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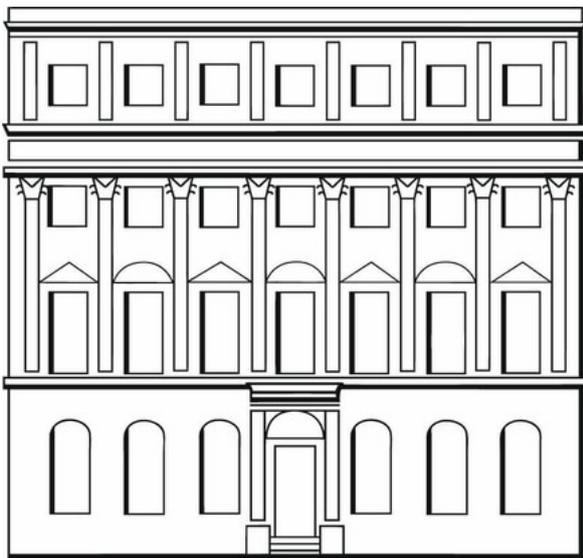
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‘Races not inferior, but different’:
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BENOÎT DE L’ESTOILE

Historians of anthropology have often been inclined to autonomize their subject. In other words, they tend to abstract knowledge products from the social practices through which they are constituted, or at least to focus on the more intellectual aspects of this field of knowledge. In his pioneering analysis of quattrocento painting, which contrasted with formalist approaches to art history, Michael Baxandall was able to retrieve the categories through which images were perceived and appreciated in fifteenth-century Italy by reconstructing the world of uses and practices (religious, commercial, mathematical, etc.) in which they made sense.¹ Similarly, looking at the colonial uses of anthropology allows one to reconstruct the universe in which scientific discourses acquired their meaning.

In France in particular, the disciplinary tradition tends to underplay the significance of the colonial context for anthropological knowledge.² The new subject of *Ethnologie* which emerged around the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography in the 1930s, culminating in the grand opening of the new Musée de l’Homme (Museum of Man) in 1938,³ is more readily associated with the

¹ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford, 1972).

² Thus the centenary exhibition on ‘L’Afrique de Marcel Griaule’ at the Musée de l’Homme in 1998 left the issue of the colonial setting of his ethnographic activities virtually unaddressed.

³ *Ethnologie* was the term used by Paul Rivet, the founder of the Musée de l’Homme, to designate the ‘science of man in its totality’, encompassing prehistory, physical anthropology, the study of material culture, and ethnography, which he managed to establish as the official name of the discipline.

intellectual and political avant-garde; the figure of the writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris provides an alluring icon both of the proximity of ethnologists to the artistic and literary avant-garde, and of their critical attitude towards colonization.⁴

In this essay I shall argue that the International Colonial Exhibition, which was held at Vincennes, on the outskirts of Paris, from March to October 1931, was a key moment in the history of French ethnology in the sense, first, that it allows the links between the development of the discipline and its colonial uses to be deciphered, and secondly, that it constituted a critical step in the process of disciplinary formation in anthropology.⁵

It is, however, necessary to begin by clarifying what is meant here by 'uses'. It is indeed possible to address the issue of the 'uses of science' in two opposed ways. The first, usually favoured by scientists themselves, relies on the 'pure vs. applied' dichotomy. The problem here is to understand how a (theoretical) science, once elaborated by scientists, is disseminated, and possibly modified, while generating a series of practical applications. This vision of an 'objective' science, towering above political controversies and historical vicissitudes, postulates a distinction between the elaboration and validation of knowledge, which alone constitutes science proper, and its uses, which largely bypass scientists, who by definition bear no responsibility for any 'extra-scientific' uses, or misappropriations, of their work. This model implicitly relies upon a neat distinction between a scientific core (of 'pure' science) which is both chronologically and logically primordial, and a number of derivative ('impure') applications.⁶ 'Elaboration'

⁴ See e.g. the entry by John Leavitt for 'French anthropology' in the recent *Encyclopedia of Cultural and Social Anthropology*, ed. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (London, 1996), in which Leiris is described as 'ethnographer, critic of colonialism and a celebrated poet' (p. 244). Cf. also Jean Jamin, 'Introduction', in Michel Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1996), 9–59. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

⁵ This essay draws on an earlier one, published as 'Des races non pas inférieures, mais différentes: de l'Exposition Coloniale au Musée de l'Homme', in Claude Blanckaert (ed.), *Politique de l'anthropologie: pratiques et discours en France (1860–1940)* (Paris, 2001), 391–473. It has benefited greatly from comments made at presentations at the PPGAS-Museu-Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, and the African Studies Seminar, University of Chicago, and by Louis-Herns Marcelin.

⁶ This vision of science is prevalent among those who head scientific establishments. See Norbert Elias, 'Scientific Establishments', in id. and R. Whitley (eds.), *Scientific Establishments and Hierarchies* (Dordrecht, 1982), 3–69. See also Richard Whitley, *The Intellectual and Social Organization of the Sciences* (Oxford, 1984).

and 'uses' thus appear as completely separated, at least in principle, and should therefore be analysed separately.⁷

An alternative approach, which we may call 'pragmatic', denies the absolute character of any opposition between 'pure' and 'applied'. In anthropology, this pragmatic approach was formulated by Bronislaw Malinowski, who argued that it is impossible to grasp the *meaning* of a verbal utterance, an artefact, or a ritual without understanding the 'pragmatic context' of its uses.⁸ The uses of a word, but also of a type of discourse, such as myth or science, are therefore not to be seen as *external*, since they constitute its very meaning.⁹ To analyse anthropological knowledge in terms of its colonial uses is thus not to look at the 'extra-scientific' uses of a 'scientific' discourse; rather, it is to reconstruct the context which was the precondition for a specific scientific discourse and conferred meaning upon it.¹⁰

The issue of the uses of social sciences has often been framed in moralizing terms, especially when it comes to analysing the relationship between scientific discourses and colonialism. In the vast body of literature, we can identify two categories by which social scientific discourses have been analysed, namely, instrumentalization and ideology. On the one hand, use may be equated with *instrumentalization*: social science, since it aims to act upon the social world, is more a technique, or political technology, harnessed to the service of political objectives, than proper science.¹¹ On the other hand, use may boil down to *ideology*: these discourses on society, aiming to justify or veil the continuation of exploitation and domination, may be seen as belonging

⁷ In other words, 'applications' are seen as 'external' to science proper.

⁸ 'The maxim that you cannot understand the rules of the game without a knowledge of the game itself describes the essence of this method.' Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, vol. i: *Soil-Tilling and Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands* (Bloomington Ind., 1965; 1st edn. 1935), 320. This principle was illustrated by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, in *Witchcraft, Magic and Oracles among the Azande* (Oxford, 1937).

⁹ 'It is the function, the active and effective influence of a word within a given context which constitutes its meaning.' Bronislaw Malinowski, 'An Ethnographic Theory of Language and some Practical Corollaries', in id., *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, ii. 3-74, at 52. Malinowski claimed this pragmatic approach extended to scientific writing (ibid. 58).

¹⁰ In Britain, the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) developed along similar principles, generally claiming a debt to Wittgenstein rather than to social anthropology. For a stimulating comparison between Wittgenstein's and Malinowski's approaches to language see Ernest Gellner, *Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹¹ See the 'anthropology as colonial handmaiden' theme.

not to the realm of science, but to 'ideology posing as science' or 'false science'.¹²

These two categories, which are, in fact, more complementary than contradictory, have been especially prominent in historical accounts of colonial anthropology. They imply a moralizing attitude towards colonial knowledge, which is exposed as a kind of intellectual perversion related to illusion, dissimulation, and lying, and distracting from what is supposedly the very aim of science, namely, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Such an approach often results in scholarly colonial discourses being disqualified as instances of 'pseudo-science' or 'dubious' science rather than 'real' science.¹³

On the other side, those who try to uphold the scientific quality of a body of knowledge such as anthropology do their best to dispel any suspicion of involvement with colonialism by pleading the 'useless' character of the discipline and the colonial administration's total lack of interest in it,¹⁴ or, alternatively, by claiming that the colonial context had no effect on the 'contents' of knowledge.¹⁵

In the terms of this debate, in which 'colonial' has become a term of abuse, the more colonial knowledge is, the less scientific it is; conversely, the more scientific it is, the less colonial it is.¹⁶ What needs to be addressed, however, is precisely what is meant by anthropological knowledge being a 'colonial science'.¹⁷ We

¹² See Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason', *Social Science Information*, 14/6 (1975), 19-47.

¹³ e.g. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's reading of Foucault in *id.*, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1983), ch. 5.

¹⁴ See Peter Loizos (ed.), 'Anthropological Research in British Colonies: Some Personal Accounts', *Anthropological Forum*, 4/2 (1977); G. W. Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951* (Madison, 1995), e.g. 389, 411.

¹⁵ See Jack Goody, *The Expansive Moment: Anthropology in Britain and Africa* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁶ For a discussion of 'science and imperialism' in the natural sciences see Lewis Pyenson, 'Science and Imperialism', in Robert C. Olby (ed.), *Companion to the History of Modern Science* (London, 1990), 920-33; Paolo Palladino and Michael Worboys, 'Science and Imperialism', *Isis*, 84 (1993), 991-1102; and the recent issue of *Osiris, Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise*, 15 (2000).

¹⁷ See also Peter Pels, 'The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History and the Emergence of Western Governmentality', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), 163-83; Benoît de L'Estoile, 'The "natural preserve of anthropologists": Anthropology, Scientific Planning and Development', *Information sur les Sciences Sociales*, 36 (1997), 2; *id.*, 'A Rationalization of Colonial Domination? Anthropology and Native Policy in French-Ruled Africa', in *id.*, F. Neiburg, and L. Sigaud (eds.), *Empires, Nations and Natives: Anthropologies and States in the Making* (Durham, NC, forthcoming).

need to understand the specific historical configuration in which some discourses and practices could be held as 'scientific', while at the same time unambiguously belonging to the colonial world.¹⁸

The 1931 International Colonial Exhibition provides us with a privileged look at the place of the human sciences and, more specifically, of anthropology, the 'science of (native) mankind', in its colonial setting. Marcel Olivier, a former Governor of Madagascar who, as *Délégué Général*, helped Maréchal Lyautey to organize the Exhibition, summarized its aim in 1930: 'We want to set it up so as to constitute, in the context of colonization, a gripping, fortifying lesson of *humanité*.'¹⁹ Olivier was punning on the double meaning of *humanité* in French ('humanity' and 'humankind'), referring back to the self-proclaimed 'humane character' of French colonization, but also to the colonial populations who were the object of this policy. Thus the Exhibition was also a *leçon d'humanité* in the sense that it aimed to present 'colonial mankind' (*l'humanité coloniale*) in all its diversity: the *humanity* of the French imperial power consisted precisely in his caring for 'colonial mankind'. In fact, one could say that anthropological knowledge occupied a strategic place in the Colonial Exhibition since one of its intentions was to display the 'cultures'²⁰ of France's colonial subjects: 'native' artefacts and themes were ubiquitous throughout the Exhibition.²¹

¹⁸ My concern here is not to evaluate the character of colonial knowledge as 'scientific' or 'non-scientific' from a present-day perspective, but to understand what was within the realm of 'normal science' at the time. See Steven Shapin, 'Discipline and Bounding: The History and Sociology of Science as Seen Through the Externalism-Internalism Debate', *History of Science*, 30 (1992), 333-69.

¹⁹ Quoted in Marcel Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d'outre-mer: Rapport Général présenté par le Gouverneur Général Olivier, Délégué Général*, Imprimerie Nationale, 9 vols. (Paris, 1933-4), iv.

²⁰ I use the term 'culture' here to translate the French *civilisation* since it is the received term in Anglophone anthropology. Thus 'Institut International des Langues et Civilisations Africaines' was the French name for the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. One of its founders was the colonial figure Maurice Delafosse, a leading proponent of *politique indigène* (native policy) in the 1920s. His application of the term *civilisation*, which until then had been used for the 'great civilizations', to African societies was a symbolic revolution. See Maurice Delafosse, *Les Civilisations négro-africaines* (Paris, 1925).

²¹ The Exposition Coloniale can be reconstructed from various sources: images are numerous, but mostly devoted to its architecture. The lavishly illustrated magazine *L'Illustration* published a series of special issues. See e.g. 'L'Exposition Coloniale: album hors-série', Nov. 1931. I have consulted the colonial archives in Aix and the archives of the Musée de l'Homme and used texts written for the use of visitors, such as Albert Demaison,

Native Policy and the Diversity of Races

In order to analyse the role of anthropological knowledge and themes in the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, it is necessary to understand the project behind it, as formulated by those who conceived it. Scholars who approach such events as the Colonial Exhibition as privileged instances of 'colonial discourse' or of 'colonial imagination'²² tend to underestimate the tensions at the heart of the colonial world. In fact, the Exhibition was itself a field of internecine struggle between various groups contending with each other to define the 'colonial project', including those lobbying for colonial economic interests, lawyers specializing in colonial matters, local administrators, and colonial reformers promoting a new 'native policy'.

The reconstruction of architectural monuments symbolizing the different cultures of the Empire (along with 'typical' places such as villages, and traditional trades) has generally been interpreted as revealing a taste for the 'colonial picturesque', destined to reinforce the general public's faith in France's imperial vocation.²³ These characteristics, however, take on another meaning if the Exhibition is seen as a colonial ritual performance, which aimed to transform views of the world and, ultimately, practices. By considering it as a *ritual*, we can analyse three crucial aspects: *cognitive*, as ritual performs an ordering (*mise-en-ordre*) of the natural world which also often buttresses a vision of an ordered social

Exposition Coloniale Internationale: guide officiel (Paris, 1931), Albert Keim's trilingual *Manual of the International Colonial Exhibition* (Paris, 1931), and the *Livre d'Or de l'Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris 1931* (Paris, 1931). Finally, the monumental final report provides a mass of information: Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d'outre-mer: Rapport Général*. Most of these texts do not read as simple 'descriptions', but rather as 'narratives' that construct the meaning of what was displayed.

²² Whereas 'colonial discourse' analysis has been prominent in Anglophone post-colonial studies since the 1990s, a salient feature of recent, semi-scholarly French discourse on colonial history is the category of *imaginaire colonial*: every colonial 'image' (postcard, drawing, ethnographic photograph, etc.) is taken as an instance of 'colonial imagination'. See e.g. Pascal Blanchard et al., *L'Autre et Nous: scènes et types* (Paris, 1995).

²³ See Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre, 1931: *l'Exposition Coloniale* (Paris, 1991); Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity* (Ithaca, 1992), ch. 2; Charles-Robert Ageron, 'L'Exposition Coloniale de 1931: mythe républicain ou mythe impérial?', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris, 1984), i. 561–94; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'L'Apogée: l'Exposition Coloniale Internationale', in Charles-Robert Ageron and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Histoire de la France coloniale* (Paris, 1991).

world; *scenographical*, by looking at staging devices (*mise-en-scène*); and *sensory*, regarding aesthetic form (*mise-en-forme*).²⁴

For the Chief Commissioner (*Commissaire Général*) of the Exhibition, Maréchal Lyautey (1854–1934), the initiator of the policy of establishing a protectorate in Morocco whose basic tenet was to rule while preserving or revitalizing traditional institutions,²⁵ the display of human diversity aimed not only to produce picturesque effects but also to recognize the value of the ‘personality’ of each colony.²⁶ The message that the organizers wanted to convey to the general public as well as to French political élites was that the effective recognition of this diversity by means of a *politique indigène* (native policy) of ‘adaptation’ would provide a sound basis for French colonial policy. Thus at the Exhibition’s closing banquet on 14 November 1931 Lyautey declared:

The only possible policy is that of association: association of our race with those races about whom we understand more and more, as we get to know them better, that we must not refer to them as inferior, but different, and with whom one cannot work effectively unless one takes into account these differences and adapts to them.²⁷

Lyautey suggested there was a process of mutual reinforcement between a better knowledge of ‘native races’ and the improvement of ‘native policy’. The more one got to know them, the more their supposed ‘inferiority’ was redefined as ‘difference’, and the more it became necessary to get to know them in order to adapt policy to these differences. The policy of association extolled by Lyautey was to replace the policy of assimilation

²⁴ My use of the notion of ‘ritual’ is not a claim as to the ultimate essence of the event, but an analytical strategy to highlight aspects of the ritualization process. I draw, among others, on Max Gluckman, ‘Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand’, *Bantu Studies* (Mar. 1940), 1–29; Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, LSE Monographs on Social Anthropology, 44 (London, 1954); id., ‘Ritual’, in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (Chicago, 1968), xiii. 520–6; Pierre Bourdieu, *An Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, 16, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977).

²⁵ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

²⁶ Thus the Morocco pavilion’s magnificent gardens were inspired by the garden of the Oudaias in Rabat. See Ch. René Leclerc, ‘Le Maroc à Vincennes’, in *Livre d’Or*, 58–61.

²⁷ Maréchal Lyautey, quoted in Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d’outre-mer: Rapport Général*, iv. 523.

which had been the official objective during the early years of colonization. The context of this reassessment of imperial policy was the perception of what the former Minister of Colonies Albert Sarraut called a 'moral crisis, crisis of domination, crisis of authority' of colonization, referring especially to the rise of nationalist movements in South-East Asia (British India, Dutch Indonesia, and French Indo-China).

It was precisely the necessity of restoring the sense of the individuality of indigenous societies against the former ideal of uniformity that the Exhibition was meant to illustrate. Thus the replica of the Angkor Temple, which had been 'discovered' and excavated by archaeologists of the French School of the Far East (based in Hanoi), symbolized France's efforts to restore ancient monuments and the value of the original Khmer civilization. Similarly, efforts to gain a scientific understanding of indigenous societies were meaningful within this political context.

Native souls are infinitely more complex than the first contacts with them had anticipated. It is necessary, in order to apply the policy of collaboration which is the basis of our colonial methods—which involves the protection of customs, of native rights and interests, and of native participation in the exercise of public power—to scrutinize these native souls very closely and to do our best to understand them.²⁸

The organizers of the Colonial Exhibition thus established a causal link between the affirmation of a new, rational, colonial policy and systematic investment in a (scientific) knowledge of native societies. One form of this investment was the support given to academic institutions such as the Institute of Ethnology, created in 1925 and financed essentially by the Ministry of Colonies. This concern for a scientific study of native populations, epitomized by ethnology, was doubly important. It emerged both as an essential *condition* and also as a *symbol* of a new political technology. Thus the Colonial Exhibition's project emphasized the plea for recognition of a colonial policy founded on the valorization of *difference* and an affirmation of the diversity of races and cultures.

²⁸ Ibid.

The Colonial Exhibition as a Scientific Event

Far from being dedicated solely to leisure, the universal exhibitions had, since the nineteenth century, had an encyclopaedic and educational ambition.²⁹ The term 'universal exhibition' should be understood in the strongest sense, as the organizers of these events intended them to be veritable living encyclopaedias, in which 'the world was collected and displayed'.³⁰ For Lyautey, this informative and educational dimension was essential. In 1929, he had expressed his 'desire to see each colonial section organized in the most complete manner possible, at once *pictur- esque and instructive*, in order to display the maximum amount of *interest and attraction*'.³¹

Thus the Colonial Exhibition was also to be a scientific event. Its importance for anthropological studies was recognized by scholars of that period. Indeed, the leading anthropological journal of the time, *L'Anthropologie: Matériaux pour l'Étude de l'Homme*, dedicated no less than fifteen pages to a thorough scientific assessment of it.³² The editor, Henri Vallois, then Professor of (Physical) Anthropology at the University of Toulouse and later successor to Rivet's chair at the Museum of Natural History, underlined the Exhibition's significance for the anthropological sciences:

By gathering together native peoples from all the colonies and by displaying them within a framework that it endeavours to make identical to the one in which these indigenous people live, the Exposition happened to realize an event which was at once anthropological and ethnographic.³³

The 'anthropological' dimension (at the time in France the term *anthropologie* meant physical anthropology³⁴) refers back to

²⁹ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester, 1988).

³⁰ Raymond Corbey, 'Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930', *Cultural Anthropology*, 8/3 (1993), 338-69.

³¹ Letter by Maréchal Lyautey, 7 Jan. 1929 (italics added). Archives Nationales de la France d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence (ANFOM). ECI/12. Exposition Coloniale.

³² Henri Vallois, 'L'Exposition Coloniale de Paris et les Congrès', *L'Anthropologie*, 42 (1932), 55-70.

³³ *Ibid.* 55.

³⁴ See Claude Blanckaert, 'Fondements disciplinaires de l'anthropologie française au xixème siècle: perspectives historiographiques', *Politix*, 29 (1995), 29-54.

the presence of living natives, allowing for anthropometric studies, whereas the 'ethnographic' character stems from the fact that the natives were presented in a 'realistic' framework. Vallois proposed, then, to assess the 'results provided on both these accounts', clearly revealing the register of a scientific report.

The assessment of the Exhibition's contribution to ethnography began with a description of the pavilions of the different colonies, which were inspired by such monuments as the great mosque of the Sudanese town Djenné, accommodating the pavilion of French Western Africa. Similarly, in the Indo-China section, the Laos pavilion was a miniature of the pagoda of Xien Thuong in Luang Prabang, and that of Annam replicated two buildings of the citadel and the palace of Hué. Finally, the most magnificent was the copy of the temple of Angkor-Vat, housing an exhibition on Indo-China. Far from seeing these reproductions as mere cardboard cutouts, Vallois attributed to them a *documentary* value.

While the 'very original local colour' of the different quarters of the Exhibition met with Vallois's warm approval, he lamented the absence of 'more direct specimens of native constructions' in the form of 'reconstructions of houses or huts, or even entire villages, such as had been the case, notably, for the Marseilles Exhibition, where the Dahomey village had been received with great success'. The Exhibition's great achievement, for Vallois, was that it placed 'under the eyes of the public' these normally inaccessible realities, in this way satisfying both the public's 'curiosity' and 'ethnographic interest'. This was why Vallois voiced his disappointment that the Indo-China section failed to exhibit 'those reconstructions of a Cambodian village and of a Hanoi street that had met with such success' during the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition in 1922. He nevertheless praised attempts at ethnographic staging, such as in the 'Cambodian pavilion, one of the few endowed with an ethnographic section, where a vast room of wax models represented monks praying in a pagoda'.³⁵ This style of realistic reconstruction of indigenous life, aiming to produce among visitors the illusion of really being there, which developed in the context of the universal and colonial exhibitions, has since become familiar in ethnographic

³⁵ Vallois, 'L'Exposition Coloniale'.

curating.³⁶ (It was still widely used in the permanent exhibitions at the Musée de l'Homme until they finally closed in 2003.³⁷) Finally, 'a last group of ethnographic happenings consisted of various demonstrations carried out by the natives who had come for the Exhibition'. The dances, in particular, were greeted by Vallois as 'magnificent lessons in ethnic psychology'.

On the other hand, Vallois regretted having to be 'very brief' from the point of view of physical anthropology. Noting the 'large number of races gathered in Paris',³⁸ he deplored that the organizers had denied physical anthropologists permission to repeat the 'beautiful studies done by Deniker and Laloy on the subjects who came for the [Universal] Exhibition of 1889'.³⁹ To have direct access to 'samples of a number of the world's important races', both during these performances and in the Exhibition proper, in itself constituted a type of anthropological experiment, even if, according to Vallois, 'it is a pity that they only enriched our anthropological knowledge with mere visual impressions'. He noted with vexation that 'a few photographs taken here and there by various anthropologists were the sole practical benefit that Physical Anthropology was able to gain from this vast event'.

Fieldwork at the Colonial Exhibition

Another aspect of the scientific dimension of these large exhibitions was the organization of conferences. A total of 208 conferences were convened around the Colonial Exhibition, including several international conferences which brought together

³⁶ For the case of North America see Mary-Jo Arnoldi, 'From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 155-6, vol. XXXIX, 3-4 (1999), 701-26.

³⁷ Vallois's approval of this museography is especially significant, since he would later become Director of the Musée de l'Homme.

³⁸ According to Vallois, 'L'Exposition Coloniale', 61: 'the Exhibition gathered a much larger number of natives than ever before.' He mentions the 'very large number [unspecified] of Algerians, 265 Tunisians, and 69 Moroccans, essentially small artisans'. About 200 'natives' came from Western Africa, and 35 from Eastern Africa, excluding colonial troops.

³⁹ This prohibition of anthropometric measurements by Lyautey and Olivier indicates a change of attitude among colonial officials towards 'native participants', which transformed the meaning of what had been a 'standard' scientific practice into a potentially offensive gesture.

numerous scholars from different branches of anthropological knowledge, such as physical anthropology, ethnography, prehistory, linguistics, and African ethnology. The exhibition offered representatives of the anthropological world a chance to vindicate the eminently colonial character of their activities.⁴⁰ Apart from the International Congress of Anthropology, Prehistory, and Ethnography, organized by the Institut International d'Anthropologie, itself an outgrowth of the École d'Anthropologie de Paris,⁴¹ the links between 'native policy' and scientific knowledge of indigenous societies were discussed in particular at two conferences, which were organized by the colonial authorities explicitly to demonstrate their keen interest in native 'social problems'. The first of these was the Congrès International et Intercolonial de la Société Indigène (International Congress of Native Society).⁴² The second was the Congress of Linguistics and Ethnology Applied to Colonization, organized by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures⁴³ (later the International African Institute). Participants in this conference included Bronislaw Malinowski, the government anthropologists Charles K. Meek and Ronald S. Rattray, the 'father of Indirect Rule', Lord Lugard, the renowned missionary-anthropologist E. W. Smith, the German linguist Dietrich Westermann, and the *Kulturkreis* ethnologist Schebesta.⁴⁴ Both of these conferences were opened by Lyautey, thus demonstrating his deep concern for these issues.

At the Congress of Native Society, a session devoted to 'Understanding Native Mentalities' gave rise to a protracted

⁴⁰ See Paul Rivet, 'Organisation des Études ethnologiques', *Congrès des Recherches Scientifiques Coloniales* (1931).

⁴¹ This congress was the most important in terms of numbers, with slightly fewer than 200 communications in ethnography and folklore, prehistory, physical anthropology, eugenics, and psycho-sociology. See *xve Congrès International d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Préhistorique (suite) vè session de l'Institut International d'Anthropologie: Comptes-rendus* (Paris, 1933). See also 'Participation de la Société d'Ethnographie au vè Congrès de l'Institut International d'Anthropologie', *L'Ethnographie* (1931).

⁴² *Congrès International et Intercolonial de la Société Indigène: Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris, 5-10 octobre 1931* (Paris, 1931).

⁴³ *Congrès de Linguistique et d'Ethnologie appliquées à la colonisation: Comptes-rendus* (Paris, 1932).

⁴⁴ This conference was organized by Henri Labouret, Professor of African Ethnography at the Colonial School and the Institut d'Ethnologie, French Director of the IALC, and one of the proponents of a 'new native policy'. See his *A la recherche d'une nouvelle politique indigène dans l'Ouest Africain* (Paris, 1931).

debate about the adequacy of ethnographic research for colonial needs. Robert Delavignette, former administrator in French Western Africa and later Director of the Colonial School (École Coloniale), linked the transformation of ethnological research to the new orientation in colonial policy, using Lyautey's own words to express the shift from the language of racial hierarchy to a language of difference within a shared humanity:

What is significant is the current spirit of the research, which is beginning to reach the general public, and which no longer establishes watertight partitions or hierarchical relations between native cultures [*civilisations*] and our own. There is a recognition that Natives are not inferior beings, but different men. They are studied without any assumption of our superiority, but rather with a concern to understand their originality.⁴⁵

In his concluding address, Georges Hardy, Director of the Colonial School, urged colonial governments 'to create ethnographic and psychological institutes; to circulate the results of this research widely in the form of local journals; [and] to support functionaries who would encourage the widespread study of indigenous languages and customs'.⁴⁶ Hardy thus strongly underscored the importance of incorporating a scientific knowledge of native societies and mentalities into projects for colonial reform.

It would be mistaken to analyse these scholarly gatherings solely from the point of view of the debates that took place at them. Anthropological knowledge was not limited to 'discourses'; it was fundamentally linked to vision (and to exhibition).⁴⁷ It is a well-known fact that in the nineteenth century ethnography developed in a close relationship with artefacts and museums.⁴⁸ The conferences confirmed the elective affinity between the logic

⁴⁵ Robert Delavignette, 'La Connaissance des mentalités indigènes: AOF', in *Congrès International et Intercolonial de la Société Indigène*, 554.

⁴⁶ Georges Hardy, 'Rapport Général', in *Congrès International et Intercolonial de la Société Indigène*.

⁴⁷ Nélia Dias, 'The Visibility of Difference: Nineteenth-Century French Anthropological Collections', in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture* (London, 1998).

⁴⁸ George W. Stocking, Jr. and James Clifford (eds.), *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, History of Anthropology, 3 (Madison, Wis., 1985); Nélia Dias, *Le Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro (1878-1908)* (Paris, 1991); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, 1994).

of exhibition and the practices of scholarly ethnography, both of which were marked by the importance of 'seeing' and 'displaying': ethnographic artefacts, slides, or films were often presented during the sessions. Louis Marin, organizer of the International Congress of Anthropology, characterized the spirit of this meeting as follows: 'Live studies will be an essential method: documents from the Exhibition and from our museums with guided visits; native camps, excavations undertaken in the neighbouring regions.'⁴⁹

Marin thus established a parallel between the Colonial Exhibition and museums on the one hand and, on the other, visits to the natives and 'live' archaeological excavations that allowed conference participants to take part in the process of discovery, underlining the fieldwork dimension of these activities. In fact, the organizers planned to hold conference sessions in the morning, reserving the afternoons for documentary visits to the Colonial Exhibition. According to the conference report, 'Specialists were brought in for the visits who exposed the relevance of the documents for our field of study. Numerous measurements were taken from natives; enquiries conducted with them provided particularly useful explanations.'⁵⁰

The Colonial Exhibition thus emerges as a space of privileged scholarly enquiry. At the time such practice was part and parcel of 'normal science'. The specifically scientific importance of an event such as the Colonial Exhibition stems largely from the system of division of labour that was still a general characteristic of this field. To most scholars occupying positions in metropolitan museums or at universities, who had never had the opportunity to visit the colonies, the Colonial Exhibition offered a privileged venue which allowed them both to harvest facts and to elaborate comparative hypotheses. In this way it constituted a type of temporary museum which, in a limited space, brought together a considerable number of 'scientific facts' and placed them at the disposal of scholars.⁵¹ The very language used by Vallois, when he spoke of 'samples (*échantillon*) of a number of the world's most important races', of 'subjects', or 'a large supply

⁴⁹ Louis Marin, *Revue anthropologique* (1931), 91.

⁵⁰ *XVe Congrès International d'Anthropologie*, 1933, p. lxvi.

⁵¹ W. H. R. Rivers made a similar statement in 1900 at the Anthropological Institute (cf. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 88).

(*stock*) of Kanaks', is revelatory of this conception of the Colonial Exhibition as a vast outdoor anthropological museum.

Thus, far from disqualifying the Exhibition altogether, Vallois intended to sift out what was authentic—and as such admissible as data for science—and what was merely commercial or hoax. Precisely because native dances constituted a precious ethnographic experience, scholars had a duty to track down inauthentic performances and to expose 'simple vulgar imitations executed by professionals who were not even of the nationality of the country they were purporting to represent'. Vallois was particularly scandalized by the Canaque 'pseudo-cannibals' who, far from being 'ferocious savages carrying out their war dances, were peaceful cultivators, workers, or artisans',⁵² whose supposed 'war cries' were in reality missionary hymns.

Displaying 'Colonial Mankind'

I should now like to assess the significance of 'ethnographic documents' in the Exhibition by looking in greater detail at some of the ways in which they were presented. The main focus of my analysis will be the presentation of 'colonial humanity' in the Exhibition of Colonial Prehistory and Ethnography, which was housed in the Palais Permanent des Colonies, home of the Permanent Colonial Museum.⁵³ The mounting of this exhibition was entrusted to the Institut International d'Anthropologie and to Louis Marin's Society of Ethnography.⁵⁴ A note dated July 1930 expresses interest in 'presenting a complete history of indigenous races: religions, customs, tools, indigenous arts'. The description of the project reads as follows:

The mezzanine of the palace would be entirely dedicated to the study of the physical, intellectual, and moral characteristics of the native throughout the centuries. It would constitute, along with the sections devoted to health services and education that were on the first floor, the most effective response to criticisms made by the foreign press of our methods of colonization. According to a certain number of foreigners,

⁵² Vallois, 'L'Exposition Coloniale'.

⁵³ From 1960 to 2003 it became home of the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts.

⁵⁴ For a portrait of Marin, herald of conservative social science, see Lebovics, *True France*, ch. 1.

in fact, the Colonial Exhibition of Vincennes would constitute an inventory of the different procedures used by the French in the exploitation of their colonial subjects.⁵⁵

How can 'the study of the physical, intellectual, and moral characteristics of the native throughout the centuries' appear as a justification of French 'colonial methods?' A detailed analysis of this section of the exhibition, as presented in the *Rapport Général*, gives at least a partial answer.⁵⁶ The display began with *anthropologie* in the strict (physical) sense of the term. 'At the top of the entry stairs' the visitor was greeted by 'eight larger than life sized statues and busts', 'representing the characteristic types of the great indigenous races that populate our colonies'. Next was the 'hall dedicated to colonial anthropology', whose showcases illustrated the continuity of human 'types' from prehistory to the present, displaying 'skulls and skeletons, some of which dated back to the earliest times', alongside 'modern-day photographs illustrating the presentation of skulls and bones'.⁵⁷

The lesson to be drawn from this display was provided in leaflets by Dr Papillault, setting forth 'scientific laws' which could guide colonial policy.⁵⁸ 'Moral and social conceptions', having a biological foundation, he argued, could not be unified by education alone. A policy of standardization, aiming to make all colonial subjects into French citizens, was impossible; the policy of assimilation was doomed to failure, since it could never take into account the aptitudes specific to different races. Papillault claimed that there was, indeed, an evolutionary scale which allowed for a hierarchization of different human groups, while unilinear evolutionism, which theoretically underpinned the possibility of assimilation, was summarily dismissed. Evolution, in this context, was not simply a question of a process of 'civilization', but above all a biological phenomenon; evolutionary characteristics were *fixed* at different levels for different

⁵⁵ Note, 5 July 1930. ANFOM, Exposition Coloniale, box ECI/12.

⁵⁶ Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d'outre-mer: Rapport Général*, v. 51-6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Georges Papillault (1863-1932), who held the chair of Sociology at the School of Anthropology, coined the term *socio-biologie*, which he proposed as a 'scientific' alternative to Durkheim's 'bizarre speculations'. See Claude Blanckaert, 'La Crise de l'anthropométrie: des arts anthropotechniques aux dérives militantes, 1860-1920', in *id.* (ed.), *Politiques de l'anthropologie*, 95-172, esp. 148-51.

racés.⁵⁹ He argued that if natives could be educated up to a certain point—keeping in mind, of course, their different hereditary characteristics in order to propose an adapted education—racial stock (and thus, culture) could be transformed only through cross-breeding.

Next the visitor encountered an archaeological display which presented the results of scientific expeditions to the Sahara, followed by an ‘exhibit of indigenous arts’ which included, remarkably, a number of artefacts (masks, ‘fetishes’) belonging to the most important Parisian collectors of and dealers in *art nègre*.⁶⁰ The exhibition of native arts did not just have a decorative purpose; the *Rapport Général* also underlined its educational value. Objects were charged with meaning: they expressed the artistic faculties (and more generally the aptitudes) characteristic of each race and also provided a yardstick by which to measure their level of civilization, which was a direct reflection of European influence.⁶¹ In other words, the presentation of indigenous art illustrated at once the profound diversity of races presented in the colonies, the relatively fixed character of these from the distant past to the present, and, at the same time, the possibility of evolution under the benevolent influence of the colonizing power. This presentation of native art can thus be read as a parable of European influence exercised in harmonious continuity with the pre-colonial period.

The claimed solidarity between the domains of ethnography, (physical) anthropology, and prehistory had strong political implications in this context. The presentation of ‘colonial mankind in its mores and its works from the earliest times to our days’ took on meaning within the master narrative of Civilization staged by the Exhibition as a whole; namely that ‘primitive mankind’ had lived a long prehistory without evolution and had not entered history until colonial conquest. What was presented here was the starting point for the process of colonial transformation, that is,

⁵⁹ Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d’outre-mer: Rapport Général*, v. 52–3. Papillault’s version of Darwinian evolutionism drew on genetics, eugenics, and Francis Galton’s research on psychological heredity. See Blancaert (ed.), *Politiques de l’anthropologie*, 148–51. It is necessary to point out that this rather extreme ‘raciological’ version does not reflect Lyautey’s views.

⁶⁰ Such as Lefèvre, Ratton, Carré, Level, Hessel, etc.

⁶¹ Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d’outre-mer: Rapport Général*, v. 56.

the 'human material' found by colonizers upon which they were to act, taking into account its variable 'quality'.

This presentation of 'colonial mankind in its mores and its works' within the Colonial Museum allows us to understand how anthropological sciences could provide a 'scientific' validation of two basic postulates of the colonial cosmology:

- the classification of humankind into neatly distinct groups, endowed with differentiated abilities;
- the possibility of humankind progressing under the benevolent influence of civilization and education transmitted by the European powers.

An examination of the pavilions of the different colonies, or groups of colonies, would permit a more precise analysis of the different roles played by indigenous artefacts and ethnography within this ritual setting, under the triple perspective of staging, aesthetic shaping, and ordering.⁶² Here I shall only briefly mention the pavilion of French Western Africa, whose officials had taken particular care to portray native cultures in a sympathetic light. In addition to the famous replica of the Djenné Mosque, a Djenné street, a 'fetishist village', a lakeside village, and a Moorish camp had been reconstructed, in which 'an entire nation of native craftsmen . . . worked under the eyes of the public'. In addition, four groups of musicians and dancers, including the famous Dogon, who were soon to epitomize French Africanist ethnography, presented their dances to the public. The *Rapport Général* underscored the realistic character of this reconstruction, which highlighted both the artistic capacities of native Africans in the form of handicrafts and dance, and the peaceful quality of their activities under the benevolent control of France.⁶³

The pavilion of French Equatorial Africa (AEF) exhibited pieces of African art belonging to the famous *art nègre* collector Stephen Chauvet.⁶⁴ To ensure that this exhibit would be 'supported in the neighbouring room by solid geographical and ethnographic documentation', the Governor of AEF had in

⁶² See de L'Estoile, 'Des races non pas inférieures, mais différentes', 431-47.

⁶³ Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d'outre-mer: Rapport Général*, v. 299-300.

⁶⁴ He was considered an expert on African art. See Stephen Chauvet, *Les Arts indigènes des colonies françaises* (Paris, 1924). He later became a donor to the Musée de l'Homme. Some pieces from his collection are now on display in the 'Arts premiers' rooms of the Louvre.

1930 commissioned a senior official with the important task of collecting ethnographic photographs and data.⁶⁵ This section also displayed a native village.⁶⁶

Finally, the Musée d'Ethnographie at the Trocadéro organized its own colonial exhibition,⁶⁷ the French Colonies' Ethnographic Exhibition, which opened on 29 May 1931. As in the Colonial Exhibition itself, private collectors lent some of their pieces, which were presented along with works from the Museum's collections. Thus sculptures belonging to the art dealer Charles Ratton were exhibited both at the Trocadéro and at the Permanent Colonial Museum.⁶⁸

The visitor to the Colonial Exhibition was invited to appreciate the formal qualities of indigenous artefacts and ethnographic performances, but these were not presented in isolation. Rather, they took their meaning from narrative frames that focused on the projects of colonizers upon indigenous societies, whether transformation or preservation.

Artefacts and Narratives

The display of large numbers of these artefacts, presented either as 'ethnographic documents' or as 'native art', was not solely decorative, even if their presence was fundamental to the Exhibition's ritualization process. This consisted of producing the illusion of a voyage in space and time.⁶⁹ Ethnographic artefacts were always invested with a double signification, both aesthetic, as formally remarkable objects, and as signs and embodiments of a reality of a different order, namely, culture.

As Nicholas Thomas reminds us, indigenous artefacts displayed in exhibitions or museums are not only 'decontextualized', that is

⁶⁵ Antonetti to Massala, 25 June 1930. 'AEF; Exposition Coloniale', in Archives Nationales de la France d'Outre-Mer/AEF/archives du Gouvernement Général de l'AEF.

⁶⁶ '40 natives of whom 3 interpreter male nurses, 4 wood-carvers, 6 ivory workers, 4 smiths, 2 tortoiseshell [*sic*] carvers, 4 morocco-dressers, with women and children. (Cost of upkeep of a native, for the period of the exhibition: 7.000 francs approximately.) Native troops.' *Manual of the International Colonial Exhibition*, 86.

⁶⁷ The expression is used in a letter from Jacques Soustelle, organizer of this exhibition, to Bishop, a collector, 22 Apr. 1931, Rivière Correspondance, Musée de l'Homme.

⁶⁸ Romy Golan, 'Triangulating the Surrealist Fetish', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 10/1 (1994), 50–65.

⁶⁹ In addition to indigenous art, the Exhibition featured numerous works by French artists 'inspired' by 'native art forms'.

to say, extracted from the context of their original use; they are also 'recontextualized' in the sense that they open up new uses, having been inserted into new settings.⁷⁰ The 1931 Colonial Exhibition did not feature a monolithic system of colonial 'discourse' or colonial 'imagining', but was to a certain extent open to various interpretations. At least three ideal-typical modes of contextualizing 'ethnographic' objects (not only artefacts, but also photographs, films, cards, dioramas, and spectacles) can be distinguished. They coexisted at the Exhibition and eventually contradicted one another.

The most traditional of these narratives can be characterized as 'evolutionist'. In this scheme, artefacts and other ethnographic documents illustrate the savagery and barbarity in which native peoples stagnated before the progress permitted by the civilizing process. Ethnography was largely identified as dealing with prehistory, preceding the entry of primitive societies into history proper which began with European conquest and pacification, and continued with the accomplishment of colonial improvement (*mise en valeur*). More recent native arts products testified to this civilizing influence. The evolutionist paradigm that supported the discourse of the 'civilizing mission' structured the intellectual framework of nineteenth-century exhibitions.⁷¹ This master narrative was still pervasive in the Colonial Exhibition,⁷² notably in the Permanent Colonial Museum. It is necessary to point out, however, that the use of indigenous men or women themselves in the staging of 'savagery' seems to have disappeared, at least in the official Exhibition. Excluding the presence of 'native monstrosities', which he deemed offensive, Lyautey had thus refused to rent space within the Exhibition's precinct to impresarios who wanted to display so-called 'négresses à plateaux',⁷³ and 'pygmies'.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Nicholas Thomas, 'Indigenous Presences and National Narratives in Australasian Museums', *Humanities Research* (Winter 1997), 3-16.

⁷¹ Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*; Corbey, 'Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930'.

⁷² e.g. for the Morocco pavilion: 'the work of civilisation is given life and explained in a series of Rooms, arranged around the central axis: Pacification, constructive role of the army, efforts at organisation and progression, the "marches", civilian supervision.' *Manual of the International Colonial Exhibition*, 86.

⁷³ This term was a popular designation for Surma women from Ethiopia who practised a spectacular labial deformation ('lip-plates') and had been a favourite attraction in 'freak shows'.

⁷⁴ Joël Dauphiné, *Canaques de la Nouvelle Calédonie à Paris en 1931: de la case au zoo* (Paris, 1997), 104. The pseudo-Kanak cannibals were in fact not presented at the Exhibition, but

The second narrative might be called 'differentialist'. Here, ethnography and indigenous artefacts were used to illustrate not so much the progress of humanity along the road of civilization as the diversity of cultures (*civilisations*) and races that made up the French Empire. For the organizers of the Exhibition, this diversity was a positive element that was to be preserved, at least to a certain extent. The study of indigenous societies, in particular, through the acquisition of anthropological knowledge, appeared at once as a condition of possibility and as a symbol of this new 'native policy'. This differentialist narrative could, depending upon the case, fall back upon a 'raciological' vision. The difference was then conceived according to the (physical) 'anthropological' paradigm as having a biological basis. Or this narrative could be told in terms of the difference between cultures.⁷⁵

In the evolutionist as in the differentialist narrative, the display of artefacts and other ethnographic documents symbolized, beyond themselves, 'conceptions', a 'mind', or a different 'mentality' that were the true focus of the colonial policies. It was necessary to recognize them in order either to fight against them in the name of progress, or to protect them to allow them to 'evolve at their own pace'. The recourse to ethnography, meanwhile, took on a very different meaning depending upon which principle of legitimation was drawn upon, the progress of civilization or respect for civilizations.

Whereas these two contextualizing modes referred to political projects based on scientific discourses, the third was related to the intellectual and artistic currents of the inter-war period. This could be called a 'primitivist' narrative, to use a term employed in art history;⁷⁶ ethnography exemplified the Other, the bizarre, the return to the primitive, to the savage, to the origins. This narrative might appear to invert the stereotypes of evolutionist discourse (the very features which had been denounced as

at the Jardin d'Acclimatation, a popular resort which had presented 'native peoples' since the 19th century. See Philippe Revol, 'Observations sur les Fuégiens: du Jardin d'Acclimatation à la Terre de Feu', in Claude Blanckaert (ed.), *Le Terrain des sciences humaines (xviiiè-xxè siècle)* (Paris, 1996), 243-96.

⁷⁵ The notion of 'race' was not used in a strictly biological sense, but referred to a composite notion, at once natural and cultural.

⁷⁶ William Rubin (ed.), *Primitivism in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 2 vols. (New York, 1984-5).

'savagery' became valuable as the embodiment of 'primitive art' and 'primitive soul'), all the while cultivating alterity. A watered-down version of this search for radical otherness could coexist with the aesthetic exoticism of 'local colour.' *Art nègre* was not only displayed in the surrealist counter exhibition;⁷⁷ it was also, significantly, a prominent theme in colonial propaganda throughout the 1930s.

Thus the status of the artefacts, photographs, and even the very representatives of the indigenous peoples displayed at the Exhibition wavered between that of *document* (conveying information), *illustration* (visually translating a fact or an idea), and sometimes *decoration* (attractive and picturesque). This ambivalence allowed for their multiple use, both by those who staged the Exhibition and by the visitors—and probably also to some extent by the indigenous people who were the 'performers'.⁷⁸

The Colonial Exhibition, therefore, appeared as a sort of 'living museum' which offered a unique opportunity to practise a comparative humanism. This was indeed the meaning of various scholarly statements that dwelled upon the theme of the 'diversity of mankind'. Thus Eugène Pittard (1867–1962), Professor of Anthropology at Geneva, addressed the matter at a banquet given by the Count of Vogué, president of the Exhibition's welcoming committee:

From one stand to the next, we see the unfolding of various images, which are states of civilization whose diversity both instructs and enchants. Through your efforts, we can get to know the multiple faces of Mankind . . . Thus we have found a scientific and a moral lesson at the same time.⁷⁹

Reconstructions of colonial architecture, and more generally efforts to stage indigenous life, were regarded quite seriously as manifestations of other cultures by the representatives of the

⁷⁷ A tiny 'counter-exhibition' had been set up at the end of September 1931 by the surrealist group, including Aragon, Eluard, and Tanguy, who lent some pieces from their *art nègre* collections, at the House of the Syndicates of the Communist-orientated CGTU. However, it went virtually unnoticed at the time, even by Communist Party members. See Herman Lebovics, *True France*, ch. 3.

⁷⁸ The official reports provide little insight into the vision of the indigenous participants.

⁷⁹ 'une leçon de choses et une leçon de morale.' 'Leçon de choses' refers to an elementary school method of teaching designed to give children a rudimentary understanding of natural phenomena and scientific principles.

scholarly world. Although Pittard disclaimed any intent to comment on policy matters, his concluding remarks forcefully upheld the preservationist point of view that was to shape a powerful trend in twentieth-century anthropology.⁸⁰

Let it be permitted for us, ethnographers, who wish to preserve the earth's innumerable physiognomies, to ask those who have the authority to do it, that these marvellous traditions, the millenary traditions of indigenous arts, not be allowed to disappear in favour of certain of our more mediocre traditions or of our more restricted bookish conceptions. Let us preserve intact this spirit of our different brothers. Let us preserve it as a precious jewel that belongs to everyone.

Similarly, the respected linguist Antoine Meillet, Professor at the Collège de France and at the Institute of Ethnology, insisted:

The admirable exhibition that welcomes us today teaches us a precious lesson. It shows us first of all, the immense diversity of mankind, which is a precious asset; it also reveals, under dissimilar appearances, the strength of human unity.

This essential tension between the universalistic emphasis on the unity of mankind and the particularistic recognition of the diversity of cultures (seen as an 'asset', or 'jewel') that characterized the new colonial humanism can still be found in French ethnology to this day.⁸¹

The Museum of Man: 'Above all a Colonial Museum'?

The Colonial Exhibition can indeed be described as 'an event at once anthropological and ethnographic' to the extent that it served as a temporary living museum of colonial mankind, displaying a variety of races and cultures, as a place of ethnographic enquiry and experiment, and as a venue for scholars to gather and meet with other players in the colonial field. Ethnography was mobilized in different ways throughout the Exhibition; it contributed to its documentary and educational

⁸⁰ See e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Race et culture', in *Le Regard éloigné* (Paris, 1983) (conference given at UNESCO in 1971).

⁸¹ To the present day the official name of the anthropological section at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique is 'Unity of Man and Diversity of Cultures'.

value while helping to create an exotic atmosphere. In particular, it underlined the 'realism' of the staging of colonial peoples, presented in their natural environment. At a more general level, anthropological knowledge buttressed the cognitive colonial order by confirming a worldview in which the division of humanity into distinct groups appeared as a primordial fact: the boundaries between races and cultures could be overcome within the larger community of the Empire, but they were still significant features.

In staging the harmonious coexistence of every culture within an Empire rich in diversity, the Colonial Exhibition built up an imperial fiction, giving shape to a new colonial project of incorporating the differences between cultures and their reconciliation into a universalistic humanism, including all of mankind. In this sense, the Exhibition appears to prefigure the Museum of Man (*Musée de l'Homme*), which would, from 1938, exhibit the diverse cultures of mankind by displaying their 'treasures' brought together in the capital of the French Empire. The valorization of cultural difference at the heart of the Museum of Man's new ethnological project thus entertained a relation of elective affinity with a reformist colonial humanism.

To dismiss the Colonial Exhibition as simply illusion, as a cheap copy, is to avoid having to explain a more troubling dimension, namely, the often unsuspected continuities between colonial exhibitions and a form of ethnological rationality that in France would be typically expressed by the style of curating practised in the *Musée de l'Homme*. In order to understand these paradoxical continuities, it is necessary to renounce the caricature of a monolithic 'colonial discourse', which fails to take into account inconsistencies, contradictions, and conflicts at the heart of the colonial universe.⁸² Thus the intention to value the 'diversity of cultures' was not shared by all of the actors in the colonial world, nor even by all colonial officials.

The Colonial Exhibition provides us with a key for rereading the history of French ethnology in the twentieth century. Far from being 'less colonial' than British social anthropology, as

⁸² Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in eid. (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997), 1–56; Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge, 1994).

many French ethnologists would like to think, because it was less concerned with the study of practical problems, French ethnology was colonial in another way. To the extent that the activity of colonial propaganda often took the form of documentation, it can indeed be said that ethnography represented one of the most elaborate and subtle forms of colonial propaganda.⁸³ Ethnological scholarship could thus contribute to the work of colonial legitimization without even making explicit reference to the activities of the Empire. In fact, two events seen as major in standard Whig histories of French ethnology were directly related to the preparation and realization of the Exhibition: the creation in 1930 of the Society of Africanists, which would play a major role in the development of a distinctive French *Africanisme*, and the Griaule mission (1931–3), symbolically linking French possessions in Africa from Dakar to Djibouti, hailed as a symbol of a renewal of interest in the ethnographic exploration of Africa.⁸⁴

It would certainly be an oversimplification to see the Musée de l'Homme—epitomizing the new French ethnology—as a simple outgrowth of the Colonial Exhibition. The scientific dimension was definitely given more emphasis in the Museum of Man; its founders had a politically progressive agenda that valorized human diversity and opposed the most common stereotypes in colonial milieux and theories of racial hierarchy taught at the École d'Anthropologie by Papillault and his like.⁸⁵ Similarly, the Museum of Man did not restrict itself to 'colonial mankind', but developed a new notion of humanism which was enlarged to include all of humankind, and exhibited European and (Native) American societies as well.⁸⁶

⁸³ For Lyautey, one of the Exhibition's most important components was the City of Information which made a number of 'facts' about the Empire available to the general public as well as to professionals. 'No exhibition galleries, no collections, but information, direct and accurate documents' (*Manual of the International Colonial Exhibition*, 79). 'Propaganda' is not a term of abuse, but the term officially used at the time. See *Congrès National d'Action et de Propagande Coloniale, 11 & 12 mai 1931, Compte-Rendu*, Institut Colonial Français (Paris, 1931).

⁸⁴ See Benoît de L'Estoile, 'Africanisme, Africanism: esquisse de comparaison franco-britannique', in A. Piriou and E. Sibeud (eds.), *L'Africanisme en questions*, EHESS, Dossiers africains, 1 (Paris, 1997), 19–42.

⁸⁵ Rivet was one of the founders of the Committee of Antifascist Intellectuals. Jean Jamin, 'Le Musée d'ethnographie en 1930: l'ethnologie comme science et comme politique', in *La Muséologie selon Georges Henri Rivière* (Paris 1989).

⁸⁶ It could be argued that this reflects the universalistic claims of French imperialism.

It is, however, essential to analyse the continuities, both in aims (the presentation of the diversity of peoples and cultures) and the forms used (aesthetic and curatorial), between the Colonial Exhibition and the Musée de l'Homme. The Museum's educational objectives and its targeting of a popular audience made it akin to the Colonial Exhibition. The organizers of any anthropological museum, in fact, face challenges that are not altogether different from those which must have obsessed the organizers of the Colonial Exhibition, namely, how to 'force visitors to see everything, without letting them suspect it and without wearying them; to remain true while avoiding vulgarity'.⁸⁷ When Rivet explained his project for the new Museum of Man in 1936, he formulated the same concern for aesthetic shaping, staging, and ordering:

The goal will be to give the visitor clear and precise ideas, to bring out for him the essential facts without burdening him with over abundant documentation. The most typical anthropological or ethnological specimens will be chosen, and great care will be taken to avoid presenting so many that they would exhaust and disperse the attention of the spectator.⁸⁸

Thus it is not surprising that the Museum of Man would, consciously or not, borrow from the Colonial Exhibition a number of methods of displaying different cultures, from the contextualization of the artefacts to performances of dance and music; these will again figure prominently in the programme of the new Museum of (Tribal) Arts and Cultures to be opened at the Quai Branly in 2005.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Olivier (ed.), *Exposition Coloniale Internationale et des pays d'outre-mer: Rapport Général*, v, pt. 2, p. 300.

⁸⁸ Paul Rivet, 'Ce qu'est l'ethnologie', in *L'Encyclopédie Française*, vol. vii: *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris, 1936), 7.08-3. See also id., 'Organisation d'un musée d'ethnologie', *Muséum*, 1/2 (1948).

⁸⁹ The project of presenting to the general public the arts and cultures of 'Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania', 'discovered' by the West during its expansion, by putting on display their aesthetic 'treasures' —the very idea which is touted today as the great original contribution of the future Museum of Arts and Cultures at the Quai Branly, in Paris—is, in a sense, merely a new version of the Colonial Exhibition and the Museum of Man. However, the project of a museum of cultures and, more specifically, since it excludes both Europe and the 'great civilizations' of Asia featured at the Musée Guimet, that of a 'museum of tribal cultures' that dares not speak its name, seems a difficult endeavour from the point of view of anthropological research today. See Benoît de L'Estoile, 'Le Musée des "arts premiers" face à l'histoire', *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian*, Lisbon, 45 (2003), 41-61.

The presence of ethnographic artefacts, photographs, and performances at the Colonial Exhibition, and the commentaries on them, give us insights into the complex array of colonial uses of anthropological knowledge because they were products of the same principles and worldview, and responded to similar uses. These displays made apparent cognitive schemes that were more generally at work in the production and reading of ethnographic knowledge. Thus, the wavering at the Exhibition between evolutionism, differentialism, and primitivism, as well as the hesitation between the foregrounding of 'races' or of 'cultures' were also characteristic of French ethnology in the 1930s. Similarly, the Griaulian school of ethnography focused on the very themes valorized in the Exposition's aesthetics, from dances to masks to rituals. French ethnography developed in the 1930s in and around museums, with the express purpose of collecting artefacts.⁹⁰ This privileging of artefacts as embodiments of cultures (and secondarily, the importance of photography as document), together with a primitivist fascination for an authentic Africa (largely preserved from polluting contacts with Islam or the West), were enduring characteristics of French *Africanisme*, and should be re-examined in the light of the Colonial Exhibition. This was an ambiguous fascination. It both essentialized the primitive (the Dogon were seen as miraculously preserved remnants of an authentic archaic black culture) and represented a genuine attempt to understand a culture that was considered the equal, in complexity and richness, of ancient Greek civilization.⁹¹

The Colonial Exhibition thus appears as a founding moment, however misunderstood, in the history of anthropology in France. Seven years later, Rivet would write to Daladier, then France's *Président du Conseil*, to ask him to allow colonial troops to be present at the opening of the Museum of Mankind; indeed, he insisted, 'our museum is above all a colonial museum'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Jean Jamin, 'Objets trouvés des paradis perdus: à propos de la mission Dakar-Djibouti', in Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr (eds.), *Collections passion*, Musée d'Ethnographie (Neuchâtel, 1982), 69–100; *Instructions sommaires pour les collecteurs d'objets ethnographiques*, Musée d'Ethnographie et Mission Scientifique Dakar-Djibouti (Paris, 1931).

⁹¹ Benoît de L'Estoile, 'Au nom des "vrais Africains": les élites scolarisées de l'Afrique coloniale face à l'anthropologie (1930–1950)', *Terrain*, 28 (Mar. 1997), 87–102.

⁹² Rivet to Daladier, 31 May 1938, in Rivet Correspondence, Paul Rivet papers, Library of the Musée de l'Homme.