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Staging the Past

Themed Environments in Transcultural Perspectives

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Popular representations of history are taking on new forms and reaching wider audiences. The search for usable pasts is branching out into active appropriations of history such as historical theme parks, housing developments, and live-action role play. Drawing on themed environments across the continents, the articles in this volume focus on how these appropriations bypass, are different from, or even contradict traditional as well as scientific modes of disseminating historical knowledge. Bringing together theorists and practitioners, they provide the basis for an interdisciplinary as well as a transcultural theory of how pasts are staged in various social contexts.

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Introduction: Staging the Past

WOLFGANG HOCHBRUCK/JUDITH SCHLEHE

In global processes of identity formation, the present is anchored in socially constituted histories and meaningful pasts (Friedman 2008: 89). The production of histories of the self and the negotiation of alterity takes place in many forms and formats – not just in academic historiography. In popular contexts, the practices of theming and staging communicate certain versions of the past that are consumed and appropriated by immense numbers of people. And obviously they enjoy it! But what accounts for this attraction and how may it be assessed?

The origins of this transdisciplinary volume of essays, which the editors hope will serve as an introduction to the field of themed environments and staged pasts, can be traced to a conference in Freiburg, Germany, in 2009.¹ It was the first gathering of scholars as well as practitioners from various fields participating in the creation and study of the current wave of themed and theatrical representations of history as can be discerned in widely separate parts of the world. Researchers in cultural studies, archaeology, anthropology, tourism studies, military history, literature, living history, theatre, museums, media education and pedagogy present their research results and experiences in this book, in a series of writings as diverse as their transdisciplinary approaches.

It is the aim of this volume to go beyond the established patterns of thought within disciplines and to explore the field and its considerable variety of forms and formations in several cultural contexts.² The articles seek to explain how history became not only a popular cultural pastime in the second half of the 20th century, but a theatrical venue, a commercial asset, and a hobby for multitudes – without losing its political significance.

1 The editors would like to thank Victoria Tafferner and Coman Hamilton for their valuable work in proof-reading this volume.

2 To this end, the DFG Research Group 875: *History in Popular Cultures (Historische Lebenswelten in populären Wissenskulturen der Gegenwart)* has received funding from the German Research Foundation since 2007.

This volume will enhance a deeper understanding of how particularly the spatial and the performative turns in cultural theory and practice have affected, and are continuing to affect, our perspectives on the various popular representations of history that we encounter in theme parks (Joy Hendry, Judith Schlehe/Michiko Uike-Bormann, Noel B. Salazar), music, the theater, living history programmes and experiences with reenactments (Martine Teunissen, Mark Wallis, Vanessa Agnew, Carolyn Oesterle), tourist sites and places of pilgrimage (Cornelius Holtorf, Amos S. Ron), as well as in historiography and literary fiction. (Re-)Constructions of history have become popular pastimes that not only amuse audiences but influence and instruct beyond their historical range (Regina Loftus/Paul Röllke/Victoria Tafferner), construct new formations of social fabric among participants (Gordon L. Jones, Anja Dreschke), and even gradually leave the realm of bounded space and time allotted to them to become ubiquitous and pervasive as consumer-oriented lifespace (Scott A. Lukas). The title of this volume acknowledges the two main components of themed environment and theatrical reenactment that enable and empower individuals and independent groups as well as museums and other *appareils d'état*, but also private, commercial and multinational corporations to create their own versions of history. These versions unfold their meanings only when seen in their specific cultural contexts and from a transcultural perspective. It is crucial to understand that what is staged in themed environments is either the creation of a history of a nation, region, or ethnic group, as an offer to the visitor for imaginative identification, or it is the creation of a seemingly timeless exotic Other, juxtaposed to the Self and serving to stabilize and position it in the global world. In order to reveal the meanings of these versions of history in the context of identity politics we suggest extending cultural studies to encompass an inter- and transcultural studies approach which will also focus on global cultural entanglements and particular social positions. It is of great importance in this context that analyses are grounded in empirical field research. When regarding theming and performance of pasts as meaningful social practices, our goal is to critically explore which uses people make of these practices in specific present-day contexts.

Themed Environments

The shifts of power in the media from the word to the image, and from the image to the simulacrum (cf. Ron in this volume), have also affected transmissions of historical knowledge both in terms of the media used in the process and in terms of structuring the ac-

quisition process. Reading and viewing are gradually being replaced by multi-sensory experiences, the active role of the reader/recipient, and the passive consumption of viewing merging in the guided activity of experiencing spatially and thematically structured arrangements of historical knowledge. Themed environments,³ this volume argues, are not only a device for materially transforming architectural presents world-wide according to individual or collective taste, but have also become a ubiquitous way of experiencing *pastness*, to borrow from Cornelius Holtorf. *Pastness* is here used to describe the practical results of all sorts of themed environment constructions that refer to events, themes, topics, and persons that are perceived as historical by visitors and which have been instrumentalised to cater to the apparently increasing urge to authenticate identities based on individual and/or collective histories: "People are interested in constructing authentic relationships with a particular retelling of the past, and that past assists in the construction or reaffirmation of a sense of identity" (Rowan 2004: 263).

Bringing together disneyite forms of Imagineering (Imagineers 1996) and the reconstructive impulse of historical open-air museums from Swedish Skansen to Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts and to Taman Mini in Indonesia, theming provides the basic instrumentarium of spatial arrangements necessary to create simulacra that appear to circumvent the obvious irretrievability of the past. Not that this irretrievability had ever kept scholars, politicians or other parties interested from researching, (re-)writing and realigning their impressions of the respective pasts with current affairs, needs, and insights, usually in the form of traditional historiography. The turn towards spatialising history in four permanent dimensions as themed environments, however, is (relatively) new. Its impulse appears to have three roots: one, the theming visible in amusement parks (traceable to the Bakken park which opened already in 1583 at Klampenborg near Kobenhavn, DK) and in the early ethnographic spectacles in commercial venues and in imperial and colonial expositions (Stanley 1998), two, the regional and historical theming of open-air museums where the three-dimensional manikin-based tableaux start walking and talking simultaneously with similar two-dimensional efforts in the field of cinematography, and three, the theming in other architectural environments such as shops, malls, and restaurants (Gottdiener 2001, Wood/Munoz 2007). Several contributors to this volume also mention the transgression between themed and everyday envi-

3 The definition of themed environment here follows Gottdiener (2001: 5): "[...] themed material forms that are products of a cultural process aimed at investing constructed spaces with symbolic meaning and at *conveying* that meaning to inhabitants and users through symbolic motifs" (cf. Ron in this volume: 120).

ronments. Theme parks are not necessarily bounded liminal places anymore, as Alexander Moore has suggested (Moore 1980: 216), but have become 'normal' tourist destinations. Theming is not any longer something extraordinary, it has become an integral aspect of both tourism, leisure and, most importantly, of ordinary, everyday life. City-centers, shops, restaurants, and housing developments are often themed to varying degrees, so a considerable part of peoples' lives all over the world already takes place in themed environments. More precisely: theming intrudes into the life-worlds of the urban cosmopolitan middle-classes.

Consequently, there are a growing number of people who celebrate their marriages, practice their respective forms of worship, or even dwell permanently in theme parks. Important parts of life have intruded into the themed space which can in many situations no longer be designated as liminal – certainly not in the classical sense which has previously alluded to anti-structural and transformative qualities.⁴ Consuming and appropriating a well-defined, unambiguous past in themed environments now appears to guarantee continuity and adds to the comfort of enjoying a structured, safe present.

Theming environments and their inhabitants at least on a surface level refers to displays of 'real' lives and their conditions, to *Lebensweltlichkeit* – that which existed before and outside the extraordinary world of adventure. Experiencing the pastness of these ordinary lives inside the themed space, however, turns the relations between normality and adventure inside out in an ironic reversal: the ordinary is seen, viewed, or experienced hands-on as the extraordinary. Yet, this extraordinarity is not so much challenging as entertaining,⁵ and it is not taken too seriously by visitors – which also adds a great deal to its attraction.

This is the point where open-air historical museums with living history programmes deviate from theme parks, (where the aim is what the Disney imagineers call "heightened reality"), or where they *should* deviate, or at least *have* deviated in the past. Originally the theme park was characterised as an amusement park with rides and booths centered around a particular theme. Recently, while joyride-based amusement parks have been experiencing hard times (List

4 Erika Fischer-Lichte explained recently that Victor Turner's concepts of the "liminal" and the "liminoid" can be applied to leisure activities and all kinds of cultural performances as long as they bear the aspect of transformation (Fischer-Lichte 2009, cf. also Oesterle in this volume). We would argue that theming is normalized and naturalized to such an extent that there are hardly any transformative experiences to be discerned in the consumption of themed environments.

5 This holds even true for the so-called "dark theming" to which Lukas (in this volume) refers: the shocking elements are just entertaining.

2009), theme parks with historical topicalities appear to have increased in attractiveness, an example of which, the Europa-Park in Rust close to Freiburg with its mixture of spectacular rides and regionally grouped pan-European⁶ historical vistas, has seen continuously increasing visitor figures in spite of economic pressures.

Given the pull-factor of entertainment-oriented theming with its “artistic license to play more directly to [...] emotional attachments” (Imagineers 2005: 23), one should probably not be overly surprised that historical museums, however consciously or unconsciously, have begun modelling the concessions and paraphernalia of their presentations partially according to theme park models. Additionally, museums have started inviting living history presenters and interpreters to enliven their traditional programmes – with mixed results. Concurrently, there is a tendency in Asian theme parks to integrate museum-like elements, thereby blurring the boundaries between themed entertainment spaces and serious educational institutions (cf. Hendry 2000).

All themed environments have the same capacities critics now credit to the more sophisticated cartoon narratives or the middle-brow novel – to challenge the reader into an intellectual game of intertextualities, while entertaining everybody. Also, both museums and theme parks rely on scientific research for their constructions of visitor-oriented spectacle. Difference becomes apparent, however, in that while the task of the museum is to educate its visitors by introducing them to new and hitherto unknown/unseen documents, objects, and scenes, the historical theme park will content itself with rearranging those things the visitors knew before into forms that appear simultaneously new and familiar. The difference is visible when comparing such visits as those to the Hohenlohisches Freilandmuseum Wackershofen, where attempts at romanticising the life of small tenant farmers are undercut by spelling out the gruelling work conditions, lack of education and general squalor of their circumstances, to the arrangements of ‘historical’ sights at the Europa-Park in Rust, Germany, or Huis Ten Bosch near Nagasaki, Japan. In Rust, axes of vision have been designed to create vistas that contain enough familiar visual glimpses and moments to trigger the ‘proper’ national-historical identification. In Huis Ten Bosch, an idealized vision of European – more specifically Dutch – history is presented as a utopian model for Japanese visitors (cf. Schlehe/Uike-Bormann in this volume).

6 But not just European: Interestingly enough, the Europa-Park contains various elements staging stereotyped vistas of non-European places. Supposedly showing Africa, as well as Dutch Batavia, they represent colonial history in an orientalist form.

This is not to say that museums always live up to the expectations set for them. As Mike Wallace noted already in 1981, American museums had, at least until then, been functional preserving and incorporating “selections and silences of such an order that they falsified reality and became instruments of class hegemony” (Wallace 1981: 88). Wallace’s critique focused mainly on the content level, complaining that at the time museums were not interested in securing social change, even though changing attitudes had made it possible to depict more problematic and confrontational issues.

In sharp relief, newer museums like Wackershofen with its socio-critical approach provide insights that are clearly more acceptable within the framework of a pluralist and democratic society, although the programme – and the programming – remain solidly in the hands of a controlling *appareil d’etat*. There is very little visitors can do or see other than follow the directions and read the explanatory material. In the Europa-Park, a change of vistas, a conscious change of visual angles, will provide the postmodernist intellectual segment of the visiting crowds (however small in percentage this segment may be) with the added pleasure of seemingly being able to look behind the scenes – a trick from the treasury of capitalist irony already well known to Disney Imagineers and gleaned from the ‘grandfather’, Phineas T. Barnum, who, in his *American Museum*, began mixing museum and early theme park elements with serious lectures as well as circus-like formats of entertainment in the mid-19th century (Barnum 2000 [1855], cf. Harris 1973).

Martine Teunissen in the present volume explores how, since when, and to which extent, at least the time-honored flag-ship of American living history museums, Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, has managed to overcome the limitations Wallace saw in 1981. It can be argued that the inclusion of living history programmes adds to the levels of potential experience accessible to visitors in museums. In most North American open-air museums as well as in a number of British and some French and Dutch sites, costumed interpretation by trained staff is the rule, while German museums are still reluctant to adopt interpretation by costumed staff on a regular basis (see the discussion in Carstensen/Meiners/Mohrmann 2008).⁷ This discussion is not continued in the present volume, but it needs to be noted that whereas the use of third person interpretation and scripted scenes/tableaux opens a range of possibilities for the interpretation of places, conditions, and even objects that stationary

7 In the Indonesian park Taman Mini, representatives of all provinces guide visitors through the cultural displays of their respective areas. As frequently encountered in tourist sites, it is assumed that a local guide can provide authentic information on local history – although this is not at all guaranteed in multiethnic and hierarchical societies.

exhibitions alone can not offer there are also drawbacks. For at least some visitors, the inclusion of themed presentations by costumed interpreters in a museum environment seems to blur the difference between museum and theme park.

“Costumed employees in the Historic Area at Colonial Williamsburg sometimes like to ridicule the ‘clueless’ visitor ... the one who gets off the bus at the Duke of Gloucester Street and expects to find a theme park, complete with thrilling rides. This visitor is part of the mythology of the place. Interpreters tell and re-tell the story about the visitor who, stooping to get a closer look at one of the nearly tame squirrels that are everywhere scurrying or begging for tidbits, asked: ‘Is it mechanical?’ The clueless visitor who thinks live squirrels are clever simulacra is a kind of stereotype. Such people do, however, exist – as we discovered while interviewing, at random, visitors on the streets of the reconstructed city. [...] When we explained that we wanted to know what visitors to Colonial Williamsburg thought of the way the museum reconstructed the past, the woman (a teacher of ‘gifted children K through 12’) exclaimed: ‘Oh, this is a museum? I thought it was an attraction – a theme park!’” (Handler/Gable 1997: 28)

One obvious similarity between living history museums as staged historical spaces and ‘historical’ theme parks as stages for present entertainment remains intact anyway:

“The museum ha[s] some obvious appeals: many are charming places that demonstrate interesting old craft techniques and exhibit quaint old objects; there are, after all, real pleasures in antiquarianism. The museums are also safe, well promoted, and one of the few available ‘family’ experiences.” (Wallace 1981: 89–90)

The relative safety of this kind of museal space is not only physical but extends to the experiential level: visitors are usually not irritated or challenged by encounters with unfamiliar living people, or confronted with problematic topics. It seems reasonable, therefore, to predict a further narrowing of the margins of difference between theme parks and museums in terms of their existence as themed environments for tourist consumption. It is a pincer movement, one direction being the museums’ frantic attempts to attract visitors, the other the postmodern tourists’ assumption (see above) that in any themed environment authenticity must of needs be staged (MacCannell 1973). This second arm of the pincer is stronger than the first, considering that authenticity as a consumer item can be had outside of museums, too: So-called cultural centers, folklife festivals, even hotel lobbies may serve as backdrops for cultural performances in which the performers “become living signs of themselves” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 18).⁸

8 For a recent discussion of fictions of authenticity cf. Pirker et al. 2010.

The pincer movement is further reinforced by the fact that theming can be superimposed on spaces especially if they are devoid of structures pre-determining interpretation. Amos S. Ron's contribution to this volume opens venues into the field of 19th and 20th century Protestant pilgrimages to the Holy Land as a form of reconstructing found environments as biblical. The pilgrims preferred the openness of seemingly natural spaces because these open ranges could be superinscribed with meaning and interpreted as unchanged since the days of the Christ – other than the existing historical and archaeological sites that mediated previous interpretations by other religious groups.

Stages for a Re-enacted Past

In a related vein, sites for reenactments are chosen if and because they are *not* the original sites which in many cases have been turned into historic parks with paved accessways and monuments on site. Instead, the reenactment site provides the supposedly original look *prior* to the engagement that led to the construction of the commemorative site, while the reenactment has to move to a site which is more 'original' in status than the original.

When discussing reenactments, it should be noted that the thrill of the lived-in experience of the modern living history museum is doubled where and when the seemingly historical life-world becomes host to that which the visitors know did happen around the time depicted in the museum as special events: the joust [*tjoste*] between mediaeval knights, Roman legionnaires pitching camp, a skirmish between Union pickets and raiding Rebel cavalry. Special living history programmes of this kind, providing a lifespace-plus experience, are used to entice return visitors to become regulars, and to lure first-time visitors into returning. As independent events, they are commonly referred to as *reenactments*.

The term *reenactment* bears two implications that are usually not reflected by the reenactors themselves, or by the audience for that matter. For one, the re-enactment turns the original event that is being conjured up into an *enactment*, implying a *mise-en-scène* quality few of the original events that have become subject to reenactments ever had. Secondly, the varying degrees to which the reenactors have attempted to come close to the real thing, subsumed under the heading of 'authenticity', have usually obscured both the insurmountable ironic distance between the events and their reenactments, and the essentially theatrical nature of the reenactment itself.

Attempts at re-enacting past events can be traced all the way to the Colosseum, but those reenactments were limited to monumen-

tal acts that were re-played in what was clearly thought of as a theatrical environment. Later reenactments such as Emperor Maximilian's famous tournaments can be interpreted as regressive attempts at reliving a nostalgically imagined past, while the contemporary proliferation of forms and formations of living histories as drama – which we call *Geschichtstheater* – has to do with the affective turn in history, as Vanessa Agnew has pointed out:

“contemporary reenactment is indicative of history's recent affective turn, i.e. of historical representation characterized by conjectural interpretations of the past, the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on affect, individual experience and daily life rather than historical events, structures and processes.” (Agnew 2007: 299)

In the reenactment format, however, the individual experience is, other than in the living programmes in museums, often fused with the traditional 'battles-and-leaders'-topicality of pre-modern historiography: the reenactor participates in his or her own historical film while simultaneously watching it, so to speak (cf. Thompson 2004: 3). It is not history, however, which is passing before their eyes, but a (re-)constructed past for which a stage has been prepared on which the same willing suspension of disbelief is operative which already informed Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of the theatre, and which is largely based on the credibility of the presented past's pastness.

Still, reenactments as stages for a re-imagined past should not be waived off – as they often are – as fantastic battle-grounds for incurable adolescents and fans of military show and glamour. While there is certainly a considerable percentage of reenactment hobbyists for whom the hobby provides the same or at least a similarly familiar haven as any other hobby (see Gordon L. Jones' contribution in this volume), the theatrical and the didactic possibilities of reenactment range far beyond 'battlefield karaoke' or individual-scale identity politics. Reenactments have been tapped for their roots in ceremonial re-staging and ritual for reconciliation purposes as well as for the opposite, for keeping a sense of conflict awake, see Jeremy Deller's 2001 reenactment of the 1984 “Battle of Orgreave” (Deller 2001, cf. Kitamura 2010) between striking British miners and mounted police, in which many of the original combatants participated. Reenactment also lies at the core of the historical city games (re-)enacted every year in the town of Schwerte in North Rhine–Westphalia by Regina Loftus and Paul Röllke (cf. their contribution with Victoria Tafferner in this volume) where children learn about the history of the town as well as study and incorporate specific roles within the social and environmental fabric of mediaeval Svierte. Ultimately, the (all-too-often not realized) potential of reenactments includes that of the Brechtian *Lehrstück*, the Educational Play, in

which actors play largely for themselves, and by and through playing learn about the thoughts, the feelings, the responsibilities and the perspectives of the roles and the functions these roles have – or had – in the society represented. This holds true also for the initial training and learning process of the costumed interpreter in a living history museum.

Academic historiography still provides the research bases and the background for museum curators as well as living history interpreters and reenactors, creating new programmes and critical re-evaluations of older ones, but also reading some historiographical contention in the new light of practical re-staging. At the same time, the living history equivalent to the themed amusement park, fantasy LARP (Live Action Role Play), seems likely to do to the Brechtian possibilities of reenactment and to the critical reception of living history interpretation what postmodern tourism is doing to the difference between museum and theme park: obliterate it, creating a perpetual, entertainment-focused and utterly a-political present. Likewise, the howsoever imaginary time-travel to seemingly other spaces and periods with its considerable range of possibilities for independent and self-determined learning as well as for the history and literature classrooms, might be overdetermined by consumer-oriented life-spacing that levels regional identity and distinction in favour of tuscanic-looking housing developments with English lawns in the foothills of, for instance, the Black Forest.

Cross-Cultural Theming and Performing

This volume does not only refer to theme parks and reenactments in Euro-American but in Asian and African contexts as well. And we emphasize that what is staged and performed is not necessarily the imagination and construction of one's own past but quite often the idea of the past (or of so-called 'traditional life') of an exotic Other. When the 'Self' is staged in non-European contexts, then it has most often to do with post-colonial processes of nation-building as exemplified by the case studies of Indonesia (Schlehe/Uike-Bormann) and Tanzania (Salazar). Ethnically heterogeneous post-colonial nations construct and display what is supposed to be a shared knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of diverse ethnic groups which are acknowledged by the nation-state. For that reason, folkloristic aspects that seem to stand for continuity over time, mystifying both historical fractures as well as current fragmentations and conflicts, are carefully selected and displayed.

On the other hand, when it comes to displays of 'traditional' *foreign* cultures, these can be traced back to theatricality in the

cross-cultural encounters of first contacts (Balme 2006) as well as to European 19th century “show-spaces” (Poignant 2004: 7), in which indigenous people were made objects of curiosity in “Western systems of mass entertainment and education involving display and performance” (ibid.) in circuses, fairs, exhibitions and museums. Relations of colonial power and a “vulgar evolutionism” (Stanley 1998: 17) were made visible: indigenous people had to play the role of the savage Other to the Western civilized Self. Although some historical and literary studies mention that these indigenous people were “not just passive pawns” (ibid.: 15) but discerned a certain agency, e.g. by observing the observers, they hardly refer to anthropological studies revealing how European colonisers were perceived and imitated e.g. in mimetic performances and possession cults in African cultures (Kramer 1989). Obviously, mimetic practices in dealing with the foreign have deep roots in many cultures.

For the situation at present, in a globalized world where the gazes are mutual and multi-directional, we think that it is of special interest on the one hand to reflect on how Europe is displayed and appropriated in popular cultures in Asia (as exemplified by Huis Ten Bosch and other Japanese parks), and on the other hand to consider how ‘local cultures’ are staged for tourists all over the world. It is remarkable that recent studies stress that – notwithstanding the asymmetrical power relations in many cross-cultural encounters in the commercialized contexts of international tourism – performances can also “provide a ground to imitate and thereby approach one another” (Balme 2006: 6). Dreschke (in this volume) calls this “playing ethnology”. Furthermore, besides criticising ongoing exploitative structures and commodification of cultures, the aspect of ‘native’ self-representation connected to the emergence of local cultural movements in the Global South⁹ comes to the fore: this means that the agency of the performers, e.g. in cultural centres, especially when they are controlled by indigenous groups, is emphasized. Joy Hendry (Hendry 2005 and in this volume) goes even further, stating that their ways of insisting on cultural ownership and reclaiming ‘their’ culture can be regarded as healing. Although there might be some romantic visions involved in this kind of identity politics, what can be concluded from this is the desire all over the world to identify with certain versions of the past. Which ones are selected and how they are displayed and performed can only be understood in specific local and national contexts as well as in peculiar ways of relating to the global world. Therefore, transcultural perspectives are

9 The notion of self-representation is usually restricted to indigenous peoples and displays which means that, apparently, there is a need to emphasize that these groups are represented by themselves and not by others.

needed even when we look at popular leisure worlds that seem to deal with nothing but entertainment.

Conclusion

History used to be passed on in tales, legends, myths, expressive genres – personified, affective, staged for consumption and identity formation by the respective interpretive community. Oral traditions were not fixed, and rituals always involved the audience as contemporary theatre sometimes does (cf. Oesterle in this volume). While it would be a clear overstatement to argue that the de-theming of history by academic historiography has failed and given way to a free-for-all of individual appropriations of historical matter, the tendency in the Western world to de-hegemonise the discourse of histories is obvious. However, it is as yet not clear which direction the new participation historiography might be taking. Even if there was no linear practice of histories being conveyed solely along and through academically informed school curricula, the contemporary proliferation and overlap of historical as well as historiographic agency seems to be a historic novelty.

An important factor in this context is of course the political economy of popular historical cultures. The difference between historical re-enactors performing for their own fun and live interpretation directed by a governmental or a private commercial institution may not be visible to audiences, but it entails a host of questions and possibly problems regarding agency, authenticity and quality management.

Wherever stagings of pasts take place, and whatever themes and values are projected onto these pasts, themed environments, reenactments and live interpretation always create positioned representations. They provide space for subjective engagement and they speak to all human senses. They are enjoyable and entertaining which makes them all the more effective. It is this effectivity which warrants a conscious and responsible use of the resources and possibilities offered by these forms of conveying historical knowledge in popular format.

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