The Multi-Mediatized Other
The Construction of Reality in East-Central Europe, 1945–1980

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Historical Reenactment in Photography: Familiarizing with the Otherness of the Past?

The historical reenactment movement[1] is related to photography in multiple ways. One way is that the photography is a kind of self-representation of historical reenactment itself. Almost all reenactment events are captured in photographs. The photos serve as documentation of an event or a particular test of the quality of reenactment in terms of historical accuracy. Thus photos that demonstrate proficiency in re-creating the past are especially valued among reenactors. Such photos are often posted on the internet, their content is discussed by reenactors (directly or online), and the details of replicas of clothes, armour, and equipment become points of interest. The photos become a reminder of an event or even a form of advertisement of the reenactment movement or of a particular group within it. Yet, there is one more kind of photography related to the historical reenactment event, one that is a subject of re-creation itself: such photographs can serve as reminders of events, can constitute a subject of discussion on historical accuracy, but above all, taking them is perceived as reenactment practice itself.

In this chapter, I will focus on the question of reenacting photography dealing with WWII. The context for my study is the Polish reenactment movement[2] (Kwiatkowski 2008; Szlendak et al. 2012). War photography is the most visible branch of this field, whereas there are significantly fewer pictures representing civilian life. Thus the re-created reality of the discussed photos is wartime military his-

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[1] Research for the present article was financed by the grant of the National Science Centre, Poland (project no. UMO-2011/03/B/HS3/04686).

[2] The historical reenactment movement in Poland dates back to the 1970s. It started with knights' tournaments and also Indians' villages reenactment. Over time, Indian reenactment separated from historical reenactment and the second phenomenon began to develop rapidly. Simultaneously various branches of historical reenactment appeared: from representations of ancient times, the Romans and barbarians, through the early middle ages with Slavic and Viking tribes; the high middle ages with knights, tournaments, and quasi-sport combat leagues; the 17th century with Polish gentlefolk; the 19th century with Napoleonic battles and Polish uprisings; and finally the extremely complex 20th century reenactment with both World Wars and the Polish-Soviet war between them, with anti-Communist opposition, and reenactments of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Piotr Kwiatkowski, who tried to count the number of reenactors in Poland, boldly states that every fifth person has an acquaintance that belongs to a reenactment group (2008: 113), but it is difficult to verify his estimations. Today the historical reenactment movement in Poland is a very popular phenomenon, visible in the public sphere; however, it is also severely criticized for oversimplifying history. The potential of encountering the past present in historical reenactment is acknowledged very rarely. It is perceived mostly as a kind of entertainment. This is partially true since reenactors undertake this activity for pleasure and their own satisfaction, but it is also a way of touching the past (see Gapps 2009; Johnson 2015; Schneider 2011).

tory. The foreignness of the past represented in them (to refer to the often-abused slogan of David Lowenthal, 2011) is strengthened by the otherness of the war itself and by the frequently raised issue: the separation of contemporary viewers of war photography from war experiences (Berger 1999; Sajewska 2013; Sontag 2010). Nevertheless, the feeling of otherness does not paralyze reenactors' will to cognize the past. History in this perspective is seen rather as a different culture, which can be understood within the general human condition (see Domańska 2005: 61, 76–77). Moreover, war photography, though it presents a foreign (to use Lowenthal's notion) reality, is a convenient material to imitate, since there are many pictures preserved that were made by war cameramen working at various fronts and within various armies. Imitating those photographs allows us to simulate the aesthetics of war pictures, however, reenactors are often more ambitious in this respect and want to represent more than aesthetics.

The analysed activity is enumerated in Vanessa Agnew's definition of reenactment: taking photographs may be an act of reenactment (2007: 300). The phenomenon I am going to describe refers only to historical periods when photography was in use. Photographers take pictures that imitate or simulate the past; sometimes they even reenact the whole practice of taking photographs. In their work they refer to form, content, and aesthetics of the original pictures they have access to. They learn how photographs were produced and composed, what was their subject in a particular epoch and what was deliberately ignored in the iconoclastic gesture of a photographer (see Demski 2015; also Mitchell 2005). Having some knowledge about original photography, the reenactors try to create their vision of the past themselves by means of photography, capturing scenes from re-created reality. This kind of photography has to be considered within the wider framework of historical reenactment as such, since, as I will show further, it is closely related to the general goals of re-creating history—namely, performing, experiencing, and immersing in the past (Gapps 2009).

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There are various media through which touching and narrating the past in historical reenactment is possible. They—just like Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (1989)—include movement, gesture, historical sources, and memorial sites: indispensable and interconnected elements of the reenactors' practice. What is more, representations of the past embedded in those elements are frequently transferred from one medium to another. I am particularly interested in the process of turning images into gestures, which are subsequently transformed into image once again by reenacting war photography. I focus on the crucial relation between photography and practice or, in other words, the embodiment of the photography-related knowledge based on static images of the past and the performance of it. Performing and constructing visions of the past, as experiencing history itself, relies on the interplay of these factors, and due to the powerful ability to create new interpretations of history and new ways of experiencing it, the performance seems to be the strongest of all media representing the past involved in reenactment (Johnson

2015; Schneider 2011). Moreover, performance itself becomes an archive of historical gestures and practices (Schneider 2011). The same performance can be, however, subsequently captured, by either a bystander or a reenactor engaged in the performance of history, using photography to visualize the remote past.

The particular activity analysed in this article is usually referred to as "reenacting photography". It has many variants and no established codex or rules, as these are still in the making, since the activity is a quite new phenomenon that appeared only a few years ago as a further development of historical reenactment. Usually however, it is realised in two main ways or in their certain combination. The first way focuses on taking photos of reenacted events or reenactors, using digital cameras, and editing them to make them look as if they were from a particular historical period. The second way is a reenactment practice, re-creating the work of war photographers. In such a case, contemporary photographers use cameras and wear uniforms from the historical period to be able to make pictures on the reenacted battlefield and, subsequently, if possible, develop pictures in period-like conditions—sometimes (although rarely) even in a tent next to the battlefield.

The fundamental aim of making photos using both of these techniques is to imitate pictures from the past through capturing reenactment events in them. Photographers undertaking this task are often reenactors themselves (in the case of war cameramen these are exclusively men, since women generally were not allowed to be on a battlefield; however, women also make photographs of reenactment events, from a distance), but they focus mostly on taking photographs and capturing in them the reenacted ambience of the historical period. This practice brings the other and distant past to the present in a particular way. In order to achieve it, contemporary photographers deconstruct the image of the past, dividing it into pieces in order to build a photographic representation of history. They thus create a new image of history—in the form of a picture taken and edited by themselves (Figs 1–4). The Other—the past—reenacted and preserved on photography—cropped and modified according to the contemporary imagination about historical periods—is designed by photographers. It is construed either by means of modern technology or by a meticulous re-creation of past photographic techniques. Whichever the mode of production may be, the resulting photos resemble contemporary imagery of a particular period.

Research on Reenacting Photography

The data for this article came from various sources. I have browsed Second World War pictures on over twenty reenactment groups' websites and websites dedicated to war photography. It was not a rigorous query—I merely wanted to grasp the character and the mood of war photographs. In my research I focused above all on the "reenacted" pictures posted on websites, which are the most common space for displaying those photographs. I observed the work of photographers on reenacted battlefields and I talked with them about their work. I spoke with reenactors about

the work of reenactment photographers.[3] Furthermore, I conducted formal interviews with two of them, both popular and recognised "reenacting" photographers within the WWII reenactment movement. What is more, fan pages on social networking sites administered by the two photographers, which contain their photos, are widely renowned within the WWII reenactment world. The sites are "Reenacting Photography",[4] administered by Łukasz Dyczkowski and "Mołdaw Reenacting Photography",[5] administered by Grzegorz Antoszek. There are, of course, many more reenacting photographers who make high-quality photos, but I decided to focus mostly on the work of Dyczkowski and Antoszek, because they represent the two variants of reenacting photography mentioned above, because they use a variety of techniques for making pictures, and finally, because they use a particular medium—the internet—to share their work with others. Sometimes they exhibit their photographs or use them for books covers, museum leaflets, and calendars, but the internet is the main medium from which they display their works.

The two chosen cameramen have various backgrounds in which they began reenacting war photography. Both are reenactors themselves and both originally were members of groups dedicated to representing Nazi Germany units. They both devised the idea of sharing the effects of their work on the internet around 2013, when their Facebook fan pages appeared. Łukasz Dyczkowski is an archaeologist and a professional photographer, while Grzegorz Antoszek, a historian, is not a professional but started to learn photography in order to be able to reenact its wartime version. Their general aim as reenacting photographers—the same for both—is to grasp the ambience of the past and to make people look at their photographs and wonder whether these are contemporary pictures or period ones, although they realise this aim in different ways[6] and using different technology.

Reenacting WWII Photography

Generally, the images that are meant to re-create photographs from the past are taken during battle reenactments, historical spectacles, group manoeuvres during so-called reenactment events (in Polish *rekonstrukcje* 'reenactments' or *inscenizacje*

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[3] I conducted research on historical reenactment from 2013 to 2015. It appears that photography is an extremely important element of the whole phenomenon, and it started to be one of the subjects of my research and, as such, it was present in most of the interviews conducted with World War II reenactors. However, it was not a separate topic of my study. I also talked, formally and informally, with eight photographers who take pictures of reenactment events, although not all of them deal with reenacting photography. The people I talked to about photography were of various ages, most were in their forties, and they were also of various professions. I talked to both men and women, although to men more frequently as more men than women are involved in the World War II reenactment movement.

[4] https://pl-pl.facebook.com/ReenactingPhotography (last accessed on: October 10, 2016).

[5] https://www.facebook.com/MoldawReenactingPhotography (last accessed on: October 10, 2016).

[6] Which is only partially true, since Łukasz Dyczkowski works also with a digital camera and a project with analog one lasts for circa two years. However, for the purpose of this description I have chosen his analog pictures.

'battle performances'), reenactment groups reunions (in Polish *zloty* 'meetings'), or during photographic sessions that involve both male and female reenactment (Figs 1–8), which often accompany the mentioned events. In the case of battle reenactments, a photographer cannot influence the subject of the photography directly. He or she captures events as they unfold and the dynamics of the reenactment and can modify only the form of the image—crop it, change the light; later he or she can edit the image using computer programs. However, some photographers, especially those using analog cameras, avoid "postproduction". What is more, when organizing a photo session, the photographers have significantly more to say in terms of photo composition, and the whole subject of such photographs is more susceptible to the photographer's imagination.

This kind of rendering imitates actual war photographs by original war pictures. Photographers make efforts, through taking photos of reenactors and their actions, to give an impression of the past (Fig. 9). There is an intriguing ambiguity in their activity. In some way, the photographers should overcome the otherness of the past[7] by re-creating it in images, yet simultaneously, they should reflect this otherness in photographs to make them look authentic, similar to those of the past. This interplay between original war images and their contemporary re-creations constitutes the core of reenacting photography. The constant tension between the past and the present is thus inalienably inscribed in contemporary visual representations of history. Today's images of reenacted war would not affect viewers if no original war photographs existed—without originals they would not be understandable. Therefore, these modern images are not only a commemoration of a social (reenactment) event, but they are seen and experienced within the context of original war photography and general imagery of WWII and also as affected by the reenactors' practice, which is embedded in the imagery, as is the whole WWII reenactment scene.

Reenacted photos are also made within the very same context. Photographers want their photographs to be typical of the reenacted period and perceived as such. In this sense they try to make *studium*-type photographs, to employ the Barthesian (1981) notion, in a way that they would like them to be a part of historical narration.[8] This manner of taking pictures of war, learned and embodied by reenactors and also the photographers themselves (in the discussed cases mostly employed by people making impressions of German *Kriegsberichters*—war photographers), as well as their aesthetics, becomes a tool in reenacting WWII photography. However, only some contemporary photos effectively imitate the pictures from the past, and making them into credible replicas (Fig. 10) is a task not only for the photographer but also for reenactors who are depicted in those images. They have to collect all

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[7]   This problem is relevant for the majority of activities in the reenactment movement (see e.g. Agnew 2007; Cook 2004; Crang 1996; Decker 2010; Gapps 2009; Handler & Saxton 1988).

[8]   On *studium* and historical narration, see Jay 2011.

the items needed to re-create such an image: uniforms, weapons, equipment. Most of the photographs are, nonetheless, made in a "style" of WWII photos. Photographers experiment with visual language, they refer to original war pictures, and "quote" them in their work.

However, John Berger points out that the language of photography is a language of events (Berger 1980: 293). In the presented case it is worth noting that reenacted photos generally should not speak the language of the reenacted event but of the war itself. In this sense reenacted photography remains in some opposition to art that focuses on representing war which, as Katarzyna Bojarska states, "does not rest on situating events, giving icons, but on eliminating the present boundary between an event and its "established" images, feelings, memories and even results"[9] (2013: 9). Reenactment photography, on the contrary, works through icons and established images of war, although it still tries to evoke reflections and emotions.

Therefore, other reflections concerning visual art devoted to war are also valid for re-enactment of photography. Drawing on a reflection of Bojarska (Ibid.: 10–11), contemporary images are statements about the past not only because they present its images but because they evoke emotions directed towards history. I believe this is exactly the objective of reenacting photography: to speak about the past by re-creating its ambience, the details that have to be recognized in a contemporary context as the essence of war,[10] and, at the same time, to speak through experiences triggered by looking at those images. For reenactors those emotions are strong. Although historical reenactment is their hobby and a way of spending leisure time, they are aware of the horrors of war, of the daily suffering and brutality during that time. They empathize mostly with soldiers, since in the Second World War reenactment the military aspect is the most developed one, but they also sometimes depict and reflect on the fate of civilians who also were influenced by the extreme cruelty of the war. One of the photographers I talked with tried to explain difficulties with reflecting upon tragedy of war.

> I started to wonder how far can I go, is it ethical at all. I don't want to laugh at dead, I don't, this is too serious and I don't want to laugh at the fallen, I don't, I'm full of respect for them. But I also know that I should make those pictures, because it is an only way to move someone. And although I separate myself from this reality—I have lenses, they separate me from it, I won't go crazy because of those emotions, because I have to leave a sign (Photographer, male, age 25, Łabiszyn, 2015).

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[9] All translations from Polish literature are mine: K. Baraniecka-Olszewska.

[10] Here I refer to the conviction that representation evoking authentic experience should contain an essence of the represented (see Reisinger & Steiner 2006: 74).

For reenactors, photographs imitating war photos are another means to engage with the history. Reactions of non-reenactors can be completely different, because they do not have the experience of immersing into the past (however, they did not become a part of my study).

Thus I argue that reenacting photography should be analysed not only in terms of photography and its representational and evocational potential but also in terms of Hayden White's historiophoty (1988). The opinion that we cannot perceive photography as "true" representation of reality and that it is always filtered by the photographers' view and his or her political or social aims has already become a truism. With regard to reenacting war photography, it is even more evident that we do not deal with a representation of war but a kind of restaged representation, a sophisticated fake. Moreover, debating ways in which reenacted photos cannot represent the "true" past is fruitless and, as I show further, in this process of merely skimming over the "representation crisis" (see, e.g. Greene 1994; Lutkehaus & Cool 1999); I see a certain interpretative potential here, which can be explored with the help of the category of historiophoty.

Reenacting Photography as Historiophoty

Historiophoty is a term introduced by White (1988) to define "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse". White derives his considerations from Robert Rosenstone's article about the reliable representation of history in film (1988). Notwithstanding that both authors reflect mostly on films, they both see dangers of giving visual representations too much credit for describing the past. Furthermore, White underlines that reading visual data of the past requires different tools than the critique of written documents (1988: 1193), thus historiophoty and historiography tend to be separate phenomena, although they are perceived as bound together, since visual representations—for example, photos—are expected to be deprived of their own narration. And such conviction according to White is inconsistent with the whole idea of historiophoty as an autonomous kind of narration of the past. Thus, White proposes a way of representing history in parallel with and supplemental to historiography (not only complementing it, as visual data is granted some autonomy here).

Consequently, instead of focusing on reading visual representations of history, I would like to develop a practice of historiophoty. White (Ibid.: 1194) notes that some aspects of history can be more accurately presented by visual media than by writing. Also Bojarska pays attention to form and its adequacy in presenting historical content in her analysis of visual arts representations of history (2013: 8). The conviction that in some circumstances visual media work better is commonly shared. Despite some trust placed in this form of historical representation, White reminds us that "no history, visual or verbal, 'mirrors' all or even the greater part of the events or scenes of which it purports to be an account, and this is true even of the most narrowly restricted 'micro-history'" (1988: 1194). This is true of reen-

acting photography as well, but perceiving it as a part of historiophoty allows the viewer to see the voice of reenactors in the discussion of history in those images. Reenactors try to depict war history through the prism of particular types of biographies—for example, to underline bravery or contrary depression of the soldiers of a particular unit in a particular moment of the Second World War. Reenactors would like to attract audience attention to details, to microhistories (see Domańska 2005) and not to global processes.[11] Photography is in their opinion one of the means of expression that can draw attention to a detail—despaired sight, madness, to a single death that was forgotten in a chaos of war, or to a determination with which soldiers fought, though they had no chance to survive. This perspective of a detail was what photographers I talked to wanted to grasp. They have the ambition to show war as a sum of microhistories, of particular stories that melted into a history of global, macro processes. Some choose to do it through photography.

Analogous to historiography, which operates with words, historiophoty is understood to work on images. I sustain, however, the conviction expressed earlier that in reenacting photography there is more than a mere attempt to represent the past in images. This particular historiophotic practice involves evoking emotions and experiences directed towards history, since reenactment is a kind of affective history (Agnew 2007; McCalman & Pickering 2010), based on a personal engagement with history (Carnegie & McCabe 2008).

Referring to art, Bojarska writes that when reenacting the past from a historical distance, we make history irreducible to a particular historical event, making the past involved in a game of memories, associations (2013: 10). I believe this is relevant for reenacted photography. Although it uses the language of WWII pictures, it inevitably involves the language of later wars, as well as of contemporary photography and the whole of contemporary imagery of war. Moreover, nowadays those pictures cannot be seen, read, or interpreted within the historical context of WWII. Historiophoty, just like historiography, depends on the condition of the present.

Simulating War Photography

Reenacted photography is a part of historiophotic practice; it gives or at least should give us an image of the past. At the same time it does not bear witness to the past, it simulates it. As one of the photographers put it:

> I have my own satisfaction, that I'm, well, close to the original to the degree that someone who also deals with history takes my picture and says—look it is an original one. But I never make those pictures thinking that I'm going to

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[11]   This kind of perspective of a detail embedded in reenacted photography usually allows a photographer to escape the more general discussions on the visions of history, which are present also in the reenactment movement and are inevitably connected with historical policy. Photographers I talked to agreeably stated that they try hard not to get involved in politics.

promote them as originals, never. That's not an idea of everything, but to make a good photo, yes (Photographer, male, age ca 40, Poznań, 2015).

The "crisis of representation" is evident here, but the idea of reenacting photography is to go beyond it, to simulate the past in order to add something to the present knowledge about it, but also to express the photographer's feelings about the past.

That [image in a photograph] is not my vision of reenactment. It is my vision of the past. But it is a vision which starts in my head. It is mine. Of course, I read a lot, I browse original pictures etc., but it is my vision of the past, constructed of what I have in my head (Photographer, male, age ca 40, Poznań, 2015).

To some degree it is consistent with White's thesis that history exists only in representations—for example, narrations (1973; Domańska 2005). Images of the past could be recognized as another narration or an interpretation that does not have to be identical with the original (or with the original interpretation of) war photography. Nevertheless, we have discussed some doubt regarding whether photography can constitute a narration. White (1988) and, earlier, Rosenstone (1988), in their articles, focused mostly on film as a form of historiophoty, and they did not examine whether images themselves, without context and additional information (e.g. captions, title, description), can be regarded as historical narrations. This problem was dealt with, however, by the theorists of photography.

There is still a conviction that a photograph itself, as an image, is deprived of meaning (Berger 1999: 75; also Sontag 2010). Pictures themselves do not talk, they just register. To "talk" they need additional narration. Berger makes a distinction between private and public photographs. He argues that private pictures are perceived within a continuous context from which photography extracts the image, but meanings belong to that context (Berger 1999: 76). The situation with public photographs is rather different: viewers look at photos who have nothing to do with the photographs and their meanings directly. Information contained in such photographs is deprived of lived experience. Public pictures in this respect are perceived as strikingly Other. Berger believes that this is the reason why photos can be used and interpreted in any possible way (Ibid.: 76). The separation of photographs from human experience influences their optional perception (see Ibid.: 82–83), since the photos contain only information and no meaning (Ibid.: 76).

It seems thus that this issue of public photography has a close connection to reenactment photography as well. The otherness of its re-created content is evident: WWII exceeds the range of experiences of most people living contemporarily. Although Berger suggests that a certain kind of de-otherising of such photography might be achieved by introducing those images into human memory and creating a particular, continuous attitude towards the past within the viewer; he remains

pessimistic about it, claiming that we currently deal with an irreconcilable otherness of photographs of the past (Ibid.: 83). Thus, according to Berger, nowadays we have to produce a special context for photographs—using other pictures and words (Ibid.: 84). If we succeed, we can place a picture in time again—not its original but in the time of narration (Ibid.: 89). That is, in my opinion, what reenactors—photographers are doing when they re-create war pictures and offer their narration about the past.

Susan Sontag, drawing widely on Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1963), shows that in war photographs themselves there is no meaning, but instead they come with a caption or a picture interpretation. As Roma Sendyka, who compiles the works of Woolf, Sontag, and Butler put it, "Photographs have no cognitive value—they are cognitively empty and that is why they evoke indignation—war erases everything that is human. Hence, for Woolf the image of war does not show anything" (2012: 97). Sontag follows this by arguing that we inscribe in photographs what should be seen on them (2010: 39). She also points out that the truth about war can be felt only by its participants (Ibid.: 145), for others, war images are just empty containers that can be filled with meaning (Sendyka 2012: 100).

Discussion undertaken by Woolf and continued by Sontag was later criticised by Butler. Butler claims that photography cannot be semantically empty, because, as Sendyka explains Butler's standpoint "the act of making it is human, placed within meaningful practices" (Ibid.: 101). Although Sontag is aware that photos themselves constitute a kind of interpretation of photographed reality (2010: 58), Butler bases her argument on this particular practice of interpretation: "It seems important to consider that the photograph, in framing reality, is already interpreting what will count within the frame" (2005: 823). Pictures therefore seem to be an interpretation in the very moment of taking them. In the same time, however, Butler admits that it does not necessarily mean that they have a narrative coherence, since there are also other types of interpretation (Ibid.: 823). For Butler the "framing" of a photograph is therefore particularly important, since in her opinion, it evokes reactions and emotions (Ibid.: 827).

Sontag also points to emotions triggered by photographs, but in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2010), she describes their influence as "haunting", which does not necessarily constitute a reflexive process. Moreover, she states that this potential of photographs to "haunt" viewers decreases in time: there are too many shocking images; therefore they cannot influence us deeply anymore. Representations of humans' suffering in particular according to Sontag are just clichés with no power to affect the viewers. Reenacted photos are thus also clichés, therefore we should reflect on whether they have the potential to influence the audience and complement the imagery of the past. As I mentioned earlier, with regard to reenacted pictures we have to be aware that, although posted on the internet and accessible to everyone, they are targeted rather at members of a reenactment movement. They present battles, military equipment, and soldiers' gatherings but also

faked deaths, injuries, and destruction. They imitate WWII photography and they can only shock because of the shocking character of the actual conditions if they accurately reflect a reenacted death or the chaos of battle. These pictures are described as "grasping the war spirit". As one of the photographers reenactors sees it:

> With photography you create an image of reenactment movement and an image of history. That is why a photographer of reenactments, who claims to be a professional, has to perform work which can be compared with the work of photographers from the past (Photographer, male, age 25, Łabiszyn, 2015).

However, they record only a simulated war. Original photographs exist, and they are easily accessible in archives, thus it is time to face the question of the purposes for why reenactors—photographers imitate them.

The general aim of reenacting photography is, as mentioned earlier, to re-create the work of war cameramen and to present an impression of the past in images. This pertains both to the form and to a particular kind of expression. Furthermore, photography becomes the means of constituting a historical narration. Although reenacting photography is not as popular and widely known as historical reenactment itself, it thus constitutes a way of narrating the past. In the framework of reenacted photography this purpose is not realised on a larger scale; however, historical reenactment itself is perceived as a distinct way of narrating the past (de Groot 2008), and I would argue that reenacted photography constitutes a kind of subnarration. It is linked to the vision of history presented by historical reenactment, but simultaneously, it has its own way of expression.

> The effect which is achieved by photographs from a reenacted battlefield through showing dirty, sweated and full of emotions faces, smoking guns, moving vehicles and with wonderful, impossible to copy with digital camera, blurred image, is amazing (Photographer, male, age 25, Łabiszyn, 2015).

Reenacting photography underlines different aspects of the past and triggers different emotions. Although these photographs are not widely discussed, and their audience comes in few thousands rather than billions, they are becoming gradually a more recognizable kind of visual narration of the past, at least within the reenactment movement.

> You know, there are those methodological considerations that history doesn't exist anymore, it was, but it is gone and the whole reenactment is based on it. This is what we are doing—we have to show it, to show that it existed, to recall it. And that is why I make those pictures. To recall history (Photographer, male, age 25, Łabiszyn, 2015).

Re-creating photography is a part of the historical reenactment movement not only as one of its practices but also as a realization of its assumptions and ways of relating reenactors to the past. The aim of the reenactment movement is thus to present history in a multimedial way, different from school education (see Wilkowski 2013). For photographers, the camera is another means to look at the past. They share this view with other reenactors, the audience, and all those who enter their profiles on social networking sites.

Reenacting photography, as a whole historical reenactment movement, is more about first-hand experiences of the past and about an affective attitude towards history (Agnew 2007; Cook 2004) than about raising academic discussion on representing history. Thus, in this particular case the camera is a medium of experiencing the past not only of capturing it. It is also a medium of presenting a different face—focused on details and microhistories—of WWII,[12] since it is, as I see it, an attempt to supplement original war photography with reenacting photography and to tell another story about war, a story of unknown facts, focused on the particular biographies of both men and things (Daugbjerg 2014), making an advantage of the contemporary reflection about it.

Reenacted photography tries to capture the dynamics of the past: battles (e.g. from the September Campaign in Poland 1939, the Winter War 1939–1940, campaigns in Africa 1940–1943, Italy 1943–1945, battles in Netherlands 1944, France 1944), gatherings, joys, and sorrows. Using various techniques, the photographers—reenactors—present their photographic narration of WWII. They complement their own—reenactors'—historical narration construed, not only as the basis of academic, social, and cultural narrations of the past, but also of their own experiences of touching history (Schneider 2011) deriving from the participation in the reenactment movement. For reenactors, such photography can be described in Berger's words as private: not only linked to their own life experiences but above all as a representation of their attitude towards the past. Dorota Sajewska reminds us that reenacting the past is not merely representing it, it is participating in it (2013: 11). This strategy seems to also underlie reenacting photography. And for others, who are just looking at those pictures, it remains, using Berger's categories again, public photography, since neither war experiences nor the reenacted ones are a part of their lives.

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[12]   It is important to note that reenactors do not present alternative and fantastic visions of history but try to switch perspective from general to particular.

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Military Zone
Reenactment event, photograph by Łukasz Dyczkowski, Gostyń 2014.

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Military Zone

4   Reenactment event, photograph by Łukasz Dyczkowski, Gostyń 2014.

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"Wkra Battle"
6   Reenactment event, photograph by Grzegorz Antoszek, Mokra 2015.

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Death on a Battlefield
8 Reenactment event, photograph by Grzegorz Antoszek.

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Grenadiere Reenactment Group

Photo session, photograph by Grzegorz Antoszek.