

# Reconstruction as trope of cultural display

## Rethinking the role of “living exhibitions”

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**Abstract:** *During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a new and particularly widespread type of exhibition practice occurred all over the Western World, namely “living exhibitions”. They were characterized by the display of indigenous and exotic-looking peoples in zoological gardens, circuses, amusement parks, various industrial expositions, and major international expositions where representatives of indigenous and foreign peoples from all over the globe performed their everyday life in reconstructed settings. Entire milieus were recreated by bringing along dwellings, animals, objects, etc. Eventually this would also become the dominant trope of display in folkloric exhibitions. Nevertheless, the living exhibitions have not been regarded as influential to this development. Instead, the trope has most commonly been accredited to the Swedish folklorist Artur Hazelius. In this article, I stress the importance of situating his display techniques and museological ideals within a wider context, most importantly the living exhibitions. The emphasis will be on the display of Sámi.*

**Keywords:** Living exhibitions, exhibition history nineteenth and early twentieth century, Sámi, cultural reconstruction, folk-ethnographic displays, open-air museums, zoological gardens, Skansen, Sámi encampments, international expositions, wax museums.

Reconstruction as trope of cultural display is often accredited to the Swedish folklorist Artur Hazelius (1833–1901), the founder of the Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection (the later Nordiska Museet) in Stockholm in 1873, and the closely associated Skansen open-air museum in 1891. In contrast to the other prominent and competing modes of display in Scandinavia at the time, and mainly asserted

by archaeologists, Hazelius wanted the visitor to experience complete and realistic cultural environments – not detached objects estranged by typological or chronological arrangements. The ambition was to exhibit Swedish folklife “in living style”. Outside, at Skansen, he reconstructed entire lived-in surroundings with buildings, animals, plants, and people or mannequins dressed in regional attire. Inside,

50 at Nordiska Museet, he reconstructed domestic living spaces and created dioramas or scenes of family life in a similar way. Hazelius wanted the visitor to take active part in the exhibition; he wanted the exhibition to speak to people's imagination by experiencing – at close hand – the culture enacted.

Hazelius himself testified to his reputation as a pioneering figure – albeit with reservation: “I’ve not followed the old path, but to a certain extent cleared new ones”,<sup>1</sup> he wrote to a friend soon after Skansen had been inaugurated (Böttiger *et al.* 1903:16). Thus, he contributed to what Stoklund has referred to as the “Hazelius Myth” (Stoklund 1993:91). According to this myth, advocated more or less uncontested in both European and American literature on museum history until the 1990s, it was Artur Hazelius who conceived the idea for a new type of museum and museum display and presented them at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1878. Here he participated with several folklife scenes including a Lapland panorama. This type of museum display has been regarded as having its origins in Sweden and the Nordic countries and spreading from there. As his Norwegian folk-museum colleague Anders Sandvig would later state: “With his work he [Hazelius] has lit the torch that shines not only over the North, but all over Europe” (Sandvig 1969:135).

As Hazelius himself was aware, and without deterring from recognizing the influence his display ideas had throughout both Europe and America, his exhibition technique drew upon an existing repertoire of visual technologies, among which the theatre, the *tableau vivant*, popular genre paintings in the “Düsseldorf style”, the panorama, and the diorama are often highlighted. Central in this regard is a series of articles in which Bjarne Stoklund (1993, 1994, 1999) has focused on the relationship between the Hazelian project and the great

international exhibitions where reconstructed settings of folk culture, primarily the peasant, became frequent during the 1860s and 1870s. For example, quite independently of Hazelius, Sweden (with Norway) had participated with costume groups at the World's Fair in Paris in 1867, Vienna in 1873, and Philadelphia in 1876 based on the sculptor Carl August Söderman's acclaimed life-like wax dummies (Stoklund 1993:91). Even though the World Exhibition in Paris in 1878 was the first to include displays of costume groups arranged in diorama form, namely Hazelius' scenes where again Söderman was responsible for the figures, the World Exhibition in Paris in 1867 was the first to include such groups in a systematized way. Significant to the development of Hazelius' display technique was also the so-called pavilion system usually accredited to Frédéric Le Play with reference to his nationally differentiated displays of realistic, reconstructed environments in a park alongside the great exhibition hall at the very same Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867 (Stoklund 2003:27). Such parks became an integral feature of subsequent exhibitions.

A more recent addition to the history of reconstruction as a trope of display comes from scholars of wax museums or panopticons, most notably Vanessa Schwartz (1998) and Pamela Pilbeam (2003) with their works on the Musée Grévin in Paris and Madame Tussaud's in London in the mid-nineteenth century, and Mark Sandberg (2003) with his study on the rise of wax museums and folk museums in Scandinavian cities in the late nineteenth century. In fact, one of the virtues of Sandberg's study is that it draws our attention away from scenographic display in major European cities and focuses instead on developments within Scandinavia with protagonists such as Bernhard Olsen (1836–1922), the director of

the Scandinavian Panopticon in Copenhagen. As Sandberg explains, “if the wax museum was largely a borrowed form” in Scandinavia, “the folk museum, by contrast, was a peculiarly Scandinavian project” (Sandberg 2003:146).

A less emphasized and potentially more controversial source of inspiration is the preceding, but mostly parallel, practice of displaying exotic and indigenous peoples at world’s fairs, zoological gardens and elsewhere. When Hazelius was showcasing his folklife groups at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1878, Sámi from Karasjok and Kautokeino in northern Norway demonstrated the lifestyle of nomadic reindeer herding at the city’s zoological garden, Jardin d’Acclimatation, while a *Cairo Street* and an *Algerian Bazaar* was part of the exposition itself. Despite the fact that cultural reconstruction was the dominant trope in displays of “non-Western folk” they are rarely mentioned in relation to Hazelius’ work. Also, more generally in relation to the history of museum exhibits, the impact of these “living exhibitions” seems to be disregarded.

In this article, I would like to situate Hazelius’ approach in relation to the practice of displaying exotic and indigenous people in Europe and America in the nineteenth and early twentieth century with emphasis on the display of Sámi, more specifically Sámi mainly recruited from reindeer-herding societies. The living exhibitions first and foremost staged the lifestyle of nomadic reindeer herding, which was widely regarded as the authentic Sámi lifestyle. The history of the living exhibitions of Sámi mirrors the history of display of other peoples with lifestyles that were fundamentally different from the sedentary farming and developing industrial societies, although I will not touch upon these here. Moreover, I will relate the living exhibitions of Sámi which mainly took place outside

Scandinavia (Denmark being the exception) to developments within Scandinavia in the same period, mainly the Sámi encampment at Skansen and Sámi encampments elsewhere which doubled or were established as tourist attractions. Last but not least, I will introduce some individuals whose activities testify to the close ties between the living exhibitions and the folk museum.

### MR. BULLOCK’S EXHIBITION OF LAPLANDERS

The living exhibitions were a display practice that emerged more or less simultaneously all over the Western World during the nineteenth century. Of course, exotic people had made appearances in major cities in Europe and America regularly for centuries. What distinguishes the living exhibitions is the large-scale public performances, the emphasis on collective cultural difference, and last but not least the contextualized displays (Baglo 2011). In Europe, London was the capital of exotic displays in the first half of the nineteenth century, most of them embedded in the larger category of the “freak show” (Durbach 2008). However, another related yet distinct type of display would soon emerge. Particularly innovative in this regard was William Bullock’s *Exhibition of Laplanders* at the London Museum of Natural History and Pantheon, also known as “the Egyptian Hall” in 1822, a display that featured the South Sámi Jens Thomassen Holm, his wife Karen Christiansdatter, and their young child (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Bullock (1773–1849), a traveler, naturalist, and antiquarian had met the Sámi in Stavanger on the southwestern coast of Norway where they had arrived from Røros as herders for reindeer bought by a local entrepreneur who wanted to establish reindeer husbandry in the surrounding mountain areas.



Fig. 1. "Mr. Bullock's Exhibition of Laplanders." London Museum of Natural History and Pantheon (Egyptian Hall), 1822. Litograph: Thomas Rowlandson, National Library of Norway.

Driven by the same incentive, Bullock wanted to introduce reindeer herding in England. As this plan failed, as well as the plan of presenting the Sámi and the reindeer in a theatrical play, an exhibition seems to have been a solution to save the money invested.

Although primarily known for his showmanship, Bullock was also an important museologist and one of the first to introduce "habitat displays" or dioramas to Europe (Alexander 1985, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Much like Charles Willson Peale, the founder of one of the first museums in North America, Bullock developed a design that exhibited stuffed animals surrounded by appropriate vegetation, arranged in representative scenes, and set against a painted background evoking the environments in which the animals had

lived. "The illusion is so strong", Bullock wrote regarding another contemporary (but not inhabited) exhibition, "that the surprised visitor finds himself transported from the crowded metropolis to the depth of an Indian forest" (Bullock 1812:2 quoted in Alexander 1985:122). Similar tropes would be repeated by later organizers of living exhibitions. As pointed out by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998:42), during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, geography was an omnibus discipline devoted to all on the earth's surface, including people in their environment. Consequently, it must have seemed sensible to arrange the display of the Sámi in a similar way. The Sámi family and the live reindeer were installed against a frosty panorama fitted out with their tents, belongings, and utensils. Thousands of visitors

turned out to see the Sámi drive their sledge round the “spacious plains” of the museum halls. Nevertheless, it seems to have been the reindeer, not the Sámi, that sparked the visitors’ interest, “Indeed they are the chief attraction of the place”, wrote the *Literary Gazette* (January 19, 1822:45).

### CARL HAGENBECK AND HIS “ANTHROPOLOGICAL-ZOOLOGICAL” EXHIBITIONS

After Bullock’s early and singular display, similar exhibitions did not take place until the 1870s. When numerous groups of exotic and indigenous peoples from all over the globe now began to travel to Europe and America, this is not least due to the emergence of new arenas of performance and exhibition. Central among these were the world’s fairs and large international expositions. For example, Sámi were hired to perform their everyday life in connection with the *Vienna International Exposition* in 1873 as well as the one mentioned in Paris in 1878, and again in 1889, although not as part of the official program. They gained their most prominent position at the *World’s Columbian Exposition* in Chicago in 1893, where a *Lapland Village*, advertised as “a miniature reproduction of a Lapland settlement and a source of knowledge of people whom few care to visit”, constituted one of the attractions on the Midway Plaisance. More frequently, however, Sámi exhibitions took place in zoological gardens, amusement parks, and circuses. The animal trader and zoo owner Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913) was critical of this development. His Hamburg-based firm was enormously successful at organizing traveling “anthropological-zoological” exhibitions, also referred to as *Völkerschauen*, which toured most European cities for more than half a century.

In fact, Hagenbeck’s very first showing of exotic people in 1875, a date that can be seen as a watershed in the development of the living exhibitions, consisted of a family of four and two male Könkämävuoma Sámi from northern Sweden accompanied by thirty reindeer and three herding dogs (fig. 2). Having heard that Hagenbeck intended to import reindeer to meet the requests of a number of zoological gardens, Heinrich Leutemann, a friend and animal painter specializing in “zone pictures”, a popular form of geographical illustration aiming to visualize the determining relationship between a locality and its inhabitants, suggested that “it would certainly excite significant interest if the reindeer were accompanied by a family of Laplanders, who naturally would also bring their tents, weapons, sleds, and complete household along” (Hagenbeck 1911:47).<sup>3</sup> The exhibit was mounted in the backyard of Hagenbeck’s private residence which constituted the *Thierpark* (Animal Park) until 1907 when he built the modern (as we picture it) zoo still existing outside Hamburg.<sup>4</sup> The group of visitors simply set up their tents, corralled the reindeer, and proceeded, according to the story, to go on with their lives in this foreign land. Within a few weeks, “all of Hamburg” had seen the Sámi and the group traveled to Berlin and Leipzig where all the household items were sold to the newly opened ethnographic museum. Unfortunately, poor weather conditions resulted in the tour barely earning enough to cover its expenses. Nevertheless, the showing of the Sámi and their way of life was sufficiently successful to inspire Hagenbeck to plan almost immediately for the next tour. During the following years Hagenbeck’s zoological garden was inhabited by, “the most interesting natives” and their animals from all over the world (Hagenbeck 1911:50). During the summer, the firm usually hired people from the Southern Hemisphere

54 while Sámi, Inuit, Oirats (Kalmucks) and peoples from the Northern Hemisphere attracted audiences during winter. A few of these troupes consisted of German colonial subjects, but the vast majority of performers were recruited from elsewhere, and at least in relation to the Sámi, always voluntarily as a peculiar, but not at all uncommon, wage labor. It has been estimated that approximately 2,000 to 3,000 individuals with indigenous or minority background subsisted partly or completely on this kind of work around the end of the nineteenth century in the dozen or so countries concerned, many of them employed by Hagenbeck and his firm (Blanchard *et al.* 2008:14).

### THE LIVING HABITAT

In his book about Hagenbeck and his enormously popular displays, Eric Ames (2008) convincingly argues that Hagenbeck did more than simply gathering and conveying interesting natives to spectators in Europe. He sought to recreate certain geographical areas or cultural groups by arranging humans, animals, and objects in particular ways. Part of a broad movement in the nineteenth century toward contextualized displays across several fronts, Hagenbeck's *Völkerschau* reshaped that movement in terms of a *living* habitat. As such, it was paradigmatic. Despite many assumptions about Hagenbeck's displays, "the anthropological-zoological" exhibitions did not assert the idea of a biological continuum between humans and animals. Rather, Hagenbeck followed a model similar to Bullock's, which grouped foreign peoples together with their exotic animals within the same display space, preferably the zoological garden which was Hagenbeck's point of departure. Zoological gardens were soon considered to be ideal venues



Fig. 2. *Setting the scene? Illustration of Hagenbeck's first anthropological-zoological display in 1875, a group of Könkämävuoma Sámi from northern Sweden with reindeer and herding dogs. The original caption reads: "The loading up of the reindeer before the summer travel. Drawn from nature by H. Leutemann." Illustration: Die Gartenlaube 1875.*

for live ethnographic performances (and often preferred by performers), not only because of their prestige as cultural institutions, but also because they offered ample space as well as the desired exotic atmosphere, the sights, sounds, and smells of far-away places.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the living habitat called for a certain type of display space. "What helped", Leutemann wrote after the first exhibition of Sámi in 1875, "was the fact that everything appeared in the open air, and not in a circus or in a fairground booth, which had the effect of adding authenticity" (Leutemann 1889:49 after Ames, 2008:76).

Hagenbeck made a career of exhibiting what he called the "authentic". He wanted nothing to do with the antecedents of this tradition of spectacle, from which he claimed to depart. Leutemann framed Hagenbeck's approach to the ethnographic exhibition as a break with tradition. Other exhibitions have "two major flaws", he claimed: "first, they show only the people, that is, without their characteristic surroundings, the dwelling, tools, weapons, domesticated animals, etc.

that comprise *a unified whole*; as a result – and this is the second flaw – it is impossible to see these people in their characteristic activities, using their tools, domesticated animals, etc.” (Leutemann 1878, original italics). By contrast, the argument ran, Hagenbeck’s shows rectified both problems by arranging a large number of production elements arranged in situ. As such, a great deal of his agents’ job consisted of collecting ethnographic artifacts from the areas the exhibited peoples were recruited from including having new costumes sewn and making sure – at least to the greatest extent possible – that the people to be displayed had the “right” looks. As a local newspaper wrote regarding a Sámi group from Røros preparing for a tour organized by the Danish showman and circus director Povl Neve in Denmark in 1933: “The means the Danish circus director has spent on this expedition are not meager. All the members of the two families he has hired have received brand new clothes from head to toe” (cited in Danielsen 1996:45).

Ordinarily, the living exhibitions featured on-site production of handicrafts which were sold to the visitors for the performers’ own profit. In relation to the *World’s Columbian Exposition* in Chicago in 1893 (fig. 3), Fredrick Ward Putnam, director and curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard and in charge of the displays of indigenous and foreign peoples at the fair, explained his vision for the Committee in the following matter: “of the greatest popular interest [...] will be our out-of-doors exhibit of the native peoples of America, in their own houses, dressed in their native costumes and surrounded by their own utensils, implements, weapons, and the results of their own handiwork” (Putnam 1891 cited in Hinsley 1991:347). Sometimes the exhibitions featured a separate display of ethnographic artifacts but usually they were the basis for

tasks. The 1875 Sámi group, for instance, performed a variety of tasks before the public on the basis of the artifacts brought along: assembling tents and sleds, lassoing reindeer, cooking food, nursing the baby, etc. Although the general tendency over time was toward ever larger groupings, the family was always the core of the living exhibitions, as it was in Bullock’s display. As a category of exhibition, the family provided a cognitive framework that had the advantage of being understood by all potential audiences, it represented the known within the unknown. The continued effort to exhibit a spectrum of performers in terms of age and gender doubled further as a marketing strategy for soliciting a diversity of spectators by appealing to their powers of identification and recognition (Ames 2008:77, Baglo 2011:231–233).

Another important configuration of Hagenbeck’s habitat groups was the work display. It seems to have started inadvertently with Hagenbeck’s very first show. Upon their arrival at each new venue, members of the Sámi troupe assembled their wood and canvas tents and spectators turned out in large numbers to see them set up, even before the actual show began. Over time, the visual display of everyday labor became an integral part of Hagenbeck’s *Völkerschau*, as it did later in the context of folk museums and world’s fairs. Regardless of the origin of the troupe and the scale of the exhibitions, they purported to represent the everyday life of non-Western peoples through a full program of performances, enactments, and dramatic scenes. During the *Northland Exhibition*, sponsored by Hagenbeck in Berlin in 1911, where more than fifty Sámi from Kiruna and Gällivare in northern Sweden participated along with other “Polar Inhabitants”, their part of the program consisted of “searching for a camp site, skiing, arrival at the camp site,

56 the reindeer colony, assembling the hut, and lassoing the wild reindeer before departure” (Ausstellung Nordland, Programm 1911, see also Baglo 2011:160–166). The exhibition also comprised Inuit and Nenets – as well as folk dancers from Skansen.

Hagenbeck’s exhibition concept developed further through the production of a series of Ceylon exhibitions in the 1880s where the different groupings of the habitat – such as families and work displays – were rearranged in idealized native villages, a walk-through environment, which also marked the culmination of the habitat idea in the context of human display. As pointed out by Ames (2008:85), more than just an elaboration of the native encampment, the reconstructed village encouraged the audience to perceive the exhibited peoples as members of a living society (not just a group or family) and consequently increased the impression of the exhibition as a realistic rendering of “natural life”. From the viewpoint of exhibition and display history, however, the village was distinguished by more than its scale. The key historical movements reside in the arrangement of display elements in relation to one another and in the expanded use of the display space. A reporter gave the following description of the 1884 Ceylon show:

In the middle of a wide open space there is a large water basin, around which the Sinhalese huts, made of bamboo poles and roof of dried palm leaves, have been grouped. The spaces between and behind the huts are decorated with palm trees and other large-leaved plants in such a way that the whole indeed strikingly resembles a small, Ceylonese settlement (Beckmann 1884 in Ames 2008:85–86).

Elaborating and rearranging the performance space in this way was a means to enhance its sensory experience, inviting the spectator to

physically enter the exhibition. This had the effect of blurring the boundaries between the exhibition space and spectatorship. Contrary to the idea of ethnographic exhibition as the construction of “an invisible but tangible boundary between ‘them’ and ‘us’” (Blanchard *et al.* 2008:23), the co-presence of spectators and performers in shared space created a sense of commonality that competed with the expectation of radical difference (Ames 2008:88, Baglo 2011:248–253). Although this aspect of Hagenbeck’s shows is fundamental to understanding the living exhibitions and how they have been misrepresented, my point in bringing it to the fore here is to demonstrate how it relates to Hazelius’ emphasis on the visitor’s total and embodied experience.

Although Hagenbeck’s human displays never featured at world’s fairs or international expositions and his relationship to them was indirect and largely unacknowledged, he became a highly influential entrepreneur also in this context as he exported a series of shows (Laplanders, Nubians, Eskimos, Kalmucks, Fuegians, Sinhalese) from Hamburg to the Jardin d’Acclimatation, a zoological garden in Paris, during the period 1877–87. Among the shows Hagenbeck organized during this period, we find the already mentioned group from Karasjok and Kautokeino who performed there in 1877. The shows were highly successful and spectators attended in unprecedented numbers. For example, in its six-week run Hagenbeck’s 1886 Ceylon show attracted nearly a million visitors, accounting for more than two-thirds of total gate receipts for the Jardin that year (Ames 2008:67). The organizers of the exposition surely noticed the phenomenal popularity and financial success of the shows. Thus, Hagenbeck’s shows at the Jardin helped prepare the ground for the display of native villages elsewhere and helped set the stage for



Fig. 3. “The co-presence of spectators and performers in shared space created a sense of commonality that competed with the expectation of radical difference.” Lapland Village, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893. Manager Patrick Henry Coney with South Sámi performer Nils Thomassen Bull sitting on the bench intended for encounters like this. Photo: Chicago History Museum.

the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, which some scholars (for example Greenhalgh 1991:85) see as a defining moment in the exhibition of exotic peoples.

### THE SÁMI ENCAMPMENT AT SKANSEN

From its very start in 1891, Skansen included a Sámi encampment, or as expressed more precisely by Hazelius himself, an “entire Sámi encampment with a Sámi family and reindeer (live of course)” (Böttiger *et al.* 1903:14, my translation). The family was Nejla Makke Åhren, his wife and children from Frostviken in Jämtland, Central Sweden, who were hired to inhabit the camp from April to September that year (fig. 4). In 1897, when the *General Art and Industrial Exposition* took place in Stockholm, the number of families was increased to three, all from Jämtland. Much like Hagenbeck,

Hazelius organized the displays at Skansen according to geographical principles. The displays were intended to demonstrate “the relationship between the natural conditions of a place and the characters and appearance of its population” (*Vårt Land* 1891 after Rentzhog 2007:19). As noted by Magdalena Hillström (2010), the scope of the Hazelian ethnographic project was multiperspectival and Scandinavist rather than nationalist. Although showcasing the Sámi alongside peasant farmers from the provinces of Dalecarlia and Scania was meant to draw attention to the internal diversity of Sweden and Scandinavia, Hazelius was clearly influenced by the attraction of the times to everything exotic when he made the Sámi camp the most complete reconstructed environment at Skansen. As pointed out by Rentzhog (2007) in his book about the Scandinavian open-air museums, Hazelius went on a study tour to zoological gardens in Germany and Denmark the same year as Skansen was inaugurated, and surely he also visited Hagenbeck’s zoo which was the world’s most famous. At the zoological gardens, he cannot have seen only animals, exotic buildings, and parks. He may also very well have met Thomas Andersson, his son Johannes Thomasson, and members of their families from Hallen-Myssjö in Jämtland, who demonstrated the reindeer herding Sámi way of life at various venues in Germany in the early 1890s, most likely also at Zoologischer Garten, Hamburg’s second zoo (Baglo 2011:112–113). In the summer of 1891, a family from northern Sweden and “very rich in children” also performed at Castan’s Panoptikum, a large wax museum in Berlin that frequently engaged exotic and indigenous peoples (Baglo 2011:115).

There are also more direct links between Skansen, Hagenbeck, and the living exhibitions of Sámi. In January 1901, a Sámi family with



Fig. 4. “The family was always the core of the living exhibitions.” Postcard from Skansen, Stockholm, probably 1890s. Photo: Kierulf postcard collection, Tromsø University Museum.

two children was hired to set up camp at the zoological garden in Copenhagen. The camp was a great success not least due to the great and timely snowfall which made the camp look “twice as natural” (*Illustreret Tidende*, February 3, 1901). During the two months the Sámi were there, the number of visitors to the zoo was quadrupled in comparison to the previous year.<sup>6</sup> It was not the first time, however, the family took part in this kind of enterprise. They were also hired by Skansen to inhabit the Sámi camp during the *Stockholm Exposition* in 1897. Indeed, Hagenbeck visited Skansen in 1899 and found that Hazelius’ way of displaying animals in reconstructions of their natural environment corresponded to his own ideas. As mentioned earlier, the Hagenbeck firm

would hire Swedish folk dancers from Skansen for the *Northland Exhibition* in Berlin in 1911. Similarly, four women from Dalecarlia had been a part of the *Lapland Village* in Chicago in 1893 (Baglo 2011:120, 132, 160) (fig. 5). These incidents indicate the blurred boundaries between the living exhibitions of exotic and indigenous peoples and folkloric exhibitions. Following the theories of Johannes Fabian (1983:143), both were perceived as primordial. The science of (evolutionary) anthropology – including ethnology/ethnography – emerged and established itself as a science of other people (and other things) in another time. Skansen was a venue where education was blended with popular entertainment. It was at the same time a zoo, an architectural display where different



Fig. 5. Blurred boundaries? South Sámi and Dalecarlian (the four women to the right) performers at the Lapland Village, Colombian Exposition, Chicago 1893. Photo: Chicago History Museum.

types of buildings found throughout the country and larger Scandinavian region were reconstructed, and a venue for concert and theater performances. In this regard, Skansen can be seen as Stockholm's answer to Paris's Jardin d'Acclimatation which had a similar profile, Daniel Alan DeGroof (2012:236) has recently argued. But with one important difference: whereas at Skansen the exhibition of Scandinavian popular tradition occupied pride of place, "the Jardin was dedicated primarily to the exhibition of exotic peoples". The similarities between the venues are however striking – as is Hagenbeck's zoo in Stellingen. Nevertheless, Rentzhog characterized Skansen as, "completely without precedents" in the same book (2007:18).

#### SÁMI ENCAMPMENTS IN SCANDINAVIA AS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Another contemporary phenomenon Hazelius and many organizers of living exhibitions must have been influenced by was the actual Sámi encampments within Scandinavia which became commonplace tourist attractions in the last part of the nineteenth century. An example is the Sámi camp in Tromsdalen just across the strait from the island town of Tromsø in northern Norway (Baglo 2015). Until World War II, it was a seasonal camp for some of the many Swedish *Könkämävuoma* Sámi who migrated with their herds to the summer pastures along the coast of Troms county each June (or before). From the 1870s, the camp in Tromsdalen was visited on a regular basis



of Tromsø as a town in 1894, reconstructions of Sámi settlements were included. In the same period, Sámi from the Tromsø area and elsewhere were hired to set up encampments at mountain lodges and hotels in many other places where tourists traveled,<sup>7</sup> including Bergen where the company “Lappeleiren Ltd.” established a camp in Bjørndalen in 1897 (Baglo 2007:10). The camp was inhabited by Sámi from the Røros and Härjedalen area – some of whom had participated in the exhibition at Jardin d’Acclimatation in Paris in 1889. One of the shareholders was Thomas Cook & Son’s representative in Scandinavia who had complained a few years earlier about the location of the Sámi camp in Tromsdalen and how it was associated with “several difficulties” (Scarlett 1922:96). Not only was it strenuous to walk up the valley; the excursion was made expensive by boat transportation across the strait, the payment to the interpreter and to the Sámi for bringing down the reindeer from the mountains (the corral at the camp was constructed for tourists only). The reconstruction – or dislocation – of a Sámi camp in Bjørndalen was a response to these challenges. In many ways, reconstructions of exotic camps and settlements, including the majority of the living exhibitions of Sámi, can be understood as bringing exotic peoples and places to a broader public. As argued by Ames, Hagenbeck’s project for example, was never about verisimilitude, illusion or deception but about a wide-scale physical dislocation of the spectacle to the observer (Ames 2008:9).

**RUDOLPH VIRCHOW, ADRIAN JACOBSEN,  
AND THE BERGEN NATIONAL  
ETHNOGRAPHIC ASSOCIATION**

In one of his later articles, Stoklund accentuated the German pathologist Rudolf Virchow

(1821–1902) as one of the folk museum’s early pioneers along with Artur Hazelius, Bernhard Olsen, and the German collector Ulrich Jahn (Stoklund 2003). According to Stoklund, they were all experimenting with new forms of communicating, drawing upon inspiration from the great exhibitions *and* the new wax museums, with the aim of evoking a national consciousness among ordinary people. Virchow sought to achieve this through the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin but more importantly through the independent Museum of German Folk Costumes and Products of Home Industry in 1889. Virchow had met Hazelius and visited the one-year-old Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection in Stockholm during a congress in archaeology and (physical) anthropology in 1874, and according to Stoklund, “that got him started” (2003:30). Indeed, the museum manifesto states that the purpose of the folk museum was to present a wide-ranging picture of daily life in all parts of rural Germany, “in order to demonstrate their still existing popular characteristics in costumes, house design and products of domestic industry, where possible exhibited in complete room arrangements with plastic figures, in the way it has been done in Hazelius’ museum in Stockholm” (Jahn 1889:337 in Stoklund 2003:31).

It is not my purpose to downplay the importance of Virchow and the Berlin museum for the history of the early folk museum; evidently an open-air extension was planned but the plan ceased when Virchow died in 1902. What I find striking is the neglect or lack of knowledge of Virchow’s lifelong relationship with the living exhibitions. As pointed out by Rothfels (2002:93), of all the people who dedicated a significant amount of their intellectual energy to the living exhibitions of exotic and indigenous peoples, Rudolph

62 Virchow was their most important scholarly advocate, in Germany as well as abroad. To Virchow, the shows presented such a treasure of information – whether anthropological, ethnographic, or archaeological – that over the course of some thirty years he consistently admonished his colleagues to attend the shows, lecture to the newly established Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory on his findings derived from examinations of the peoples exhibited and defended in the press both the exhibits and Hagenbeck, with whom he collaborated closely. For example, Virchow examined almost all the (adult) Sámi who performed in Germany between 1875 and 1897.<sup>8</sup> I find it hard to believe, however, that the many living exhibitions he had seen since his visit to Stockholm in 1874 and in particular Hagenbeck's shows in which Virchow was so deeply involved, did not contribute to more than knowledge of the physical and cognitive constitution, the customs and history of the people displayed. Surely the way these people were presented, and what was presented, had an impact on his museological ideas too.

A parallel to Virchow, but linking Germany to Scandinavia as much as the living exhibitions to the museum world, is the collector (Johan) Adrian Jacobsen (1853–1947). In fact, Jacobsen collaborated closely with Virchow in the establishment of the Museum of German Folk Costumes and Products of Home Industry, working for him as a curator and traveling to both Switzerland and Tyrol to collect. Born outside Tromsø in northern Norway where he trained to be a sailor, but residing most of his life in Germany, Jacobsen came to Hamburg in search of employment in 1874. In 1876, he became acquainted with Carl Hagenbeck who needed a traveler to assemble and import a group of Inuit from Greenland. Jacobsen proved to be more than apt to accomplish the task, and until

1926 he took on assignments for Hagenbeck on an irregular basis, assembling six ethnographic troupes (Inuit from Greenland in 1877, Sámi in 1878–79, Inuit from Labrador in 1880, Nuxalk from the American Northwest Coast in 1885, Oglala Sioux in 1910 and again Sámi in 1926). In addition, he served as impresario for other troupes traveling in Europe. Partly parallel to his work for Hagenbeck, Jacobsen worked as a collector for the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin. Between 1881 and 1887, Jacobsen completed three large journeys for the museum (the Pacific Coast from California to the Arctic, Siberia, the Amur region, Sakhalin, and Indonesia) resulting in more than one fifth of its collections. Jacobsen also contributed substantially to museums and international expositions elsewhere, including the Field Museum in Chicago which was established on the basis of collections displayed at the *World's Columbian Exposition* in Chicago in 1893. The work in Berlin brought him into close contact and collaboration with some of the most important scholarly authorities of the time, such as Franz Boas and Adolf Bastian, Germany's first professional ethnologist and ethnographer and director of the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin, in addition to Virchow.

Jacobsen's activities may have been controversial not least due to his lack of academic training. Nevertheless, his work was widely recognized also by contemporary colleagues in Norway and Scandinavia. In 1890, he received the Order of St. Olav after he had been recommended by Yngvar Nielsen, the director of the Ethnographic Museum in Christiania (Oslo). The same year Jacobsen lost his job at the Berlin museum due to lack of funding, but was hired already the following year to curate the exhibition *Länder und Völkerkunde* in Cologne.<sup>9</sup> In 1892, he was hired by the newly established National Ethnographical

Association in Bergen, western Norway, to collect and curate objects with the intention of establishing a folk museum in Bergen – a plan which likewise was abandoned due to lack of funding. According to the contract, Jacobsen was trusted by the committee to exhibit the collected objects and “arrange them in the same way they do in similar museums abroad, partly in cabinets, partly in furnished peasant ‘rooms’ where wax mannequins dressed in costumes appropriate to the room will be placed”.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In his important study of the rise of wax museums and folk museums in Scandinavian cities in the late nineteenth century, Sandberg (2003) not only demonstrated how they relied on a shared genealogy of display practices emphasizing objects (and effigies) in carefully contextualized scenes. There were also close institutional ties – particularly to Scandinavia, he insists – between what has been perceived as a quintessential purveyor of modern amusement and distraction (the wax museum) and the more “serious” representations of folk culture in the ethnographic and open-air museums. In Copenhagen, the connection was quite literal: the first wax museum (Scandinavian Panoptikon) and folk museum (Danish Folk Museum) opened within a week of one another in 1885 in the same building and under the direction of the same man, Bernhard Olsen. Nevertheless, the folk museum (along with its later offshoot open-air museum, Frilandsmuseet) became his longer-lasting legacy, the one that established him as the father of modern museology in Denmark, while his wax museum, often characterized as a youthful indiscretion, has by contrast receded both in his official biographical profile and in public consciousness (Sandberg 2003:12–13).

In a similar way to the wax museum, the living exhibitions seem to have been ignored or dismissed as irrelevant to museum history. This is particularly the case when it comes to exhibitions that took place in zoological gardens, amusement parks, and other commercial venues. Studies of ethnographic display have in fact included the tradition of live displays of indigenous and foreign peoples, but they have almost exclusively focused on the great international exhibitions and the “native village” genre (see for example Schneider 1977, Corbey 1995, DeGroot 2012). Moreover, the focus has often been on the displays’ important but overemphasized relationship to colonialism, racial theory, and (physical) anthropology (see also Benedict 1983, Rydell 1984, Greenhalgh 1991, Sanchez Gómez 2003). As Robert W. Rydell commented in a later work on the historiography of international expositions in the United States: “Too often the exhibits by and of Native Americans and colonial people have been subsumed under a broader interest in anthropologists and their involvement with the fairs” (Rydell 1992:30). He emphasizes the lack of the performers’ own perspectives and experiences as one result, but the neglect of important material, spatial, and organizational aspects of the displays should be acknowledged too. Also when zoological gardens, amusement parks, and other venues are brought into focus, as in the growing literature over the last two decades on the history of the Hagenbeck firm and the *Völkerschauen* tradition (Thode-Arora 1989, Staehelin 1993, Brändle 1995, Eissenberger 1996, Bruckner 1999, 2003, Schwartz 2001, Zimmerman 2001, Dreesbach 2005), or in recent analyses of the display phenomenon from a more diversified perspective (Blanchard *et al.* 2008), the approach is arguably anthropological, either in its emphasis on

64 science and disciplinary practices, or in its emphasis on people (often reduced to human bodies) as the only significant element of the display.<sup>11</sup> According to Ames, anthropological approaches to the exhibitions of indigenous and exotic peoples typically elevate the themes of ethnographic authenticity, scientific knowledge, and intellectual authority, at the expense of mass spectatorship, commercial entertainment, and sensory experience (Ames 2008:64).

In my opinion, this choice of scope is due to a preconception of the exhibitions as the Western World's staging of primitivity and race within a hegemonic discourse based on exploitation and repression. In particular, exhibitions in zoos have been understood as instrumental in staging otherness as inferiority and primitivity. The term "human zoos" – adopted by, for example, Blanchard *et al.* (2008) as a generic term for this practice even when exhibitions did not take place in zoos – testifies to this view. It should be noted however, that the understanding of the zoological garden as a particularly connoting scene for the prevailing racial and social Darwinian discourses is highly exaggerated. The display of indigenous and exotic peoples in zoological gardens in Europe was not significantly different from similar displays elsewhere, such as the international expositions. The dominant interpretative paradigm has revealed many important aspects of how cultural difference was normalized and naturalized through this particular kind of staging, but it has also seriously obscured important material features of the exhibitions themselves. In many ways, the very exhibition phenomenon itself seems to have made thorough analysis unnecessary. Their association with commercialism, amusement, and mass culture has hardly contributed to increasing their academic importance. For

example, Hagenbeck is rarely mentioned in relation to the history of ethnographic display and when he is, as in the American book *Museum Masters: Their Museums and their Influence* (Alexander 1995), it is as the founder of the modern cage-free zoo and his naturalistic displays of animals – not people.

It is of course, hardly a coincidence that the heyday of the living exhibitions, from approximately 1875 to 1900/1910, coincided in time with the palmy days of racial theory and social Darwinism, but they have been too closely and too simplistically associated. Indeed, the living exhibitions preceded and persisted through the evolutionary and racial frameworks they have been perceived as a mere product of. A consequence has been the disinclination to see the exhibitions as part of a broader mass-cultural movement, or what Tony Bennett has coined "the exhibitionary complex" (Bennett 1995). As pointed out by Ames, for example, remarkably enough the habitat idea has never been thoroughly analyzed in the context of the *Völkerschau* (Ames 2008:63). Indeed, the use of the term "living exhibition" rather than "human zoo", "human exhibitions", "ethnographical/anthropological/ethnological exhibitions", or "people show", is an attempt to reshape their meaning as an integral part of this movement in the nineteenth century toward contextualized display (Baglo 2011). It is also an attempt to direct attention toward the importance of all the things in the display as a unified whole, as Leutemann wrote: people, animals, and objects of culture and nature alike. In accounts of living exhibitions of Sámi, for example, information about the omnipresent reindeer and herding dogs is often ignored along with the many objects so paramount to the meaning of the display – also for the meaning and motivation of the performers themselves such as the demonstration of cultural distinctiveness in



Fig. 7. "Caravan" of South Sámi from Frostviken, Jämtland on exhibition tour, ca. 1890. The caravan was a frequent configuration Hagenbeck and others made use of to organize and denote the habitat group when consisting of nomadic peoples. Note the amount of objects in the display. Photo: Kierulf postcard collection, Tromsø University Museum.

times when the nation states sought by various means to exterminate or isolate other lifestyles than the Western.

As implied in the quotation in the first part of this article, Hazelius knew that the paths he cleared were not all new. Similarly, it is not unknown that Hazelius' "new type of museum" was part of a broader mass-cultural movement. It is less known however, that the display of indigenous and exotic peoples at zoological gardens, amusement parks, circuses, wax museums, and industrial expositions of various kinds and sizes, abroad as well as inside Scandinavia, formed an essential part of the same movement – perhaps the most essential part considering the millions of visitors that visited the living exhibitions. This way the living exhibitions contributed to creating a

genre for the representation of indigenous and exotic cultures that has been little investigated. This article has demonstrated the importance of situating Hazelius' displaying techniques and his emphasis on the "total experience" of the visitor in a wider context than what has been the case in museum history up to now. Moreover, the folk museum/open-air museum may have been a peculiarly Scandinavian project, to borrow Sandberg's words, but the display form was shared with many other institutions and entrepreneurs. Not only were Hazelius, Hagenbeck, and many other exhibition organizers informed by the developing culturism in Scandinavia and elsewhere. In addition to sharing the same trope of display there were also close ties between the Scandinavian folk museum and

66 the living exhibitions in terms of exchange of people, animals, and objects. The impact of these circumstances, however, is largely unacknowledged.

## NOTES

1. The original quotation in Swedish is: "Jag har ej gått de gamla museivägarna, utan till en viss grad brutit nya."
2. For more information on the exhibitions of Sámi mentioned in this article, see Baglo 2011.
3. For more information on the zone pictures and their importance as a visual source for Hagenbeck's habitat, see Ames 2008, 72–74.
4. For a description of Hagenbeck's early zoo, see Rivet 2014, 65.
5. According to South Sámi Trygve Danielsen (1922–2005), who toured Europe with his family in the 1930s, it was an advantage to perform at zoological gardens because there were veterinarians and specialists trained in the care of animals. In Paris, the group was offered lodging in a house on a noisy street, but they preferred to stay at the camp in the much more attractive Bois de Boulogne where the zoological garden was situated. Baglo 2011: 291–292.
6. Pers. comm. Peter Nørresø Haase, head of exhibitions, Copenhagen Zoo, 2010.
7. For example Grotli Mountain Lodge in Sjøk, Finse Hotel on the Hardanger Mountain plateau, Nystuen Hotel at Filefjell, Nordseter Hotel in Lillehammer, Djupvasshytta Hotel in Geiranger, and Fjellsæter Hotel in Bymarka in Trondheim.
8. On Virchow and physical anthropology's use of the living exhibitions as "field laboratories" from 1875 to approximately 1900, see for example Baglo 2011, 184–219.
9. Letter from Johan Adrian Jacobsen to Yngvar Nielsen, Cologne, July 31, 1891. Brevsamling 639, The National Library, Norway.
10. Contract and drafts of contract entered between

Johan Adrian Jacobsen and Bergen National Ethnographic Association, August 13, 1892, Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg, Jacobsen-archive, 2011.37:16/5.

11. I too emphasize an anthropological perspective in my articles, Baglo 2006 and 2008.

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