

## Egypt at the exhibition

The Egyptian delegation to the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists, held in Stockholm in the summer of 1889, travelled to Sweden via Paris and paused there to visit the World Exhibition. The four Egyptians spent several days in the French capital, climbing twice the height (as they reported) of the Great Pyramid in Alexandre Eiffel's new tower, and exploring the city laid out beneath. They visited the carefully planned parks and pavilions of the exhibition, and examined the merchandise and machinery on display. Amid this order and splendour there was only one thing that disturbed them. The Egyptian exhibit had been built by the French to represent a winding street of Cairo, made of houses with overhanging upper stories and a mosque like that of Qaitbay. 'It was intended', one of the Egyptians wrote, 'to resemble the old aspect of Cairo.' So carefully was this done, he noted, that 'even the paint on the buildings was made dirty'.<sup>1</sup>

The Egyptian exhibit had also been made carefully chaotic. In contrast to the geometric lines of the rest of the exhibition, the imitation street was laid out in the haphazard manner of the bazaar. The way was crowded with shops and stalls, where Frenchmen dressed as Orientals sold perfumes, pastries, and tarbushes. To complete the effect of the bazaar, the French organisers had imported from Cairo fifty Egyptian donkeys, together with their drivers and the requisite number of grooms, farriers, and saddle-makers. The donkeys gave rides for the price of one franc up and down the street, resulting in a clamour and confusion so life-like, the director of the exhibition was obliged to issue an order restricting the donkeys to a certain number at each hour of the day.

The Egyptian visitors were disgusted by all this and stayed away. Their final embarrassment had been to enter the door of the mosque and discover that, like the rest of the street, it had been erected as what the Europeans called a *façade*. 'Its external form as a mosque was all that there was. As for the interior, it had been set up as a coffee house, where Egyptian girls performed dances with young males, and dervishes whirled.'<sup>2</sup>

After eighteen days in Paris, the Egyptian delegation travelled on to Stockholm to attend the Congress of Orientalists. Together with other non-European delegates, the Egyptians were received with hospitality – and a

great curiosity. As though they were still in Paris, they found themselves something of an exhibit. 'Bona fide Orientalists', wrote a European participant in the congress, 'were stared at as in a Barnum's all-world show: the good Scandinavian people seemed to think that it was a collection of *Orientalists*, not of *Orientalists*.' Some of the Orientalists themselves seemed to delight in the role of showmen. At an earlier congress, in Berlin, we are told that 'the grotesque idea was started of producing natives of Oriental countries as illustrations of a paper: thus the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford produced a real live Indian Pandit, and made him go through the ritual of Brahmanical prayer and worship before a hilarious assembly . . . Professor Max Müller of Oxford produced two rival Japanese priests, who exhibited their gifts; it had the appearance of two showmen exhibiting their monkeys.'<sup>3</sup> At the Stockholm congress the Egyptians were invited to participate as scholars, but when they used their own language to do so they again found themselves treated as exhibits. 'I have heard nothing so unworthy of a sensible man', complained an Oxford scholar, 'as . . . the whistling howls emitted by an Arabic student of El-Azhar of Cairo. Such exhibitions at Congresses are mischievous and degrading.'<sup>4</sup>

The exhibition and the congress were not the only examples of this European mischief. Throughout the nineteenth century non-European visitors found themselves being placed on exhibit or made the careful object of European curiosity. The degradation they often suffered, whether intended or not, seemed nevertheless inevitable, as necessary to these spectacles as the scaffolded façades or the curious crowds of onlookers. The façades, the onlookers and the degradation seemed all to belong to the organising of an exhibit, to a particularly European concern with rendering things up to be viewed. I will be taking up this question of the exhibition, examining it through non-European eyes as a practice that exemplifies the nature of the modern European state. But I want to reach it via a detour, which explores a little further the mischief to which the Oxford scholar referred. This mischief is a clue, for it runs right through the Middle Eastern experience of nineteenth-century Europe.

To begin with, Middle Eastern visitors found Europeans a curious people, with an uncontainable eagerness to stand and stare. 'One of the characteristics of the French is to stare and get excited at everything new', wrote an Egyptian scholar who spent five years in Paris in the 1820s.<sup>5</sup> It was perhaps this staring he had in mind when he explained in another book, discussing the manners and customs of various nations, that 'one of the beliefs of the Europeans is that the gaze has no effect'.<sup>6</sup> An Ottoman envoy who stopped at Köpenick on his way to Berlin in 1790 reported that 'the people of Berlin were unable to contain their impatience until our arrival in the city. Regardless of the winter and the snow, both men and women came in



1 Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1889: the Egyptian exhibit.

carriages, on horseback, and on foot, to look at us and contemplate us.<sup>7</sup> Where such spectacles were prevented, it seemed necessary to recreate them artificially. The members of an Egyptian student mission sent to Paris in the 1820s were confined to the college where they lived and allowed out onto the streets only every second Sunday. But during their stay in Paris they found themselves parodied in vaudeville on the Paris stage, for the entertainment of the French public. 'They construct the stage as the play demands', explained one of the students. 'For example, if they want to imitate a sultan and the things that happen to him, they set up the stage in the form of a palace and portray him in person. If for instance they want to play the Shah of Persia, they dress someone in the clothes of the Persian monarch and then put him there and sit him on a throne.'<sup>8</sup>

Even Middle Eastern monarchs who came in person to Europe were liable to be incorporated themselves into its theatrical events. When the Khedive of Egypt visited Paris to attend an earlier Exposition Universelle in 1867, he found that the Egyptian exhibit had been built to simulate medieval Cairo in the form of a royal palace. The Khedive stayed in the imitation palace during his visit and became a part of the exhibition, receiving visitors with medieval hospitality.<sup>9</sup> His father, Crown Prince Ibrahim of Egypt, had been less fortunate. Visiting the manufactories and showrooms of Birmingham in June 1846, he insisted wearily to the press after his experiences elsewhere with the British public that 'he should be regarded merely as a private gentleman'. But he was unable to escape becoming something of an exhibit. He went out for a stroll incognito one evening and slipped into a showtent to see on display the carcass of an enormous whale. He was recognised immediately by the showman, who began announcing to the crowd outside that 'for the one price they could see on display the carcass of the whale, and the Great Warrior Ibrahim, Conqueror of the Turks, into the bargain'. The crowd rushed in, and the Crown Prince had to be rescued by the Birmingham police.<sup>10</sup>

This sort of curiosity is encountered in almost every Middle Eastern description of nineteenth-century Europe. Towards the end of the century, when one or two Egyptian writers began to compose works of fiction in the realistic style of the novel, they made the journey to Europe their first topic. The stories would often evoke the peculiar experience of the West by describing an individual surrounded and stared at, like an object on exhibit. 'Whenever he paused outside a shop or showroom,' the protagonist in one such story found on his first day in Paris, 'a large number of people would surround him, both men and women, staring at his dress and appearance.'<sup>11</sup> Such stories could be multiplied, but for the time being I want to indicate only this, that for the visitor from the Middle East, Europe was a place where

one was liable to become an object on exhibit, at which people gathered and stared.

I should make clear my own interest in this mischief, because the tendency of Europeans to stand and stare has sometimes been noted before. In fact words such as those quoted from the Ottoman envoy on his way to Berlin have been offered as part of the evidence for an essential historical difference between Europeans and other people, the difference between the curiosity of the Europeans concerning strange places and people, and the 'general lack of curiosity' of others. The difference is said to go back to, and to illustrate, the great blossoming of European intellectual curiosity at the beginning of the modern age. We are told that it is to be understood, essentially, as a 'difference of attitude'.<sup>12</sup> Many people, myself included, would find it implausible that such staring could help to serve as evidence within a group for the presence or absence of intellectual curiosity. But there is also the implication that this 'attitude' – if that is how it should be understood – was in some sense natural. Such curiosity, it seems to be suggested, is simply the unfettered relation of a person to the world, emerging in Europe once the 'loosening of theological bonds' had brought about 'the freeing of human minds'. Fewer people would question this assumption. In fact I would argue that the notion of 'theological bonds' that loosen or become broken, leaving the individual confronted by the world, continues to govern our understanding of the historical encounter of the Middle East with the modern West, and even of political struggles in the Middle East today. The reason for my detour through this mischief is because I want to examine the way of addressing the world that Middle Eastern writers found in Europe as something not natural but mischievous – dependent, so to speak, on a certain theology of its own.

### *Objectness*

Accepting for the moment this curious attitude of the European subject, we can note first of all that the non-European visitor also encountered in Europe what might have seemed a corresponding 'objectness'. The curiosity of the subject was called forth by a diversity of mechanisms for rendering things up as its object. Ibrahim Pasha's encounter with the whale and the students' experience of being parodied on the Paris stage were only minor beginnings. The student from that group who published an account of their stay in Paris devoted several pages to the Parisian phenomenon of *le spectacle*, a word for which he knew of no Arabic equivalent. Besides the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, among the different kinds of spectacle he described were 'places in which they represent for the person the view of a town or a country or the

like', such as 'the Panorama, the Cosmorana, the Diorama, the Europorama and the Uranorama'. In a panorama of Cairo, he explained in illustration, 'it is as though you were looking from on top of the minaret of Sultan Hasan, for example, with al-Rumaila and the rest of the city beneath you'.<sup>13</sup>

The panoramas were the forerunners of the world exhibitions, which were organised on an ever increasing scale as Europe entered its imperial age. Along with other public and political spectacles, including the increasingly lavish international congresses of Orientalists, the first of which was held in Paris in 1873, these events became the major subject of Arabic accounts of the modern West. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, more than half the descriptions of journeys to Europe being published in Cairo were written to describe visits to a world exhibition or an international congress of Orientalists.<sup>14</sup> These accounts devote hundreds of pages to describing the peculiar order and technique of such spectacles – the curious crowds of spectators, the device of the exhibit and the model, the organisation of panoramas and perspectives, the display of new discoveries and merchandise, the architecture of iron and glass, the systems of classification, the calculation of statistics, the lectures, the plans and the guide books – in short the entire machinery of what I am going to refer to as 'representation': everything collected and arranged to stand for something, to represent progress and history, human industry and empire; everything set up, and the whole set-up always evoking somehow some larger truth.

Spectacles like the world exhibition and the Orientalist congress set up the world as a picture. They ordered it up before an audience as an object on display, to be viewed, experienced and investigated. The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London claimed to present to its six million visitors 'a living picture' of the development of mankind.<sup>15</sup> Orientalism, it was claimed in the same way at the inauguration of the Ninth International Congress in London in 1892, had 'displayed before us the historical development of the human race'.<sup>16</sup> An earlier Orientalist, the great French scholar Sylvestre de Sacy, had envisioned this process of display in a manner very similar to the future world exhibitions. He had planned to establish a museum, which was to be 'a vast depot of objects of all kinds, of drawings, of original books, maps, accounts of voyages, all offered to those who wish to give themselves to the study of [the Orient]; in such a way that each of these students would be able to feel himself transported as if by enchantment into the midst of, say, a Mongolian tribe or of the Chinese race, whichever he might have made the object of his studies'.<sup>17</sup>

By the later decades of the century, almost everywhere that Middle Eastern visitors went they seemed to encounter this rendering up the world as a picture. They visited the museums, and saw the cultures of the world portrayed in objects arranged under glass, in the order of their evolution.

They were taken to the theatre, a place where Europeans portrayed to themselves their history, as several Egyptian writers explained. They spent afternoons in the public gardens, carefully organised 'to bring together the trees and plants of every part of the world', as another Arab writer put it. And inevitably they took trips to the zoo, a product of nineteenth-century colonial penetration of the Orient, as the critic Theodor Adorno wrote, 'which paid symbolic tribute in the form of animals'.<sup>18</sup>

These symbolic representations of the world's cultural and colonial order, continually encountered and described by visitors to Europe, were the mark of a great historical confidence. The spectacles set up in such places of modern entertainment reflected the political certainty of a new age. 'England is at present the greatest Oriental Empire which the world has ever known', proclaimed the president of the 1892 Orientalist Congress. 'She knows not only how to conquer, but how to rule.'<sup>19</sup> Exhibitions, museums and other spectacles were not just reflections of this certainty, however, but the means of its production, by their technique of rendering history, progress, culture and empire in 'objective' form. They were occasions for making sure of such objective truths, in a world where truth had become a question of what Heidegger calls 'the certainty of representation'.<sup>20</sup>

Such certainty of representation has a paradoxical quality, which I want to try and bring to light. By reading from some of the Arabic accounts of the world exhibition, it may be possible to understand a little further the strange objectness, and the strangely objective truths, that visitors from outside Europe encountered. The strangeness, I am going to suggest, did not arise as one might suppose from the 'artificial' quality of the endless exhibitions, displays and representations. It arose from the effect of an 'external reality' to which such seeming artificiality lays claim. The source of objective truths was the peculiar distinction maintained between the simulated and 'the real', between the exhibition and the world. This was a peculiarity which non-European visitors, finding themselves so often not just visitors but objects on exhibit, might have found a little more noticeable.

### *Representation*

At first sight, the distinction between representation and 'external reality' seemed very clearly determined. There are three features of the world exhibitions I will mention in order to illustrate how this distinction was set up: the apparent realism of the exhibits, their organisation around a common centre, and the position of the visitor as the occupant of this central point. First, it was remarkable how perfectly the exhibitions seemed to model an external world. As the Egyptian visitor noticed, on the buildings representing a Cairo street even the paint was made dirty. It was precisely

this kind of accuracy of detail that created the certainty, the effect of a determined correspondence between model and reality. Very often some of the most realistic exhibits were models of the city in which the exhibition was held, or of the world of which it claimed to be the centre. The realism with which these models were calculated and constructed always astonished the visitor. The 1889 exhibition, for example, included an enormous globe housed in a special building. An Arab writer described its extraordinary resemblance to reality:

Ordinary maps do not resemble the world perfectly, no matter how perfectly they are made, because they are flat while the earth is spherical. Conventional globes are very small, and the countries are not drawn on them clearly. This globe, however, is 12.72 metres in diameter and 40 metres in circumference. One millimetre on its surface corresponds to one kilometre on the surface of the earth. A city such as Cairo or Alexandria appears on it clearly. It is made of iron bars covered in thick paper shaped according to the form of the earth. It is mounted on a pivot on which it rotates with ease. Above it there is a large dome. Mountains, valleys and oceans are moulded on it, with the mountains raised proud of the surface. A mountain of 20,000 feet protrudes more than 6 millimetres, which makes it clearly visible. The globe turns on its axis one complete revolution every 24 hours, and rotates half a millimetre every second.<sup>21</sup>

Equally accurate representations were made of the city where the exhibition was held. At the centre of the 1878 Paris exhibition visitors had found the Pavillon de la Ville de Paris, which included exhibits and models of 'everything connected with the city's functions: schools, sewers, pumping stations, urban rebuilding' as well as plans of the city in three-dimensional relief.<sup>22</sup> This was surpassed at the next Paris exhibition, in 1889, where one of the most impressive exhibits was a panorama of the city. As described by the same Arab writer, this consisted of a viewing platform on which one stood, encircled by images of the city. The images were mounted and illuminated in such a way that the observer felt himself standing at the centre of the city itself, which seemed to materialise around him as a single, solid object 'not differing from reality in any way'.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, the clearly determined relationship between model and reality was strengthened by their sharing of a common centre. A model or panorama of the city stood at the centre of the exhibition grounds, which were themselves laid out in the centre of the real city. The city in turn presented itself as the imperial capital of the world, and the exhibition at its centre laid out the exhibits of the world's empires and nations accordingly. France, for example, would occupy the central place on the Champs de Mars surrounded by the exhibits of the other industrialised states, with their colonies and other nations surrounding them in the proper order. ('It is not on the Champs de Mars that one should look for the Egyptian exhibit', we



are told in a didactic guide entitled *L’Egypte, la Tunisie, le Maroc et l’exposition de 1878*. ‘This is easily explained, for the country has no industry at all, properly speaking . . .’<sup>24</sup> The common centre shared by the exhibition, the city and the world reinforced the relationship between representation and reality, just as the relationship enabled one to determine such a centre in the first place.

Finally, what distinguished the realism of the model from the reality it claimed to represent was that this central point had an occupant, the figure on the viewing platform. The representation of reality was always an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst, an observing gaze surrounded and set apart by the exhibition’s careful order. If the dazzling displays of the exhibition could evoke some larger historical and political reality, it was because they were arranged to demand this isolated gaze. The more the exhibit drew in and encircled the visitor, the more the gaze was set apart from it, as the mind is set apart from the material world it observes. The separation is suggested in a description of the Egyptian exhibit at the Paris Exhibition of 1867:

A museum inside a pharaonic temple represented Antiquity, a palace richly decorated in the Arab style represented the Middle Ages, a caravanseraï of merchants and performers portrayed in real life the customs of today. Weapons from the Sudan, the skins of wild monsters, perfumes, poisons and medicinal plants transport us directly to the tropics. Pottery from Assiut and Aswan, filigree and cloth of silk and gold invite us to touch with our fingers a strange civilisation. All the races subject to the Viceroy were personified by individuals selected with care. We rubbed shoulders with the fellah, we made way before the Bedouin of the Libyan desert on their beautiful white dromedaries. This sumptuous display spoke to the mind as to the eyes; it expressed a political idea.<sup>25</sup>

The remarkable realism of such displays made a strange civilisation into an object the visitor could almost touch. Yet to the observing eye, surrounded by the display but distinguished from it by the status of visitor, it remained a mere representation, the picture of some strange reality. Thus there were, in fact, two parallel pairs of distinctions, between the visitor and the exhibit, and between the exhibit and what it expressed. The representation was set apart from the real political reality it claimed to portray as the observing mind was set apart from what it observed.

Despite these methods of creating the determined distinction between representation and reality, however, it was not always easy in Paris to tell where the exhibition ended and the world itself began. It is true that the boundaries of the exhibition were clearly marked, with high perimeter walls and monumental gates. But, as the Egyptian delegation had begun to discover, there was much about the real world outside, in the streets of Paris

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and beyond, that resembled the world exhibition; just as there was more about the exhibition that resembled the world outside. It was as though, as we will see, despite the determined efforts within the exhibition to construct perfect representations of the real world outside, the real world beyond the gates turned out to be rather like an extension of the exhibition. This extended exhibition would continue to present itself as a series of mere representations, representing a reality outside. Thus we should think of it as not so much an exhibition as a kind of labyrinth, the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits.<sup>26</sup> But then, perhaps the sequence of exhibitions became so accurate and so extensive, no one ever realised that the 'real world' they promised was not there. Except perhaps the Egyptians.

### *The world as an exhibition*

To examine this paradox, I will begin again inside the exhibition, back at the Egyptian bazaar. Part of the shock of the Egyptians came from just how 'real' the street claimed to be. Not simply that the paint was made dirty, that the donkeys were from Cairo, and that the Egyptian pastries on sale claimed to taste like the real thing. But that one paid for them, as we say, with real money. The commercialism of the donkey rides, the bazaar stalls and the dancing girls was no different from the commercialism of the world outside. This was the real thing, in the sense that what commercialism offers is always the real thing. The commercialism of world exhibitions was no accident, but a consequence of the scale of representation they attempted and of the modern, consumer economy that required such entertainment. Beginning with the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, which was four times the size of any previous exhibition, the expense of the event was offset by charging each exhibitor for the costs of furnishing the exhibit, and by including throughout the exhibition-ground shops and places of entertainment.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, the exhibitions came to resemble more and more the commercial machinery of the rest of the city. This machinery, in turn, was rapidly changing in places like London and Paris, as small, individually owned shops, often based on local crafts, gave way to the larger apparatus of shopping arcades and department stores. The Bon Marché opened in 1852 (and had a turnover of seven million francs by the end of the next decade), the Louvre in 1855, and Printemps in 1865.<sup>28</sup> The size of the new stores and arcades, as well as their architecture, made each one almost an exhibition in itself. The *Illustrated Guide to Paris* offered a typical description:

These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-walled passages, cut through whole blocks of houses, whose owners have combined

in this speculation. On either side of the passages, which draw their light from above, run the most elegant shops, so that an arcade of this kind is a city, indeed a world in miniature.<sup>29</sup>

The Egyptian accounts of Europe contain several descriptions of these mechanical worlds-in-miniature, where the real world, as at the exhibition, was something created in the representation of its commodities. The department stores were described as 'large and well organised', with their merchandise 'arranged in perfect order, set in rows on shelves with everything symmetrical and precisely positioned'.<sup>30</sup> Non-European visitors would remark especially on the panes of glass, inside the stores and along the gas-lit arcades, which separated the observer from the goods on display. 'The merchandise is all arranged behind sheets of clear glass, in the most remarkable order . . . Its dazzling appearance draws thousands of onlookers.'<sup>31</sup> The glass panes inserted themselves between the visitors and the goods on display, making the former into mere onlookers and endowing the goods with the distance that is the source of their objectness. Just as exhibitions were becoming more commercialised, the machinery of commerce was becoming a means of creating an effect of reality, indistinguishable from that of the exhibition.

Something of the experience of the strangely organised world of modern commerce and consumers is indicated in the first fictional account of Europe to be published in Arabic. Appearing in 1882, it tells the story of two Egyptians who travelled to France and England in the company of an English Orientalist. On their first day in Paris, the two Egyptian protagonists wander accidentally into the vast, gas-lit premises of a wholesale supplier. Inside the building they find long corridors, each leading into another. They walk from one corridor to the next, and after a while begin to search for the way out. Turning a corner they see what looks like an exit, with people approaching from the other side. But it turns out to be a mirror, which covers the entire width and height of the wall, and the people approaching are merely their own reflections. They turn down another passage and then another, but each one ends only in a mirror. As they make their way through the corridors of the building, they pass groups of people at work. 'The people were busy setting out merchandise, sorting it and putting it into boxes and cases. They stared at the two of them in silence as they passed, standing quite still, not leaving their places or interrupting their work.' After wandering silently for some time through the building, the two Egyptians realise they have lost their way completely and begin going from room to room looking for an exit. 'But no one interfered with them', we are told, 'or came up to them to ask if they were lost.' Eventually they are rescued by the manager of the store, who proceeds to explain to them how

it is organised, pointing out that the merchandise being sorted and packed represents the produce of every country in the world.<sup>32</sup>

On the one hand this story evokes a festival of representation, a celebration of the ordered world of objects and the discipline of the European gaze. At the same time, the disconcerting experience with the mirrors undermines this system of representational order. An earlier Egyptian writer recalled a similar experience with mirrors, on his very first day in a European city. Arriving at Marseilles, he had entered a café, which he mistook at first for some sort of 'vast, endless thoroughfare'. 'There were a lot of people in there,' he explained, 'and whenever a group of them came into view their images appeared in the glass mirrors, which were on every side. Anyone who walked in, sat down, or stood up seemed to be multiplied. Thus the café looked like an open street. I realised it was enclosed only when I saw several images of myself in the mirrors, and understood that it was all due to the peculiar effect of the glass.'<sup>33</sup> In such stories, it is as though the world of representation is being admired for its dazzling order, and yet the suspicion remains that all this reality is only an effect. Perhaps the world remains inevitably a labyrinth, rather than an interior distinguished from – and defined by – its exterior.

At any rate the unusual and sometimes discomforting experiences of the world exhibition seem to be repeated, in such stories, in the world outside, a world of passages ending in one's own reflection, of corridors leading into a labyrinth of further corridors, of objects ordered up to represent every country in the world, and of disciplined, staring Europeans. It was not just in its commercialism, in other words, that all this resembled the world exhibition. Characteristic of the way Europeans seemed to live was their preoccupation with what the same Egyptian author described as *intizam al-manzar*, the organisation of the view. The Europe one reads about in Arabic accounts was a place of discipline and visual arrangement, of silent gazes and strange simulations, of the organisation of everything and everything organised to represent, to recall like the exhibition some larger meaning. Outside the world exhibition, it follows paradoxically, one encountered not the real world but only further models and representations of the real. Beyond the exhibition and the department store, everywhere that non-European visitors went – the museum and the Orientalist congress, the theatre and the zoo, the countryside encountered typically in the form of a model farm exhibiting new machinery and cultivation methods, the very streets of the modern city with their deliberate façades, even the Alps once the funicular was built – they found the technique and sensation to be the same.<sup>34</sup> Everything seemed to be set up before one as though it were the model or the picture of something. Everything was arranged before an observing subject into a system of

signification (to use the European jargon), declaring itself to be the signifier of a signified.

The exhibition, perhaps, could be read in such accounts as epitomising the strange character of the West, a place where one was continually pressed into service as a spectator by a world ordered so as to represent. In exhibitions the traveller from the Middle East could describe the curious way of setting up the world encountered more and more in modern Europe, a particular arrangement between the individual and an object-world which Europeans seemed to take as the experience of the real. This reality-effect, let me provisionally suggest, was a world more and more rendered up to the individual according to the way in which, and to the extent to which, it could be set up before him or her as an exhibit. Non-Europeans encountered in Europe what one might call, echoing a phrase from Heidegger, the age of the world exhibition, or rather, the age of the world-as-exhibition.<sup>35</sup> World exhibition here refers not to an exhibition of the world but to the world conceived and grasped as though it were an exhibition.

There are three features of this world, each of them already introduced, that are going to provide themes I want to explore in this book. First, its remarkable claim to certainty or truth: the apparent certainty with which everything seems ordered and organised, calculated and rendered unambiguous – ultimately, what seems its political decidedness. Second, the paradoxical nature of this decidedness: its certainty exists as the seemingly determined relation between representations and ‘reality’; yet the real world, like the world outside the exhibition, despite everything the exhibition promises, turns out to consist only of further representations of this reality. Third, what I will refer to as its colonial nature: the age of the exhibition was necessarily the colonial age, the age of world economy and global power in which we live, since what was to be rendered as exhibit was reality, the world itself.

### **The colonial order**

To explore these themes, in the final pages of this chapter I am going to return with the Egyptian travellers to Cairo, and examine Middle Eastern life through the eyes of nineteenth-century European scholars, writers and tourists. If Europe was becoming the world-as-exhibition, I am going to ask, what happened to Europeans who left and went abroad? How did they experience a life not yet lived, so to speak, as though the world were a picture of something set up before an observer’s gaze? Part of the answer, I will suggest, is that they did not realise they had left the exhibition. How could they, if they took the world itself to be an exhibition? Reality was that which

presents itself as exhibit, so nothing else would have been thinkable. Living within a world of signs, they took semiosis to be a universal condition, and set about describing the Orient as though it were an exhibition.

We will remain in the Middle East for the rest of the book, mostly in Egypt of the later nineteenth century. My aim is to examine this combination of order and certainty that I have referred to as the world-as-exhibition, in the attempts to construct Egypt as a modern or colonial state. (Britain's colonial occupation of Egypt occurred late in the nineteenth century, in 1882. I will be using the word colonial, however, to refer beyond this event to the 'colonising' nature of the kind of power that the occupation sought to consolidate, a power which began to develop around the beginning of the century if not earlier.) The book is not intended as a history of this process, which remains even today something unaccomplished and incomplete. Instead I will examine certain exemplary projects, writings, and events which can suggest how such order and certainty were to be achieved, and illuminate something, I hope, of their strange nature.<sup>36</sup>

In chapters 2 and 3 I am going to begin by examining parallels between three characteristic practices in which a modern political method came into being: the formation of a new army, the introduction of organised schooling and the rebuilding of Egyptian villages and towns. The new processes that I examine – taking peasants for the first time to be drilled and disciplined into an army, pulling down houses to construct model villages or to open up the streets of a modern city, putting children into rows of desks contained within schools laid out like barracks – all replicated one another as acts of what was now called *nizam*, order and discipline. Such acts of order, which I contrast with other, older notions of order, all worked to create the appearance of a structure, a framework that seemed to exist apart from, and prior to, the particular individuals or actions it enframed. Such a framework would appear, in other words, as order itself, conceived in no other terms than the order of what was orderless, the coordination of what was discontinuous, something suddenly fundamental to human practice, to human thought. This effect was something new. It was the effect, I will argue, of a world that would now seem divided in two, into the material realm of things in themselves, as could now be said, and an abstract realm of their order or structure.

In chapters 4 and 5 I will try to connect this appearance of order with the 'order of appearance' I am calling the world-as-exhibition. To the world divided in two, I argue first of all, there corresponded a new conception of the person, similarly divided into a physical body and a non-physical entity to be called the mind or mentality. I examine how the new political practices of the colonial period were organised around this distinction, with the aim of making the individual body disciplined and industrious, and how the

same distinction became the subject of a large literature, concerned in particular with the Egyptian mind or 'character', whose problematic trait was its lack of the same habit of industry. The political process was conceived, in other words, according to this novel dichotomy between a material and a mental world, an object and a subject world. Its purpose, in turn, was to create both a material order and a conceptual or moral order. The new name for this moral order was 'society'.

In chapter 5, in the context of the military occupation of Egypt by the British, I will deal with the problem of political certainty or meaning. I want to consider how the new methods and new conception of order, examined in the preceding chapters, brought about the effect of a realm of meaning and authority. I propose to explore this by drawing a parallel from the same period with the question of meaning and authority in written texts, arguing that a new kind of distinction between the material and the mental also came to govern the nature of writing. I will use this parallel to argue that it was in terms of this strange distinction that the nature and authority of the modern state were to be conceived and achieved. Finally in chapter 6 I will try to connect together these parallel themes, returning to the question of the world as exhibition.

### *The globe*

Before moving on to the Middle East, I want to outline briefly some of the more general aspects of Egypt's relation to the Europe of department stores and world exhibitions. This outline will provide both a historical itinerary and a further indication of the direction in which my own path leads off. The world exhibitions and the new large-scale commercial life of European cities were aspects of a political and economic transformation that equally affected Egypt. The new department stores were the first establishments to keep large quantities of merchandise in stock, in the form of standardised textiles and clothing. The stockpiling, together with the introduction of advertising (the word was coined at the time of the great exhibitions, Walter Benjamin tells us) and the new industry of 'fashion', on which several Egyptian writers commented, were all connected with the boom in textile production.<sup>37</sup> The textile boom was an aspect of other changes, such as new ways of harvesting and treating cotton, new machinery for the manufacture of textiles, the resulting increase in profits, and the reinvestment of profit abroad in further cotton production. At the other end from the department store, these wider changes extended to include places like the southern United States, India, and the Nile valley.

Since the latter part of the eighteenth century the Nile valley too had been undergoing a transformation, associated principally with the European

textile industry.<sup>38</sup> From a country which formed one of the hubs in the commerce of the Ottoman world and beyond, and which produced and exported its own food and its own textiles, Egypt was turning into a country whose economy was dominated by the production of a single commodity, raw cotton, for the global textile industry of Europe. By the eve of the First World War, cotton was to account for more than ninety-two per cent of the total value of Egypt's exports.<sup>39</sup> The changes associated with this growth and concentration in exports included an enormous growth in imports, principally of textile products and food, the extension throughout the country of a network of roads, telegraphs, police stations, railways, ports and permanent irrigation canals, a new relationship to the land, which became a privately owned commodity concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful and increasingly wealthy social class, the influx of Europeans, seeking to make fortunes, find employment, transform agricultural production or impose colonial control, the building and rebuilding of towns and cities as centres of the new European-dominated commercial life, and the migration to these urban centres of tens of thousands of the increasingly impoverished rural poor. No other place in the world in the nineteenth century was transformed on a greater scale to serve the production of a single industry.

It was exactly this kind of global transformation that world exhibitions were built to promote. The Saint-Simonists, believers in the new religion of 'social science' who had travelled to Cairo in the 1830s to begin from within Egypt their project for the industrialisation of the earth, and had miserably failed, were subsequently among the first to turn to the idea of world exhibitions. Michel Chevalier, editor of the Saint-Simonist journal *Globe*, advocated exhibitions for the same reason he advocated constructing canals at Panama and Suez: to open up the world to the free movement of commodities.<sup>40</sup> 'The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations' was the full title of the first of them, the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851. In place of the industrial exhibitions exclusive to one nation that had become popular during the first half of the century, all foreign nations and manufacturers were invited to exhibit at the Crystal Palace, reflecting the desire to promote unrestricted international trade on the part of British industrialists. What was on exhibit was the conversion of the world to modern capitalist production and exchange, and to the movements of communication and the processes of inspection on which these were thought to depend. The purpose of the exhibition was to

bring the leading men in manufactures, commerce and science into close and intimate communication with each other – establish an intelligent supervision of every branch of production by those most interested and most likely to be informed – have annual reports made in each department, and let the whole world be invited to assist



in carrying forward the vast scheme of human labour which has hitherto been prosecuted at random and without any knowledge or appreciation of the system which pervaded it.<sup>41</sup>

The 'whole world' was to be invited in to see a fantastic and yet systematic profusion of material goods, all the new necessities and desires that modern capitalism could order up and display. 'Europe is on the move to look at merchandise', wrote the French historian Taine, when France responded to the Crystal Palace Exhibition with its first Exposition Universelle in 1855.<sup>42</sup> The first Arabic account of a world exhibition, describing the next Paris exposition in 1867, was entitled simply and accurately enough, *The Universal Exhibition of Commodities*.<sup>43</sup>

It was the representatives of these commercial and manufacturing interests who organised the participation of non-European nations at the exhibitions, to draw them into modern capitalism's 'vast scheme of human labour'. The government of Ottoman Turkey, for example, received the encouragement and assistance of local European consuls and businessmen, and of organisations such as the Manchester Cotton Association, in gathering together samples of all the marketable commodities that might be produced in the Empire and shipping them to Europe for the exhibitions. The Manchester Cotton Association even promoted local exhibitions in Istanbul and Izmir, to encourage Turkish landowners to convert their fields to cotton growing. After the success of the Paris exhibition of 1855, an international exhibition was organised in Istanbul itself, to promote capitalist production and marketing.<sup>44</sup> Egypt followed a decade later, after the Paris exhibition of 1867. The occasion of the Egyptian exhibition was an international celebration to mark the opening of the Suez Canal, built under the Saint-Simonist engineer de Lesseps, which confirmed Egypt's new importance to European world trade. The exhibition took the form of a new Europeanised city, its façades hastily constructed alongside the existing quarters of Cairo, and in some cases cutting right through them, complete with public gardens, a vaudeville theatre, and an opera house for the performance of Verdi's *Aïda*. The Khedive returned the favour of the imitation medieval palace that had been constructed for his use at the Paris exhibition two years earlier, by having a palace specially built on the Nile for the Empress Eugénie, in which the rooms were made exact replicas of her private apartments in the Tuilleries.<sup>45</sup>

The rebuilding of Cairo and other Middle Eastern cities according to the principle of the exhibition was intended, therefore, like the construction of exhibitions and exhibition-like cities in Europe, to promote the global economic and political transformation I have just outlined, and to symbolise its accomplishment. In other words the new façades of the city, like the

display of commodities at the exhibition, could be taken as a series of signs or representations, as we say, of the larger economic changes ‘underneath’. The problem, however, is that the sort of thing I want to understand is this very distinction between what we see as a realm of signs or representations, and an outside or an underneath. The economic and political transformations, I shall argue, were themselves something dependent on the working of this peculiar distinction.

*Objective people*

The new world of façades and exhibits, models and simulations, is certainly to be understood in relation to the wider capitalist transformation I have been describing. ‘World exhibitions are sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish’, wrote Benjamin, associating them with that ‘theological’ effect through which Marx understood power to operate in capitalist societies.<sup>46</sup> The effect occurs when production for the market causes the ordinary things people produce to be treated as commodities – objects, that is, whose diverse meanings or values are made comparable and exchangeable, by supposing them each to represent the result of a certain quantity of an identical and abstract process that we call ‘production’. As a commodity, Marx explained, an object is treated as a mysterious ‘social hieroglyphic’ representing this imaginary productive process. It no longer represents to people the real labour and the real social lives of those who actually made it.<sup>47</sup>

Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism already suggested the central role that events like world exhibitions – and the whole industry of entertainment, the media, advertising, packaging and popular education which followed – were to play in modern, consumer capitalism. Exhibitions ‘open up a phantasmagoria that people enter to be amused’, wrote Benjamin. ‘They submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and others.’<sup>48</sup> The theory of commodity fetishism rests, however, on revealing such representations to be misrepresentations. Marx opposed to the imaginary productive processes represented by these misunderstood hieroglyphics the ‘transparent and rational form’ in which the practical relations of everyday life should present themselves.<sup>49</sup> To the mechanism of misrepresentation by which power operates, Marx opposed a representation of the way things intrinsically are, in their transparent and rational reality.

The problem with such an explanation was that, in revealing power to work through *misrepresentation*, it left representation itself unquestioned. It accepted absolutely the distinction between a realm of representations and the ‘external reality’ which such representations promise, rather than examining the novelty of continuously creating the effect of an ‘external

reality' as itself a mechanism of power. The working of this mechanism is what I will be examining in later pages of this book, but the weakness of accepting the distinction already begins to appear as soon as one asks what the 'transparent and rational' reality, which capitalist representation misrepresents, really is. The answer in Marx's case, once one lifts the veil of the commodity, or the earlier veils of religion or 'the ancient worship of nature', was of course 'material production'. Material production, wrote Marx, is 'a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature . . . thus acting upon the external world and changing it'.<sup>50</sup> Such an account, however useful, is only a particular description. As Jean Baudrillard points out, it remains itself a language, a social hieroglyphic, no less a representation, and thus no more a transparency, than the commodity fetish or the ancient worship of nature.<sup>51</sup>

The language is problematic not just because it can be shown to be a particular description, rather than reality itself. It also happens to be the very language which world exhibitions were constructed to promote, and which was to be introduced into nineteenth-century Egypt. As I will try to show, the political and economic transformation that was to be attempted in places such as Egypt required, not a Marxist conception of the human person, but a conception which shared with Marx certain common assumptions. To prepare for the trip we will be taking to Egypt for the rest of this book, it may help to end this section by considering briefly what modern Europeans had come to think a person was.

The person was now thought of as something set apart from a physical world, like the visitor to an exhibition or the worker attending a machine, as the one who observes and controls it. His own nature (I will say 'his' when dealing, here as elsewhere, with male-centred notions) was realised in being 'industrious' – in maintaining the same steady observation and control over his own physical body and will. In the labour process, wrote Marx, the worker 'opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body . . . and compels them to act in obedience to his sway . . . This subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention.'<sup>52</sup> Separated in this way from a physical world and from his own physical body, the true nature of the human person, like that of the observer at the exhibition, was to learn to be industrious, self-disciplined, and closely attentive.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a new term came into vogue for characterising this combination of detachment and close attentiveness – the word 'objective'. 'Just now we are an objective people', *The Times* wrote in

the summer of 1851, on the occasion of the Great Exhibition. 'We want to place everything we can lay our hands on under glass cases, and to stare our fill.'<sup>53</sup> The word denoted the modern sense of detachment, both physical and conceptual, of the self from an object-world – the detachment epitomised, as I have been suggesting, in the visitor to an exhibition. At the same time, the word suggested a passive curiosity, of the kind the organisers of exhibitions hoped to evoke in those who visited them. Despite their apprehension about allowing enormous numbers of the lower classes to congregate in European capitals so soon after the events of 1848, the authorities encouraged them to visit exhibitions. Workers were given permission to leave their shops and factories to attend, and manufacturers and benevolent societies subsidised the cost of their travel and accommodation. The result was an example of mass behaviour without precedent. 'Popular movements that only a few years ago would have been pronounced dangerous to the safety of the State', it was reported after the 1851 exhibition, '... have taken place not only without disorder, but also almost without crime.'<sup>54</sup> The article on 'objective people' in *The Times* was commenting on the reassuring absence of 'political passions' in the country during the exhibition. The objective attitude of the exhibition visitor, in other words, seemed to suggest not only the true nature of the modern individual, but the model of behaviour for the modern political subject.

I want to recall, finally, from my earlier discussion of the exhibition that this 'objective' isolation of the observer from an object-world, in terms of which personhood was understood, corresponded to a distinction that was now made between the material world of exhibits or representations and the meaning or plan that they represented. This too the authorities and organisers seemed to understand. In order to encourage the proper objective attitude among visitors, they made a concerted effort to provide the necessary catalogues, plans, sign-posts, guidebooks, instructions, educational talks and compilations of statistics. (Thus the Egyptian exhibit at the 1867 exhibition was accompanied by a guidebook containing an outline of the country's history – divided clearly, as was the exhibit to which it referred, into the ancient, the medieval and the modern – together with a 'notice statistique sur le territoire, la population, les forces productives, le commerce, l'effective militaire et naval, l'organisation financière, l'instruction publique, etc. de l'Egypte' compiled, appropriately enough, by the Commission Impériale in Paris.)<sup>55</sup> Such outlines, guides, tables and plans mediated between the visitor and the exhibit, by supplementing what was displayed with a structure and meaning. The seemingly separate text or plan, one might say, was what confirmed the separation of the person from the things themselves on exhibit, and of the things on exhibit from the meaning or external reality they represented.

Marx himself, although he wanted none of the accompanying political passivity, conceived of an essential separation between the person and an object-world in the same way, in terms of a structure or plan existing apart from things themselves. What distinguished man from 'external' nature was his ability to make an interior mental map. Like the architect, as Marx explained in a well-known phrase, man 'raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality'.<sup>56</sup> Like the visitor to the exhibition, that is, his separation from an external object-world was something mediated by a non-material plan or structure.

This notion of an 'imaginary structure' that exists before and apart from something called 'external reality', in the same way as an exhibit or a plan stands apart from the real world it represents, is what gives shape to the experience and understanding of objective people. It governs, in other words, the strange anthropology in which we inhabitants of the world-as-exhibition believe. In order to anthropologise a little further our thinking about the person and the world, I am now going to move on to consider what happened to the nineteenth-century European who travelled to the Middle East. The Orient, after all, was the great 'external reality' of modern Europe – the most common object of its exhibitions, the great signified. By the late 1860s Thomas Cook, who had launched the modern tourist industry by organising excursion trains with the Midland Railway Company to visit the Crystal Palace exhibition, was offering excursions to visit not exhibits of the Orient but the real thing.<sup>57</sup> Yet as we will see, European visitors would arrive in the Orient looking for the same kind of structure 'raised in the imagination'. They would come expecting to find a world where a structure or meaning exists somehow apart, as in an exhibition, from the 'reality' of things-in-themselves.

### **The East itself**

'So here we are in Egypt', wrote Gustave Flaubert, in a letter from Cairo in January 1850. 'What can I say about it all? What can I write you? As yet I am scarcely over the initial bedazzlement . . . each detail reaches out to grip you; it pinches you; and the more you concentrate on it the less you grasp the whole. Then gradually all this becomes harmonious and the pieces fall into place of themselves, in accordance with the laws of perspective. But the first days, by God, it is such a bewildering chaos of colours . . .'<sup>58</sup> Flaubert experiences Cairo as a visual turmoil. At first it is indescribable, except as disorder. What can he write about the place? That it is a chaos of colour and detail, which refuses to compose itself as a picture. The disorienting experience of a Cairo street, in other words, with its arguments in unknown languages, strangers who brush past in strange clothes, unusual colours,

and unfamiliar sounds and smells, is expressed as an absence of pictorial order. There is no distance, this means, between oneself and the view, and the eyes are reduced to organs of touch: 'each detail reaches out to grip you'. Without a separation of the self from a picture, moreover, it becomes impossible to grasp 'the whole'. The experience of the world as a picture set up before the subject is linked, as we will see, to the unusual conception of the world as a limited totality, something that forms a bounded structure or system. Subsequently, coming to terms with this disorientation and recovering one's self-possession is expressed again in pictorial terms. The world arranges itself into a picture and achieves a visual order, 'in accordance with the laws of perspective'.

If Europe, as I have been suggesting, was the world-as-exhibition, what happened to Europeans who went abroad – to visit places whose images invariably they had already seen in pictures and exhibitions? How did they experience the real world such images had depicted, when the reality was a place whose life was not yet lived as if the world were an exhibition? They were confused of course, but perhaps the key to their confusion was this: although they thought of themselves as moving from the pictures to the real thing, they went on trying – like Flaubert – to grasp the real thing as a picture. How could they do otherwise, since they took reality itself to be a picture? The real is grasped in terms of a distinction between a picture and what it represents, so nothing else would have been, quite literally, thinkable. Brought up within what they thought of as a representational world, they took representation to be a universal condition. Thus they set about trying to describe the Orient as though it were an exhibition – a delapidated and mismanaged one of course, indeed an exhibition of its own delapidation and mismanagement. What else could it be taken to represent?

Among European writers who travelled to the Middle East in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, one very frequently finds the experience of its strangeness expressed in terms of the problem of forming a picture. It was as though to make sense of it meant to stand back and make a drawing or take a photograph of it; which for many of them actually it did. 'Every year that passes', an Egyptian wrote, 'you see thousands of Europeans travelling all over the world, and everything they come across they make a picture of.'<sup>59</sup> Writers from Europe wanted to make pictures in the same way. They wanted to portray what they saw in words with the same chemically-etched accuracy, and the same optical detachment, as the daguerreotype or the photographic apparatus, that 'instrument of patience' as Gérard de Nerval described it, '... which, destroying illusions, opposes to each figure the mirror of truth'.<sup>60</sup> Flaubert travelled in Egypt on a photographic mission with Maxime du Camp, the results of which were expected to be 'quite special in character', it was remarked at the Institut de France,

‘thanks to the aid of this modern travelling companion, efficient, rapid, and always scrupulously exact’.<sup>61</sup> The exact correspondence of the image to reality would provide a new, almost mechanical kind of certainty. The publication in 1858 of the first general collection of photographs of the Middle East, Francis Frith’s *Egypt and Palestine, Photographed and Described*, would be ‘an experiment in Photography . . . of surpassing value’, it was announced in the *Art Journal*, ‘for we will *know* that we see things exactly as they are’.<sup>62</sup>

Like the photographer, the writer wanted to reproduce a picture of things ‘exactly as they are’, of ‘the East itself in its vital actual reality’.<sup>63</sup> Flaubert and Nerval were preceded in Egypt by Edward Lane, whose famous *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* was published in 1835. The book’s ‘singular power of description and minute accuracy’ made it, in the words of his nephew, the Orientalist Stanley Poole, ‘the most perfect picture of a people’s life that has ever been written’. ‘Very few men’, added his great-nephew, the Orientalist Stanley Lane-Poole, ‘have possessed in equal degree the power of minutely describing a scene or a monument, so that the pencil might almost restore it without a fault after the lapse of years . . . The objects stand before you as you read, and this not by the use of imaginative language, but by the plain simple description.’<sup>64</sup> Lane, in fact, did not begin as a writer but as a professional artist and engraver, and had first travelled to Egypt in 1825 with a new apparatus called the camera lucida, a drawing device with a prism that projected an exact image of the object on to paper. He had planned to publish the drawings he made with this device and the accompanying descriptions in an eight-volume work entitled ‘An Exhaustive Description of Egypt’, but had been unable to find a publisher whose printing techniques could reproduce the minute and mechanical accuracy of the drawings. Subsequently, he published the part dealing with contemporary Egypt, rewritten as the ethnographic description of the modern Egyptians.<sup>65</sup>

### *The point of view*

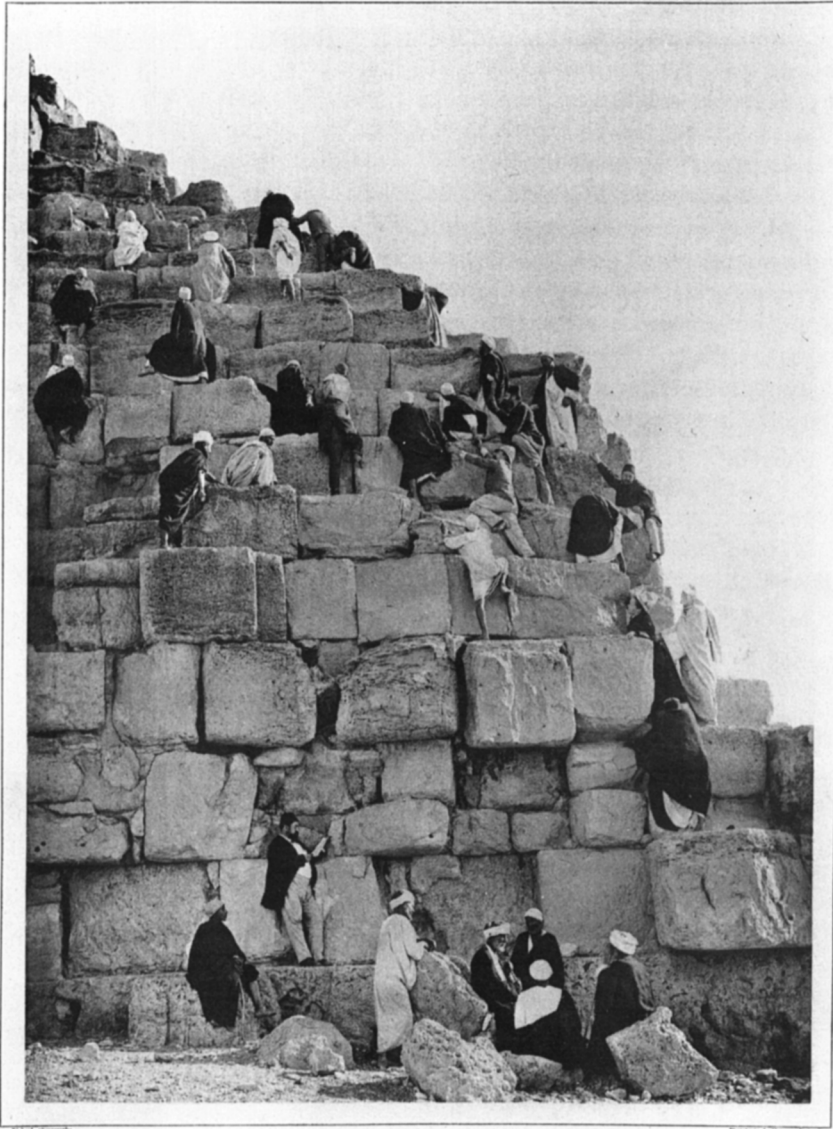
Besides the apparent accuracy of representation of these mechanical ‘mirrors of truth’, writers also sought their optical detachment. Like the exhibition, the daguerreotype or photograph presented the world as a panorama, a picture-world set apart from its observer. The predecessor of the photographer was in many cases the panorama painter, men like David Roberts and Robert Ker Porter who travelled to the Middle East in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. They returned to produce not just prints or easel pictures but enormous panoramic paintings, often with moving shadows and mechanical animations, which the general public came

to see in places of entertainment such as the Leicester Square Panorama.<sup>66</sup> Daguerre himself, the inventor of the photographic process, was a panorama painter in Paris (where he had pioneered the technique of changing shadows known as the diorama). In 1839 his diorama burnt down, and it was that year that he announced the invention of the daguerreotype.<sup>67</sup>

The problem, then, for the daguerreotypist visiting the Middle East, or for the writer who desired the same accuracy of representation, was to separate oneself from the world and thus constitute it as a panorama. This required what was now called a 'point of view', a position set apart and outside. Edward Lane lived while he was in Cairo near one of the city's gates, outside which there was a large hill with a tower and military telegraph on top. This elevated position commanded 'a most magnificent view of the city and suburbs and the citadel', Lane wrote. 'Soon after my arrival I made a very elaborate drawing of the scene, with the camera lucida. From no other spot can so good a view of the metropolis . . . be obtained.'<sup>68</sup> Such spots, however, were difficult to find. Besides the military observation tower used by Lane, visitors to the Middle East would appropriate whatever buildings and monuments were available in order to obtain the necessary viewpoint. The Great Pyramid at Giza had now become a viewing platform. Teams of Bedouin were organised to heave and push the writer or tourist to the top, where two more Bedouin would carry the European on their shoulders to all four corners, to observe the view.<sup>69</sup> At the end of the century an Egyptian novel satirised the westernising pretensions among members of the Egyptian upper middle class, by having one such character spend a day climbing the pyramids at Giza, to see the view.<sup>70</sup> The minaret presented itself similarly to even the most respectable European as a viewing tower, from which to sneak a panoptic gaze over a Muslim town. 'The mobbing I got at *Shoomlo*', complained Jeremy Bentham on his visit to the Middle East, 'only for taking a peep at the town from a thing they call a *minaret* . . . has cancelled any claims they might have had upon me for the dinner they gave me at the *divan*, had it been better than it was.'<sup>71</sup>

Bentham can remind us of one more similarity between writer and camera, and of what it meant, therefore, to grasp the world as though it were a picture or exhibition. The point of view was not just a place set apart, outside the world or above it. It was ideally a position from where, like the authorities in the panopticon, one could see and yet not be seen. The photographer, invisible beneath his black cloth as he eyed the world through his camera's gaze, in this respect typified the kind of presence desired by the European in the Middle East, whether as tourist, writer or indeed, as we will see, as colonial power.<sup>72</sup> The ordinary European tourist, dressed (according to the advice in Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Lower and Upper Egypt*, already in its seventh edition by 1888) in either 'a common felt helmet or





2 Giza: climbing the Great Pyramid.

wide-awake, with a turban of white muslin wound around it' or alternatively a pith helmet, together with a blue or green veil and 'coloured-glass spectacles with gauze sides', possessed the same invisible gaze, the same ability to see without being seen.<sup>73</sup> It was no wonder that an Egyptian writer had to explain, as I mentioned, that one of the beliefs of the European was that the gaze had no effect. To see without being seen confirmed one's separation from the world, and corresponded at the same time to a position of power. Certain of the more Europeanised members of the country's Turkish ruling elite, such as Adham Pasha, whom we will encounter in a later chapter as the man who introduced into Egypt a modern system of schooling based on constant surveillance, began to wear green- or blue-coloured spectacles with gauze sides when they went on tours of inspection.<sup>74</sup> By the 1860s even the Khedive himself travelled the country wearing coloured glasses. When the first satirical political journal appeared in Egypt in 1877, attacking the power of the Europeans in the country and ridiculing their Turkish collaborators, it was shut down almost immediately by the government and its editor deported. It had called itself *Abu al-nazzara al-zarqa*, the man in blue-coloured spectacles.<sup>75</sup>

The writer shared with the authorities this desire to see without being seen. The representation of the Orient, in its attempt to be detached and objective, would seek to eliminate from the picture the presence of the European observer. Indeed to represent something as Oriental, as Edward Said has argued, one sought to excise the European presence altogether. 'Many thanks for the local details you sent me', wrote Gautier to Nerval in Cairo, who was supplying him with first-hand material for his Oriental scenarios for the Paris Opéra. 'But how the devil was I to have included among the walk-on's of the Opéra these Englishmen dressed in raincoats, with their quilted cotton hats and their green veils to protect themselves against ophthalmia?'<sup>76</sup> Representation was not to represent the voyeur, as the Algerian scholar Malek Alloula has described the colonial presence in a study of colonial postcards, the seeing eye that made representation possible. To establish the objectness of the Orient, as something set apart from the European presence, required that the presence itself, ideally, become invisible.

On the other hand, however, while setting themselves apart in this way from a world-as-picture, Europeans also wanted to experience it as though it were the real thing. Like the visitor to an exhibition, travellers wanted to immerse themselves in the Orient and 'touch with their fingers a strange civilisation'. Edward Lane wrote in his journal of wanting 'to throw myself entirely among strangers, . . . to adopt their language, their customs, and their dress'.<sup>77</sup> This kind of immersion was to make possible the profusion of ethnographic detail in writers such as Lane, and produce in their work the

effect of a direct and immediate experience of the Orient. In Lane, and even more so in writers like Flaubert and Nerval, the desire for this immediacy of the real became a desire for direct and physical contact with the exotic, the bizarre, and the erotic.

There was a contradiction, therefore, between the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and experience it directly; a contradiction which world exhibitions, with their profusion of exotic detail and yet their clear distinction between visitor and exhibit, were built to accommodate and overcome. The problem in a place like Cairo, which had not been built as an exhibition, was to fulfil this double desire. On his first day in Cairo, Gérard de Nerval met a 'painter' equipped with a daguerreotype, who 'suggested that I come with him to choose a point of view'. Agreeing to accompany him, Nerval decided 'to have myself taken to the most labyrinthine point of the city, abandon the painter to his tasks, and then wander off haphazardly, without interpreter or companion'. But within the labyrinth of the city, where Nerval hoped to immerse himself in the exotic and finally experience 'without interpreter' the real Orient, they were unable to find any point from which to take the picture. They followed one crowded, twisting street after another, looking without success for a suitable viewpoint, until eventually the profusion of noises and people subsided and the streets became 'more silent, more dusty, more deserted, the mosques fallen in decay and here and there a building in collapse'. In the end they found themselves outside the city, 'somewhere in the suburbs, on the other side of the canal from the main sections of the town'. Here at last, amid the silence and the ruins, the photographer was able to set up his device and portray the city.<sup>78</sup>

It was Edward Lane who found the ideal device for meeting this double demand, to immerse oneself and yet stand apart. The device was that of hiding beneath a deliberate disguise, rather like the tourist in coloured spectacles or the photographer beneath his cloth. In order 'to escape exciting, in strangers, any suspicion of . . . being a person who had no right to intrude among them', Lane explained, he adopted the dress and feigned the religious belief of the local Muslim inhabitants of Cairo. The dissimulation allowed him to gain the confidence of his Egyptian informants, making it possible to observe them in their own presence without himself being observed. His ethnographic writing seems to acquire the authority of this presence, this direct experience of the real. But at the same time, as Said points out, in a preface to his ethnography Lane carefully explains the deception to the European reader, thus assuring the reader of his absolute distance from the Egyptians. The distance assured by the deception is what gives his description its 'objectivity'.<sup>79</sup>

The curious double position of the European, as participant-observer, makes it possible to experience the Orient as though one were the visitor to an exhibition. Unaware that the Orient has not been arranged as an exhibition, the visitor carries out the characteristic cognitive manoeuvre of the modern subject, who separates himself from an object-world and observes it from a position that is invisible and set apart. From there, as Pierre Bourdieu says of the modern anthropologist or social scientist, one transfers into the object the principles of one's relation to the object and 'conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone'. The world is grasped, inevitably, as though it were 'a representation (in the sense of idealist philosophy, but also as used in painting or the theatre)', and people's lives appear as no more than 'stage parts . . . or the implementing of plans'.<sup>80</sup> I would add to what Bourdieu says that the anthropologist, like the tourist and the Orientalist writer, had come to the Middle East from Europe, a world as we have seen that had been set up more and more to demand this kind of cognitive manoeuvre, a world where objectivism was increasingly built-in. They came from a place, in other words, in which ordinary people were learning to live as tourists or anthropologists, addressing an object-world as the representation of something, and grasping personhood as the playing of a cultural stage part or the implementation of a plan.

*Traces of the East*

With this in mind, I want to introduce what will seem at first a contradictory argument. The Europeans, I have said, arrived in the Middle East without realising that they had left the world-as-exhibition. On the other hand, however, they came looking for a reality which invariably they had already seen in an exhibition. They thought of themselves in other words as actually moving from the exhibit to the real thing. This was literally the case with Théophile Gautier, who lived in Paris writing his Orientalist scenarios for the Opéra-Comique and championing the cause of Orientalist painting. He finally set off for Egypt in 1869 after being inspired to see the real thing by a visit to the Egyptian exhibit at the 1867 Exposition Universelle.<sup>81</sup> But in this respect Gautier was no exception. Europeans in general arrived in the Orient after seeing plans and copies – in pictures, exhibitions and books – of which they were seeking the original; and their purpose was always explained in these terms.

Edward Lane, for example, was inspired to travel to Egypt after seeing the replicas and paintings on display at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. David Roberts, who had begun his career as a set designer at the Drury Lane Theatre, went to the Orient as an accomplished panorama painter and aspir-

ing artist in search of the originals of theatre sets and panoramas he had already produced. Both Roberts and Lane were also inspired to visit Egypt by the famous *Description de l'Égypte*, the twenty-two volume work of French artists and scholars who had set up camp with the French army during Napoleon's occupation of Egypt, published by the French government between 1809 and 1822. And both of them set off declaring that their purpose was to correct the 'inaccuracies' of the *Description*, which somehow they knew to exist before even seeing the 'original' it claimed to represent.<sup>82</sup> So, I am arguing that on the one hand Europeans in the Middle East were unaware they had left the world-as-exhibition, but on the other they conceived of themselves as having moved from a mere representation to the real thing.

The contradiction can be resolved, I think, by recalling the paradoxical nature of the world-as-exhibition. The exhibition persuades people that the world is divided into two fundamental realms – the representation and the original, the exhibit and the external reality, the text and the world. Everything is organised as if this were the case. But 'reality', it turns out, means that which can be represented, that which presents itself as an exhibit before an observer. The so-called real world 'outside' is something experienced and grasped only as a series of further representations, an extended exhibition. Visitors to the Orient conceived of themselves as travelling to 'the East itself in its vital actual reality'. But, as we saw, the reality they sought there was simply that which could be photographed or accurately represented, that which presented itself as a picture of something before an observer. A picture here refers not just to a visual illustration, but to what stands apart as something distinct from the subject and is grasped in terms of a corresponding distinction between representation and reality. In the end the European tried to grasp the Orient as though it were an exhibition of itself.

There were two kinds of consequence. First, as I have already suggested, since the Middle East had not yet been organised representationally, Europeans found the task of representing it almost impossible and the results disappointing. 'Think of it no more!' wrote Nerval to Théophile Gautier, of the Cairo they had dreamed of describing. 'That Cairo lies beneath the ashes and dirt, . . . dust-laden and dumb.' Nothing encountered in those Oriental streets quite matched up to the reality they had seen represented in Paris. Not even the cafés looked genuine. 'I really wanted to set the scene for you here', Nerval explained, in an attempt to describe the typical Cairene street, 'but . . . it is only in Paris that one finds cafés so Oriental.' His disappointment resulted from the failure to construct representations of the city that were to serve, as so often, very practical purposes. As I mentioned, he was

supplying Gautier with descriptions that could be reproduced as stage sets and pantomime acts for the Paris Opéra. Nerval finally despaired completely of finding 'real Egypt', the Cairo that could be represented. 'I will find at the Opéra the real Cairo, . . . the Orient that escapes me.' In the end only the Orient one finds in Paris, the simulation of what is itself a series of representations to begin with, can offer a satisfying spectacle. As he moved on towards the towns of Palestine, Nerval remembered Cairo as something no more solid or real than the painted scenery of a theatre set. 'Just as well that the six months I spent there are over; it is already nothing, I have seen so many places collapse behind my steps, like stage sets; what do I have left from them? An image as confused as that of a dream: the best of what one finds there, I already knew by heart.'<sup>83</sup>

The second consequence was that the Orient more and more became a place that one 'already knew by heart' on arrival. 'Familiar to me from days of early childhood are the forms of the Egyptian pyramids', wrote Alexander Kinglake in *Eöthen*. 'Now, as I approached them from the banks of the Nile, I had no print, no picture before me, and yet the old shapes were there; there was no change: they were as I had always known them.' Gautier, for his part, wrote that if the visitor to Egypt 'has long inhabited in his dreams' a certain town, he will carry in his head 'an imaginary map, difficult indeed to erase even when he finds himself facing the reality'. His own map of Cairo, he explained, 'built with the materials of *A Thousand and One Nights*, arranges itself around Marilhat's *Place de l'Ezbekieh*, a remarkable and violent painting . . . ' The attentive European, wrote Flaubert in Cairo, 'rediscovers here much more than he discovers.'<sup>84</sup>

The Orient was something one only ever rediscovered. To be grasped representationally, as the picture of something, it was inevitably to be grasped as the reoccurrence of a picture one had seen before, as a map one already carried in one's head, as the reiteration of an earlier description. The 'traces of travel brought home from the East', as Kinglake called such reiterations, were in such profusion by mid-century that a reviewer in Tait's *Edinburgh Magazine* complained in 1852 about 'these all but daily Oriental productions . . . There they are; the same Arabs, camels, deserts, tombs and jackals that we journeyed with, rode on, traversed, dived into, and cursed respectively, only a week ago, with some other traveller.'<sup>85</sup> And besides the books there were the paintings, the photographs, the spectacles, the panoramas and the exhibitions. To describe the Orient, which refused to provide a point of view and to present itself, became more and more a process of redescribing these representations. How far this process went was illustrated by Gautier, the champion of Orientalist art, when he was finally inspired by the world exhibition, as I mentioned, to leave Paris and visit Cairo to see the real thing.

The account of Egypt he then published began with a long chapter entitled 'Vue générale'. This took the form of a description, in great detail, not of Egypt but of the Egyptian exhibit at the 1867 Paris exhibition.<sup>86</sup>

The representation of the Orient obeyed, inevitably, this problematic and unrecognised logic, a logic determined not by any intellectual failure of the European mind but by its search for the certainty of representation – for an effect called 'reality'. Europeans like Edward Lane had begun the drawing up of their 'exhaustive description of Egypt', already determined to correct the earlier work of the French scientific mission's *Description de l'Égypte*. Later writers would then take themselves to the library of the French Institute in Cairo, and draw from and add to this body of description. Gérard de Nerval, collecting the material in Egypt he later published as *Voyage en Orient*, his life's major prose work, saw more of the library than of the rest of the country. After two months in Cairo, more than half way through his stay, he wrote to his father that he had not even visited the pyramids. 'Moreover I have no desire to see any place until after I have adequately informed myself from the books and memoirs', he explained. 'At the Société Égyptienne I have found a collection of almost all the works, ancient and modern, that have been published on the country, and as yet I have read only a very small part of them.' Six weeks later he wrote again, saying that he was leaving the country even though he had not yet ventured outside Cairo and its environs.<sup>87</sup>

As a result the bulk of *Voyage en Orient*, like so much of the literature of Orientalism, turned out to be a reworking or direct repetition of earlier descriptions, in Nerval's case mostly from Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. Such repetition and reworking is what Edward Said has referred to as the citationary nature of Orientalism, its writings added to one another 'as a restorer of old sketches might put a series of them together for the cumulative picture they implicitly represent'. The Orient is put together as this 're-presentation', and what is represented is not a real place but 'a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these'.<sup>88</sup> The 'East itself' is not a place, despite the exhibition's promise, but a further series of representations, each one reannouncing the reality of the Orient but doing no more than referring backwards and forwards to all the others. It is the chain of references that produces the effect of the place. Robert Graves remarks wryly on this effect in *Goodbye to All That*, when he disembarks at Port Said in the 1920s to take up a job at the Egyptian University and is met by an English friend: 'I still felt seasick', he writes, 'but knew that I was in the East because he began talking about Kipling.'<sup>89</sup>

*No plan, no anything*

There is an ambiguity here, which must be cleared up – or at least acknowledged – before we can move on into the following chapters and begin to consider the politics of nineteenth-century Egypt. In claiming that the ‘East itself’ is not a place, am I saying simply that Western representations created a distorted image of the real Orient; or am I saying that the ‘real Orient’ does not exist, and that there are no realities but only images and representations?<sup>90</sup> My answer is that the question is a bad one, and that the question itself is what needs examining. We need to understand how the West had come to live as though the world were divided in this way into two: into a realm of mere representations and a realm of ‘the real’; into exhibitions and an external reality; into an order of mere models, descriptions or copies, and an order of the original. We need to understand, in other words, how these notions of a realm of ‘the real’, ‘the outside’, ‘the original’, were in this sense effects of the world’s seeming division into two. We need to understand, moreover, how this distinction corresponded to another division of the world, into the West and the non-West; and thus how Orientalism was not just a particular instance of the general historical problem of how one culture portrays another, but something essential to the peculiar nature of the modern world. Finally we need to understand the political nature of these kinds of division, by understanding them as techniques both of order and of truth.

Herman Melville, who visited the Middle East in the winter of 1856–57, felt the usual need to find a point of view and experienced the usual difficulties. Rather than an exhibition of something, Cairo seemed like some temporary market or carnival – ‘one booth and Bartholomew Fair’, he called it. Like Gérard de Nerval and others before him, Melville wrote of wanting to withdraw from the ‘maze’ of streets, in order to see the place as a picture or plan. Visiting Constantinople, he complained in his journal that there was ‘no plan to streets. Perfect labyrinth. Narrow. Close, shut in. If one could but get *up* aloft . . . But no. No names to the streets . . . No numbers. No anything.’<sup>91</sup> Like Nerval, Melville could find no point of view within the city, and therefore no picture. What this meant, in turn, was that there seemed to be no plan. As I suggested earlier when discussing world exhibitions, the separation of an observer from an object-world was something a European experienced in terms of a code or plan. He expected there to be something that was somehow set apart from ‘things themselves’ as a guide, a sign, a map, a text, or a set of instructions about how to proceed. But in the Middle Eastern city nothing stood apart and addressed itself in this way to the outsider, to the observing subject. There were no names to the streets and no



street signs, no open spaces with imposing façades, and no maps.<sup>92</sup> The city refused to offer itself in this way as a representation of something, because it had not been built as one. It had not been arranged, that is, to effect the presence of some separate plan or meaning.

Already in the 1830s, however, Emile-T. Lubbert, former director of the Paris Opéra and Opéra-Comique, had been appointed by the Egyptian government as director of *fêtes et divertissements*.<sup>93</sup> Entertainments alone, of course, were not enough. 'What Egypt like the rest of the Levant has never possessed is order', explained Charles Lambert, a Saint-Simonist social scientist and engineer who set up and directed an Ecole Polytechnique in Cairo modelled on the great school in Paris, in a report to Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Governor of Egypt.<sup>94</sup> 'You have acquired great power', wrote Jeremy Bentham approvingly in his own letter to the Pasha in 1828. '... but it remains to determine the plan.'<sup>95</sup>

To colonise Egypt, to construct a modern kind of power, it would be necessary 'to determine the plan'. A plan or framework would create the appearance of objectness that Melville found lacking, by seeming to separate an object-world from its observer. This sort of framework is not just a plan that colonialism would bring to Egypt, but an effect it would build in. As the following chapters will show, the colonial process would try and re-order Egypt to appear as a world enframed. Egypt was to be ordered up as something object-like. In other words it was to be made picture-like and legible, rendered available to political and economic calculation. Colonial power required the country to become readable, like a book, in our own sense of such a term.

A framework appears to order things, but also to circumscribe and exclude. As we will see later on, like the perimeter walls that seemed to exclude the 'real world' from the world exhibition, a framework sets up the impression of something beyond the picture-world it enframes. It promises a truth that lies outside its world of material representation. To 'determine the plan' is to build-in an effect of order and an effect of truth.