

Of Coffee, Nature and Exclusion

Designing Brazilian National Identity at International Exhibitions (1867 and 1904)

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Brazil has a long and rich history of exhibiting artefacts made in the country and of designing publications, displays and pavilions to represent and promote the nation abroad. From 1862, forty years after its independence from Portugal, the Empire of Brazil (1822–1889) participated frequently in International Exhibitions organized in Europe, North and Latin America. During that period, the Empire used exhibitions to project a civilized image of the nation abroad, to promote an advantageous commercial and political position for Brazil in an increasingly globalized and competitive market, and to prompt Brazil's identification as a political, cultural and social unit through differentiation from other national communities. International Exhibitions proved to be such a successful medium for state-driven processes of national identification and international projection that, just four years after its advent as Brazil's new political regime, the First Republic (1889–1930) seized the opportunity to redefine Brazil as a republican nation at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 (Rezende 2010).

The artefacts produced and amassed to represent Brazil abroad, and the material and visual evidence generated after these exhibitions form an unprecedented resource for the study and understanding of Brazilian culture, design and the formation of discourses of national identity. These sources, however, have received little attention from Brazilian design scholars and historians. This neglect stems, among other causes, from the way in which design has been understood and debated in Brazil until recently. The cultural and political discourses around design in Brazil have centred upon examining and exalting design as

a modern activity only, established through the industrialization and rationalization of material production. Design historiography, similarly, has focused on narrating the institutionalization of education and of professional practice since the mid-twentieth century (Leon 2014; Cara et al. 2010; Bonsiepe 2011; Braga 2011; Moraes 2006; Pereira de Souza 1996) and on writing the biographies of professional designers and their heroic precursors framed as ‘pioneers’ (Cunha Lima 1997, 2012; Souza Leite 2003). This narrowing of discourse resulted in relegating to academic and historical oblivion artefacts produced in Brazil before the ‘arrival’ of modern design like those displayed at International Exhibition.

This modernist conception of design practice and discourse is constrained by the ideologies of industrialization and unbridled modernization. It differs from the epistemological acceptance of design as a cultural phenomenon, professionalized or not, the historical investigation of which has included material and visual cultures produced by peoples from diverse geographical backgrounds and temporal experiences. Since the early 2000s, Brazilian design scholarship has diversified significantly to embrace the investigation of material and visual culture and to include archival research as the main source and method of enquiry. For example, evidence of visual communication and printing processes developed in Brazil before the establishment of the modern paradigm, but no less modern, for that matter, have been unearthed from archives and libraries. Research by Cardoso (2005, 2009), Fonseca (2012a, 2012b), Heynemann et al. (2009), Lima (2006) and Rezende (2005) has demonstrated, in examining graphic ephemera such as consumer goods labels and illustrated magazines, the development of a producer and consumer market in nineteenth-century Brazil. Changes in design curricula and historiographical revision of the discipline also show a preoccupation with establishing a design scholarship and design practices more attuned to wider social and cultural considerations (Souza Leite 2006; Braga and Moreira 2012). More recently, scholars have contributed to expanding the geographical and conceptual boundaries of the design debate in Brazil. Adélia Borges (2012) examined the potential of craft production to become a valuable and socially innovative form of sustainable entrepreneurship across Brazil, a proposal that counteracts Gui Bonsiepe’s persistent association of design and industrialization for the development of what he calls ‘the Periphery’ [sic] (2011: 17–27). The organization of the 8th Conference of the International Committee for Design History and Design Studies (ICDHS) in 2012 in São Paulo, and its subsequent publication (Farias et al. 2012), promoted the global character of design studies by ‘making connections between design historical work in different national, regional and linguistic communities, and recognizing the multiple sites at which this works is done’ (Adamson, Riello and Teasley 2011: 2).

Adding to the growth of this scholarship, this chapter contributes to a wider and more robust understanding of Brazilian culture and design history by addressing a question posed by citizens and intellectuals alike at least since independence in 1822: what makes Brazil different from other nations and

through what cultural, political and social processes are people and things identified as being Brazilian or having 'Brazilianness'? The phenomenon of International Exhibitions posed similarly pressing questions to participating countries by demanding a materialization of the nation into designed objects, or into the design of displays and pavilions. In retrospect, these designs and exhibitions offer an effective viewpoint from which to investigate the 'national' within the context of a globalized exchange of ideas and commodities.

National Objects, International Exhibitions

The term 'international exhibitions' encompasses a large variety of exhibitions, expositions universelles, world's fairs and shows that have proliferated around the globe since the Great Exhibition of the Industries of All Nations in London in 1851. Paul Greenhalgh (1988: 10–14) asserts that the birth of the international exhibition concept gave rise to the increasing commercial and cultural dispute between Britain and France from the first half of the nineteenth century. In the exhibitions arena, this dispute was sustained by comprehensive and competitive displays of fine arts, manufactures and machinery under a context of national production. Through their frequent exhibitions, Britain, France and subsequent host nations promoted a re-organization of the world's material wealth through the systematic classification and competitive evaluation of exhibits brought in by visiting nations against those of their own. International exhibitions commonly promoted a model of an industrialized and 'civilized' society to be aspired to and pursued by other nations. They advanced capitalist expansionism under the paradoxical discourse that wished to promote peaceful competition among nations in the context of an ever-increasing international market and access to natural resources (Rezende 2010: 113–194; Wesemael 2001).

'Nation' and 'national identity' are paramount concepts for exhibition studies. National provenance was the primary and chief category whereby exhibits from around the globe were organized and then classified, compared, ranked and awarded. Exhibitions promoted the identification between nation and artefact to the extent that national positioning in the ranking of civilization depended upon how national displays were interpreted and placed with a spectrum of value that ranged from technical advancement to exoticism. Conversely, as exhibits were to extol 'nationhood', 'nation-ness' or 'national identity', authorities responsible for organizing national participation in international exhibitions deployed the medium to further their top-down views of what their nations were and should become.

Eric Hobsbawm asserts that 'no single objective criteria – language, ethnicity, territory or common history – can explain *a priori* what a nation is'. He adds, 'categories that may explain one case may not be sufficient for another' (Hobsbawm 1990: 5–6). In some cases, however, the state has primacy over the

project of nation-building as ‘nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around’ (Hobsbawm 1990: 10). Official participation in international exhibitions played a central role in Latin American nation-building processes and their study shows ‘how states, nations and nationalisms, and notably the elites, have mobilized and united populations in novel ways to cope with modern conditions and modern political imperatives’ (Smith 1998: 223). The Brazilian case exemplifies this primacy. In a postcolonial context in the mid-nineteenth century, the Empire of Brazil furthered its wishful identification as a civilized and modern nation despite continuing the enslavement of African peoples and the decimation of its indigenous population.

To enquire into this state-driven conceptualization of a nation, this chapter provides a comparative analysis of two instances of participation in international exhibitions – one organized by the Brazilian Empire (1822–1889) and the other by the First Republic (1889–1930) – thereby exploring two markedly different views of what the nation was and should become. By examining the Brazilian participation in the 1867 Exposition Universelle et Internationale in Paris against the representation sent to the 1904 Louisiana Purchase International Exposition in St Louis, this chapter will reveal cleavages in the processes of national identification and will demonstrate their artificiality as opposed to the idea of a natural and organic manifestation of nationhood. These two cases, occurring nearly forty years apart and in different geopolitical contexts, demonstrate how historical changes elicited changes in the representation and the materialization of the national ideal in the design of displays and exhibition spaces.

‘A Place for Improvement’: An Empire in a Virgin Forest

On 1 April 1867, the gates of the Champs de Mars palace opened to the second international exhibition held in Paris, and the first under the Second French Empire (1852–1870). Conceived to out-do prior London exhibitions in the continuous rivalry between Britain and France, the Exposition Universelle et Internationale succeeded in promoting an ‘optimistic and progressive view of society’ (Greenhalgh 1988: 33) while transitioning the exhibition model from ‘traditional industrial exhibitions to modern culture expositions’ (Wesemael 2001: 221). Unprecedented emphasis was given to shows of different cultures, from the flaunting of colonial orientalist displays to the erection of specific pavilions and rooms to identify and differentiate nations in that massive international site of exchange.

The Empire of Brazil was initially uncertain about participating in the Paris exhibition. Since 1865, Brazil had been engaged with Argentina and Uruguay in a war against Paraguay, the longest in its history (1865–1870). The war opposed the continuation of an indigenous ruled society in South America understood as

barbaric. Hobsbawm, however, considered it as an attack against 'self-sufficiency' in the 'only area of Latin America in which the Indians resisted the settlement of the whites effectively' (Hobsbawm 1975: 78). While in Paris 'the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture attained its most radiant unfurling', as Benjamin (2002: 7–8) famously framed the 1867 exhibition, in South America resistance to capitalist expansion was being brutally repressed; the male population of Paraguay was reduced to 30,000 individuals by the end of the war (Hobsbawm 1975: 78).

After organizing provincial and national exhibitions to muster a considerable collection of exhibits, a group of Brazilian exhibition commissioners, sanctioned by the emperor Dom Pedro II, undertook the challenge of representing Brazil amidst the war. Close scrutiny of the Brazilian official publication-cum-catalogue issued for the exhibition reveals the rationale for going to Paris: 'In order that Brazil may become one of the greatest nations of the world, nothing is wanting but population, and to attract this, it is only necessary to render herself known' (*The Empire of Brazil at the Paris International Exhibition 1867*). By 'greatest' exhibition commissioners meant not only the nation's continental and vastly unpopulated territory; they also took it upon themselves to act as the 'civilization's forerunner in the South' (Villeneuve 1868 viii). Thus, it is no exaggeration to conclude that Brazil's aims in Europe and in South America, as well as its positioning in an increasingly globalized world, were not only that of being recognized as an Empire but also clearly imperialistic.

Perhaps unaware of the conflict in the Plata Basin, the French exhibition commission planned to group all South American countries in one single room at the Champs de Mars. The idea prompted furore among Brazilian commissioners. Led by the Brazilian minister in Britain, Francisco Ignacio de Carvalho Moreira (Barão de Penedo), they challenged the French plan, arguing that Brazilian goods were 'more numerous and more indispensable to the world commerce than those from the rest of the Central and South Americas' (Villeneuve 1868: xxxii-xxxiii).

Brazil eventually occupied an area of 785 square metres, larger than the aggregate area given to other Latin American countries, and it secured a separate room but one still located too near to other South American nations (Pesavento 1997: 137; Villeneuve 1868: xxiii-lix). 'The vicinity to the republics obliged us to give the ornamentation of the Brazilian rooms a *sui generis* character, in order to avoid confusion at all costs', reported Brazilian chief-commissioner Jules Villeneuve (1868: xxxii-xxxiii, original emphasis).

Territorial demarcation in the palace was achieved through the design of an interior space specifically coded to convey imperialism and tropical abundance, as the remainder of this section will discuss. The main entrance to the room (Fig. 15.1) consisted of two imposing portals and an adjoining wall covered in a pattern of squares alternating the Brazilian imperial coat of arms and the dragon of the Bragança dynasty, from which the Brazilian emperor descended. The pattern was painted in the Brazilian heraldic colours, yellow and green,

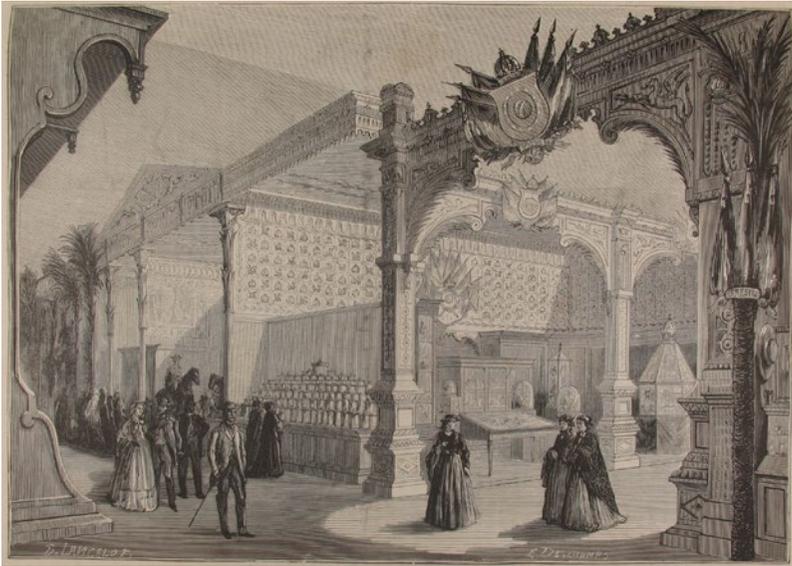


Figure 15.1 Main entrance to the Brazilian room installed at the Champs de Mars palace during the Exposition Universelle of 1867, Paris. The wall to the left of the portal was covered in a square pattern alternating the Brazilian imperial coat of arms and the dragon of the Bragança dynasty and painted in the Brazilian heraldic colours, yellow and green. Further left, the South American gaucho display can be seen. Photo from: Ducuing, F. *L'Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustrée*: Publication Internationale, Autorisée par la Commission Impériale. Paris: Administration 106, Rue Richelieu [1868]. NAL pressmark 504.G.41.

forming an early example of the famous colour scheme that later would be repeated persistently to signify 'Brazil' in patriotic celebrations (Villeneuve 1868: xlv). Before reaching Brazil's colourful room, visitors had to walk past an area that, Villeneuve noted contemptuously, 'the South American republics have populated with gauchos' (Villeneuve 1868: xlv).

The term 'gaucho' refers to the inhabitants of the Plata basin in South America, and for the Brazilian commissioner, the display of mannequins in national costumes resorted to a 'popular spectacle' clearly designed 'to dissimulate the scarcity of their exhibits' (Villeneuve 1868: xlii). The Empire of Brazil was against 'vulgarity and exoticism', continued Villeneuve, 'It would have been easy to decorate our rooms with indigenous costumes, or typical outfits from the inhabitants of our provinces. However, the [Brazilian] commission has decided to exhibit products of first necessity for the European commerce and industries' (Villeneuve 1868: xlii). What ensued from the official resolve of identifying Brazil with its 'inexhaustible resources', 'precious products', 'fertile territory', 'healthy climate' and 'liberal institutions' was a display like the 'virgin forest', discussed below, an emblematic example of how Brazil was identified with its territory in 1867 (Villeneuve 1868: xlii).



Figure 15.2 The ‘virgin forest’ was a monumental display of timber from the Amazonian Forest designed to impress the world. It showed timber previously unknown in Europe cut in horizontal, vertical and diagonal sections to demonstrate its special material properties. Around the display, a set designer of the Paris Opéra painted an interpretation of a tropical forest. Photo from: Ducuing, F. *L’Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustrée*: Publication Internationale, Autorisée par la Commission Impériale. Paris: Administration 106, Rue Richelieu [1868]. NAL pressmark 504.G.41.

In another room also dedicated to Brazilian exhibits, a monumental display of timber from the Amazonian Forest was designed to impress the world. Arranged in a high and broad pyramid, large blocks of timber were cut in horizontal, vertical and diagonal sections to specifically demonstrate their material properties (Fig. 15.2). Around the centrepiece ran a panorama painted by Auguste Rubé, a set designer from the Paris Opéra, intended to represent a tropical forest. The dramatic scenario was set underneath a ‘dome formed by the lofty branches of a tree, behind which one could see the blue and transparent sky’ of springtime Paris (Villeneuve 1868: xlii). The Brazilian timber display was an open space. Visitors walked around the imposing collection, measuring their bodies against the gigantic Amazon trees. The spectacular tropical setting gave visitors an immediate feel of the bounty of the Amazon Forest and, therefore, of Brazil. Nicknamed ‘virgin forest’ by the French press, the display was a success, boasted Villeneuve, soon one of ‘the most visited places of the exhibition, being reproduced in illustrated magazines, and mentioned in all newspapers and journals’ (Villeneuve 1868: xlii).

At the Exposition Universelle et Internationale of 1867, the Brazilian virgin forest turned out to be as spectacular and popular as the criticized

South American display of *gauchos*. The difference between the two forms of national identification comes from their intended outcomes. Whilst some South American republics exhibited regional culture in dress and custom through models of local dwellers, the Empire of Brazil identified the nation with its imperial status but also as a virgin territory, empty of people but replete with untapped natural resources. In Mary Louise Pratt's words (2008: 60–61), Brazil was then represented as a 'place for improvement' to the eyes of foreign industrial entrepreneurs, for the Empire equated national development with the international exploitation of Brazilian resources and the attraction of European immigrants for population.

'The Land of Opportunity': A Republic of Coffee

The Louisiana Purchase International Exposition held in St Louis in 1904 commemorated the centenary of the land purchased from France that augmented the USA's territory to continental proportions. Likewise, the St Louis exhibition mobilized large numbers. It consisted of fifteen mammoth exhibition palaces and more than 1,500 buildings to accommodate all the federated states, 34 foreign nations and 20 million visitors in seven months (Rydell et al. 2000: 56). Thousands of people lived in situ, mostly imported by exhibition commissioners as human displays of foreignness and primitiveness (Rydell 1984: 167–168). Privately organized by the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company and supported by President Theodore Roosevelt, the St Louis exhibition aimed to convince citizens that the USA thrived after a period of economic recession (Rydell 1984: 157). To the world, the fair confirmed the USA's growing military power and proposed a ranking of nations, peoples, and cultures according to the idea of racial segregation (Greenhalgh 1988; Rydell 1984; Rydell and Gwinn 1994; Rydell et al. 2000).

For the Republic of the United States of Brazil instated just fifteen years earlier, in 1889, the USA's territorial expansionism and display of power over the American continent compelled its global repositioning. While in Europe the attraction of immigrants partly motivated the Empire of Brazil to participate, in St Louis the Brazilian republic aimed at affirming its geopolitical weight as the 'second nation' in the Americas and the first in South America through specific commercial strategies. As propagandized by the main national publication designed for and circulated at the exhibition:

Very little is manufactured yet in Brazil for exportation and the manufactured supply of many articles is not even sufficient for the demands of the country. There is, therefore, a very good market for foreign goods and splendid opportunities for the establishment of factories both to supply the home market and for exportation. Especially when taken the fact [sic] that raw material of first-class quality is inexpensive and abundant, that almost all kinds of machinery enter the country

free of duty, and that labour is plentiful and cheap. (*Brazil at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904*: 105)

The logic was simple and seductive: Brazil's population was growing, bringing with it 'plentiful and cheap' labour and the promise of an expanded consumer market. In this way, more manufactured and industrialized goods were necessary, but Brazil's output was inadequate. If only foreign capital could continue 'pouring into the country' to exploit the 'inexhaustible' and 'abundant' natural resources, mutual profits for Brazil and its investors would ensue (*Brazil at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904*: 4). In contrast to the want of population seen in 1867 when Brazil was represented as a 'place for improvement', the official line in 1904 presented the country as the 'land of opportunity' (Andermann 2009: 346) where international capital would find no obstacles to exploit untapped resources. The main avenue for mutual profitability was Brazil's 'black gold': coffee.

By 1904, Brazil exported four-fifths of the world coffee production, and coffee alone accounted for more than half of Brazil's export revenue (Ministère du Commerce 1906: 119). Exhibition commissioners sent to St Louis were closely related to the coffee oligarchs who ruled Brazilian politics from 1894, either by family ties or by holding professional roles in the federal government. To establish its global position in the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazilian commissioners devised an exhibition that compounded the idea of the nation with its most profitable staple, as this section will discuss further.

The effect and response prompted by the virgin forest display in Europe was replicated in the USA with the extraordinary coffee exhibit housed in the neoclassical Brazilian pavilion erected in the exhibition park (Fig. 15.3). Well positioned in the foreign section of the park, the Brazilian pavilion was designed by Colonel Francisco Souza Aguiar and received awards for its exquisite 'French renaissance style of architecture' (*Brazil at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904*: 83). Its interior flaunted grandeur and elegance with 'flights of granitoid steps', marble statues and upholstered settees, large porticos, and a majestic double staircase that led to a gallery which offered splendid views of the fairgrounds (*Brazil at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904*: 83). Although integrated into the Beaux-Arts architectural style prevalent at the St Louis exhibition, an unusual exhibition dominated the palatial pavilion's ground floor – an exhibit that went beyond traditional strategies of display to embrace all the sensorial inputs felt during the making of coffee (Fig. 15.4).

Every day, on the ground floor of the Brazilian pavilion freshly ground and brewed coffee was served free of charge to the visiting public. With their imaginations whetted by the powerful and tempting smell that permeated the pavilion, visitors enjoyed their hot drinks and some Brazilian conviviality around charming little tables placed in the main hall and its open-air loggias. Skilled



Figure 15.3 The award-winning Brazilian national pavilion designed by Colonel Francisco Souza Aguiar in the Beaux-Arts style for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, 1904. Dubbed the ‘Palace of Coffee’ for its vast exhibition of coffee on the ground floor, the pavilion helped to conflate the association between Brazil and coffee in the United States of America and beyond. Photo from: *Brazil at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis, 1904*. Saint Louis: S.F. Myerson Ptg. Co., 1904. NAL pressmark A.32.19.

workers from São Paulo prepared and served the ‘flavoursome national beverage’ in small cups, as this is how coffee is appreciated in Brazil (Relatório da Comissão 1906: 137–138). In total, more than two hundred thousand pounds of coffee by weight were served. Brazilian commissioners exulted in the success of their coffeehouse and the commercial advantage ‘of greatly popularizing the use of the Brazilian coffee under its own name instead of under the fictitious name of Java or Mocha, by which it is commonly sold’ (‘Brazil at the World’s Fairs’ 1904: 20). Asserting the provenance of the best coffee beans was matched by another central rationale for turning the national pavilion into a Palace of Coffee. In the process of nationalizing the commercialization of coffee, it also became paramount to ‘Brazilianize’ coffee drinking, as shown by the emphasis on drinking rituals and the attempt to change preparation and consumption habits in the USA.

In associating nation and coffee, commissioners designed displays centred also on coffee production. Adjacent to where coffee was being served at the



Figure 15.4 The exhibition of coffee mounted in the interior of the Brazilian national pavilion unusually emphasized the sensorial experiences of coffee consumption and production together with its visual displays. Visitors could touch the beans displayed and smell coffee being roasted, ground and prepared in the premises. Hot coffee was served free of charge everyday in dainty little cups to change consumption habits in the United States of America. Photo from: *Brazil at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis, 1904*. Saint Louis: S.F. Myerson Ptg. Co., 1904. NAL pressmark A.32.19.

Brazilian pavilion, operating machines instructed visitors on how coffee was transformed and packaged in sacks for exportation. Visitors could touch, smell or taste the beans displayed in open sacks, judge them by colour or shininess, and choose their preferred variety from among the many cultivated in Brazil. Roasting machines processed raw coffee from green beans into hard, brown ones; grinding machines turned shells into a powder which was then brewed into the fragrant beverage served in those peculiar, small Brazilian cups. Photographs of Brazilian *fazendas* (coffee farms) and plantations reinforced the exhibitionary progression from beans to beverage by exposing coffee cultivation and harvest in Brazil (Relatório da Comissão 1906: 138).

The republic mounted displays of various natural resources and products in at least thirteen other department buildings. Brazil was represented as a cohesive political unit, albeit culturally segregated into primitive and modern regions and peoples as per the worldview proposed by the St Louis exhibition. At the Forestry and Game department, for example, Brazil's Amazon and Northern

regions were framed as the loci of primitivism in Brazil via displays of timber and rubber that heightened their unskilled extraction. This was in contrast to the more complex and skilled work of coffee cultivation shown in the compelling exhibition at the national pavilion that inextricably associated Brazil and coffee in the North American and European consciousnesses.

Coffee, as discussed here, was represented as the agricultural, cultivated solution for Brazil's future. Domestically, coffee production and oligarchic politics occurred near the country's largest urban centres, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, thus framed as the loci of modernization and modernity in Brazil. The construction of a national identity conducive to that of a 'Republic of Coffee' in 1904 was therefore politically as well as economically motivated. The identification between nation and coffee – and the subsequent materialization of this concept in specific displays – served not only to strengthen commercial ties between oligarchs and international businesses but also to establish oligarchs' hegemony over the country.

Reconsidering the National Paradigm Built on Exclusion

On 1 May 2010, another international exhibition opened. Expo 2010 Shanghai China, to give it its official name, celebrated China's international power by promoting urban modernization as the locus of modernity. The exhibition proposed 'Better Cities, Better Life', a theme which participating countries interpreted in their own ways. In Shanghai, Brazil was represented again by a tropical forest, a trope this time employed in the surface design of its shed-structured pavilion (Expo 2010 Shanghai China; retrieved 30 April 2009 from http://en.expo2010.cn/c/en_gj_tpl_29.htm). Unlike the virgin forest display of 140 years earlier, the Brazilian pavilion in Shanghai was designed, paradoxically, to celebrate 'pulsating cities' (Expo 2010 Shanghai China). 'The tropical-forest-like Brazil Pavilion [sic] shows off the cultural diversity and dynamism of Brazilian cities', states the Expo's official website. The incongruity is striking. Few images could misrepresent urban dynamism and cultural diversity more than that of a tropical forest. Nevertheless, the conflicting representation of Brazil seen in Shanghai was no novelty.

As discussed in this chapter, tropical nature, urban modernization and Brazil's population have been seen as historical national 'problems' that frequently emerged through the cracks of seemingly positive representations. Brazil's exhibitionary efforts, across the Empire (1822–1889) and the First Republic (1889–1930), were based repeatedly on exclusion. 'Brazilians' themselves were largely absent from the national representations seen abroad, especially those from working and peasant classes, black descendants and indigenous peoples. At the Exposition Universelle of 1867, Brazilian exhibition commissioners criticized other South American nations for displaying the material culture and

costumes of gauchos. They named those displays of customs ‘artifices’ used to offset a supposedly ‘scarcity’ of exhibits. Brazil, instead, had nature that could provide products ‘of first necessity for European commerce and industries’. The enslavement of black people, internationally condemned by then, was described in this period as a sort of ‘humanitarian slavery’ by one of the several propaganda publications that sought to mitigate ‘preconceptions’ against the country (*The Empire of Brazil at the Paris International Exhibition 1867*: 30–31). Material cultures from Brazil’s numerous indigenous peoples were chiefly confined to the anthropological departments of exhibitions and displayed to exemplify allegedly past human stages. Indigenous people were as such excluded from the present. Rural Brazil, especially during the Republic, represented an antithesis to the optimistic view of national modernization and modernity with which the state wanted to be identified.

Brazilian population and society were, and are to date, distinguished by their multiracial and multicultural make-up. This, I argue, constituted a representational problem for exhibition commissioners. International exhibitions commenced by gathering, classifying and ranking the ‘works of industry of all nations’ but considerably extended this classification and ranking to exhibiting nations and to those exhibited as colonial possessions. The Louisiana Purchase International Exposition in 1904 epitomized this phenomenon by placing nations, cultures and peoples in a supposedly evolutionary, progressive scale that promoted the white race and Western cultures as the pinnacle of civilization. To succeed in this increasingly divided and radicalized world, Brazilian exhibition commissioners opted for excluding the plural and diverse characteristics of the Brazilian population and their cultures.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, Brazil has become big news. International commentators have hailed the country and its recent economic and political success as ‘Latin America’s big success story’ (*Brazil Takes Off: A 14-Page Special Report on Latin America’s Big Success Story* 2009: 13). Has that great future so often predicted by exhibition commissioners finally arrived for Brazil? Whatever predictions may be true, with economic and political growth come new challenges for national development within a context of material and representational global exchanges. Brazil’s ascension as a coming power was endorsed by its successful bids to host two major global tournaments, the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic games in 2016. As a result, international eyes have turned again towards Brazil and its status as a democratic, modern and progressing nation is closely scrutinized. How will cultural diversity and urban dynamism be represented on national soil during these games? What will be made visible and what will remain excluded? Most importantly, how will Brazil’s exploitation of natural resources and its national development project equate with the global debate on sustainability that demands a restructuring of traditional paradigms of production and consumption? These shifts also imply the reconsideration of traditional ways of approaching design and

the writing of design history. They require a move from the territorialization of the discipline towards a conceptualization of design as a cultural phenomenon that includes not only the canons established by the professionals but also the broader material and immaterial production of the Brazilian population while acknowledging them as global experiences.

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