Berteke Waaldijk

Utrecht University

berteke.waaldijk@let.uu.nl

'Colonial exhibitions and world fairs as precursors of digital public space:

digital citizenship & historical comparisons'

When I submitted my proposal for this paper I had in mind a wide range of questions dealing with digital citizenship and world fairs as precursors of digital culture. Too many by far for the fifteen minutes available. Seeing that I would be presenting in the context of a panel on 'spectacle', I have decided to let this context guide me in cutting down my paper.

In 1901 visitors to the PanAmerican Exposition in Buffalo were warned: 'Please remember: the moment you enter the gates, you are part of the show' (cited by Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, p. 68/69, who cites Harris, 1978, who cites the 1901 'Short Sermon to Sightseeers') For some visitors the show was over rather soon, President McKinley was shot at when he visited a reception at the Fair, and he died a few days later, proving that there was no chance of seeing an Exposition without being exposed yourself, and reminding us that politics does not stop when showtime begins.

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Today, students, shoppers, gamers, workers and citizens who log on for education, consumption, entertainment, work or politics in cyberspace hardly need such a warning. They know that their presence will be eagerly recorded by marketing researchers, bosses and teachers, that devices will count the frequency of your visits, the number of hits, and taht engaged designers will take their presence as a sign of interest for their cause. The moment you visit a site, your traces are tracked, your temporary presence is recorded. You are part of the crowd, you are part of the show

Today I want to argue that historical comparisons and especially the comp between WWW and World Fairs, are useful in thinking about digital citizenship. I want to claim that the implications of digital I&C-technologies allow us to broaden the concept of citizenship beyond formalized political rights (civil, political and social as defined by Marshall) and to reflect on the borderlines / limits. The implications of exclusion for that what is included. Coherence between internal and external democratization (Braidotti on subjectivity: entitlements, Taylor & Ess)

World fairs have long been studied as examples of a technology that allowed visitors to see it all, to imagine they ruled the world, to dream the imperial dream of omnipotence. They induced a sense of (racial, cultural and military) superiority in the visitors.[i] It has been convincingly argued that world fairs, seduced & convinced people from the working classes to feel part of the nation, and thus turned workers into British subjects, peasants into Frenchmen. (Arnold, E.Weber) WorldFairs and inter-national expositions made visitors into subjects by offering them a view of the world as it was seen by the ruling classes.

Recent research has taken different trajectories and began to revise that image, world fairs now are being studied because they not only confirm, but also mitigate, sometimes even blur the distinction, or subvert the hierarchy between the lookers and the looked-at. It is noted that at world fairs the gaze of visitors is often returned ? The men and women who make up the human show cases looked back (Everett, Grever & Waaldijk). Spectators themselves became part of the spectacle for others (Rabinovitz). The idea of being a spectacle is translated into the performativity of the spectators involved in visiting fairs(Roche) Others make clear that in the 'ethnographic spectacle' the represented other is performing 'native presence'.(Rony, Krischenblatt) Summarizing a multitude of research in this field one could say that being a turned into a spectacle is never complete, always contested. Spectacularity is always blurred with spectatorship.

I will take this revision as a starting point for some reflections on mediated citizenship now and a century ago. Under what conditions can the spectator become a citizen? When does the consumption of images turn into political participation? When does the difference in power between the spectator and a human object of the gaze (represented as as a spectacle) reinforce? What conditions create the difference between the spectator and the spectacle, between the one who sees and the people that are being seen. Turning a person into a spectacle is an effective way of exclusion: instead of listening to arguments, one reduces the other to a position of outsider, a spectacle, that unites the spectators. Can spectacles be used in such a way that exclusion is not repeated?

I will look for answers to these question by discussing three aspects of the blurring between spectacle and spectatorship that took place on world fairs and that may have counterparts that are more or less clear in digital constructions of spectacles and spectators. I will start with the

experience of entering another world as described by visitors to cyberspace and by visitors to world fairs. I will then continue with the performativity of participants in both contexts. I will conclude with the issue of what I would call 'custodial citizenship': the sense of responsibility that is induced by mediated public spaces (whether digtial or exhibitionary). I hope to conclude by convincing you that the comparison between digital public space and world fairs provides us with questions (equipment) to study the issue of digital citizenship as one where issues of access can no longer be separated from liberatory experiences within digital public space.

1. Entering another world

> You come out of that mile long Babel you pass under a bridge and all of a sudden you are in a great beautiful silence. The angels of the women's building smile down and bless you, and you know that in what seemed like one step you've passed out o' darkness and into the light' (cited in Weiman 1981)

> Flags in the wind that is salty and fresh and comes right from the sea. You feel as if you are boarding a ship, but the turnstile revolves and still the solid ground is under your feet. (Grever & Waaldijk 162)

> Indeed, it seemed to him as though, this year, education went mad. (…) when one sought rest at Chicago, educational game started like rabbits from every building, and ran out of sight among thousands of its kind before one could mark its burrow. The Exposition itself defied philosophy. (…) Here was a breach of continuity - a rupture in historical sequence! Was it real or only apparent? One's personal universe hung on the answer (…)(*Education of Henry Adams*, 339-341)

In an exciting article about the colonial gaze, Sara Mills distinguishes (following the work of Marie Louise Pratt on *women's travel writing)* between the imperial panoramic view of the colonial surveyor, who is the 'master of all his eyes can see' and the 'contact- or danger zone' (Pratt 1992). , a colonial space where the colonizer puts him/herself 'at risk' in the dangerous situation where he/she meets the indigenous population, gets lost in the jungle, enters the heart of darkness. The two sites of of seeing the colonial other are gendered. The excitement of the immersion in a dangerous meeting

with the colonial other is explicitly sexualized (rape, lust, loss of self) while the panoramic view is connected to the male authority of imperial government.

The distinction between the panoramic and the immersive view is gendered: the first is mostly experienced by male colonial administrators who survey the land in order to bring it under colonial rule. The immersion in the dangerous contacts is sexualized and often illustrated by the experiences of women (for whom the sexual encounter is considered to be dangerous in itself) or men who get lost in sexual encounters

The colonial exhibitions around 1900 combine these two imperial views: on the one hand the panoramic view of all colonies (cf McClintock on the panoramic view of the world at colonial exhibitions) on the other hand the experience of getting lost in the jungle, the unorganized and 'real' life' experience of visitors who visit 'African villages' where visitors could feel 'immersed' in the colonies. It has been noted that the way the Western countries were presented at worldfairs differed from the way colonies were represented. The first were shown in an orderly, structured way, the route of the visitor re-enacted the history of progress. (Coombes and Grever & Waaldijk, Grever). In the colonial pavilions, the visitor could experience the feeling of being virtually lost, immersed in a strange world, no straight lines, with no order, just an avalanche of sensations (smell, vision, hearing, feeling). Dwindling roads, unexpected vistas, meeting 'real' people and be surprised by them was seen as the essence of the colonial exhibition.

The two forms of visualization of empire did co-exist, they presupposed each other at colonial exhibitions/ Both forms of vision interact.

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With Ann Stoler, I am inclined to see the construction of the 'meeting with the dangerous Other' as an element in the making of western racialized sense of self and subjectivity.(Stoler, 1995 & 2001)

discuss & show:

Picture of men and women looking out at Chicago Fair

Picture of belly-dancing: a combination of panorama

– the stage with a full view of the whole dance, and the immersion: the mirrors on stage make the audience a part of the show itself
– panorama means immersion in the location from which panoramic view is possible.

Instead of asking which perspective dominated at the World Fairs, immersion or panorama, I want to follow the lead of the quoted citations and the pictures: and stress the fact that exactly the co-existence of the two perspectives constituted the exhibiton-experience.

As the quotes at the beginning suggest, world fairs and expositions were experienced as combinations of panorama's and immersion. Visitors describe being both overwhelmed, and seeing unity. Both of getting lost and being proud about understanding the exhibition.

Loosing yourself and knowing where you are lost, being immersed and imagining oneself in a position of power at the same time seem to me characteristics of the representation of expositon experience.

It has been argued of course that the image of the free individual, endowed with rights, presupposes its counterpart in the form of slavery, pauperism, colonial others. As Hegel pointed out what is the fun of being a master when there is no slave.

Although many critics of digital cultures stress the fact that internet and digital communication technologies will produce new forms of subjectivity, and that being wired, networked and logged on will deeply change the traditional concepts of citizenship, inclusion and exclusion.

However,

both the optimism of 'defenses' of digital citizenship and their pessimistic counterparts who predict reduction of civil liberties, refer to the traditional schemes and distinctions between the really free movers and the slaves. The optimists claim more democracy, more participation, more fun and more freedom then ever before. But all these claims are accompanied by references to the ones who do not join that freedom.

In writings about digital space we see a comparable combination of fantasies about getting lost, being overwhelmed, transformation even, and at the same time a reinforcement of the idea of being in charge, navigating through dangerous waters. Whether discussing the impact of IT on education, or discussing the total end of the national state, authors have to invoke the image of the non-liberated user.

> '(F)or every student who sees the excitement in building a collection of Web
> documents, how many others are content to click more passively through
> hypermedia collections built by someone else? (Charles Ess, 'Wag the Dog;
> Online Conferencing and Teaching' *Computers and the humanities* 34: 3

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> My hope is that this collection reflects some of the diversity of views in the
>
> online world today and that it shows the tremendous energy of the current
>
> denizens of that world. (…)The coming years, the suits may colonize
>
> cyberspace and turn it into a vast suburban shopping mall, and the current party
>
> may be forced to dissolve, but (…) it cannot be dissolved forever. (Peter
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> Ludlow, *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias* Cambridge, Mass &
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> Londen: MIT Press, 2001) xx

What I am looking for in theories of mediated citizenship is how technologies that create the

idea of liberation and the sense of sovereignity & independence in some, will produce

(project?) simultuanuously the absence of this independence in others. A comparison between

World Fairs and digitally mediated forms of community because the combination of

immersion and panorama that popularized empire in a mixture of colonial pavilions and

entertainment areas, may help to understand the political stakes of popularizing digital

citizenship.

> According to Martin Jay, different forms of visualization (distance and immersion) can be
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> connected to different conceptions of citizenship. (Jay, 1993) The difference between
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> distance and immersion can be related to two models of politics and thus citizenship:
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> respectively of representative politics (distance) and participatory democracy, characterized
>
> by immersion of all citizens in the political process. Jay connects the last form of politics
>
> to Rousseau and his ideal of the fesitval as the ultimate political democracy: a people united

in one will (volonté genral) Every citizen himself participates, risks his presence in a participatory move. Opposed to this ideal of total democracy is the principle of representative democracy: citizens elect representatives, who – like actors on a stage in a theatre – perform politics. For Rouseau the falseness, the make-belief of the theatre contrasted unfavorable with the transpararency of the festival. In the latter form of democracy citizens run no risks, they remain in the dark (as the audience in a theatre), they can observe politicians, and all that is at stake is whether the actors (politicians)do a good job of expressing the wishes of the audience.

The experience of immersing in an exhibition might be compared to participating in a festival, and to Rousseau's ideal of participatory politics, the distinction between spectaotor and spectacle disappears. (cf Derrida, Grammatology cited by Martin Jay, p. 93: 'the spectator, presenting himself as a spectacle (…) will efface himself the difference between the actor and the spectator'. The experience of seeing in one image a panoramic view of the whole world history and all civilized progress on the other hand may be seen as a preparation for representative democracy, where the citizen is conceptualized as an overseer, a custodian (see Waaldijk,1999) Safe in their anonymity, exhibition visitors could see the world, the social problems, without (they believed) being really touched by them. However, whether the visitors of exhibitions were aware of it or not, a visit to a fair was a form of political participation. the money you paid for a ticket as well as your presence itself contributed to the political fact of a successfull show. (cf breadcrumbs)

2. the performativity of the exposed

Colonial Expositions have used the human showcase as one of its main attractions. Thousands of men, women and children have traveled the world to serve as living images of the culture in their own countries, whether these were located in Africa, Asia or the remote regions of the colonizing nations. The sites where humans were on show, have served as sites of exclusion: the racialized other was behind a fence, could be studied and observed and was reduced to an example of a culture that was considered less civilized. Their powerlessness created a sense of power in visitors who looked at the human showcases. Colonial encounters in the saddest sense of the word, a tradition that started with South African San-woman Saartje Baartman.

If you want an example of subjectivity based on the exclusion of others, the colonial pavilion will provide you with one easily. However, historical research has began to change this image. Close scrutiny of the experiences of men and women who were put 'on show' has made Exhibition historians aware of the fact that subjection to the gaze of others has never been complete. Hazel Carby and others have described how WEB DuBois organized an anti-racist convention of African Americans and Africans from Africa in the middle of Midway Pleasance, where people from Dahomey were exhibited. (Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood)* Fatimah Rony (in *The Third Eye* Duke UP 1996*)* describes how the railing separating visitors from performers were permeable: visitors could and did sometimes mix, or talk with the people who provided the show.(p. 39/40) Moreover, not all visitors nor all performers fitted perfectly their role. Some visitors to an African village may have had African ancestry themselves. Some performers also worked as wards. Women who visited the 1893 world congress of Beauty, where women from all over the world were exhibited as specimens of their 'Race' may have identified with the exposed women. In the Netherlands a

group of Javanese dancers went on strike for higher wages, as did a group of factory girls who were hired to show / perform how factory girls worked.(Grever & Waaldijk, 1998) The moment visitors went to a live show, they became objects of the gaze of the performers, and the distance (or the contacts) between the two groups had to be negotiated.

In what sense does this knowledge about the performative character of the behaviour of both the exposed and the visitors help us in understanding citizenship in a digitally mediated world? to answer this I think we must turn to Foucault and the image of the panopitcum. The image of the technology of the panopticum is often invoked when the risks of digital culture are discussed. The technological possibilities to make everybody visible all the time suggest that complete and total surveillance (David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye*) is at hand and will turn all of us into objects of a watching Big Brother. However true as this may be, it is not all that happens. The name of the television series makes clear that the effect that accompanies the panoptification of the world is that everybody herself / himself will turn into a surveillor. Everybody will not only be looked at, but s/he will be looking. Here the work of Bennett and Roche on the Exhibitionary complex is crucial - he argues that it is almost impossible to be a spectator in a mega-event without being part of the spectacle yourself. (Roche, *Mega-Events and modernity* Routledge 2000*)*

This is not to be seen as an easy egalitariansim, (oh let us not bother about lack of privacy, we ourselves can pry into each others affairs as well). On the contrary, I want to argue that the example of human show cases at world fairs may help us to reflect on the conditions and possibilities of the permeability of the distinction between observers and observed. On world fairs, sex, commerce and politics structured the gestures that resulted in temporary crossing of boundaries. Prostitution, political protest, strikes for higher wages, tips for good

performance happened. Diverse forms of identification led to conversations, contacts, marriage, novels.

I think we desperately need the historical detailed study of these encounters, where the exposed become performers, and the visitors become performers. If we look at the way people move in digital space, how politics is formed there, one thing that strikes everybody (optimists and pessimists) state that identities on internet are never stable, lasting and permanent. Temporary autonomous zones, rhizomes, short-time coalitions, buz-words that make us aware of the precious little time that we have when making a difference. This temporariness force us to think about the conditions that shape the possibilities of crossing lines and swop positions of observer and observed.

can be studied in profitable comparisons. These will help us to move beyond historical comparisons that stress exclusion (digital haves and digtial have not yets) .

3.   Custodiality - being on the brink and watching over others

Let me start with a concrete and example from the fairs.

Image the women's building at the Columbian Exhibition in 1893. 'Close to Midway Pleasance', the commercial sideshow with the Ferris Wheel (intended to surpass the Eiffel Tower), all 'human show cases' Javanese, Japanese and Dahomey villages, Little Egypt. Women's Congress of Beauty. This was commercial amusement in its purest form. The women's building was one of the twelve major buildings of the white city. Allen Trachtenberg (1982) has commented on its position between midway pleasance and the White City. For the women who organized the Woman's Building this location caused problems,

because right around the corner was teh 'Street in Cairo' where Little Egypt performed belly-dancing (recently invented as an orientalist tradition) shows were given. According to Fair-historian Weiman, a newspaper reported that Bertha Palmer, the president of the women's building took her friends to see this show one evening. She was furious about this - in her eyes - accusation that she visited these immoral grounds. Her protest (she asked the directors to close down Little Egypt altogether) lead to a new rule for the fairs: (no vocal and visual advertisment of immorality) on midway pleasance. Lauren Rabinowitz has convincingly argued that this was one of the reasons that made it possible for many more women and girls to go to Midway Pleasance, to claim that space, to be seen as enjoying the pleasures of exotic consumption.

[skip]

The follow-up for the president of the women's pavilion was interesting as well: a report by amateur woman historian pointed out to her that belly dance was actually about religious self-control and should not be feared in disdain for popular entertainment. A woman amateur historian (Ida C. Craddock) explained in a long letter to Ms Palmer that belly dance was actually about religious self-control (Weimann, p. 258)

What strikes me is the fear and disdain for the popular amusement that Palmers reaction betrays. The women organizers had – it must be admitted - a tough time, they had to defend a separate woman's building and were faced the question: where do women belong? Was the answer: everywhere in the regular exhibition (women artists refused to exhibit their work in the 'women's building because they argued: our art is as good as that of men) or should women go to the in the World Congress of Beauty (Applebaum, 95) where women from all over the world (but inreality all from Vienna) participated in half-erotic beauty contests? The legitimacy of a separate woman's

building was under attack from different sides.

The anger of Mistress Palmer was not so much against the fact that belly dancing took place in "little Egypt' but against the fact that this made it possible to construct her as somebody who watched immorality. This has to do with the construction of the public sphere, not as a civil society.

I think we can compare the effort of ms Palmer to distinguish between women's emancipation and the public appearance of women in amusement settings with the fear and disgust expressed by web-educators who show how horrendous forms of pornography are only two clicks away from sesame-street? The language of danger and contamination of youth is certainly reminiscent of the reactions of nineteenth century feminists against public entertainment.

Or can we compare it to the new spelling of girls by cyberfeminists (grrrls) to escape representations of 'girls' in pornographic websites. Both have to do with the meeting of different domains (domain names), with the creation of distinctions between realms and with warnings: now you are entering dangerous zones.
Both have to do with organizers who are aware of the possibilities and risks of their genre.
Both have to do with structural characteristics of a genre (medium) that points to the power of those in charge of representation. It shows how a racialized and gendered other (the belly-dancer) will serve as the background against which emancipation of a specific group is being projected.

In 'Women and Children first: gender and the settling of the Electronic frontier' Laura Miller argues that it is not so much the fact that child porn and sexism appear on internet, that should interest us, but

the active construction of women and children as beings that have to be protected, a movement that makes the 'act of protecting the weak' ('the protecting actor') an example of digital citizenship. (Laura Miller, in James Rook & Iain A. Boal, eds, *Resisting the Virtual Life, pp 49-59.*)The language of danger, vigilance and responsibility on the internet creates two positions: one for the ones who use that language and one for the objects of that protective mode. the custodian sees the field and has to know the dangers in order to protect other. The citizenship of this role is dependent upon the position of the others, the one that should be protected. But in order to fulfill one's role as custodian, one has to know about danger, one as to mingle with the people (see second illustration). One is 'contaminated' with the dirt that one wants to keep away.

Of course this is a familiar pattern for those who study the risks of a digital surveillance: in order to prevent breaches of privacy, governments have to breach privacy. In order to fight pornography, one has to repeat it. Worrying about women and children as victims, constructs them as victims (Miller). Speaking about the digital divide will put some outside cyberspace, others inside(Anna Everett). In order to enjoy the panoramic or the panoptical view, one puts oneself in danger. However, there is a definite tendency to stress the new and the unique character of cyberspace in this respect. Never before everybody could go everywhere anonymously, never before have realities been created that escape the checks and balances of traditional families, states, communities. I want to argue that there have in the past been many situations where visitors could anonymously look around, where self-appointed custodians had to put themselves in danger to keep others from being at risk.

I think it will be necessary to see when this blurring of positions occurs. The organized spectacles of world fairs and colonial exhibitions provide us with examples of the sensitive tensions of a medium that addresses millions of people at the same time and divides them in spectators and objects of the gaze. We can study the moments of transgression, when spectators crossed the line and became a

spectacle themselves, and when men and women who were invited to form a spectacle turned their eyes upon the spectators. The conditions of interaction that structured these breaches are worthwhile studying. They help us understand how today again , sex, commerce and politics structure the moments of temporary blurring between positions that seem so far apart when studied with the classical concepts of citizenship studies, i.e. the formalized political rights (civil, political and social as defined by Marshall)

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