



# International expositions: a historiographic approach from Latin America<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This essay examines the historiography of international exhibitions, seen as geopolitical phenomena of modernity to which are associated the rise of middle classes, nationalist and colonialist movements, as well as an exhibitionary network connecting distinct spaces and times. Most of the recent studies analyses this repertoire and this pattern, and their relationship with political, economic, social and cultural issues. This study stresses, among ongoing approaches, the Latin American work – still barely visible or integrated into a field which is already consolidated –, and suggests how its visibility can be improved.

Keywords: international exhibitions; universal exhibitions; historiography; representation; transnational history.

In 2015, between May and October, the city of Milan hosted the most recent of the great international exhibitions. With the theme “Feeding the planet, energy for life,” the show attracted 150 countries and twenty million visitors. In spite of the fact that the organizers considered it a “success,” not only because of the numbers but particularly because of the “enthusiasm of visitors in front of the spectacle of the Tree of Life” – a gigantic architectural structure created by Marco Balich (Expo..., 2015) – one image which will certainly remain associated with this exhibition is that of the violent protests which occurred in the first few days of May, led by the No Expo movement (Chi Siamo, 2015). Thousands of people marched through the streets of the city against the cost of the show, considered to be extremely high at a time of economic crisis; the working conditions of employees and volunteers, which were considered abusive; the corruption involved in the tendering for services, regularly denounced in the press; and the fact which was evident to everyone: the event which celebrated cultural diversity, healthy eating and sustainable development was sponsored by multinationals from the agri-food business (Berizzi, Pisa, Vanni, 2015; Cos’èl’Expo 2015, 30 abr. 2015; Violence..., 1 maio 2015; Protests..., 2 maio 2015). These and other contradictions were noted at the time of the opening of the exhibition, which was widely publicized as a sign that Italy was “finally back on its feet” (Kirchgaessner, 29 abr. 2015).

This was not the first time that the world witnessed political conflicts with regard to major exhibitions. At the end of the nineteenth century, in Italy itself, there were many voices raised against the Exhibition of General and Sacred Art, of Missions and Catholic Activities, held in 1898 in Turin. Anarchist and socialist movements protested against high prices, unemployment and living conditions of workers and accused the government of wanting to distract people’s attention from the grave economic crisis through which the country was passing. If, in an international context, this exhibition launched Italy as an economic power and a fount of civilization – a line which would be stressed in subsequent events, such as in Turin 1902, Milan 1906 and Turin-Rome 1911 – internally the alliance between liberals and Catholics was sealed, accompanied by the repression of social movements, which led to a cycle of violent conflict culminating in the assassination of King Umberto I in 1900, and the subsequent political reconstruction of the country around a nationalist and colonialist agenda (Picone Petrusa, Pessolano, Bianco, 1988; Levra, Rocca, 2003; Della Coletta, 2006; Bassignana, 2006).

Both examples – 2015 and 1898 – demonstrate the potential of international exhibitions for analyzing politico-social processes, economic transformations, mentalities, cultural connections, and the contradictions and different expectations that historical actors, starting from distinct positions, bring together in the actual fabric of such events. If, for the organizers – generally national governments in association with city authorities and private organizations – the exhibitions serve to affirm geo-political projects on a global scale, for the exhibitors who take part – industrialists, businessmen, rural producers and liberal professionals – they are a good opportunity to do business and/or publicize their products and services, by encouraging consumption as a cultural habit, expanding business networks, popularizing trade as the basis for international relations and industrial production the basis for social and economic development. For scientists, physicians, inventors, artists and intellectuals of various tendencies, such great events are spaces for sharing and debating, and opportunities to exchange experiences in order to advance investment in innovation

and technology, and to expand the audience, customers or users of intellectual assets and cultural services.

Depending on one's point of view, exhibitions are also places to spread religious beliefs, ideological and political propaganda, amusement and leisure activities, or educational and instructive material. They may be privileged opportunities for observing the awkwardness and unease felt by many people in the face of the intoxicating force of "modernity," with its triumphalist optimism and its mirage of prosperity and well-being, like the character created by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the Underground Man, who, on being confronted with the Crystal Palace, translated into anguish a world that appeared to him precise, absolute and intimidating (Berman, 1987, p.223-235). Prejudice, racism and social inequality also flourish in the organization of these great shows, whether deliberate or not: in the great exhibition of Paris in 1889, a group of visiting Egyptians felt that it was itself part of what was being shown in a reconstruction of the city of Cairo, an object of curiosity in a society which was not only showing but also marking and distancing itself from what it considered different and exotic (Mitchell, 1989, p.217-219).

The many-sided character of international exhibitions, with their recurrence in time and space, their continuities and breaks, the diversity of historical subjects, coupled with a public *en masse* incapable of being described in its totality, all make a study of these mega-events difficult and complex. Even so, the exhibitions, especially those staged prior to the early decades of the twentieth century, have gained enormous visibility in the last 30 years, when the hundredth or hundred and fiftieth anniversaries of the great shows have been commemorated. The literature currently available on the subject, produced in various countries and published in many languages, with different theoretical approaches and themes, emphasizes the size of the problem which confronts the historian. What approach should be adopted, from what theoretical viewpoint? What intellectual resources and analytical tools are available? How does one select and scrutinize the sources; where does one find them? How does one deal with the historical legacy, with a social memory constructed from objects, narratives and monuments? How does one identify and access the public and its views and reactions?

These and other questions are undoubtedly posed by those who have studied and continue to study these exhibitions, particularly when confronted with the challenges and possibilities of a field of enquiry which has been renewed and expanded in recent decades. Recent developments in the field and the longevity of what is perhaps one of the most fascinating social phenomena of the globalized world have been the starting point for this essay. In the following pages, different theoretical approaches will be presented, along with the main aspects studied and sources used in examining the exhibitions, particularly up to the early decades of the twentieth century. Without aspiring to be an exhaustive bibliographical survey or a conclusive analysis, certain studies shall be highlighted which have contributed towards consolidating the field. As far as possible, authors who have looked at Latin America will be especially considered, because the experiences of the continent remain little known or mentioned in the most wide-ranging studies or in the grand panoramic views of the subject. At the end, an investigative approach for providing a global view of the exhibitions is suggested, including the experiences of the most diverse countries in organizing these events since the middle of the nineteenth century.

## Definitions

It is appropriate to begin with a question: what exactly are we talking about? Over the course of time there have been various kinds of “exhibition,” ranging from universal to thematic, and associated with an area of knowledge (the arts, sciences, medicine, health etc.), an economic activity (design, manufacturing, mining, agriculture, floriculture etc.) and/or historical events (Discovery of the Americas, French Revolution, Italian Unification, Independence of the United States, of Belgium, of Brazil etc.). There are international shows, i.e., those which include the formal representation of a number of countries, along with national, regional, provincial or colonial events, many of which are conceived on a geographical basis extrapolating local borders. The majority are intended to exhibit products and processes and to promote ideas and places, but there are also events which are strictly commercial and private which, despite being called “exhibitions,” are more like large fairs. The actual vernacular designation of such events denotes conceptual and structural differences, from the encyclopedic show conceived by the French – the *exposition universelle* – to the American “world fair” and the German *Weltausstellung*. The compendia by Findling and Pelle (1990) and Schroeder-Gudehus and Rasmussen (1992) show not only the diversity of the exhibitions during the period, but also how contemporary scholars understand each event differently, in accordance with the place from which they write.

It would be fruitless to discuss whether a particular event was a “universal exhibition,” a “world fair” or an “international exhibition,” because there were quite a few cases of the same show presented as a “universal and international exhibition” or of an avowedly thematic international exhibition being frequently considered by contemporary scholars as a “universal exhibition.” For this reason, those studying the subject should not lose sight of the fact that: (a) starting in the nineteenth century, the term “exhibition” underwent a semantic expansion, in that new museums were opening and events were being organized under various pretexts; (b) it is important to be aware of the manner in which each event is presented by its organizers, particularly in comparative studies seeking similarities and differences between the shows; (c) it was only in 1928 that the first international convention was signed that sought to codify and define rules, length and frequency of international exhibitions, because it had become impracticable for countries to participate in all the events. According to Galopin (1997), between London 1851, considered the first international exhibition because it brought together exhibits from 25 nations and 15 colonies, and 1931, the year in which the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) started operating, linked to the Council of the League of Nations, there were eighty universal and international exhibitions – an average of one per year. A greater example of competition and of the disparity in projects came in 1888, when no less than five shows were held simultaneously, in Barcelona (Universal Exhibition), Brussels (Universal and International Exhibition and Great International Competition in Science and Industry), Copenhagen (Nordic Exhibition of Industry, Agriculture and Art), Glasgow (International Exhibition of Science, Art and Industry) and Melbourne (Centenary Exhibition).

However, varied the projects might be in their intentions and format, it is necessary to establish benchmarks to distinguish an international (and universal) exhibition from its local cousins, from fairs, markets, competitions and similar events, even if the former has regional

or national traces. In the first place, the patronage of the State is fundamental, even where the show is organized by private groups or city authorities. The host State plays an important role in issuing invitations to other States, and in persuading and convincing the international community. Historical celebrations operate in this process, by creating the environment and the justification for other nations to be represented in a certain event. At the same time as the celebration is conceived for the self-glorification of the host country, it encourages rivalry and challenges other countries to publicize their greatness and achievements. Up until the First World War, the process is self-sustaining, based on the expansion of industry and international trade and on an ideology which lauded "progress" and "education."

Another fundamental point is the existence of a system for classifying the objects exhibited, irrespective of whether prizes are awarded or products sold. In all cases the classification must be meticulous. Objects are generally arranged in groups and classes, depending on the materials with which they are made and/or the use(s) for which they are intended. For example, in the International Exhibition of Industry and Work, held in Turin in 1911, everything exhibited was classified into 26 major groups, which in turn were subdivided into 167 classes, from education and learning (group 1) to artefacts and works for the defense of the country (group 26), passing through precision instruments and scientific apparatus, mechanics, electricity, transport, postal services, sports, health, decoration, music, extractivism, silviculture, agriculture, food, chemicals and textiles, mining, leatherwork, the press etc. This attempt to order all human activities and knowledge goes back to the encyclopedic tradition starting in the eighteenth century and also to the didactic character which forms the core of the exhibitions. In this respect, they share the same educational concerns as museums, because both can be looked at as "spaces for ordering" (Galopin, 1997, p.18).

The systems, however, varied over time and space. According to Rasmussen (1992), there were two competing systems in the nineteenth century, one French and the other English. The former was thought to be "intellectual" or "philosophical" because it conceived industrial activity by reference to the raw material, the techniques used and the resulting products. The latter, more "pragmatic," classified products into large groups in accordance with their usefulness. This was the system which prevailed, despite being much criticized and continually revised and adapted. The fact is that when prizes are awarded, the system of classification has a direct effect on the assessments by the international jury, because the system can influence the way in which the products are evaluated and can favor certain objects or industrial activities in which the host State or the organizers are more interested or to which they wish to give greater prominence. The system also affects how the space is conceived, the planning of specific pavilions, the layout of the buildings and the route or course followed by the show, giving an organic character to the whole.

It is possible to find an example of such a flexible attitude to classification (and of the political interests involved in the system) from the exhibition referred to above, namely that of Turin in 1911. On this occasion, there were constant disputes between the organizers of the show, all industrialists, and the representatives of an agricultural and extractivist country, namely Brazil, due to the classification adopted for certain products, based on their use and the place they occupied in the European industrial scene. The Brazilians wanted to see one of the country's principal exports, rubber, included in the silviculture and forest products

group or the extractive and chemical industries group, but the Italian organizing committee took the view that it should be classified in the leather industries group, because at the time rubber was the raw material which was replacing leather in various industrial products. A similar problem arose with cocoa, included in the confectionery class, contrary to the wishes of the Brazilians to classify it simply as an agricultural product. As a result, rubber and cocoa were evaluated by the jury on the basis of their industrial applications and not on the basis of the qualities inherent in their productive processes, as argued by the representatives of Brazil (Sanjad, Castro, 2015, 2016).

Both points – the patronage of the State (political and economic aspects, both national and international, related to the show) and the classification system (organizational, spatial and material aspects giving the show its form) – give substance to a field of investigation which touches on different areas of knowledge. They concern both the legibility of the objects in society and the social and political hierarchies. Around these points various questions arise which are still scarcely researched, such as the creation of monopolies for exploiting the services connected with the exhibition, the composition of the jury and the award of prizes, the working conditions and pay of the employees involved, the production of advertising material and the enlistment of the press, urban and landholding reforms, the repression of opposition movements etc. These questions – which are essentially controversial and disputed – cannot be relegated to the status of mere details or treated as diversions in the history of each show, because they form part of the process of the planning, construction and operation of these mega-events. More than any other aspect, it is the contradictions and conflicts which reveal the varied forces at work in society, the differing points of view, the dissonances and fractures which we are accustomed to call “modernity.”

We have, therefore, a combination of elements which may be considered as subjects for investigation, including the social forces operating in the process, from the political and business elites to the attitudes of exhibitors, visitors, local inhabitants, workers, women, intellectuals, religious personnel etc., whether in confrontation with each other or not. This combination is common to all the exhibitions held during the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century. Some scholars identify the First World War as a milestone in time for a particular type of exhibition, others believe that the milestone occurs in the 1930s. It is not my intention to discuss such a division, because I do not consider it important and there is disagreement about it. In any event it is possible to note that there is a change between 1910 and 1930 in the way the exhibitions are conceived, the manner in which objects are shown and even in the effects on society of the great exhibitions. The creation and subsequent consolidation of the BIE contributed towards a new framework for international exhibitions with regard to the concept of “exhibition,” the types and hierarchies of shows, the regulation of frequency and time spans etc. Less “universal” and more “thematic” or “specialized,” less “commercial” and more “cultural” or “humanist,” less “didactic” and more “ideological,” less “material” and more “conceptual:” these are some of the aspects discussed in the literature which still demand certain efforts in precision and investigation, particularly with regard to the exhibitions staged after the Second World War.

## Historiography

Historiography defines international exhibitions as geopolitical phenomena of modernity, associated with the rise of the middle classes throughout the world, nationalist and colonialist movements which molded international relations of the period, and the emergence of an “exhibitionary network” or “exhibition culture” which connected different places and times in human history, making it possible to develop a repertoire and pattern in the language of such exhibitions. This interpretive picture, occurring particularly from the 1980s onwards, is to be found in certain theoretical constructs in the social sciences and the humanities. The first and perhaps the most important is the theory of hegemony of Antonio Gramsci, which allows us to view the exhibitions as ideological tools of the dominant classes for imposing their values and constructing a social consensus through persuasion and the consent of those dominated, represented by the huge numbers of visitors attending the events. Rydell (1987, 1993) developed this view in two books, the first on exhibitions held in the USA between 1876 and 1916, which “reflected the efforts by America’s intellectual, political, and business leaders to establish a consensus about their priorities and their vision of progress as racial dominance and economic growth” (Rydell, 1987, p.8). While “symbolic universes,” a concept borrowed from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann to represent structures for legitimizing the social experience, with a view to constructing a collective reference point for individual actions, the shows studied by Rydell were essential for the understanding of American culture. The idea is taken up again and expanded in the second book, dedicated to exhibitions held up to the 1950s, including European exhibitions. According to Rydell (1993), there were substantial differences between the shows of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intended to construct an image of stability and order in a world undergoing transformation, as viewed by the dominant classes, and those that took place after 1930, concerned with contemplating the future and presenting different solutions for the evils afflicting humanity, without, however, questioning what sustained the capitalist system at the time, namely inequality and colonialism.

This approach seems connected with three others, centering around the writings of Eric Hobsbawm, particularly those concerned with imperialism; that of Michel Foucault, for whom control and discipline constitute the reason for state action and social standardization; and those of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in whose works we find the concepts of culture industry, mass consumption and popular culture. MacKenzie (1984) and Greenhalgh (1988) are among the first to posit the relationship between imperialism and exhibitions, the former focusing on the various manifestations of the “imperial idea,” including the portentous British shows, in which the exploitation of colonies was represented as a form of human adventure and social responsibility, the latter analyzing how the exhibition phenomenon developed in England, France and the United States as a means of “national self-expression” and, at the same time, as an instrument of cultural apparatus by which imperialism was explained for mass consumption.

A study showing the influence of Foucault and Gramsci can be found in Bennett (1995). In creating the concept of the “exhibitionary complex,” the author included international exhibitions in the set of institutions which, in the nineteenth century, transferred objects

and human bodies from the private sphere to the public domain, subject to representations which transformed them into “vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power ... throughout society” (Bennett, 1995, p.60-61). The London exhibition of 1851 was a milestone in this process by creating a standard for exhibitions, which simultaneously regulated the objects for examination by the public and the public who examined the objects. This interpretation views the international exhibitions as characteristic expressions of a disciplinarian society with totalitarian ambitions, to the extent that they tried “to make the whole world, past and present, metonymically available in the assemblages of objects and peoples they brought together and, from their towers, to lay it before a controlling vision” (Bennett, 1995, p.66). Both the State and society played important roles in the development of the “exhibitionary complex,” the former by providing the finance for “educational and civilizing agencies,” the latter by organizing, encouraging and acclaiming in a spontaneous manner those educational institutions which were managed by the State itself, such as the museums and the great exhibitions. This complex, according to Bennett (1995, p.73), provided “new instruments for the moral and cultural regulation of the working classes.”

The binomial of mass culture/mass consumption appears frequently in studies on these mega-events and has obvious points of convergence with the approach analyzed here, although few authors go back to its historical dimension, owing to the Frankfurt School and the relationship established between it, the binomial and the culture industry. Ley and Olds (1988) warn that these concepts represent a theoretical trap, in that they assume that the public or audience at the exhibitions is a mass manipulated by an economic elite. Both the idea of hegemony and ideas of social control and mass consumption/mass culture can ignore the visiting public and the organized social movements as historical agents, namely as essential parts for the functioning of the exhibitions, capable of interpreting, resisting, negotiating and intervening in the historical process, changing the context and being changed by it. We should remember the protests and the polemics which preceded the opening of the exhibitions of 1898 and 2015, mentioned at the beginning of this text.

According to Ley and Olds (1988, p.200), the “imputations of hegemony and social control in existing studies are, however, little more than inferences from above, and include minimal evidence of the actual perception of the public.” In some analyses, not only the public at the exhibitions remains an unknown, but the elite is represented in a monolithic manner, as though there were no differences, disagreements or conflicts of interest. The actual ideology which shaped the exhibitions cannot be looked at as something fixed in time and space. Ideas about morality, education, race, health, cities, art, science and other matters were not universal or fixed. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the controversies and the conflicts, to the distinct points of view between the social classes and among members of the same class. Ley and Olds (1988) advanced the matter by studying the perceptions of the public which visited the exhibition held in Vancouver in 1986. These were not always coherent or consistent with the intentions of the show’s organizers.

This criticism is based in large part on a more anthropological approach to the exhibitions, which is to be found, among other places, in the works of Benedict (1983) and Starr (1983). The former author examined the socio-cultural significance of the international exhibitions during the industrial era. According to him, “the fairs were not only selling goods, they were selling



ideas: ideas about the relations between nations, the spread of education, the advancement of science, the form of cities, the nature of domestic life, the place of art in society” (Benedict, 1983, p.2). Ideas also inspired and connected visitors, who behaved in a symbolic manner, as if they were taking part in a ritual, a pilgrimage or a collective performance. In this sense, it is possible to draw analogies between industrial society and other human societies, such as certain indigenous groups of North America, which use ceremonies to strengthen their prestige and status, with a view to the construction of social identities. Starr (1983) analyzed the reception of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, held in San Francisco in 1915, drawing attention both to the sources available for this kind of approach and to the intentions and reactions of the middle classes who visited the show. Beyond the “circus” and “spectacle” metaphors with which one supposedly characterizes an unpoliticized public, the author shows that the search for “self-improvement” and “uplift” was as important for the public as the entertainment and fantasy that the exhibitions provided. Instead of a mono-directional process from top to bottom, involving control and annulment, the exhibitions ended up with an interpenetration of the manifest interests of organizers and visitors/consumers.

Equally close to an anthropological approach and as the result of the development of the history of mentalities and of cultural history, more recent studies on international exhibitions have been largely based on the concept of “representation,” as advanced by Chartier (1989, 1994), and on that of “construction” or “production” of reality, analyzed in masterly fashion by Burke (2004). However strange or misplaced it may appear, it is not uncommon to see, associated with the constructivism of the so-called new cultural history, a trend towards semiological studies, particularly that developed by Roland Barthes in the 1970s, at the time he expanded the concept of “language” and applied it to the investigation of the power relationships established by discursive practice. The term “discourse,” therefore, makes its appearance to designate utterances which are not restricted to the text and the verb, which are by nature ideological and which impregnate images, objects, the ways they are exhibited, the architecture of buildings, ceremonies, types of behavior, gestures etc., while it is the task of the investigator to deconstruct them and reveal their meanings, whether hidden or not. Incorporated into the studies of international exhibitions, these theoretical contributions, derived from the cross-fertilization of different areas of knowledge, have expanded the field, revealed new objects of investigation, and allowed more complex approaches, for example with cognitive processes and semiotic systems.

At this stage, the reader will already have perceived that there are many possible ways to approach these events – and almost no consensus between those who study them. As well observed by Rydell, Findling and Pelle (2000), perhaps the only consensus is the perception that the exhibitions were and continue to be heterogeneous phenomena in time and space, sufficiently contradictory and complex to oblige any investigator to make cuts and reductions which make historiographical analysis difficult. These authors produced a similar analysis and identified six “schools of thought.” The first is the “school of cultural hegemony,” centered on the producers, which “examines world’s fairs largely through the intentions of their organizers and managers” (Rydell, Findling, Pelle, 2000, p.10). The works of Rydell and Bennett, already quoted here, are linked to this “school.” The second is centered on the public, with the purpose of showing that “despite the intentions of expositions organizers to organize

the experiences of fairgoers and, at least in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to educate those visitors, they were not necessarily taken in by the ideological messages of the fairs' sponsors" (Rydell, Findling, Pelle, 2000, p.11). Some examples of this "school" are the works of Gilbert (1991) and Walden (1997), the former on the urban utopias at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, the latter on the industrial exhibitions held annually in Toronto from 1879 to 1903. The third "school," considered counter-hegemonic, was also centered on the public, but from a different perspective: included in it are the studies of how exploited and marginalized social groups, such as indigenous peoples and women, were capable of turning the exhibitions to their own advantage and defying the stereotypes assigned to them. This was the case in the study by Moses (1999) on how the Wild West Shows helped indigenous groups assimilated by force to preserve traces of their culture by obliging them to dance, re-enact battles and reconstruct their settlements. Although the work of Moses is firmly anchored in anthropology, the influence of this discipline was considered by Rydell, Findling and Pelle (2000) as the main characteristic of the fourth "school," without further details. The principal references are Benedict (1983), already mentioned, and Susman (1985), who is a historian better known for his work on North American culture. The fifth "school" has a more "documentary" focus, opening "windows on the technological, scientific, architectural, and urban planning dimensions of world's fairs" (Rydell, Findling, Pelle, 2000, p.12). Examples are, among others, the works of Findling and Pelle (1990) and Schroeder-Gudehus and Rasmussen (1992). The sixth "school" includes the works written by memorialists and collectors, with a non-academic approach, but which were fundamental for the development of this field of study.

These distinctions outlined by Rydell, Findling and Pelle (2000) are highly questionable, firstly because they do not define the concept of "school of thought," but also because they confuse a theoretical approach, objects of study and literary genre. Of the six "schools" listed by the authors, only one was even minimally characterized, namely that of Gramsci/Foucault – and it is doubtful whether there currently exist schools other than that with an anthropological bias and that developed within the cultural history and history of mentalities. More consistent and effective, in the sense of trying to organize the field, are the texts of Ory (2010) and Geppert (20 jun. 2013), even though they are summaries. They are not historiographical studies, but essays which allow the exhibition phenomenon to be placed within an organic and coherent framework.

According to Ory (2010, p.225), international exhibitions are, on the one hand, the result of "two modernities," both political and economic, of two countries, England and France, and on the other hand, "the best evidence of their communion in a new religion: the religion of Progress." The persistence of this phenomenon over a period of time and its spread to various other countries was possible because it fulfilled "eight functions of modernity": a technological exhibition, intended to show off technical innovation and awaken vocations in the devotees of "modern religion;" a commercial fair, understood as a space to proclaim the capitalist system; an architectonic exercise, bringing together architects and engineers in the development of construction techniques and aesthetic experimentation; a leverage for urban improvement, given that the great shows were pioneers in city layout and the "ambitious" and "violent" occupation of space; an art exhibition, both in current

and retrospective shows, which encouraged the development of the history of art and the production of new works; a garden party given by the host nation, in the sense that the shows were a “propaganda exercise” by governments; a league of nations, each exhibition being “an extraordinary collection of national *mises en scène*,” full of “signs and, frequently, confessions with regard to the stereotypes assumed by the country in question in the eyes of others” (Ory, 2010, p.230); and a people’s party, a meaning which persists in the collective imagination regarding these mega-events, through representations and reminiscences. According to Ory (2010), these eight functions combine the essence of the utopia which shaped modernity, based on progress and peace as transcendent entities which make possible a positive relationship between individuals and nations. We can also consider them here as keys for accessing the world of exhibitions, starting from a cultural viewpoint.

The text of Geppert (20 jun. 2013) may be considered in a similar manner. The author considers international exhibitions to be “the most popular and most powerful medium of the 19th century.” Indicators of progress and modernity, such “as an elaborate spectacle of social self-representation and much-respected places of the global exchange of persons, ideas and goods, world exhibitions, especially in the second half of the 19th century, were of world-historical importance.” More sensitive and aware of the global dimension of the exhibition phenomenon, Geppert (20 jun. 2013) places it in the tension between locality, nationality and globality. The phenomenon played an essential role in forming a global society, being an active agent in the process of international integration. The ways of approaching it can be summarized as three: a study of its forms or models, characterized by the material transitoriness associated with the creation of permanent legacies and local traditions; its social and political functions at various levels, such as the encouragement of consumption and middle class habits, the expansion of national prestige, the furtherance of international commerce and the demonstration of the superiority of the western hemisphere, resulting in a mixture which simultaneously encouraged eurocentrism and cosmopolitanism, internationalism and colonialism; and its results, the most obvious among which are urban and spatial planning, civil engineering and the development of infrastructure, but also the institutional connections which linked, for example, the exhibitions and the development of collections and museums.

Geppert’s speculations (20 jun. 2013) raise important questions for the understanding of the phenomenon on a broader scale. They go towards overcoming what Galopin (1997, p.15) identified as an “indifference towards the foreign experience” in the literature that exists on the exhibitions, namely the excessively internal, local or ethnocentric nature of the analyses, which are often steeped in national prejudices and pay little attention to the changes, the integration and the imitation which can be observed in the succession of exhibitions over a fairly long time and all over the planet. The focus of the shows held in England, in France and in the USA, which are the subject of the greater part of the available literature, gave rise to propositions, comparisons and inferences which fail to take into account other social experiences, as well as variations, differences and adaptations. As a result, little exposure is given to exhibitions held in other parts of the world, such as Latin America, a region made up of former colonies with economies based on agriculture, cattle raising, extractivism and mining. How, for example, do they fit into an interpretive picture which associates the

exhibitions with imperialism, colonialism and industrialism? Or what about the great shows as private capital projects, in which the State often played a secondary or supporting role? These are questions which deserve attention.

Munro (2010, p.83), in an inspirational historiographical essay, mentions that “the exclusive focus on American and European world’s fairs eclipsed the importance of fairs held in other regions.” Examining studies of shows held in Mexico, Argentina and Ecuador, the author argues that “nations throughout Latin America both participated in and hosted a number of expositions in an effort to promote images of cultural modernity and industrial progress to international audiences” (Munro, 2010, p.83). The actual themes regularly given prominence in the literature, such as the social processes connected with urbanization, industrialization and colonization, exclude *a priori* many countries from the categories analyzed, as though the exhibitions that they held were deviant phenomena. To get around this historiographical gap, Munro (2010, p.87) suggests a broader understanding of international shows: “Fairs staged in former colonies held meaning distinctly different from those held in either the United States or Europe, as these nations varied in their approaches to fair organization, access to funding sources, and understandings of the cultural and social significance of expositions.” This broadening of perceptions towards a more global perspective of the exhibition phenomenon is being made possible thanks to the investigations of researchers such as Geppert and Munro. New themes and subjects for study must be sought, and in the case of Latin America the analyses must include the considerable historical record written in Spanish and Portuguese, which is almost always ignored by English and French speaking writers.

### **Themes and variations**

In contrast to the works on the characteristics and general structure of the international exhibitions, well-known from the historians (Bouin, Chanut, 1980; Findling, Pelle, 1990; Schroeder-Gudehus, Rasmussen, 1992; Greenhalgh, 2011), a large number of studies which are relatively new in their approaches and themes have been produced in recent years in many countries. In these studies, exhibitions are seen as windows for looking at society and mindsets in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through which it is possible to see “snapshots” of social segments and shared beliefs which flourished before, during and after each event.

Among them are gender studies, particularly those concerned with female work and with the way women saw things, saw themselves and were depicted during such events (Rabinovitz, 1997; Boisseau, Markwyn, 2010; Wadsworth, Wiegand, 2012). These studies in general owe a debt to the classic book by Weinman (1981) on the Women’s Building constructed at the Chicago Columbian Exhibition, planned, decorated and run by women, with the aim of extolling the presence of women in various human activities. They passed through an interesting development in analyses such as that of Selanders and Crane (2010), on the role played – at a distance – by Florence Nightingale at the International Congress of Charities, Correction, and Philanthropy, held in parallel with the Chicago show, which was fundamental for the professionalization of nursing in the USA; or that of Simour (2014), on the female Moroccan dancers who performed at American exhibitions, known pejoratively

as “belly-dancing girls,” which touches not only on the history of racial contacts and cultural estrangement, but also on the construction of an erotic image of the oriental woman which helped to redefine the role of women in a puritan society. As regards Latin America, where gender studies associated with the exhibitions are still hardly developed, González Stephan (2004) has produced a very good study of objects which disputed the national and patriarchal image constructed during the first Venezuelan National Exhibition in 1883, particularly an embroidered portrait by the unknown J. Paz Guevara of a well-known heroine of the country’s independence, Policarpa Salavarrieta, who also used to sew and embroider. According to González Stephan (2004, p.54), “the considerable contingent of women who took part in the Exhibition did not celebrate the Father of the Fatherland with their contributions. The face of Simón Bolívar was significantly absent from their works; in his place, the image of Policarpa Salavarrieta emerged.”

Racial studies and those of a marked anthropological influence have increased in number and complexity. They discuss the meanings assigned to words like “negro,” “savage,” “native” and “Indian,” figures almost always represented as inferior and primitive beings; the way in which “representatives” of non-European populations were co-opted or captured by the organizers of shows and exhibited to a public thirsty for novelties and oddities; and the polemics on otherness, hierarchy, slavery and empire which the exhibitions produced (Maxwell, 1999; Sánchez Gómez, 2002; Blanchard, Boëtsch, Snoep, 2011; Qureshi, 2011). The performance studies also fall into this group, devoted to analyzing how individuals or social groups, generally captive, exploited or marginalized, constructed their own meanings and appeared in the exhibitions as performers, capable of resisting, adapting and sometimes benefitting from degrading or disadvantageous situations. It is especially interesting to observe how North American, African and Asian indigenous peoples, and also black people climbing the social ladder, learned to “play” by the rules of a white, macho and violent society – and that submission and entertainment were expected from them (Moses, 1999; Denson, 2003; Gleach, 2003; Afable, 2004; Bell, 2011; Simour, 2013; Cardon, 2014).

In line with this perspective are the books by Parezo and Fowler (2007) on the ethnographical shows and human exhibitions in the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition of 1904, organized by anthropologists from the Smithsonian Institution, which brought together the impressive number of three thousand indigenous persons; and by Wilson (2012), on the formation of a black public at American exhibitions and museums from the end of the nineteenth century to 1960, at the same time as an active black counter-public sphere started to promote its own agenda of social demands, which came to play a decisive role in the narratives and representations of the cultural identity of this group. Finally, from a more cultural aspect, but still concerned with uncovering barely visible sectors of society, Missal (2008) and Markwyn (2014) brought together texts and images relating to the construction of the Panama Canal and the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition of 1915, with the aim of analyzing the meanings constructed by different groups, from the Asian workers directly involved in the construction of the canal to the inhabitants of San Francisco, on themes related to the show, such as technology, work and fatherland.

Studies on the presence of, and the part played by, religious personnel in the exhibitions, or on the organization of missionary shows sponsored by governments and churches, are

among the themes that have arisen in recent years, but which have been developed in a more timid manner. In general, they examine how churches and religious groups merged with political and colonial interests, at the same time as they took advantage of the exhibitions to disseminate their creeds, gain sympathizers and increase their social status (Burriss, 2002; Neilson, 2011; García Jordán, 2012). Cantor (2011) shows the extent to which religious matters formed part of the organization of exhibitions, starting with the London show of 1851, which was considered not only a celebration of industry, but also a “confession of faith,” noticeable in certain details: the cruciform design of the Crystal Palace and the analogies with myths described in the Bible, such as the Tower of Babel and Belshazzar’s Feast. The author analyzes hundreds of sermons and treatises produced by various faiths during the exhibition, revealing “answers” of various kinds to the advance of modern materialism. Diverging positions were also a feature of the World’s Parliament of Religions which met at the Chicago Columbian show, with delegates from various western and eastern churches, particularly with regard to the function of religion in a world which was becoming more global and more secular (Kittelstrom, 2009). Notable among these studies are the investigative efforts of Sánchez Gómez (2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012) with regard to the relationship between Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church, the colonialist State, such as Spain and Portugal, ethnological research and the displays of ethnographical material at the international, colonial and missionary exhibitions.

One of the themes which deserve greater attention is the perception/reception by the public of what was presented, as well as the social profile of visitors and how they interpreted and reproduced their experiences at international shows. Researchers in the field are unanimous regarding the difficulty of the task owing to the scarcity of sources. However, one inspirational work is that of Niquette and Buxton (1997) on the sociability and reflexivity at nineteenth century exhibitions. Making use of concepts and methods employed in studies of sociability in museums, the authors examine cartoons showing visitors interacting with each other. According to Niquette and Buxton (1997, p.86), the cartoons offer “a complex and detailed view of people’s concerns, values, and opinions,” like “a second-order cliché that serves to make the receiver aware of stereotypes held in common by the mass public.” For the authors, an exhibition is a “space for social differentiation,” which not only transforms the public into a “self-regulating organization”, but also allows social identities to be negotiated through the interaction of visitors. These conclusions lead us to the studies by Barth (2008a) and Tran (2012, 2015). The former, taking advantage of techniques to be found in museum studies, allied to micro-history, examined the imagination of persons visiting the Universal Exhibition of 1867 in Paris, with the aim of characterizing exhibitions as “independent imaginary worlds,” namely as events which were not judged by what they represented or by the intentions of the organizers, but by their ability to make visitors create agreeable images and sensations of pleasure. Tran (2012, 2015) examines the consumption of food at exhibitions, as a cultural habit and a symbol of integration and civility (or the lack of it), as happened in the restaurants for tourists, at the picnics organized by the visitors, at the banquets offered by the organizers of the shows and in the human zoos.

The same subject – the consumption of food – received an extraordinary contribution in the volume edited by Teughells and Scholliers (2015), perhaps the first of its kind. It

brings together texts by various authors, with various kinds of approach, on gastronomy, commercialization, propaganda and the display of foodstuffs in exhibitions, and includes a chapter on Latin America, written by Pilcher (2015). According to this author, food was to be seen in Latin-American pavilions at various exhibitions and was considered an important resource for highlighting the place of this region in the world by means of cultural diplomacy, commerce and the encouragement of immigration. Products transplanted from Europe, such as Chilean wines, awarded a prize for the first time at the exhibition of Bordeaux in 1882, and native products appropriated by national society, like Mexican tequila, offered to visitors to the Mexican pavilion since the 1855 exhibition in Paris, were important factors in the emergence in Latin America of national cuisines, which combined “patriotism and cosmopolitanism in pursuit of social distinction” (Pilcher, 2015, p.56).



These are some of the historical themes and topics which have emerged in recent years and which show the growth of this field of study. This development, however, has not impeded the continuance of more traditional studies, centering on urbanism and architecture, on the arts and sciences, and on external and internal political relationships. It might be said that they are responsible for the “explosion of scholarship” mentioned by Rydell (2008, p.21.1) almost ten years ago; there is so much good work published on these themes, demanding a high degree of selectivity from the historiographical and bibliographical reviews. They can be divided into four groups. The first appears to be the most numerous and difficult to describe because the works have been produced by professionals from a variety of areas and with differing aims. In general, they have also been renewed by cultural history. These studies range from an examination of the process of planning the exhibitions to the impact on the infrastructure and culture of the host cities, passing through architectural projects, the construction of national pavilions and exhibition design. As examples, it is worth looking at the works of Morton (2003) on the association between politics, architecture and city planning in the colonial exhibition of Paris in 1931; of Courtenay (2011) on the architectonic equalization employed in Rome for the international exhibition of 1911; of Udovi ki-Selb (2012) on the Soviet pavilion in the Paris exhibition of 1937; and of Castillo (2012) on the German pavilion at the Brussels exhibition of 1958. All of these works deal with architecture and the political context – national and/or global.

It is the same situation with urban studies, currently intertwined with political and cultural questions. They are generally part of a post-colonial critique which deconstructs bourgeois representations of the urban and rural world. Worth mentioning here are the studies of the utopias of Ville-Lumière (Paris), of White City (Chicago), of Bianca Valentina (Turin) and of Jewel City (San Francisco) (Gilbert, 1991; Mabire, 2000; Appelbaum, 2009; Geppert, 2010; Gursel, 2010; Robinson, 2013; Ackley, 2014). From another aspect, scholars have looked at urbanism, exhibitions and national/global politics. See for example the pioneering study by Pereira (1988) on the urban transformations produced in Rio de Janeiro for the National Exhibition of 1908 and the inspirational article by Meller (1995) on the part played by exhibitions in the professionalization of town planning and the widening of international

cooperation in the field, encouraged by philanthropic organizations; or the articles by Martin (2010, 2015), on the urban and social problems faced by the organizers of the International Exhibition of Damascus in 1954, and Soppelsa (2013), on the urban disasters and epidemics which occurred in Paris in 1900, which were used by opponents of the Universal Exhibition to attack it, and thereby undermine the conception of “urban modernity” which emerged with the French Third Republic.

In Latin America, the most recent urban studies associated with international exhibitions seem to be developing in a rather timid manner. At least in Brazil and in Argentina it is possible to identify important contributions concerned with the history of urban visual culture and with the history of urbanism. Barbuy (2006, 2011), for example, proceeded consistently in this direction, extrapolating the theme of exhibitions and widening our understanding of the urban phenomenon as regards material and visual culture, particularly the cosmopolitanism and eclecticism which shaped the commercial center of São Paulo in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. In the same manner, Pereira (2010) revisited the National Exhibition of 1908, this time as curator of the show “1908: Brazil exhibited” (“1908: um Brasil em exposição”), seen in various Brazilian cities between 2010 and 2012. According to the author, the 1908 show differed from its predecessors because its aim was not to pre-select products and objects destined for international exhibitions, but to celebrate the centenary of the opening of Brazilian ports to friendly nations. The date was symbolic for the liberal mentality for what it contributed to trade and the interchange of ideas and products, and for the first time it afforded a picture of a Brazil “seen from inside,” vigorous and modern, directed at a domestic public which longed to play an active part in a globalized world. Boixadós (2009) also examined urban reforms associated with a national exhibition, that of Córdoba in 1871. Heralded as “the first exhibition of the Republic of Argentina,” the show “was presented as a complement to a series of actions for the transformation of Argentinian society,” demanding a variety of urban policies intended to transform the city into a government shop window, the actual “enactment of modernization and modernity,” but which in the end produced an insufficient legacy because of a “clash of interests,” “disagreements” and political demands (Boixadós, 2009, p.148).



The second group of studies brings together, in fact, a series of works on various themes, such as the plastic arts (painting and photography), cinema, music, science, health and medicine, instruments and techniques, antiquities etc., examined in the light of questions of a political, economic, social and cultural nature, such as nationalism, diplomacy, institutionalization, innovation, advertising, popular culture, markets, collecting etc. The various themes are generally approached from the standpoint of public presentations, conferences or specific shows held during the exhibitions, whether in parallel or forming part of the official program, some of them with far-reaching results. Another feature common to these studies is the preoccupation with a cultural and ideological matrix which is customarily known as “modernity,” in all its aspects, such as visual culture, cosmopolitanism, the consolidation of



the public sphere, the domain of technology, specialist knowledge etc. (Carré et al., 2012; Wulf, 2015; Ganz, 2015).

This thematic group is further split up, to the extent that the actual object of historical investigation becomes specialized or explores new aspects of society. Today we have, for example, analyses dealing with the appreciation of Japanese painters in Vienna (1873), Paris (1878) and Chicago (1893) (Coaldrake, 2013), of American and Swiss painters in Paris (1855-1900) (Fischer, 1999; Ruedin, 2010), of Hungarians in San Francisco (1915) (Barki, 2010) and of Europeans in various Argentinian exhibitions (Dosio, 2006). The same process of historical surveying occurs with the cinema, which entered exhibitions in the 1890s, without the same prominence given to the plastic arts, but which, from 1915 onwards, took on the role of “celebration” and “spectacle,” “used increasingly as a ‘shop window’ in which the nation displays, to itself and others, the national virtues to be celebrated in a context marked by imperialism” (Morettin, 2011b, p.239). See, for example, studies on the projections made in Saint Louis (1904) (Gunning, 1994), Paris (1900 to 1937) (Bertrand, 2011; Morettin, 2013; Puyal, 2015) and Rio de Janeiro (1922) (Morettin, 2011a, 2012).

Investigations into the presence of music in international exhibitions, whether through the appearance of bands or the holding of symphony concerts and festivals, have not developed to the same extent as the other arts. Fauser (2005) published a pioneering book on the “soundscape” of the 1889 exhibition, the stage for many concerts which would change the course of modern music, such as those featuring Debussy and Rimsky-Korsakov, but also much popular and non-European music, analyzing the performance of composers, the criticism by writers and journalists and the reaction of the public. According to the author, music was fundamental to the process of constructing national identities, particularly in France, and of defining social hierarchies and the distance between what was considered “civilized” taste (European) and “primitive” (exotic). This argument is close to that put forward in studies on the presentation and reception of non-European music in other shows, such as that of Talusan (2004), who investigated the journey of a Philippine military band to the exhibition in Saint Louis (1904), and of Cannata (2014), on musicians from Guatemala, from Mexico and from indigenous peoples at San Francisco (1915). Both authors agree that, if international exhibitions were spaces of “imperial authority” where stereotypes and prejudices were constructed in order to differentiate the Other, they were also spaces for resisting and challenging this authority, including through music and the way in which it was performed, in open demonstrations of belonging and racial or social pride.

The works on material culture may be included in the same group. In general, they investigate the ways in which utilitarian, ritual or decorative objects, from various places and epochs, were presented, interpreted and received at the exhibitions, which puts these works at the frontier between museology, anthropology, history and archaeology. To give examples of the diversity of studies in this field, it is possible to cite those which deal with the display and reception of medieval artefacts in the exhibitions held between 1867 and 1900 (Effros, 2008), of Scandinavian peasant utensils in Paris (1878) (DeGroff, 2012), of archaeological objects also in Paris (1867, 1878 and 1889) (Müller-Scheessel, 2001), of *art nouveau* objects in Turin (1902) (O’Neill, 2007), of Japanese and Chinese artefacts in Vienna (1873), Seattle (1909) and San Francisco (1915) (Baird, 2011, 2014; Lee, 2007; Markwyn, 2008) and of Russian

decorative arts in Philadelphia (1876) and in Chicago (1893) (Kettering, 2007). These studies demonstrate how a selection of objects said to be “exotic,” “primitive” or “popular,” whether old or even innovatory, as well as the way they were exhibited, can reveal interesting traits in the society of the time.

Although they have been less studied than artistic objects or antiquities, scientific and technological artefacts and instruments, including those displayed in shows on health, medicine and hygiene, also had ample space in the exhibitions. They represented, above all, the technological development of each country, their control over diseases and natural phenomena, their capacity for industrial innovation and even their military power at times of great international tension, such as the years preceding the First World War and the years of the Cold War (Brown, 2009; Siegelbaum, 2012; Devos, 2013). Electricity and photography are especially typical of the nineteenth century, because they were simultaneously exhibited as technological innovations and incorporated as resources for improving the exhibitions themselves through techniques of illumination and movement and the potential for visual representation (Beauchamp, 1997; Brown, 2001). See, for example, the use that the Brazilian government made of photography in the exhibitions held between 1862 and 1889. According to Schuster (2015a), this resource was essential for the construction of a visual narrative which supported the image of a “modern” country, which exhibited the supposed whitening process through which it was passing and also confronted the problem of slavery, presented through carefully selected photographs, for a wide and cosmopolitan public, as a civilizing and educational project. For the organizers of the Brazilian shows, “photography was the appropriate technique to accomplish their goal of convincing public opinion of the ‘humane’ nature of Brazilian slavery, as the medium was generally associated with ‘objectivity’ and thus suitable for creating a ‘reality effect’” (Schuster, 2015a, p.37).

In general, scientific instruments were viewed with interest by the public, by the exhibition judges and by journalists, because they were signposts to the future, in legitimizing what was considered “new,” “modern” and “useful.” In this sense, the science shows had an obvious standardizing bias, which could be seen in the differentiation of knowledge, the formation of a public which appreciated new inventions, the capitalist organization of labor and the apotheosis of the nationalist spirit (Lawn, 2009; Kremer, 2014). Even in the nineteenth century, these shows were related to themes of economic and educational order, implying that science, economics and education were already appearing as essential conditions for social “progress” (Edwards, 2008).

In Latin America, studies on scientific culture and how it spread through the exhibitions were especially developed in Brazil. Lopes (1997) and Domingues (1999) are among the first authors to give prominence to the involvement of researchers and scientific institutions in organizing and assembling the Brazilian shows, which were generally centered on the exhibition of agricultural products and raw materials for industry. Both authors show how the scientists involved took advantage of the shows to publicize their work, exchange ideas, join research networks and solicit prestige. From another angle, Heizer (2005) started to investigate the exhibition of scientific instruments in Brazilian shows in their capacity as symbolic objects of “modernity,” particularly the astronomical instruments and the variety of printed matter sent to Paris in 1889, by means of which the Brazilian government intended

to construct the image of a cultivated and civilized nation. Santos (2009) also approached the subject in an innovative manner, with wide-ranging research on the displays of Brazilian minerals in the exhibitions held between 1862 and 1911, highlighting not only their relationship to mining activities, but also the changes that took place in the manner of representing this sector of the economy over the course of time, and the role of engineers and the press in promoting this sector. In turn, Ferreira (2011) examined the idea of “progress” which permeated projects for modernizing Brazil in the nineteenth century, particularly those concerned with the industrial base, and how this idea shone through in the representation of the country at exhibitions and affected the process of institutionalizing the sciences.

Despite these contributions, the theme was considered hardly explored by Almeida (2010), who stated that there was still insufficient Brazilian consideration of the scientific dimension of international exhibitions and their potential for examining wider processes, such as the institutionalization of science, the professionalization of physicians and scientists and the formulation of political strategies for regional and international cooperation in the medico-scientific field. In the series of studies on the conferences held during the exhibitions, among which prominence must be given to that by Rasmussen (1989) on the more than four hundred conferences held at the Paris exhibitions (1867, 1878, 1889, 1900), Almeida (2004, 2006, 2012) has made a significant contribution towards making the topic more visible in Latin America, through her investigations of the medical conferences and health exhibitions.



The third group of studies approaches the exhibitions as instruments for government propaganda, products, cultural manifestations and tourist destinations (Della Coletta, 2006; Duranti, 2006; Lockyer, 2013); as forums for cultural diplomacy and political and commercial negotiations (Rydell, Kroes, 2005; Fiss, 2010; Martin, 2015; Shepherdson-Scott, 2015); and as means for the diffusion of images and beliefs relating to colonies, imperialist interests and the construction of national identities (Murray, 1999; Lagae, 2006; Sánchez Gómez, 2006b; Stanard, 2009; Vargaftig, 2010). Great engineering works, such as the Crystal Palace, the Viennese Rotunda, the Eiffel Tower, the Panama Canal and the railroads, as well as machines, works of art and natural products were displayed as symbols of economic power, technological development, “genius” and the riches of each nation (Moore, 2013).

This is the most developed line of investigation in and about Latin America. The works of Neves (1986), Pesavento (1994, 1997) and Barbuy (1996, 1999), on the Brazilian presence at various exhibitions, as well as the book by Tenorio-Trillo (1996) on the presence of Mexico in Paris (1889), Rio de Janeiro (1922) and Seville (1929), are perhaps the most well-known works of reference. But recently, the way in which cultural modernity and the peoples of Latin-American countries have been represented in periods of political, economic and social transformations, by means of architecture, objects, texts, images and spectacles put on for a foreign audience, has concerned many researchers, particularly in the field of cultural history. The studies by Hardman (1988), Turazzi (1995), Silva (1996), Schwarcz (1998), Kuhlmann Jr. (2001), Neves (2001), Fey (2004) and Moss (2010), as well as the volume edited by Di Liscia and Lluç (2009), all principally concerned with Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, have advanced

our understanding of the process of Nation-State building on the continent through the production of national symbols associated with the major shows and the development of ideological and educational projects.

The perception by the governing classes, artists and intellectuals of their own countries, with their countryside, cities, industries, natural resources, cultural manifestations and indigenous peoples, and how the image they created was used in processes of political affirmation is also the basis of recent comparative studies on Latin-American iconography. For example, the collections edited by González Stephan and Andermann (2006) and Schuster (2014a) have enormously extended the potential for analyzing the construction and reconstruction of Latin-American nations on the basis of visual culture, especially the images displayed in exhibitions, museums, monuments, archaeological sites, celebrations and the press, understood as an “exhibitionary complex” in the sense assigned by Bennett (1995), whose most important effect was the “training” of perceptions, ideas and points of view. The connections between images, power and nation-building is also the central theme of the work by Andermann (2007), which is concerned with the representations of nature and of history in Brazil and in Argentina, especially in museums, exhibitions and maps, in their role as “figures of visual order” which produce the State.

Cizeron (2009) is another scholar who deserves attention. He examines the representation of Brazil in the universal exhibitions from 1867 to 1937, pointing out the changes in exhibition perspectives which took place over time and considering an aspect which has received little or no attention from researchers, namely the way in which a foreign public perceived and interpreted the Brazilian shows. In other words, the author was concerned not only to analyze the political and cultural aspects relating to the representation of the country, a topic extensively dealt with in Latin America, but also the effects the shows had on the social imagination of countries where Brazil was represented. For example, despite the enormous efforts undertaken by the Franco-Brazilian committee to present a “modern” and “civilized” country at the exhibition of 1889, the French sources examined by Cizeron mention a “colonial palace” in the middle of a vast garden, the same “mysterious” and “disquieting” image produced for the Brazilian show of 1867, also in Paris, which included a pyramid of wood and a baroque and colorful decoration, with many flags and plumes. There are questions, therefore, over the communicational effectiveness and the effects of the Brazilian displays – full of coffee, sugar, minerals, timber and rubber – in countries which were already passing through the second industrial revolution, were expanding their educational and scientific systems at enormous speed, and took pride in exhibiting every sort of machine and manufactured product.

The paradoxes between reality and what is represented, and between what is represented and what is perceived, is perhaps the principal argument between the scholars engaged in this type of investigation, since at least the pioneering study by Neves (1986) on the Brazilian national exhibitions and how the country was represented in them, on the signs of “modernity” and “civilization,” but incongruently giving prominence to the riches of nature, the exotic and the unusual in its products and peoples. Later studies developed similar ideas, such as that by Pesavento (1994) on the contradictory image of the Brazilian pavilion at the Philadelphia exhibition of 1876, which stressed the “progress” of a slave-owning

and agri-exporting country. The same phenomenon was observed by Araújo (1997, 1998), who examined the introduction of industrial techniques and equipment in Brazil in the second half of the nineteenth century. He believes that local economic modernization did not mean modernization of politics, as may be observed, for example, in the National Exhibition of 1861, where the railroads were hailed as symbols of “modernity,” along with a liberal-slave-owning discourse.

In the case of Chile, Murillo Sandoval (2015) observed a “contrast” in the country’s representation during the exhibition held at Santiago in 1875: an agricultural and mining country presented its “exploitable nature” in a denaturalized, patrimonialised way, i.e. as a resource which was the fruit of the national genius, just like manufactured products. A similar phenomenon was defined by Fernández-Bravo (2000) as the “nationalization of nature,” which transformed commodities into the “national icons” of various Latin-American countries, such as Argentina in the case of beef and Brazil in the case of coffee. According to Fernández-Bravo (2000, p.171-172), the process includes “the procedures through which national and regional representation in Latin America was connected with elements of nature converted into goods, raw materials sent by Latin America to the world market, which rapidly became a symbolic shorthand for Latin American nations.” For Murillo Sandoval (2015, p.276), the symbolic appropriation of the natural world by the State was a recurrent feature of Latin American countries: “the presence of a regime of the natural in the national images of the continent continues and remains associated with elements such as fertile soil, exotic fruit, mono-cultivation, oil exploitation, copper or the resources of the sea or the forest.”

A duality or contradiction in the representation of Latin American countries is also underlined by Fey (1999) in a study of the continent’s pavilions at the exhibition of 1889, whose public image veered between “civilization” and “barbarism.” Fernández-Bravo (2001) drew attention to the “ambivalence” of the Argentine representation at the same show, situated between French and English symbols and cultural values, considered advanced or modern, and the Latin American and indigenous approach of other pavilions from the same continent, which the local governing classes rejected because it looked back to the colonial past of the country. Barth (2008b), in his turn, examined the representation of Argentina at the Paris exhibitions of 1867, 1878 and 1889, noting the dubious way in which rural populations were presented, sometimes as examples of ethnic “authenticity,” sometimes in negative contrast to certain cultural values, implying a national identity constructed on the uncertain boundaries between “nation” and “otherness.”

This phenomenon seems to have been common to other countries, as the studies by Munro (2009) and Schuster (2015b) show. The former studied the representation of indigenous peoples at the Central American Exhibition held in Guatemala in 1897. According to her, the remaining native peoples were shown there as an industrious labor force for the cultivation of coffee, but their ancestors appear in a negative light, creating an “artificial barrier” between past and present, between “primitivism” and “progress.” The latter author studied the “visual and performative dimensions” of the Brazilian display at the Vienna exhibition of 1873, emphasizing, on the one hand, the grandiosity of the national narrative, expressed above all in the plastic arts, and, on the other hand, the invisibility of the population of African descent and of slavery and the presentation of indigenous material culture as the relics of the

past. According to Schuster (2015b, p.68), “for a peripheral country such as Brazil it was not an easy task to combine images of ‘modernity,’ associated with technological progress and ‘high culture,’ with the dismal realities of a slaveholding monarchy, whose population was overwhelmingly poor, illiterate and ‘mixed-race.’”

On the basis of these studies, one can identify certain distinct elements in the way in which Latin American countries represented themselves in the exhibitions: (a) there was great difficulty in preparing narratives and constructing symbols similar to those of the Europeans, which were centered on industrial and technological development, on education and on social welfare; (b) the images and messages contained in buildings, objects and spectacles were imprecise and sometimes ineffective, almost always referring to Latin-American “backwardness,” even when they emulated European “modernity”; (c) there were constraints, both in the sense of condensation or reduction, and in terms of the embarrassment caused by a morally uncomfortable situation, in presenting the social and cultural diversity of these countries in an imperialist, colonialist, racist and Eurocentric context, which led to the idealization of the local populations in a positive or negative way, but always represented in an a-historic manner, homogenized, de-territorialized, and sometimes purposely made invisible.

This last point has been especially important for scholars concerned with the representation of native populations of Latin America in national and international exhibitions. In addition to the authors already referred to, such as Barth, Munro and Schuster, it is worth mentioning certain others so as to give a better picture of the constraints or embarrassment experienced by the creators of the anthropological shows. For example, in his analysis of the Brazilian Anthropological Exhibition of 1882, Andermann (2004, p.130) affirms that, in showing the materiality of indigenous life through anthropological science, the exhibition reassessed the “utility of the Indian as a representative of the modern nation.” This Indian, the artistic and literary icon of the Empire of Brazil, reappeared objectified by science, but still associated with a contradictory discourse which idealized him and denied his social reality. The show, therefore, did not fail to promote an “inclusive exclusion” or a “sovereign proscription in which the political order is based on the inclusion of the naked life of the native in relation to his exclusion from the nation.” For Sánchez Arteaga and El-Hani (2010, p.400), the process of scientific rationalization observed in the Brazilian show of 1882 had its corollary in the process of the “scientific animalization of the Other,” in this case the various indigenous peoples represented as semi-human or semi-beast in the exhibition. According to the authors, exhibitions such as this, with clear educational purposes, end by revealing “ideological undertones of the construction of the scientific knowledge,” such as the racist ideologies associated with the myth of the savage devoid of any trace of civilization, both widely diffused in the society of the time (Sánchez Arteaga, El-Hani, 2010, p.410).

However, it was not simply the objectification and anthropological animalization which gave meaning to the display of indigenous artefacts. Ferreira (2010) and Sanjad (2010, 2011) called attention to the archaeological debates in Brazil in the nineteenth century, particularly to the way in which the objects were interpreted pursuant to a project for the historical construction of the nation. This project exalted the noble Indian, both warrior and worker, but extinct, as a myth of origin for a country which rejected its colonial and Iberian past. The same argument is advanced by Schuster (2015c, p.2), according to whom the Brazilian

displays in the exhibitions held between 1862 and 1889 celebrated the grandiosity of the pre-Columbian indigenous peoples: “the Empire of Brazil appeared as the result of a long-term teleological process, taking ancient indigenous cultures as its historical starting point.” The construction of this narrative articulated the myth of the good savage and an ambivalent national discourse, which excluded contemporary indigenous peoples, who were supposedly degenerate or incapable. This process of division between past and present is similar to what Tenorio-Trillo (1996) and Munro (2009) observed in the representation of the peoples of Mexico and Guatemala respectively.

From another viewpoint, also concerned with the representation of indigenous populations in national and international Brazilian exhibitions of the nineteenth century, Amoroso (2006) examined the “archaism” or the “stress on the past” to be seen in these exhibitions because of the policy of catechization and immigration encouraged by the imperial government. According to the author, a large part of the ethnographic objects displayed in the exhibitions came from the missionary settlements, interpreted on the basis of letters which considered Indians as savages on the way to extinction, when they were not viewed as degenerate beings because of their mixed race or contact with Europeans. Their material culture, therefore, went back to a past which was being overtaken by the civilizing action of the State and the Church. García Jordán (2012) also examined missionary operations as the genesis of an idealized representation of indigenous peoples, particularly the Guarayos, who lived in what is now Bolivia. They were important examples of the “success” of the civilizing project attempted by the Franciscans and publicized in the Turin exhibition of 1898, with the aim of renewing interest in the capacity of the Catholic Church to create “civilized spaces” around the world.

The image of the savage in extinction, of a disappearing culture, can also be seen in the USA. It is there, for example, in the great anthropological exhibition at Saint Louis (1904), along with other discourses characteristic of American indigenous policy, such as the need to integrate the Indians in a progressive and expanding national society and the new discourse which presented them as “authentic primitives,” untouched by modernity (Parezo, Fowler, 2007). At the San Francisco exhibition (1915), a change could be observed in the vanishing-race ideology towards a more diversified perception of indigenous life. According to Markwyn (2016, p.276), four different tropes were detectable at this time: “the vanishing Indian, the noble first American, the assimilated Indian, and separate white and Indian worlds.” These figurative descriptions are perceptible in the actual experience of Indians who took part in the exhibition, in the perception of the public, and also in the way in which native peoples were represented by the organizers. According to the author, they point to deeper changes which would occur in the 1930s, when indigenous culture began to be more appreciated than despised.

Both works, of Parezo and Fowler (2007) and of Markwyn (2016), raise questions with regard to Latin America. Had there been any changes in the way native populations were represented? From when? Parezo and Munro (2010) offer a good analytical perspective by investigating the representation of Mexico, Argentina and Brazil in Saint Louis (1904), including the possibility of changes in the exhibition strategy of these countries owing to the political and economic transformations through which Latin America had been passing since the end of the nineteenth century. In the case of Mexico, the authors identified a

permanent character in the strategy for representing native populations between 1889 and 1904, centered on the celebration of a remote past, especially Aztec (the great national symbol of the *Porfiriato*), and in the static presentation of contemporary peoples, in the process of “evolution” and assimilation by a nation which called itself modern and civilized. In the case of Argentina, a significant change was identified: from complete invisibility in 1889 to a great anthropological show in 1904, which emphasized government control over the indigenous populations living on the frontiers and the distancing of the modern nation from its colonial past. As regards Brazil, the authors say that they could not find information on the participation of the country in exhibitions (Parezo, Munro, 2010, p.44-45). Schuster (2014b), however, identified an important “discursive change” in Brazil, but only in the Rio de Janeiro exhibition (1922). According to the author, anthropologists and archaeologists meeting at the International Congress of Americanists, held in parallel with the exhibition, vehemently disputed the official line of the Brazilian government, which denied the participation of contemporary indigenous peoples in the historical construction of the nation. The raciological basis of the whole of Brazilian historiography in the nineteenth century, whose major thesis was the idea of the three founding races of the nation (the noble Indian of the past, the negro with his strong arms and the hard-working white), began to be replaced in this period by a more culturalist approach, inspired by Franz Boas. Schuster (2014b), however, does not examine how this discursive change affected the anthropological exhibitions.

The question, therefore, remains valid as to the continuities and breaks in the representation of the native peoples of Brazil, particularly in view of the clear rejection by the republican leaders who came to power in 1889 of the symbols and discursive strategies of the Empire. There also deserves to be a test, by means of a full comparative analysis, of the thesis of Parezo and Munro (2010, p.27) on the three approaches discernible in the representation of Amerindians in exhibitions: (1) to make them completely invisible, as if they did not exist; (2) to use them to stress the progress and modernity of the country, with the aim of showing a moral evolution in the nation, and attracting investment and immigrants; (3) to celebrate its material culture and its abilities to demonstrate economic possibilities and natural resources with the potential for exploitation. This is a line of investigation of great historical and ethical importance.



The last group of studies is connected with the preceding one. Its focus is on the tensions between what was emerging, in each country, as a “national-urban” discourse and the world considered “regional” or “provincial.” It also considers the relationship between colonial expansion and the marginalization of non-urban populations, usually depicted negatively in folklore as “backward” and “primitive,” even though their cultural manifestations were very often considered as “typical” and “genuine,” and important for the definition of national traditions (Ageron, 1997; Peer, 1998; Giberti, 2008; Storm, 2010; Storm, Vandevoorde, 2012). These points are especially relevant in countries with marked regional differences, irrespective of geographical area, such as the USA, Switzerland, France and Italy. Harvey (2014), for example, examined how the organizers of exhibitions in Atlanta (1895), Nashville (1897) and



Charleston (1901) tried to escape from the racial stigma and the image of poverty associated with the southern United States. Salomon (1998) and Centlivres (2006) examined, respectively, the reconstruction of rural villages and the images displayed in national exhibitions of Switzerland, questioning the process of urbanization and the construction of a national identity in that country. Rossi (2013) and Moentmann (2003) concerned themselves with the idealized regional representations in, respectively, the Rome (1911) and Paris (1937) exhibitions, and argued that both were intended to present a country which was politically unified with a predetermined identity.

In Latin America, there is an enormous field for research into the tensions between “national” and “regional” and also the local disputes at national and international exhibitions, that is to say, the way in which local elites represented their states/provinces, often in opposition to the central authority or in competition with other states/provinces. The books of González Stephan and Andermann (2006) and Andermann (2007), on the “totalizing miniatures” which, as a result of synecdoche, take the part for the whole, that is to say, link the content of exhibitions and visual representations to abstract entities such as “fatherland” and “nation,” are good reference works for such a discussion. On the other hand, consideration must be given to the social, economic and environmental diversity of each Latin American country – and the resulting diversity of expectations and modernizing projects engendered, simultaneously, in each of their regions or provinces, which encountered, in their respective capitals, a selective filter and an arena for political disputes which were conventionally referred to as “national identity.” It is appropriate to ask how this “identity” was represented, not in the capitals but in the provinces.

The pioneering study by Elkin (1999) on Brazilian exhibitions held between 1861 and 1922 took this point forward. He interprets these shows as part of a publicity campaign intended to attract workers, technology and foreign capital, and also to encourage the economic exploitation of the territory by Brazilians. According to the author, the image idealized in the exhibitions was that of a nation rich in natural resources, waiting for entrepreneurial heads and hands. However, the paradox already mentioned between the representation of a “modern” nation, in the style of Europe, versus an economy which exported agricultural products and was based on slavery until 1888, revealed not only the fragility of the modernizing project of the elites living in the capital but also the competition and disputes between the provinces and between the provinces and the national State. According to Elkin (1999), these factors weakened the “demonstrative effect of the exhibitions” and meant that the modernizing and industrializing project planned in the middle of the nineteenth century remained “incomplete.”

A local example of this process may be mentioned. The studies by Coelho (2007, 2012) and by Sarges and Coelho (2014) show how two of the most important intellectuals of Amazonia, Frederico de Santa-Anna Nery (1848-1901) and José Coelho da Gama e Abreu, the baron of Marajó (1832-1906), thought of and represented the region where they were born, the former as one of the organizers of the Brazilian representation at the Paris show of 1889 and one of the organizers of *Le Brésil en 1889*, and the latter as a delegate from the province of Pará at the same exhibition and author of a report on the show. Both were concerned with the representation of their own region and came into conflict with the plans for the general

organization of the event and the other Brazilian representatives, who not only curtailed the space available for the Amazonian provinces, but also tried to show an “exotic” and “savage” Amazonia, instead of a “progressive” and “civilized” region. The controversies that occurred in connection with the Palais de l’Amazonie were ultimately part of a wider debate in Paris over the past and future of Brazil, the demands of the regions, the role intended for the Indians in national society and the significance attached to the archaeological and ethnographic collections in the museums of the time (Ferreira, 2010; Sanjad, 2010, 2011; Dantas, 2012).

Cunha (2010) deals with similar questions, albeit in Bahia and with regard to the provincial exhibitions organized between 1866 and 1888 as preparatory shows for national and international exhibitions. The conception and structuring of those exhibitions are described in terms of the project for “modernity” which imbued them, that is to say, whether or not the provincial elites supported the ideas and perspectives of the Court, particularly with regard to the way they wished to be represented and to the discourse of “civilization” and “progress” that they adopted. One of the most interesting points of this study is the way it shows how the regional elites took over ideas which began life outside Brazil and came up with a self-representation which did not depend on the role played by central government and was detached from the grave economic and social crisis which afflicted the province. Rezende (2010) reached similar conclusions. In discussing the political projects which were evident in the Brazilian displays assembled at international exhibitions between 1862 and 1922, the author stresses that, despite it being a multicultural country, it was portrayed as a homogenous nation. This gave rise to conflicts of interpretation, a solution to which was attempted after the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, when local oligarchies gained more space and more power to promote their respective regions independently of central government, as happened in Chicago (1893) and Saint Louis (1904). In a dialogue with these authors, Sanjad and Castro (2015, 2016) show that, even at an exhibition planned by a better organized central government, such as Turin (1911), behind-the-scenes disputes between representatives of the Brazilian states were constant, with direct consequences for the way in which the country was presented at the show. At the heart of the matter was the fact that the nation project of the Brazilian elites of the First Republic (1889-1930) was inconsistent and incoherent – and this fragility showed itself in a very obvious manner whenever the “nation” needed to be considered and represented.

The embarrassment, therefore, occurred not only at the time of representing Amerindian populations, but also in the choice of what should be exhibited, where and how, bearing in mind that the very idea of “nation” in many Latin American countries was the subject of disagreements and disputes. It was therefore necessary to take a closer look at the process of the internal production of the “national icons” displayed to the public in Latin American pavilions and displays, a process which was perhaps rarely consensual and depended more on the fortuitous balance of political forces. This is shown, for example, by Tenorio-Trillo (1996) in his analysis of the role of José Vasconcelos in organizing the Mexican pavilion in 1922, by Zusman (2011) in considering the part of Juan Atwell in the Argentinian display at the Pan-American Exhibition in Buffalo in 1901, and by Sanjad and Castro (2015, 2016) in their examination of the role of Jacques Huber in organizing the Brazilian pavilion at the Turin exhibition of 1911. In these three cases, personal ideas and perceptions of “fatherland”

and “nation” were introduced into the public domain and incorporated into the political repertoire of each country by their respective governing classes, in the midst of conflicts and disagreements.

Even where there is a recurring pattern in the representation of the country (which might signify a degree of political consensus), such as in the case of Argentina, whose exhibitions between 1889 and 1915 mainly showed a vast, beautiful and fertile uninhabited territory, waiting for entrepreneurs and tourists, and a list of natural products available to businessmen and industrialists, the content of photographic images, geographical information and statistical data, as well as the organization of the pavilions and displays, were decided by differing political views and bearing in mind the nearness or distance of diplomatic initiatives which were unclear but with an obvious ideological bias, such as “Latin-Americanism” and “Pan-Americanism” (Zusman, 2009, 2013). In this sense, as local divisions are very often fundamental for understanding the production of the “national,” in the same way as the expectations of the public and of the organizers of the exhibitions, it seems appropriate to follow the suggestion of Andermann (2009, p.338) in thinking of the Latin-American pavilions erected at international shows not as the “immediate expression of the state-as-author,” but as “complex and negotiated performances of the national image involving multiple intermediaries; a crossroads of gazes and voices to which the verbal and visual accounts of exhibition visitors would add further layers of meaning.” Such intersections would also include the alternative or dissident projects of “modernity,” discussed and presented largely at national exhibitions – and very often in opposition or disagreement with what was presented to an overseas public (Andermann, 2009, p.335).



The works briefly referred to here do not exhaust the topic, which has been the subject of various disciplines seeking to problematize the architecture, the urban projects, the cultural manifestations, the educational proposals, the visual and scientific culture, the technological imagination, the involvement of intellectuals, the world of work, the reception and perception of the public and the conceptions of “modernity” in the exhibitions. What we wish to emphasize is the complexity that the field acquired in recent years and the need for detailed analyses in dialogue with the fertile international production. We also wish to think about the place of Latin America in such exhibitions and the importance of these events in the building of the Latin American nations. In organizing the field into themes and lines of investigation, highlighting the production of recent years, we are thinking of the different possible paths for researchers interested in the subject. In the next section, proposals will be made, in addition to a thematic organization, for a theoretical approach which might not only widen the visibility of Latin America in this field of study, but also allow a greater integration of the historiography developed in this region with the international debates.

## **A way forward for future studies**

The boom in studies on the international exhibitions occurred between the end of the 1980s and the middle of the 2010s, when anniversaries of the great shows were celebrated and a new look was taken at the events themselves and also at the way they passed into the memory of each country, as is well illustrated by the interesting volumes by Buzard, Childers, Gillooly (2007), on the legacy of the London exhibition of 1851, and Gilbert (2009), on the relationship between history and memory in the written, oral and audiovisual narratives relating to the Saint Louis exhibition (1904). The wealth of sources contributed towards this revisionist historiographic movement, because the exhibitions produced an enormous quantity of printed and audiovisual material, published both by the general organizers of each event and by the exhibitors, whether individuals, businesses or governments. To these sources we must add literary efforts, such as the stories and novels published at the time of the events; newspapers with their daily coverage, sometimes extremely detailed; the oral statements of persons who visited or worked in the exhibitions; and the documents of private origin, such as letters and diaries, of use in revealing perceptions, expectations and conflicts which are not always clear in the other sources. Let us finally add the vast number of images made available in dozens of recent editions of coffee table books, some with excellent analyses, published to celebrate the memory of the events and what they represented as project and social utopia.

The centrality which the subject has assumed in recent decades, for various disciplines and in a variety of countries, is evidenced not only by the number of books published, but also by the space occupied by articles in periodicals. The fact is that, whatever their theoretical approach and the theme studied, the national and international exhibitions have become fundamental for thinking about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and now form a field for research not only with regard to politics or economics, but in connection with cultural exchanges and the construction of otherness, as well as the construction of professional, artistic, ethnic, regional, colonial and national identities (Hollweg, 1999; Berglund, 2003; Hilaire-Perez, 2014).

In Latin America a renewed interest in the subject can also be observed. Despite many authors complaining of the lack of research in and about the region and of its invisibility in wider comparative studies, including the international bibliographies available on the web (Burke, Serafica, Higgins, 2005; Geppert, Coffey, Lau, 2006), the historiographical material on the continent is now considerable, as we have tried to show in the pages of this essay. The problem perhaps lies in a double historiographical gap: on the one hand, most of the studies done in Europe and the USA approach the subject via three aspects, “industrialization,” “imperialism” and “urbanization,” which almost automatically excludes Latin America from their analyses, pushing it to the margins as a deviant phenomenon; on the other hand, the absence of a fuller theoretical framework or mold places limits on the dialogue built up by investigators of Latin America, whose works are, to a great extent, self-referencing. There are few Latin American investigators who try to establish relationships and analogies with other countries in Latin America, seeking out references, standards, relationships, similarities or differences. This double gap has restricted the analytical dimensions of many Latin American studies, despite the potential for a comparative approach owing to the fact that the countries

of the region participated in many exhibitions and hosted a good number of them, in addition to many national, provincial and regional shows held on the continent since the middle of the nineteenth century.

In recent years, this situation has started to change thanks to the work of scholars such as Margarida de Souza Neves, Alvaro Fernández Bravo, Nancy Parezo, Jens Andermann and others, who have started to investigate and encourage investigations into Latin America in different disciplines. Interest in the region is growing and can be seen in various places, such as the international conference held in 1998 in Portugal, which showed the potential for associated and comparative analyses in the Iberian-American world (Mourão, Matos, Guedes, 1998), or the virtual exhibition organized by the Postgraduate Program in Spanish and Latin American Visual Culture at Birkbeck College (University of London, UK), which brought together articles and images of Argentinian, Brazilian and Chilean exhibitions and museums (Andermann, Schell, s.d.). It is therefore the time to widen and deepen this process by means of two operations, which I believe are more political than historiographical: (a) bring Latin American studies closer to a more internationalized debate on the exhibitions, leading to dialogue and criticism in the direction of a more global view of the matter; (b) incorporate in the international literature the historiographical work in the Spanish and Portuguese languages, which is almost totally absent from the bibliographies, even among authors who study Latin America.

Another route would be of a historiographic nature, properly so called. This means adopting an analytical bias which gives greater visibility to the exhibitions held in Latin America and also to the part played by Latin American countries in European and North American shows. Global history and world history are interesting ways forward, because both shift the centrality of the Nation-State from the analysis. The former operates with planetary forces, without geographical limits or a precise chronology, that is to say, in a perspective which transcends the “national” and the “international” (Christian, 2004). This focus would allow an interpretation of the exhibitions as a human phenomenon of long duration with a planetary impact, and would demand an investigation which took into account different times and places. A world history also places the subject on a larger scale, although it does not reject or discard a dialogue with national history (Clavin, 2005). It focuses on transnational elements, namely the networks or phenomena which connect many Nation-States simultaneously, such as immigration, trade, epidemics – and, why not, international exhibitions.

Proposals to this effect are not new. Harvey (1996), for example, studied the representation of nations and multi-national corporations at the exhibition in Seville (1992), characterizing this show as a marker of the overlap of political and corporate interests on a global scale – which brings us back to the introduction to this essay, where mention was made of certain criticisms made of the Milan exhibition (2015) and of the capture, by mega-corporations, of the political agenda put forward by the organizers of the show. Rydell (2008, p.8) also speculated about a global approach to the field at a conference in Australia (a country with similar historiographical questions to those of Latin America), stressing that “the extent to which expos have charted and nurtured the triumph of multinational corporate capitalism is well worth additional exploration, especially the degree to which national pavilions have become showcases for corporate shows and the degree to which world expos have hastened

the process of globalisation.” Geppert (20 jun. 2013) advanced a similar view of the matter when stating that the exhibitions of the nineteenth century “not only aroused world trade, world communication and the world society, but also played a decisive role in their constitution. [In the context of] the so-called first wave of globalization, they proved to be active agents in the process of international integration.” On this view, the Latin American shows, both in and outside the continent, were constituent parts of a system responsible for trade and cultural exchange on a world scale, with precise characteristics and functions. We think of, for example, the role of Latin American countries in the setting up of the BIE, or in how foreign corporations contributed to the picture of technological modernity in Latin America, or even how European industrial exhibitions helped to structure the extractivist economy of Amazonia and of Central Africa – including the way in which it was presented for external consumption. In all cases, the connections between the Latin American shows and those of other continents were much more evident than the differences between them.

Another path, perhaps more interesting through the possible association with cultural history and comparative studies, is transnational history. It differs from world history in paying more attention to national, regional and local history. Its focus, according to Clavin (2005, p.438-439), is on the transnational communities, that is, a cross-border actors network which interacts and, by interacting, “sustains and gives shapes to the identities of nation-states, institutions and particular social and geographic space.” This network does not necessarily depend on the Nation-State, its expertise is not controlled by any national government, but it always acts towards the development of relations between Nation-States or between different regions and localities. The multicultural and multinational nature of these communities would allow an approach which valued society and culture as autonomous spheres of historical interest, uncoupling them from governmental and diplomatic actions. Clear examples of transnational communities are those formed by environmentalists, religious missionaries and non-governmental organizations operating internationally (Iriye, 2013).

Another aspect characteristic of transnationalism is its focus on the circulation, the movement, the interchange and the transfer of ideas or knowledge into different contexts. According to MacDonald (2013, p.2), “transnational history’s relativization of given state formations is not only concerned with placing these within wider contexts, or transcending them, but also seeks to recognize the extent to which they were themselves the products of the very processes of exchange and circulation on which transnational history focuses.” As opposed to global history and world history, these processes do not necessarily need to have a world-wide application. They may be specific to a single nation, region or even social group, as, for example, the study of the reception, negotiation and appropriation of texts, images, objects and knowledge in a transcultural perspective. Or the study of intellectual life across borders, i.e. human movement, in individual or group trajectories, who live or move through different national contexts.

Such a perspective opens up enormous possibilities for the investigation of national and international exhibitions, which can be understood as a transnational cultural system, that is to say, as a set of principles and practices, continually adapted and transformed, which has had an intense circulation throughout the world since the nineteenth century, connecting persons, times and places. Look at, for example, the recent collection edited by Filipová

(2015), which brings together works on “marginal” exhibitions, i.e. lesser shows held in places thought to be “distant” from the economic centers, whether a city in the interior of England, France or Belgium or one in Brazil, Japan or Tasmania, but having in common a desire to become part of an international network, the celebration of icons of modernity and the process of constructing regional and national identities.

Thinking of the Latin American exhibitions as parts of a decentralized system which expanded and transformed itself over the course of time and space would allow us to include them in a complex and diverse global scene. It would, however, demand an investigative effort as to the make-up of the intellectual communities which conceived, supported and made possible the Latin American exhibitions, and as to how these communities interacted with those of other countries, what concepts and practices they adopted, where they circulated, and what ideas they managed with regard to concepts such as nation, progress, race, class, gender, culture and nature. It would also require an analysis of the production of the “national” as a two-way street, that is to say, a study of both the internal political negotiations and the transcultural interchanges, in which texts, objects, images, buildings, spectacles, food products etc. take on a symbolic dimension capable of influencing the identity processes of various social groups in the country itself and in other countries. The recent book by Uslenghi (2015) on the participation of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico in the shows at Philadelphia (1876) and Paris (1889 and 1900) opens the way in this direction by stressing the importance of the exhibitions for imagining a utopian modernity in Latin America, expressed particularly in photographs, in the architecture of the national pavilions and in the work of an intellectual community which moved between the exhibitions and their respective countries.

In another approach, but one which also conceives of the exhibitions as “transnational spaces,” Medak-Saltzman (2010) studies the meeting between indigenous groups from Patagonia (Tzoneca) and from Japan (Ainu) at the Saint Louis exhibition (1904); how they were found and transported by the organizers of the show, how they interacted among themselves and with visitors, and what impact their respective groups had when they returned to their places of origin, particularly in reinforcing their ethnic identity and strengthening their common struggle for recognition. This case is a good example of non-state actors, who should be studied not only in relation to the Nation-State or government policies, but more particularly as “transnational entities,” whose history transcends national frontiers and time scales and possesses its own agenda (Iriye, 2013, p.13-14). It also helps to think of movement, interchange and the resulting transformation as features which constitute transnational history, with an enormous field for investigation in Latin America.

With the expansion and diversification of the field for investigations into the international exhibitions and with the consolidation of transnationalism as a theoretical and methodological approach, Latin American researchers have the right conditions for examining new sources, preparing research methods, organizing an agenda, developing integrated studies and occupying a space in an intellectual arena which is now relatively well filled, but increasingly inclusive and open.

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## NOTE

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