

# Sensing World War II: Affect, Ritual and Community in Historical Re-Enactment

By Lise Zurné

**Abstract:** Re-enactments of the past have become an increasingly popular mode to engage with war-related history. In contrast to conventional modes of historical inquiry, re-enactment offers a “body-based discourse” through which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experiences (Agnew, *What is Re-enactment*: 330). So far, most studies have focused on re-enactment’s epistemological potential for the individual (Agnew, *What is Re-enactment, History’s Affective Turn*; Braedder and others, *Doing Pasts*; Daugbjerg, *Patchworking the Past*; and Gapps, *Mobile Monuments*). This article will specifically explore how affective encounters in re-enactment are not merely acquired individually, but also collectively. This study is based on a sensory ethnography of two re-enactment groups portraying the *Volksgrenadierdivision* and Army Nurse Corps and aims to analyse how re-enactors create intimate encounters with World War II through collective multisensory experiences. The analysis demonstrates how re-enactors use authenticity as discourse to mediate their affective experiences. It shows how physical and emotional sensations associated with the “discomforts” of war are considered authoritative and experiential evidence and mediate one’s position within the re-enactment community. Further, by drawing on Victor Turner’s (*Liminal to Liminoid*) concept of the *liminoid*, I will explore re-enactment as a ritualized practice in which shared experiences of hardships serve to access certain sentimental and emotional states, in particular a sense of belonging. The analysis will also show how these immersive experiences are susceptible to conflicts, when re-enactment moves from play to obligation.

**Keywords:** *historical re-enactment, affect and emotions, World War II, ritual, embodiment, sensory ethnography*

## Introduction

In the summer of 2020, I spent the night in a farm about an hour north of Prague to accompany eleven Polish and Czech women on the training weekend of their WWII United States Army Nurse Corps re-enactment group. After a night of preparation, we dressed up in our herringbone twill uniforms, hid our smartphones, and loaded our army duffle bags into a WWII Dodge. A four-hour-long drive separated us from the contemporary world: countless vehicles caught up with the slow pace of the Dodge as we passed by people waving at the odd sight of eleven WWII army nurses. Finally, as we reached a bumpy road up the Czech mountains, the “nurses” were laughing and screaming while trying to hold on as we drove through countless potholes. I was forced to put my camera away because of the large sand clouds our trail created. It was at that moment that I noticed the strong smell of gasoline and suddenly became

*Close Encounters in War Journal* – Issue n. 4 (2021): “Close Encounters in War and the Emotions”

extremely aware of the hard bench I was sitting on, the wooden bar I hit my back against with every bump, the sound of the bags that were sliding on the floor, and the sand stinging my eyes. These profound physical sensations made me suddenly question: could this be what they are after?

Since the 1980s, an increasing number of people is seeking encounters with (war) histories, often via engagement with artefacts, sites, or texts of the past. Following what is known as the “affective turn” in the social sciences and humanities, studies increasingly emphasize the bodily and emotional dimensions of such encounters. As a result, scholarly interest in historical re-enactments has expanded. The term re-enactment is used for a diverse range of phenomena, from living history at museums and heritage sites, to re-enactments in television, film, theatre, and performance-art, and is predominantly concerned with issues of war (Agnew, *History’s Affective Turn*). In contrast to other more conventional modes of representation, re-enactors use their bodies as mediums to reanimate historic events “as it really was” in order to gain insight into the emotions of past actors (Agnew, *What is Re-enactment?*). This quest for authenticity is re-enactment’s most defining characteristic, predominantly defined in relation to the historical accuracy of appearance and material culture (Thompson, *Wargames*; Braedder, *Expertise and Amateurism*). Re-enactment is therefore characterized by a “holistic” desire to “feel” or “touch” the past, and in turn, to be touched (Hetherington, *Spatial Textures*; Schneider, *Performing Remains*: 34).

Most academic discussions revolve around the question of whether re-enactment’s focus on affect, daily life, and physical and psychological experiences can constitute historical knowledge and understanding (Agnew, *History’s Affective Turn*: 309; Johnson, *Rethinking (re)doing*: 194; McCalman & Pickering, *Historical Re-enactment*; and Gapps, *Mobile Monuments*). Anthropologists have argued that by virtue of its sensory character, re-enactment can provide “other [bodily] ways of knowing” (Johnson, *Performing Pasts*: 41). They often draw on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodiment to destabilize the binary opposition between cognition and experience, by demonstrating how material culture affects re-enactors through corporeal perception (Johnson, *Re-enactment’s Embodying of History*: 9, 200; Card, *Body and Embodiment*: 30). So, exploring how re-enactors “make sense [of war histories] through the senses” is not new (McCalman & Pickering, *Historical Re-enactment*). However, also within more empirically grounded studies, the focus often remains on the relationship between individuals and war-related objects (Johnson, *Rethinking, Performing, Re-enactment’s*; Kalshoven, *Crafting the Indian*). This study will add to the existing literature by including re-enactments’ social

dimensions as I aim to demonstrate how affective encounters are not merely acquired individually, but also collectively. The research question of this article is: how do groups of re-enactors of World War II pursue authentic experiences through affective encounters, and what kind of meaning is attributed to these experiences?

This paper is based on a multi-sited ethnographic study of two European re-enactment groups portraying Axis and Allied armed forces during World War II: the 277<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadierdivision* of Nazi Germany's Wehrmacht and the United States Army Nurse Corps. The data for this study consists of nineteen qualitative interviews with members from these groups and participant-observation at various re-enactment events. For this analysis, I focus particularly on data obtained in 2020 during a member's weekend of the *Volksgrenadierdivision* and the Army Nurse Corps annual training camp. As conventional research methods tend to centralize seeing (observing) and verbal knowledge (interviewing) (Pink, *A Multisensory Approach*), this study adopts sensory ethnography to take the affective and multisensorial experiences of both research participants and the ethnographer into account (Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography: 1*; Van Ede, *Sensuous Anthropology*). This included a special focus on physical sensations and emotions in participant observation and interviewing, and videography to record the visual and aural aspects of the research and to evoke the tactile experiences of these encounters during the analysis.

Recent studies on emotion and re-enactment have shifted their focus from the simulation of emotions and mentalities of past actors to the emotional impact re-enactment practices may have on the participants themselves (Cook, *The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment*; Brauer & Lücke, *Emotion*). However, so far little empirical research has demonstrated how this specifically comes about. In order to do so, it is important to first clarify what is meant by emotion in re-enactment, or the much-preferred term "affect" (Brauer & Lücke, *Emotion*). While often used interchangeably, some scholars differentiate between feelings (personal), emotions (the sociological expressions of feelings) and affect (the "non-conscious" and physical response to feelings that "cannot be fully captured in language") (Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: 30*; Gorton, *Theorizing Emotion and Affect: 334*). Other scholars have ignored these distinctions altogether, by focussing on what emotions do and how they work, "rather than what they are" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions: 10*; Driessen, *Touching War*; and Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*). Instead of differentiating between "feeling" and the mental recognition of that feeling, Sara Ahmed (2004) has for example argued that emotions should be regarded as bodily change itself: e.g. we feel

fearful because our heart is racing and our hands are trembling. Hence, I will refrain from distinguishing between feelings and emotions as they are not “distinct realms of human experience” (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*: 6).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, insights from cultural studies have taught us how emotions are culturally specific, bound to the body and communicated through practices of the body (Scheer, *Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?*: 199). Emotions are therefore not cultural constructs, nor something we “have”, rather they are impressions left on the border “between the body and psyche” (Brauer & Lücke, *Emotion*: 53). Emotions therefore mediate between the body and mind, but also between the individual and collective, connecting and separating us from others in society (53; Skoggard & Waterston, *Introduction*: 111). This insight is particularly fruitful in studying re-enactment, as it understands emotions not just as something we may experience, but above all, cultural and social practices we *do* (Scheer, *Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?*: 195).

Furthermore, the field of ritual studies has a long history of analysing collective emotional experiences, albeit from a structural-functionalist perspective (Leavitt, *Meaning and Feeling*: 526). I will therefore draw on Victor Turner’s (*Liminal to Liminoid*) notions of *communitas* and liminality to explore how specifically affective experiences impact group dynamics by analysing re-enactment as a “liminoid” phenomenon. Turner famously distinguished between liminal practices in pre-industrial societies and liminoid phenomena that emerged with the beginning of industrialization. Whereas liminal rituals are highly structured and obligatory for all members in societies, liminoid phenomena imply freedom of choice and encompass leisure genres like “art, sport, pastimes, games, etc. [...] practiced by and for particular groups” (Turner, *From Ritual*: 86).<sup>2</sup> These contemporary practices involve a break from society in which participants make up their own rules, therefore immersing into their own (in this case historicized) reality. Or, as described by Turner: “One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid” (*Liminal to Liminoid*: 86). Adopting the liminoid as a “sensitizing concept” (Blumer, *What is wrong with Social Theory?*)<sup>3</sup> allows me to analyse how re-enactment may recharge or transform participants, while also highlighting how, as a ritualized practice, re-enactment may result in either integration and solidarity, or exclusion (Bell, *Ritual Theory*: 98).<sup>4</sup>

The outline of this article will follow Turner’s (*The Ritual Process*) classical ritual model and distinguishes between different phases of re-enactment, including preparation, the liminoid condition (in this case, “immersion” into WWII) and (re)integration as “ideal types” (Weber, *Objectivity*).<sup>5</sup> First, I will “set the scene” by shortly describing the re-enactment groups and activities that

formed the basis of the analysis. I will highlight the requirement of certain elements for re-enactment, such as rules, war-related objects and place in the preparation for re-enactment. A dominant concern here is authenticity, often understood as a perfect simulation that aims to close the gap between past and present (Agnew & Tomann, *Authenticity*; Handler & Saxton, *Dyssimulation*). I aim to demonstrate how re-enactors use authenticity as discourse to articulate their affective relationship to war-related objects. In the second part of this article, I will describe in greater detail how this discourse ascribes authority to intense physical sensations associated with war histories, and how the experience of hardships may mediate one's position within the re-enactment community. The collective endurance of these hardships then serves to bolster the affective bonds between re-enactors. Lastly, I will describe how these immersive experiences are susceptible to conflicts, when re-enactment moves from play to obligation.

### Setting the scene

In the period between 2019 and 2021, I became a (guest) member of two re-enactment groups portraying the armed forces during WWII: the 277<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadierdivision* of the Wehrmacht of Nazi Germany and the Army Nurse Corps of the United States. While the most well-known re-enactments tend to focus on war and battle in distant pasts, such as Waterloo or Gettysburg, I anticipated that the reenactors of World War II would have a more intimate and emotional connection with the roles they perform, due to familial ties or simply because WWII occupies such a dominant position in popular culture. Similarly, some scholars had argued that twentieth-century war re-enactors seemed to grapple with more complex issues than others, due to their portrayal of foreign soldiers, the possible politicization, and their interactions with veterans (Gapps, *Practices of Authenticity*: 185; Thompson, *Wargames*: xx). Despite the relatively “fresh wounds” WWII left on our collective memory (Berens, *WWII Re-enactment*: 6), I had noted a small number of groups that considered it a useful narrative for their “play”. I therefore selected two groups that performed opposing roles, namely the Allies and the Axis – although choices were limited for a women researcher in this male-dominated hobby (Tomann, “*You can't just put men in the field*”; West, *Historical Re-enacting and Affective Authority*).<sup>6</sup> The first group, the 277<sup>th</sup> *Volksgrenadierdivision* consists of 26 predominantly Belgian members, with a few from the Netherlands. Four of its members are female (although this number is expanding) and portray the roles of *Flakhelferinnen*, a relatively unknown section of the auxiliary staff of the German Luftwaffe. The second re-enactment group, the Army Nurse Corps, is the only organized and

*Close Encounters in War Journal* – Issue n. 4 (2021): “Close Encounters in War and the Emotions”

all-female re-enactment group portraying the United States Army Nurses in Poland and the Czech Republic. It consists of approximately 15 women aged between 17-30 years old and is relatively equally divided in terms of Polish and Czech nationalities. The main activities of re-enactment groups can be broadly distinguished into two categories. The first and most common consists of what re-enactors call “display”: “static” presentations of the group’s material culture and/or demonstration of its weaponry and vehicles in a public event, such as a liberation festival. In contrast to many others, the two groups selected for this study also undertake the second category, which encompasses “immersive” activities designed to “experience” war-related history. These consist of less accessible, private re-enactment practices, where often audiences, the enactment of scripted historical narratives, or the embodiment of real historical persona is lacking. These exclusive performances involve community-building or training activities, such as camping, group trips to historic sites, specific skill-learning activities, or physical challenges such as overnight stays in the forest in mid-winter Bastogne with limited supplies. Due to their intensity and immersivity, they are often understood to offer more “authentic” experiences of war than audience-catering “displays” and will therefore form the basis of analysis. In 2020, this included a private members’ weekend of the *Volksgrenadierdivision* and the third edition of the annual Army Nurse Corps training camp.<sup>7</sup> I will now introduce the elements required in the preparation stage of these events.

Pursuing authentic experiences in re-enactment requires a certain groundwork. During my fieldwork, I observed how re-enactments are built around a number of elements, including rules, objects, and place. Let me start off by asserting that the first one, namely the “rules” of re-enactment encompasses one dominant objective, namely that of “doing things authentically” as a perfect, historically accurate simulation (Handler & Saxton, *Dyssimulation*). This firstly implies building an authentic material representation of WWII through assembling a true-to-life uniform, weapons, and equipment, known in re-enactment terminology as one’s “kit” (Daugbjerg, *Patchworking the Past*: 725). As described on the web page of the *Volksgrenadierdivision*: “modern clothing or utensils are strictly prohibited in this depiction.”<sup>8</sup>

While re-enactment initially seems to revolve around creating this authentic tangible representation, re-enactors particularly ascribe authenticity to their sensuous relationship with these objects. While most re-enactors started off with collecting relics of the past, they often described a desire to learn more about them, simply by “feeling” their “kit”, wearing it, and utilising them in action. This involves extensive archival research, experimentation, restoration and craftsmanship, a process that, according to some, resembles the research of

academic historians or early anthropologists (Johnson, *Re-enactment's Embodying*: 210; Kalshoven, *Moving in Time*: 197). The sensory qualities of the material culture used in re-enactment were believed to grant specific kinds of embodied knowledge. Evelyn, who re-enacted the First Lieutenant of the Army Nurse Corps (29), explained for example how she learned about the impractical design of the HBT [herringbone twill] uniforms through re-enacting: by wearing it in different circumstances, she experienced how “[they] really don’t protect you either from cold or heat.” Nonetheless, it was the experience of such discomfort itself that was believed to make one’s impression more authentic by impacting for example the way one’s body moves (Johnson, *Rethinking (re)doing*: 200). Thus, re-enactors constantly engage in processes of authentication by which they validate something as genuine or original (Cohen & Cohen cited in Agnew & Tomann, *Authenticity*: 21). This was further illustrated by Marc (27), a *Schütze* [shooter] from the *Volksgrenadierdivision*, who emphasized the importance of “pocket litter”, a term used for the war-related objects that often remain invisible to the public. He described how the pockets of his uniform would be stuffed with small items as lucifers, a comb, a songbook and, even though he did not smoke outside of the hobby, a pipe and tobacco. “In the beginning you think, I have a uniform, [my impression] is complete. But eventually, you will have a uniform whose pockets are bulging. It is not comfortable, but that is what makes it more authentic” (my translation). According to Marc, authenticity was not related to the “pocket litter” in itself, but an embodied and physical sensation (Daugbjerg, *Patchworking the Past*: 730; Kalshoven, *Moving in Time*: 547; and Braedder and others, *Embodied Simulations*). The quote therefore demonstrates how authenticity should be understood as an affective experience, shaped in contact between individuals and objects (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics*: 45-46).

Lastly, crucial to pursuing authentic experiences is establishing a liminoid space. This often meant travelling to places in which the re-enactors could imagine themselves in the past, an “in-between” such as isolated or historical sites in which they were separated from daily life (Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid*). While some settings had a specific historic value related to WWII as *lieux de mémoire*, other sites were actively authenticated by re-enactors through the creation of stories or imagining traces of the past. For the members weekend of the *Volksgrenadierdivision*, we for example camped next to an eighteenth-century mill, our modern cars parked at a distance so it would not disrupt the historicized scene. While checking out the site, re-enactors would discuss how the Wehrmacht could have used the mill to signal the local region during WWII. In the case of the Army Nurse’s training camp, our stay was a nineteenth-century house owned by one of the group’s members. Even though

there was no known relevance to WWII, it fit right in due to its relative isolation and old-fashioned interior (although the 1940s might have been a leap too far). While there was electricity, it only had a limited water supply, meaning that we could not shower in the upcoming days, a detail that, according to the Army Nurses, would only add to our training's authenticity. Evelyn explained that while we mostly see Army Nurses in films "looking pretty" with ironed uniforms, re-enacting taught her how stained clothing, greasy hair and the smell of sweat was more realistic. Thus, authenticity in re-enactment is used to describe what is felt and sensed, rather than an essential quality of material culture. It is therefore a discourse invoked by re-enactors to mediate their experiences. In the following section, I will demonstrate how this discourse particularly ascribes authenticity, and therefore power, to intense physical sensations and emotions.

### **Pursuing authentic sensations of war**

In addition to the affective relationship between re-enactors and war-related material culture, re-enactors may engage in activities designed to provoke certain sensations. As explained by Sara Ahmed, we often only become aware of our bodies in the event of feeling discomfort (*Collective Feelings*, 29). Prickly sensations, for example, become "pain" through an act of reading and recognition, which is then followed by a judgement, pain is for example usually labelled as "bad" (*ibid.*). However, in the case of re-enactment, "feeling" the discomfort of war is considered crucial in understanding the experiences of past actors. Sensations of exhaustion, pain, being "dirty", greasy, cold, or extremely hot, a lack of sleep, muscle aches, are therefore not simply "bad" or unpleasant, but rather valuable. Such bodily experiences function as reminders of "how hard it was back then" and serve to bolster the seriousness of the practice (Gapps, *Mobile Monuments*: 410). Intentionally, both the members' weekend of the *Volksgrenadierdivision* and the annual Army Nurses Training camp were used to integrate new re-enactors, resembling therefore a kind of "initiation rite" in which they transitioned from "outsider" to group member (Dreschke, *Ritual*: 203).

Simulating the original United States Army Nurse training from 1942 and 1943, the training camp of the nurses followed a similar daily schedule. That meant that each morning at six o'clock, all participants had to be in 40's gym outfits in front of our basecamp to undertake a gym session. This consisted of a twenty-minute routine that included running and stretches, based on a study of pictures of these trainings and diaries of WWII nurses by Fran (28) who re-enacted as Second Lieutenant. Getting up at six often meant getting up about an

hour earlier, not just to dress oneself, but especially to remove the countless hair curlers and bobby pins from your hair, which had already prevented you from a good night's sleep by painfully stinging your head. Whereas beginners like me used plastic hair curlers in private events, more experienced re-enactors like Fran often received compliments for consistently using the original metal ones, even at home. She told me how she had "trained" to sleep with them, in order to become used to the curlers' sensory characteristics.

Authentic historical experiences thus required practice to get comfortable with the presumed reality of WWII. During the members' weekend of the *Volksgrenadierdivision* for example, I was woken up around five o'clock. Heavy rainfall had started leaking through the fabric of the *Truppenzelt* [troop tent] we slept in, drenching at least five re-enactors, their sleeping bags, pillows, and clothing. After moving their stuff around to avoid getting even wetter, I remember being astonished by the fact that they went back to sleep in their soggy sleeping bags. Discussing the matter the following morning, I was told "this happened every time." The headache of a bad night, or the muscles aches of sleeping in a cold wet sleeping bag was just considered part of the experience.

Issues of authenticity are always related to questions of authority, since labelling something as genuine, true or real ascribes it to a certain power (Bruner, *Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction*). Mattijs van de Port has argued that bodily experiences are particularly powerful in processes of authentication: as one "cannot argue" with personal experiences as pain, they are presented as "incontestable facts" (Van de Port, *Registers of Incontestability*: 17). Similarly, in re-enactment, physical sensations as exhaustion, muscle aches were considered experiential evidence and contributed to what Brad West called "affective authority": the claim of knowing the past based on an empathetic experience of it (*Historical Re-enacting*: 400). I was for example explained how the most physically demanding and therefore "hardcore events" were therefore even widely regarded as the most authentic. Each year, the *Volksgrenadierdivision* would for example travel to Manhay in Belgium to re-enact the Battle of the Bulge for several days amid December. This meant camping in the freezing cold, with high chances of heavy snowfall and severely muddy terrain. Despite the group having installed a little kerosene heater in the tent that year, one of the members, Marc described his visit in 2019 as a "little bit of a traumatic experience":

Even the mud of that year is still on the inside of my car, I just couldn't get it out. You would just sink into the mud, to the edge of your boots. The leather got completely wet,

your feet became ice-cold, it just felt like [they] were freezing, it was so painful. [...] I had less than a square meter to sit in front of the heater, [...] completely wrapped in cloak, scarf, and the smoke was constantly stinging my eyes. And then I just started crying, I couldn't take it anymore. I hadn't slept for two nights, I was broken and had to go home.<sup>9</sup>

The limited protection the WWII materials offered to the severe meteorological conditions may have given insight into the experiences of the German soldiers, Marc however mainly remembered the trip as “horrible”. These “horrible” experiences did not only play a key role in creating communal memories, the mud serving as physical traces of historicized adventures, they also functioned as a form of capital within the hierarchy of the re-enactment community. Often, stories of hardships were rekindled during bonfires or dinners in a competitive manner. Since authenticity was linked to authority, the level to which one was able to endure physical challenges mediated one's status within the group, further materialized in the form of a reward. In the *Volksgrenadierdivision*, male re-enactors could receive different *Abzeichen* [badges].<sup>10</sup> Criteria for these badges included for example being physically wounded or sleeping for six nights in the freezing cold. Two members had earned a badge after one fell on his gasmask, breaking two of his cervical vertebrae, while the other fell on his bayonet during a battle, bruising several of his ribs. While this reward system was based on the original *Ostmedaille*, the military award for Wehrmacht personnel by ordinance of Adolf Hitler, it was also used to motivate re-enactors to challenge themselves to engage in more “authentic” experiences. As *Feldwebel* and chair of the *Volksgrenadierdivision* Jack (28) explained:

Before, I was chair, there was too much comfort at our events, people went to stay at hotels or slept in modern equipped tents. And because we wanted to change that, we came up with the *Ostfront Medaille* [Eastern Front Badge] [...] just to make the experience more authentic. And it is for you personally right, because the audience does not realize in what kind of conditions we sleep. I hope it will motivate everyone to seek more authentic experiences, because well, it was cold. We have all these luxury sleeping bags now, but people in WWII were just cold.

As demonstrated in the quote, Jack and other members of the group believed authentic experiences were rooted in physical sensations and the traces they left on the body. “Modern-day comfort” would detach one from the immersive experience of re-enacting, by making it less genuine. The military award which served as a symbol of appreciation for one's perseverance and commitment to the hobby, also signified the relationship between authority and profound bodily sensations as pain or cold. The following section will further elucidate

how affective experiences of discomfort were not only considered more authentic, but also particularly meaningful in establishing group ethos and solidarity. However, this proved to be a topic of contestation.

### **“My whole body is crying”**

In Turner’s distinction between the liminoid and the liminal, he argues that “[the first] is all play and choice, an entertainment, [while] the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread” (*Liminal to Liminoid*: 74). Despite being a “genre of leisure”, re-enactment communities often represent an interesting hybrid with regards to obligation and optation (Kalshoven, *Crafting the Indian*: 135). While participating is a matter of individual choice, each member carries a responsibility to uphold the simulation by fulfilling certain requirements and tasks. Thus, a successful, in other words authentic, re-enactment, meant all re-enactors had to undergo physical and emotional hardships collectively.

Jack explained how in the *Volksgrenadierdivision*, re-enactors were assessed on their “contribution to the group” with each event. This contribution was defined in terms of “discipline” on three levels: discipline to stay in the past (behaving yourself “authentically”, such as avoiding checking your smartphone), the discipline to bear the responsibilities of your role within the group (e.g., always carry ammunition if you are a *Schütze* [shooter]), and lastly and most importantly, the discipline to follow orders. This specifically applied during physical challenges such as tacticals (mock-battles), drilling, and going on patrol. Mimicking the hierarchy of the military, re-enactors like Marc would often emphasize how important it was everyone listened to their superiors:

If you are not going to follow the hierarchy, you will get in trouble. If your commander says we are going to do this [...] I know that is the best option. But if you think, I know better, you will create problems, because it is not just you but also your whole group that will be in danger. So that is the most important, [that’s] how you learn about comradery, because then you will know that person supports me, I will support them. And that’s how we are going to make it [*en zo komen we er wel*].

While the quote seems directed at situations of battle, I had posed a more general question about what Marc had learned from re-enactment. His answer therefore demonstrates how following orders in precarious situations was deemed similarly important in more mundane settings. Re-enacting the hierarchy of the military had therefore taught him to rely upon another, of listening, respect, and the importance of teamwork.

Conflicts may however arise when re-enactment moves from a “free activity” involving freedom of choice, to an obligatory practice (Kalshoven, *Is this Play*). A particularly illustrative moment within my research took place during an intensive hike that was part of the Army Nurses Training camp. On an extremely hot day of about 35 degrees Celsius, we left our basecamp around two o’clock to travel to the nearby mountain range. Following military protocol, re-enactors did not know anything about the duration and route of the hike to come, except Evelyn and Becky (29) who had assisted her in planning the activity. We had been told to prepare for an overnight stay outside, carrying all our equipment, food, supplies and water (although most only owned a 750ml canteen bottle for the whole 24-hours). As we would only have a layer of tent cloth to separate ourselves and the earth, I had been quite scared for the cold at night and secretly slipped a legging, wool sweater, and a few sleeping pills in the musette I borrowed. The video recordings I made of the hike capture its intensity quite well: shaky images, heavy panting, red faces, and the sound of the 1.3 kilo heavy helmets rhythmically pounding on our skulls. As we were walking up the mountain in the burning sun, one of the fellow re-enactors is heard telling me “my whole body is crying”, pointing to the countless patches of sweat on her uniform. Already after a few hundred meters, some re-enactors had asked for breaks, as an increasing number were out of breath, had developed blisters in their stiff leather boots, or were just in need of some shade. As time passed, the group increasingly started to disperse, with the more enthusiastic hikers in front. When the people behind lost track of the others, frustrations started to emerge. Some criticized the First Lieutenant (Evelyn) for re-enacting the “military protocol” in which the “nurses” were not given any information about the hike beforehand, arguing they were not mentally prepared for its intensity. Others accused the hikers in front of leaving them behind. About six hours into the hike, the group gathered for a second break and tensions finally spiralled into a highly emotional conflict with accusations being thrown back and forth. About five re-enactors opposed continuing the hike, therefore deviating from the WWII simulation of the training camp as designed by Evelyn.

In studies on re-enactment, various scholars have sought to conceptualize the immersive aspect of re-enactment (Adriaansen, *Conceptualizing the Period Rush*). They hereby often refer to “magic moments” (Handler & Saxton, *Dyssimulation*: 245), “history flashes” (Hochbruck, *Between Living History*: 99), or in Victor Turner’s own terminology, “flow”, assuming this immersivity to consist of a holistic sensation in which past and present appear to coexist (Csikszentmihalyi cited in Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid*: 87). Disagreements about what constitutes an appropriate simulation, such as illustrated in the hike, are a result of what

Petra Kalshoven described as “moral breakdown”: when these “flows” are “ruptured and call for a performance of ethics” (Zigon cited in Kalshoven, *Moving in Time*: 137). What is interesting about “flow” in the context of re-enacting, is how it may induce a sense of “communitas”, or as Turner explained: “it is not teamwork inflow that is quintessential, but *being* together, with being the operative word, not doing” (*Liminal to Liminoid*: 80). Hence, when the five re-enactors challenged the simulation this formed a direct threat to both the immersivity of the experience as well as the bonding process of the group. What followed was a group discussion in which re-enactors would attempt to define and redefine the authenticity of their performance, by negotiating how the hike might be altered. Short-cuts, longer breaks, and a swim session were proposed to cater to the five opposing re-enactors while still being attentive to the more enthusiastic hikers. Finally, as it became clear that the tensions could not be easily mended, it was decided that the group would split, each “nurse” had to decide whether she would continue the hike. Evelyn called her friends on the smartphone she carried for emergencies and agreed they would pick up the five nurses in a WWII Dodge. While they would be brought back to the basecamp, the others would continue their hike. As our tents were now incomplete, we would continue walking to the basecamp through the night, rather than camping outside, eventually reaching the camp at approximately three o’clock in the morning.

### **“We’re sisters now”**

Sara Ahmed (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*) argued that while we often treat emotions as properties we “have”, emotions take the shape in contact we have with others and objects. Feelings may be solitary but are never private: even though you may not feel exactly, let us say, the pain of others, you respond to it (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*: 31). In other words, emotions are not simply located in individuals, but move between bodies (Gibbs, *Contagious Feelings*). In the final part of the hike with the Army Nurse Corps, the withdrawal of the five nurses seemed to have a transformative effect on the rest of the group, as energy shifted from frustration to almost ecstatic. There seemed to be a new kind of appreciation of one another, namely that despite exhaustion, shakiness, blisters and headache’s, the remaining “nurses” had decided to finish this together. As we continued walking through the night, they were cheerful, making jokes, and were physically closer to one another, illustrated by several “nurses” holding hands. One of the most significant moments was when some of them started singing, their voices echoing between the Czech mountains. While music is widely known to boost morale, we often

tend to think about lyrics, rather than the bodily engagement of music itself (Stengs, *Square Sentiments*). Singing along, harmonizing, making eye contact with one another, and in the case of the hike, our rhythmic tread all fostered a feeling of being part of something, even to the extent that people like me, who did not know the melody nor lyrics (and felt too uncomfortable to sing) were integrated through active listening and moving synchronically. In line with Emile Durkheim's famous work on crowds, this sense of cohesion did not emerge of an individual's consciousness or body, but through doing, as a collective practice (Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*; Scheer, *Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?*). Moreover, this was symbolically sealed when we paused at a local café. The relief of a break and the effects of beer on our empty stomachs seemed to make everyone giggly. When one of the "nurses" found sticky tattoos at the bar, she decided to break with the rules of authentic appearance and mark all of us to "represent our sisterhood." With this sticky tattoo on my arm, I seemed to have lost my status as an outsider as the others kept jokingly telling me "we're sisters now." Going through the same experience of suffering had remediated my relationship to the others: I had also sighed, complained, had an equally sweaty and red face and stains on my uniform. As Ahmed described, it is through an act of reading and recognition that we separate or connect with others (*Collective Feelings*: 29). I had made an impression. And while I had earned their respect, they had earned mine. At the same time I became an "insider", the nurses who had chosen to back to the basecamp became "outsiders." "Sisterhood," or in Victor Turner's (*Liminal to Liminoid*) terminology "communitas", emerged in particular *after* the group had split. This sentiment took shape in relationality, defining the "us" who endured the hardships of the hike versus "them" who did not endure (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*: 10; Skoggard & Waterston, *Introduction*: 111).

While hardships were considered crucial in creating authentic experiences and a sense of community, the extent to which the re-enactors were willing to undergo such challenges remained a topic of contestation. In the case of the Army Nurse Corps, this negotiation continued during a special meeting in which all re-enactors were invited to share their perspective on the conflict. Some "nurses" like Beth (29), praised physical challenges as opportunities for personal achievements, arguing she was "proud of [her]self that [she] didn't quit", and emphasizing that these moments make "the best memories". Others, like Vicky (25) argued that for her it "spoiled the weekend" and made her doubt whether she "should have come". Anne (26) explained to me that for her, "it [was] not about being realistic, but [about] having fun and doing something nice." Eventually, a compromise was proposed by Evelyn: next year, everyone would be able to decide between a shorter and longer route for a hike. Despite

such attempts to re-establish group ethos, a new member had decided not to join the Army Nurse Corps after the training. Also, within the *Volksgrenadierdivision*, I observed similar discussions. Within their group, they recently reached consensus with regards to the “most authentic” but physically demanding annual event in the forests of Bastogne: they would alternate each year between sleeping in their tents (including kerosene heater, and re-enactors were allowed to bring folding beds and several wool blankets) with renting a cabin for their stay.

These continual negotiations about the conditions of re-enactment demonstrate the porous boundaries between “play” (“having fun”) and “work” (Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid*). Since these discussions pervaded all re-enactment practices, they indicate how re-enactors do not necessarily engage in a linear process of preparation, “immersion” into the liminoid realm of WWII, and reintegration, but rather move between these phases. Similarly, in her studies on Indianism, Kalshoven argues how subjects may feel “uncomfortably conscious” during their re-enactment of Indianists: rather than “being-in-the-world”, they constantly reflect upon the quality of their performance (*Moving in Time*: 562). While the multisensory nature of their practices may evoke a certain “flow” among some re-enactors, these moments are constantly disrupted by debating the practice itself. As described by Kalshoven: “moral breakdown is looming constantly, and therefore rather a state than an occurrence” (568). The significance of this reflection to re-enactors was exemplified when I asked a member of the *Volksgrenadierdivision* why he considered it important to experience discomfort in re-enactment:

We can say, I feel ill, or I am tired, I am going home. But people during the war couldn't say that they would be killed or had to deal with the court-martial. You did not have those choices. If you had to sleep in a freezing cold and soaked bed, you had to do it. [...] And that is the importance of these challenges, since we can just say, I am ending this or this is enough, you realize: what did they have to feel when they were freezing to death?  
(Marc)

Some scholars have argued that re-enactment encompasses a holistic desire for “real experiences” and is a response to the alienation of modern-day society (Braedder and others, *Doing pacts*: 182; Handler & Saxton, *Dyssimulation*: 24). Taking this perspective, Marc's re-enactment of WWII did not only teach him something about the past, but more so about the present: it was not just the affective experience of discomfort, but rather the freedom to choose that was considered valuable. So, being able to quit re-enacting but deliberately deciding

to endure together is what bolsters the strongest sense of solidarity, as illustrated by the “sisterhood” during the final parts of the hike. In the re-enactment of WWII, difficult sensations and emotions are relational and intentional, they involve a direction towards each other. Or, in Evelyn’s words: “Challenging things [...] really bring you together. None of us would probably go to the forest in the middle of the night with a shitty flashlight from the war, because I would probably die if I was there alone. But we were together.”

## Conclusions

The rising popularity of re-enactment practices is, according to some, indicative of the affective turn in history, by breaking with the ethical and political characteristics of post-war scholarship (Agnew, *History’s Affective Turn*: 299). As an embodied practice, re-enactment is particularly insightful in the study of emotions, not simply because re-enactors aim to approximate the actions, thoughts, and emotions of historical actors (Brauer & Lücke, *Emotion*: 53), but also because emotions are experienced, learned, and mediated through practices of the body (Scheer, *Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?*: 195). However, so far little empirical research has been done to explore how re-enactment practices may emotionally impact participants. In this article, I have analysed how re-enactors seek authentic experiences through affective encounters, and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. I hereby particularly focussed on WWII re-enactment due to WWII’s prominent position in collective memory and the emotional impact it still has on many people in society, including re-enactors. I therefore drew on a sensory ethnography of my participation in two re-enactment groups portraying the armed forces in WWII. Data obtained during two private re-enactment events in 2020 formed the main body of the analysis: a members’ weekend of the 277<sup>th</sup> *Volksgranadierdivision* and the annual training camp of the United States Army Nurse Corps.

Analysing re-enactment practices as liminoid phenomena, I started off by describing how re-enactment revolves around creating authentic material representations of the past through war-related objects and sites. The authenticity of re-enactors’ performances is further shaped in their experiential relationship with these objects, namely the way this materiality affects the body. “Pocket litter”, the impractical design of uniforms, and the sensory characteristics of metal hair curlers granted the re-enactors in these cases with embodied kinds of knowledge that they deemed crucial in their understanding of WWII. Authenticity is thus used to describe what is “felt” and an affective experience rooted in bodily sensations, rather experienced than an essential quality of material culture. Additionally, I have demonstrated how re-enactors

engage in processes of authentication, by labelling what is genuine and true, and what is not. This use of authenticity as discourse particularly grants power to profound physical and emotional sensations associated with the discomforts of war such as pain, cold, muscle aches and exhaustion. The experience of such sensations mediated one's position within the social hierarchy of the re-enactment community, exemplified in the competitive comparison of hardships and material rewards as medals.

Furthermore, by drawing on detailed descriptions of a hike during the Army Nurse training camp, I also demonstrated how re-enactment activities may be considered transformative rites of endurance. Shared experiences of hardships had to be endured collectively in order to evoke a sense of belonging within both re-enactment communities, with physical traces such as mud or sticky tattoos as symbols for collective memories. Yet, as liminoid phenomena are initially characterized as activities in which participants make up their own rules (Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid*), re-enactment then provides interesting dynamics between play and obligation. Throughout my fieldwork, re-enactors constantly debated the extent to which they were willing to undergo physical challenges. Conflict is therefore always "looming": "immersive" and "authentic" experiences can only be "successful" if all participants commit to the simulation. Disagreements about what constitutes the simulation may threaten both the immersivity of the experience as well as the bonding process, as illustrated in the conflict that emerged during the hike. Negotiation processes that follow indicate attempts to re-establish the simulation. In the case of the Army Nurse Corps, the group decided to split, dividing the ones who choose to endure the hardships versus those who did not, with one member later leaving the group altogether. These observations suggest that, in line with Kalshoven (*Moving in Time*), re-enactors find themselves more often in a reflexive mode rather than a holistic state of "flow" (Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid*). Yet, it is this reflexivity itself that bolsters the affective bonds between re-enactors, as it reveals the determination and commitment to their practices and each other. This sense of community or sisterhood is thus not a feeling re-enactors have, but something that is produced together through bodily practices.

While this analysis demonstrates the important role of affective experiences play in establishing communities, there is still a widespread tendency to see emotion as something private and inward (Leavitt, *Meaning and feeling in the anthropology of emotions*: 527). Similarly, most studies on re-enactment tend to focus on the individual, by exploring re-enactments epistemological potential and the affective relationship between re-enactors and material culture. However, as demonstrated by the conceptual framework on affect, emotions

take shape in relationality to others. Re-enactment then, which is almost explicitly performed in the context of a group, should be studied as a social practice. Subsequently, embodied and affective experiences are produced collectively, rather than individually. Paying attention to these social dynamics in re-enactors' attempts at authentic experiences offers opportunities to further explore how emotions are produced in the engagement with war histories.

## References

- Adriaansen, Robbert-Jan. *Conceptualizing the "Period Rush". Ludic Dimensions of Immersive History in Historical Reenactment*. In *Historical Re-enactment. New Ways of Experiencing*. Ed by Mario Carretero, Brady Wagoner and Everardo Pérez Manjarrez. New York: Berghahn Books, forthcoming.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others*. «Theory, Culture & Society», 21, 2, (2004): 25-42, doi:[10.1177/0263276404042133](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276404042133).
- . *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- Agnew, Vanessa. *History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present*. «Rethinking History», 11, 3 (2007): 299-312.
- . *Introduction: What is Reenactment?* «Criticism», 46, 3, (2004): 327-339.
- Agnew, Vanessa and Juliane Tomann. *Authenticity*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*. Ed. by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb and Juliane Tomann. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021,. 20-24.
- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Berens, Daniel. *WWII Reenactment in West-Central Wisconsin. Context of History and Memory from the Last World War*. Bachelor Thesis, History 489 Research Seminar, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (2008).
- Blumer, Herbert. *What is wrong with social theory?* «American Sociological Review», 18, (1954): 3-10.
- Brædder, Anne. *Embodied Simulations of Pasts: The Past as Present to WWII Reenactors and Living Historians*. «Public History Review», 25, (2018). <https://doi.org/10.5130/phrj.v25i0.6391>.
- . *Expertise and Amateurism*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*. Ed. by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb and Juliane Tomann. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. 74-78.

- Brædder, Anne and Others. *Doing Pasts: Authenticity from the Reenactors' Perspective*. «Rethinking History», 21, 2 (2017): 171-192.
- Brauer, Juliane and Martin Lücke. *Emotion*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*. Ed by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb and Juliane Tomann. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. 53-56.
- Bruner, Edward. *Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism*. «American Anthropologist», 96, 2, (1994): 397-415.
- Card, Amanda. *Body and embodiment*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*. Ed by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb and Juliane Tomann. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. 30-33.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Cook, Alexander. *The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment*. «Criticism», 46, 23 (2004): 487-496.
- Czarniawska, Barbara and Carmelo Mazza. *Consulting as a Liminal Space*. «Human Relations», 56, 3 (2003): 267-290.
- Daugbjerg, Mads. *Patchworking the Past: Materiality, Touch and the Assembling of "Experience" in American Civil War Reenactment*. «International Journal of Heritage Studies», 20, 7-8 (2014): 724-741.
- Dreschke, Anja. *Ritual*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*. Ed. by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb and Juliane Tomann. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. 202-205.
- Driessen, Siri. *Summers of War. Affective Volunteer Tourism to Former War Sites in Europe*, «Tourism Geographies», (2020): 1-20.
- Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957 [1912].
- Frauser, Annegret. *Sounds of War. Music in the United States during World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Gapps, Stephen. *Mobile Monuments: A View of Historical Reenactment and Authenticity from inside the Costume Cupboard of History*. «Rethinking History», 13, 3 (2009): 395-409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520903091159>.
- . *On Being a Mobile Monument: Historical Reenactments and Commemorations*. In *Historical Re-Enactment. From Realism to the Affective Turn*. Ed. by Ian McCalman and Paul Pickering. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. 50-62.

- . *Practices of Authenticity*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies*. Ed. by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb and Juliane Tomann. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021. 183-186.
- Gibbs, Anna. *Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect*. «Australian Humanities Review», 24 (2001). <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/IssueDecember-2001/gibbs.html>.
- Glaser, Barney G. *Theoretical Sensitivity. Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. MillValley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978.
- Gorton, Kristyn. *Theorizing Emotion and Affect*. «Feminist Theory», 8, 3, (2007): 333-348.
- Handler, Richard and William Saxton. *Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in "Living History"*. «Cultural Anthropology», 3, 3 (1988): 242-260.
- Hetherington, Kevin. *Spatial Textures: Place, Touch, and Praesentia*. «Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space», 35, 11 (2003): 1933-1944.
- Hochbruck, Wolfgang. *Between "Living History" and Pageantry: Historical Reenactments in American Culture*. In *Beyond the Mainstream. Papers Given on the Occasion of the Fourth Annual Conference of the German Society for Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English*. Ed by Peter Paul Schnierer. Trier: WVT, 1997. 93-105.
- Johnson, Katherine. *Performing Pasts for Present Purposes: Reenactment as Embodied, Performative History*. In *History, Memory, Performance. Studies in International Performance*. Ed. by David Dean, Yana Meerzon and Kathryn Prince. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 36-52.
- . *Re-Enactment's (Em)bodying of History*. Doctoral Dissertation. Sydney: University of Sydney, 2016.
- . *Rethinking (Re)doing: Historical Re-enactment and/as Historiography*, «Rethinking History», 19, 2, (2015): 193-206. DOI: [10.1080/13642529.2014.973709](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2014.973709).
- Kalshoven, Petra Tjitske. *Crafting the Indian. Knowledge, Desire and Play in Indianist Reenactment*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012.
- . *"Is this Play?" Reframing Metaphoric Action on Indianist Playgrounds*. «Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers», 91 (2005): 66-88.
- . *Moving in Time, out of Step: Mimesis as Moral Breakdown in European Re-Enactments of the North American Indian Woodland*. «The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute», 21, 3, (2015): 561-578.

- Leavitt, John. *Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions*. «American Ethnologist», 23, 3, (1996): 514-539.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- McCalman, Ian and Paul Pickering. *Historical Reenactment. From Realism to the Affective Turn*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London : SAGE Publications, 2009.
- . *Multimodality, Multisensoriality and Ethnographic Knowing: Social Semiotics and the Phenomenology of Perception*. «Qualitative Research» 11, 3 (2011): 261-276.
- . *A Multisensory Approach to Visual Methods*. In *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. Ed. by Eric Margolis and Luc Pauwels. London : SAGE Publications, 2011. 601-614.
- Scheer, Monique. *Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is that what Makes them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion* «History and Theory», 51, (2012): 193-220.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Skoggard, Ian and Alisse Waterston. *Introduction: Toward an Anthropology of Affect and Evocative Ethnography*. «Anthropology of Consciousness», 26, 2, (2015): 109-120.
- Stengs, Irene. *Gepopulariseerde cultuur, ritueel en het maken van erfgoed*. «Sociologie», 15, 2 (2019): 175-208.
- . *Square Sentiments: The Moving Presence of Religious Heritage in André Rieu's Musical Performances*. «Anthropological Notebooks», 26, 3 (2020): 40-69.
- Thompson, Jenny. *Wargames: Inside the World of 20<sup>th</sup> Century War Reenactors*. Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2010.
- Tomann, Juliane. *"You Can't just Put Men in the Field and be Accurate" Women in American Revolutionary War Reenactment*. In *Reenactment Case Studies: Global Perspectives on Experiential History*. Ed. by Vanessa Agnew, Juliane Tomann, and Sabine Stach. London: Routledge, forthcoming.
- Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theater. The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.

- . *Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology*. «Rice Institute Pamphlet – Rice University Studies», 60, 3, (1974): 53-92.
- . *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
- Port, M. van de. *Registers of Incontestability: The Quest for Authenticity in Academia and Beyond*, «Etnofoor», 17, 1/2 (2004): 7-22.
- Ede, Y. van. *Sensuous Anthropology: Sense and Sensibility and the Rehabilitation of Skill*. «Anthropological Notebooks», 15, 2 (2009): 61-75.
- Weber, Max. *Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy*. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Translated and ed. by Edward Shils and Finch Henry. New York: Free Press, 1904/1949.
- West, Brad. *Historical Re-Enacting and Affective Authority: Performing the American Civil War*, «Annals of Leisure Research», 17, 2 (2014): 161-179.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Ahmed further uses the example of pain to highlight how emotions involve sensations, as pain is often described as both. She argued that a distinction between these categories risks cutting “emotions off from the lived experienced of being and having a body” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion*: 40).
- <sup>2</sup> Scholars like Czarniawska and Mazza reject Turner’s preference to use liminoid instead of liminal for “modern societies” as they argue that anthropology and the social sciences in general seem to “have agreed that there is no “great divide” between so-called premodern and modern societies” (*Consulting as Liminal Space*: 271). While I agree with their claim, I have still chosen to use the liminoid in this paper to demonstrate the sensitivity between optation and obligation in re-enactment practices.
- <sup>3</sup> American sociologist Herbert Blumer’s distinguished between definite and sensitizing concepts. Whereas definitive concepts “refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed benchmarks [...] a sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes”, he argued (Blumer, *What is Wrong with Social Theory*: 7). Instead, sensitizing concepts would give social scientists a general sense of guidance without functioning as a preconceived notion (Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*).
- <sup>4</sup> Rather than understanding ritual as a “fixed” set of actions, Catherine Bell argued against universal definitions of ritual and uses the term ritualization to emphasize its dynamic process and fluidity (*Ritual Theory*: 74 and 82). This approach is now broadly accepted within ritual studies as it allows power relations, strategies, dynamics and change to be included in the analysis (Stengs, *Gepopulariseerde Cultuur*: 181).
- <sup>5</sup> I hereby refer to Max Weber’s *Idealtypus* as abstract and fictional models that “cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality” (*Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy*: 90). Using ideal types will allow me to analytically categorize stages in re-enactment practices, while at the same time affirming the subjective nature of scientific knowledge.

- 
- <sup>6</sup> Despite a recent study indicating that the number of women in re-enactment is increasing (Tomann, *"You Can't just Put Men in the Field and be Accurate"*), re-enactment remains a dominantly white, male hobby, that is perhaps unsurprisingly centred around gendered and patriotic ideals (Daugbjerg, *Battle*; Thompson, *Wargames*; and West, *Historical Re-Enacting and Affective Authority*). Juliane Tomann (*"You Can't just Put Men in the Field and be Accurate"*) has demonstrated that in the male power structures at play authenticity is often used as a regulating argument that excludes women from entering and partaking in (many) re-enactment activities. Subsequently, as a women researcher my possibilities to do participant-observation are limited. The gendered composition of both the *Volksgrenadierdivision* and the Army Nurse Corps is therefore far from representative in the broader re-enactment population. Future work will address the gendered challenges of doing ethnographic research in this male-dominated environment.
- <sup>7</sup> As many public and private events were largely cancelled in the period 2020-2021 due to COVID-19, there were limited opportunities to do ethnographic research for this article.
- <sup>8</sup> Accessed on 4-5-2021: <https://die-gruppe-vgd.be/re-enactment/re-enactment.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> All translations are mine unless differently stated.
- <sup>10</sup> Female members of the group could not receive these badges as *Die Flakhelferinnen* had never been stationed near the eastern front in WW2. Granting them a badge would therefore not be considered authentic, according to the participants of this study.