

ON REPRESENTATION

MACIEJ BUGAJEWSKI

The essays included in this thematic volume of the Anthropology of History Yearbook attempt to look at the puzzle of the representation of the past from the perspective of various humanistic disciplines. Our reflection inevitably circles between the paradigms of thinking about representations in terms of the “same”, “other” or “analogous”. In the first case, present-day representations of the past are credited with the ability to make the past visible to some extent; in the second case, our representations are given the status of a self-presentation or an expression of the will of the culture which produced them; in the third case, they are a mediation between us and the past, a mediation which in some sense resembles the past.

The latter, mediation approach, was cautiously explored by Paul Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, for whom historiographic representation is analogous to the past in the sense that it shows the past not as it was, but as it could have been¹. Bogumił Jewsiewicki also points out the ambiguous status of representations; he believes it is possible to juxtapose representations of the past and the Host, since both these discourse areas, in his opinion, show the similarities between the procedures of creating the belief in the presence of the Other in what is visible (representation, bread)². Krzysztof Zamorski takes a similar position; he examines memory and historiographic representations of the past within the framework of the dialectic between the past and the contemporary, articulated in the spirit of hermeneutic philosophy³. The mentioned standpoints are opposed to theories based on “other”, such as that of Michel de Certeau, who contended that what historiography produces is a “metaphor of absence”, replacing the past

¹ P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 1–3, Paris 1983.

² This is our understanding of Professor Jewsiewicki’s position presented during a seminar in the Institute of History at the Adam Mickiewicz University on 10 October 2013.

³ K. Zamorski, *Dziwna rzeczywistość. Wprowadzenie do ontologii historii*, Kraków 2008.

and making it into something which, for us, is different and absent⁴. Michel Foucault's genealogy also embraces the "other"; he propagates rejecting identities originating from the past in favour of unreality, understood as remaining outside identity projects⁵.

The notion of representation is also helpful when attempting to define the beliefs of individual and collective subjects living in the past, studied by contemporary historical sciences, generating representations of the previous representations. Therefore, we encounter the notion of representation both in the subject and object of studying the past. A question arises about the relation between memory and historiographic re-evocations and re-interpretations of representations rendered by past actors and the very representations they rendered. There is a tempting image of (mutual) mirrors, reflexes, and reflections, in which the stakeholders of the past pursue their aspirations. However, if we do not intend to create theoretical fireworks or to "identify the past with the present" (Zamorski), and we want to make an attempt to examine the relations between past representations and our ones in a way that would have a methodological significance for studying the past, we could try to absorb Saul Friedlander's lesson. For him, the creative aspect of present-day representations, going beyond a mere repetition of the old ones, does not necessarily lead to a deformation or loss of the discourse of the past, since, as the author posits, in some situations "a contemporary reelaboration presents the reality of the past in a way that sometimes reveals previously unsuspected aspects". Thus, attention may transfer from the past to the present and from the present to the past, "allowing us to grasp some hidden forms of past and present imagination".⁶

Representation of the past is, perhaps above all, a spectacle put on a stage, where relations between its creators develop. Relations among their creators are an important aspect of representations. Considering the problem from an existential point of view, it could be said that a representation generates history in the most basic sense – a community of the dead and the living – since the actors appearing on the stage where representations are generated are both dead and alive, at least in mediation interpretations of the cognitive status of representations, i.e. in the interpretations in the "analogous" vein. Both the living and the dead take part in configuring representations of the past, which maintain both

⁴ See M. Bugajewski, *Brzemie przeszłości. Zło jako przedmiot interpretacji historycznej*, Poznań 2009, part 2.

⁵ M. Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire*, in: *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, ed. S. Bachelard [et al.], Paris 1971, p 145–171.

⁶ S. Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism: an essay on Kitsch and death*, New York 1984, p. 18.

their voice and ours. Such thinking about representations that is aware of this problem, very quickly recognises a dramatic question: how to generate representations of the past and how to interpret their cognitive and existential status so that the dead retain their voice, but in such a way that their voice does not become mixed with the voice of the living, so that the latter can also retain their own voice, produced in their own space. Perhaps Jan Karski understood this best in the last hour of Lanzmann's film, but this is a lesson that professional historical discourse finds very difficult to absorb⁷.

One notion that would perhaps allow us to avoid the opposition between the subjectivity of the dead and the rights of the living is the notion of justice, which would allow us to propose creating such representations of the past which would do it justice not only in the sense of making the past visible and closer, but also in the sense of probing the past critically, with the idea of justice in mind.

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This brief introduction to the volume cannot comprehensively present the wealth of essays published here. Our invitation to reflect on the problem of representation was accepted by outstanding anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists, culture experts, and historians. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the authors who responded to our invitation. Since its inception, the *Anthropology of History Yearbook* has been promoting multi-disciplinary studies, focused on examining representations generated by actors of the past as well as their references to contemporary representations.

The editors have no doubt that familiarity with the knowledge and reflection of our Authors presented in this volume will make a valuable contribution to the discussion on various facets of studies of human history.

⁷ See M. Bieńczyk, *Książka twarzy*, Warszawa 2011 (the NIKE Literary Award), the essay *Wielki narrator*.