The ARCHAEOLOGY of TIME TRAVEL

Experiencing the Past in the 21st Century

Edited by
Bodil Petersson
Cornelius Holtorf
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME TRAVEL

EXPERIENCING THE PAST IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Edited by
Bodil Peterssson
Cornelius Holtorf

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY
Contents

Preface ...........................................................................................................................................vii

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Meaning of Time Travel ................................................................. 1
Cornelius Holtorf

Part One
Emerging Possibilities in Virtual Time Travels

Chapter 2: Time Travel Using 3D Methodologies
Visualising the Medieval Context of a Baptismal Font................................. 25
Nicoló Dell’Unto, Ing-Marie Nilsson† and Jes Wienberg

Chapter 3: The Kivik Grave, Virtual Bodies in Ritual Procession
Towards New Artistic Interactive Experiences for Time Travellers ........... 47
Magali Ljungar-Chapelon

Commentary: Time Travel Paradoxes and Archaeology ....................... 79
Per Stenborg

Commentary: Taking Us to the Past and the Past to Us ......................... 83
Isto Huvila

Part Two
Time Travel as an Educational Method

Chapter 4: Use the Past, Create the Future
The Time Travel Method, a Tool for Learning, Social Cohesion and
Community Building ........................................................................................................... 89
Ebbe Westergren

Chapter 5: To Make and to Experience Meaning
How Time Travels are Perceived amongst Participants ....................... 113
Niklas Ammert and Birgitta E. Gustafsson

Commentary: Forming Bridges Through Time Travel ....................... 129
Cecilia Trenter
Part Three
Living the Distant Past

Chapter 6: Performing the Past
Time Travels in Archaeological Open-air Museums......................... 135
Stefanie Samida

Chapter 7: Being There
Time Travel, Experience and Experiment in Re-enactment and ‘Living History’ Performances......................................................... 157
Mads Daugbjerg

Chapter 8: Face-to-Face with the Past
Pompeii to Lejre........................................................................... 175
Cornelius Holtorf

Commentary: The Power of Time Travel........................................ 191
Roeland Paardekooper

Commentary: Mediated and Embodied Pasts – A Comment............. 195
Carsten Tage Nielsen

Part Four
Time Travel on Screen

Chapter 9: Waterworld
Travels in Time between Past and Future Worlds............................ 201
Bodil Petersson

Chapter 10: A Cup of Decaf Past
An Archaeology of Time Travel, Cinema and Consumption............. 213
Dawid Kobiałka

Commentary: On Time Travelling and Cinema ............................. 229
Laia Colomer

Commentary: A Cup of Decaf Past and Waterworld ..................... 233
Niklas Hillbom
Part Five
Time Travel and Contemporary Society

Chapter 11: History as an Adventure
Time Travel in Late Modernity from the Perspective of a European
Ethnologist ................................................................. 241
Michaela Fenske

Chapter 12: Time Travel to the Present
Interview with Erika Andersson Cederholm .............................. 257
Cornelius Holtorf and Bodil Petersson

Commentary: Time-Travelling Tourism
Reflections on the Past as a Place of Fascination as well as Refuge .......... 271
Thomas Småberg

Commentary: Time Travels as Alternative Futures ............................. 277
Britta Timm Knudsen

Conclusion

Chapter 13: Anachronism and Time Travel ........................................ 281
Bodil Petersson

About the Authors ........................................................................ 299

Index ......................................................................................... 305
Chapter 6
Performing the Past
Time Travels in Archaeological Open-air Museums
Stefanie Samida

Abstract
Historical and archaeological topics have been very popular for many years. This is witnessed by a variety of events and developments, as for example by time travel formats on television as well as by such performances at historic sites or at open-air museums. These historical performances and affective adoptions – bodily and sensual experiences that serve as a medium to the past – attract a large audience. This chapter is devoted to these historical performances and their impact as an educational tool in archaeological open-air museums, especially in Germany where their use is still in its infancy. The first part of the chapter deals with the phenomenon and development of historical performances, while the second focusses on potentials and limits of recent time travel performances in German archaeological open-air museums on the basis of interviews with performers and museum curators. The analysis looks at both the benefits and limitations of living history performances. On the one hand, time travels offer benefits because they stem from the haptic nature of the experience and the ability of the viewer to interact with history through their senses. On the other hand, time travels can, for example, create stereotypical presentations of the past. A look back at the roots and the analysis of contemporary living history performances illustrates that time travels tell us more about the time they are practiced than they do about the past.

Keywords: Living history, reenactment, open-air museums, prehistory, experience, performance.

Introduction
For many years, the public has become increasingly aware of historical and archaeological topics. Large-scale and well-attended exhibitions, an ongoing success of historical television documentaries and a booming market in specialised books and magazines give ample proof of this interest. Since the end of the 1990s there has been a trend towards a more experience-oriented presentation of historical topics, especially in open-air museums. In addition, a growing number of people dream of travelling to past worlds. These historical performances and affective adoptions of the past – in terms of bodily and sensual
experiences that serve as a medium to past environments or as a projection screen for interpretations of the past – are well known as ‘re-enactments’, ‘living history’ or ‘time travels’ and are seen as a ‘global phenomenon not necessarily confined to autochthonous events nor even to factual ones’ (Agnew 2004:328). Yet, even though the impact of time travels as an educational tool in archaeological open-air museums – especially in Germany – is still in its infancy, the affective adoption and staging of history is not a new phenomenon. There is a long tradition of performing the past, starting with medieval passion plays and historical pageantries. During the 1970s, there was also a ‘resurrection’ of similar performances in US open-air museums that spread to Europe during the 1990s. Today, many museums frequently rely on these performances or ‘museum theatre events’ to increase attendance.

As an educational tool, however, time travels offer potentials beyond the traditional museum exhibit with its showcases and ‘mute’ objects. These benefits stem from the haptic nature of the experience and the ability of the viewer to interact with history through their senses. In this way, museum visitors can internalise the experience and are more likely to learn or absorb the ideas conveyed in the time travel. However, there are challenges or limitations that require archaeologists, museum directors, re-enactors and visitors to avoid persistent stereotypical presentations of the past through lack of quality standards and self-reflective discussions. The main objectives here are to critically assess the benefits and limitations of living history performances for disseminating scientific knowledge in the context of educating the public and to assess whether time travels tell us more about the time they are practiced than they do about the past.

To achieve this, I draw from the research project ‘Living History: Re-enacted Prehistory between Research and Popular Performance’ (Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam and University of Tübingen), which lasted from 2011 to 2016. This project focussed on television documentaries, open-air museums, historic sites and ‘themed walks’ (Samida 2012a; Willner et al. 2014). Within this context, my own research was directed at the interactions between professional archaeologists, performers and visitors (scholars, actors and recipients) in selected German open-air museums and historic events. Data used here were collected through interviews in 2012 with re-enactors and museum curators. To provide a historical setting for the discussion of modern-day time travels, I chronicle the phenomenon and development of historical performances and affective adoptions of the past. Here, early acting phenomena are outlined. I then discuss and analyse potentials and limits of recent time travel performances in archaeological open-air museums in Germany.
Historical performances

Beginnings and development

The tradition of performing the past goes back to ancient times. Widely ignored in the discussion of living history’s precursors is their similarity to the presentations known as *naumachiae* that were very popular during the Roman Empire. *Naumachiae* can be described as re-enactments of historical naval battles performed by gladiators and people who were sentenced to death. For these spectacles, artificial lakes, amongst others, were created specifically for this purpose. One of the most famous *naumachia* in Roman times was probably the re-enactment of the Battle of Salamis (480 BC), which was staged under Emperor Augustus in the year 2 BC. Moreover, *naumachiae* were not only popular in ancient times but also during the Baroque era (c. 1600–1770). For example, at Castle St. Georgen (Bayreuth/Germany), on various occasions, naval battles were staged on the man-made lake surrounding the castle.

Religious or spiritual plays – common in many cultures and confessions – constitute another root of historical performance. They represent a mode of ritual performance and were and are usually carried out at specific times of the year. The most famous Christian plays besides *Krippenspiele* (Christmas pageants) are surely passion plays, which emphasise the suffering and death of Jesus. They were first staged in the Middle Ages and are still performed as the well-known Oberammergau Passion Play (Germany), which was organised for the first time in 1634. Since 1680 this world-famous passion play, in which only the inhabitants of Oberammergau may take part, has been held every ten years. During the play in 2010, each performance lasted more than five hours. Quite as popular as the passion plays is the Roman Catholic procession on the Via Dolorosa in the Old City of Jerusalem (Israel), which takes place annually on Good Friday. According to religious tradition, Jesus had to carry his cross on this path to the Mount of Golgatha where he was crucified. The procession – usually headed by a priest or monk – follows this route and commemorates Jesus’s sufferings at nine Stations of the Cross. During this procession, the pilgrims pray and chant. Currently, re-enactments also take place in which people in historical costumes re-enact Jesus’s sorrowful path.

Here it might be important to observe that all Christian plays have two things in common: they emerged in medieval times, and the organisers of these ‘festivities’ were generally towns. These festivals were not reserved only for specific classes but were festivals for all residents independent of their social background. The performers in these festivals, which often lasted hours and even days, usually were and are not clerics but lay people. Thus, a town could have transformed itself into
Jerusalem and the spectators into the townspeople of Jerusalem for the duration of the play (Fischer-Lichte 2012:15). In doing so, the assembled community saw itself as a Christian community, and through the regular repetition of these plays it again and again affirmed this common spirit. By performing such festivals, the participants tried to conquer the fear of pain, suffering, violence and death (Fischer-Lichte 2012:20). Moreover, the participation, whether as a passive observer or an active performer, had a sacramental character, because the Church quite often granted the indulgence. The collective participation in the performance thus gave everyone a sense of community as well as redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In addition to religious or spiritual plays, another form of historical performances evolved in the last third of the 19th century: Historische Festzüge (pageants) were an expression of the emancipation process of the middle class. Their aim was to present the past in a historical procession and at the same time to thereby educate the public. These public pageants, which are sometimes called ‘costumed’ or ‘artistic’ pageants, are characterised by their physical involvement and affective experience (embodiment) because they involve ‘being there’, that is ‘experiencing’. For this reason, the pageant and other forms of performing the past are, as Meghan Lau (2011:268) put it, ‘powerful tools for the representation of history because they work not simply through reason but through emotion, the body and memory’.

On the one hand, the pageants mainly aimed to renew and to consolidate the potentates’ leadership claims, and on the other hand, they were a means of self-expression and of creating identity as a nation, town, village or guild. Thus, the pageants had an identifying function. Furthermore, they can be viewed as an expression of cultural and social progress. Re-enacting the past was to illustrate that history leads to something better (Fischer-Lichte 2012:49).

In 1886 about 1500 costumed actors performed the triumphal procession of a ruler of the Attalid Kingdom, most likely of King Attalus I (Figure 6.1). The pageant, held in the German capital city of Berlin, presented the victorious Hellenes and the defeated Galatians (or Celtic Galatians). What at first glance looks like an entertaining performance was nothing less than an allegory for German history because the Prussians defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1871; and, as a result, the unified German Empire was founded shortly thereafter. Numerous newspapers of that time reported on the pageant in detail and with pictures. Amongst them were, for example, the family magazine Gartenlaube, which was popular and widely read in the 19th century, and the Illustrirte Zeitung, which was published weekly in Leipzig (see the articles in Gartenlaube 1886, No. 31, 540 ff.; Illustrirte Zeitung [Leipzig], 10 July1886).
But while re-enactments of the ancient world were not very common in German pageants, exceptions are those mentioned above and the one in honour of German Emperor Wilhelm II at the Saalburg at a totally reconstructed Roman fort, the re-enactments of the so-called ‘Germanic Prehistory’ were rather popular in the early 1900s (see Hartmann 1976). Such anniversary celebrations were held at different places in 1909 to remember the famous Varusschlacht (Battle of the Teutoburg Forest or Varian Disaster) between Roman legions under Varus and Germanic tribes under the leadership of Arminius of the Cherusci (Herman) which took place in AD 9. The largest festival involved several hundred participants in a Germanic pageant that was held in Detmold, a city at the edge of the Teutoburg Forest where a monumental bronze statue of Herman as the liberator of ‘Germany’ has been standing since 1875.
While Germanic warriors were portrayed in animal skins as oversimplified and stereotyped for a long time, by the beginning of the 20th century the public began to see these early warriors as freedom fighters and as representative of a common nationalistic pride. In this way, the narrative had changed, and a transformation took place even though the re-enactment itself had not been modified. People brought their own experience into it and began to perceive the story differently. The pageants, thus, are an, albeit slight, expression of a metamorphosis that can be ascribed to more overall movements such as nationalism.

Approximately at the same time, the so-called Pfahlbauern (lake dwellers) were celebrated in Switzerland. In 1854 Ferdinand Keller (1800–1881), Swiss archaeologist and founder of the Antiquarische Gesellschaft Zürich, discovered the first lake dwellings at Obermeilen (Lake Zurich). The residents of these Neolithic lake dwellings were considered to be ancestors of Swiss history and ‘pioneers of civilisation’ (see Gramsch 2009). Moreover, they offered the contemporaries in the young Swiss province, established in 1848, an identity in opposition to that of mountain farmers in the Alps and the Swiss national hero Wilhelm Tell.

Such historical pageants, however, were not only popular and widespread in nineteenth-century central Europe, we find a similar phenomenon in Great Britain and the USA in the early years of the 20th century. British artist Louis N. Parker (1852–1944) established the ‘pageant movement’ by initiating the first event – The Pageant of Sherborne – in 1905. At that time he was invited to produce a celebration of the 1200th anniversary of the founding of Sherborne. The outdoor spectacle involved hundreds of performers who re-enacted scenes from the town’s history before a huge audience, and it was a big success (Lau 2011:270). Afterwards it was hardly surprising that he produced a series of pageants; examples are those in Warwick (1906) and Dover (1908). Parker’s rather apolitical approach to pageantry was simply to re-enact scenes from local history in order to celebrate the common past of a town’s history and to create a social experience. He claimed, as Lau (2011:271) points out in her interesting article, that the open-air plays are a ‘great incentive to the right kind of patriotism; love of hearth; love of town; love of county; love of England’ (Parker 1928:279).

A closer look at the pageant movement shows that it was a reaction to the consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation as well as a protest against them or, to put it briefly, modernity. The new age brought with it a certain loss of solidarity and a social collapse, as observed in a growing individualism (Fischer-Lichte 2012:24). Thus, like the historical pageants and passion plays, these pageants were to strengthen the sense of community – thought to
have been lost – of a town, a district or a village. Another characteristic of pageantry is its claim of authenticity, which is a claim based on the fact that the performance was held at the historical site with which the presentations are most closely connected. The performance at the historical site promised and guaranteed the ‘celebration’ of townspeople’s continuity (Fischer-Lichte 2012:27; see also Parker’s comments in his autobiography 1928:278–303). Above all, Parker emphasised the educational aspect in an interview given to The Star (Christchurch/New Zealand) in September 1909 in which he stated the following:

Thousands of boys and girls have had a new interest in history awakened. I have been able to show them the actual occurrences in history, re-enacted on the actual place where they occurred, by people dressed exactly as the actual actors were dressed, and in many cases by their actual descendants, bearing the same names. I have made history a living thing where it was dead, and I have enabled the people of a number of towns to realise what a splendid history they were heirs to.

In the USA the pageants were adopted quite quickly and attracted enormous interest until the end of World War I in 1918. The first event took place in Philadelphia in 1908. But unlike the British pageants, the American performances were generally much less intent on glorifying the past and were rather oriented towards the future (for more details on US pageantry see Glassberg [1990]).

Thus, historical performances have a long history with the body as the core of performative acts. The sensual experiences – mediatised by the actors through costuming, music, ritual and ceremonial acts – affect the audience and lead to a sense of community. Hence, pageantries, as a mode of performance and historical representation, are quite obviously a form of affective history (Lau 2011:266–267). While these historical performances mostly have a religious or ritual origin and try to strengthen identities, historical performances in open-air museums have a more educative goal.

**Living history museums**

Skansen, the first open-air museum in the world (for more details see Rentzhog 2007:4–32), served as a model for contemporary living history museums. It was founded in 1891 near Stockholm by Artur Hazelius (1833–1901). From the very beginning, the museum, which was dedicated to Swedish folk culture, included ‘living models’ like craftsmen, musicians and other ‘performers’ who were to ‘enliven’ the museum. Hazelius’s concept also integrated the local fauna and flora (e.g. reindeer) in the exhibition in order to convey a complete impression. As Nils-Arvid Bringéus (1974:14) stated, Hazelius’s ‘intention was not only to entertain, but to create traditions that would never be abandoned’. Although Skansen presented
the visitors a romantically idealised and quite patriotic view, this museum was still a novelty whose concept spread all over Europe.

In Germany the Urgeschichtliche Forschungsinstitut in Tübingen (south-western Germany), which was founded in 1921, played a particularly important role in the 1920s Ästhetisierung der Vergangenheit (aestheticism of the past). Markedly well-preserved lake dwellings in the Federsee area revived a ‘living past’, which was animated by actors and recorded in movies in a romanticised and glamorised form ([Figure 6.2] for more details see Strobel [1999:95–109]). Thus, the distant past provided a vast projection screen for the ideals and dreams of the society of the Weimar Republic, which was traumatised by its defeat during World War I (Strobel 1999:96). The Nazis’ takeover in Germany in 1933 then also affected the young discipline of prehistoric archaeology, which was quite quickly exploited.
The adaptation of the dominant ideology led to *Germanophile Volksbildung* – a Germanophile popular education, not only within the discipline but also in museums. At this time, the open-air museums above all saw a boom in many new establishments such as Oerlinghausen (Paardekooper 2012:41–42; Schmidt 1999; Sénécheau and Samida 2015:108–113). As prehistorian Hans Maier (1936:652) at that time proclaimed, ‘every German could be visually impressed by the multi-millennia history and heritage of his homeland’. At Oerlinghausen as well as at other German open-air museums, Germanic cultural superiority and the continuity of Germanic settlement were pointed out.

As already alluded to, the US open-air museums above all played a crucial role in establishing living history as we encounter it today in museums and at historical events. It is here that new concepts that attempt to convey and experience the past through ‘theatrical representations’ were developed. At that time, these groundbreaking forms of mediatisation greatly promoted the popularity of many historic sites since this mode of representation went far beyond that which was familiar in museum exhibitions until then – artefacts, texts, true-to-the-original reconstructions and historic buildings. In the USA Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation belong to the earliest American historic sites that integrated living history in their exhibitions (for a detailed history see Rentzhog 2007:135–151). Thanks to the financial support of John D. Rockefeller Jr. (1874–1960), the capital of the British colony of Virginia was reconstructed in the 1920s and 1930s as the biggest ‘living history museum’. Colonial Williamsburg gives its visitors insight into a North American town of the 18th century – a town brought to life through actors in historical costumes. Here you can meet craftsmen, merchants, politicians, judges, soldiers and slaves. They all act like persons of the 18th century and thus simulate the past. Another example, Plimoth Plantation, shows the first settlement of the Plimoth Colony (Rentzhog 2007:245–254), which was founded in 1620 by English settlers – the so-called pilgrims – who travelled on the Mayflower to America and arrived on the coast of Massachusetts. The main objective of Plimoth Plantation, established in 1947, was to show the life of the pilgrims in the year 1627 in a reconstructed historical setting based on existing archaeological and historical sources – mainly written sources such as passenger lists, letters and church and court records. The presenters in the settlement therefore only communicate in a way that gives ‘visitors the impression of actually meeting a person of that era’ (Carlson 2000:241).

Thus, the attempt to imitate the past is neither a new nor exclusively postmodern phenomenon. Rather, it has played an important role for many different social groups with quite different functions for a long time. Hence, living history or time travelling has many roots and cannot be traced solely to the historic pageants of nineteenth-century central Europe or to the development of open-air museums in North America. But today, and this must be pointed out, the reasons why people
want to travel back in time are different. Therefore one can agree with Vanessa Agnew (2004:327), who said that the contemporary boom can be seen in the ‘winning combination of imaginatively play, self-improvement, intellectual enrichment and sociality’.

**Time travel as living history**

A look back at the roots of living history has shown that the phenomenon is not new. However, time travels into prehistoric times and specifically in museums and archaeology tourism as well is a recent phenomenon. This is particularly true in Germany, as a trend to a more experience-based orientation in German archaeological open-air museums has only been noticeable since the 1990s. Further, since the start of the new millennium, open-air museums are no longer conceivable without it.

As far as the German discussion in archaeology is concerned, the scientific discussion of what constitutes time travels and what possibilities and dangers are inherent in it has just begun (e.g. DASV 2011; Keefer 2006; Mölders 2008; Samida 2012b, 2014a; Schöbel 2008; Sénécheau and Samida 2015). This must be emphasised because Anglophone research on this topic, mainly on terminology, has a long tradition. One of the pioneers of living history research, the American folklorist Jay Anderson (1982:291), defined it as ‘an attempt by people to simulate life in another time’. In his well-known and fundamental book *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (1984:12–13), he distinguished three types or dimensions of living history that are relevant for us. First, living history can be part of ‘research’. According to Anderson this means, for example, that through ‘experimental’ living history, archaeological hypotheses about specific questions such as technology could be tested. Second, living history could serve as a tool for interpretation as a means of disseminating knowledge about the past. And finally, living history could be conceived of as ‘play’. In doing so, it could serve as a ‘recreation’ where one could ‘participate in an enjoyable recreational activity that is also a learning experience’ (Anderson 1982:290–291).

Anderson’s classification, however, has led to a certain dilution of the concept and a blurring of the academic, professional and public – non-professional – spheres, which inevitably causes misunderstandings from multiple sides. Furthermore, as Scott Magelssen (2007: xx–xxi) emphasised, the term *living history* is unfortunate because it implies on the one hand that there are forms of history, which are ‘dead’ and, on the other, ‘that one can bring history back to life by way of performance’. Magelssen’s remark shows that the term living history is ultimately contradictory. Similarly, the differentiation between living history on the one hand and re-enactment, on the other, can hardly be maintained in everyday usage; both are often used interchangeably. To be sure, the term *re-enactment* refers to the replay of concrete historical events (often battles), whereas living history generally implies an attempt to simulate in the present other living conditions of the distant past.
Wolfgang Hochbruck, a specialist in American studies, has also repeatedly called attention to these inconsistencies and ambiguities. Specifically, he emphasises the need to differentiate between various kinds of living history (e.g. 2009, 2013). Instead of living history he uses the term *history theatre* and differentiates between what he called re-enactment and *museum theatre* as modes of history theatre. While the first stands generally for re-enactments as costumed plays for leisure activity, the latter describes a special form of living history or history theatre including a didactical concept that is solely performed in museums (Hochbruck 2009:216–218). This is without a doubt an important suggestion that ought to be taken up in future research.

The term ‘time travel’ is used as well (e.g. Fenske 2009; Holtorf 2007, 2010). Quite different than in H. G. Wells’s famous science fiction novel *Time Machine* (1895), in which the leading character travels into an unknown future, our contemporaries travel into a seemingly well-known past. Hence, the term *time travel* – unlike the concepts presented here so far – also implies a journey into the future. Cornelius Holtorf (2010:33) put it as follows, ‘time travel is an experience and social practice in the present that evokes a past (or future) reality’.

Anderson’s classification has – as already mentioned – led to equating experimental archaeology with living history, respectively time travel. However, experimental archaeology is a special subject of archaeology, which by means of repeatable and controlled scientific experiments, attempts to gain deeper insights into certain pre- and protohistorical phenomena (e.g. Eggert and Samida 2013:56–57; Outram 2008). Strictly speaking, experimental archaeology is not a form of living history or time travel at all because experimental archaeology is not a social practice that evokes a past reality. Experimental archaeology is an archaeological method (like dating, classification, ethnoarchaeology, etc.) that provides analogies for interpretation based on measurable scientific results (e.g. Mathieu 2002). For sure, there is overlap; time travels and experimental archaeology, for example, deal with objects and how they were produced and used in former times. But I agree with Christopher Hawkes (1954) of more than 60 years ago and others in recent times (e.g. Eggert 1993, 2003) that a concept of a humanistic experimental archaeology as Bodil Petersson and Lars Erik Narmo (2011) proposed it cannot deliver insights into the social and religious conceptions – the immaterial sphere – of prehistoric humans. This does not mean that research going on with a focus on living experiments in, for example, houses and an overall understanding of the living conditions in past times are disqualified in general. We can probably get some ideas – which might also be gained by means of ethnoarchaeological studies – of how people in ancient times might have behaved – no more, no less.

Taking all this together and according to Roeland Paardekooper (2010:67), with whom I agree, one could say, that living history can be seen as ‘focusing on people and
stories, while experimental archaeology focuses more on artefacts and techniques’. Magelssen (2011:6), who mentions that the ‘very notion of performance as a practice of creating history is an essential issue today’ or Holtorf (2010:31) who emphasises that time travel goes along with storytelling, argue similarly. Living history tries, and the quotations again clearly show this, to tell stories about past environments in an affective way because performances allow for quite different opportunities to ‘tell’ stories than are possible by means of text; ‘It can encourage considerations of the gestural, the emotional, the aural, the visual and the physical in ways beyond print’s ability to evoke or understand them’ (Canning 2004:230; see also Handler and Saxton 1988:248). Not only time travellers themselves recognise this, but now so do many directors of open-air museums, who tend to base their programmes less frequently on artefacts and more often on activity-based interactions. The key words of archaeological open-air museums are then, as Paardekooper (2010:62) stresses, education, presentation, experiment, commerce and time travel. Thus, archaeological open-air museums should be considered as a form of living history.

**Potentials and limits of archaeological time travels**

As already mentioned, my own research is directed at the interactions between professional archaeologists, performers and visitors in selected German open-air museums and historic events. Various interviews, which I conducted with curators of archaeological open-air museums as well as with performers in 2012, will serve as the basis for the following critical analysis of potentials and limits of time travels.

One museum director emphasised that there is, of course, always a constant search for new didactic possibilities such as multi-media shows and living history. Precisely living history has the advantage because it stresses the haptic even if one cannot, of course, prevent the ‘nostalgic moment’ that comes along with such an affective presentation. However, the balancing act between education and entertainment, which accompanies, for instance, the inclusion of living history performances, is seen particularly problematic by German curators (e.g. Schmidt 1999) and is described as Disneyfication. This term, primarily used in a pejorative overtone in discussions about the intersection of cultural heritage and tourism, is encountered quite often. Critical depictions decry trivialisations of culture and history and reduce these developments to Disney theme parks (see Bryman 2004:5–10).

---

1 Interview with R. B., 28/11/2012; translation by author.

‘There is the difficulty – we do not have any gold, gems that sparkle, but it is # it is the prehistoric buyback centre which has been preserved. There is nothing which is really attractive, and so one of course looks for new didactical concepts in order to communicate it. And then there are the multimedia shows, that’s one thing – and the other is this haptic thing, off # – that is the exact opposite – away from the modern world of computers into this haptic thing: to touch something again, back into the past, and, of course, there is a bit of nostalgia involved in order to essentially simulate the past.’

In order to make the translated interview clippings more legible, the interviewer’s questions and expressions (e.g. affirmations) as well as interjections (e.g. hm), stammering and overlappings were eliminated. Notations: (.) – (. . .) = 1 to 3 second pause; # = partial words or sentences, speaker restart; [...] = ellipsis.
Performing the Past

One of my interviewees advert to the increasing competition within the leisure market. The interviewee asserts that climbing parks, with their extraordinary experiences, put pressure on museums. Thus, on the one hand, the open-air museum has to participate in the modern leisure market, which is in the end defined by the visitors of the so-called Erlebnisgesellschaft (experience society) and their frame of expectations. On the other hand, there are limitations since there are aspects that cannot be performed affectively for ethical reasons (e.g. aspects of the archaeology of religion and ritual such as a child’s immolation). Moreover, it was underscored by this curator that, from a museum’s perspective, ‘stagings in the form of time travels does not make representations of the past more credible and more scientifically precise’.

Quite the contrary, in most cases, the popular scientific performance introduces problems with its bodily and affective presentation because the presented images make a much stronger statement and have a much stronger effect than perhaps texts. One could say that by means of staging performances, interest in the past is aroused in an entertaining manner; whereby, the mediated images and living environments make an extraordinary impression on the audience because of their emotive approach to the past, which actively involves both parties (i.e. the time travellers and the audience). Thus, there is a certain danger that such performances create not only false but also misleading images of the past. This concerns primarily visitors who give museum presentations particular credence because they ‘tend to believe what they see and experience is “authentic” and close to what they conceive of as “historic truth”’ (Oesterle 2010:171). The danger, as Carolyn Oesterle (2010:171) continues, is the ‘uncritical absorption and internalisation of sanitised versions of history that may be based on privileged knowledge, prevalent stereotypes, or worse, outright propaganda’ (similarly Tivers 2002:189). Just think about clichés and stereotypes such as Celtic Druids cutting mistletoes, instrumentalisations by esoteric groups, neo-pagan religions as well as right-wing extremist circles (see e.g. Banghard 2009; Mölders and Hoppadietz 2007).

---

2 Interview with R. B., 28/11/2012; translation by author.
‘Yes. Yes, certainly. Museum # participates in the modern leisure market, if you want to call it that. And this market is ultimately [...] defined by the visitors and their expectations. Or at least # or what one subliminally ascribes to visitors’ expectations – well, that’s propaganda, too. But the, the # for sure, museums, that want to generate visitors, certainly need to move somewhere on this platform together with other institutions – whether this is a climbing park or what have you. And so, the museum of course also changes. And then not always for the better. [...] There is in the end # That’s difficult # also limits to archaeological communication as far as experiences are concerned. I cannot stage everything experientially. [...] And then we just had two exhibitions – one was about aspects of an archaeology of religion and ritual and then there was the exhibition with M., where we focussed on child murder, if you wish. Or on the sacrifice of a child () to be more precise. In this case, of course, it is difficult to set up a fitting theme in an open-air venue. And here, we are forced – and this is of course sometimes also quite difficult – to mesh the interior with the exterior.’

3 Interview with R. B., 28/11/2012; translation by author.
‘But living history performances do not make the past more credible or more scientifically precise but rather the whole thing is only – how shall I say? – produced quasi-scientifically anew with a new factor. And that’s, of course, where the problems already also begin.’
In order to avoid such stereotypical presentations in general, quality standards have to be negotiated with all involved parties (museums, time travellers and academics). To this end, first discussions and suggestions were made (see Hochbruck 2011). But besides expertise, didactical and pedagogical concepts as well as acting qualifications, the will for integration and communication of all parties must be the first step to less stereotyped and more accurate presentations of the past. Just like all presentations of the past, time travel performances have a responsibility, that is to say that they first have to encourage an understanding of the past in the context of the present (Tivers 2002:198–199). Additionally, visitors should be informed as to how archaeologists achieve their conclusions and models and on what facts the presentations and performances are based (Schmidt 1999:154). For sure, some observers could be disappointed, but ‘we cannot please everyone, nor should we aim to’ (Schmidt 1999:154–155).

The re-enactors also consider bodily experience and haptic aspects to be a central advantage in their performances. One actor expressed this very succinctly: ‘we are the “answer showcase” that can be touched’ (Interview with A. W., 24/7/2012). Along with it, however, the experience, particularly when it concerns the visitor, is also repeatedly moved into the foreground. The spectator has to ‘live’ and vividly experience the past and how people lived then precisely because that which is experienced leaves a deeper impression:

Okay, I want to show this late robe, I want that normal people somehow experience this, I want that they experience how it is to talk to someone to, to # to stand in front of somebody like that, I also want to experience that myself and then perhaps give a report about my experience, a bit like in experimental archaeology. (Interview with C. E., 23/7/2012)

One can recall something that one experienced much more readily than something that one simply read on an information board. In order to have the ‘correct’ experience, emotions again play an important role. One re-enactor uses this element quite consciously in order to draw in the audience and to provoke an experience.

With whatever you connect an experience, that’s what you remember forever. If I cried during a play, this scene I remember till the end of my life, yes. But what I have read on some information board is possibly forgotten two hours later. And so I use strong emotions as a hook. So, it is like casting a fishing line in order to try to catch fish. People take the bait, and children also bite but adults also still take the bait. (Interview with C. E., 23/7/2012)

However, the question remains as to what extent the past can actually be experienced or relived at all because many time travellers are aware that one cannot immerse oneself in or enter into the past. One is, for example, not an ancient Celt, but one
only attempts to play one. The Australian historian Alexander Cook (2004:489) came straight to the point when he said, ‘We can never be Them’. He emphasised that time travels do not perform a spectacle of the past but rather are a spectacle of people who try to explore the past (Cook 2004:494). Cook is not the only critic; in fact, there is a broad consensus that time travels, and thereby living history, ought rather to be understood as a social practice in the present (Holtorf 2010:33). Vanessa Agnew (2004:235) is even more radical since she refuses re-enactment’s epistemological claim that experience furthers historical understanding. Moreover, she stresses that ‘body-based testimony tells us more about the present self than the collective past’ (see also Cook 2004:494; Fenske 2007:87).

Is time travelling therefore only a play that tells us nothing about the past and only holds up a mirror of the present? Is history just another event in our experience society? The answer remains ‘yes, but’. Time travels can certainly evoke effects, which have already been mentioned such as stereotyping and they surely promise too much because there are aspects that cannot be performed affectively. From an academic viewpoint, time travel is an ambivalent social phenomenon. Its problems as presented here are by all means well known (e.g. stereotypical presentations of the past, the static mode of the representations and lack of re-enactors’ self-reflection), but what is sometimes forgotten is its potential. Time travelling as living history must be seen in a very positive sense as a form of ‘history from below’. It should be welcomed because even though history is an academic field, it should be open to everyone who is interested. Although this form of public history does not always deliver a scientific view of the past, time travel often addresses quite different questions about the past, as one of my interviewees underlines.

But the contribution is, as stated, a) to expose, uncover questions, gaps, where one could make new research. The second is, to some extent, a long-term experience. If you namely are on the road with your equipment for ten years, to be sure not every day, but often, then you recognise what works and what does not. (Interview with A. W., 24/7/012)

He and others give examples such as long-term tests of clothes and equipment or technical aspects of processes of production. While wearing or reconstructing costumes, new questions to the material and its condition emerge like ‘do the Romans really wear this sword during their campaign in that way? It’s not really comfortable – they should have worn it in a different way’. Thus, one has to agree with Cook (2004:495) who states ‘reenactment can offer no answers’ but it certainly ‘raises questions’ (similarly also Willmy 2010).

4 Interview with D. A., 24/7/2012; translation by author.
Okay, that’s how it could have been, but we do not know the rest. This [the past] is really unknown to us. We cannot immerse ourselves there. Never.
Re-enactment – one of the most currently important tropes for historical engagement that can be found in nearly all media and forms (de Groot 2009:104) – is a phenomenon that, at least in central Europe, is best paraphrased with the Latin expression *in statu nascendi* (under construction). In view of its popularity, scientific discussions of it have to be intensified because living history raises many questions concerning education, ownership and authenticity that have remained unanswered while also being under-theorised by both historians and archaeologists as Jerome de Groot emphasises (2009:103). The impact of time travels as an educational tool in archaeological open-air museums – especially in German open-air museums – is still in its infancy. This is due to a general scepticism by German museum directors who understand museums still as educational institutions where entertaining and experience-oriented presentations are widely dismissed. Many argue that education and entertainment do not go hand in hand (e.g. Schmidt 1999; my interview partners). Time travel performances also pose the question of ownership in the sense of ‘who owns the past?’ As a form of ‘history from below’ it competes with the academic history, which often discredits such forms of history presentations. Here something has to change in the future because dismissive polemics are not the appropriate way to engage with alternative histories or archaeologies; understanding and dialogue on both sides are necessary (see Holtorf 2005). Furthermore, the aspect of ‘authenticity’ in time travels as a currency ‘that confers status both within the re-enactment community and on its relations with cultural institutions and wider audiences’ (Gapps 2009:398) is also under-theorised. What does authenticity or ‘authentic experiences’ mean in the context of time travelling? By whom and how is authenticity created? Why does authenticity play such an important role for actors and observers? (e.g. Samida 2014b) Finally, the aspect of personal and group identity within living history (e.g. Goodacre and Baldwin 2002:167–199), which also needs further analyses in the future, plays an important role because living history activities can ‘foster and develop “memories” which can contribute to the identity of individuals and groups’ (Goodacre and Baldwin 2002:196). They can also ‘powerfully affect the way in which we identify ourselves and others’ (Goodacre and Baldwin 2002:197). So if, as Vanessa Agnew (2007:309) declares, ‘re-enactment is to gain legitimacy as a historical genre’, it will be necessary ‘to do for re-enactment what has been done for other forms of history writing’, that is to establish systematic source-criticism and self-reflectivity.

**Conclusion**

The main aim of this chapter was to illustrate the development of time travel performances and second to present potentials and limits of such performances in present-day archaeological open-air museums. The historical survey shows that time travels are not a postmodern or new phenomenon of our times. They have a long and changeable tradition and diverse roots that go back to the ancient world.
While in Roman times ancient battles were re-enacted, the reversion to Christian plays were of particular importance in the Middle Ages. Time travels – illustrated in the short historical overview as well – had and still have at all times and in varied contexts quite different functions. The re-enactment of history in medieval times must be seen within a spiritual and religious context, while pageants of the 19th century must be considered as a reaction to an increasing industrialisation and urbanisation and an instrumentality for nationalistic purposes. Since the emergence of open-air museums at the end of the 19th century, time travels have been considered to be a mode of stimulation where historic living environments can be presented quite vividly. In this context, time travels serve as a method to communicate knowledge; therefore, they play an increasing role in present-day open-air museums. However, this form of historical performance has not only advantages but also disadvantages. As noted above, the problems lie in the potential to perpetuate and create stereotypical presentations of the past. Moreover, time travelling cannot constitute a process but is a much more static mode of representation. Quality standards as well as a self-reflexive discussion of the mostly non-academic actors of these performances, are often absent. Besides these limits, time travels certainly do have positive aspects and advantages over other presentations of history. The actors ‘experience’ the past especially through objects, so the haptic moment has to be seen as one of the important experiences in this case. In addition, the emotive approach to the past also involves the spectator who can be taken ‘along for the ride’ and enmeshed in the performance. The past is no longer displayed in a showcase but can be touched. However, it must be remembered that the past is bygone and cannot be repeated. To phrase it more positively, one could say: ‘the actor cannot really recreate a moment in history, nor can the spectator travel in time, but provoked by the performance, the spectators’ imaginations can transport them to another reality, a liminal one that feels real’ (Hughes 2011:146). Thus, the past is just simulated – imagined – and in doing so the past usually tells us more about the present than the past itself.

Acknowledgements
The research presented here was supported through a fellowship at the Berlin Excellence Cluster Topoi: The Formation and Transformation of Space and Knowledge in Ancient Civilizations as well as the Volkswagen Foundation. Many thanks are given to Ruzana Liburkina (Berlin) who did the transcription of the interviews that I conducted. I am grateful to Cornelius Holtorf and Bodil Petersson for inviting me to this publication and their critical comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Finally, I would like to thank Herma Moschner (Clearwater, USA) who corrected my English, which was definitely no easy undertaking – thank you very much. All German quotes in the text were translated by the author.
References


