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To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to offer this review of Marta Filipová's *Czechoslovakia at the World's Fairs: Behind the Façade* (Central European University Press, 2024) as part of her habilitation review. I do not know Dr. Filipová well and have never co-authored with her. *Czechoslovakia at the World's Fairs* makes a significant contribution to the history of interwar Czechoslovakia and interwar Europe more broadly. It offers an ambitious, wide-ranging interpretation of Czechoslovak world fair exhibitions, beginning with the 1922 Rio de Janeiro world fair and concluding with the 1939 San Francisco and 1940 New York exhibitions, which took place after the Czechoslovak state ceased to exist. Throughout the book, Filipová explores how the Czechoslovak state and "exhibition elites" sought to portray, and garner international legitimacy, for their new state abroad. She also highlights the economic aspects of these exhibitions engaging in fruitful discussions of the less visible participants and creators of the exhibits and the ways in which eugenics and even European imperialism found their way into the ways in which Czechoslovak exhibitions were designed, presented, and experienced.

World fairs, as Claude Lévi-Strauss might say, are "good to think with" and, as a result, have been the focus of much scholarship of late. I am not an expert in this field, but my sense from the book is that Dr. Filipová knows the field well and has engaged with it fruitfully. As Filipová points out, while scholars have studied well Czechoslovak participation in post-World War II world fairs – most notably the 1958 Brussels World Fair – there has been no sustained

study of Czechoslovakia's interwar exhibitions. The focus on Czechoslovakia is well considered, and not just because of the country's successes. (At the 1937 Paris World Fair, only the Soviet Union and Germany received more prizes than Czechoslovakia.) The newly formed state, similarly to other successor states in Europe, sought to define itself to the world. For Czechoslovakia, this meant emphasizing Bohemia's industrial advancement, which was balanced by a celebration of folk customs and the more "primitive" peoples to the east of Bohemia, which also served to bolster Czechoslovakia's historical legitimacy and the fiction of a "Czechoslovak" nationality. It was also meant to remind the world of Czechoslovak democracy and its liberator president. (Most exhibits brought visitors into a large entrance hall with a painting of Prague and a bust of President Masaryk.) At the same time, organizers debated about what constituted "modern" Czechoslovak art. Their decisions contributed to the establishment of the interwar canon, including works from the Mánes Association of Fine Artists Mánes and Slovak landscapists. The world fair also represented an opportunity to tout tourism to Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovak products such as Detva textiles, Moser glass, Pilsner beer and Baťa shoes.

As Filipová writes, "National pavilions at world's fairs, including the Czechoslovak ones, were not condensed versions of the world around them; they were designed to create new worlds that interpreted the past, selected the present and constructed the future." (247) Here she invokes Zygmunt Bauman to show how exhibition elites "gathered the seeming chaos of the present, sorted it, classified it and explained it." (3) One way they did this was through eugenics' inspired thinking about the body and classifications of Czechoslovakia's various ethnic groups. Behind the façade, however, were workers, especially among the Czechoslovak diaspora at the Chicago World's Fair, and women, who, while excluded from leadership positions, not only made the exhibitions possible but quietly inserted their own meanings into the exhibits. The chapters

covering these two topics, in particular, are highly original and demonstrate Dr. Filipová's impressive scholarly range. The book merits much praise and, as such, I recommend that it be accepted for habilitation and promotion.

Sincerely,

Chad Bryant