

Michał Pawleta\*

## **THEATRUM ARCHAEOLOGICUM: STAGING THE PAST VIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL FÊTES AND HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT**

### **ABSTRACT**

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In this article I argue that archaeology can be viewed as an “art” of staging the past. Archaeology as a discipline generates accounts of past time by creating some complete narratives which can be textual, visual, or take the form of staged events – a staging. Archaeological fêtes and the staged reconstructions which fall under the umbrella term of the so-called historical re-enactment are examples of forms of narrating the past. In this article I present arguments that these forms instantiate new modes of talking about the past, presenting, popularizing and experiencing the past which are based on attractiveness, wide accessibility, participation and affective engagement. The phenomena under discussion illustrate the theatricalisation of the past defined as all modes of presenting and relating historical events, processes and persons with the use of theatrical practices – costumes, personalized drama, staging, etc. Following this line of reasoning, I argue in the present article that fêtes and historical re-enactments can be perceived as a spectacle or a show and analysed with the use of methodology applied to describe cultural events understood as a broad concept.

Key words: theatricalisation of the past, affective turn, archaeological fêtes, historical re-enactment

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\* Institute of Archaeology, Adam Mickiewicz University, Umultowska st. 89d, 61-614 Poznań, Poland; mpawleta@amu.edu.pl

## INTRODUCTION

The term archaeology comes from the Greek word “archaiologia” (*archaios* – ancient, old and *-logiâ* – speech, science), which literally means “a story about the distant past”; it was used for the first time by Thucydides to describe the knowledge about past epochs (Hensel 1986, 17). At present the term archaeology refers to the academic discipline whose aim is to reconstruct the human socio-cultural past using archaeological resources, that is material remnants of human activity which can be found atop the ground, buried under the ground or submerged in water, and which can be recovered mostly by excavations (Ławecka 2009, 5). It is less known that in Greece in the early centuries AD, the term “archaeologist” was used to refer to actors who used the art of mimicry to stage ancient legends (Bahn 1997, 21).

The metaphor of the world as a theatre (*theatrum mundi*) in turn, has been known since antiquity and constitutes one of the classic images that have been used, for example in literature, where the life of people is described as if they were actors whose task is to perform their life’s role on the world’s stage. In a broader sense the metaphor can be extended to conceptualizing the world and human life as a kind of performance. *Per analogiam*, archaeology can be also treated as theatre – *theatrum archaeologicum* – in two respects: (1) as a metaphor of the contemporary archaeological practice (activity) and its function in the present world, according to which archaeologists are perceived as “actors” who perform their professional roles on the world’s stage; (2) as a theatrical metaphor used to interpret past events and particular spheres of life of people from the distant past, their activities and behaviour by re-enacting, performing and staging them. The difference between both interpretations is that of substance as it concerns their subject matter. The former refers to the contemporary context of archaeological activity while the latter concerns the attempts to present the material evidence of the past.

The present article explores the latter aspect. I propose to look at archaeology as an “art” of rendering the past – an active practice of creating various, frequently incomparable, images of times gone by. Archaeology generates accounts of the past by creating some complete narratives which can be textual, visual, or take the form of staged events – a staging (Marciniak 2013, 20-25). It creates narratives about the past as an ordered sequence of interpretations, as some broader stories which give the impression of cohesion. Archaeological fêtes and staged events created within the so-called historical re-enactment are forms of such narratives. Both phenomena exemplify interrelated tendencies, which I have elsewhere termed as the festivalisation and theatricalisation of the past (Pawleta 2016, 166-170). In this article I present arguments that these forms instantiate new modes of talking about the past, presenting, popularizing and educating about it, which are based on attractiveness, broad accessibility and participation. In addition, they are an expression of new forms of contact between the contemporary people and the distant past which rely on experiencing the past. They constitute an important medium used to present knowledge

about the past to a wide audience as some kind of complete narrative with a story-like structure. They can therefore be perceived as a spectacle or a show and analysed with the use of methodology applied to describe a wide range of cultural events.

## CHANGES IN PRESENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PAST AND THE AFFECTIVE TURN

Contemporary times have brought a new formula for the relationship between people and the past which is characterized by several diagnostic features. In most general terms it can be recognized by the following aspects: (1) the past is forgotten, its significance becomes eroded, the interest in history is diminished and the time horizon is shortened to the immediate past; (2) at the same time the significance of the past and remembering increases in public life; (3) there is a democratization of access to the past, it is privatized, which denotes a tendency to create its personalized images; (4) the conviction of contemporary people that they are able to gain a direct insight into the past by sensory experience; and (5) the commercialisation of the past and cultural heritage as a result of transforming the informative content related to the past into marketable products in the form of commodities, services and experiences (Szpociński 2007; 2010; Kwiatkowski 2008, 39-40; 2009, 131-134; Szacka 2009). All the aspects listed above are also relevant when considering the changes in the relationship with the past created by archaeology (Pawleta 2016, 42).

One of the key aspects of the contemporary attitude towards the past is the dominance of such forms of reliving the past, experiencing it and learning about it which are not predominantly based on the intellect but on sensory and/or visual experiences, that is which, among others, include performances and historical happenings relating some past events. These forms apart from providing audiences with some aesthetic experiences also offer the opportunity to participate in the community gathered for the event (Szpociński 2007, 33-42; 2009, 230-231). The characteristic feature resulting from the above attitude is: *“a focus on experiencing the past not with the intellect but through the senses”* (Szpociński 2007, 42). What is of key significance here is the conviction that it is possible to gain an insight into the past in a personal and direct way and *“evoking sensitivity related to the senses is perceived as the practical recipe for revealing the image of the past”* (Krzykała 2007, 629). The central quality of such a relationship with the past is reliving it by being immersed in the world of the past and experiencing it with the senses. The contact with the past is not reliant on acting on a single sense (usually vision) but on activating the sensory perception of the sense of taste, smell, hearing and touch in the process of experiencing the past. At present the affective and sensory contact between the spectator and history therefore play a key role in the process of learning about the past, becoming familiar with it and perceiving it.

The changes described above are related to the so-called affective turn. Since the 1990s the humanities underscored the role of emotions and affect as central research categories

(cf. Budrewicz *et al.* 2014). The phenomenon has been defined as the affective turn and it encompasses various forms of recalling history with the focal themes of personal experiences, social relations and everyday lifeway (Agnew 2007, 300-301; quoted after Widzicka 2015, 271). At the same time the irremovable split between the past and the present is being questioned, the personal experiences are favoured at the expense of facts and phenomena from the past, and finally the tangible and material dimension of experiencing the past reality is underlined (Widzicka 2015, 271). The turn towards affect which has taken place in the contemporary attitude to the past can be noticed in many manifestations of the so-called “living history” (see Anderson 1992), that is the historical re-enactment movement, historical reconstruction, theme parks, and interactive museums. There are clear indications that the historical re-enactment movement should be related to the affective rather than purely rational or perceptual approach (McCalman and Pickering 2010; Widzicka 2015, 270). Historical reconstructionists make feelings and emotions their tool in the reconstruction process by “reliving” the past (Bogacki 2010b), and they want to elicit the same effect in spectators. A similar affective approach is a feature of activities around the concept of “edutainment” – the act of learning through play, which has become a canonical part of present educational activities referring to the past.

The affective turn is in line with the transformation of cultural theories which dethrone language and discourse as having a hegemony in favour of the social significance of affective states. At the same time, the affective turn is an issue of cognition with fundamental importance which allows for a fresh insight into the place of history and the past in the life of contemporary people.

## THEATRALISATION OF THE PAST

The application of theatre as a metaphor for archaeology and its practices is not new. For example, in 1989 Christopher Tilley used the metaphor of theatre to refer to excavations. He postulated that excavations can be perceived as a “theatre” in which people can create their own visions of the past, which are not an expression of some unclearly defined mythical heritage but which are primarily understandable for themselves (Tilley 1989, 279). Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, on the other hand, in their book, “Archaeology/Theatre” (2001) showed ties linking professional expertise in the discipline with art, which they treated as a medium for disseminating knowledge about the past.

The theatralisation of the past is a completely different tendency related to the changes in the contemporary attitude towards the past. It refers to the cultural practices which focus on the visualization of the past within the social “*performative activities with stage-related practices*” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 41) as characteristic of living history type of events. These activities are related to live re-enactment by actors dressed in period costumes of some activities which reconstruct or visualize certain aspects and scenes from past lives. The actors are not always professional but the activity itself denotes the use of

theatrical practices also by non-professional performers (Leyko 2015, 13). The essence of these practices lies in the transmission of certain predefined meanings which are imposed on the audiences in the form of a set sequence of events from the past or a reference to a hypothetical state of the past reality. They, inter alia, consist in adapting scenes from the everyday lives of people from the past in order to adjust them and present to the wider public which wants to learn about its aspects and get the feel of earlier times. This means that the past events are pictured in a way which is loosely consistent with the archaeological or historical facts. But the performative practices include carefully selected activities which are enhanced by re-enactment, costumes, weapons and ornaments (Marciniak 2013, 52). These practices can take a more or less complex form, from a simple demonstration and a show to a complex well directed staging which engages hundreds of participants and attracts numerous visitors. This tendency is mainly related to the phenomenon of historical re-enactment, a staged performance of prehistoric life, archaeological fêtes, and to a lesser degree it is connected with presentations and shows within experimental archaeology.

The tendencies described above are categorized in two notions that is theatralisation and performativity, which are by no means identical. Performativity as one of the distinctive features of contemporary culture, connected with the so-called performative turn in present day humanities (Domańska 2007; Zeidler-Janiszewska 2007), characterizes human activities which are performed or realized in the presence of a certain group of people, and where the addressees of the communicated message are present during its creation, and have the chance to respond to it in a direct way (Kolankiewicz 2005, 23). In this respect, the notion of “performativity” is close to the concept of “performance” denoting an act of staging or acting out. This approach to “performativity” is advocated, for example by Ewa Domańska (2007, 49), who points out that “performativity” refers to notions related to action and re-enactment (performance): “*in a narrow sense it means performing certain actions live before an audience, that have the nature of a theatrical act*”, in a broader sense, it can take the form of “*rituals, manifestations, parades, festivals, and the like.*” The term thus can also be used to refer to such notions as staging, stand-up shows, acting out, role creation, spectacles, theatre performances (e.g. Skórzyńska 2003; 2007).

Theatralisation, on the other hand, by reference to the theatrical origins of the term, means “*giving something a theatrical style, making it a spectacle, applying the theatrical convention*” (Kwiek 2007, 76). The term is much broader than a denotation of activities strictly related to the theatre (Pękała 2016, 147). It is to be understood in a much wider sense as a kind of creation which is achieved with the help of theatrically structured activities making use of means known from theatrical conventions (inter alia, special effects, theatrical temporal-spatial framework, costumes) and assumes the participation of spectators and actors, aesthetic qualities and a staged show, that is such elements of a spectacle which are visible in its form and its accompanying frame (Skórzyńska 2007, 79-81). Theatralisation refers to all forms of the presentation and acquisition of historical events,

processes and persons in which theatrical practices are applied – costumes, personalized drama or staging in a public space (Schlehe *et al.* 2010; Hochbruck 2013, 11; quoted after Leyko 2015, 14). For this reason, theatralisation should not be perceived exclusively through the prism of the theatre as a prototype of artistic creation but in a broader sense as a transmission of some meaningful content in the form of a staged performance, as giving something a theatrical style, as the application of theatrical and aesthetic means in order to enhance the communicative function of the message, make it more intensive and more vivid (Kuczyńska 2008, 201, 205).

While theatralisation assumes the traditional division between actors and spectators with clearly set roles, with a marked division of space and one-way communication, performativity (performance) anticipates interaction as it favours active involvement and participation in the event, role switching, it creates a community and provokes physical contact (Fischer-Lichte 2008). Activities of this type are thus defined through the paradigm of participation (Leyko 2015, 13).

Performativity “constitutes a divergent attempt to depart from the textual metaphor and it stems from the belief that cultural phenomena exist only when they are performed, re-enacted and repeated. Therefore the portrayal of the past can take the form of a performance which refers to human actions and narratives. It leads to dramatization of the past in the framework of re-enactment, experiencing the place and the time and bodily actions. What is meant here is the reconstruction of the past with reference to archaeological heritage. But the result of such actions is more a re-contextualization of the cultural substance rather than its reconstruction” (Marciniak 2012, 172-173). The author cited here makes reference to the proposal of Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks (2001, xiii-xiv; quoted after Marciniak 2012, 173), that the portrayal of the past takes the form of theatrical practices, that is performance understood as an organized human act in front of an audience. In their approach performance becomes a specific medium to create meaning with a key role given to the context in which it is created, including location, architecture and the setting; all of these have a direct and tangible impact on the dramaturgy and pre-sentation techniques.

The theatralisation/performativity of the past is characterized by *mimesis* as an important feature. *Mimesis* is an aesthetic concept which originated in the Greek tradition and denotes the act of imitating nature in the work of art, either by imitating reality, life or human activity. For Plato *mimesis* meant a reflection, an image or imitation and it was considered by him as something imperfect, deceitful, based on sensory impressions, something that conjures up illusory images, appearances and fantasies (Melberg 2002, 10). For Aristotle, on the other hand, the concept did not denote a faithful act of copying reality, because he believed that mimetic art only mimics nature. Aristotle therefore approved of resorting to deformation and idealization: the artist did not necessarily have to show reality as it was, but also its more beautiful or uglier version, not only what really existed but also what was possible or probable; the artist also could limit details for the sake of

a more holistic and unique artistic composition (Melberg 2002, 53-55). In the context of theatralisation discussed in this article, *mimesis* refers to imitating past lives, replicating past behaviour or events, both real and hypothetical, and organizing them into a thematic whole with a fixed course of events, showing them live as a staged performance which then constitutes a cognitive representation of a past reality. It, at the same time, is a form of communication, influence and effort to achieve a persuasive effect (Kwiek 2007, 76-77).

Theatralisation and performativity in the portrayal of the past play an increasingly important role in contemporary historical culture, either in the form of happenings or other performative activities with the accompanying visualizations (iconicity) understood as the dominance of visual sensations in social communication, including the process of knowledge transmission and perception of the past (Szpociński 2009). For example, Anna Ziębińska-Witek (2011, 75-80), having analysed the present museology points to the emergence of a new paradigm of participation which is associated with its two fundamental elements, which are theatralisation and performativity of the exhibition. As she notes, both terms are combined in the concept of a performative spectacle (performance) in which the distance between the exhibition and the viewer is abandoned; everybody who is present participates in the event which is based on the idea of interaction assuming the rejection of the dividing line between the active sender and the passive receiver for the sake of the dynamic process of interpretation. Performativity is then associated with new forms of experiencing the past, emotional engagement and a transformation of the viewer into an active participant in the event (Ziębińska-Witek 2011, 76). Izabela Skórzyńska (2010, 7), writes about a specific form of making reference to the past, namely spectacles, which constitute “*communal and direct (that is without the involvement of mass media) practices of updating the past in the present which serve the purpose of public articulation of the need for identity among particular groups and individuals.*” This however, does not mean that at the same time they cannot also fulfil educational and persuasive functions (Skórzyńska 2010, 26). The author makes an additional observation, that although many such spectacles simply stage past events and constitute a representation of the past, some of them not only present the past in a traditional theatrical sense but they also re-present it and creatively replicate (“perform”) and in this way they offer the past a new presence (Skórzyńska 2010, 8).

The processes of theatralisation and performativity of the past have a growing impact on the forms of representing the past as demonstrated by the increasing presence of the para-theatrical and spectacular performative elements in historical re-enactments. The impact is noted mainly in the area of representing and popularizing knowledge about the past, and by the same token it constitutes a significant element of expanding the knowledge of archaeology and making the medium of knowledge transmission more attractive (Nowaczyk 2007). This is decisively influenced by the participation and affective engagement of the re-enactors and the spectators, by the focus on sensory perception

accompanied by entertainment and dramatic tension which create suspense, motion and enthusiasm. As a result of these processes the past is being transformed into a dynamic attractive staging or a spectacle, into a space of the show.

## STAGING THE PAST: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED EXAMPLES

The notion of theatricalisation of the past will be analysed with the example of archaeological fêtes and accompanying activities of historical re-enactment which frequently come together. In the introduction I stated that archaeological fêtes and the activities of historical re-enactment constitute an important medium of transmitting knowledge about the past structured as a narrative whole forming a kind of story to a wide audience, and in an attractive way. They can therefore be perceived as a spectacle or a show and in consequence analysed with the use of methodology applied to the description of cultural spectacles. I thus argue that it is possible to find an analogy between archaeological fêtes, and other outdoor events of a similar type, and a theatre performance and describe them with the use of a theatrical spectacle metaphor. Below I provide arguments for this thesis.

In most general terms, an archaeological fête is an outdoor event with an archaeological-historical theme and educational-popularizing character which is usually located in or nearby places referring to the past (e.g., open-air archaeological museums) during which various aspects of material, social and spiritual life of people from the past are presented (Chowaniec 2010, 208-210). These events derive from the festivalisation of the past understood as a tendency to organize spectacular mass outdoor events on a historical topic either in the form of a festival or archaeological picnics and also as historical re-enactment (Pawleta 2016, 169). Historical re-enactment means “*a visual historical presentation based on reconstructing the image of the past times using the most accurate means as indicated by research into the most reliable historical sources pertaining to the past which is being reconstructed to ensure a faithful reconstruction*” (Rojek 2009, 6). The re-enactment therefore means a reconstruction in the present of any event from the past. These activities focus on two important issues – reconstruction of the artefacts from the past and visualization of the past in the form of repeated staged re-enactments of historical events (Lowenthal 1985, 295; Regiewicz 2013, 91). Researchers underline the difference between the reconstruction and re-enactment of events. While the aim of reconstruction is to restore a historical period, culture or event, the aim of re-enactment is to act them out for the audience. Consistently, in reconstructions priority is given to remaining faithful to history and the present state of knowledge, whereas in re-enactment the focus is on making an impression on the viewers (Bogacki 2010a, 11-15; Stulgis 2013, 145).

An archaeological fête constitutes a specific form of a narrative – it relates a story about the past which is taking place in time and space defined by its plot combining elements of historical truth and fiction into one entity. It is therefore a unique *licentia archaeologica*



(Tomaszewski 1988, 148) which is used as a medium to present certain spheres of human life from the past and in a broad sense the historical material culture. However, while by definition traditional narratives have a verbal (discursive) form, in the case of fêtes, the discourse is strongly reduced and the narrative relies on other communication channels: icons, images, presentations, enactment, staging or experiencing certain events from the past.

In simple terms a spectacle (Latin *spectaculum*) is a staged performance or a theatre play, acted out by actors before a gathered audience which is a combination of various artistic genres: literature, acting, costumes, music, choreography, etc. As the name suggests, a spectacle is something to be watched, something “put on show” to attract spectators (MacAloon 2009, 363). It can therefore be combined with a pageant, staging or a performance. The characteristic features include a division between the performers (actors) and the audience, the stage where the action takes place and the viewers, as well as the inclusion of elements of material culture (props) used to create illusion in the staged performance. Other features include a spectacular nature and the “showiness”: the size, number of participants, grandeur or the intensity of evoking emotions, etc. (see Ritzer 2004, 184-186; Skórzyńska 2007, 19-73; Regiewicz 2013, 96). Some elements of a spectacle can be also found in the idea of performance, that is performing, putting on stage or acting out roles by actors in front of an audience (Schechner 2007; Zeidler-Janiszewska 2007, 35-36). Performances are targeted at viewers and meant to be watched – it is the act of watching which is the *sine qua non* condition of their very existence. Besides, spectacles are a somatic activity also characterized by iterability (capacity to be repeated in a different context) and they are delimited, that is they have set temporal and spatial boundaries (Wachowski 2011, 308-309).

Without going into a complex theory of cultural events, it should be underlined that in the most general sense, the theory implies conceptualizing culture as a unique kind of theatre, in which all activities involve a division of roles, marking out a stage and defining the boundaries of the activity (Kolankiewicz 2005; Zambrzycka 2013, 185). For the purpose of further argument, I will limit the range of the term “spectacle” to one kind that is a staging showing the past. I have assumed that an archaeological fête, being a specific kind of narrative on a topic of the past, includes elements characteristic of a spectacle and applies conventions of a show or a theatrical performance, although it differs in several aspects from its classical form; I also assumed that the way in which the past itself is presented during a fête takes on a spectacular form. An archaeological fête is therefore a continuous enactment of the *theatrum* of the past (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 68). It is a certain series of events and spectacles organized in a set space and time under a joint name which refer to a central theme and where all displays and other forms of staged performance encompass quite a wide archaeological context pertaining to the realities of everyday life in the reconstructed periods.

The proposal to view an archaeological fête as a spectacle can be approached through several of its distinctive features. These should be cohesive and correspond to a defined

holistic concept so that they can make an impression on the spectators and create an effect intended by the organizers. First of all, a fête assumes the presence of the performers – actors and spectators who play a key role in this form of presentation of the past. For a fête as a spectacle to come into existence, it is essential that two groups, namely the action performers and the viewers to whom the spectacle is addressed, meet in a set time and place. Both kinds of roles are of a normative nature, are interdependent and the spectacle itself happens thanks to their mutual confrontation and interaction (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 57; MacAloon 2009, 363). However, while professional actors play in theatrical performances in the case of a fête the actors are amateurs without any professional training, for example museum staff members, historical re-enactors, students, etc. They are distinguished from the spectators by their costumes as they are usually dressed up in clothes from a given historical period, while the spectators wear present day clothing. The role of the actors is to re-enact and demonstrate some selected scenes and “authentic” aspects of the earlier life, certain behaviours and activities. During the performances, the actors either intentionally or spontaneously use some elements of the stage design and paratheatrical techniques as well as some props – replicas of historical objects as well as contemporary artefacts which relate to the reconstructed period. The performers resort to a certain repertoire of expressive means, including sound effects, noises and gestures which enhance the sense of authenticity and strengthen the illusion of real experience (Regiewicz 2014, 190). The division of roles between the performers and the spectators is further supported by the dramatization of the action: the first group re-enacts past events whereas the viewer's treat them as a spectacle, or they might be invited to participate by joining in the activities in agreement with the performers and in line with the prepared script (Regiewicz 2014, 190).

The second distinctive feature of a spectacle is the actual place – the stage (Goffman's façade) where it is taking place, or a locale – the “*physical space which is the setting for the interaction*” (Giddens 2003, 163, 425). Archaeological fêtes are most often organized in historical locations: nearby archaeological sites, in open air archaeological museums which are already equipped with full-size reconstructions, also near the ruins of some medieval castles, etc. (Gancarski 2012; Czopek and Górski 2016). Archaeological fêtes can also be set up in places unrelated to the past, like for example in the scenery of contemporary cities or living areas, or in other locations artificially arranged for their needs. They can then become a more or less probable setting for the re-enacted events but at the same time they also function as a part of the spectacle's stage design. The decoration prepared for the spectacle is an important part of the stage set; it can include some unmovable elements, for example full-size reconstructions of farmhouses, tents put up for the time of the fête or other structures (Regiewicz 2014, 189). The locations chosen for the fête become alive thanks to the staging organized against their backdrop in which the re-enacted past events are contextualized so that “*the re-enacted images of the past are more authentic*” (Wrzesiński 2013, 178). The animated images of the past are complemented by sensory experiences, the smoke wafting from the bonfire, sounds coming from the farmhouse or

the farmyard. Fêtes are thus meant to facilitate the creation and the strengthening of the aura of the past and the authenticity of the re-enacted events so that “*the visitor could immerse himself/herself into the atmosphere and identify with the past*” (Eco 1996, 18). In this way the setting of the fête becomes a stage of a dynamic spectacle, or rather a series of simultaneous spectacles – an “accumulation of spectacles” (Debord 2006, 33). What differentiates a fête from a classic theatre is the lack of one central stage, which is replaced by a number of smaller, independent stages where various events are staged at the same time. The continuous *theatrum* of the past is carried out throughout the time of the fête between the stalls, stands, near the crafts people’s workshops, in replicas of the farmhouses, etc. (Dziadowiec 2012, 142). The spectacles range from small-scale events to larger ones which involve several hundred participants, as it is the case with the re-enactment of battle scenes or show fights.

One more constitutive aspect of stage design can be mentioned, namely the “personal façade” as described by Erving Goffman (2008, 53-59; quoted after Regiewicz 2014, 190). It is connected with the person of the actor and his or her defining features like for example the physical appearance, costume, manner of speech, social status, etc. The façade can include some attributes which define the position of the actor on stage, for example the “façade” of a warrior allows to be identified by such element as the costume, weapons, manner of behaviour, or actions taken. The personal façade does not necessarily require a specific (historical) stage setting, as it is easy to imagine the actor outside the reconstructed space. Besides, the personal façade is movable and adds to the stage design.

Although during a fête there is a division into the specific areas of the spectacle – the stage, the audience and the backstage, the boundaries are often moved in an undisturbed way, blurred or intentionally concealed. The areas are not always clearly and unambiguously separated but they engulf one another. In effect, there is no clearly demarcated dividing lines between the space of the stage where the planned and directed spectacle is taking place and the space for the spectators, which would at the same time mark the boundary between the re-enactment and the reality, the past and the present (Regiewicz 2014, 190). What is more, the boundary between the stage and the backstage, as the unofficial more spontaneous private space, also becomes blurred, and it often happens that the space of the backstage overlaps with the space for the viewers. As a result the viewers have an opportunity to look at what happens behind the stage, that is into Goffman’s backstage where usually the outside observers are not allowed. Many visitors who go to see a fête seek “genuine” authenticity and atmosphere of the past, and want to reach beyond the bounds of the performances which are offered and this attitude “*expresses the desire to see ‘who is who in real life’ in situations when the mediating veil of fiction is taken off*” (Warchala 2006, 7). An archaeological fête, for example, enables visitors to watch how artefacts are produced, to ask producers about some nuances of the production processes, and it also allows for personal direct participation in the events by taking on the role of performers. By the same token, a fête gives viewers the impression of participating

in a spectacle and evokes a feeling of communing with something real, authentic as they do not only watch the prepared spectacles but they also see what goes on backstage and they can witness everyday lifeway. Despite the fact that viewers are aware that they watch spectacles based on a certain structure of reality, that is a kind of mystification, they often feel they are let into the backstage (Ogonowska 2010, 173-174).

One of the most characteristic features that provides the grounds to view an archaeological fête as a spectacle is the manner in which the past events are portrayed, namely as a drama. In this case, the concrete combination of events (from the past), for example in everyday life in the settlement, production activities, battles, etc. are perceived as an attractive narrative form into which events are then arranged. This leads to creating narratives about the past which “*take the form of stories collectively performed and experienced*” (Burszta 2013, 272). Fêtes encompass the adaptations of scenes pertaining to various aspects of everyday life and activities of people from the past which are adjusted and re-enacted in order to be presented to a wider audience who wants to get the feel of the ancient atmosphere and become familiar with the way life was in the distant past. In this way such events allow for a presentation of a fairly complete picture of history and they create a narrative sequence which is imposed on past events. A common denominator for archaeological fêtes is that they usually make references to the local past (with some exceptions, as for example the reconstructions of ancient battles), as well as the fact that they reconstruct not as much some concrete, local events from the past as they make use of the archaeological and historical material in a sketchy fictional way (Błaszczak 2015, 236). In other words, their aim is mainly to visualize the imagined past and not so much to stage historically documented events (Leyko 2015, 18). Every spectacle, including a fête operates with specific language and employs various modes of communication. In the contemporary visual culture the communicative attractiveness is assured by going beyond the limits of text and prioritizing images. An archaeological fête as a spectacle in the same way rejects textual description as unattractive and is characterized by the “*importance of the visual code*” (Wachowski 2011, 304) which constitutes its main substance and relies mainly on icons, pictures, performances, presentations and spectacles.

The elements present in these types of spectacles mainly include *mimicry*, *agôn* and *ilinx*, that is concepts taken from the classification of play and games by Roger Caillois (1973, 310-328). All activities performed by groups of historical re-enactment, including staged events and presentations during archaeological fêtes, fall into the category of mimicry (the act of mimicking) that is play based on acting out someone's role, pretending to be somebody else. As Caillois (1973, 318) wrote, “*all play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game: in-lusio), then at least of a closed conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe. Play (...) consist of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving.*” All kinds of play which involve acting out a role and pretending to be somebody else belong to this category. What is important here is the imagination of the person playing

the game and his or her ability to step into someone else's shoes (Nowiński 2012, 81). This makes it a kind of simulation, playing a game in an imaginary or illusionary world and being involved in activities where a closed, contractual reality resides together with dramaturgy and situatedness (Błaszczak 2015, 240). Mimicry blends together with elements of *agôn* – competition and fight, and *ilinks* – the thrill-seeking behaviour of the re-enactors and the spectators

Various attempts to revive the past are an important element of archaeological fêtes. Mieczysław Kurzątkowski (1978; quoted after Hadasz 2005, 137) distinguishes three basic strategies of dramatic composition to revive ethnographic heritage museums which can also be applied to archaeological exhibitions, including fêtes and the sites on which they are organized. These include: (1) mystification – creating some semblance of life, for example a directed mess which gives an impression of the place being recently abandoned by inhabitants; (2) staging – taking the form of continuous or occasional shows, for example a presentation of a craft by craftsmen, performances by folk groups or bands; (3) imitation – forms of activity without the spectator, imitation of some craftworks, rituals, for example using traditional methods to grow crops on a farm. Archaeological displays of the past in the open air are thus created by a conscious combination of some elements and activities aimed at their revival. Various strategies combining theatre and scenography are used to revive the past in reconstructed settings of a historical settlement or town, for example bringing in the re-enactors dressed in period costumes who perform scenes from everyday life in the past, such as the imitation of agricultural activities, or the presence of farm animals, etc. The aim is to create an authentic atmosphere of the place by providing a more interesting and more attractive offer for visitors, as well as to expand the circle of people interested in such forms of presenting the past. These forms engage the imagination of visitors, appeal to their emotions and give a genuine human touch to events making them in this way more authentic. Additionally, the fact that these activities are “*conducted in the setting of original prehistoric remains or their reconstructions*” (Brzeziński 1998, 70) significantly strengthens the power of the message. The reception of the images coincides with strong affective sensations which result from sensory perception including the sense of smell, taste and touch (Pękała 2008, 153). Thanks to these experiences visitors are for a moment able to find themselves in a different historical reality and empathize with people's roles in the past.

Archaeological fêtes restore a spectacular character in such areas as exhibition space, education and the behaviour of spectators. In contrast to museums, for example, they involve the “spectacular mode of presentation” (Popczyk 2006, 332), typical of places of entertainment, that is a multimodal ludic form deprived of the tendencies to organize and classify which dominate in museums. Such conceptualization of a spectacle together with closely related simulation should be taken as new modes of presenting the past – which is an expression of the current attitude towards the past – that is based on the elements of play and games and which engage the imagination, emotions and personal experiences.

A fête is after all a kind of spectacle in which not only the actors but also the spectators participate. The participants who play the part of the spectators do not only watch the prepared staged performance but they also become emotionally involved in the watched performance (Regiewicz 2013, 96). A spectacle is something to be experienced, to be received in a sensual way: what matters is direct communication, a lively presence and a welcoming attitude towards new experiences. During an archaeological fête many senses are engaged into the process of learning, perceiving and experiencing, and past worlds are brought back to life by bodily and sensual experiences. Participating in such events does not include only looking at objects which have been produced or watching staged spectacles but the experience becomes extended to include action, for example making artefacts with one's own hands or participating in some activities. In effect the space of the fête stops being a place of sensory reception and becomes a performative space (Regiewicz 2014, 194). In what follows, the space of the fête should be considered in relation to such concepts as agency, action and performativity. A turn towards these means of communication results from more general cultural changes as well as from the changes in the relationship between people and the past which I described earlier on: contact based not on the intellect but on the senses and the semblance of direct experience (living through) the past by participating, interacting that is actively creating the space of the spectacle and its entire dynamics. Because of this visitors are transformed from being passive observers not belonging to the spectacle into its active agents (Ogonowska 2010, 77).

Furthermore, a spectacle is by definition a purposefully organized show which takes place in front of an audience and which is meant first of all to provide the audience and the performers with pleasure and entertainment. I should also add that the audience to participate in the show does not have to meet any initial requirements, that is it does not have to be prepared for it in any way – the essence of such events is that they are not focused on the act of understanding (Wachowski 2011, 307-308). This is because ludic elements are inscribed into the concept of a fête and the atmosphere is created by its spectacular character and performativity. Fêtes attract large numbers of visitors and they include many events, games and competitions which assume the participation of an audience (Dominiak 2004; Pawleta 2012). In a similar vein, historical re-enactment is for many spectators a kind of “contemporary entertaining holiday time” (Błaszczak 2015, 253).

Finally, a spectacle is also a space for multidimensional consumption. A characteristic feature of contemporary places connected with consumerism is that the spectacles are not the aim in themselves but their aim is to attract a large number of people who will purchase the produce, services and experiences offered during the spectacle (Ritzer 2004, 186). Consumption, which becomes a kind of ludic experience (Kantor 2011, 35, 38), is a related and indispensable element of each spectacle. An archaeological fête can be perceived as a place for the consumption of selected parts of history and output of archaeological knowledge. During a fête, the produce of archaeological research is being offered in the form of consumable images, performances, narratives, etc., and their consumption can

be both passive (watching, taking photos), or more active. The process of consumption can take place at various mutually interconnected levels and pertains to the following aspects: (1) time – travelling to the distant past; (2) space – escapades into undiscovered, unknown territory; (3) objects – replicas of historical objects, copies or artefacts, reconstructions, and souvenirs; (4) events/activities – demonstration of ancient crafts, production processes, including entertainment; (5) shows/spectacles – living history, battle re-enactment, scenes from everyday life; (6) myths – contemporary myths, conceptions or stereotypes about the past, an idealized, pastoral image of prehistory, etc.; (7) artificially created aura of the past and its simulacrum (Pawleta 2011, 15-16; 2016, 282). All this means that fêtes offer the past and its images as a commodity – easily accessible and pleasurable, but it should be noted that the consumption goes beyond goods and services and encompasses symbols, performances and entertainment including primarily the accompanying sensations and experiences. A spectacle is at the same time an act of beautifying and retouching the manufactured goods, and an expression of materialized illusion, that a commodity which is offered has become (Nieroba *et al.* 2010, 237).

The way of interpreting archaeological fêtes as a spectacle or an event of a spectacular kind, which I have outlined in this article, can of course be questioned as they differ from traditional theatre spectacles in some respect. Although during fêtes the script sets the frame of the events; however, the way it unfolds is not closely directed but staged by amateurs who do not act out a rigidly predefined pattern. This leaves a lot of room for creativity for the performers (re-enactors) and as a consequence some elements of the spectacle are filled in by spontaneous and unplanned actions, although the end is well known (Regiewicz 2013, 99). Another distinguishing feature of fêtes is that the spectators are more active, engaged and their role is not only to passively watch the performance but they can frequently participate in it as well. Besides, as noted by Andrzej Przychodni (2012, 279), spectacles are only one type of spectacular events – others include interaction between the actors and the viewers, a craftwork show, workshops for children, etc., which aim at deeper interaction between the re-enactors and the spectators. The author, among other issues, points out that the performers who take part in fêtes cannot be compared to stage actors, and that the main aim of fêtes is to show to the public as faithful an image of the past as can be possibly achieved (therefore even the objects which are used have to be authentic and it is difficult to compare them to theatre props). Additionally, the contact between the performers and the spectators is not a kind of theatrical acting but interacting with the aim to explain some notions related to the fête. The reason why fêtes are organized is not to make an impact on the viewer by the spectacle itself, which is only a means to an end, namely sensitizing the audience towards archaeological heritage, transmitting knowledge in an accessible way, raising social awareness and understanding for the profession of an archaeologist and the recognition of the concern for cultural heritage (Przychodni 2012, 296-297).

In my opinion, the above comments do not contradict the general conception of an archaeological fête as a spectacle, because fêtes constitute a part of spectacular events and

can be characterized as such, and therefore can be described with terminology applied to spectacle-like phenomena. This approach is justified by the elements of the spectacle I discussed above – the quintessential *mise-en-scène* of archaeological fêtes which at the same time constitute its spectacular potential including all the visible aspects of the framing: visual composition, artefacts, costumes, stage setting, the script, acting out roles, or the sequence of scenes, etc. They all create the form of the fête and the content is the communicated knowledge about the past. In such contexts we can talk about the phenomenon of theatricalisation or even a dramatization of the past – shaping the transmitted historical knowledge in the form of a spectacle adapted to the formula of the stage. Besides, it is precisely the spectacular character of the archaeological fêtes that decides about their attractiveness and popularity. The form of the communicated message takes on an effective shape, which meets the expectations of the contemporary audience and communicates knowledge about the past in a spectacle-like convention that is more easily perceived and remembered (Nieroba *et al.* 2010, 262). By the same token, fêtes represent the form of a spectacle with a certain affective load which evokes in the spectators' particular reactions and emotions by engaging their senses and involving them in the course of the presented events.

## CONCLUSIONS

The theatricalisation of the past, which is a derivative of broader socio-cultural processes, is a conventionalized manner of social regulation of the attitude towards the past and at the same time it constitutes evidence for the emergence of some phenomena in the historical culture of contemporary Polish society, and the formation of a different – in comparison with the previous period – relation of people to the past. Theatricalisation of the past is also an expression of the departure from the standardized universal vision of the past in favour of new historical discourses. At the same time it shows the diversification of narratives about the past – expressing individually and collectively ways of experiencing history that is a unique form of articulating the past. In such cases to visualize history and remember about it – revive it, reconstruct, recreate and restore it – requires one to resort to theatrical means: costumes, props, scripts, staging which can be used to make a transition into past times (Leyko 2015, 22). The notion itself remains in close relation with the social functions of archaeology in the contemporary world, including communicating its achievements to society and popularizing knowledge about the past. It is via fêtes that the social commitments of archaeology can be fulfilled, and which include the dissemination of research results in a clear, effective and engaging way for those who participate in them.

Fêtes and staged performances about the past require active involvement and interaction from visitors. They engage their emotions and help to feel the mood of the place, or of the re-enacted events. During such events both the transmitted informative content is important as well as the form of communication, with the focus on visual effects and the spectacular nature of the shows, their extraordinary character and attractiveness, ludic



elements, and contact with the living attempts to interpret the past. The level of authenticity of the past created in this way is arguable, because theatricalisation can have more in common with theatrical enactment and the staged performances of certain behaviours (from the past) than with experiencing them in a genuine way (Skórzyńska 2004, 75). This however is a topic for another discussion.

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