has ever been seen in Europe. Most interesting for everyone.” (Municipal Archives, Rotterdam). A few years earlier, *De Boschmannen of wilden van Afrika* (“The Bushmen or savages of Africa”), as the title of the accompanying brochure reads, were on tour. Judging from their appearance, this brochure states, “they show more similarity to Apes than to people. . . . Notwithstanding their ferocity these Bushmen are nearly harmless, and even the most fearful person can approach and feel all over them with the greatest confidence” (Municipal Archives, Rotterdam). The suggestion that they could be touched indicates how close the attitude toward these people was to the attitude toward animals. That the exhibited people were similar—metonymically, metaphorically, qua appearance and behavior—to animals, especially apes, was indeed a common perception, fed by contemporary scientific theory. In recent decades, in contrast, Bushmen once again came to play a positive role in Western imagination, similar to the one they played in the 18th century—that of noble savages, spontaneously and innocently enjoying a pure, natural, paradisiacal existence.

The natives performed in several roles. The American firm William Foote & Co. African American Characters exploited a show with African-Americans—as the letterhead of the firm stated—appearing as “Savages, Slaves, Soldiers and Citizens” (Thode-Arora 1989:41). Crafts, hunting techniques, rituals, dances, and songs were among the activities staged, as well as stereotypical “authentic” performances like warfare, cannibalistic acts, and head-hunting. At the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Igorots from the Philippines could be seen eating dog meat, a food taboo in the West, while African Pygmies illustrated decapitation. The above-mentioned Dahomey “Amazons,” heavily armed, simulated fights. Aborigines from Queensland, Australia, presented as *Austral Neger*, on exhibit at the Frankfurt Zoo and elsewhere in May 1885, were described on posters as cannibals and bloodthirsty monsters—“wirklich blutdürstige Ungeheuer” (Figure 5). Another poster, printed for their appearance in England, continued a European iconographical tradition reaching back to De Bry’s late 16th-century *Grands Voyages* and earlier, by depicting them engaged in a ferocious cannibal ritual, with the following text:

Male and female Australian cannibals / R. A. Cunningham, Director / The first and only obtained colony of these strange, savage, disfigured and most brutal race ever lured from the remote interior wilds, where they indulge in ceaseless bloody feuds and forays,



Figure 5

A troupe of Aborigines from Queensland, Australia. Exploited by the ruthless A. R. Cunningham, they arrived in Germany in 1883, probably from England, where they performed at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, a popular venue for ethnological exhibits. This picture was bought in Berlin in 1884. In 1896, only three individuals out of eight were still alive. Cabinet photograph, Negretti and Zambra, London, collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

to feast upon each other's flesh / The very lowest order of mankind, and beyond conception most curious to look upon. [Plakate 1880–1914:228]

How did the exhibited individuals themselves, often more or less coerced into participation, experience and cope with the exhibits? Many had to battle with homesickness, emotional confusion, difficulties of adjustment to the European climate and food, and vicious infections. Often they actively resisted the roles that were forced on them, for instance by running away, and they could be put back in harness only by force. Now and then bad treatment led to court cases. In the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* of 1880, Rudolf Virchow, the prominent anthropologist and politician, describes in detail how an Inuit woman whose measurements he wished to take literally ran into the walls of the room in total panic (quoted by Thode-Arora 1989:129–130), an incident that was by no means exceptional. The percentage of those who died soon after their arrival in Europe was considerable. When the aforementioned group of Aborigines (Figure 5) arrived in Germany in 1883, there were eight of them; in May 1885, when they appeared in the Frankfurt Zoo, five were still alive; in October 1896, when they were examined by members of the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, there were only three



Figure 6

Some members of two Inuit families, on exhibit in 1880 at Berlin, Frankfurt, and several other German cities. In January 1881, both families succumbed to an infectious disease. The diary of one of the male members of the group is one of the few preserved testimonies from the perspective of the exhibited individuals (Taylor 1981). This carte-de-visite, with the printed text “Hagenbeck’s Thierpark, Hamburg / Photographie von J. M. Jacobsen, St. Pauli” on its reverse, was bought during the month of October 1880 in Berlin by a Dutch visitor. Collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

survivors of the original group. The members of two Inuit families from Labrador, on exhibit in several German cities during the year 1880 with their dogs and kayaks (Figure 6), all succumbed to an infection in January 1881 (Plakate 1880–1914:236). At the cemetery of Tervuren, Belgium, close to the site of the 1897 colonial exhibition, a number of Africans lie buried who were part of the “Kongolese Village” and rowed canoes on the Tervuren ponds. In some cases, however, the exhibited natives were paid very well, treated with warmth and care, and offered sightseeing tours and dinners with local prominents.

How the individuals on display—confronted with an alien world, unfamiliar food, strange customs, and a different climate—experienced and handled their situation is an important question. The relative scarcity of sources concerning their intentions and feelings should not lead us to underestimate their subjectivity or to leave it understudied. Who were they? How did they think and feel? How did they negotiate their identities? How did they creatively exploit the roles they were cast

into to realize their intentions and express their reactions?³ How did these roles influence their conceptions of themselves and of the Western people they met? How, for instance, did Penobscot Indian Frank Loring (alias Chief Big Thunder), Micmac Indian Jeremy Bartlett (alias Doctor Lone Cloud), and Maliseet Indian Henry Perley (alias Red Eagle) feel about their roles as itinerant Native American performers (Prins 1991)?⁴

The diary of one of the males from the Inuit troupe touring Germany has been preserved (Taylor 1981). Much is known about Jefke, a black African boy on exhibit at the Antwerp (Belgium) Zoo, as well as about Ota Benga, a Pygmy boy displayed in a cage with a chimpanzee and later with an orangutan at the Bronx Zoo (Bieder 1991; Bradford and Blume, in press). Less is known about Klikko, "The Wild Dancing Bushman," a Khoi-San performing in London around 1913 (Parsons 1988). Mitchell (1988, 1989) quotes reactions of Egyptian scholars visiting the "Rue de Caire" at the Paris Exposition universelle of 1889. How did Black Elk conceive of his appearances in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (Figure 7; see Neihardt 1988; Rice 1991), or Mary Alice Nelson (alias Molly Spotted Elk), a Penobscot Indian, of her dance performances in Paris, where she thrilled the public with her floor-length eagle feather headdress (McBride 1989)?⁵ What was on the minds of the Indians



Figure 7

Members of the successful "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," visiting London in 1887 on the occasion of the 50th jubilee of Queen Victoria's succession to the throne. In subsequent years, the show toured Europe twice, including an appearance at the 1889 world fair in Paris. This photograph was bought at London in July 1887 by a Dutch visitor. The handwritten numbers correspond to the handwritten names and tribes of the pictured Indians on the reverse. Cabinet photograph, Elliot and Fry, London, collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

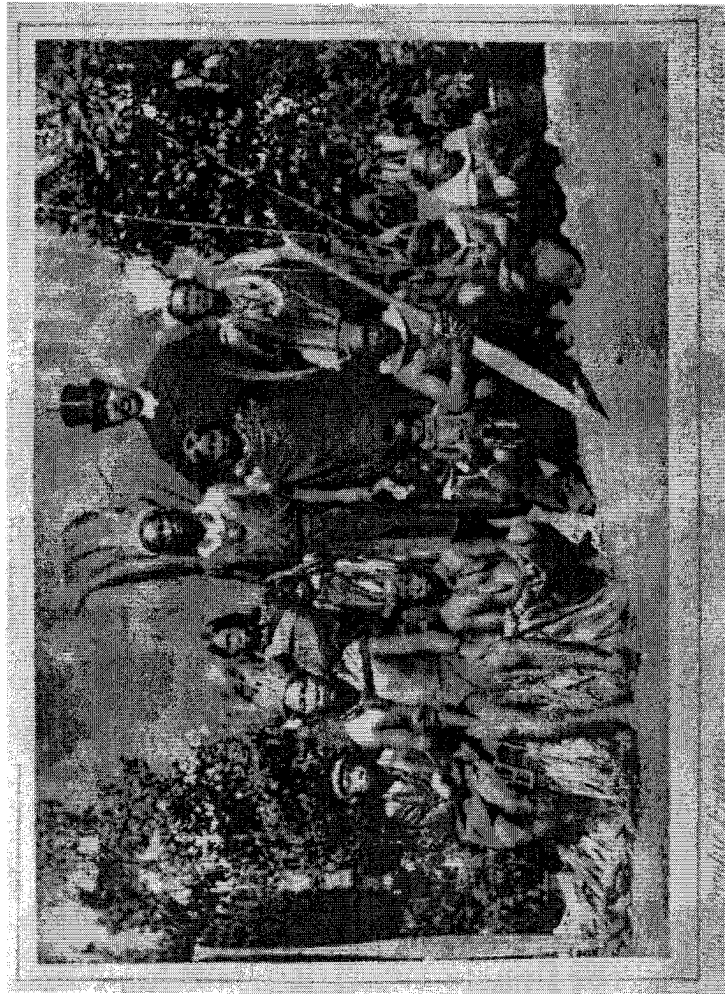


Figure 8

“Natives from Surinam,” probably with their impresario, at the Amsterdam 1883 colonial exhibition that, besides these Indians (and Marrons) from the Dutch West Indies, featured colonial natives from the Dutch East Indies (cf. Figure 9). Cabinet photograph, Photographie Française, Amsterdam, Collection of the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 9

Two gamelan players and two women dancers who performed in the “Javanese Kampong” (Javanese native village) at the 1883 “International Colonial and Exportation Exhibition” in Amsterdam. Together with others, they were recruited in the Dutch East Indies by the Dutch Missionary Society (Nederlands Zendingsgenootschap). Cabinet photograph, F. D. van Rosmalen, collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

from Surinam performing at the 1883 colonial exhibition in Amsterdam (see Figures 8 and 9), who seem to have been wildly enthusiastic during the first days of exposure to their new world, but soon had to cope with boredom, sickness, and the disappointment of not meeting their Dutch king as promised (Pieterse 1992:34–35)?

Commerce and Science

Hagenbeck was certainly not the first to take such an initiative. Although *Völkerschauen* became very popular during the period 1870–1930 and took place on a larger scale than ever before, the phenomenon as such was by no means new. During the 1820s, Captain Samuel Hadlock from Maine toured Europe with a troupe of Inuit, which was exhibited in London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Prague, and Vienna. Part of his company was a “Maori chieftain” whom he had come across in England. When this Maori suddenly died, his head was preserved chemically and fixed to a model of his body. “We do not even need the Captain’s word for it to be convinced,” the Austrian *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung und Unterhaltungsblatt* wrote on the occasion of the exhibition of the reconstructed Maori at Vienna, “that this

man from New Zealand, before he was taken aboard, really has eaten other people, because that's indeed the way he looks" (Goldmann 1985:256).

In London, to give but a few more examples, "Red Indians" could be seen in 1844; in 1845 and 1847, Bushmen; in 1850 and 1853, south African "Kaffirs," in the Egyptian hall—reflecting England's renewed interest in that part of the world during those years. In London, as in Berlin or Paris, learned societies such as the Ethnological Society and the competing Anthropological Society showed great interest in the ethnological exhibitions. Here too, as in Germany, the general attitudes of the public were rather negative, not least under the influence of contemporary missionary propaganda. "In appearance," the *Times* wrote on the Bushmen in 1847,

they are little above the monkey tribe, and scarcely better than the mere brutes of the field. . . . They are sullen, silent and savage—mere animals in propensity, and worse than animals in appearance. . . . In short, a more miserable set of human beings—for human they are, nevertheless—was never seen. [Quoted in Altick 1978:281]

And Charles Dickens wondered, "Is it idiosyncratic in me to abhor, detest, abominate, and abjure that noble savage?" adding that he hoped something would happen to the stove these people slept around, so that they would suffocate. In his eyes, and in the eyes of most of his contemporaries, the savage was

a prodigious nuisance and a gross superstition . . . cruel, false, thievish, murderish; addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs; a wild animal with the questionable gift of boasting; a conceited, tiresome, bloodthirsty, monotonous humbug . . . if we have anything to learn from the Noble Savage, it is what to avoid. His virtues are a fable; his happiness is a delusion; his nobility, nonsense. [Dickens 1938:133–138, quoted in Altick 1978]

We should add, however, that in later years Dickens traded his ideas on Anglo-Saxon superiority and progress for a form of cultural relativism implying much milder views on foraging and tribal peoples.

Columbus and Hernán Cortés had already brought back Indians and Aztecs from the New World. European princes, such as the Medici at Florence, had scores of aliens at their courts as curiosities and for purposes of prestige. During the age of European expansion, virtually every generation of Europeans could see Nubians, Inuit, Saami, North American Indians, and Pygmies at fairs, in inns—like the Amsterdam "Blaauw Jan," precursor to the Artis Zoo—and theaters or, together with exotic animals, in zoos and princely menageries. An analogous practice was that of exhibiting the insane—usually presented in cages, with an admissions fee. In 18th-century France, insanity was seen as a decline to a state of wildness and unruly animality, associated traditionally with all that was wicked and unnatural (Foucault 1961), while at the same time there existed a whole body of publications theorizing on similarities of physical appearance between particular types of insanity and particular animal species. "What was presented here," as Dörner writes,

was wild and indomitable nature, <beastliness>, absolute and destructive unruliness, social danger, which, behind the bars installed by reason, could be staged the more dramatically for showing at the same time to the public reason as the necessity of controlling nature, as a constraint upon unlimited freedom and as securing the order of the state. [1984:22]

Order was contrasted with chaos, reason with wildness.

Also comparable were the "monsters" and "freaks" shown at fairs, in circus side-shows, and in the amusement zones of world fairs: individuals with clubfeet, Siamese twins, bearded women, giants, dwarves, and so on (cf. Bogdan 1988). A famous case is that of Merrick, the "elephant-man," an intelligent and sensitive person who was terribly maimed by sickness, exhibited in a freak show in London at the end of the 19th century until a prominent surgeon took him into his custody (Montagu 1971). The so-called panopticons in large cities, like Castan's Panoptikum and the Passagen-Panoptikum in Berlin, combined features of a museum of anatomy, a cabinet of curiosities, and a horror cabinet. The way exotic animals were—and still are—shown and handled in circus performances elucidates practices of discipline and the concomitant idiom of wildness and taming that were present more implicitly in many exhibits involving people. P. T. Barnum's shows and, somewhat later, the German Circus Sarrasani for decades had ethnological acts on their program, often combined with acrobatics.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, exhibits of life specimens were increasingly reframed in terms of science, especially physical anthropology and natural history. Aside from their entertainment and curiosity value, their educational value came to be stressed more and more. Hagenbeck, for instance, advertised his manifestations as "anthropological-zoological exhibitions" (*Anthropologisch-Zoologische Ausstellung*). In many ways, exhibitions of human individuals were related to scientific practices and purposes anyhow. The lunatic asylums where the insane were put on show were in the process of being medicalized; what was monstrous or exotic was often as interesting from a scientific point of view as it was shocking or fascinating to the general public. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Khoi-Khoi ("Hottentot") woman Saartjie Baartmann was put on show when alive, and dissected by the famous Cuvier when dead. A mold of her body was then exhibited—in fact, until a few years ago, at the Paris Musée de l'Homme—as was, half a century later, the skeleton of the Tasmanian woman Truganini, which was cremated and committed to the waves only in the 1970s. Anthropologists used to be represented on the committees heading the anthropological sections of world fairs, often quarreling with those who wished to cater more to commercial than to scientific or educational interests.

In anthropometric and psychometric laboratories at the world fairs, visitors could witness and even take part in scientific research on racial characteristics. Phrenology, craniology, physiognomy, and anthropometry shared the assumption that in the outward shape and physical appearance of the body, the inner character—of different races, but also of criminals, prostitutes, and deviants—was manifest. The outward shape, therefore, had to be measured and mapped meticulously (cf.



Figure 10

A number of Indians from Tierra del Fuego, probably Selk'nam, with their impresario, on exhibit in Paris in 1889. During the first decades of the present century, missionaries protested sharply against the systematic murder of the natives of Tierra del Fuego by white colonists and their bounty hunters. The skulls of murdered natives were often sold to museums in the Western world, fetching high prices. In addition, infectious diseases played havoc, so by around 1940, only a hundred individuals remained from an original population of many thousands. The anthropologist Anne Chapman (1982) could locate only ten genetically unmixed Selk'nam during three fieldwork stays between 1964 and 1974. From Gusinde (1931).

Sekula 1986). Particularly manifest in this context are the interconnections between exhibiting colonial natives and scientifically collecting, measuring, classifying, and filing them. At the same time, anthropological societies and museums of natural history accumulated tens of thousands of native skulls.⁶ Saartjie Baartmann and Truganini are typical cases. According to contemporary views of the genetic variation of mankind, Khoi-Khoi, Tasmanians, Australian Aborigines (Figure 5), and several native peoples from Tierra del Fuego (Figures 10 and 11) stood closest to the apes and prehistoric ape-men in the racial hierarchy, and therefore were outstanding examples of "contemporary ancestors" and "missing links."

Exhibited colonial natives typically had to appear before anthropological societies such as those of Oxford and London or the Société d'Anthropologie in Paris. The Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte used to organize special sessions for this purpose, often at the same locations as the ethnological shows. On March 28, 1896, for instance, a number of members of the Berlin anthropological society studied an "authentic Arabic harem" at the above-men-



Figure 11

Another picture of “Patagonians,” possibly Techuelches, taken in a Hamburg studio and bought in May 1879 on the occasion of a *Völkerschau* at Hamburg—as written by hand on the reverse. While North American Indians usually were admired and romanticized, as were the Samoans in Figure 2, the fascination with most other groups was tinged with fear and disgust. Cabinet photograph, J. M. Jacobsen, Hamburg, collection of the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam.

tioned Passagen-Panoptikum (Theye 1989:103). Usually anthropometric measurements and photographs were taken on such occasions, and it will come as no surprise that the objects of research, who were urged to undress, were often uneasy or even reluctant. The manufacture of plaster casts of different parts of the body was another research activity, as were linguistic and ethnomusicological observations. The learned societies provided certificates of authenticity of the people exhibited, and suggested new target groups that would serve the financial needs of the impresarios as fully as their own scientific interests.

So science, commerce, and imperialism went hand in hand. When Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (Figure 7) performed in Paris during the summer of 1889, Prince Roland Bonaparte, ethnologist and anthropologist, was present continuously in order to question and measure the Cheyenne and Sioux who took part in the show. J. A. Jacobsen, a Norwegian and one of the most important collaborators of the Hagenbeck family, also collected for the Berlin Museum of Ethnology and supervised the manufacture of ethnographical dioramas featuring wax, plaster, or papier-

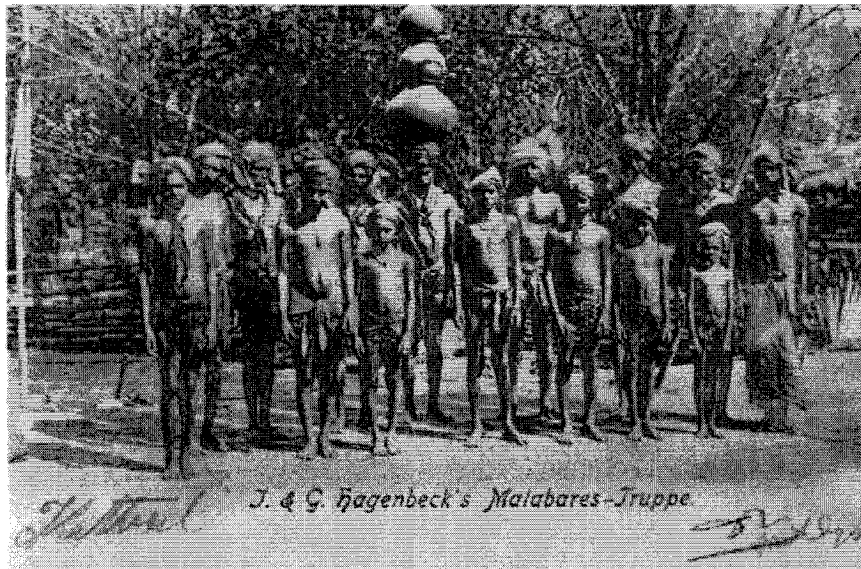


Figure 12

Hagenbeck's "Troop of Malabars," probably 1925. Often, as in this case, the exhibited persons on request signed postcards bearing their picture, which were sold at the venue. Postcard, collection of S. Wachlin, Amsterdam.

mâché mannequins. These were fabricated with the help of life casts and photographs, and they showed dramatic scenes from ritual and daily life. The Hagenbecks maintained close relations with the Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde, to the benefit of both parties. And museums of ethnography or so-called colonial museums often originated from world fairs that, despite their many aspects, were first and foremost commercial happenings: the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro—now called the Musée de l'Homme—in Paris was created on the occasion of the 1878 world fair (Dias 1991), while the Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika at Tervuren, Belgium, resulted from the colonial exhibition of 1897.

William Schneider (1977:98–99) signals a certain shift back to the traditional amusement-oriented character of European ethnological exhibits, which he situates at about 1890. In order to increase profits, the organizers began to stress the unusual and the bizarre and to add spectacular performances, such as mock battles or cannibalistic rituals. What had begun to develop into a means of scientifically educating and edifying the public about faraway peoples and their customs turned into a form of amusement again, yet without impeding the persistence of a third function: that of political and imperialistic propaganda. Similar differences existed between the official ethnographic exhibits and the less scholarly orchestrated midway amusement zones at North American world fairs, which also served as venues for ethnographic types and spectacles.⁷

Science and imperialism went hand in hand; and so, of course, did missionary activities and imperialism. I do not know of any human showcases within the context of missionary propaganda, but other practices of categorizing, picturing, and exhibiting uncivilized, "heathen" peoples had much in common with more profane happenings. During the first half of the present century, many European missionary museums and countless missionary exhibitions, Roman Catholic as well as Protestant, tried to persuade their visitors to take certain views and certain actions concerning colonially dominated non-Western, non-Christian peoples. Such exhibitions, permanent or temporary, were staged by missionary societies with the help of objects, photographs, maps, and sometimes dressed mannequins or busts. On such occasions, the well-known narrative plots and metaphors, slightly modified, return: civilized or Christian whites bringing the light of civilization or religion to savages or pagans, in the name of some higher instance, be it progress or God. Missionary photography for propagandistic goals showed characters and scenes from such narratives.

On December 24, 1924, Pope Pius XI opened the World Missionary Exhibition at the Vatican, which attracted over 750,000 visitors during the following year. There was a Hall of Propaganda, a Hall of the Holy Land as the Cradle of Christianity, one of the History of the Missions, and one dedicated to quantitative data concerning the missions. All of these halls were crammed with ethnographical objects showing the customs and morals of the heathen cultures that were the target of the Roman Catholic civilizatory and religious offensive, neatly arranged according to ethnologist Father Wilhelm Schmidt's theory of *Kulturkreise* and their historical development (Kilger 1925). Rome was represented as the center of the world—a role that on medieval world maps was still reserved for Jerusalem and in imperialist discourse was given to the metropolises of the leading imperialist nation-states. Roman Catholic missionary pageants in Belgium, the southern Netherlands, and elsewhere in Europe during the first decades of this century, with locals made up and dressed to represent black Africans, are reminiscent of Indian painter George Catlin's Indian Show in England during the 1840s, where native English people dressed up as North American Indians, or of the show in honor of King Henry II in 1550 near Rouen, France, where French sailors played Brazilian Indians.

The 1930s witnessed the decline of the ethnological exhibition, at least in the specific form it had taken until then. Criticism of imperialism and racism increased, and ethnographic shows were found objectionable on moral grounds.⁸ Ethnographic films and numerous scientific, semi-scientific, and pseudo-scientific anthropological treatises, abundantly illustrated with photographs, took over much of the function of ethnological exhibits, as did colonial and missionary propaganda films. The increasing acculturation of colonial natives thwarted the creation of romantic or depreciating scenes of their natural lives. Recruiting exhibit groups in the German colonies became very difficult after 1901 because of new laws and regulations, and then World War I and its aftermath complicated things even more. During the 1930s, the *Völkerschau* was prohibited by the National Socialists, who feared they would increase the sympathy of the German people for other races.

Nonetheless, manifestations that are quite similar in several respects have persisted until today; for instance, the presence of Maori at the Te Maori exhibition at New York or of Sulawesi Toradja building a rice barn at the Toradja exhibition in the London Museum of Mankind during the 1980s. As a counterpart to exotic native villages at late 19th-century world fairs, a "Dutch city" in Nagasaki was opened in the spring of 1992 featuring four miles of canals with full-scale replicas of well-known Dutch buildings such as the Utrecht Cathedral. The cinema, television, and tourism also share certain functions with the *Völkerschau*, which was often recommended as an opportunity to visit faraway cultures.

The Story and the Gaze

It is not difficult to show the pivotal role of narrative structures in 19th- and early 20th-century world fairs, museums, or missionary exhibitions. Narrative plots are as pervasive in the civilizational, imperialist, missionary, and scientific discourses of the period as in the three-dimensional spectacles that, to a considerable degree, were governed by these discursive activities. As many contemporary book titles suggest, the history of mankind was narrated essentially as a heroic ascent toward the natural and ultimate goal of cosmic evolution: the industrial civilization of white, European, middle-class citizens of the 19th century. Other races followed the same path, it was postulated—especially in evolutionist ethnology, which was a scientific manifestation of the discourse on progress—but lagged behind culturally and physically. Imperialist expansion was represented in terms of a social Darwinist natural history, and European hegemony as a natural and therefore desirable development. There has been some controversy over the question of whether the master narrative of progress and civilization is essentially a secularized avatar of the Christian idea of world history as God's working, but in any case, it is not formulated in religious terms. The implied development is from lack of civilization to civilized state, from wildness to civility, achieved heroically by the white, Caucasian race under its own power, and by the other races with the help of the Caucasian one, insofar at least as their constitutions allowed them to progress. The stagewise development from savagery through barbarism to civilization was suggested by organizing museum and world fair exhibits into evolutionary sequences.

Sekula's (1986:58) stress on the spirit of optical empiricism and encyclopedism of pictorial archives, with their purely iterative character, is heuristically useful and certainly justified to a certain degree; but in many contexts of collecting, filing, and exhibiting, an order was imposed on the data that went beyond mere iteration and taxonomy. In many cases, all essential ingredients of the story, or at least of a certain type of story, are present: a beginning where some desirable good is lacking; an end that is somehow implied by that beginning teleologically; acting subjects; strife and struggle; and other plot elements. World fairs and museums not only categorized peoples, races, cultures, species, and artifacts by creating taxonomies, but also ordered them syntagmatically, creating the well-known plots of civilized/Christian whites bringing light to the savage/heathen in the name of some higher instance. The same goes for many photographs from colonial contexts,

showing moments from the story they presuppose and illustrate (Corbey 1988, 1989, 1990). Those well-known plots—flexible and capable of incorporating disparate elements, of outdoing alternative readings—are as pervasive in 19th-century civilizatory, imperialist, missionary, and scientific discourses as in the spectacles and pictures that were governed by these discursive activities. This century saw the proliferation of historicized, evolutionary frameworks of representation—of artifacts and natural history specimens, of human, racial, and national origins.

One aspect of these spectacles, pictures, and narratives was that they neutralized the cognitive dissonance and the threat to Western middle-class identity constituted by the baffling cultural difference of new peoples. Colonial Others were incorporated narratively. In a *mise-en-intrigue*, they were assigned their roles in the stories told by museum exhibitions, world fairs, and colonial postcards (Figure 12). They were cast as contemporary ancestors, receivers of true civilization and true religion. The radical difference of the Other was made sense of and thus warded off by a narrative <discordant concordance> between “civilized” and “savage.” Money, trade, and exchange mediated between peoples (cf. Hinsley 1991:362), but on another level stories were created in order to mediate the basic contradiction between the two states of mankind. Here I concur with Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of myth as a struggle with contradictions or paradoxes, as a syntagmatic mediation of paradigmatic oppositions.⁹ Carol Breckenridge (1989:211) points out the analogy between the building of private collections by colonial officials, creating an illusion of cognitive control over a colonial experience that might otherwise have been disturbingly chaotic, and the world fair as a reminder of the orderliness of empire, which consolidated the sense of imperial knowledge and control in the imagined Victorian ecumene.

But the resultant concordance will never be complete; the attempt to harmonize is ultimately bound to fail. For as the plot develops, the initial discordance between civilized and primitive, white and black, Christian and heathen, is slowly but never totally overcome. Struggle develops into contracts, but some antagonism and difference is necessary all the way, to keep the story going. The story familiarizes and exoticizes at the same time.¹⁰ Also on a different level—that of the citizen’s personal experience—the Other seems to preserve an elusive quality; he or she never yields completely to incorporation within the framework of the familiar, stubbornly resisting a textualizing closure of spontaneous experience, of fascination, of wonder.¹¹

To return now to the 1893 world fair motto we began with—“To see is to know”—of course we do not know how things are by simply looking. The eye is not innocent. The motto succinctly expresses an underlying ideology that is at work in a range of seemingly disparate practices in colonial times: photography, colonialist discourse, missionary discourse, anthropometry, collecting and exhibiting, and so on. What people saw, rather than reality as it is, was, to a considerable extent, reality as perceived, as actively constructed by images, conceptions, native taxonomies, stories, and motivational attitudes on the spectator’s mind (cf. Mason 1990). The

perceived order was an imposed one; the citizen's gaze on alien people was determined to a considerable degree by stories and stereotypes in his or her mind.

"Visualization and spatialization," Fabian writes in his study of the central role of the gaze and the visual in the history of anthropology,

[became] a program for the new discipline of anthropology. There was a time when this meant, above all, the exhibition of the exotic in illustrated travelogues, museums, fairs, and expositions. These early ethnological practices established seldom articulated but firm convictions that presentations of knowledge through visual and spatial images, maps, diagrams, trees, and tables are particularly well suited to the description of primitive cultures. [Fabian 1983:121]

In this context, completely in line with our analysis of ethnological exhibitions, he stresses the ideological effects of *visualism* as a cognitive style. What is seen, the objectified Other, is looked on as coming not only from faraway places, but also, and more importantly, from a different, allochronic time. Fabian shows how a temporal gap is constructed between citizens and their "contemporary ancestors," "how anthropology has managed to maintain distance, mostly by manipulating temporal coexistence through the denial of coevalness" (Fabian 1983:121). This occurred in anthropology, just as it did in the political ideology of imperialism, in Christian discourse on heathens and the mission, at world fairs, and in certain photographic practices.

When modern anthropology began to construct its Other in terms of topoi implying distance, difference, and opposition, its intent was above all, but at least also, to construct ordered Space and Time—a cosmos—for Western society to inhabit, rather than "understanding other cultures," its ostensible vocation. [Fabian 1983:111–112]

Besides plotting, there is a second aspect of the storied nature of the imperial imagination that has relevance to a proper understanding of ethnological exhibitions. It has to do with the encyclopedic character of world fairs. "As with other dimensions of the show," notes Greenhalgh (1988:87), "the imperial dimension was underpinned by the belief that it was possible to present a complete knowledge, to create a physical encyclopedia capable of capturing and explaining a total world view." What is interesting here is the cognitive position ascribed to the visitors: they are assumed to be situated high above the world they gaze upon. On a very basic level, activities such as narrating, taking pictures, or just plain looking create the illusion of the surveyability or transparency of reality, connected with the suggestion that those who narrate, take pictures, or look, find themselves in the privileged position of a panoptic spectator. In spontaneous visual perception, we already tend to experience ourselves as the natural center of the world we see—a world that seems to be organized around the onlooker as its pivot; in other words, perspective is more than a neutral mathematical projection on external space. All three activities—looking, taking pictures, narrating—are perspectivistic, not only in a literal sense, as in the case of looking or photographing, but also cognitively, emotionally, and ideologically. External reality is constructed from and around a central position, that of

the onlooker, the photographer, the narrator—and also that of the citizen roaming the world fair. These spectators by their very activity seem to be panoptic, omniscient; their point of view is or seems to be panoramic, that of a bird's eye rather than a frog's eye. The narrator, hovering high above the plot, oversees time and space to a considerable degree, having relatively free access to what narrative characters are doing at different times and places. This panoptic gaze is very wide, and might indeed be coextensive with story or narrative as a highly general discourse structure, operating not only in fiction and literature, but also in the sciences and in philosophy, in religious practices, and in everyday conversation.

The position of the narrator is usually external to the story, somewhere above the narrated events, permitting an overview of space and time, although it may be more limited, tied to one of the characters in the represented events and part of these.¹² External narrators find themselves in an excellent position to assign significance and value to the events and characters, including, in the case of a typical 19th-century master narrative, their own heroic role, natural superiority, and unshakable moral and cognitive orientation. "The panoramic approach lays out the whole world conceptually in a Linnean classification or evolutionary scheme, or experientially in a scenic effect. . . . The view is comprehensive, extensive, commanding, aggrandizing. As a prospect, it holds in it scenarios for future action" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:413). Panoramic landscape descriptions in novels or travel accounts, as well as landscape photographs and turn-of-the-century postcards, often embody a discourse of empire and domination, with the seer as a "monarch-of-all-I-survey" (Pratt 1988; cf. Fabian 1983:118–123), in firm control of the seen. The same gaze—self-confident, panoptic, voyeuristic—is to be found in many photos of colonial natives. "There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera," Susan Sontag (1984:7) has remarked, and taking pictures was indeed another means of taking possession of native peoples and their lands, as was narration.

A fine example of the encyclopedic urge in an imperialist context was an ambitious project the Asiatic Society of Bengal tried to realize in Calcutta in 1865: a synoptic exhibition of living representatives of the races of the Old World (or at least of India), to be visited primarily by scientists (Falconer 1984–86). The idea was that of a kind of panopticon, as we know it from the writings of Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault. The spirit of the project once again was one of optical empiricism, as expressed by the Chicago motto "To see is to know."¹³ The effort failed. A somewhat meager but similar outcome realized instead of the exhibit of life specimens was constituted by E. T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), illustrated with lithographs based on photographs, and the eight-volume *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations with Descriptive Letterpress of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan* (Watson and Kaye 1868–75), commissioned by the British government, both covering the native peoples from this part of the British empire. In a comparable way, richly illustrated publications like Karl Ernst von Baer's *Types principaux des différentes races humaines dans les cinq parties du monde* (1861) proffered the "photographic museum of the human races" that had been postulated theoretically 20 years before by E. R. A. Serres (1845:243; cf.

Theye 1989) in France and had quickly become a quite common ideal, all the more so because it was felt that soon it would be too late. In the year 1872, the German ethnologist Adolf Bastian also formulated the project of "a photographic museum of the human races," which was indeed created later by the Berliner Gesellschaft für Ethnologie, Anthropologie und Urgeschichte; tens of thousands of accumulated photographs were destroyed during the Second World War (Theye 1989).

Apart from illustrating the synoptic theme, the project of a photographic census of humanity also brings out nicely the role of photography in the complex of practices regarding colonial subjects: collecting, scrutinizing, measuring, categorizing, filing, controlling, narrating. The second half of the 19th century witnessed the quick rise of photography as another machinery of capturing and displaying the world. Here, too, we come across the illusion of authenticity, of unmediated encounter. Time and again the unbiased, true character of the photographic picture was stressed; photos were seen as windows on the world, as unmediated and therefore unbiased copies of nature itself. Photography was applied on a large scale in many scientific disciplines, in a spirit of optical empiricism. While the prospering middle classes of Western industrial societies presented themselves honorifically in self-congratulatory studio portraits, hundreds of thousands of photos of their Others—other races, criminals, prostitutes, the insane, deviants—functioned in the context of repression. Publications like *The People of India*, Carl Damman's *Anthropologisch-Ethnologisches Album in Photographien* (c. 1872), or, somewhat later, the scenes-and-types postcard genre, were matched by photographic albums with "types" of criminals. In this context, the needs of nation-states went hand in hand with scientific purposes. Breckenridge (1989:195–196) points out that agencies such as archives, libraries, surveys, revenue bureaucracies, folklore and ethnographic agencies, censuses, and museums provided a context for surveilling, recording, classifying, and evaluating called for by the new order of 19th-century nation-states with their imperializing and disciplinary bureaucracies—whether it concerned colonies abroad or criminals and slums at home.

Tony Bennett, in an argument that in many ways parallels and in other ways complements the one developed here, has unraveled relations between power and knowledge in the development of what he appropriately calls an "exhibitionary complex." It encompasses museums of art, history, and natural science; dioramas and panoramas; national and international exhibitions; arcades and department stores, serving as "linked sites for the development and articulation of new disciplines (history, biology, art history, anthropology) and their discursive formations (the past, evolution, aesthetics, man) as well as for the development of new technologies of vision" (Bennett 1988:73).

Conclusion

I have explored some of the complex interdependencies between the colonialist, scientific, and visual appropriation of cultural others in the context of world fairs and ethnographic exhibits. Persons from tribal cultures, on show in the West, were commodified, labeled (Bouquet and Branco 1988), scripted, objectified, es-

sentialed, decontextualized, aestheticized, and fetishized. They were cast in the role of backward, allochronic contemporary ancestors, receivers of true civilization and true religion in the stories told by museums, world fairs, and imperialist ideologies, thus becoming narrative characters in the citizen's articulation of identity—of Self and Other. Their own voices and views—ironically often as ethnocentric and omniscient as Western ones—were neutralized. Fitting cultural others into narrative plots, we suggested, was a way the citizen's panoptic eye/I dealt with their wondrous, disturbing difference without annihilating it completely. These plots came with the illusion of the panoptic position of an omniscient spectator, functioning as another strategy of power—the illusion that “to see is to know.”

Over the last centuries, the “we”-group, as an emic category of Western middle classes characterized by true humanity, has been expanding continuously to include many categories that were formerly excluded or considered ambiguous: women, slaves, peasants, the poor, and non-Western peoples.¹⁴ In this article, occasional reference was made to analogies between how other races and species were thought of and treated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By now, the boundary of the human species has been reached and, in fact, is being questioned—not least as to its moral significance—and transgressed. The discussion is now shifting toward zoos, circuses, dolphin shows, bioindustry, and animal experiments; toward “simian Orientalism” (Haraway 1989) and other forms of anthropocentrism. It would seem that our observations on ethno-/eurocentric ethnographic exhibits during the heyday of colonialism are in many ways readily extendable to present-day forms, in theory and practice, of anthropocentrism and < speciesism >.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I wish to thank, among others, Ivan Karp, Peter Mason (who also suggested the motto from de Sade), Bunny McBride, Harald Prins, and two anonymous referees for their stimulating comments. Part of the archival and photohistoric research on which this article is based was carried out by Steven Wachlin, photographic historian, Utrecht, Netherlands, who coauthored the captions to the twelve pictures.

1. In this context, Ivan Karp's analytical distinction between exoticizing and assimilating strategies of exhibition is relevant (in Karp and Lavine 1991:375 ff.); both strategies are examples of the cognitive strategy of assimilation—as opposed to accommodation—in the sense of Piagetian developmental psychology.

2. For a survey of ethnographic exhibits in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, see Schneider 1977.

3. A fruitful line of analysis not exploited here might pursue the infamous character of similar trades and professions; cf. Blok in press.

4. Prins (1991) argues that these early showmen functioned as cultural mediators between dominant Euro-American society and their own respective native communities, and that their performances inspired the imagery currently used to express ethnic self-identity among tribespeople in the Northeast.

5. Bunny McBride (Manhattan, Kansas; cf. McBride 1989) is writing a biography of Molly Spotted Elk on the basis of her diaries.

6. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., for instance, at this moment harbors the remains of about forty thousand non-Western individuals.

7. As remarked before, I am trying to bring out the general character of ethnographic exhibits in the period under consideration more than differences between nations, over time, or between types of manifestation. For an analysis of national differences, see Benedict 1991.

8. One would also expect conflicts between the scholarly and the popular imagination to have increased toward the end of the period 1870–1930 with the advent, in anthropology, of paradigms critical of evolutionist anthropology.

9. At the same time, as may be clear to insiders, we take some inspiration from the structuralist narratology of A. J. Greimas and the Paris School—without necessarily subscribing to all its presuppositions, however. For an as powerful but more radical, poststructuralist, analytical approach to exhibitionary practices, see Bal 1992.

10. Here again, Karp's distinction between exoticizing and assimilating strategies is relevant; see note 1.

11. Stephen Greenblatt's (1991) stress on the enduring fascination with "the marvelous" complements the narratologically inspired perspective developed here.

12. In contemporary narratology, the narrator's perspective is analyzed in terms of internal and external "focalization"; compare Genette 1972 and Bal 1991, who stress the ideological effects of focalization not only in texts but also in pictures and museums, developing the theory of focalization into a powerful tool of cultural criticism.

13. I am here indeed indirectly and loosely drawing on certain ideas from the work of Michel Foucault, which has proved to be inspiring and heuristically useful in the field of cultural studies (cf. Mitchell 1988, 1989), despite its lack of historical precision, its too-sweeping generalizations, and its tendency toward sometimes rather obscure rhetoric.

14. Even early hominids may be included in this group. A poster announcing the 1989 exhibition "*Archéologie de la France: 30 ans de découvertes*" at the Grand Palais in Paris shows a *Homo erectus* man with a modern baby on his knee, the caption reading "*Nous avons tous 400,000 ans,*" which only 20 years ago would still have been unthinkable.

References Cited

- Altick, Richard D.
1978 *The Shows of London. A Panoramic History of Exhibitions, 1600–1862.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Bal, Mieke
1991 *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology.* Sonoma: Polebridge Press.
1992 Telling, Showing, Showing-off. *Critical Inquiry* 18:556–594.
- Benedict, Burton
1983 *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915.* London: Scolar Press, in association with the Lowie Museum of Anthropology.
1991 International Exhibitions and National Identity. *Anthropology Today* 7(3):5–9.
- Benjamin, Walter
1984 *Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts. In Allegorien kultureller Erfahrung. Ausgewählte Schriften 1920–1940.* Leipzig: Reclam.
- Bennett, Tony
1988 The Exhibitionary Complex. *New Formations* 4 (Spring):74–102.

- Bieder, Robert E.
 1991 *Zoo: Race, Sex and Power*. Bloomington, IN, unpublished MS.
- Blok, Anton
 In press *Infamy*. London: Routledge.
- Bogdan, R.
 1988 *Freaks Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bouquet, Mary, and Jorge Branco
 1988 *Melanesian Artifacts—Postmodernist Reflections*. Lisbon: Museu de Etnologia.
- Bradford, Phillips, and Harvey Blume
 In press *Ota Benga: The Pygmy at the Zoo*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Breckenridge, Carol A.
 1989 *The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:195–216.
- Chapman, Anne
 1982 *Drama and Power in a Hunting Society. The Selk'nam of Tierra del Fuego*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Corbey, Raymond
 1988 *Alterity: The Colonial Nude*. *Critique of Anthropology* 8(3):75–92.
 1989 *Wildheid en beschaving. De Europese verbeelding van Afrika*. Baarn: Ambo.
 1990 *Der Missionar, die Heiden und das Photo*. *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 40:460–465.
- Dalton, Edward T.
 1872 *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.
- Damman, Carl
 n.d.[c1872] *Anthropologisches-Ethnologisches Album in Photographien*. Berlin: Wiegand, Hempel, & Parey.
- de Sade, D. A. F.
 1990 *Oeuvres*. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pleiade.
- Dias, Nelia
 1991 *Le Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro 1878–1908*. *Anthropologie et Muséologie en France*. Paris: CNRS.
- Dickens, Charles
 1938 *The Noble Savage*. Reprinted Pieces. London: Bloomsbury Press.
- Dömer, Klaus
 1984 *Bürger und Irre. Zur Sozialgeschichte und Wissenschaftssoziologie der Psychiatrie*. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.
- Fabian, Johannes
 1983 *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Falconer, John
 1984–86 *Ethnographical Photography in India*. *Photographic Collector* 5:16–46.
- Favrod, Charles-Henri
 1989 *Voir les autres autrement. In Étranges étrangères: Photographie et exotisme, 1850/1910*. Paris: Centre National de la Photographie.
- Foucault, Michel
 1961 *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Plon.

- Francis, D. R.
1913 *The Universal Exposition of 1904*. St. Louis: Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company.
- Genette, Gerard
1972 *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil.
- Goldmann, Stefan
1985 *Wilde in Europa*. In *Wir und die Wilden*. Einblicke in eine kannibalische Beziehung. Thomas Theye, ed. Pp. 243–269. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Greenblatt, Stephen
1991 *Resonance and Wonder*. In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. Pp. 42–56. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Greenhalgh, Paul
1988 *Ephemeral Vistas*. The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and Worlds Fairs, 1851–1939. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gusinde, Martin
1931 *Die Feuerland-Indianer*. In *Die Selk'nam*. Vom Leben und Denken eines Jägervolkes auf der grossen Feuerlandinsel, Mödling, Austria: S.V.D.
- Hagenbeck, Karl
1909 *Von Tieren und Menschen*. Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen. Berlin-Charlottenburg.
- Haltem, Ulrich
1971 *Die Londoner Weltausstellung von 1851*. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der bürgerlich-industriellen Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert. Münster: Verlag Aschendorf.
- Haraway, Donna
1989 *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge.
- Helms, Mary W.
1988 *Ulysses Sail: An Ethnographic Odessey of Power, Knowledge and Geographical Distance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hinsley, Curtis M.
1991 *The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition*. In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. Pp. 344–365. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Karp, Ivan, and Steven D. Lavine, eds.
1991 *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kilger, Laurenz
1925 *Die vatikanische Missions-Ausstellung 1925*. Die Katholischen Missionen 53(6): 167–179.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara
1991 *Objects of Ethnography*. In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. Pp. 386–443. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Lederbogen, Jan
1986 *Fotografie als Völkerschau*. Fotogeschichte: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Photographie 6: 47–64.

Lehmann, Alfred

- 1955 Zeitgenössische Bilder der ersten Völkerschauen. *In* Von fremden Völkern und Kulturen. Beiträge zur Völkerkunde. Hans Plischke zum 65. Geburtstag. W. Lang, W. Nippold, and G. Spannaus eds. Pp. 31–38. Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag.

Mackenzie, John M.

- 1984 Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1860–1960. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mason, Peter

- 1990 Deconstructing America. Representations of the Other. New York: Routledge.

Mason, Peter, ed.

- 1992 Indianen en Nederlanders, 1492–1992. *Wapum* 11, special issue.

McBride, Bunny

- 1989 A Penobscot in Paris. *Down East* August: 63–65, 80–81.

Mitchell, Timothy

- 1988 Colonising Egypt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- 1989 The World as Exhibition. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:217–236.

Montagu, Ashley

- 1971 The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity. New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey.

Neihardt, John

- 1988 Black Elk Speaks. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Parsons, Q. N.

- 1988 Frantz or Klikko, The Wild Dancing Bushman: A Case Study in Khoisan Stereotyping. *Botswana Notes and Records* 20:71–76.

Pieterse, Evelien

- 1992 Amerika binnen handbereik. *In* Indianen en Nederlanders, 1492–1992. Peter Mason, ed. *Wapum* 11:16–39.

Plakate 1880–1914

- n.d. Exhibition catalogue, Historisches Museum, Frankfurt.

Pratt, Mary Louise

- 1988 Conventions of Representation: When Discourse and Ideology Meet. *In* The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language, Literature, and Culture. Willie van Peer, ed. Pp. 15–34. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Prins, Harald E. L.

- 1991 Public Performance and Ethnic Identity: Chief Big Thunder and the Peddling of 'Indian' Culture. Paper presented at the American Society for Ethnohistory, Annual Meeting, 7–10 November.

Rice, Julian

- 1991 Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing its Lakota Purpose. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Rydell, Robert W.

- 1984 All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schneider, G.

- 1982 Das deutsche Kolonialmuseum in Berlin und seine Bedeutung im Rahmen der preussischen Schulreform um die Jahrhundertwende. *In* Die Zukunft beginnt in der Vergangenheit. Schriften des Historischen Museums XVI. Pp. 155 ff. Frankfurt: Historisches Museum.

Schneider, W.

1977 Race and Empire: The Rise of Popular Ethnography in the Late Nineteenth Century. *Journal of Popular Culture* 11:98-109.

Sekula, Alan

1986 The Body and the Archive. *October* 39(Winter):3-64.

Serres, Etienne-Renaud-Augustin

1845 Observations sur l'application de la photographie à l'étude des races humaines. *Comptes Rendues de l'Académie des Sciences* 21:243 ff.

Sontag, Susan

1984 *On Photography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Taylor, J. Garth

1981 An Eskimo Abroad, 1880: His Diary and Death. *Canadian Geographic* Oct./Nov.

Theye, Thomas

1989 <Wir wollen nicht glauben, sondern schauen>: Zur Geschichte der ethnographischen Fotografie im 19. Jahrhundert. In Idem (red.), *Der geraubte Schatten: Die Photographie als ethnographisches Dokument*. Pp. 60-119. München: Münchner Stadtmuseum.

Thode-Arora, Hilke

1989 Für fünfzig Pfennig um die Welt: Die Hagenbeckschen Völkerschauen. New York: Campus Verlag.

Von Baer, Karl Ernst

1861 *Types principaux des différentes races humaines dans les cinq parties du monde*. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg.

Watson, J. F., and J. W. Kaye

1868-75 *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations with Descriptive Letterpress of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan*. 8 vols. London: India Museum.