Fin de rêve: Reactions in the British, French, and American Press to the 1900 Exposition Universelle

Patrick Doherty
Senior Honors Thesis
Advised by Professor Ari Sammartino
History Department
Oberlin College
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Introduction: The 1900 Exposition and Modernity

> *I am convinced that, thanks to the persevering enunciation of certain generous ideas with which the closing century has resounded, the 20th century will behold a little more fraternity, and less miseries of all kinds, and that we shall perhaps soon have reached an important stage in the slow evolution of labour towards happiness and of man towards humanity. It is under the auspices of this hope that I declare the Exhibition of 1900 opened.*[1, 2] *- Emile Loubet, President of France*

Delivering these words on Easter Sunday, President Emile Loubet of France marked the opening of Paris' Exposition Universelle de 1900. The Exposition was advertised as one that would trump all that came before in size, scale, and vision. Visitors to the Exposition were greeted with visual spectacles, displays of artistic and technological achievements, and visions of the twentieth century from the moment they crossed through the Porte Monumentale and entered the Champ de Mars. On one end, the Champ de Mars was marked by what is arguably one of the world's most enduring symbols of modernity – the Eiffel Tower. The opposite end of the Champ de Mars was occupied by a structure designed specifically for the 1900 Exposition – the Palace of Electricity. Designed to be as much of a marvel as the Eiffel Tower, the Palace of Electricity was one of many palaces designed specifically for the Exposition, each having a different theme or focus. It would soon become apparent, however, that the spectacle of the Exposition would prove to be overwhelming and confusing to most visitors, playing into the general insecurity of the fin de siècle.

Strolling down the Champ de Mars from the Eiffel Tower towards the Palace of Electricity, visitors were surrounded by buildings and palaces dedicated to industry and

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[1] « Je suis convaincu que, grâce à l'affirmation persévérante de certaines pensées généreuses dont le siècle finissant a retenti, le vingtième siècle verra luire un peu plus de fraternité sur moins de misères do tout ordre et que, bientôt peut-être, nous aurons franchi un stade important dans la lente évolution du travail vers le bonheur et de l'homme vers l'humanité. C'est sous les auspices de cette espérance que je déclare ouverte l'Exposition de 1900. »

[2] "Opening of the Paris Exhibition," *The Times*, 16 April 1900.

development. On their left, visitors would pass by the Palace of Mines, the Textile Fabrics Building, and the Mechanical Process Building. This side of the Champ de Mars was dedicated to the industries of old – mining, metalworking, and textiles – and the impressive developments that continued to drive these industries in the transition into the twentieth century. The opposite side of the Champ de Mars was lined with the Palace of Chemical Industries, the Palace of Civil Engineering and Transportation, and the Education and Instruction Building. Visitors might be drawn to the Palace of Chemical Industries for its impressive displays of perfumes or its display that reproduced the process by which paper was manufactured. The Palace of Civil Engineering and Transportation was decorated with a façade depicting transportation from ancient times through the opening of the Exposition. Harper's guide to the Exposition described the experience of the Champ de Mars in the following manner:

> Let us direct our steps immediately to the huge mass of iron [the Eiffel Tower] which, in 1889, was undoubtedly one of the wonders of the world, and let us take up our positions beneath the Tower and gaze southward. We are first struck by the fact that the huge 'field of Mars,' a great rectangular expanse of land, has been almost entirely built over. Straight in front of us, at a distance of a few hundred yards, is the Grand Waterfall, immediately behind which, stretching right across the entire width of the Champ de Mars, is the Palace of Electricity.[3]

The Champ de Mars, which made up the majority of the fair grounds, was lined with the accomplishments of modern societies and the progress that had been made in various industries and in the development of technologies.[4]

Because they had the goal of displaying the progress of society and the ways in which technologies and industries had developed, world's fairs offer historians unique opportunities for historical analysis. International expositions are unique in several ways. They are one of the few times in which the world's nations come together in peaceful competition on a massive

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[3] *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900: A Comprehensive Map and Guide to the City of Paris; A Complete Guide to the Exposition*. (London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1900), 146

[4] *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900,* 139-165.

scale. As Vincente Gonzáles Loscertales, the Secretary General of the Bureau of International Expositions, has argued, "A world expo is an exercise in global public diplomacy. It offers national governments a unique opportunity to showcase their achievements to the world."[5] It is this sense of international competition and simultaneous international cooperation that led to the construction of the Statue of Liberty by France as a gift to the United States, the torch arm for which was delivered at the United States' Exposition marking the centennial of the American Revolution.[6] This same sense of competition led to the construction of the Eiffel Tower by the French for their centennial exposition. Additionally, international competitions led to Campbell's Soup winning a blue ribbon at the 1900 Exposition, a fact they still proudly display on their soup can labels.[7] One should also not overlook the fact that the 1900 Exposition hosted the Summer Olympic Games, which are also instances of international competition that exist in a peaceful competitive environment. Peaceful international competition is a distinguishing factor for international expositions.

In addition to being rare instances of nonviolent international competition – contrasting with international competition exercised through military and colonial conflicts – international expositions offer an opportunity to closely examine the values of societies at key historical turning points. Additionally, they offered participants a unique opportunity to reflect upon their own historical moment. Loscertales also has argued that "Expos are platforms for innovation and for showing citizens the problems that the global society faces in different cultures and different latitudes."[8] By examining the manner in which displays were organized and crafted,

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[5] Vincente Gonzáles Loscertales, "Foreward," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 2.
[6] France's gift to the International Exposition hosted by Philadelphia in 1876 was the torch of the then-unfinished Statue of Liberty.
[7] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 153.
[8] Vincente Gonzáles Loscertales, "Foreward," 1.

one can learn about the priorities that host nations placed on certain societal developments. London's 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition, for example, clearly reveals that the centerpiece of British pride in the mid-nineteenth century was its expansive empire and British influence on the social, political, and economic development of the globe.[9] Furthermore, one can gain insights into the values of cultures and societies by examining the ways in which visitors to expositions – both domestic and foreign – reacted to the displays presented by the fairs' organizers.

Current scholarship on the 1900 Exposition Universelle is rather limited, most likely due to the fact that the 1889 Exposition and the construction of the Eiffel Tower often overshadow the 1900 Exposition. Philippe Julian's *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibition 1900* focuses solely on the role that art nouveau played at the 1900 Exposition. He argues that art nouveau was established as a legitimate art movement by its overwhelming presence at the 1900 Exposition. Julian's work is demonstrative of the majority of scholarship on the 1900 Exposition in that it highlights one key feature of the Exposition, rather than focusing on the broader goals of the fair. Though Richard Mandell's *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* offers a comprehensive overview of the 1900 Exposition and its themes and goals, the majority of scholarship on the Exposition has a more narrow focus. Mandell's argument is largely that the Exposition was a failure in that it failed to achieve the popularity that was anticipated by the planners of the Exposition and the press. The failures of the Exposition were part of greater issues, not just a matter of failing to meet attendance expectations. The Exposition was caught up in a whirlwind of international crises, the general unease of the fin de siècle, and the increasing instability of the French Republic. Perhaps the

[9] John R. Davis, "London 1851" in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 10.

most critical source for analysis, and one that most scholarship on the 1900 Exposition has not utilized, is the tie between world's fairs and modernity.

International expositions have a futuristic, and usually optimistic, orientation. Speculation about the future is embedded in the very nature of expositions themselves, as Bernhard Rieger has argued, and international expositions offer visitors an opportunity to consciously reflect upon society and simultaneously envision a future for that society through the expositions' documentation of progress.[10] An academic exercise, if you will, in utilizing current societal developments to predict those of the future. For this reason, international expositions are of particular interest to historians who are concerned with the study of modernity.

One way in which societies make sense of changes is through the construction of a narrative of the traditional and the modern. Modernity cannot be discussed without a simultaneous, parallel conversation of tradition, for the two concepts are inseparable. One cannot establish a notion of what is "traditional" without creating a notion of what is "modern." In very much the same manner, one cannot have a discussion of what is "modern" without having an understanding of how it contrasts with the past. A crucial component of understanding and utilizing modernity is therefore established: a discussion of the modern relies largely on the fact that something – whether an idea, cultural value, or some other aspect of society – has changed and has created a space in which said concept has become outdated and replaced with a new, supposedly more "modern," concept. One can see examples of this

[10] Bernhard Rieger. "Envisioning the Future: British and German Reactions to the Paris World Fair in 1900." In *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, ed. Martin Daunton and Berhard Rieger. (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 146

throughout history all over the globe.[11] Modernity and tradition go hand-in-hand and cannot be separated analytically.

Carol Gluck embraces this argument concerning the construction of the modern and the traditional in "Japan's Modernities: 1850s-1990s," in which she argues against the narrative of modernity relying upon a break with the past. Instead, she crafts a narrative in which concepts of tradition and the modern are co-dependent:

> But modernity [for Japan] was defined in terms of its obverse, the new inevitably juxtaposed against the old. So Meiji Japan, like Victorian Britain, early Republican China, and other modern-minded, were simultaneously engaged in an almost wholesale 'invention of tradition.' Sometime, as in the early Meiji condemnation of Confucianism or the Republican Chinese 'invention of the peasant,' tradition was portrayed as an obstacle to modernity. At other times, as in the reinvention of the Japanese emperor or the mythologizing of the Scottish kilt, tradition served as a native reservoir of cultural strength for the modern transformation.[12]

Gluck argues that one cannot have a concept of the modern or the traditional without the two evolving at the same time. Gluck's argument has implications beyond those of the Japanese context. Despite the fact that the evidence for her argument is specific to Japan, one can apply the notion of the construction of the narrative of traditional versus modern on a broader scale. Indeed, Gluck herself notes that Victorian Britain's construction of tradition – in this case, what she refers to as the "mythologizing of the Scottish kilt" – allowed Victorian Britain to create a strong sense of cultural legacies upon which modern Victorian society was supposedly built. In this case, the construction of traditional and modern depicted both the traditional and the modern as being intrinsically positive and interconnected, though this is not always the case.

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[11] Take, for instance, the notion of the "modern woman" that was established between the First and Second World Wars. The modern woman was considered to be modern because she had qualities that were deemed to be new and contrasting with the qualities of the role of a woman who was deemed to be "traditional." The modern woman cannot exist without the traditional woman, just as the traditional woman cannot exist without the modern.

[12] Carol Gluck, "Japan's Modernities, 1850s-1990s." In *Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teaching*, edited by Ainslie T. Embree and Carol Gluck (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 571.

The Exposition of 1900, through its combined goals of both synthesizing the nineteenth century and displaying a vision of twentieth-century society, actively engaged in the construction of the traditional and the modern in the turn of the century.

Bernhard Rieger argues that the 1900 Exposition was defined by its orientation towards progress and the future, and is thus a key exposition to study in terms of modernity:

> "No matter how multidimensional the Paris universal exhibition was, its orientation towards the future represented one of its defining aspects. First, the *exposition universelle* situated itself in the contemporary discourse of 'progress.'…The cautious tone of [French President] Loubet's [opening day] speech and [French socialist trade minister Alexandre] Millerand's choice of topic indicate that such rhetorics of progress implicitly reacted to contemporary scepticism and fear of revolution."[13]

And, indeed, the opening speech by French President Emile Loubet, a portion of which appears at the beginning of this introduction, encapsulates the 1900 Exposition's themes of modernity and progress. If one takes Gluck's definition of modernity and its reliance on tradition and combines said definition with Rieger's discussion of modernity and the fair, it becomes apparent that the only way that the French could engage in a conversation about modernity, progress, and the future would be to have a simultaneous goal of creating a vision of nineteenth-century society.

And, indeed, during the planning stages of the Exposition, the French Minister of Commerce, Jules Roche, stated, "the Exposition of 1900 will synthesize the nineteenth century and ascertain its philosophy."[14] The French state viewed the 1900 Exposition as an opportunity to reflect upon the supposed end of an era. The French, along with the other participants in the Exposition, had the unique opportunity to generate and display comprehensive visions of nineteenth-century society. Neither the French nor the other participants in the Exhibition

[13] Bernhard Rieger. "Envisioning the Future," 146-147.
[14] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 153.

overlooked this opportunity while crafting their displays. By creating this vision of nineteenth century society, the participants in the 1900 Exposition Universelle were creating an opportunity to establish a contrast between the traditional – in this case, nineteenth-century Europe – and the would-be modern of the twentieth century.

Both synthesizing the nineteenth century and speculating about the future through notions of progress and modernity were key components of the 1900 Exhibition. Despite the 1900 Exhibition's stated goal of synthesizing the nineteenth century, however, the Exposition did more to spark speculation and intrigue about the twentieth century than it did to reflect upon the supposed end of an era. British, French, and American reactions against the architectural, artistic, and technological displays at the 1900 Exhibition were reactions against the further modernization of society and against the twentieth century itself – a century that the 1900 Exhibition unintentionally depicted as one of chaos, confusion, and dangerous new technologies. Though the 1900 Exhibition did not effectively depict the end of an era and thus cannot be viewed as an historical break, it nonetheless captures a key component of the fin de siècle in Europe: a gradual transition away from the nineteenth century and into the unknown of the twentieth century without fully abandoning nineteenth century ideals until the outbreak of the First World War.

While planning the 1900 Exposition, France outlined ambitious, unprecedented goals in terms of the size and scope of the Exposition. The resulting expectations in the French, British, and American press were high - anticipating that the French would successfully achieve the goals outlined in the planning process. With the resurgence of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898 and the subsequent international backlash, the press' anticipation of the fair began to shift. When the uncompleted Exposition opened on Easter Sunday 1900, critics took advantage of the

opportunity to lambast the Exposition, focusing on artistic, architectural, and technological displays and their relationship with notions of modernity, progress, and the future. Critiques of the Exposition highlighted the fact that the Exposition did little to assuage the unease of the turn of the century in Europe and, in fact, due to its poor organization and over-the-top displays, criticisms of the Exposition became synonymous with critiques of modernity in the turn of the century.

Negative reactions to the 1900 Exposition Universelle in the French, British, and American press began with the tarnishing of France's international reputation due to the resurgence of the Dreyfus Affair. These reactions escalated when, upon the opening of the fair, it became clear that the exposition failed to realize its goals of synthesizing the nineteenth century and creating a vision of the twentieth century. In failing to realize its goals, the Exposition Universelle gave the press a focal point for discussion of the general unease that was characteristic of the fin de siècle; a discussion that was, more often than not, framed in language directly tied to debates about modernity.

Chapter One: Planning the Exposition

In 1892, France announced its intention to host an international exposition in the year 1900. The exposition would continue the trend of Parisian expositions that had been hosted every eleven years since 1867, and the symbolic importance of the event was not lost on the French officials who were to be involved in planning the Exposition. The French were not the only ones who recognized the importance of this particularly exposition. In an article published shortly before the opening of the Exposition in April of 1900, B. D. Woodward, the Assistant Commissioner-General of the United States to the Paris Exposition of 1900 made the following remarks:

> On the thirteenth day of July, 1892, a decree was issued by the President of the French Republic providing for a Universal International Exhibition to be held in Paris in 1900. One of the clauses of this official proclamation referred briefly to the periodical recurrence of expositions in France every eleven years since 1867, and in this spirit attention was called to the year 1900 as bringing to a close an era of scientific and economic achievements of the greatest magnitude. This same date, furthermore, was to inaugurate an age of possibilities foreshadowed alike by scientists and philosophers, who ever in their wildest flights of imagination could not be expected to conceive and compass about the results of future times.[15]

Soon after the announcement of the plans to host an exposition in 1900, the French began planning for an international exposition of unprecedented scale.

Nineteenth-century expositions were focal points for international competition. Rather than competing through direct military conflicts, nations were brought together in a format that permitted them the opportunity to display cultural, commercial, imperial, artistic, and technological might. In this respect, the 1900 Exposition was not an exception when compared to its predecessors. The exposition, however, did have a few key distinguishing features. The

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[15] B. D. Woodward, "The Exposition of 1900," *The North American Review* 170 (1 April 1900): 472, accessed 5 September 2010, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25104981

French, British, and American press did not overlook the fact that the 1900 Exposition would attempt to outstrip its predecessors in terms of both size and scope. Woodward, speculating about the Exposition shortly before it opened, stated, "This coming Exposition will be the sixteenth held on French soil. The last was in 1889, with 61,722 exhibitors, and an attendance of 32,650,000. The conservative forecast for 1900 is said to double these last named figures."[16] The French planned for an exposition of over 120,000 exhibitors with an expected attendance of over 60 million people. To even consider such numbers, the French had to be extraordinarily ambitious in their planning of the 1900 Exposition.

In 1894, the French government announced a competition to create the plans for their grand exposition. *The New York Times* outlined the plans in the following manner:

> The exhibition grounds are to include the Champ de Mars, the Trocadéro and grounds, the Quay d'Orsay, the Esplanade des Invalides, the Quai de la Conference, the Cours la Reine, and the Palais de l'Industrie, with its grounds. A broad bridge is to be built over the Seine in front of the Invalides, and other bridges, if necessary. The following are the sites to be marked on the plans: The palaces and other exhibition buildings, halls for fêtes, a building for the congresses, and another for the administration; bridges over the Seine, parks, gardens, waterworks, and other ornamental grounds; means of locomotion inside the exhibition, entrances and cab ranks, Government, colonial, and foreign buildings, special buildings, machinery halls, and restaurants. Competitors are free to propose the maintenance or demolition of any buildings standing from the last exhibition, the Eiffel Tower included. However, the Trocadéro Palace is to remain…The Competitors are given free choice of building material, bearing in mind that the structures are to be temporary, and that the greatest effect should be obtained with the cheapest material.[17]

There are several important indicators as to the plans of the exposition within this quote. First, the size of the grounds is extraordinary. This scope was planned as early as 1894 and was larger than previous expositions. Furthermore, the extent of the detail required for the potential plans should not be overlooked. Those proposing plans for the Exposition needed to have all of the

[16] B. D. Woodward, "The Exposition of 1900," 479.
[17] "The Paris Exposition," *The New York Times*, 26 August 1894.

major – and even some of the minor – details prepared for the French government before their plans were even accepted. The extent of the detail required by the French government during the early planning stages indicates the care that the French took in outlining their plans for the 1900 Exposition. The French realized that, in order to craft an exposition that would outshine its predecessors, they would have to have meticulous planning throughout the initial stages of development for the exposition. In addition, the temporary nature of the buildings is one way in which the 1900 was no different than its predecessors. The willingness of the French government to accept plans that included the destruction of the Eiffel Tower is not entirely surprising.[18] The scale of the Exposition was crucial to the Exposition's potential success.

In addition to the size of the Exposition, another key goal outlined by the French government was to provide a comprehensive vision of nineteenth-century Europe. In May of 1895, *Le Temps* noted that this theme would be tied to the size of the fair itself:

> In 1900, there will be a bit more than a century edified between the amphitheater of the Champ de Mars and the Seine, an elegant palace of sixty-eight arcades, extended rectangularly, in the manner of a small royal palace, on a surface that will be more extensive than that of a panorama.[19,20]

The size of the exposition was important, but so were the other goals of the exposition: the desire to simultaneously create a retrospective vision of nineteenth century society and a vision of the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, these goals were actually interconnected. By planning an exposition of unprecedented size, the French would give themselves the physical

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[18] Indeed, the Eiffel Tower was constructed for the 1889 Exposition that marked the centennial of the French Revolution. Five years later, in 1894, it was the world's tallest building. Despite being the tallest building in the world, the Eiffel Tower was a controversial structure that many, including residents of Paris, considered to be an eyesore and a detriment to France's reputation as an artistic capital of the world. Expositions were designed to be temporary in nature and the structures for expositions were no exception. Not even the Eiffel Tower. The plans that resulted from the contest included the Eiffel Tower in the layout. One could, in fact, argue that the Eiffel Tower's increasing popularity was partly due to the negative reactions towards other buildings designed for the 1900 Exposition.

[19] « En 1900, il y aura un peu plus d'un siècle que s'édifiait, entre l'amphithéâtre du Champ de Mars et la Seine, un gracieux palais de soixante-huit arcades, s'étendant rectangulairement, à la façon d'un petit Palais-Royal, sur une surface qui n'était guère plus étendue que celle d'un panorama. »

[20] "L'Exposition de 1900," *Le Temps*, 8 May 1895.

space necessary to create a vision of the nineteenth century for the visitors to the fair. The French continued planning throughout the 1890s, never straying from the notion of the 1900 Exposition as a spectacle of unmatched splendor. With the conclusion of the contest and the plans announced, the British and Americans began planning for their participation in the Exposition.

The Americans were determined to have a large display at the Exposition and pestered the French for more space on the fair grounds throughout the planning stages of the Exposition. *The New York Times* covered the issues of space for American displays at the Exposition quite extensively. In November of 1898, *The New York Times* remarked: "The United States has been allotted 200,750 feet of ground space in the exposition. The original concession was of only 147,000 feet; but…53,750 feet have been added, which, by the further addition of upper stories, can readily be increased to 90,000, making a total of 237,000 feet."[21] And, less than a month later, *The New York Times* covered the issue again, presenting the opinion that American displays would be greatly hindered by their lack of space:

> 4,300 square feet of additional ground space [has] been granted to the United States…This increased appropriations…will enable the United States Commissioners so to arrange their buildings as to command a total of 250,000 square feet, though even this will not nearly meet the demands, which already total 700,000 square feet.[22]

Though they continued to demand an increasingly large space, the United States had the largest foreign presence at the 1900 Exposition.[23] The Americans were determined, through the size of their displays, to display their cultural prowess. The British, on the other hand, chose to focus on the content of the displays, rather than clamoring for a larger space.

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[21] "Space at the Paris Exposition," *The New York Times*, 20 November 1898
[22] "The Paris Exposition: This Country Will Have 250,000 Square Feet, but Needs 700,000," *The New York Times*, 16 December 1898
[23] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 151.

The focus on the artistic displays that would be featured by the British reveals the importance of culture in planning the 1900 Exposition. The Exposition would not be one merely of industry; it would be an exposition that would embrace and display the world's cultures through displays of art and architecture. The British press focused heavily on the artistic displays that would be featured by Britain. *The Times*, in 1889, remarked on the plans in the following manner:

> It is gratifying to learn from speeches made at the Royal Academy banquet that the British Fine Art Section at the Paris Exhibition promises to be worth of our country. Two years ago at Brussels British art achieved a distinct success, and it is desirable that the prestige then won should not only be maintained, but if possible added to in 1900. This can only be done by making our section representative of all vital phases of contemporary British Art, some of which were inadequately represented at Brussels.[24]

Not only did the British consider art to be an important feature of the Exposition, but their considerations for displaying art tied directly into the theme of the exposition as stated by French Minister of Commerce Jules Roche. It was not sufficient to present contemporary British art – the British had to make their section "representative of all vital phases of contemporary British Art," embracing the notion that the 1900 Exposition would provide a cultural synthesis of the nineteenth century for its participants and visitors. Furthermore, by taking advantage of the opportunity to display British art in Paris – the artistic capital of the world in 1900 – the British were presented with the opportunity to display their artistic and cultural relevance at the turn of the century.

The commercial importance of the Exposition was not lost on the British either. The Prince of Wales, who would, in 1901, become King Edward VII – made the following remarks concerning British artistic displays that were planned for the 1900 Exposition:

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[24] "British Art at the Paris Exhibition," *The Times*, 9 May 1899.

> The exhibition will afford an opportunity, of which I trust full advantage will be taken, of asserting the commercial supremacy which this country has happily enjoyed for many years….It should also be remembered that this is not so much an occasion for competition of British exhibitors among themselves as for competition between British and Irish exhibitors and those of foreign countries….I trust the full advantage will be taken of the time at our disposal, and that our united efforts will result in a display not unworthy of the Empire.[25]

Prince Edward believed the Exposition to be an opportunity to assert Britain's commercial dominance to the rest of the world. Though the British and the Americans had similar goals of establishing a powerful representation of cultural might through their displays at the fair, their manner of doing so was radically different. The British chose to focus on specific aspects of the fair – art, in particular – that they viewed to be culturally relevant. The Americas, on the other hand, sought an all-encompassing presence throughout the fair.

The American interpretation of cultural might was a display that was bigger than those of its foreign rivals and encompassed all of the themes of the Exposition. In addition to their pursuits for more space throughout the planning stages, they also dedicated a significant amount of resources toward making their participation at the 1900 Exposition a success. Ferdinand W. Peck, the American Commissioner General of the United States to the Paris Exposition of 1900, was ambitious not only in terms of lobbying the French for more space, but also in lobbying the United States' federal government for additional resources: "The appropriation made by Congress for the use of the Commission is $650,000 and Mr. Peck hopes to see this increased by at least $400,000, President McKinley having originally favored an appropriation of $1,000,000 for this purpose."[26] Peck was also incredibly organized, and had the support of the federal government and the major industries that would be involved in the Exposition:

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[25] "The Paris Exposition of 1900," *The New York Times*, 18 February 1898.
[26] "The Paris Exposition," *The New York Times*, 31 July 1898.

> There will be from seven to ten great departments created at once, at the head of which will be placed the most eminent men in their respective lines in the country. The departments will include those of agricultural, transportation, electricity, fine arts, machinery, American inventions, mines and mining, and others.[27]

The Americans were ambitious – they desired greater participation than any nation other than France and planned to be involved in every major display at the Exposition. Nor were the Americans shy about their intentions. In March of 1899, Major Frederick Brackett, secretary to the United States Commission for the Paris Exposition was quoted as saying, "It is the aim of the commission to make a display at Paris superior in every way, if possible, to that of any other nation. Therefore the space will be allotted to only the best products in every class or group."[28] The Americans were determined to put on a display that would outshine those of all other participants in the 1900 Exposition. By creating the most impressive and expansive foreign display, the Americans had the potential to force the world to realize and accept the influence of the United States on all aspects of the Exposition.

The planning stages of the 1900 Exposition Universelle began in 1892 and did not end until Easter Sunday in 1900, when the Exposition opened to the public. The French were determined to organize a fair that would surpass those of the past century. The British were determined to display their cultural prowess through artistic displays, more so than other aspects of the Exposition. The Americans, easily the most ambitious foreign participants, sought to overshadow all other displays through the creation of a massive participation scheme that would infiltrate all aspects of the Exposition. Throughout the planning stages of the Exposition, the press in France, Britain, and the United States covered not only the logistical elements of the planning, but the expectations for the Exposition itself. Planning for the

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[27] "The Paris Exposition," *The New York Times*, 31 July 1898.
[28] "The American Exhibit at Paris," *The New York Times*, 19 March 1899.

Exposition was ambitious, and it should come as no surprise that, as a result, the expectations for the Exposition were high as well.

Chapter Two: Exposition Expectations

When, in 1892, the French government announced its intention to host an Exposition Universelle in 1900, there was a brief, though not minor, international crisis. It was widely known that the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, planned to have Berlin host an international exposition in 1900.[29] The French, however, refused to back down. The international expositions that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century have long been lauded as sources of peaceful, nonviolent international competition.[30] By announcing the planning of an international exposition for 1900, the French marked their determination to test the limits of nonviolent international competition. *The Times* covered the initial tensions in the following manner:

> The apparent determination of the French Government to forestall Germany in fixing the year 1900 as the date of the next International Exhibition in Paris has caused not only much commotion among the supporters of the Berlin Exhibition scheme, but also some irritation in Government circles…The action of France may be resented here, but it seems, at any rate, likely to afford the very stimulus that was wanted to render the Berlin Exhibition scheme thoroughly popular throughout [Germany] and to enlist the support even of those who at first viewed it with undisguised coolness or disfavor.[31]

The prediction of this particular reporter would prove to be inaccurate. France refused to back down in planning an international exposition for 1900, and, soon, German plans for an exposition for the same year would collapse entirely.

The French, unsurprisingly, were quite pleased with the German decision to back down in planning an international exposition. *The New York Times* did not miss the fact that the

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[29] "The Rival International Exhibitions," *The Times*, 5 July 1892.

[30] In the preface to *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, editors John E. Findling and Kimberly Pelle describe the origin of the fairs, their intentions, and the implicit repercussions of the fairs: "From this amalgam of industrial arts displays, art exhibitions, mechanics institute exhibitions, and French national shows emerged the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851…At their core, [the modern exhibitions] have never strayed too far from the object stated with respect to the Crystal Palace: 'to forward the progress of civilization.' With the inclusion of an international component, exposition organizers could allow visitors to make easy comparisons of technology and craftsmanship among the industrial and other products that many nations displayed."

[31] "The Rival International Exhibitions," *The Times*, 5 July 1892.

French considered this to be a victory against a rival nation: "The decision of the German government not to hold an international exhibition in Berlin was greeted [in Paris] as a victory for the projectors of the French exhibition, and Frenchmen are chuckling over the way in which they claim to have discomfited their enemies."[32] France had won a momentary, though not insignificant, victory against a rival nation by being able to host a world's fair in 1900. And though the initial plan to host the fair was briefly tarnished by its rivalry with German plans for an exhibition, the expectations for the fair would be extraordinarily high until the resurgence of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898, which would begin to tarnish France's international reputation.

The tensions that arose due to the conflict over which country would host an exposition in 1900 illustrate the importance of expositions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Throughout the latter half of the century, all the French expositions were organized in response to the exhibitions hosted by Great Britain, which were wildly successful. Indeed, the success of the 1851 Crystal Palace marked the beginning of a golden age of expositions, which reached its climax with the Parisian Exposition of 1900. Expositions were viewed as ways for nations to prove their commercial and cultural supremacy to the rest of the world. Richard Mandell notes:

> The peaceful success of the Crystal Palace Exhibition was important in the great increase in international contacts among people with similar interests during the rest of the century. Scholarship, technology, social welfare, philanthropy, and sport were no longer contained within national boundaries. After 1851 a major purpose of expositions was to encourage the *international* application of the arts and sciences to industry, to education, and to society in general.[33]

Expositions, therefore, became important points of cultural exchange between the nations of the world. Since host nations allotted themselves the greatest amount of space at expositions, they had the greatest opportunity to display their cultural relevance to the world through displays of

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[32] "Frenchmen Greatly Pleased: They propose to have a big world's fair in 1900," *The New York Times*, 19 August 1892.
[33] Richard Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 9.

art, architecture, technology, and other mediums. The press, realizing the importance of these fairs, covered them extensively, and the 1900 Exposition was no exception.

In the lead-up to the opening of the fair, the press in the United States, Great Britain, and France offered extensive coverage of the ambitious plans for the exposition. The extensive coverage of these plans included the press' high expectations for the Exposition of 1900, well illustrated by *The New York Times*' coverage of the aquarium that would appear at the Exposition:

> What probably will constitute one of the great attractions at the Paris Exposition next year will be the Aquarium. The whole thing will be so well mounted, so nicely combined, the real so skillfully [mixed] with imitation that illusion will be complete and the initiated only will know that everything is not real in this wonderful sight.[34]

The expectations of the public were no less than those of the press. In a letter to the editor to *The Times* in 1895, a reader proclaimed that the Exhibition would be a spectacle to be remembered:

> It may be more philosophical to thank the Parisians for providing us once again with such a marvelous spectacle as will certainly be found in Paris in 1900. If an exhibition there is to be, there is no other place for it in the world but Paris, and, let me add, no other people with such capacity for successfully organizing it as the French.[35]

Confidence in the ability of the French successfully organization such a spectacle was derived from France's previous successes in hosting international expositions in Paris.

France's first modern international exposition was hosted in 1855 to mark the international cooperation that had been a direct result of the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo. Though the result of the battle itself was not one the French would typically celebrate, the cooperation that emerged between Britain and France was of particular importance to this

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[34] "Exposition Marvels: A Mammoth Aquarium with Very Startling Effects," *The New York Times*, 4 September 1899.
[35] "The Paris Exhibition of 1900," *The Times*, 14 September 1895.

exposition.[36] The exposition was planned and held in response to Britain's Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, which was both popular and successful. The French sought to distinguish this exposition from the Crystal Palace by featuring something that had not been featured in 1851: fine arts.[37] This trajectory of originality and innovative planning would become a characteristic of French exhibitions throughout the nineteenth century.

The next French exposition, held in 1867, sought to distinguish itself from its British predecessor – London hosted an exposition in 1862 – by dedicating itself to social issues, particularly those of the working class. This was also the first Parisian exposition to be held on the Champ de Mars, which would become the site for all future Parisian expositions.[38] The exposition sought to provide a means by which progress could be measured by the visitors:

> The exposition of 1867 was conceived as a three-dimensional world encyclopedia of representative objects. The criterion for display insisted upon each nation's contribution to progress, understood as a steady and linear development geared towards perfection. By means of science and observation, organizers claimed that progress was measurably in an objective and universal manner.[39]

Progress was not only a keystone of this exposition, but, for the first time, fairgoers were given the tools with which to "measure" progress.

The Parisian Exposition of 1878 moved the focus of expositions away from commerce and industry and more towards culture. In this instance, the fair sought to establish the superiority of French culture after the French had lost the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. Cultural superiority, in the French mindset, was established through showcasing art and diversity of industry that was designed to create an image of a France that was culturally

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[36] Barrie M. Ratcliffe, "Paris 1855," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 21.
[37] Barrie M. Ratcliffe, "Paris 1855," 23.
[38] Volker Barth, "Paris 1867," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 37.
[39] Volker Barth, "Paris 1867," 41.

superior in every way to Germany.[40] The lasting impact of this exposition was its shift away from commerce toward culture. From this point forward, French expositions would concern themselves more with culture than with any other aspect of society.

The Parisian Exposition of 1889, which celebrated the centennial of the French Revolution, was, by far, the most influential exposition when it came to planning the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Like its predecessor in 1878, the 1899 exposition focused on culture. But, most importantly, it established the precedent of spectacle:

> What was unique about the 1889 exposition was its spectacular demonstration of the power of technology to transform the natural environment on an unprecedented scale by creating a manmade wonderland of light, color, sound, engineering, and amusement that raised the bar for subsequent world's fairs.[41]

The Exposition of 1889 used spectacle to demonstrate that, 100 years after its revolution, France was as culturally vibrant, relevant, and influential as it had been in the early half of the nineteenth century. The most influential aspect of the fair, and one of the world's most potent symbols of modernity, was the construction of the Eiffel Tower. In an effort to prove their cultural superiority to the rest of the world, the French embarked on an endeavor to construct the world's tallest building. Reactions to the Eiffel Tower were mixed, some lauded the achievement while others criticized the lack of a pleasing aesthetic. Regardless, the structure would endure as a powerful symbol of modernity and cultural influence.

The French, with four successful expositions held between 1855 and 1889, set the stage for high expectations for the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Because of the previous success of the expositions hosted in Paris – attendance rose from 5,162,000 in 1855 to 32,350,000 in 1889 – the French laid out plans for an exposition that would trump all its predecessors in terms of

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[40] Andrea C. Roeber, "Paris 1878," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008),
[41] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 153.

size and scale.[42] The American, British, and French press all had high expectations for the fair. Even after the outbreak of the Dreyfus affair, there were those in the press who remained overwhelming optimistic about the exposition:

> I will only add that the scheme is being carried out on a scale of magnificence never before approached, even in Paris, and that they exhibition bids fair to surpass any of its predecessors in extent and splendour. Evidence of interest which the exhibition has excited throughout the civilized world is to be found in the universal acceptance of the invitations to take part in it, and in the large grants which have been made by foreign Powers.[43]

This writer for *The Times* clearly believed that the exposition would be a sight to behold. The scale and the goals of the exposition were unprecedented, and yet the press had an overwhelmingly positive anticipation of the event.

The fair as a whole was anxiously anticipated, however the press, during the lead up to the opening, began to focus on specific aspects of the fair that would be particularly illuminating. For example, *The North American Review* featured an article about the 1900 Exposition, with a significant chunk of the article being devoted to the new technologies that the fair would feature:

> A brilliant display is expected in the new Palace of Machinery and Electricity. No pains are spared to take advantage of all electric means and devices to enhance its beauty and attractiveness. Outside, an electric fountain is rapidly assuming majestic proportions. Huge sheets of water will flow over multi-colored electric lights, creating, especially at night, a vision of fairy splendor.[44]

The focus on the exhibits at the exposition, and the corresponding anticipation and expectations, play largely into the reactions of the press to the very displays once the exposition had opened. In this case, B.D. Woodward speculated that the Palace of Machinery and Electricity would be a sight beyond compare.

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[42] "Appendix B: Fair Statistics," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 414.
[43] "The Paris Exhibition of 1900," *The Times*, 18 February 1898.
[44] B. D. Woodward, "The Exposition of 1900," 477.

The Americans were not alone when it came to speculating about specific aspects of the fair. The French also speculated about the exposition's specifics, with the focus of this article from *Le Temps* being the means in which art would be presented to visitors at the exposition:

> The retrospective exhibition of works of art must be, in principle, the exact reconstruction of French art from 1800 to 1890. The framework will be the summary of the annual shows. The main works of these annual shows will be displayed using a period of four to five years, organized chronologically. By browsing each room in succession, visitors will physically witness the history of artistic production of France during the century.[45,46]

Once again, the anticipation by the press is focused on a particular aspect of the exposition. Specific displays became the focal point for press coverage of the exposition before it opened officially to the public. Though coverage of the exposition was widespread and articles far-reaching in terms of their focus, many of the articles in the British, French, and American press that describe the fair focused on one of three broad aspects of the fair: art, architecture, or technology.

The fact that the press chose these focal points is not surprising, for, in planning the exposition, the French firmly dedicated themselves to featuring art nouveau through both art and architecture. The decision to situate the Palace of Electricity opposite the Eiffel Tower – combined with the opening of the Paris métro, the use of electric trains, and the extensive use of electrical lighting – was a move that was of great symbolic importance. The press, both domestic and foreign, latched onto these three features of the fair – three features that would not only be of important aesthetic value, but whose uses are strongly tied to France's desire to mold a vision of the twentieth century for the audience. This dedication to these specific

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[45] « L 'exposition rétrospective des œuvres d'art doit être, en principe, la reconstitution exacte de l'art français de 1800 à 1890. Le cadre sera le résumé des salons annuels. Par période de quatre ou cinq ans et par ordre chronologique, en réunira les œuvres principales ayant figuré dans ces salons. En parcourant successivement les salles, le visiteur verrait donc se développer matériellement devant lui l'histoire de la production artistique de la France pendant le siècle. »

[46] "L'exposition de 1900," *Le Temps*, 7 February 1897.

aspects of the fair in the press set the stage for their later reactions to the fair once its vision was put to the test. The French press dedicated much space to covering the fair's displays and the ambitious planning on the part of the French government. The British and American press, however, had different focal points.

It should be noted that the British were far more devoted to covering the broad planning of the fair than the specifics. While the American and the French dwelled on specific exhibitions – particularly those related to technology, architecture, and art – the British found it more suitable to cover the financial and political background for the fair. British coverage was much more extensive during times of political scandal – both during the initial conflict with the Germans over who would host a fair in 1900 and during the return of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898. The British press, however, did remain optimistic in terms of the ability of the French to successfully host a fair. Their focus on the fair, however, was more political, at least until the fair opened itself to the public. The political focus of the British press largely plays into the fact that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the French expositions were all organized in response to previous British expositions. Indeed, it was the British who began the golden age of expositions with their Crystal Palace in 1851. There were some in the British press who believed that the French were merely continuing their trend of imitation British expositions by choosing to host an exposition in 1900:

> Since 1867, it seems to have been the fashion with the French to leave between each [exhibition] a period of eleven years. It has not escaped notice that the same interval separated [the British] exhibitions of 1851-62, but this was accident, not design…[France] means to make her Exhibition pay very handsomely, as is already realized by those who have reserved spaces for the sale of their productions. For this she is certainly in no way to blame. But she also finds in such occasions the desired opportunity of demonstrating her marvelous fertility of resource, as well as publishing her goodwill towards so among her neighbours.[47]

[47] F. G. Aflalo, "The Promise of International Exhibitions," *The Fortnightly Review* 73 (1900): 835-839

British coverage of the 1900 Exposition had much more to do with international political and cultural rivalry than anything else.

To contrast, American press – including newspapers such as *The New York Times* and prominent journals – focused on specific aspects of the fair. Like the British, the American press gave rather extensive coverage to any aspect of the fair's planning that may have resulted in an international scandal or crisis, but the American press also took the time to cover specific aspects of the fair. The extent to which Americans covered the detailed planning can be explained by a few factors. First, the Americans had the largest foreign presence at the fair, and the American press devoted extensive coverage to the attempts of the Americans to expand their presence at the fair.[48] The obsession of the American planners of the Exposition and the American press on the space that would be utilized by the Americans demonstrates that both the American government and the American press viewed the 1900 Exposition Universelle as an important opportunity to integrate with the international community and assert American relevance in all aspects of the fair.

> 'I know that Americans will largely patronize the Paris Exposition,' said Mr. Peck,[49] 'and I do not believe that the war or any temporary feeling which may have grown out of it will to any large extent affect the demand of American manufacturers for space in aiding them to bring their products before the eyes of the world. The real sentiment of the French Republic is most favorable to her greater sister, and any impression to the contrary will prove fleeting.'[50]

The American government and American businesses viewed the 1900 Exposition as an opportunity to demonstrate American cultural and commercial relevance to the world. The American press, therefore, covered the planning of the Exposition accordingly. The British, French, and American press remained cautiously optimistic about the Exposition Universelle.

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[48] "Space at the Paris Exposition," *The New York Times*, 20 November 1898
[49] Ferdinand W. Peck was the Commissioner General of the United States to the Paris Exposition of 1900.
[50] "The Paris Exposition: Americans will flock to Paris," *The New York Times,* 31 July 1898.

Through the successful hosting of four international expositions, the French created the precedent and expectation that they would be able to achieve something unheard of with their exposition in 1900 – expectations closely tied to the fair's devotion to art, architecture, and technological displays. Though the British, French, and American press had different focal points during the planning stage of the exposition, the press from these three countries all remained optimistic about the impact that the fair would have on its visitors and the vision that it would be able to present to the world. However, the resurgence of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898 would prove disastrous for France's international reputation and would begin to tarnish the reputation of the upcoming fair before the exposition opened to the public.

Chapter Three: L'affaire Dreyfus

When the plan to have Paris host an exposition universelle in 1900 was announced, the French Minister of Commerce, Jules Roche, stated, "the Exposition of 1900 will synthesize the nineteenth century and ascertain its philosophy."[51] The exposition was an opportune moment for participants to create a comprehensive vision of the nineteenth century and for the visitors to experience, absorb, and reflect upon the very same vision. Creating this vision, however, proved to be nearly impossible. The previous chapter demonstrated the high expectations for the fair up until the resurgence of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898. The Dreyfus Affair created an unstable political and social environment during the years directly preceding the exposition. This political instability and social uncertainty, combined with the perceived chaos of the Exposition itself, left visitors unable to ascertain a thematic summation of the nineteenth century. The failure of the Exposition to accomplish this stated goal contributed to the negative reactions to the fair itself.

The Dreyfus Affair (in French, *l'affaire Dreyfus*) was a political scandal that wreaked havoc both domestically and internationally for the French in the 1890s. In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a military officer of Jewish descent, was convicted of treason and sentenced to life in prison. Two years later, evidence surfaced that Dreyfus had been wrongly accused and convicted. This evidence was suppressed by the military, and rather than putting the real culprit, Ferdinand Esterhazy, on trial, the military framed Dreyfus for producing counterfeit documents designed to frame Esterhazy. In January of 1898, Émile Zola published an open letter entitled *J'accuse*, which revealed the military's framing of Dreyfus to the French public and to the international community.

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[51] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 153.

In 1899 Dreyfus was granted a second trial in which his conviction for treason was upheld. The world erupted in protests. Richard Mandell notes that protests rocked the social and political core of France and its empire and that the most crucial aspect of these protests were calls to boycott the Exposition in 1900:

> Almost every area of the world seemed to vent its indignation against France and threaten punishment by attempting to ruin the exposition. In their vituperation the journalists of Hungary and Italy rivalled [sic] the English; there were strong movements for boycott in Denmark, Portugal, Argentina, and even Turkey. And almost all of this international invective had burst forth within three or four days after the decisions at Rennes.[52]

According to Mandell, the atmosphere leading up to the opening of the Exposition was tense to the point where it nearly prevented the Exposition itself from happening. Mandell's claims are supported in reactions in the press – particularly the American and British press – that speculated about the impact the Dreyfus Affair would have on the upcoming fair.

When the Dreyfus Affair resurfaced in 1898, the English-speaking press began to hypothesize about the future of the exposition and the impact the Dreyfus Affair would have on the French. *The Times* noted that the German press became highly involved in coverage of the Dreyfus Affair, possibly due to the fact that the Germans had originally planned to hold an exposition in 1900 and had had their plans undermined by the French in the early part of the decade. In addition, the German government chimed in on the matter, asserting that they had no ties to Dreyfus: "The [German] Minister for Foreign Affairs, Baron von Buelow…declared most emphatically that there had never been relations of any kind between German

[52] Richard Mandell, *Paris* 1900, 95.

representatives or agents and Dreyfus."[53] The English-speaking press began to anticipate a revolution and believed that the only thing staving off a revolution was the desire of the French government to stage a successful exposition in 1900:

> The German Press, without exception, is of the opinion that affairs are drifting towards a serious crisis in Paris, and the *Cologne Gazette* heads its account of the events of the last few days 'A Coupe d'État.' The partiality which the President of the Republic is alleged to exhibit for the army is not regarded as diminishing the danger, but rather as increasing it. The desire to spare France the ordeal of a revolution until the Exhibition of 1900 is over may, it is thought, cause the opposition between the General Staff and the civil Government to be closed for the present, but there is a rift in the lute which can hardly ever be mended.[54]

Even if the Exposition somehow managed to prevent a revolution, the English-speaking press was of the opinion that France's Third Republic would be unable to recover from the social disorder caused by the Dreyfus Affair prior to the opening of the 1900 Exposition Universelle.

The New York Times, when writing about the Dreyfus Affair, noted that the scandal began to have a direct impact on the planning of the Exposition itself:

> The latest developments in the Dreyfus affair all tend in favor of Dreyfus, and public opinion in France is undoubtedly veering to his side…The Droits De L'Homme publishes the novel proposal to force the Government to obtain Picquart's[55] release, suggestion a strike of all the intellectual professions, teachers refusing to teach, those who are officers in the Reserve and Territorial Army sending in their resignations, and artists and manufacturers who are preparing for the Exhibition of 1900 withdrawing.[56]

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[53] "Dreyfus Case in Germany," *The New York Times*, 25 January 1898.
[54] "The Dreyfus Case," *The Times*, 24 September 1898.
[55] Picquart was the French Minsiter of War at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. He uncovered the evidence that proved that Esterhazy, rather than Dreyfus, was the guilty party in the treason allegations. He was accused of forging this evidence and was court-martialed under the assumption that he had played a role in the treason allegations against Dreyfus. He was eventually exonerated and released from the custody of the French government.
[56] "Dreyfus Agitation in France: Public Opinion Veering to His Side – Novel Proposition to Enforce Picquart's Release," *The New York Times*, 11 December 1898.

With exhibitors for the exposition withdrawing in protest of Dreyfus' conviction, France ultimately attempted to quell this international crisis by pardoning Dreyfus prior to the opening of the Exposition in April of 1900. The Dreyfus Affair interrupted the planning for the Exposition with threats of a revolution, and the French government became determined to use the Exposition as a means by which to stave off a revolution that would tarnish their international reputation.

In a preview article that was featured two days before the Exposition opened, the London times described the international scene in the following manner:

> The Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900 will open on Saturday. At the exact moment fixed some months ago, the formal inauguration will take place, in spite of the difficulties at home and the agitation abroad; in spite of all the elements of discord both [in Paris] and elsewhere.[57]

Domestic and international tensions were high when the exposition opened. Though the French government was able to avoid a revolution and an international boycott by pardoning Dreyfus, both France and Britain were experiencing domestic and colonial tensions when the Exposition opened in April of 1900. Though these tensions were not directly related to the fair – such as the Boer War in the case of Britain – they still set the backdrop for the mood of the Exposition within the greater context of the turn of the century.

The conscious awareness of the international tensions in the turn of the century heightened criticisms of the exposition. The press emphasized the goals of the fair shortly before its opening, reminding visitors what was to be expected of this particular exposition:

> One of the clauses of this official proclamation referred briefly to the periodical recurrence of expositions in France every eleven years since 1867, and in this spirit attention was called to the year 1900 as bringing to a close an era of scientific and economic achievements of the greatest magnitude.[58]

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[57] "The Paris Exhibition," *The Times*, 13 April 1900.
[58] B. D. Woodward, "The Exposition of 1900," 472.

The stage was set, therefore, for an exposition that would mark the end of one era of scientific, economic, and social achievements and highlight the opening of another era. Realizing these goals would be difficult due to the poor organization of the Exposition and the inability of fairgoers to completely separate themselves from the tensions underlying the Exposition's existence.

The ability of fairgoers to realize the themes and goals of the Exposition was directly tied to the effectiveness of the organizational aspects of the Exposition. In order for a vision of nineteenth-century society to be ascertained by the average fairgoer, the organization of the fair would need to be clear and simple. The organization of the Exposition, however, proved confusing and prohibitive to visitors and led to increasing criticisms of the fair. The fair's classification system separated exhibits that visitors anticipated should be located together and placed said exhibits in unexpected locations. For example, visitors interested in planned working housing had to visit three different displays: the German pavilion, the Vincennes annex, and the Palais des Congrès.[59] The exhibitions that were designed to be retrospective, rather than being grouped together, were separated by classification group, which made it nearly impossible for visitors to gain any sort of historical perspective.

The confusion as to the organization of the displays is best embodied in the inability of the guides published by Hachette and Harper to agree upon an explanation of the classification of the displays. Hachette's guide devotes three pages of explanation to the layout of the exhibition and the classification of displays, highlighting the 18 groups used by Alfred Picard, the organizer of the exhibition.[60] Harper's guide also devotes three pages of explanation to the

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[59] *1900 Paris Exposition: guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* (Paris: Hachette & Company, 1900).
[60] "Organisation générale de l'Exposition" in *1900 Paris Exposition: guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* (Paris: Hachette & Company, 1900), 177-180.

classification of displays, yet claims that "the entire exhibitions have been divided into *16* groups comprising 120 different classes [emphasis added]."[61] In an ironic twist, Harper's guide actually applauds the organizational scheme for the exposition, failing to realize that its interpretation of this scheme did not match that of the French-language Hachette guide: "Though less favorable perhaps to striking national displays, the new arrangement has one great advantage that will surely be appreciated by visitors, of presenting the arts and industries of one country side by side with the similar arts and industries of another."[62] The intent highlighted in Harper's guide, however, was not realized in actuality. If the two most popular international guides to the fair were unable to agree upon the manner in which the fair was organized, one can only assume that fair-goers must have been hopelessly confused and thus left unable to ascertain anything about the fair's philosophy on the nineteenth century.

The Commissioner-General of the United States for the 1900 Exposition produced an extensive, multi-volume report on the exposition after the fair closed. Within its summations of the various displays, it also offered critiques of the failures of the fair while noting the ways in which the exposition was particularly effective. In the introduction to the second volume of this report, F. J. V. Skiff, the Director in Chief of Exhibit Departments for the United States remarks that there was confusion among not only visitors to the exposition, but also those who were planning displays, particularly in the month after the exposition opened:

> The confusion within the Exposition grounds at Paris, confronting and delaying the installation of exhibitions…was general and extreme…The Paris Exposition was not complete in the physical aspect of its buildings until after the middle of May.[63]

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[61] *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900* (London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1900), 156-159.
[62] *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900*, 156.
[63] *Report of the Commissioner-General for the United States to the International Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900 (Volume II)*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 10.

The confusion among the organizers of the exposition carried over into the visitors being able to realize the stated goals of the exposition. Skiff notes that there was a lukewarm response, at best, to the Exposition's stated goals of synthesizing the nineteenth century and presenting a contemporary vision of Europe for the century to come:

> There were two distinct expositions undertaken at Paris in 1900 – one contemporaneous and the other centennially retrospective; the evident general idea being to exhibit at once not only the arts and sciences of to-day, but the evolutionary stages by which this condition and capacity had been reached during the past one hundred years…The responses were…very unsatisfactory.[64]

The Exposition, therefore, failed to present the public with a vision of nineteenth century Europe that was considered either acceptable or accurate. Visitors were struck by a fair marked by a lack of an organizational system that made sense to anyone, including the two major guides for the fair.

Because of the fair's inability to realize its goal of presenting visitors with a comprehensive vision of nineteenth-century society, it was unable to denote itself as a marker of a significant historical break with the past. Visitors and critics alike were already caught up in a maelstrom of international unease and tensions, mostly due to the Dreyfus Affair, that would continue to absorb the European continent until the outbreak of the First World War.

The Expositions failures were not limited to synthesizing the nineteenth century in order to ascertain its philosophy. On a whole, despite the popularity of the fair, critics in the British, French, and American press were under-whelmed by the Exposition and its attempts to craft simultaneous visions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century societies. When it came to the Exposition's attempt to create a vision of the twentieth century through displays of technological achievements and advancements – relying primarily on electricity – critics would

[64] *Report of the Commissioner-General*, 17.

once again balk at the Exposition and react negatively to the way in which the Exposition presented one of its goals to visitors.

Chapter Four: Technology and the 1900 Exposition Universelle

When the Exposition Universelle opened in Paris on 15 April 1900, visitors were immediately greeted by overwhelming displays of France's technological, architectural, and artistic achievements. The Eiffel Tower, marking one end of the Champ de Mars, had been constructed eleven years prior for the 1889 Exposition, which marked the centennial of the French Revolution. The tallest building in world, it gave visitors an overwhelming sense of the marvel of modern technological accomplishments. The Porte Monumentale, one of the primary entrances to the Exposition, was designed as a temporary structure that would exist solely for the Exposition itself.[65] The Porte Monumentale – often referred to as the Porte Binet after its architect, Réné Binet – was designed to allow 60,000 visitors an hour to pass beneath the massive dome. The design itself was "a dome flanked by two minarets, the ensemble topped by a controversial figure representing the city of Paris and illuminated by thousands of multicolored lights."[66]

The Porte Monumentale was an extravagant, elaborate entrance to the fair grounds via the place de Concorde. The Porte Monumentale was decorated with electric lights and was lit at night by giant mirrors. Philippe Jullian describes the Porte Monumentale as "the most typical monument in the entire exhibition," which he later explains means that the building was "the strangest, the most ornate, and the most lacking in taste."[67] His retrospective opinion of the Porte Binet was not one unshared by critics. The Hachette guide offered a more optimistic description of this entrance to the Exposition:

> Of a completely new architecture, of an disposition that is original and ingenious, of a rich harmony of colors, dominated by shades of blue, green, and

[65] *Harper's Guide to Paris and the Exposition of 1900*, 154.
[66] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 153.
[67] Philippe Jullian, *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibition 1900* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1974), 38.

> gold, the Porte Monumentale of the Concorde is an entrance worthy of an Exposition inaugurating a new century. The door is not light itself, but in the evening, eight powerful reflectors hidden in the Concorde illuminate the entire monument as an appearance that is fantastic.[68,69]

Though the description from the Hachette guide is a positive review of the Porte Binet, others felt differently about the elaborate entrance to the Exposition. W. Fred, for example, offers a critical view of the Porte Monumentale in an article in *The Artist*:

> The visitor's sufferings commence already at the first gate. The much discussed Porte Monumentale by Binet is an example of the manner I have just discussed, the ornamentation being apparently the main object. This gate at the Place de la Concorde has painted ceilings, cupolas, polychrome statues and reliefs, much ornament, and the highly-soaring statue of sad fame: the *Parisienne.* Out of the many ornamental details which are disconnected, their home being partly Assyria, partly a misconceived Paris of to-day, a gate is formed which has no effect in daylight, in spite of the variegated by weakly colours, whilst under the artificial light in the evening the separate effects of the different parts produce hopeless confusion.[70]

Though Fred's criticism was written for a rather specialized audience – those who would consider themselves artists or art critics – he was not alone in his criticism of the Porte Monumentale. And, like Fred's criticism, the critique featured in *The New York Times* is less than flattering:

> Nobody would think of calling the form of the [Porte Monumentale] beautiful, nor can it any more be called logical, which is the least we can ask of decorative engineering, and in which kind the Eiffel Tower is such a masterpiece of exposition. For the huge double arch is of the formed called 'Florentine,' round within and pointed without, with the point converted into a pedestal for the very much dressed Parisieene. The result of the arrangement is that the arch is thickest at the top and thinnest at the springing in defiance of nature and mechanics, and makes the impression of an ultra-ugliness. Neither is the color

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[68] « D'une architecture absolument nouvelle, d'une disposition originale autant qu'ingénieuse, d'une riche harmonie de couleurs, où dominent les tons bleus, verts et or, la porte monumentale de la Concorde est une entrée digne de l'Exposition qui inaugure un nouveau siècle….La porte n'est pas lumineuse par elle-même, mais, le soir, huit puissants réflecteurs dissimulés sur la place de la Concorde illuminent le monument tout entier comme une fantastique apparition. »

[69] *1900 Paris Exposition: guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* (Paris: Hachette & Company, 1900).

[70] W. Fred, "Architecture and Exterior Decoration at the Paris Exhibition, 1900," *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries (American Edition)* 28 (1900): 134-135.

> much more successful than the form. The designer had no model for his form…The peacock supplied the motive for the color decoration, but the blues and greens do not combine to the intended sheen…By daylight the whole erection becomes nothing but the memory of a bad dream.[71]

Critiques of the Exposition began with one of the most popular entrances and did not halt upon passing through the disaster that was the Porte Monumentale.

The language utilized in the Hachette guide is one deeply rooted in the dialogue of modernization that consumed the fair. The architecture and design is described as "new" and "worthy of an Exposition inaugurating a new century." This language should and cannot be overlooked. Hachette's guide prescribes a similar role to the Porte Binet as Jullian did in his book 74 years later. The Porte Binet *was* the Exposition in that in incorporated the various facets of the exposition into one, massive building. Elaborate, over-the-top designs combined with the use of electric lights and mirrors marked one of the entrances to the fair, meaning that visitors would immediately begin to speculate and contemplate what the modern aspects of the fair would mean when it came to defining twentieth-century European society.

Beyond the entrances to the Exposition, technology was a keystone of the displays along the Champ de Mars. At one end of the Champ de Mars, opposite the Eiffel Tower, the Palais d'Électricité was prominently featured, accompanied by a massive waterfall. In addition to the Palais d'Électricité, the Exposition also featured extensive use of electrical lighting, particularly at night, the debut of the Paris Métro, the use of electrical trains, and a host of other technological marvels. The spirit of the experience of the Exposition was captured in *Le Temps*:

> At the moment that the procession departs the gardens of the Champ de Mars, a genuine emotion seizes every heart. The show is really amazing. On both sides, left and right, the façade is lined with palaces of mechanical and chemical industries, clothing and textiles, mining, engineering, and liberal arts. It is an extraordinary city, populated with domes, minarets, and towers on top of which float the flags of all nations. And in the distance, beyond the tour of three

[71] "The Paris Fair as an American Sees It," *The New York Times*, 12 August 1900.

> hundred meters [the Eiffel Tower], in the sunset, we see other minarets, domes, and other towers, dominated by the silhouette of the Byzantine Trocadéro. All lines are stretched toward the sky. A sort of universal joy inspires all. Never has there been a more enchanting scenery designed for a grander celebration.[72,73]

The exposition was an awe-inspiring spectacle of technological prowess. Visitors, including the press, were struck by the overwhelming nature of the displays, which seemed to extend as far as the eye could see. Furthermore, this article from the opening day of the exposition captures the intense sense of optimism with which many critics approached the exposition. This optimism, however, would fade quickly.

Displays of industrial and technological achievements have been a central component of all major international expositions since the Crystal Palace in 1851. In fact, the full name of the Crystal Palace Exhibition – The Great Exhibition of the Works and Industry of All Nations – supports the notion that international expositions were originally designed to demonstrate the technological and industrial prowess of nations, particularly that of the host country. For the celebration of the centennial of their revolution, France constructed the Eiffel Tower, which still endures as one of the world's most popular symbols of technological achievement and modernity. In 1900, France's exposition was no exception to the desire to display technological marvels. The main technological feature of the 1900 Exposition Universelle was electricity, a relatively new technology that had yet to be fully incorporated into or adopted by European society.

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[72] « Au moment où le cortège débouche sur les jardins du Champ de Mars une véritable émotion s'empare de tous les coeurs. Le spectacle est réellement prodigieux. Des deux côtés, à gauche et à droite, s'alignent les hautes façades des palais des industries mécanique et chimique, des fils, vêtements et tissus, des mines, du génie civil et des arts libéraux. C'est une extraordinaire cité, peuplée de dômes, de minarets, de mâts au sommet desquels flottent les drapeaux de toutes les nations. Et au loin, par delà la tour de trois cents mètres, dans la poussière doréc du soleil, on aperçoit d'autres minarets, d'autres dômes, d'autres mâts, que domine la silhouette byzantine du Trocadéro. Toutes les lignes se tendent vers le ciel. Une sorte d'allégresse universelle les inspire. Jamais décor plus féerique n'avait été conçu pour une fête plus grandiose. »

[73] "L'Exposition Universelle," *Le Temps*, 15 April 1900.

The 1900 Exposition Universelle was not the first time that electricity was a featured component of an exposition. Antwerp's Exposition Universelle in 1885 was the first major international exposition to prominently feature electricity among its technological displays.[74] Four years later, at the same exposition that featured the debut of the Eiffel Tower, the French also included displays of electricity, particularly electric-powered lights.[75] However, the use of electricity as a technological feature of the 1900 Exposition was significantly different for several reasons. First, the expositions at Antwerp in 1885 and Paris in 1889 were significantly less popular than the 1900 Exposition – Antwerp's exposition drew an estimated 3.2 million visitors while the 1889 Parisian Exposition drew approximately 30 million visitors. In 1900, over 50 million persons visited the exposition, an achievement that has yet to be matched.[76] The popularity of the 1900 Exposition meant that a more extensive audience – over 15 times larger than Antwerp and over 1.5 times larger than 1889 in Paris – was exposed to electricity as a technology, opening electricity to a more critical public eye.

Popularity is not the only distinction between the 1885, 1889, and 1900 Expositions. The 1900 Exposition was positioned at a time in which the fair's visitors were encouraged to speculate about the future. Bernhard Rieger has argued that the 1900 Exposition situated itself in a dialogue about progress and the future: "No matter how multidimensional the Paris universal exhibition was, its orientation towards the future represented one of its defining aspects."[77] By actively engaging in conversations about the future and being placed at the turn

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[74] Matthew G. Stanard, "Antwerp 1885," in *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 85.
[75] Anthony Swift, "Paris 1889," 100.
[76] John E. Finding and Kimberly D. Pelle, eds., *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 414-415
[77] Bernhard Rieger. "Envisioning the Future," 146.

of a century, the 1900 Exposition Universelle depicted electricity not only as the technology of the future, but as the technology that would come to define twentieth-century European society.

Richard Mandell has also argued that the 1900 Exposition itself was unique and and will never be matched again:

> In one major respect, this world's fair will never be equalled [sic]: it was the last time anyone tried to include *all* of man's activity in one display. The pace of technical and artistic innovation since then has made inconceivable any plan for assembling the evidence of man's creativity in one exhibit, however immense. That last festival of amusement and education, co-operation and competition, chauvinism and internationalism, could only be planned during a time that still had faith in optimistic philosophical systems, hopes for social reform, joy in expanding material wealth, and confidence in the moral benefits of art.[78]

The 1900 Exposition was, therefore, a unique sequence of events that was possible only in this particular historical moment. The fact that electricity became a defining feature of this exposition demonstrates that, though the fair tried to include "*all* of man's activity," and though critics did attempt to grapple with the vast expanse of the exposition, many of them came back to critiquing electricity and the ways in which it was utilized at the exhibition. The focus of critics on electricity demonstrates the prominence with which electricity was featured as part of the exposition.

The extent and variety of ways in which electricity was displayed at the 1900 Exposition is the third, and final, way in which displays of electricity were unique at this exposition. At the 1900 Exhibition, electricity was displayed in a way that was designed to demonstrate its versatility. Notable demonstrations of electricity at the exposition include the debut of the métro, electric trains, and the Palais d'Électricité, arguably one of the most ornate and intricate buildings to ever be featured at an exposition.[79] The placement of the Palais d'Électricité, opposite the Eiffel Tower along the Champ de Mars, was not coincidental. By

[78] Richard Mandell, *Paris 1900,* xi.
[79] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 154.

placing the Palais d'Électricité opposite the Eiffel Tower – the 1889 Exposition's main display of modern and technological prowess – the French positioned electricity as the showcase of the modern at the 1900 Exposition. The Hachette Guide to the Exhibition describes the importance of the Electrical Palace in the following manner:

> The Palace of Electricity is not only to delight the eye. This enchanted place contains the living, active soul of the Exposition, providing the whole of this colossal organism with movement and light. If, for one reason or another, the Palace of Electricity happens to come to a halt, then the entire Exposition also comes to a half; the thousands of machines stop working, the myriads of lamps in the buildings and gardens remain unlit. Without electricity the Exposition is merely an inert mass devoid of the slightest breath of life.[80, 81]

The Hachette guide accurately depicts both the physical and metaphorical importance of the Palais d'Électricité in shaping the overall exposition. Critics would receive the palace with mixed, though primarily negative reactions. However, reactions against electricity were reactions against the perceived societal changes that electricity would bring to Europe, not reactions against the technology itself.

Electricity came to define the modern world in the twentieth century with the assistance of its promotion at the 1900 Exposition. James E. McClellan and Harold Dorn argue that modern industrial civilization relies heavily on electricity as its defining feature:

> Electricity is an especially versatile energy source, and the development of the electric power industry and near-universal electrification in the twentieth century represent another fundamental technological system on which modern industrial civilization depends.…Within twenty years of its innovation, electric power production and distribution were overriding social and legal conventions that reached back to early modern European history.…By 1900, the stage was set for electrification by the invention of techniques for the production and

[80] "Le Palais de l'Electricité n'est pas destiné seulement à réjouir les yeux. Ce palais enchanté renferme l'âme vivante et agissante de l'Exposition. C'est lui que fournit à tout ce colossal organisme le mouvement et la lumière. Que le Palais de l'Électricité vienne, pour une cause ou pour une autre, à s'arrêter, et toute l'Exposition s'arrête avec lui ; les milliers de machines ne marchent plus, les myriades de lampes distribuées dans les bâtiments et les jardins restent obscures. Sans l'électricité, l'Exposition n'est plus qu'un corps inerte, que n'aime plus le moindre souffle de vie."

[81] *1900 Paris Exposition: guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* (Paris: Hachette & Company, 1900)

> distribution of electric current – the battery, the dynamo, and the development of a copper wire industry.…Technology soon proved to be destiny as unprecedented technical imperatives blurred social and political boundaries.[82]

There are several key points emphasized by Dorn and McClellan that are crucial to understanding the impact of electricity in shaping twentieth-century European society. In many ways, 1900 represented a turning point for Europe and the United States in shaping the technological features of the twentieth century. And, as can be seen by the analyzing the critiques of the exposition, the advent of an electric age was largely taken for granted by critics. None of these critics truly called for the cessation of the use of electricity, though they urged those who read their critiques to consider the changes that electricity would bring.

The choice to feature electricity at the Exposition was not a surprise, and critics jumped at the chance to preemptively strike at the decision. Before the exposition even opened there were critics, such as J. Dennis Robinson, who were skeptical about the advent of electricity:

> If you believe the likes of Mr. Jules Verne and the proponents of the upcoming 1900 World's Fair – electricity may someday replace the coal furnace, eliminate the icebox, eradicate the plow, outstrip the printing press, modernize the outhouse, and put the cart horse permanently out to pasture. But will we become the masters of the lightning or its slaves? What will we do with endless hours of sunlight and ceaseless days of leisure? What will we build with the power of the gods at our fingertips? Sure, it's fun to light up the Eiffel Tower, but Portsmouth? But never fear, fair Seacoast citizens of this New Year. This is but the dawning of the Electric Age and its power still remains within our grasp. Thankfully man, for all his presumption and cleverness, has yet to learn to effectively navigate the air. If and when we learn to fly, the shocking consequences will make electricity seen as tame as the invisible atom itself.[83]

Robinson outlines a series of concerns related to the advent of an electrical age. The notable aspect of Robinson's argument is that, rather than focusing on the dangers of electricity as a technology, he expresses fear about the changes that the advent of an electrical age will bring to

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[82] James E. McClellan and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 344-345.
[83] J. Dennis Robinson, "Electricity Sparks Fears in 1900?" *Portsmouth Herald*, January 1900.

society. He does not stress that electrical mishaps can result in fires that are difficult to extinguish. Rather, he focuses on the way in which electricity would bring about changes to every life.

What, then, according to Robinson, is the root of the problem behind electricity and the changes it will bring to society? The key to understanding his criticisms and fears can be found within his word choice. Robinson believes that by "moderniz[ing]" society, electricity will bring about societal changes that will, ultimately, be harmful. Electricity and technology are often discussed in the context of modernization when debated by critics of this era. The exposition itself was caught up in this conversation of the modern due to the temporary nature of the exposition.

There were some critics whose skepticism about electricity was derived from the inconsistency it displayed at the Exposition. Jean Lorrain illustrates in his criticism of the Palais d'Electricité in his work, *Mes expositions universelles*:

> Will it or won't it work? For two days all the newspapers have been announcing that this evening, at last, this eighth wonder of the world will be in full operation. Cries of anticipated admiration can be heard everywhere. When is it going to start? All around, the illumination of the pavilions lit *a giorno* intensifies the blackness of the great hole of darkness where the doubtful apotheosis of the Water Tower still lies dormant. The Water Tower is not working properly, or rather it is not working at all. Admittedly, the red and green friezes light up well enough…but the jets of water and the cascades of the tiers of basins at the bottom obstinately remain in darkness.[84]

Lorrain's review of the Electrical Palace captures the mixture of optimism and skepticism with which critics approached electricity at the Exhibition. Unlike Robinson, he does not condemn electricity, but rather questions its functionality. And herein lies a key difference with which critics approached critiques of electricity. Critics such as Robinson focused on the changes the

[84]Jean Lorrain and Phillipe Martin Lau, *Mes Exposition Universelles: 1889-1900,* (Paris: H. Champion, 2002), 362.

technology would bring to society, whereas critics such as Lorrain chose to criticize the usefulness and practical nature of adopting the technology itself. This divide, however, would close once the Electrical Palace, and the accompanying displays of electricity, began to function. The primary reactions were those of critics who worried about the changes that electricity would bring to society.

The fact that the Exposition declared electricity to be the energy source of the future had a few repercussions. First, whenever there was an accident related to the use of electricity at the fair, it received rather extensive coverage in the French and international press.[85] If the Exposition wanted electricity to be the technology of the future, critics would fully expose the public to the perceived dangers of the adoption of electricity as the dominant technology. Second, the press covered rather extensively the various applications in which electricity could be useful. This is due in part to the fact that the fair itself was devoted to highlighting the various applications of electricity and to the fact that critics were beginning to see electricity as a widely adaptable, if dangerous, technology. Third, there was widespread debate about the merits of electricity as a technology. The exposition was devoted to highlight the versatility of electricity, but those demonstrations were not always successful – such as the fact that the Electrical Palace was not fully functional on the day the Exposition opened[86] – and were sometimes downright dangerous. Last, and most importantly, the featuring of electricity at time when societies considered themselves to be transitioning from one century to another led to widespread speculation about the broader impact of the adoption of electricity on European society.

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[85] "Fire at Paris Fair," *The New York Times*, 16 May 1900.
[86] "Opening of the Paris Exhibition," *The Times*, 16 April 1900.

The speculation about the broader impact of the adoption of electricity on European society was not isolated to the French press. The British, French, and American press all devoted extensive coverage to the potential impact of electricity. Henry Adams, a prominent American, was largely worried about the impact of the nature of electricity: "And thus it happened that, after ten years' pursuit, he found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines at the Great Exposition of 1900, his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new."[87] Adams was not the only critic left with the sense that a profound shift was beginning to impact society – and, more importantly, that the source of this shift was electric technology. Critics in the British, French, and American press all speculated about both the impact of electricity on society and the apparent societal turning point that was being marked by the Exposition of 1900. This was, in part, due to the nature of the Exposition itself.

The lack of a portrayal of historical continuity at the Exposition meant that the image of the twentieth century that was presented by the exposition was chaotic, to say the least. The organization of the exposition had no coherent theme and visitors often found it difficult to discern where specific exhibits would be located.[88] Furthermore, though the French designed two separate moving walkways to facilitate visitors' ease in navigating the fair grounds, many exhibits were not located near a moving walkway and required visitors to walk a considerable distance.[89] Unlike previous exhibitions that had had specific goals or themes, visitors were so overwhelmed by the variety of exhibits that they found it difficult to ascertain a theme for either synthesizing the nineteenth century or speculating about the twentieth century. In this way, the Exposition, though unintentionally, presented a chaotic image of twentieth-century society.

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[87] Henry Adams, "The Dynamo and the Virgin," in *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918.
[88] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 155.
[89] Robert W. Brown, "Paris 1900," 155.

The most striking aspect of the coverage of the Exposition in the press was the universal nature in which the press, both domestic and foreign, responded to the exposition. Criticisms of electricity and the exposition varied very little depending on the nationality of the person who was covering the Exposition. The British, French, and Americans lambasted the dangers of electricity and the manner in which it would dangerously impact society. Furthermore, all coverage of electricity was fully embedded in a conversation of modernity. The exposition did not exist in a bubble; it fully placed itself within the conversation of modernity that was consuming fin de siècle Europe.

The Exposition Universelle reached and impacted nearly 51 million visitors in a peaceful, though competitive manner. These visitors were presented with incoherent images of the nineteenth century and conflicting speculations as to what the twentieth century would bring. This led to an increasing sense that the twentieth century would be one defined by an increasing sense of societal chaos. Electricity, as main feature of the Exposition, sparked both the imaginations and fears of visitors to the Exposition. Critics and visitors lauded and criticized the use of electricity at the fair, highlighting its dangerous applications and how it might possibly change society. The Exposition was unable to escape a debate about modernity and how Europe's modernization process would continue to progress in the early part of the twentieth century. In the eyes of Europeans, the nineteenth century was coming to a close, and Europeans worried about what changes they might be forced to endure with the dawn of a new century. The Exposition did little to alleviate these fears, and, in many cases, seemed to aggravate speculation and intrigue about the coming century. Electricity and the other technological displays at the exposition are largely responsible for the chaotic reputation with which the Exposition was left upon its close in November of 1900. The most popular

exposition in history was tarnished by its inability to present Europeans with a comprehensive vision of nineteenth-century European society and a clear, all-encompassing vision of what twentieth-century Europe was likely to be.

Conclusion: Fin de rêve

On 12 November 1900, less than six months after it had opened, the 1900 Exposition Universelle closed its doors. The press reacted with a mixture of disappointment, nostalgia, and excitement. The one common theme in coverage of the closing of the Exposition was the sense that something tremendous had come to a close. *The Times* wrote the following about the closing of the Exposition:

> Last night, when a drizzling and chilling rain had fallen on Paris an enveloped in mist the last illuminations, three cannon shots announced the close of the Universal Exhibition of 1900, and towards midnight all the lights were extinguished. This morning the approaches were boarded up and all trace of the stir yesterday had disappeared. No vehicles or pedestrians were in sight, the rolling platform and electrical railway were at a standstill, and while descending the Seine in a boat you were struck with the almost mournful solitude on both banks. You could hear, however, the distant sound of hammering and packing. The roofs of the little booths had been removed, the framework alone remaining.[90]

Though the British took a gloomy approach to their description of the close of the Exposition, the Americans were much more upbeat about the end, noting the Exposition's glorious closing celebration: "The great exposition of 1900 closed in a blasé of illumination, the final evening being celebrated by a night fête. The booming of a cannon from the first story of the Eiffel Tower announced that the exposition had ceased to exist."[91]

> Perhaps the most illuminating depiction came from *Le Figaro.*
>
> It's over. The exhibition is closed. This thing that seemed as if it would never come has arrived. This is, in any case, the end of a beautiful dream. I piously assisted until the end. I went there the day of its death, as I went there the day of its birth. It's over.[92,93]

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[90] "The Paris Exposition," *The Times*, 14 November 1900.
[91] "Paris Exposition Closes Its Gates," *The New York Times*, 13 November 1900.
[92] "C'est fini. L'Exposition est fermée. Cette chose qui semblait ne devoir jamais arriver est arrivée. Ce sera, en tout cas, la fin d'un bien beau rêve. Je l'ai pieusement assistée jusqu'à la fin. J'y suis allé le jour de sa mort, comme j'y étais allé le jour de sa naissance. C'est fini."
[93] "Fin de rêve," *Le Figaro*, 13 November 1900.

The press, at the close of the Exposition, was consumed with the profound sense that the closing of the Exposition marked the end of an era. Calling it the "end of a dream," *Le Figaro* encapsulated the mood of the French at the turn of the century. Shortly after the closing of the Exposition, the French press began to speculate as to the result of the fair for the French. *Le Temps* noted:

> The result of the Exposition can be very useful to our country. The competition from foreign countries proclaimed the importance we have in the world and showed the respect these countries have for us. The comparison of foreign industrial products with those of France has awoken – we hope at least – activities ready to rest on past success. And when the common industries, whose progress is marked by the increasingly rapid application of science, are ours, our rivals and us, we will be in a new situation. The Exposition also gave, in her own way, a lesson of peace and brotherhood.[94,95]

Le Temps notes the international ramifications of the "dream" of the exposition. And, indeed, these ramifications are echoes of the French President's inaugural speech for the Exposition. This so-called dream, however, truly failed to live up to expectations.

By hosting an exposition in 1900, The French presented themselves with an opportunity to both create a synthesized vision of nineteenth century Europe and vision for what the twentieth-century would have in store for the world. The visions of the future that the French and other participants in the fair presented to the world were chaotic and confusing and did anything but portray a vision of a twentieth century that would be appealing to Europeans and other visitors. Architecture was viewed as over the top and too embellished, art was headed in a direction with which many critics were uncomfortable, and technology – particularly electricity – was dangerous and unpredictable.

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[94] "Le résultat de l'Exposition universelle ne peut être qu'utile à notre pays. Le concours des pays étrangers a proclamé l'importance que nous avons dans le monde et montré les égards que l'on a pour nous. La comparaison des produits de l'industrie étrangère avec les nôtres a réveillé, nous l'espérons du moins, des activités prêtes à s'endormir sur des succès d'autrefois. Et, quand aux industries communes, dont le progrès se marque par les plus rapides applications de la science, nous sommes, nos rivaux et nous, dans une situation toute nouvelle. . Et elle donna aussi, selon sa manière propre, une leçon de paix et de fraternité."

[95] "L'Exposition," *Le Temps*, 13 November 1900.

Despite the failures of the fair in realizing its simultaneous goals of synthesizing the nineteenth century and speculating about the twentieth century, the closing of the fair left visitors and critics with a profound sense that something extraordinary had come to an end. The Exposition had come to a close and, in doing so, symbolized the end of an era to contemporaries. The Exposition symbolized the end of the nineteenth century and the dawn of a new, unknown century. There is an inherent nostalgia that accompanies the turn of a century, and the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century was no exception.

This profound sense of loss, however, should not overshadow the failures of the fair. Unlike the British in the Victorian Era, the Japanese in the Meiji Era, and early Republic China, fin de siècle France failed to construct a narrative of tradition that would form the basis of understanding of its society's future. The French, along with the other participants in the Exposition, had failed in accomplishing their goals. Until the resurgence of the Dreyfus Affair, hopes for the 1900 Exposition remained high in the British, French, and American press, the 1900 Exposition Universelle ultimately failed to achieve its goals. An international crisis – with the resultant tarnishing of France's international reputation – combined with a misguided layout and a failure to safely display the technological capabilities of electricity led to the failure of the 1900 Exposition Universelle. Though there was a nostalgia associated with the close of the Exposition, in reality the Exposition did not truly mark the end of an era. Furthermore, the Exposition failed to mark the end of an era – the true end to nineteenth-century society would not come about until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. The Exposition presented the organizers and participants with the opportunity to begin building the foundation of a new era for society. And, despite many attempts to do so, the Exposition ultimately failed.

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