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# The 1889 World Exhibition in Paris: The French, the Age of Machines, and the *Wild West*

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In 1889, Paris hosted the World Exhibition, and the Americans presented their awesome technological achievements to the French, who were in the midst of their own industrial revolution. The Americans—led by Thomas Edison—dominated the high tech exhibits, while the French, with fewer inventions to their credit, used technology with dramatic effects for showmanship and an educational purpose. While the modern world seemed to be mainly an age of machines, the colonized peoples of the earth were also part of the exhibits. As a side show to an event devoted to the achievements of mankind, the American Indians,<sup>1</sup> as well as other outlandish and “colorful” peoples, were a great attraction of the 1889 Exhibition, where whole “streets” reproduced foreign cultural environments.

In 1889, the French were proud of the success of the United States, having witnessed and assisted in the country’s birth; and in the commemorative exhibit of the centennial of the Revolution, they acknowledged an American inspiration. They felt that Americans were a more energetic species of Europeans, having survived a colonial and a civil war and conquered a continent (De Varigny 837). The Americans, for their part, appeared as allies when they came to Paris on an anniversary that the monarchies shunned. Both countries shared a culture that was still called European and firmly believed that it was superior to all others and would become global due to the expanding communications network across the globe. The French envied the United States for their vast expanses of available land and the resources that were being discovered—therefore sharing a traditional version of the American Dream—but they felt empathy for the plight of the “vanishing Indian” eulogized in the press and in *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show*. William Cody, the show’s owner, who had a history of associating with World Fairs, started his second European tour in Paris in 1889, introducing the French to the vanishing life of the frontier, a vision they readily accepted.

This article explores ways in which technology, the frontier, and exoticized Indians were part of the same discourse in France as well as in the U.S. While the American side of the frontier ideology has been analyzed by scholars such as Richard Slotkin, Patricia Nelson Limerick, and Richard White, the French seem outside their scope or are marginalized as Rousseauist admirers of mythified Indians. Although in 1889 the political situation of France was largely different from the American one, a common cultural ground explained why “free” land and frontier Indians had such an appeal in Paris. The documents to prove my point are all the articles published between March and October 1889 in two bi-monthly magazines, *Le Correspondant* and *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, publications that are known for their thorough treatment of a wide range of subjects. Both catered to moderate intellectuals and the learned bourgeoisie. The fact that these magazines are non-radical gives their presentation of machines-as-threats a greater weight, signaling the pervasiveness of such feelings. In the same way, while the discourse of these magazines is generally in favor of industrial progress and territorial conquest, the compassion for the Indians losing their land and their way of life is ever present. Another (intercultural) source for the link between the American and the French visions of the frontier is Buffalo Bill’s 47-page booklet—printed for his 1889 Parisian show (*Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*<sup>2</sup>). This pamphlet mingles western lore with the local political and social context.

### Man and Machine

When the French celebrated the centenary of their Revolution and the downfall of the Bastille, their nation had witnessed a century of change and a multitude of short-lived political regimes. After the Revolution, the Directorate led to the Consulate and to Emperor Napoleon. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1830, under Louis-Philippe, the wealthy bourgeoisie became the social center of gravity. With the 1848 Revolution and the beginning of the Second Republic, Napoleon’s nephew was elected and became Napoleon III. Finally, during the war with Germany in 1870, the Third Republic was proclaimed. Dissatisfaction with the military defeat of the country led to the popular revolt of the French Commune in 1871, ending in a bloodbath a few weeks later.

Struggling with the political and economic cost of the defeat against Germany, the Third Republic had its share of scandals, and in 1889, Auguste Boucher, the columnist of *Le Correspondant*, described the “shady dealings” of a “government of squanderers” (Boucher 617). Therefore the 1889 Exhibition provided a much-needed break. To put the past behind them and to prove that their country had joined the ranks of the industrial nations of the world, the organizers showcased the latest trend in metal architecture, and among the new buildings a towering structure stood out over the fairground with its new concept and design by architect Gustave Eiffel.

Charles de Mazade covered the news for *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. In his column, the “Chronique de la Quinzaine,” relating the national and world affairs of the preceding half month, he had high hopes for the fair about to be opened, which he expected to be the “light of the year” (31 March 1889, 707). And he never failed to

mention—during the whole length of the Exhibition—the welcome relief it brought from day to day politics. That was also the opinion of American journalists who saw the *Exposition* as an escape from dreary politics and touted “a beautiful, brilliant Paris, a Paris all gayety and good-humor, a Paris without politics” (“Loitering” 360). Charles de Mazade was also enthusiastic about the scheduled shows and the “fascinating entertainment” (31 March 1889, 945). Even a few weeks later, when the novelty had worn off, he was still awed by the “seducing splendors of the *Exposition*” (1 June 1889, 711).

Among the entertainments, Buffalo Bill presented his *Wild West Show*, a typically American grand-scale performance that had already been tested two years before in Europe during a British tour that coincided with Queen Victoria’s Jubilee.<sup>3</sup> Her patronage, the presence of European royalty, and lengthy newspaper reviews, all greatly boosted the showman’s career and led him to his second European tour starting in 1889 in Paris. In order to attract spectators to a show that claimed to be education rather than circus, Buffalo Bill’s publicist, John M. Burke, “America’s first and most original public relations man,” resorted to a commercial discourse linking the on-stage action with the local history of each European nation the show was visiting, however difficult this proved to be (Gallop 255). He knew that the defeat of the French in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 was the most sorrowful incident in people’s minds. Therefore, when Burke described the formidable stampede of a herd of three thousand Longhorn cattle in Texas, he added flippantly that they would have been very helpful to Napoleon III, who would have gained victory with their help at Sedan “beating off old Wilhelm.”<sup>4</sup> As one might expect he omitted this colorful and anachronistic element in the German program.

Very tactfully, Burke did not mention the recent Boulanger Affair, an aborted *coup d’état*, which would have led the publicist to take sides. General Boulanger, a former minister of war, who had been elected *député* for Paris in January 1889, was seen by his supporters—who urged him to take over the government—as the new Napoleon. Procrastinating, he lost popular support and, while legal action was planned against him, fled to Belgium on April 1, thus ending an affair which could have ruined the opening of the Paris Exhibition (De Mazade, 14 April 1889, 946). Another danger to the 1889 Exhibition came from the fact that most European monarchies cold-shouldered Paris, displeased with the celebration of the Revolution, also an element that remained unsaid in the booklet of the show. Germany, Italy, Austria, England, Russia, and Spain did not send official delegations, although some of these countries encouraged their industries to be present among the exhibitors (De Mazade, 14 May 472–473). In *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, C. de Varigny was happy to note that the first country to accept the invitation was the United States (844).

A young country, eager to play a major role among the world powers, the United States sent a large delegation to Paris. A private endeavor, the American Scripps’ League—an association of leading Great Lakes area newspapers—organized an expedition of selected American workingmen to Europe, and more specifically to Paris, to “accumulate information concerning the advance of industrial art.”<sup>5</sup> American visitors on a private trip to France were grateful for the warm reception, as can be seen in the

rapt description of a five-week stay by Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer, who published her “Impressions of the International Exhibition of 1889” in *The Century*, calling the fair “the triumph of France” and claiming that “once again the capital of France was unquestionably the capital of Western civilization... the spot to which all eyes turned as to the focus of contemporary life.” Quoting French president Sadi Carnot, she approved the “display of ideas rather than of things” (316).

Sadi Carnot was an engineer; as such he was particularly interested in showcasing the industrial achievements of mankind. The exhibits were designed for the specialist as well as for the general public. And, in 1889, the wonders of science and the power of machinery drew a large and curious crowd. To recapture the feeling of wonder, we have to remember the discourse produced eleven years later, at the next World Exhibition in Paris, by Henry Adams. He was spell-bound by yet another technological marvel that inspired his chapter on “The Dynamo and the Virgin,” reprinted in *The Education of Henry Adams*, where he drew a parallel between technology and faith. Science—more precisely its applications—had become a new religion. While the French Revolution had tried to promote Reason as a pillar of faith, a century later science had become the new substitute. Science—which included theoretical knowledge such as Darwinism as well as technology—was to shape a new set of moral values, which reviewers such as G. Valbert reported in “L’Âge des Machines” (687).

While steam and electricity were the driving forces of the industrial revolution, steel was the new medium that was to outlast stone as a building material and transform the art of architecture. In 1889, steel buildings were no longer “industrial architecture” but had risen to what De Vogüé called “a new art form” (“II” 441–443). While the heaviness and bulk of stone conferred a reassuringly static quality to buildings, the springiness of steel endowed architecture with dynamic characteristics suggesting the idea that the material was alive, forming a powerful and flexible musculature. Steel architecture became a “metaphorical Cinderella competing with her sisters at the prince’s ball.”<sup>6</sup>

Since exhibits were also meant to entertain, the new technologies and industrial achievements were presented in a Disneylike way. In 1889, journalist A. Morillon of *Le Correspondant* doubted the usefulness of the Eiffel Tower—*A quoi sert-elle?*—(1034) while Charles de Mazade saw the structure in a poetic way as a gigantic letter *I* on the banks of the river Seine with the moon as a dot (14 May 468). The Eiffel Tower, built as the symbol of the new French nation, had not yet become the icon of Paris but stood as an example of the industrial revolution (Bloch and Delort 89–94). It was described as a “marvelous tower,” testimony to the inventive capacities of man (De Mazade, 14 May 468), and—for an American journalist—a “manifestation of human prowess (“Loitering” 373).

Despite their technological competence, machines also harbored a frightening aspect. Their sheer force led to questions about the role of man. In the second half of the nineteenth-century, French writer Emile Zola was working on *La Bête Humaine* (*The Beast in Man*, 1890), the seventeenth of his twenty Rougon-Macquart novels, describing the passions and weaknesses of a family. On April 15, 1889, for a first-hand approach of contemporary technology, Zola took the train from Paris to Mantes, on the outskirts of the capital. He traveled in the head engine and his notes described the

work of the operators. In the novel, the minute details of the operating procedure were transposed into the description of a violent train crash viewed from the engine, epitomizing the common fears generated by powerful machinery.

Zola's criticism of the industrial revolution on a fictional basis had its roots in the negative impact of mechanized work, as described by English politician and trade union supporter Frederic Harrison, who criticized the effects of repetitive and alienating industrial work in his own country (qtd. in Valbert 689). Harrison's books and articles were read in France, and G. Valbert, in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, paraphrased him, presenting a dismal image of life in an industrial town where "women wilted away and children died" while working conditions were comparable to slavery (689). The worker was seen as becoming a machine himself when confronted with the mechanical "monstrous steel animal" he had to work for (693). In the Swing Riots—the historical context of Peter Manning's "Chopstick Festival" in this issue—the symbolic destruction of threshing machines took place in the early 1830s mainly because England's industrialization had begun earlier. Half a century later, the French started to feel a similar pressure when unable to compete with the power of machines. Moreover, men felt threatened in their traditional identity and feared the loss of their archaic culture, rendered obsolete by the age of machines' stifling of imagination. For Valbert, who reflects on the negative effects of machines in his essay "L'Âge des Machines," the sameness of machine-made goods as well as the repetitiveness of industrial work would lead to the "loss of creative power" (691).

Harking back to a not so distant past, Buffalo Bill's lengthy program included articles about frontier history and legends, considered necessary background reading for spectators to enjoy the show fully (*Buffalo Bill's Wild West*). Subtly, the publicist of the show shifted the focus on the noble savage while the frontier whites were shown as valorous and skillful individuals. Moreover, the two groups were seen, as much as possible, in a non-antagonistic way. Machines—except if one counted guns as machines—were absent from the *Wild West* action and discourse. The achievements of man, an amalgamation of "cowboy" and "Indian," were glorified, and the West represented as a locus where history could be made without machines. Escapism and primitivism formed an antidote to the age of machines.

A similar approach can be seen in technical descriptions where animal imagery is used to alleviate some of the stress of newness. Journalist G. Valbert described machines as dangerous wild animals (693); considering the fact that bears and wolves were still common in the remote areas of France, such a comparison was not anachronistic. Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé extended animal metaphors to steel architecture. In steel architecture he saw powerful muscles and joints, as if recalling nature was a way to integrate an unfamiliar novelty ("II" 442). William Cody used a similar technique of capitalizing on known fears—such as personal insecurity—to convey his image of the frontier in the booklet of his show.

The fair's exhibits and shows introduced the unknown to the public, whenever possible in an entertaining way. One of the central features was the *Palais des Machines*, a glass and metal cathedral—115 by 420 meters—with a glass roof. The visitors traveled along the hall on a gantry—an elevated metal frame, usually used to hoist

heavy equipment—to view the hissing and grinding machinery working below.<sup>7</sup> Electricity, a new energy source seemingly endowed with magical qualities, was well suited to entertainment. The nightly lighting of the fairground buildings represented a breakthrough that journalists described with poetic rapture. The fountains, lit with changing multicolored lights, were a major show. Water was no longer a natural element; it had been transmogrified by the “charming witchcraft” of electricity into gemstones much as alchemy transformed lead into gold (De Vogüé, “II” 448–449). Scientific observation—light being deflected by a stream of water—had replaced the romantic meditation upon nature. For the American observers, it was “one of the artistic masterpieces of the great Exposition .... [M]agnificent in the daytime, the spectacle at night became simply indescribable ... a scene from fairyland” (“Luminous” 252). The attraction was reason enough for *The Manufacturer and Builder* (1889), an American trade journal, to give a precise description of the principles behind the illuminated water jets as well as information on how to build them.

In 1889, machines and industrial achievements were the main focus of the World Exhibition and the *Wild West*; the exhibits of ethnic peoples were sideshows. Nevertheless, these secondary shows were not of marginal importance. They participated in the overall educational purpose while providing entertainment. The exotic peoples represented the human background of the world. Among these the Indians occupied a specific niche. The French tradition of explorers writing about the peoples of the New World dates back to the seventeenth century, and the educated fairgoers were certainly familiar with ethnographic descriptions of the Indian way of life. Besides, examples of French travelers to North America “going Indian” abound, and these were often described in a positive light by the authors of travel literature. The presence of Indians at the Paris World Exhibition was thus part of a cultural tradition.

### The Indians in Europe

The World Fairs of the nineteenth century extolled the virtues of the spreading European culture of which the United States was a thriving offshoot. France had forgotten the loss of Louisiana and played the part of the admiring mentor, expecting a “great destiny” for the young nation (De Varigny 848). In *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, Charles de Mazade argued that the prosperity of the United States was explained by “a race invigorated by success” (30 April 236). He believed that the “young, active and vigorous” populations of European origin had found a “fertile soil and a suitable climate” on the new continent (30 April 236). For C. de Varigny, they profited from the wealth of resources as well as from the prior scientific and technological knowledge provided by the Old Continent (837). Technology enabled the Americas and Europe to be part of a single cultural entity, “linked thanks to steam and electricity bridging a conquered ocean” (842). The United States’ exhibit was designed to convince the visitor of the economic superiority of technological inventions such as the telephone and the typewriter, interesting instruments “that will probably be soon adopted by Europe” (846). A 700-square meter building was reserved for Edison, boasting a whopping 329 patents in his name in 1889. At the Paris *Exposition* he was a star, a symbol of inventiveness and technology (846).



The inevitable mention of the “conquering and superior races” (De Varigny 842), typical of the last decades of the nineteenth century, a period of what Nicholas Thomas calls “confident racism” (77), was generally used by the colonizing powers without second thoughts as a justification of imperialism. The new “races” of the Americas had been imported from Europe “to uproot the inborn barbarism from the indigenous peoples” (De Varigny 842). De Varigny declared that, in 1889, the indigenous cultures were part of history. The Indians were already dead, incapable of fighting against a stronger force (841). The French journalists, repeating theories professed in the U.S., mentioned the impossibility of educating Indians beyond the basic level and decried their dislike of hard work as opposed to the pioneers’ industriousness (De Chenclos 847). William Cody’s French brochure added that the Indians were inferiors because they had “no literature, almost no thought ... [and] a purely animal existence” (*Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* 36).

Since prior knowledge of the frontier could not be assumed, the French program of the show gave a lengthy presentation of the cultural prerequisites: Cody, his main performers, Western history and lore, and Indians (Figure 1). The illustrated booklet, with a collage of small-print articles, described with great details the background of the show. What was not shown on stage, such as Cody’s scalping of Yellow Hand in revenge for Custer’s death, was described in the program (24–26). It can be assumed that the cultural connotations remained at times unclear to the French reader, who must have been baffled by the mention of *pourvu que l’Etoile Empire fasse sa route vers l’Ouest* (6), which seems to be a disastrous attempt at translating Bishop Berkeley’s celebrated eighteenth-century verse “Westward the course of empire takes its way,” which had gradually become “Westward the star of empire takes its way” (Stephanson 18). (Hence the statement about an “Empire Star” in the French version.)

In his show Cody presented the cultural icons of the old West, as well as “illustrated history”: the Pony Express (*L’Express par Poneys* [sic]); Indians attacking immigrants, with Buffalo Bill coming to the rescue; Indians attacking the genuine Deadwood stage-coach (*La voiture historique de la ligne de Deadwood*), Buffalo Bill again coming to the rescue. To give a full panorama of the legendary actors of the West, numerous characters—whose names were translated for a better understanding, such as *une brave femme*, *Jeanne Calamité*—were presented on paper in relation to the on-stage action. The vignettes were interspersed with information about frontier skills and culture: riding bucking broncos, sharpshooter Annie Oakley, a buffalo hunt, pony races, and Indian dances, thus opening the way for cultural appreciation of the “savages.” Cody hired Indians, mostly Sioux, who played the role of dangerous frontier Indians—mimicking their past ferocity according to the stereotype of nineteenth-century “raciology”—to be subdued by Buffalo Bill (Berkhofer 60). Although as voiceless as the mummies exhibited in New York City—as described in Charles Martin’s essay “Can the Mummy Speak?” in this special issue—Buffalo Bill’s Indians had the dubious advantage of re-enacting their demise.

The *Wild West Show* was part of a cultural system reinforcing images of frontier traditions and moral values. The exhibition of traditional Indians during the American World Fairs—such as the 1876 Century of Progress Exposition at Philadelphia—projected



L'OUEST SAUVAGE  
DE  
**BUFFALO BILL**

**RÉCITS AMÉRICAINS**

DESCRIPTION ILLUSTRÉE ET APÉRÇUS DE FAITS HISTORIQUES

**SOCIÉTÉ BUFFALO BILL DU WILD WEST**

COL. W.-F. CODY (BUFFALO BILL).... PRÉSIDENT John M. BURKE..... Directeur général Albert E. SCHUBLE..... Représentant Carter COUTURIER..... Agent de publicité	NATE SALSURY..... VICE-PRÉSIDENT ET DIRECTEUR Jule KEEN..... Trésorier. Lew PARKER..... Agent des contrats Frank RICHMOND..... Avocat
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**PROGRAMME**

**Frank RICHMOND, orateur**

**Avis.** — La représentation à laquelle vous allez assister se compose uniquement d'une série d'exercices montrant l'habileté qu'on peut acquérir lorsqu'elle doit devenir un moyen d'existence. Au premier abord, et sans avoir réfléchi, beaucoup de gens croient que les différentes phases de notre représentation ne sont que le résultat d'une répétition générale préalablement préparée; rien n'est moins vrai cependant, et ceux qui assistent à nos exercices pour la deuxième fois, peuvent constater que les hommes, ainsi que les animaux en scène sont soumis à l'influence de circonstances variables, et ne font dépendre leur succès que de leur propre habileté, de leur hardiesse et de leur sagacité individuelle.

NATES SALSURY,  
*Directeur.*

**OUVERTURE**

<p><b>Introduction générale.</b>  <b>Grand Défilé</b> de toute la Troupe.  <b>Introduction des Célébrités individuelles,</b> Groupes, etc.  <b>Course sur Poneys</b> contre un Cowboy, un Mexicain et un Indien, faisant deux fois le tour de la piste.  <b>Tir au Vol</b> par Mlle Annie Oakley.  <b>L'Express par Poneys</b>: Façon dont on transportait les Lettres dans le Wild West avant la construction des Chemins de Fer.  <b>Attaque d'un Convoi d'Emigrants</b> par une bande d'Indiens maraudeurs. Défense du Convoi par des Eclaireurs et des Cowboys commandés par <b>BUFFALO BILL</b>.  <b>Le Quadrille de Virginie</b> dansé à Cheval par des Filles et des Cowboys de la Frontière.  <b>Tir au Vol</b> par M. Johnnie Baker.  <b>L'Amusement des Cowboys</b>: ils lancent le lasso; galopant à toute vitesse, ils ramassent des objets jetés à terre; ils montent des Chevaux relifés (<i>Bucks Jumpers</i>).</p>	<p><b>Tir au Pistolet</b> par M. C. L. Daly.  <b>Course entre des Filles de la Frontière.</b>  <b>Attaque de la Malle-Poste de DEADWOOD</b> par les Indiens. — Défense de la Malle par les Eclaireurs et les Cowboys commandés par <b>BUFFALO BILL</b>. Cette voiture est la voiture authentique qui faisait le service pour la poste de la frontière entre Deadwood et Cheyenne, il y a 35 ans.  <b>Course entre de Jeunes Sioux</b> sur des Poneys sans selle.  <b>Danse des Indiens</b>: La Danse de Guerre; la Danse du Soleil; la Danse de l'Amour, etc, par des Sioux, des Arrapahoe, des Brûlés, des Ogallala et des Cheyenne.  <b>LE COLONEL W.-F. CODY, BUFFALO BILL</b> le Roi des Hommes de la Frontière dans ses différents exercices.  <b>Chasse au Buffle sauvage.</b>  <b>Attaque d'une hutte de Colons</b> par des Indiens maraudeurs. — La défense commandée par <b>BUFFALO BILL</b>.</p>
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**PARIS**  
**IMPRIMERIE PARROT ET C<sup>ie</sup>**  
 12, RUE DU DELTA, 12  
 1889

**DÉPOSÉ**

Figure 1 Illustration from the booklet “L'Ouest Sauvage de Buffalo Bill. Récits Américains.” The McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming, MS6.6.a.1.6.

collective conceptions about native savagery (Kessler 68–69). Even though the frontier dime novels were not part of the French culture, Cody was able to gain acceptance as a conqueror and not as a circus performer. Introducing himself as *Le Colonel W.F. Cody*, he chose to emphasize his association with the military. In fact, in the 1889 program, he included letters of recommendation from American Army officers under whom he had served. Although authentic, these testimonials were shaped by “more than a decade of awareness of Buffalo Bill’s fictionalized identity,” argues Joy Kasson (74). Besides the hagiographic description of Cody’s glorious military feats, the program mentioned his respectable status in life—with a picture of his stately “Victorian” house in Wyoming to prove it—clearly conferring upon him a place in the establishment and the dominant society. In the same way, Vice President of the *Wild West Show*, Nate Salsbury, whose career had been mainly in show business, was presented as a Montana ranch owner.

The Euro-American culture that connected the French to the Americans in matters of technological development and worldview was confirmed by the fact that both sides of the Atlantic approved the white man’s conquest of the West and domination of the Indians. Therefore Cody was justified in presenting himself according to his American habit as his stage persona: Pony Express Rider, buffalo hunter, army scout, and Indian fighter—re-enacting the conquest of the West. William Cody had his posters translated, announcing his arrival and promoting his show in English, or in French as *L’Ouest Sauvage de Guillaume Bison*. His American marketing methods, which were more aggressive than the usual French advertisements of the time, helped fill the twelve thousand seats of the arena.

The spectacle of conquest that was part of the World Exhibitions is closely related to the rationalization for the domination of the world by the white race. The spatial distribution of the races on and around the fairgrounds is representative of their position in the organizer’s worldview. The white/western races occupied the buildings of the technical and artistic exhibits, and the exotic Others were implicitly segregated in a series of mock foreign settings in the large empty space of the Esplanade des Invalides while Buffalo Bill’s Indians lived in a nearby campground set up on a large vacant lot. At least one exhibit presented the post-Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest and illustrated the long way from the “infant race” to the “refinements of an older civilization,” meaning the western civilization, thereby justifying the belittling of the non-European Others and their use as entertainment (“Loitering” 366).

In his description of the colonial foreigners camping on the exhibition grounds, Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé wrote admiringly of the “geographical magic of an extravagant summer” (“VI” 450–451). The sheer multitude of the crowd was a “colorful show”; here and there “lurked” a *Peau-Rouge* (Redskin) amidst a diversity of unrelated peoples assembled in an artificial “ecumenical city” (“VI” 453–454). As long as foreign cultures did not threaten the dominant Euro-American culture, the colonial Others represented an entertainment (Thomas 19, 98) although the “brotherly medley” (695) described by G. Valbert seems a vacuous reminiscence of *liberté-égalité-fraternité*. On the other hand, Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé’s description of the fair as a “vestibule of Babel” (“VI” 451–452) under the lofty Eiffel tower contains the implicit threat of destruction of those who defied God with a building that would reach the sky (Valbert

695). Their punishment was a multitude of mutually unintelligible languages, the “brainless nasal chirping” (De Vogüé, “VI” 456) overheard by journalists in the exotic exhibits area. Cultural globalization was considered inescapable, and it was assumed that the indigenous peoples would adopt the white man’s ways, a fact that was, ironically, epitomized by the change of attitude of the Javanese dancers, who, after a few weeks in Paris, were already less compliant than at home (De Vogüé, “VI” 456).

Despite the fact that he presented Indians as culturally inferior, Buffalo Bill was eager to point out the authenticity of his performers and their (and his) place in American history. Spectators could visit their camp in Neuilly where they could see that the Indians were also Indians offstage, validating the show as history. The perception of historical re-enactment has changed over time. Mark Twain, who attended a Madison Square Garden performance during the 1886–87 season, claimed that the representation of reality was almost reality itself (qtd. in Gallop 38). Today, our view on the subject is largely influenced by the vision of French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who criticized historical re-enactments as “ritual consumerism” and placed the act of consuming in the framework of a “fun-system” that seems particularly adapted to the description of world fairs.<sup>8</sup> In 1889, both elements were probably present in the spectator’s mind—the perceived perception of reality as well as the “fun system,” although the latter was overridden by the overarching educational purpose.

For the French in 1889, the Indians, despite their value as entertainers, became the symbol of their own grappling with “progress” and a shrinking land base. In France, the massive exodus to the cities had not yet taken place, and farm land was scarce. The French felt empathy for the Indians losing their land, but they also understood the importance of “free”—meaning *available*—land in the United States in the alleviation of social conflicts, conflicts that were simmering in France.<sup>9</sup> “Free” land played an ambiguous role at the Paris fair, and the shrinking world was part of the exhibits. One of the buildings of the *Exposition* was specifically devoted to the globe, housing a scale model with a diameter of over twelve meters. Spiraling stairways, balconies, and an elevator enabled the visitor to circle the globe, to view the itineraries of the explorers, and also, most importantly, to see the web of the trade routes, railroads, and telegraph lines. The density of the solid man-made web “brought comfort” to the spectator (De Vogüé, “II” 454). The uncharted territories had almost disappeared; everywhere the frontiers were closing; and the whole world was dominated by man-made features. Only the vast emptiness of the Pacific Ocean was apt to give the (female) visitors an uneasy feeling (De Vogüé, “II” 455).<sup>10</sup> Railroads were opening the continents, with the U.S. leading the way and China barely beginning to build a line. For Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, the civilizing effect of the web of railroad lines was self-evident (“II” 453). Transportation was man’s struggle against open space, and the shrinking world meant the demise of the “savage” tribes who did not partake in the technological culture (“IV” 936).

Paradoxically, although the Parisian journalists extolled the virtues of the network covering the globe, “free” land also had a Rousseauist appeal for the French who had their own tradition of Indianness. Albert de Chenclos published an article about Redskins and Palefaces during the 1889 Exposition and described the pathetic

Indian—"last of his tribe"—he met in 1865 on the banks of the Hudson, between New York and Albany. He was an Indian who had become a beggar, unable to react to the changing world, "numb in the face of force, paralyzed in the face of threat, impassive in the face of progress." Surviving on the fringes of the white man's culture, the "degenerated" emblem for his race was "waiting for death" (De Chenclos 847–849). Other tribes were about to follow a similar fate. Albert de Chenclos analyzed the two main policies implemented up to 1889 by the Americans, from total extermination—without success—to education and assimilation, which he rightfully equated with the death of the Indian cultures (Montesquieu, qtd. in De Chenclos 833). A year before the Wounded Knee massacre officially ended the Indian wars, the remaining Indians were already well assimilated. To prove his statement, the journalist mentioned that in the Indian Territory, where one would have expected to find "real" Indians, the Five Civilized Tribes published eleven newspapers, one of them strangely named *The Telephone*. He also mentioned that their spiritual needs were served by almost 250 Christian churches and that English was prevalent. He added that "today the traditional moccasins, feathers, and tomahawks were to be found only in the Far-West or in the *opera-comique*, as well as in the novels of Fenimore Cooper" (De Chenclos 833).

News concerning the demise of the Indians reached Paris on the eve of the inauguration of the Exposition with an article about the opening of Oklahoma to white settlers. Charles de Mazade wrote in a very critical mood about the function of reservations, supposedly created to protect their Indian occupants but eyed with greed by white "fortune seekers" who were able to pressure the government to comply with their land hunger (De Mazade, 30 April 236). The French viewed the stampede in Oklahoma as a curiosity, but they were also astonished that the United States would allow the destruction of the Indians' ancient cultures on their territory. Again, the reasons given for the rapid change were technology and the railroads that were about to kill the Indian anyway. Albert de Chenclos concluded with the statement that in the Oklahoma land-rush, the "nomads were white" and that "the Barbarians were not the Indians" (855–859).

Since the 1889 Exhibition presented technology as admirable, but also as threatening, the Indians of the journalistic discourse, as well as the Indians on-stage, were seen as metaphorical substitutes for a primitive state of mankind. Considering that primitivism has frequently been considered as "an antidote for modern anxieties" (Mullin 132), the French appreciation of the vanishing Indians can be seen as escapism from the age of machines. On a practical basis nothing was done by the French in favor of the displaced tribes, and the imperialistic ideology of the turn of the century led to an unchallenged supremacy of Euro-American cultures and values. In the same way, the colonial exploitation of France's conquered nations was never questioned, and the mythification of the Indian remained seemingly unrelated to colonial policies. With the *Wild West Show* France inherited a very American vision of the frontier as an epic moment in history peopled with Indians who were not stereotyped as mere villains but also as worthy enemies and fierce warriors, a fact that would counteract their demonization and foster their "rebirth" in the eyes of the dominant Euro-American culture.



Paradoxically, while extolling the greatness of the conquest of the West, Buffalo Bill's show planted the seeds of a far-reaching pro-Indian movement in Europe, creating a new cultural locus mingling the conqueror and the conquered as one icon. Today, the *Wild West Show* lives on at the Paris Disneyland, a surprising fact, contradicting the supposed French reluctance to accept American culture. Subtitled "*La légende de Buffalo Bill – Un authentique spectacle western,*" the show glorifies the same sclerotic vision of the frontier which has now become a French cultural artifact. The only twist is that Indians are allowed to win the gunfights while the celebration of territorial conquest remains undiminished. The evolution of the French frontier ideology illustrates how popular culture combines diverse external and internal elements, whether material or ideological.

The present-day booklet of the show (*Disneyland Paris*)—which Disney prints on sixty-three pages of glossy paper, the length in keeping with the 1889 brochure—establishes a link between the stage action and local conditions. It is interesting to note that the non-controversial subject chosen for the contemporary booklet is a reprint of an 1889 *Le Figaro* article announcing the installation of Buffalo Bill's convoy on an enormous tract of land "rented for a very high price" where "roads have been cut off, a typically American way of expropriating people," the implicit reference being of course the American imperialism of the late-nineteenth century rather than actual expropriations (reprinted in *Disneyland Paris* 28). Nevertheless, the accusation was softened by the generous donation made to the local authorities and the grand spectacle that was to come. Incidentally, it is to be noted that the contemporary publicity feat, whereby American companies go as far as criticizing themselves to please the audience, is in keeping with Major Burke's nineteenth-century publicity for the show. The French were transformed by the *Wild West Show*, but William Cody himself underwent a profound change with his 1889 tour, reconstructing himself as Napoleon, the conqueror of Europe. In a poster first used in 1894, Cody used a Rosa Bonheur painting representing a youthful Buffalo Bill in 1889.<sup>11</sup> He added a caption saying that he traveled "[f]rom the Yellowstone to the Danube. From Vesuvius to Ben Nevis," using the landmarks of (market) conquest to justify his fame. According to Joy Kasson, on the same poster a paunchy Napoleon appeared with a caption describing him as the "man on horse of 1796. From the Seine to the Neva. From the pyramids to Waterloo"—i.e., the path from the victory of Arcole against the Austrians (1796) to the defeat of the former conqueror (85–88).

The 1889 World Exhibition is remembered for its glorification of machines and steel architecture. Both were seen as highly disruptive—machines for their apparent monstrousness and superior strength when competing with human labor, and steel architecture because the new structures upset the established concept of stability. But the World Exhibition exhibited peoples as well—colonials and Buffalo Bill's show Indians. While both were viewed with curiosity, the latter also elicited a feeling of nostalgia. Indians—as perceived representatives of the original mankind—were known through the travel writings of French colonial Louisiana and occupied a special place in the minds of the French.

While in the last decades of the nineteenth century, France and the United States shared a similar cultural background, the experience of the Frontier remained

specifically American. The implicit cultural references of the show had to be made explicit to enable the public to connect their own experience with that of the pioneers. Burke's mention that a herd of Texas Longhorn would have been an effective ally for Napoleon III at Sedan is a typical—albeit ludicrous—example of the attempt to present a vivid picture of the American Frontier to the French public. Whether his particular image was successful or not, the result is that the French accepted the American vision of the Frontier, a place where Indians have to make way for white civilization.

There is one interesting twist, though. The French felt empathy toward the Indians, but several sources of the corpus point to a nostalgia for rural France, a past that was about to vanish with the advancing industrial revolution. On the surface, the corpus is largely in favor of technology, although the reader senses that the commentators who describe heavy machinery hint at the fact that there is no choice but to accept the advance of industrial progress. In addition, the description of the Indians in Oklahoma about to be run over by white pioneers elicits compassion from a journalist who comments upon the tribes about to lose their land and their way of life. Both the suggestion that machinery might be dangerous but inevitable and the demise of the Indian, sad but also inevitable, indicate that an early form of primitivism is at work in the French society of the late-nineteenth century and that compassion for the Indians and interest in their way of life were, in fact, forms of self-centered interest and self-compassion.

## Notes

- [1] I use the word *Indian* in the nineteenth-century context, where *Native American* would be anachronistic.
- [2] While the cover is in English, the title page is in French: "L'Ouest Sauvage de Buffalo Bill."
- [3] See for example, studies of Buffalo Bill and the Wild West show by Gallop and Kasson.
- [4] Burke's comments are quoted in the 1889 pamphlet (17).
- [5] For details of the events, see "American Workingmens' Expedition."
- [6] De Vogüé uses this analogy in his essay (II, 441–443).
- [7] Morillon provides a vivid description of the space (1030).
- [8] See especially Baudrillard's arguments in *La société de consommation* (112, 147).
- [9] For an example of such sympathy, see Ch. de Mazade (30 April 1889: 227–240).
- [10] Gender issues in the world fairs would request a separate article. In the case of the globe exhibit, the male author ascribes uneasiness to female visitors, projecting his own fears in a socially acceptable way, thus reinforcing the stereotype that exploring uncharted territories of any kind was reserved for males.
- [11] Apparently used first in 1894, reprinted in 1898, and used in the 1905 French tour.

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