

ON THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF STEREOTYPES: WWII HISTORICAL REENACTMENT AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

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The article discusses how the WWII historical reenactments in Poland contribute to the construction of national identities. The current political situation, where Poland's ruling *Law and Justice* party supports specific interpretations of the past and intensively promotes these in the public space, the activities of historical reenactors are often read through the prism of the party's political activity. In a similar way, collective identity projects performed in historical reenactments are understood. In contemporary Polish social life WWII history constitutes a very strong political and symbolical capital. Representing war events, reenactments and reenactors place themselves in the very centre of debates on contemporary visions of the past and identities related to them. This article focuses primarily on describing how the stereotype attributed to the WWII historical reenactments influences the perception of this phenomenon by the audience and shapes their sense of national identity.

Keywords: historical reenactment, historical policy, national identity, performativity.

THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH ON WWII HISTORICAL REENACTMENT IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

Historical reenactment is an exceedingly popular phenomenon in Poland, clearly visible in the public sphere. Reenactments of WWII events play a particular role within this phenomenon.¹ As the memory of the war is still alive – it can be described in terms of communicative memory as Jan Assmann² puts it – and politicians and the media use WWII symbols in their discourse, reenactment of this period serves a significant function in the debate on the wartime past. Historical reenactment interacts with other forms of representing and interpreting history in the public sphere. It draws from them, falls under their influence, but also modifies them and makes its mark. The reenactment of the past is not a purely receptive phenomenon, which would only reflect the attitude towards the past found in

¹ Research on the reception of historical reenactments is carried out under the National Science Center grant, Poland No. 2017/27/B/HS3/00990.

² J. Assman, « Communicative and Cultural Memory », in A. Erll and A. Nünning (eds), *Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin – New York, 2008, p. 109–118.

culture; it is thoroughly performative, shaping perceptions of history, affecting cultural and social phenomena, including personal or national identity. In this text, however, the focus is primarily on a certain general image of national identity presented to the author by viewers of the WWII historical reenactments. From interviews with participants of historical reenactments, it appears that for a substantial part of them the basic value organizing the national identity is patriotism. Patriotism is rarely thoroughly analyzed by them, represented by slogans as “respect for the homeland” or “defense of the homeland,” often also embedded in the current policy, by categorizing who (and why) is patriotic and who is not. The aim of this article is not, however, to analyze thoroughly patriotism in its many forms, nor to present a detailed concept of national identity. However important, these concepts remain at the margins of the scope of this paper. The aim here is to show the situation where the performativity of historical reenactments does not derive from their content, form, intentions of creators, and what they show on the stage, but from the current public discourse and the stereotype that shapes the reception of reenactment. The intention is to show a special situation of the performance failure,³ where neither its content, creativity of the performers, nor the script determine the perceived stage reality, but rather a deep social conviction about the politicization of the WWII historical reenactments.

Importantly, this article presents an analysis of the phenomenon at a specific historical moment, when the right-wing conservative party *Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)* rules in Poland. The *Law and Justice* political activities also include the area of historiography, the aim of which is to create a framework for the interpretation of Polish history, consistent with the ideological interpretation by the party. The *Law and Justice* politicians adopted a historical policy project proposed by the conservative historians over a decade ago.⁴ This project is still being actively implemented, albeit with some modifications and certain shifts in focus.⁵ To simplify the matter for the purpose of this article, the above-mentioned project assumes an affirmative approach to Polish history. In practice, this means building a positive symbolic capital around certain events and historical figures, mainly those from the period of WWII. Its implementation has caused the further development of a certain trend, noticeable even before – the increase in the society’s interest in history and its presence in the public sphere. It has also brought about a certain trend for historical shows, books, films and games.

The reenactors are acting today in this very political and social context. The interpretations of the past enacted by them interact with the historical policy

³ L. Howe, « Risk, Ritual, Performance », *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6, 1, 2000, p. 63–79; E. Schieffelin, « Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality », *American Ethnologist*, 12, 4, 1985, p. 707–724.

⁴ R. Traba, « Polityka wobec historii: kontrowersje i perspektywy », *Teksty Drugie*, 1–2, 2010, p. 300–319.

⁵ R. Traba, *Przeszłość w teraźniejszości. Polskie spory o historię na początku XXI wieku*, Poznań, 2009; R. Traba, « Polityka wobec historii: kontrowersje i perspektywy ».

present in the public sphere, and the performers themselves, consciously or not, hold a position in relation to the content and practices aimed at history proposed by the public discourse. Their actions do not take place in a vacuum, and therefore should be interpreted in relation to the specific social situation and to the vision of the past that prevails in the culture.

Some researchers attribute a critical potential to the historical reenactments, seeing them as a tool for discussion with other interpretations of the past that are present in the public discourse.⁶ In this approach, historical reenactment appears as a grassroots voice of history formation, manifestation of its democratization,⁷ as well as a way of adding complexity to the vision of the old times, seeking alternative interpretations to the mainstream ones. At the same time, however, other researchers note the strong politicization of historical reenactment,⁸ and this phenomenon occurs in at least three different ways. Firstly, some of the performers openly support their vision of the past promoted by specific political groups. Secondly, politicians at various levels – from local authorities to state-level ones – invite reenactors to take part in commemorative celebrations, anniversaries of battles and state holidays, and the presence of reenactors in such events is interpreted as a politicized practice. Thirdly, the top-down historical policy, topics and historical events that gain a special place in public discourse influence the selection of the motifs reenacted by the circle of historical reenactors. Sometimes this happens because certain events from the past become fashionable and often recur in the media and sometimes because it is easier to get public funds to organize historical reenactment on a specific theme.

Historical reenactment as a cultural and social phenomenon has countless interactions not only with other forms of representation of the past, but also depends on the ways of institutionalization of representing the past in the public space and funding streams for events that take place in this space. A substantial number of people involved in the historical reenactment movement have the ambition and the will to organize battles or other past events in the public space. Only for a part of the reenactors it is sufficient to test their skills solely during private events, maneuvers created exclusively for the members of reenactment groups. Most of them decide to present their avocation to the audience, and this has specific consequences. The basic one is that the reenactors operating in the public space are subject to evaluation by the recipients – the onlookers, as well as those who write about historical reenactments, most often reported by the onlookers – the journalists.

⁶ M. Daugbjerg, R. Syd Eisner, B. Timm Knudsen, « Reenacting the Past: Vivifying Heritage 'Again' », *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20, 7–8, 2014, p. 681–687.

⁷ J. de Groot, *Consuming History. Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, USA-Canada, 2009.

⁸ B. West s.d., « Historical Re-enacting and Affective Authority: Performing the American Civil War », working paper, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/spais/migrated/documents/west-06-12.pdf> (retrieved: 19.12.2016).

This fact is crucial for further considerations, because they encompass not only the opinions of the reenactors themselves or the spectators, about the historical reenactment, its strengths and weaknesses and the evaluation of commitment to promotion of specific visions of history, but also a certain stereotype about reenactment that is persistent in the media, and due to them – in the public discourse, as well. Regardless of the opinions of the performers, whether they consider their actions to be apolitical or not, a stigma of supporters of right-wing parties and promoters of the historical policy proposed by these parties is quite unequivocally attributed to them.⁹ A part of the reenactment circle really falls under such a label, but a large group does not. For the external reception of historical reenactment, the internal diversity of the ideological attitudes of the performers is not, however, of great importance.

The recipients filter the actions of the reenactors through the prism of the values **related** to Polish history emphasized by the ruling *Law and Justice* party – to sum it up: patriotism, affirmative attitude towards the past, glorification of Polish heroism and a defensive attitude towards any attempts to discuss the uniquely positive image of Polishness. The details – justified by historical sources – that diversify the image, which the reenactors try to show during the reenacted battles – errors of commanders, brutal and disrespectful behavior of Polish soldiers, senselessness and deheroization of death – escape the attention of the viewers and the interpretation of the event is governed by the slogans drawn from the politicized public discourse. In such cases, the interpretation of seen reenactments often does not result only from the direct perception of the presented events, but from a particular historical habitus¹⁰, remaining in relation to the public discourse that the viewers of historical reenactments embody. For this reason, the critical aspect of reenactment has much greater impact on the performers themselves, it opens them the possibility of creating identity shaped, among others, by contesting the visions of the past that prevail in the public space.

The audience attending the historical reenactment rarely notices the nuances woven into the script of the event, and not always listens to the narrator telling about the details of the events being reenacted, indulging in the admiration of explosions, military equipment and the martial bustle and assessing the events according to the historical habitus.¹¹

As mentioned, historical themes selected by reenactors often overlap with the themes present in conservative historical policy. This fact, however, is a trap for the reenactors, especially for those who deal with topics that are also embraced by historical policy, for example, show their other interpretations and introduce these

⁹ C. Michalski, « Polityka śmierci » in *Żaloba*, Warszawa, 2010, p. 14–21.

¹⁰ See J. Olick, « From Usable Past to the Return of Repressed », *The Hedgehog Review*, Summer, 2007, p. 19–31.

¹¹ K. Baraniecka-Olszewska, *Reko-rekonesans: praktyka autentyczności. Antropologiczne studium odtwórstwa historycznego drugiej wojny światowej w Polsce*, Kęty, 2018, p. 312.

alternative understandings into the historical debate. Their actions are often perceived through the prism of the historical reenactment politicization stereotype as such and its servility towards the ruling party. Interestingly, the stereotype influences the shaping of the recipients' historical identity. The conviction about the compatibility of the visions of the past presented by the performers with the interpretations of history supported by right-wing politicians makes the viewers perceive reenactment events as events promoting patriotic attitudes, which these politicians are pushing for. Here is an interesting situation, where the content of the event itself is often blurred and its critical character is omitted¹² and the reception of the event is ruled by the stereotype of the entire cultural phenomenon.

WWII HISTORICAL REENACTMENTS RECEPTION THROUGH THE PRISM OF POLITICIZATION STEREOTYPE

Historical reenactment of WWII is, on the one hand, a grassroots initiative, a way towards individual interactions with the past. It is an avocation aimed at personal satisfaction. On the other hand, however, reenactment is used in local and national politics as an element of commemoration of the state holidays. Interestingly, in both these aspects reenactment becomes a form of expressing and also shaping national identities. As Joanna Kurczewska puts it, "historical reenactment is nothing but an indicator of norms, ones which are fundamental for perpetuating the matrix of collective identities, especially state and national ones."¹³

Although historical reenactment feeds on the past, in its performative nature it is distinctly oriented towards the present, and in a sense also towards what is to come, as it also projects national identity on the future, defining how it should look like under the influence of reenactment. Interestingly, reenactors' actions aimed at modifying identity are often conscious and planned. Many reenactors, but also the officials and politicians who seek their services openly declare their hopes that participation in a reenacted performance will have a positive impact on the perception of Polish history, reinforce a patriotic stance and enhance the feeling of pride in belonging to the Polish nation.

Not all reenactors support this goal or approve of open declarations of such aims of reenactment. And because they are aware of the stereotypical reception of historical reenactments as a field of activity for politicians, especially the right-wing ones, many fear being labelled as nationalists or radicals – as this is another association that reenactment has begun to evoke in the public. In Poland, WWII reenactment is most of all regarded as a movement, which supports the project of a

¹² Unlike the cases of historical reenactments described by R. Schneider (*Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, London – New York, 2011).

¹³ J. Kurczewska, « Dwa spotkania międzykulturowe – przedstawienia i konteksty », *Górnośląskie Studia Socjologiczne. Seria Nowa*, 6, 2015, p. 38.

national identity grounded in affirmative patriotism, pride in one's history and an uncritical approach to one's past. As mentioned, this stereotype does not convey the full complexity of historical reenactment, since the phenomenon involves performing many types of national identity and many underlying sources of patriotism, from the affirmative to the critical.¹⁴ It does, however, influence the reception of reenactment and its role in the public sphere, as the audience quite often seeks certain content and also expects the reenactors to present the glory of Polish history, which is a factor in evoking an uncritical approach to the past of the nation.

Owing to the influence of the historical policy of conservative parties, for over a decade now the public sphere has been full of depictions of the defensive war of 1939, the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and the activities of the cursed soldiers (since the end of WWII to the mid-1950s); these motifs used to be decidedly rare. Museums devoted to these events have been opened, monuments founded, books and press articles published. The stories have made their way to school textbooks and to collective memory. The national identity is being built around them. In their mythologised form, these events indicate the features of Poles as a collective – perpetually fighting, heroic, willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of higher values such as freedom and the defence of their homeland. In many cases this is also the image that emerges from historical reenactment.

Although, in its very principle, the historical reenactment movement seeks to offer the most authentic representation of the past possible, or at least a version which would be closest to the existing sources,¹⁵ it often turns into a depiction of a certain ethos currently attributed to historical figures, including WWII soldiers. Mythical figures appear in the discourse of historical events, around which a community sharing attitudes and beliefs is organized.¹⁶ Historical reenactment is a kind of performance here that creates on stage a conventional reality suspended between the past and what has happened, and the present and its uses of this past. While the performers themselves are struggling to make their presentations of history as close as possible to the sources, rooted in the past,¹⁷ the viewers come to

¹⁴ See J.J. Lipski, *Dwie ojczyzny, dwa patriotyzmy. Uwagi o megalomanii narodowej i ksenofobii Polaków*, s.d., <http://otwarta.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/J-Lipski-Dwie-ojczyzny-dwa-patriotyzmy-lekkie3.pdf> (retrieved: 30.12.2016); B. Korzeniewski, « Transformacja pamięci – o nieliniowym charakterze przemian w pamięci Polaków », *Sensus Historiae*, 9, 4, 2012, p. 11–22.

¹⁵ S.K. Decker, « Being Period: An Examination of Bridging Discourse in a Historical Reenactment Group », *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38, 3, 2010, p. 273–296; S. Gapps, « Mobile Monuments: A View of Historical Reenactment and Authenticity from inside the Costume Cupboard of History », *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 13, 3, 2009, p. 395–409; D. Radtchenko « Simulating the Past: Reenactment and the Quest for Truth in Russia », *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 10, 1, 2006, p. 127–148.

¹⁶ See M. Maffesoli, *The time of the Tribes. The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, London-Thousand Oaks-New Delhi, 1996, p. 10.

¹⁷ This does not mean that they elude the present day or are not aware of its impact on the assessment of past history. However, they make the attempt to understand the past arise from its character, not the needs of contemporary users of historical discourse. See K. Baraniecka-Olszewska, *Reko-rekonesans: praktyka autentyczności*.

historical shows with interpretations clearly emerging from the present. Thus, reenactment contributes to the project of shaping national identity through references to the features of Polishness emerging from the interpretation of the depicted historical events and very strongly this taken or embodied way of interpreting history affects the identity project seen in the reenactment.

According to the understanding of history proposed in conservative historical policy the defensive war fought in September 1939 is used to show the perseverance and heroism of the soldiers who faced overwhelming odds, especially after 17th September, when Poland was attacked by the USSR. The Warsaw Uprising, in turn, has become the symbol of grassroots initiatives in fighting for liberation undertaken by the entire society, with soldiers and civilians working hand in hand, from the youngest to the eldest. The cursed soldiers are the newest element in historical policy promoted by conservative parties. Their stories are to emphasise not only self-sacrifice or heroism, but most of all the ethos of fighting against communist ideology, since they were the people who did not lay down their arms after the war ended and kept fighting for an independent Poland, refusing to accept the country under communist rule as such.

These values are also shared by some of the reenactors. Some deliberately weave them into the content of the stories they reenact and this way these values often rise to the foreground in historical reenactment scenes, pushing adherence to sources further back. The scenes rarely leave room for critical reflection on the events presented or for showing them from different interpretative perspectives, although discussions around these WWII events are still ongoing, both in the academia and in journalism. These events fuel many controversies, especially if they are interpreted as unequivocally positive national symbols.

PERFORMING IDENTITIES AND BONDING TEMPORARY COMMUNITIES

Although not all reenactors, and not all recipients of historical staging, agree with the clarification of the interpretation of history proposed by the conservative discourse, the performers quite in solidarity underline a certain convergence of the postulates introduced by the historical policy discussed here with their views on the dissemination of history. They appreciate that the interest of the *Law and Justice* party in the past has increased the presence of the representation of history in the public discourse. In addition, the WWII reenactors, in principle without exception, confirm that patriotism is an attitude important to them. And although they implement it in many different ways, often contrary to affirmative patriotism proposed by the conservative historical policy, they admit that drawing the party's attention to the essence of patriotism in upbringing, in building a national identity, is to some extent convergent with their views. They see a higher sense in

promoting history and patriotism in general, which is why they decide to use the possibility of organizing historical performances in public space.

However, the audience who decides to attend the staging of the WWII events, often seeks for general patriotic values in the reenactment, identifying them with the content of public media and no longer looks at the details of the particular position promoted by the reenactors. Despite having some doubts regarding the manner of depicting events or seeing the ideology of conservative parties behind the representation of WWII events and the resulting criticism, many people identify with the image of the past presented by reenactors. The project of national identity performed through reenactment convinces them, and also remains in line with their own beliefs. For such people, reenactment is perceived positively, as an instrument of building identity and even more importantly promoting patriotism. These individuals are receptive to the influence of reenactment and experience such events intensely, responding emotionally to conveying certain values and the inclusion of certain symbols they regard as important. Reenactment engages them through creating a specific atmosphere around the event, the space between the actors and the audience.¹⁸ In such cases reenactment gives rise to a community of experience, a feeling of mutual identification; to use Birgit Meyer's term, a kind of an aesthetic formation.¹⁹

Although Meyer uses this term mostly in the study of religion, she also sees aesthetic formations as similar to Benedict Anderson's imagined communities,²⁰ which means the category may be applied to the analysis of non-religious phenomena. According to Meyer, communities are built around aesthetic experiences, here – after Aristotle – understood as sensorial. As she writes: “indeed, in order to grasp the particular modes through which imaginations materialize through media and become manifest in public space, generating sensorial sensibilities and aptitudes that vest these imaginations with a sense of truth, we need to move into the broader sphere of what I call aesthetic formations.²¹” Historical reenactment appeals to the senses, it is a framework in which knowledge about the past is conveyed, but also experienced sensually,²² and performed bodily.²³ Moreover, the interpretation perceived in or imposed on historical staging gives a sense of truth, a sort of arrangement of knowledge about the world. The experiences evoked by participation in reenactment events bind reenactors and spectators into a type of community, sharing the sensorial contact with a given vision of history – an aesthetic formation.

¹⁸ R. Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Philadelphia, 1985.

¹⁹ B. Meyer, « From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding », in B. Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion, and the Senses*, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 1–28.

²⁰ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London – New York, 2006 [1983].

²¹ B. Meyer 2009, « From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations », p. 6.

²² R. Schneider, *Performing Remains*.

²³ D. Taylor, « Performance and/as History », *TDR: The Drama Review*, 50, 1, 2006, p. 67–86.

This relation may be temporary, but accepts performed project of identity. In a similar vein Edward Schieffelin described ritual performances – as bequeathing permanent social meanings.²⁴ Identity communities formed around historical reenactments as being built around a specific experience are not permanent, they are not necessarily strong relationships, but the experience derived from that moment of community experience may leave a lasting trace, for example in accepting and recognizing identity projects that were perceived in reenactment. The members of this community then promote the project further in other aspects of social life.

Importantly, the creation of a community around sensual experiences resulting from the observation of embodied visions of the past does not mean the unanimity of this community or the unification of its patriotic attitude sought in historical reenactments. On the contrary, the heterogeneity of this community is its defining characteristic. What is being built here is the participation in engaging in a sensual and bodily event and the attitude to certain types of stimuli evoking the sense of national identity. This, in turn, means that not all viewers of reenactment will find themselves within the aesthetic community, because some of them contest the watched performance. Others, however, seek confirmation that their patriotic attitude is shared by more people, wanting to belong to a certain community.²⁵

Thus, historical reenactment has some effect on the level of shaping national identity, which influences certain temporary community identities that bind aesthetic formations. At the same time, it shapes individual identities, especially those of the reenactors, although in a much more diverse way. Their identity as individuals, often directly linked with their national identity, is constantly asserted and created in performative acts,²⁶ through representation of a chosen ethos of the past and strong identification therewith, apparent not only during the events, but also in everyday life. Incidentally, the practice of historical reenactment has strong ties with individual identity, since it contributes to achieving personal satisfaction, a feeling of existential authenticity²⁷ – by doing something for, and in harmony with, oneself.

CONCLUSIONS

Both reenactors and the general public associate reenactment with a considerable potential for influencing others. Although reenactment mainly affects the senses and engages the body, scholars recognise its influence not only on

²⁴ E. Schieffelin, « Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality », p. 721–722.

²⁵ See M. Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes*.

²⁶ See J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London – New York, 1990.

²⁷ C.J. Steiner, Y. Reisinger, « Understanding Existential Authenticity », *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33, 2, 2006, p. 299–318; N. Wang, « Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience », *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, 2, 1999, p. 349–370.

individuals, but most of all on socio-cultural processes.²⁸ It must, however, be noted again that the direction of this influence does not always stem from the content presented by reenactors; it is often defined by the nature of a given event or commemorative celebration in which reenactors take part or by the historical reenactment stereotype described above.

Therefore, scholars analysing the phenomenon focus not on individual identities performed through the practice of reenactment, but on the collective identity, be it national or local, associated with a specific place or region.²⁹ The 'boom for history' has resulted not only in greater susceptibility to absorb themes invoked by the historical policy of the current ruling party in Poland, but also in a generally increased interest in the past. As noted some time ago by Rosenzweig and Thelen, people take to history to seek individual, local and national roots.³⁰ Many reenactment groups concentrate on presenting not only the national history of Poland, searching for models and founding values for modern Polish identity, but also on the study of the local history of their city or region, in order to shape the local identity and cause the regional ethos to re-emerge from the past. The effectiveness of historical reenactment in this regard is visible in the public sphere. Several cities in Poland are now home to groups who focus predominantly on the history of the given locus. They popularise the memory of WWII events, which took place in these cities through references to specific historical figures and their actions. At the level of practice, identity projects created by their actions (not necessarily the reenactments of historical events themselves, also public speeches, lectures, exhibitions, tending to the cemeteries and monuments) are diverse, rooted in different interpretations of the past. However, in the public discourse this diversification is blurred and the initiatives for local history are also filtered through the interpretive framework set by the conservative historical policy. This local identity often draws from the matrix of national identity (to use Joanna Kurczewska's term³¹), it refers to the same values and symbols and is based on an affirmative attitude towards the actions of the Polish during WWII, only this time the ethos is sought in local and not national history.

On both the local and the national scale the project of identity performed through historical reenactment is based on the idea of promoting patriotic attitudes. These may be different, from the critical to the affirmative, yet the public perception of historical reenactment often deprives it of its complexity. It is

²⁸ P.T. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji*, Warszawa, 2008; J. Kurczewska, « Dwa spotkania międzykulturowe – przedstawienia i konteksty »; T. Szlendak, « Wehrmacht nie macha. Rekonstrukcyjna codzienność jako sposób zanurzenia w kulturze », in T. Szlendak, J. Nowiński, K. Olechnicki, A. Karwacki, W.J. Burszta, *Dziedzictwo w akcji. Rekonstrukcja historyczna jako sposób uczestniczenia w kulturze*, Warszawa, 2012, p. 7–70.

²⁹ P.T. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego*; J. Kurczewska, « Dwa spotkania międzykulturowe – przedstawienia i konteksty ».

³⁰ R. Rozenzweig, D. Thelen, *Presence of the Past. Popular Uses of History in American Life*, New York, 1998.

³¹ J. Kurczewska, « Dwa spotkania międzykulturowe – przedstawienia i konteksty ».

regarded as upholding the concept of patriotism that emerges from the historical policy of conservative parties. Consequently, the audience attending historical reenactment events usually shares a rather stereotypical view of reenactment and associates the phenomenon with affirmative patriotism and the same type of national identity, despite the fact that reenactors themselves are a very heterogeneous group and, as such, create different projects of national identity, based on varied visions of Polish history. In these cases, historical reenactment evokes a strongly politicised project of national identity, which is not always in line with the intentions of reenactors themselves.

Thus, we can talk about a certain performance failure in this case. In the case of historical reenactment, the performativity of the performance itself is dominated by the performativity of the historical discourse dominating in the public sphere, which creates the interpretive framework for past events. Sometimes we observe a certain harmony here, because the reenactors, while recreating the past, recall the values **promoted** by this discourse. However, many reenactors want to present a different interpretation of the past, less dependent or even undermining the understanding of the past expressed in it. In spite of their efforts, the critical aspect of historical reenactment, as well as the specific subversive potential included in performance as a tool for expressing the excluded, muted, resisting, or just expressing criticism,³² fails. The entanglement of historical reenactments into public financial systems, the desire to exist in a public space dependent on the decision-makers, as well as the following certain fashions determined by conservative historical policy, causes the reception and influence of reenactment to become ruled by a stereotype born in relation to this historical policy.

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³² D. Taylor, « Performance and/as History ».

