

ARTICLES

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HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A NEW FORM OF CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE'S RELATION TO THE PAST

ABSTRACT

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This paper looks at the phenomenon of historical re-enactment from the perspective of contemporaneity (postmodernity *sensu* Bauman 1996; 2000 or late modernity *sensu* Giddens 2002). I believe that in order to capture the unique nature of historical re-enactment and the motivations behind people's engagement in the re-creation and experience of the past, historical re-enactment should be examined in a broader, cultural and social framework. The changes in the contemporary people's attitude to the past and the transformations in the forms of transmitting knowledge about the past provide the context for my study. From this perspective, this paper proposes exploring the phenomenon of historical re-enactment using selected descriptive categories of post-modernity: (1) as an expression of the search for community and the construction of individual and group identity; (2) as an expression of the change in people's attitude towards the past, including, (a) the manifestation of the democratisation of the past, a form of alternative history; (b) a strive for personal, sensual and unmediated contact with the past and its interpretations, and (c) the commercialisation of the past; (3) as a phenomenon suspended between the search for authenticity and the inevitable existence in the world of simulacra; (4) as a formula of modern education about the past; (5) as a hobby/play; (6) as a formula of the new spirituality. In the conclusions, I argue that historical re-enactment is a characteristic element of contemporary historical culture and one of the forms of collective memory of present-day society.

Keywords: historical re-enactment, the postmodern attitude to the past, alternative histories, sensuous contact with the past, commercialisation of the past

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INTRODUCTION

Historical re-enactment is an important phenomenon “in the context of constructing images of the past present in the social consciousness” (Woźniak 2010, 248). On the one hand, it can be identified with historical memory and, on the other, with popular culture (Skórzyńska 2010, 195; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2015, 89). Historical re-enactment is an increasingly common form of contact between contemporary people and the past which can be observed not only in the number of staged recreations of historical events or the number of people involved in re-enactment activities, but also in the diversity of the movement, which testifies to its dynamic and changing nature, as well as its progressing professionalisation.

This paper seeks to present historical re-enactment as an element of broader social, cultural or economic processes observed in the contemporary world and a form of response to the emergence of a new kind of sensitivity (visual sensitivity *sensu* Lash 2004), historical consciousness or aesthetic categories. Indirectly, it also looks at the goals and motives of those who engage in re-enactment activities. Since the formal or objective aspects of historical re-enactment have been thoroughly examined elsewhere (e.g., Radtchenko 2006; Bogacki 2008; 2010a; 2010b; McCalman and Pickering 2010; Szlendak *et al.* 2012; Górewicz 2013; Kobiałka 2014; Gardela 2016; Olechnicki *et al.* 2016), I believe there is no need to duplicate the analysis here.

This article argues that historical re-enactment, and more precisely what is behind this phenomenon, is a characteristic feature of the postmodern (late modern) world in a double sense – it could have originated in the conditions this world produces and it is a response to the multi-level demand created by the contemporary world. In such a perspective, the nature of historical re-enactment is social and cultural and thus the phenomenon should be explored with the use of social and cultural categories.

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A POSTMODERN PHENOMENON (?)

Generally speaking, the term historical re-enactment denotes all actions recreating certain facts and events from the past – historical events, recreations of battles or scenes from everyday life, using artefacts produced nowadays and appropriate visualisation – costumes, situations or spectacles (Regiewicz 2014, 178). As a widespread form of presenting and popularising knowledge about the past and a way of experiencing and making the past present nowadays, historical re-enactment has increasingly been shaping people’s knowledge and ideas of bygone times. Re-enactment activities refer to the periods of the recent past, a traditional domain of history, and to the Middle Ages, but also to more dis-

tant times, the subject of archaeological studies. Historical re-enactment covers a variety of activities, inextricably intertwined and complementing one another. These include: (1) the production of items: manufacturing replicas of artefacts, weapons, historical costumes, etc.; (2) the re-enactment of the social life of various past human groups (customs); (3) historical staging, focusing on recreating specific events from the past (Kwiatkowski 2008, 113). Therefore, historical re-enactment activities concentrate mainly on two important issues: recreating past material culture and visualising the past reality. This is largely possible through impersonating figures from the past, participation in re-enactments and staging certain events, customs, etc., using contemporarily produced copies of artefacts (Pawleta 2016, 265).

Historical re-enactments are not phenomena typical merely of present times. The practice of recreating historical events has a long history dating back to ancient times. There are, however, two differences between these recreations and contemporary re-enactments (see Kwiatkowski 2008, 112-113; Skórzyńska 2010, 195). First of all, the aim of traditional spectacles was not to faithfully recreate the past, but they were either propaganda or employed to present the then problems. The decisive factor in the fact that they can be classified as historical re-enactments was a proper clothing, i.e. dressing up in historical costumes. The main purpose of contemporary recreations – and we shall not discuss here whether is possible to present the past objectively through them – is “to recreate the past for itself, to show the truth about a specific moment in the past” (Kwiatkowski 2008, 112), to stage the past on the basis of current scholarly findings. Secondly, these performances differ in scale. Occasional top-down shows organised in the past did not take the form of a bottom-up social movement as it is the case today. Historical re-enactment is a spontaneous activity, undertaken by a fast-growing number of groups and associations, covering various fields of collective life and forms of re-enactments.

It is difficult to estimate the number of those engaged in historical re-enactment in Poland, but at the heart of the movement are people of varying ages, education and motivations, all interested in the past. Most initiators and often long-time leaders of the movement once studied history or archaeology or, having developed their passion for years, have gained the status of amateur experts in sources, technologies, techniques of warfare or realities of everyday life of the reconstructed periods (Burszta 2012, 153). The incentives that incline a growing number of people to engage in the historical re-enactment movement are of diverse and individual nature, and as such belong to the sphere of individual expectations and interests. Tomasz Szlendak (2012, 13-22) distinguished twelve such motivations. These are as follows: fascination with the military; escape from the dullness of everyday life; tradition and scholarly fascination with the achievements of ancestors; patriotism; love of the local heritage, little homeland, place of residence; initiation; relationships and ties; extreme sport; prestige and influence; money; taking away from evil and spending free time.

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGES IN CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TO THE PAST

Modern times have brought a whole new quality in the perception of the past. Transformations in social attitudes towards the past can be traced back on the basis of several interrelated elements: (1) forgetting the past, the erosion of the significance of the past, a decline in the interest in history and shortening the time horizon to the nearest past; (2) a simultaneous increase in the importance of memory/the past in public life; (3) democratisation of the access to the past and its privatisation, denoting the tendency to create individualised visions of the past; (4) the conviction of contemporary people that it is possible to have a direct insight into the past through its sensual experience; and (5) commercialisation of the past and cultural heritage related to the transformation of content referring to the past into market products in the form of goods, services and experience (based on: Szpociński 2007; 2010; 2012; Kwiatkowski 2008, 39-40; Szačka 2009; 2014; for more, see Pawleta 2016, 39-75). The above-mentioned factors have transformed the attitudes and expectations of people towards the past, and also led to the revision of the hierarchy of goals, strategies and ways of educating and popularising the knowledge about the past.

Below, I propose the reading of the space of historical re-enactments using selected descriptive categories of postmodernism. Referring to some arbitrarily selected issues, they are nevertheless closely interrelated. I do not seek to dissect one main interpretation trail that would allow me to determine the significance of historical re-enactment, neither do I aim to carry out a systematic analysis of the phenomenon. By indicating the multiplicity of threads and showing how they overlap, I simply hope for a more comprehensive, multi-faceted interpretation of historical re-enactment. Every proposition discussed in the paper can be considered autotelic, interesting in itself, each deserves to be explored in a separate, extensive study.

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT MOVEMENT AS AN EXPRESSION OF A SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY AND CONSTRUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP IDENTITY

The alienation of a human being in the contemporary world, the feeling of 'uprooting' or detaching of an individual from his or her cultural heritage, as described by sociologists, are accompanied by a longing for new forms of community. Michel Maffesoli (2008) attempted to describe those new communities using an idea of 'neotribalism'. He suggests that the main feature of the structure of the post-modern society is 'socialisation' (*socialité*), which leads to the formation of a social order based on organic connections. Socialisation is the fact of being together, sharing common values or ideologies; it also means

a mutual trust, a system of clear and readable signs or codes, understood by all group members. Maffesoli claims that in post-modernity, collectivism replaces individualism and the separation of individuals is replaced by the tendency of people to bunch together in small groups. Searching for the genesis of the phenomenon, Maffesoli points to the crisis of identity in the post-modern world. Instead of permanent places in the social structure to which individuals belonged in the era of modernism and which gave them the sense of meaning, certainty and stability, identity crisis introduces loss and alienation. It is only natural for people to react to the lack of a sense of belonging by searching for a community, an emotional relationship with other people, and a tendency to associate with them. 'New tribes' can be perceived as short-term groups focused on specific ideas in which people associate on a voluntary basis, with the membership being informal and temporary. Another characteristic element is the ritualization of social life, manifested, among others, in collective participation in various secular festivals or rites (e.g., football matches). This is not only to express the attachment to the same values, but also to strengthen the sense of community and group membership, "the public articulation of the identity needs of individual groups and individuals" (Skórzyńska 2010, 26), and to self-identify in the present ambivalent, fluid and subjective reality. It also includes the desire to present oneself in front of others; to differentiate oneself from others, from mass pop culture and mass experiences; from experiencing the world superficially; from the uniformity and globalisation of behaviour.

Historical re-enactment fits well with the above-described trend. The re-enactment milieus take the form of 'new tribes' – groups in which the sense of community grows out of shared interests, ideals, views or an idea for a leisure activity. This is a grass-roots movement that fits into the wider phenomenon of 'an obsessive search for the community', observed among Western societies at the turn of the 21st century, and "the trend to constantly evoke the past in the times otherwise called the era of detraditionalization" (Burszta 2016, 20). In the case of new tribes, "essential is the very willingness to participate in the community and the sense of existential security that it provides, offering, apart from the sense of 'us', also the sense of life, an explanation of the world surrounding the individual and its place in this world" (Szczecińska-Musielak 2009, 213). In this context, participation in re-enactment groups can be viewed as a form of self-therapy, reaching to the roots, tradition, most distant history, which offers certainty, constructs identity, eliminates the sense of fear. The very process of group formation and an active participation in a group can also satisfy the needs for safety and authority. Behind the idea to participate in the re-enactment movement is often the need for shared experience, being together with others; a response to "the need for intimate contacts lost in the globalising world" (Szpociński 2012, 73).

More often than not, participation in a re-enactment movement is not only about co-sociation but about sharing a particular ethos. Based on certain components – values, personal patterns, norms or goals – the reenactors construct their identity and lifestyle

and legitimise them within certain groups or circles (Szczecińska-Musielak 2009, 217). The engagement in re-enactment activities generates certain attitudes in reenactors, which are manifested in their everyday lives (e.g., the knight's or warrior's ethos), especially among those who treat re-enactment not only as an occasional hobby or a way to make money but also as a way of life (Nowaczyk 2016, 366-377). This often takes the form of discovering traditions, recreating stories and related ideas, values and concepts. At the same time, as a form of 'an invented tradition' (*sensu* Hobsbawn and Ranger 2008; for more details see Szczecińska-Musielak 2009), historical re-enactment is a special form of 'a return to the past'. Reenactors form their own subculture within the society which is based on the positive valorisation of the past, usually of its own nation. Patriotic attitudes are a frequent occurrence among historical performers, with a great number of members of groups recreating the period of the Early Middle Ages openly declaring the Slavic Native Faith (also called *Rodzimowierstwo*, neopaganism). A fact that both aspects, i.e., the interest in re-enactment activity and at the same time conscious reference to neo-pagan ideas, interweave in the life of group members does not seem to be accidental (see below). Symptomatically, groups usually recreate the history of the community with which they identify themselves. In certain situations, this may have political overtones, when groups choose to re-enact certain visions of the history of a given region (Szczecińska-Musielak 2009, 221-222). For example, groups recreating the period of the Early Middle Ages accept ethnic names related to, for example, the culture of the Slavs (e.g., Bielska Drużyna Najemna 'Svantevit' – <http://svantevit.eu/>) or the Vikings (e.g., Nordelag – <http://nordelag.org/>). Drużyna Wojów Piastowskich Jantar provides a good example of how reenactors relate to and identify themselves with ethnic groups, the culture to which they feel close to. On their website, the group declares that "just as every other social group, our druzhina is centred around one major, common goal. This goal, and thus the activity aimed at popularising the cultural heritage of our Slavonic and Indo-European ancestors, emerged out of our passion for what over the centuries has become our common property, which defines and distinguishes us from other equally valuable cultures" (<http://livehist.blogspot.com/p/wczesne-sredniowiecze-do-xi-wieku.html>).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TO THE PAST

The reasons why people become interested in the past – and the historical re-enactment movement is a manifestation of such interest – do not derive merely from intellectual or cognitive motives but can also be inspired by social, cultural, economic or political factors. These inform contemporary people's attitudes to the past, its perception, the ideas about its function and significance in the contemporary world, as well as the ways of learning

about the past, experiencing it, presenting or making it alive. From this perspective, historical re-enactment should be viewed as an indicator of broader changes in the attitude to the past among contemporary people, which can be observed on the basis of several symptomatic elements as discussed below.

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE DEMOCRATISATION OF THE PAST AND A FORM OF ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

The democratisation of the past – analogous to the process of the democratisation of history described by Pierre Nora (2010) – manifests itself for example in the multiplication and variability of ideas about the past. The democratisation of the past flows from diverse liberation and emancipation movements among nations, groups or individuals that need to justify and reconstruct their identity, to self-identify themselves, to write their own histories, to transform the memory of the past and reinterpret their history (Krajewski 2003, 208). The democratisation of the past consists also in the opening up to the diversity of the ideas about the past, allowing for the existence of several imaginable competing images of the past. Its effects include, as Nora points out, a recently observed rapid intensification of the uses of the past, be it political, tourist or commercial, and the expropriation of a historian (an archaeologist) from their traditional monopoly of the interpreter of the past. Due to the democratisation of history, countless images of the past are allowed today and its various visions are perceived by society as equal. Academic (professional) narratives about the past cease to be the only source of cultural images and ideas about the past. At the same time, increasing in the creation and dissemination of the knowledge about the past has been the role of amateurs, i.e., people who are unfamiliar with research methods or theories, such as groups of historical re-enactments, creators of alternative historical portals, etc.

Staged historical events and spectacles, initiated by historical re-enactment groups, can be viewed as a kind of 'performative' history. In contrast to the reconstructions of the past that seek to get to know the past in most accurate way possible, the spectacles of the past (see Skórzyńska 2010) operate on different principles: they are aimed at exceeding knowledge (colloquial, encyclopaedical) to discover something new, due to the fragmentary nature and unknowability of the past (Szpociński 2012, 69). In the spectacles of the past, direct, multi-sensory contact with the staging of the past way of life dominates over the ways of getting to know it intellectually, which does not mean that the former completely invalidates the latter. But the knowledge of the past in itself is irrelevant to the experience of the past. The spectacles of the past provide aesthetic experience and offer people a sense of participation in the togetherness of the performance (Szpociński 2007, 16). It is through them that people now "not only gain 'knowledge' about the past, but this 'knowledge'

provides them with elements for constructing collective ideas relating to the distant or recent past” (Woźniak 2010, 248), defined by patterns of visualisation and verbalisation of the images of the past present in the culture. Having been discussed by an assortment of people, including journalists, hobbyists, writers, etc., history, understood as a way of getting to know the past, ceased to be the exclusive domain of scholars. In this sense, the past has become a common good, present in several aspects of life; it has become a public history (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2015, 89).

The progressive massification of the past is another result of its democratisation. The contact with the past (e.g., through museum exhibitions) has ceased to be elitist in character, something reserved only for the chosen ones, and stopped being associated with high culture. People, who had once been deprived of the contact with the past and its relics for various reasons, now enjoy easy access to the past, for example through various means of disseminating the past. These include historical re-enactments, staging events from the past, media creations or its presence in popular culture. Historical re-enactment has increasingly been gaining in popularity in Poland (see Biuro Badań Społecznych Question Mark. 2016): “each year, Poland experiences a number of historical re-enactments, which tend to become more and more spectacular. Attracting a lot of observers, the phenomenon already has large numbers of regular fans who partake in such events regardless of their localisation” (<https://dobroni.pl/kalendarium/rekonstrukcje>) This tendency is favoured by the progressing commercialisation of the past, interweaving the past into the realities of the market economy and consumer society.

Historical re-enactments are live manifestations of alternative histories, which pose a challenge for academic history and the scholarly community. They influence scholarly methods of presenting the knowledge about the past and force researchers to present it in an attractive way, in line with the expectations of contemporary recipients. Nevertheless, they are often criticised, for example for trivialising and simplifying the knowledge, not deepening historical reflection, eclecticism and putting ‘exotics’ and play to the fore, instead of knowledge and reflection on the past (Tarkowska 2012, 34-35; Van der Plaetsen 2014, 157-159).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A MANIFESTATION OF STRIVING FOR PERSONAL, SENSUAL AND UNMEDIATED CONTACT WITH THE PAST AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS

Characteristic elements of such a demeanour include the need for direct contact with the past as a form of getting to know it, with the learning having primarily sensual character, and a turn towards micro-social and individual practices of recalling the past. It is mainly about the dominance of such forms of experiencing the past and learning about the past, in which important are sensual and/or visual sensations rather than intellect. These

include performances or historical happenings, which recount some past events. In addition to offering specific aesthetic experiences, re-enactments provide the recipients also with an opportunity to participate in the community of spectacles (Szpociński 2007, 42; Fenske 2017, 247). Visible in historical re-enactment is the change in the style of transmitting knowledge about the past and the forms of its transmission; a departure from the discursive contact with the past and its relics in favour of the sensual, emotional form, playing out the roles of people long gone, the staging and theatricalization of the past, which is understood as the entirety of activities related to performing live scenes recreating the life of people in the past in the presence of spectators (see Pawleta 2017).

An example of historical re-enactment demonstrates that the past can be experienced by living and feeling it – ‘entering into’ the role of a man or woman from the past or ‘getting into’ the past (Bogacki 2010a, 187). On the website of the Valhalla group, which offers shows pertaining to the history of ancient Rome, including gladiators, we read: “now you can also feel the thrills seeing ancient warriors clash before your very eyes. They will fight with help of tridents and nets, pugiones and gladii. They will use five-toothed spears, Thracian knives and spears. Munera is in progress, suddenly horse-mounted gladiators with spears ride into the arena, and a chariot drawn by horses – from the chariot a gladiator shoots with a bow and throws javelins. A violent struggle continues, its course and completion decided by the divine Caesar. Thumbs up equals grace, thumbs down signify shameful defeat. Now you can stand in the audience of the arena and decide on the fate of the gladiators fighting heroically for your joy. You can play the role of a gladiator yourself or become a lanista, a teacher from a gladiator school” (<http://www.walhalla.com.pl/rzym.html>).

Such forms of contact with the past make it possible to take on the role of a man or woman from the past and experience it (or its simulation) in a physical way, through the body and senses, in order to find out for oneself how it was, or could have been, long time ago. The forms of direct experience of the past includes also its literal ‘consumption’ – buying and consuming food and drinks prepared in accordance with ancient recipes (Kwiatkowski 2008, 87). Emotions, feelings, the authenticity of experience, perceptual contact with the surrounding generated by all senses and based on closeness, participation and personal experience, constitute the essence of this approach (Tarkowska 2012, 37). What also attracts the audience is the possibility of experiencing the past personally by, e.g., hand-forging an ornament or a fragment of a weapon, striking a coin, shooting a bow or tasting a flatbread. The re-enactment space draws the participant into a relationship with itself through experience, even if it is hidden under the guise of consumption.

Historical re-enactments also include so-called expeditions into the past. As internal events for performers, closed to the public, they are organised in order to provide the participants with an opportunity to test themselves in the hardships of historical experiments and gain personal experience in certain aspects of life in the past. An expedition into the past is a set of deliberately undertaken actions, a conscious effort to experience, contact, thrust oneself into the past, to go back to past circumstances. They are an attempt to make

the past present now through physical, sensual contact, based on the roles of figures from the past, invoking empathy, entering into specific situations, experiencing time diversity, in other words - being 'there'. One of the goals behind such initiatives is a desire to check the adaptability to exist for a long time in conditions that are harsh for contemporary people. They encourage reflections about how people used to cope during journeys; how they found their bearings; what equipment they used to carry their belongings; how they dressed; what they ate along the way, etc. The so-called 'historical marches' would fall into this category. These are "an increasingly popular practice among the reenactors of various historical periods and an alternative to crowded and loud historical events such as fêtes or fairs. In general, they consist in a trekking trip wearing an outfit and equipment adapted to a specific era, e.g., the 10th century or the 15th century, etc. A route is marked out through mountains, a landscape park or simply an area favourable for hiking. The partakers follow the route coping just like people in the past could have done. Sometimes jokingly called medieval survival, the marches are largely used by reenactors to test themselves, their historical equipment and knowledge about how to survive in the natural environment" (<http://swiatoslav.blogspot.com/2012/11/przemarsze-historyczne-wprowadzenie.html>).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE COMMERCIALISATION OF THE PAST

The activities of historical re-enactment groups often take a commercial form: the groups organise 'living history' lessons, stage historical events, organise archaeological fêtes or actively participate in them, build replicas of fortified settlements. They may also take part in the production of films or TV series, especially historical ones, or even in TV commercials. Let us go back to the above-mentioned Valhalla re-enactment group, which deals with staging of historical events. On their webpage they claim that they are: "a Poznań-based company that deals with historical re-enactments, the only group in Poland to orchestrate historical spectacles ranging from Antiquity to the times of the Second World War. Our accomplishments in the field of historical re-enactment are many and significant. We initiate and organize fêtes and events popularising experimental archaeology and living history. We write programmes and provide added splendour to important jubilee events, such as anniversaries of granting town rights, battles or other important historical events" (<http://www.walhalla.com.pl/>).

Some groups own private strongholds or open-air museums (e.g., Warownia Jomsborg – <http://wioskawikingow.pl/>), which provide a locality for their actions and initiatives, such as the production of artefacts, shows or training. For a certain group of people, re-enactment is what they do for a living. They undertake various commercial activities, for example organise events, produce and supply reenactors with items necessary for their doings, manufacture souvenirs for tourists, act in films, etc. (Bogacki 2008, 250-251; Karwacki 2012,

125-130). Reenactors organise events that make use of historical traditions or initiate projects stimulating local communities, aimed at promoting certain places by, for example, constructing private open-air museums (*vide* the open-air museum in Wolin), which then become widely recognised tourist products. This can significantly contribute to the revival of tourist traffic in given villages, towns or regions of the country and have a positive impact on their economic growth, though, for example, the tourist service.

The often unpretentious, commercial nature of the activities undertaken as part of historical re-enactment is rightly criticised. Frequently emphasised is the poor quality of many recreations along with the progressive uniformity and standardisation of offers, which results, for example, in the re-enactment of battles or staging of battles becoming the dominant element of every spectacle. With historical spectacles accompanying a number of occasions, they gradually saturate the market. Among a wide range of activities on offer, re-enactment groups have some that have little or nothing to do with recreating the past, being aimed merely at achieving profit. These include off-road racing, paintball, business events, promotion of goods in shopping centres, etc. This is to some extent understandable, considering the market requirements and the need to expand and diversify the offer in order to reach diverse clients, but still it is a development in the wrong direction as far as I am concerned (for more on this topic, see Pawleta 2011b).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT – BETWEEN AUTHENTICITY AND SIMULACRUM

Another aspect related to historical re-enactment concerns the ways the past is experienced, providing a remedy for the deficit of communing with the authentic past felt by people nowadays. Wojciech Burszta (2013) proposes to look at the search for authenticity from the perspective of nostalgia. He believes that by engaging in certain activities, reenactors gain the certainty that the visualisation of events is a way to overcome a dead history. Burszta also points out that the re-enactment movement emphasises technical details and imitates states from the material and symbolic past, in “a strive for authenticity, or at least a belief, that efforts are undertaken by means of which the past becomes real in a sense that you can immerse yourself in it [...]. So, it is again about this metonymic adherence to the past” (Burszta 2013, 279). What is important here is the significance of the historical accuracy – on different levels: material – making costumes, weapons or ornaments based on old patterns and the use of materials and tools modelled on artefacts; structural and social – recreating the structure and social hierarchy, forming *drużyny*, preserving the division into male and female roles; and behavioural - observing the behaviour and order of ceremonies (Szczezińska-Musielak 2009, 211).

Usually, however, all kinds of recreations, staging of historical events, replicas, copies, etc., are referred to as examples of something artificial, unoriginal, arranged. “On the one

hand, the historically conditioned space allows the reenactor to seek identity or similarity with past events, and on the other hand, it emphasises its phantasmatic character and belongingness to the sphere of simulacrum” (Regiewicz 2014, 184). A re-enactment staging is the presentation of a hypothetical course of a past event, based on possible and probable events or only references to it. A staging refers to an aesthetic action, which is about creating the appearance of truth, the simulacrum of a world that does not exist beyond our imagination (Regiewicz 2014, 199). In re-enactment, concrete actions use elements of reality and fiction, creating one common world from them. It is neither real nor fictitious – it is a simulacrum. Simulations of the past do not need any pattern in the ‘past reality’ (Woźniak 2010, 257). As a result, real experiences and artefacts are replaced by simulacrum, replicas ‘copying’ the original – copies of weapons, costumes, tools, etc. At the same time, new ‘artefacts’, produced by reenactors became something better than the originals, which are frequently damaged or worn off. One can touch those newly manufactured items or check how they work. For this reason, people prefer the imitation to the original, since the imitation is more expressive and somehow more real.

We should bear in mind, however, that during this kind of relationship with the past we do not experience the past historical reality, but merely the ‘pastness’ (Holtorf 2017). Pastness means ‘being of the past’, being seen as past; it is not the past reality but a feature of being of the past, a sense or preconception of ‘prehistoricity’. The feeling of pastness does not deny the existence of the real past that once existed, but its aim is to emphasise and make the past visible as a peculiar phenomenon manifesting itself in various forms in the present, which can be variously perceived and experienced. For example, for many reenactors, the authenticity of the reconstructed historical places is irrelevant, since the mere impression of authenticity suffices. This is determined, for example, by the scenery evoking the past, the generation of specific ways of experiencing these locales, as well as the possibility to receive certain sensory stimuli while staying in them. The concept of pastness therefore focuses on how the past acquires meaning, becomes visible and available in the present.

And yet re-enactment activities will always remain a form of acting and for this reason alone it is impossible to bridge the differences between the mentality of contemporary people and those of the past. What is more, the aspects concerning personal relationships of persons attempting to recreate past human experiences are quite intimate and their value cannot be based only on the level of compliance with facts or the direct ‘experience’ of events. This also applies to the search for direct, sensual contact with the past, which can easily turn into the production of inauthenticity and artificiality, staged, a veneer-like images of the past, specially directed for the mass recipient or superficial endeavours to historicise the reality. Despite these reservations, participation in re-enactments can be regarded as a source of knowledge about the past and the way of interacting with the past, which is based not so much on the adequacy and objectivity of the message, but rather works through emotions, enhanced by the effect of stylisation and aestheticisation (Kowalski 2013, 118). The fact that we cannot experience what once existed does it mean that all attempts

at such intimate reconstruction necessarily flatten or inverse the past reality (Wilkowski 2014, 138-139). Nevertheless, historical reenactors that want to immerse themselves in the past are unable to free themselves from the present. And it is this “suspension between the strive for the ideal – the reproduction of the past in all its details, so that it does not offend anyone with the here and now – and the functioning in today’s reality governed by specific laws that is a characteristic feature of re-enactment” (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2015, 93-94).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A NEW FORM OF EDUCATION ABOUT THE PAST

One of the important functions of historical re-enactment is its educational and popularising function. It refers to an attractive and at the same time accessible form of a visual message about the past and its professional explanation, offering the recipients a feeling of having a direct interaction with the past; a possibility of unmediated contact with some elements of the historical environment through the interpretation of ‘living history’; learning the past through the senses, which facilitates its understanding. As Adam Regiewicz puts it (2013, 90), “the educational value lies undoubtedly in knowledge, deepened thanks to various recreating activities, which thanks to the personal involvement in its acquisition ceases to be just a collection of encyclopaedic facts, becoming something lived, alive and therefore more valuable and longer-lasting, as research shows, in students’ consciousness”. Among the activities aimed at this goal, he mentions the production of artefacts, reproduction of social life or, finally, staged recreations themselves, usually focused on a specific historical event (Regiewicz 2013, 90-91).

It will not be a mistake to state that “the reenactors’ activity and their even importunate openness to educational needs of the consumers of their spectacles is a *sine qua non* condition for the existence of the historical re-enactment movement in Poland” (Słapek and Nowożeńska 2011, 448-449). The educational effect of historical re-enactment consists both in the transmission of knowledge to the recipients, which flows from the activities of re-enactment groups (this includes the transfer of specific knowledge and the fact that people are encouraged to search for information on their own), and in acquiring knowledge by the participants themselves. In a wider perspective, this relatively fresh form of historical education can be successfully employed in extracurricular forms of education as well as in school or academic didactics (Słapek and Nowożeńska 2011, 445). However, we may only speak about educational and cognitive function of re-enactment if a staging of a particular event is characterised by a high level of professionalism and historical accuracy. It should not be confused with popularisation or commercial staging.

Historical re-enactment is also a form of popularising archaeology (see Nowaczyk 2016). However, in order to fulfil its function appropriately, it has to abide by two conditions. First of all, the principle of ‘education through play’ should be applied. Specific

knowledge and the educational content should be imparted to a certain group of recipients in an entertaining form, whereby entertainment is an interesting, engaging and attractive form of this message, as a result of which its effectiveness and development of new skills is increased. The second condition is scholarly reliability. This is especially important for the reenactors of 'archaeological' periods, which often lack a source base enabling a comprehensive reconstruction of the reconstructed past. This entails an obligation to constantly expand one's knowledge of the reconstructed era and to continuously improve the re-enactment craft (Nowaczyk 2016, 377).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A LUDIC PHENOMENON

Play and ludic behaviour are natural and universal elements of human activity, and thus an integral and important component of culture. However, a ludic aspect is a much broader concept, referring to a number of other phenomena, attitudes or cultural values, whereby play is its inherent element. Most useful for this study are Ryszard Kantor's (2010, 146-149) insightful remarks on the 'ludicisation' of history in contemporary consumer society. Kantor draws a sharp distinction between two aspects of this process: the 'ludicisation' of history, consisting in using historians' findings for entertainment purposes, and 'playing with the past' and 'playing the past' to describe play or entertainment based on the past, should it be imagined or recreated based on scholarly knowledge (Kantor 2010, 135).

As a form of "spending free time, [...] hobby, and therefore a secondary disinterested activity, taken and continued only for pleasure" (Tomaszewska 2009), activities that are part of historical re-enactment can also be viewed as a ludic phenomenon. Some reenactors are fairly superficially involved in the movement; important for them is primarily their participation in tournaments, fun and entertainment (Radtchenko 2006, 139; Kwiatkowski 2008, 126). Ewa Tomaszewska points out that in the case of many reenactors, the primary interest in recreating people's lives is related to fun, combined with an earlier fascination, for example with fantasy literature or role-playing games (also Bogacki 2008, 240). The basic idea around which this kind of play is organised, consist in imitating the lives of people from past periods – *mimicry*, whereby play is based on the past, which determines its character, guarantees its historical accuracy (through, e.g., props, set design, façade) and also provides it with credibility and consistency. Important in re-enactment is "a certain inclination towards a playful adoption of a new identity, acting, pretending, 'moving into' an imaginary world" (Tomaszewska 2009); the opportunity to impersonate alternative roles, dress up, take a different name, etc.

For a large number of reenactors, re-enactment activities are primarily a form of play or entertainment from which one should derive pleasure. It comes from pursuing an enjoyable hobby and a way of spending free time. The viewers take pleasure in participating in re-enactment spectacles, in observing and taking part in such events. Entertainment is

therefore also aimed at satisfying people's needs. Re-enactments meets most formal criteria of ludic phenomena, as distinguished by Roger Caillois (1973). For example, they are events set in a specific time and space and they are accompanied by a sense of a specific 'out of ordinary' reality, etc. They also fulfil the criteria for basic categories of games and plays proposed by Caillois. What one can see during those staged events is the domination of *ludus festivus* – fun, festivals, entertainment, being with other people. Entertainment, play and related pleasures are therefore an indispensable element of such events and at the same time a theme around which they are organised. It is not about approving shallow entertainment and commercialism, but rather about emphasising the role of play as an important cultural element, which can also play an important role in re-enactment activities.

A broadly understood 'ludic phenomenon' denotes not only the ways people relate to the past, but also the change in the context of the functioning of the past, history and archaeology and the knowledge they generate, and the possible ways of employing, making use of and 'consuming' the historical/archaeological heritage. This illustrates the shift in emphasis: from the past that is important to the past that belongs to the 'Rhetoric Man': looking into the past in order to get to the truth about it is now replaced by a wish to understand it, think about it or experience it, which is manifested e.g., by re-enactment spectacles, archaeological fêtes or historical theme parks (Minta-Tworzowska 2012, 1095). This is important to emphasise again that the ludic aspect of historical re-enactment in no way discredits the phenomenon; it only demonstrates play as its inalienable element. In addition, it is its spectacularity, an inherent feature of play, that largely determines the attractiveness and popularity of recreations of historical events (for more on this topic, see Pawleta 2011a).

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS A FORM OF NEW SPIRITUALITY

In addition to the emphasis placed on striving for community, the movement of historical re-enactment is in some aspects a manifestation of the formation of new spirituality formulas and the explosion of New Age or neopaganism-related parareligious phenomena. In the face of the erosion of traditions and values, there has been a growing tendency to seek and experience holiness brought about by the 'hunger of the sacrum' (Jasiewicz 2003) and the emergence of processes of resacralization of certain spheres of reality, phenomena or objects, the turn towards transcendence and an interest in the past and its elements. Regardless of technological progress, all this stems from "the human need for certainty, which is the source of exploration and the need to understand the world around us and the constant return of the question about the cause" (Jasiewicz 2003, 110) or attempts to 're-enchanted' the world and search for rules different from the ones in force in the chaos of the late modern world. I will only mention that both neopaganism as well as New Age

movements and the activities of some people associated with the historical re-enactment movement are often associated with ways of relating to the past that are alternative to those created in academia, including the archaeological ones, which are manifested in the form of different interpretations.

During the discussion on the neotribalism I mentioned that among those engaged in recreating the Early Middle Ages there are many who openly declare Slavic Native Faith or *Rodzimowierstwo* (neopaganism). The intertwining of their interest in historical re-enactment with conscious reference to neopaganism in their life seems not accidental. What we observe here is the creation of the sense of historical and cultural identity and continuity with the ancestors. The need to continue the cultural heritage of the Slavs is indicated as the reason for the transition to paganism (Szczecińska-Musieliak 2009, 215). The Slavic Native Faith, apparently inseparable from historical re-enactment, provides a nice example here. The Slavic Native Faith is a continuation of the beliefs of the old Slavs, its essence lying in the connection with ancient paganism practised on Polish lands in pre-Christian times. Devoid of any superior structure, the Slavic Native Faith is characterised by a great variety in matters of faith and practice. The practices and beliefs of its followers are based on historical, archaeological and ethnographic materials concerning the Slavic religion, and also refer to elements taken from later Slavic folklore or from non-Slavic communities (Mesjasz 2013; Simpson 2013; Pawlik 2015).

Some members of the historical re-enactment movement, especially those recreating early medieval periods, profess their native faith, thus combining the practice of recreating the lives of the old Slavs with practising the same religion (Simpson 2013, 118). The group of *Sventowie* provides an illustrative example – they are a fraternity grouping reenactors and also declared practitioners of *Rodzimowierstwo*. On their website, we learn that: “SVENTOWIE was originally established as a *druzhina* of Slavic warriors in 2003. The *druzhina*’s name derives from the adjective SVENTO ~ which stands for powerful, strong. [...] As a brotherhood, they try to bring the pre-Christian culture of our Slavic ancestors closer to us; both the traditions of the art of warfare and the hardships of everyday life. [...] Currently, the group does not constitute a physically existing, separate brotherhood, but seeks to associate the followers of Slavic Native Faith that at the same time are active in historical re-enactment” (<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=sventowie>).

In view of the impossibility of reconstructing prehistoric belief systems due to the lack of written sources, it has been pointed out in relation to this kind of actions undertaken by Polish reenactors that the very sphere of worship is the modernisation and personal interpretation of the rudimentary information of old Slavic beliefs (Bogacki 2010b, 23). Today’s reconstructed paganism is a contemporary religion, a response to the needs of present-day people. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the fact its practitioners approach their beliefs in a non-reflective way, recreating only some forgotten cultural content, but often give them “a living spiritual meaning, deeply experienced during celebrated festivals” (Mesjasz 2013, 142).

CONCLUSIONS: HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT AS AN ELEMENT OF PRESENT-DAY HISTORICAL CULTURE

In attempt to determine the attitude of contemporary people to the past, of which the phenomenon of historical re-enactment is a manifestation, we need to present it in a wider perspective of its social and cultural conditioning that determine its specificity. Such forms of relating to the past have been gaining a growing popularity, and as such can be considered one of the specific features of contemporary historical culture (Szpociński 2012, 65). Historical culture should be understood as “the entirety of ideas, norms, behaviour patterns, values and directive rules regulating all forms of reference to everything that in a given culture is considered past, gone, historical, regardless of the actual state of affairs” (Szpociński 2007, 27). Typical of this form of commemorating the past is the non-intellectual, sensual and ludic understanding of history, the dominant aspiration to “create a sense of immersion in the past, identification with the actors of historical events and their emotions and a radical change in historical sensitivity” (Tarkowska 2012, 34).

The intention of a return to the past, manifested by historical re-enactment, allows us at the same time to show the relationships that exist between the community of spectacles and the community of memory. One can therefore suppose that such formed community of the spectacle of the past is or may become a community of memory. However, this is not a community in the traditional sense of the word, but an ‘ethical’ community, bound by the same values shared by its members (Skórzyńska 2010). In this sense, it is justifiable to perceive historical re-enactment as one of the forms of collective memory of contemporary society.

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