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## From Realism to the Affective Turn: An Agenda

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Ever since the late eighteenth century when new forms of visual entertainment claimed to be able to use technology to replicate or simulate the literal details of nature, scholars, poets and intellectuals have bemoaned the increasing dominance of the realist aesthetic. Classicists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Romantics such as Samuel Coleridge found the practice of literalist simulation to be debased and disgusting. It demanded merely mechanical competence, eliminated the vital creative role of the artist's idealising imagination, and appealed to uncultivated tastes attracted by the sensational wonders of the technical facsimile. Art lost its age-old *raison d'être* if it became indistinguishable from literal nature.

From the outset, too, these forms of realist technology were linked closely to practices of historical reenactment. The advent of naturalist technologies in theatre scenography almost immediately led to mechanical and visual reenactments of real-life historical events, such as social pageants, battle-scenes and shipwrecks. These in turn quickly passed into the new spectacular visual media of panoramas and dioramas and into cinema thereafter. For many practitioners (and commentators) modern manifestations of reenactment constitute the *ne plus ultra* of realism. Every weekend countless re-enactors enjoy an 'outlet from hum-drum life', taking the 'unique freedom to roam the centuries – to explore the intricacies of our ancestors [sic] minds and habits'.<sup>1</sup> Among re-enactors are 'hard core' for whom authenticity is a byword, a means to narrow the gap between past and present, as if counting the stitches on a tunic or soaking leather in urine is a way to experience what it felt like to live in the past.<sup>2</sup>

To modern semioticians such as Roland Barthes, intoxication with the 'reality effect' is quite simply the dominant aesthetic, or more properly

anti-aesthetic, of late modernity. Inventions like the commercial panorama are said to have presaged the contemporary fetish for surrogate visual experience, for digital and cinematic special effects, and for the 'hyper-realistic' theme parks, fleshy waxworks and technology-filled museums which so bewilder, bemuse and infuriate commentators such as Umberto Eco. To the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard this contemporary appetite for realistic simulation leads ultimately to the enthusiastic consumption of the simulacrum, a real-life spectacle that never actually took place.<sup>3</sup> Some historians have responded to reenactment with an admixture of bemusement and derision. Greg Denning's irritated dismissal of the practice as the 'present in funny dress' still echoes through the academy; Fred Inglis's more recent characterisation of reenactment as 'dangerous tosh' could become the bookend for Denning's quip.<sup>4</sup> In between, the profession appears to be bent on ignoring reenactment, as if by closing their collective eyes it will go away. It won't.

In the twenty-first century, advances in Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) and other forms of digital special effects have made it possible to depict people and events of the past with seemingly literal and living detail. CGI versions of historical figures that are grafted onto actors can convey an illusion so real as to be indistinguishable from archival footage. Does this make historical representation more authentic? What does it mean for those who wish to patrol the borders between fiction and historical truth? How do we distinguish between a documentary and a fiction clothed in the compelling props of 'reality'? Art and the law provide suggestive pointers to a related ontological problem. One of the unintended outcomes of postmodern appropriation has been that the appropriated artwork can often usurp the original, supplanting it in the mind of the viewer. Similarly at a time when reenactments are increasingly being used in courts of law, there is evidence to suggest that jurors are liable to confuse the accused and the re-enactor. So too with reenactment in other contexts. Those who witnessed a nineteenth-century performance of the trial of an Irish rebel or watched the latest Hollywood version of the life of an Australian bushranger may not only 'believe' what they saw, but they are also likely to substitute crucial aspects of the reenactment for their previously held understandings of the original. It would be a mistake to underestimate the incredulity of the audience but at the same time we must recognise the seductive power of what is before their eyes. It is more than 2000 years since Jesus told Thomas, 'because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed', but the point regardless of medium remains much the same.<sup>5</sup>

The burgeoning popularity of a new 'bastard' genre called 'historical reality television' is also attracting vast viewing audiences as well as waves of disquiet from scholarly historical quarters. New forms of television are being increasingly linked with a long tradition of Western enthusiasm for popular reenactments such as mock battles, heritage scenes and living history museums using meticulously recreated material environments and costumed actors. As the late Raphael Samuel put it, 'Objects must be seen and felt and touched if they are not to remain inanimate ... events should be re-enacted in such a way as to convey the lived experience of the past'.<sup>6</sup>

Arguably, then, reality reenactment in some variant has become the most widely consumed form of popular history. As John Brewer notes in his essay, reenactment is like sexually transmitted disease, there is a lot of it about these days. It also has a fundamental impact on education. A recent survey of history departments in the UK, for example, suggested that the vast majority of students enrolling in undergraduate courses in history had gained their knowledge of history almost exclusively from television and film.<sup>7</sup> Under the rubric of 'experiential learning' or institutions and commercial sites of historical tourism, they dress up, role play and 'experience' the past as part of the syllabus with little or no reflection on the nature of the 'knowledge' they gain. At the Jorvik Centre in York, for example, visitors proceed down flights of darkened stairs to the scene of a former archaeological dig in order to take what might be called a smelly dodgem car ride through a reconstructed Viking village.<sup>8</sup> Among the unconvincingly clothed manikins (à la shop window) are 'authentically' dressed re-enactors, volunteer enthusiasts designed to augment the experience. The re-enactors are passionate about their contribution and, when questioned, expansive about its educational role. Management obviously regards them as asset, featuring them on the cover of a publicity leaflet with the unlikely invitation to become a 'time traveller' (Figure 1.1).<sup>9</sup>

The public presentation of the past then is dominated by reenactment: from 'reality television' costume dramas to weekend medieval tournaments performed by amateur enthusiasts. What lies behind this appetite? What are its implications for the more traditional imperatives of history as an inquiry into the past that seeks explanation and understanding rather than sympathetic and empathetic identification? Is mimetic realism an essential component of reenactment?

When R. G. Collingwood argued famously in defence of reenactment as an essential dimension of good historical practice, he meant that the historian should make a strenuous imaginative leap into the past, trying



Figure 1.1 Jorvik Centre, Publicity leaflet, York, England, 2008

as far as possible to obliterate contemporary knowledge and values: s/he should try to become a medieval monk or a victim of sectarian violence however impossible the aspiration. But he regarded this as a purely intellectual activity. He did not envisage re-enacting the past emotionally or physically – the historical equivalent of archaeological fieldwork – nor could he have imagined the potential of technology to aid the imaginative process.<sup>10</sup> But is this imaginative process enhanced or derailed by our modern capacity to immerse ourselves in a hyperrealistic visual simulation of past environments with the aid of CGI and virtual reality immersion technologies? If computer gamers can replicate the 'magic bullet' that struck Kennedy, does that change the way we regard the findings of the Warren Commission?<sup>11</sup>

Conversely, is the modern form of television reality reenactment compatible with the type of imaginative, rational or romantic interpretations that Collingwood advocated? In practical terms it is also worth exploring if the new forms of virtual reenactment have anything to teach professionals about how to teach, practice or explore the intellectual problems of representing history? If reenactment, whether physical or virtual, can tell us something about context, provide a useful guide to possibilities and help us to appreciate the importance of material culture in shaping experience, can it also help us glimpse the reality of the past?

This book is offered as a contribution to the quest for answers, an opening gambit of sorts. The subtitle, *From Realism to the Affective Turn*, is not necessarily intended to imply a chronology – 'from' is a slippery proposition – although some contributors (and others) would suggest that its chronological implication is apt. As Foucault reminded us in 1971, the genealogy of words and ideas ought to be based on a 'vast accumulation of source material' and 'demands relentless erudition'.<sup>12</sup> The key terms which comprise the title of this volume have different chronologies: 'realism' was coined well over a century ago whereas the ink is scarcely dry on the first use of the phrase 'affective turn'. Space permits neither a voluminous compendium of sources nor uncommon insight, but both terms merit further exposition.

In his seminal *Keywords* Raymond Williams notes the 'almost endless play in the word' 'realism'.<sup>13</sup> As he shows, from as early as the fifteenth century, the word 'real' was used both to denote something actually existing (in contrast to the imaginary) as well as something innately real (most obviously the hand of God). Realism, he suggests, was a term derived from French and first used in the 1850s in Britain where it quickly gained a number of different senses. One of these, the most controversial, is the most relevant to our use of the term here: 'a commitment to describing real events and showing things as they actually exist'.<sup>14</sup> The controversy is useful to pursue. It arose, in part, because realism was both a method and an attitude, the one not always coterminous with the other. More importantly Williams shows the lingering sense that realism might capture that which is beyond the literally real. Here he invokes the Platonic reference in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* to 'forms more real than living man'. By the time Shelley put pen to paper, his fellow Romantics, as noted, had flatly rejected literalist simulation, essentially ignoring this use of the term. Nor were Romantics the only ones to be dismissive of this distinction; the curmudgeonly un-Romantic Thomas Carlyle referred insouciantly to Frederick the Great's 'real sins'.<sup>15</sup> The study of reenactment, unlike the practice which

is mostly dominated by quirky 'time travellers' and those referred to as authenticity Nazis, slips between the two 'reals'; a desire to learn from the literal recreation of the past and, at the same time, a yearning to experience history somatically and emotionally – to know what it felt like.

A more recent concern catalogued by Williams has direct bearing on the practice of reenactment. This objection concerns the medium by which the real is represented. According to this view it matters not what the medium is – 'language or stone or paint or film' – a superficial representation is a 'falsification making us take the forms of representation as real'.<sup>16</sup> With his notion of the hyperreal, Jean Baudrillard in many ways takes up where Williams leaves off. Writing in 1985 Baudrillard argued that in the postmodern world the image is no longer an obviously artificial place marker for the real thing. On the contrary, the simulation – the simulacrum – is more real than the thing itself. The example is not Baudrillard's, but think of the bewildering absurdity when Charlie Chaplin, possessed of arguably the most famous face in the world at the time, entered a Charlie Chaplin look-alike contest and did not even make the final. Simulacra are really real. At the same time the 'really real' is not real at all, or at least not necessarily real, a deliberate ambiguity. For Baudrillard, there was none of the certainty evident in Carlyle's bilious characterisation of a 'wretched Simulacrum' as a 'hungry Imposter, without eyes or heart, practicing for a mess of pottage ... blasphemous swindlery'.<sup>17</sup> Whatever else it might denote, Baudrillard's notion of a hyperreality comprised of simulacra is a place in which reenactment is flourishing.

The noun 'affect' is venerable by antiquity but the fact that it does not appear in Williams' *Keywords* is an indication of how recently it has entered – or perhaps re-entered – scholarly discourse in the humanities. Affective (also not discussed by Williams) is another word with a long etymology and an examination of its use elsewhere in the academy – in cognitive psychology, for example – would open up far too many lines of enquiry than is possible or advisable to pursue here.

The call for an 'affective turn', one of many scholarly turns since the 1980s, was first issued from within media, gender and cultural studies.<sup>18</sup> At a political level, as Lauren Berlant argued in 1997, 'the politics of intimacy', riding on the back of the 'affective turn' has 'usurped the public sphere as a space for social antagonism and struggle, reducing citizenship to personal acts and values, and reframing nationality as a question of feelings and traumas'.<sup>19</sup>

For humanists 'affect' and 'emotion' are, rightly or wrongly, more often than not treated as synonymous. The sense in which 'affective' is used in the title of this book – 'having the quality of influencing the emotions' – is regarded by Oxford's renowned lexicographers as obsolete, a further indication of its recent emergence in academic discourse. The impact of the 'affective turn' on study of history did not occur until early in the new millennium. Affective history as a term was, if not coined, certainly taken up by Chicago scholar Vanessa Agnew, a general editor of this series. Under the banner of the 'affective history' marches the study (if not the practice) of reenactment, sometimes at the forefront, sometimes out of step. Reenactment has a long – if contested – history as an activity, but it too has only recently become the object of scholarly enquiry.

Agnew had participated in the ill-fated (from an ontological viewpoint) reenactment of the first voyage of James Cook's *Endeavour* that was screened on the British national broadcaster in 2001, an experiment described by one of the present editors, Iain McCalman, himself a participant-victim, as 'the little ship of horrors'.<sup>20</sup> For a small group of scholars, the searing experience of *The Ship* sparked an interest in 'extreme history'. Did the 'affective' encounter with pain, suffering (and the potential for death), narrow the distance between then and now?

Among many fruitful trajectories of this initial engagement with the possibilities of reenactment was a typology developed by the *éminence grise* of reenactment studies, Jonathan Lamb. Lamb, another *Ship* survivor and a general editor of this series, divided reenactment into four types: house, pageant, theatre and real. House reenactment, he tells us, 'concentrates on the awkward little things that define a historical moment'. Its interest lies in the 'accumulating frustrations suffered by the re-enactors', much like the reality television shows which have dominated programming since 2004. By contrast the distinguishing feature of 'pageant' reenactments for Lamb is the 'affirmation of a sense of community or nation'. These are not unlike the 'commemoration ceremonies' described by Paul Connerton as 'ritual reenactments' having a 'cardinal importance in shaping communal memory'.<sup>21</sup>

According to Lamb, 'pageant' reenactments range from the sublime to the farcical. The most obvious example of the former is a passion play; history offers numerous examples of the latter. Think of the Duke of Eglinton's tournament in August 1839 when, much to the amusement of the public prints, a number of Tory would-be 'knights' (and others, including the future Napoleon III), spent a fortune to re-enact a medieval joust in rain-soaked Ayrshire.<sup>22</sup> For Lamb 'theatre' reenactments

are more intimate than 'pageants' and involve 'a certain amount of extravagance ... in order to lift history above of literal fact, but not quite to the level height of spiritual, national or communal pageantry'.<sup>23</sup> The definition of 'real' reenactments Lamb leaves to a Confederate re-enactor featured in Toby Horwitz's *Confederates in the Attic* who has perfected the art (or artifice) of being a bloated corpse.<sup>24</sup>

The lines between these types are clearly not hard and fast, and they were all forged in the same fire. Lamb's early thinking on the subject almost invariably focused on the 'extreme' through the eyes, variously, of Demodocus, Odysseus, R. G. Collingwood, Jane Austen, W. G. Sebald and J. M. Coetzee's alter ego, Elizabeth Costello. From Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, for example, Lamb interrogates the understanding of history upheld by the novel's heroine, Catherine Morland. For Morland, the attraction of the past is its capacity to open up the pain of its subjects to sympathetic understanding. The 'proper adjustment of pain to sympathy', Lamb opines, 'seems to provide the affective basis of historical reenactment'.<sup>25</sup>

Soon, however, a second wave of interest brought other scholars and other subjects to the conference table – pleasure, art, science, poetry, music, film, politics, the prosaic, the everyday. Consciously or unconsciously then 'extreme history' became 'affective history'. Here we have intentionally left the definition of reenactment loose and the range of genre generous – indeed it is central to our objectives to help explore its definition and its boundaries. Readers who find our use of the term too capacious and our perimeters too porous are invited to offer tighter or narrower definitions in future volumes.

All the essays in the volume engage, in one way or another, with the quest for a definition and an appropriate delimitation of the subject as well as the philosophical and practical questions revolving around the vexed relationship between realism and affect. Without heading into an epistemological cul-de-sac, it is worth recapitulating our critical questions. Is reenactment the key to knowing what it was like to live in the past? Would the re-enactor's holy grail of realism or authenticity narrow the gap between past and present so that we might touch it? Exploring these questions is aided by attention to genre and, to that end, many of the essays here explore the place of reenactment in pursuits within and beyond the academy – history, literature, music, theatre, dance, the law, film, television, public commemoration and historical tourism. A couple of examples will suffice here. Sites of historical tourism – public and commercial – (discussed here by several authors) are intrinsically concerned with creating an affective relationship with the past because

of the very fact that this past is objectified for the visitors. Some have also dabbled with the use of sensory experience to augment this. But how do we know what the past felt like: how it smelled, tasted, sounded? As Norbert Elias has shown in relation to social etiquette, including smell, the 'threshold of repugnance' is socially constructed and varies greatly between cultures and over time.<sup>26</sup> John Brewer also makes this point in relation to neo-realist cinema that the assumption that somatic experience and feeling are timeless is deeply flawed.

The uneasy relationship between realism, authenticity and affect is further evident in cases where the boundaries of reenactment are pushed towards improvisation. By allocating visitors unscripted parts in otherwise professionally staged reenactments, tourist sites have been at the forefront of this strategy. How much historical understanding is advanced by this process is debatable, but turning tourists into 'spectators' (to borrow a term from Augusto Boal<sup>27</sup>), with all its Brechtian connotations (drama-as-a-medium), has perhaps got more to do with entertainment than pedagogy. On the other hand, Katie Kitamura shows in her chapter that mixing re-enactors and the historical actors themselves can reveal an instructive paradox. Exploring Jeremy Deller's staged reenactment of an infamous clash between picketing miners and the police that had taken place 17 years earlier in Mrs Thatcher's Britain, Kitamura shows that the re-enactors in this extraordinary piece of performance art were intent on recreating the event accurately down to the last blow, while the veterans of the clash itself were only too happy to rewrite history. In his chapter Stephen Gapps, however, shows that unscripted re-enactors can sometimes lose their heads and attempt to change history. In a scene reminiscent of the well-known episode of Matt Stone and Trey Parker's *South Park* in which Cartman foments a rebellion among Confederate re-enactors who go on to 'win' the Civil War, Gapps shows how, as a professional re-enactor, he almost lost control of those re-enacting the part of the Irish rebels at Castle Hill in New South Wales in 1804.

Taking up much the same issue in his examination of Rossellini's cinema, John Brewer insists that students of reenactment need to find a way of dealing with contingency and chance. In the interests of conceptualising a poetics of reenactment Brewer suggests his own typology that contrasts with Jonathan Lamb's (and Connerton's) in important respects. In the light of the way that Rossellini's films explore what he calls the dialectic of the bigness of history and smallness of everyday life, Brewer goes on to call for an appreciation of the difference between historical and poetic truth. A similar issue is canvassed by Paul Pickering

in his discussion of the challenge thrown down by noted film historian Robert Rosenstone.

Rosenstone argues that, unlike historians who cannot break the bounds of linear narrative, filmmakers are able to create a past that 'is at once serious, complex, challenging, and "true" in its ability to render meanings rather than the literal reality of past events.'<sup>28</sup> Pickering examines a number of films and television programmes devoted to an iconic nineteenth-century Australian rebel and finds that none of them fulfil Rosenstone's promise, offering instead a range of distortions (intentional and otherwise) driven mostly by the desire to exculpate or profit. Nevertheless this investigation underscores the enormous power of re-enacting the past on the screen (large and small). Historical films, regardless of their concern with authenticity, are surely the quintessential simulacra of Baudrillard's imagination. The invitation to spectators to believe their eyes is also a conclusion drawn by Iain McCalmán in his chapter on de Louthembourg.

Another point at which even poetic truth shades off into fiction is also the subject of consideration in the volume. In their chapters both Anja Schwarz and Paul Pickering discuss the controversy that engulfed the Australian novelist Kate Grenville when she propounded an 'experiential' theory of writing. Grenville was scorned by the academy both for her shortcomings as a researcher and for her methodological innovation, which is actually reenactment by another name. Two issues emerge from this debate: reenactment as a form of redemption and reenactment as a methodology (to which we will return).

This question of redemption emerges strongly in Schwarz's essay as well as in James Walvin's. Examining Grenville's controversial novel, *The Secret River*, alongside an Australian television series titled *Outback House*, screened on the Australian public broadcaster in 2005, Schwarz notes the fixation with the moment of colonisation and an underlying sense of unease about belonging. Both the show and the novel, she notes, are concerned not with understanding the past but with rectifying past wrongs in the present. In this respect Schwarz highlights Grenville's use of knitting as a metaphor, as if history can be unravelled back to a 'mistake' – in this case colonial dispossession – and re-knitted. In *Outback House* reenactment is the vehicle for this anachronistic redemptive narrative. Again, it is worth noting that film and television have proved to be highly popular sites for lingering over reenactment in the presence of a mass audience. Following *South Park*, another popular animated comedy, *Family Guy*, featured a Civil War reenactment where the outcome was contested. The highly successful situation comedy

*Everybody Loves Raymond* used the Civil War as a crucible not to rewrite the past but to explore the affective capacity of reenactment in the present:

RAYMOND: Either I'm on your side in this thing or I'm not going to go.

FATHER: You can't desert now.

RAYMOND: You can't desert Dad, there's no war here. It's just dressing up in costumes like it's Halloween with your friend Harry-slash-Jebb.

FATHER: You shut up now. This means something to us. There's camaraderie here. There's spirit. You don't understand anything about this. You have no idea what it feels like to stand on a battlefield pretending to fight for something you believe in.<sup>29</sup>

In each case the object was not trauma but an almost insidious sense of discomfort disguised by humour.

At a more general level Jonathan Walker in his chapter points to the potential of reenactment to act as a metaphor. This comes close to another intriguing paradox: actualising the past as signifier of something else: resolution or understanding via a reenactment of a reenactment. Stephen Gapps also makes a case for the cathartic value of reenactment and he goes on to suggest that as a participatory activity, it is at the cutting edge of what he calls democratic history. Clearly re-enacting for the benefit of the present is beneficial to both audience and re-actor but, at the same time, popularity is an odd index of historical accuracy. Regarding history as 'unfinished business', Gapps tells us, is useful at getting to the heart of unresolved issues; it might also be taken as an invitation to make it up.

On this question of the tension between creativity and authenticity James Walvin suggests in his essay that one of the central functions of many sites of historical tourism is to assuage the collective guilt of the history's victors (in this case the beneficiaries of the slave trade). Walvin shows, for example, that in tourist sites devoted to plantation history reenactment and role-playing of various kinds are standard fare. These pageants are almost invariably popular with visitors except when they are used to disrupt the dominant narrative. Telling both sides of the story, Walvin notes, has proven to be discomforting to descendants of the victims and perpetrators alike. This conclusion suggests that the generic consumer of public history is less concerned with a warts-and-all

understanding of what happened than with closure even if this means accepting a sanitised version of the past. Affect is not universally desirable: joy is welcome, revulsion less so. It is surely no accident that the so-called history wars that have raged in many countries are almost invariably about what citizens feel about their past – pride or shame.<sup>30</sup> Given that sites of historical tourism, as with historical films and television shows, are firmly lodged in the education system, the implications of this are considerable.

A third important strand in many of the essays is that they focus on the history of reenactment. This is a neglected area. For all that, new developments in aesthetics and technology have produced a remarkable shift in the modes of presenting history; the practice of reenactment itself has, as we have noted, a long history. Historicising reenactment undoubtedly helps us to understand it. For example, both in the postmodern world and in the past, reenactment has been crucial to the creation and contestation of public memory. Part of the task of historians is to explore its various manifestations and to track its development over time, which, in itself, raises a number of contentious issues. The final two essays written by Simon During and Iain McCalman respectively, for example, traverse some of the same historical ground but offer different conclusions about the beginning of what we might call modern Western reenactment. McCalman suggests that its inception is to be found in the experimental spectacles created by Philippe de Louthembourg in late Georgian London; for During these were merely part of series of proto-reenactments that preaged the formal commencement of the practice in the aftermath of the American Civil War. By asserting that modern reenactment began in London in the 1780s, McCalman directly challenges the popular US view that the fiftieth anniversary reenactment of the battle of Gettysburg heralds the beginning of the genre. His suggestion that de Louthembourg presented the first disaster movie also contradicts numerous later claims to originality.

The relationship of reenactment to the historian's craft is as much a practical question of method as it is a philosophical conundrum. This is another issue raised in several chapters, including those which muse over R. G. Collingwood's ideas. By exploring Collingwood's early writings about music, Kate Bowan draws attention to a fundamental contradiction in his thinking about the practice of reenactment. As noted, in relation to history, Collingwood ultimately envisaged reenactment as an entirely cerebral activity, but here we meet Collingwood the 'man of action', or as Bowan puts it, the man who believed that the reenactment of the

past as lived experience was important, who maintained that a student of music could not imagine a Beethoven symphony without having heard it performed. The issue of reenactment as an embodied activity is also examined by Paul Pickering. By examining the extensive use of reenactment in the criminal justice system – both inside and outside the courtroom – Pickering notes that a similar range of issues are exercising the minds of scholars. Although re-enacting is increasingly seen as problematic when brought into the court as evidence, its potential is embraced willingly by criminal investigators without any of the angst displayed by historians. As an avid reader of detective fiction, Collingwood knew this well; by restricting reenactment to his imagination, he forgot it. The debate about the place of reenactment within the law is clearly an arena for future exploration.

So too with other disciplines.<sup>31</sup> In her essay, Katie Kitamura draws on cultural theory – in particular Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics' – to consider performance art as reenactment. Similarly, Ruth Phillips and Tracey Nicks highlight the potential for the study of reenactment through dance. In her chapter on music, Kate Bowan explores formative attempts by a pioneer of the Early Music Revival to recreate early Western music while festooned in Elizabethan pantaloons before appreciative audiences of the Bloomsbury cognoscenti. She then goes on to link this to the fierce debate among classical musicians about the possibility of authenticity within historical music performance. This debate has raged for decades and, as Bowan shows, it offers important insight to students of reenactment on the tension between creativity and authenticity and the limits and possibilities of the latter. A further contribution to the discussion of reenactment as a methodology is Iain McCalman's notion of 'reflexive reenactment'. Accepting the fact that re-enacting can never fully capture what it might have felt like to be there, he has argued that we should make a virtue of that shortcoming. The very element of unpredictability, he suggests, can become a source of creative exchange with the past, provided it is frankly acknowledged.<sup>32</sup> Taken together the chapters in this volume suggest that taking reenactment seriously as a methodology is worth the risk and that its potential is best explored through an interdisciplinary lens.

Finally the book explores the extraordinary potential of reenactment as a form of extra-textual communication. It is clear from the essays by Phillips and Nicks, Walker and Bowan that reenactments have a powerful and immediate impact on a visceral register and can reveal the past in ways that words cannot.<sup>33</sup> Phillips and Nicks demonstrate how Esther Deer, an acclaimed Hodenosaunee (Iroquois) entertainer who performed

in Europe, Africa and North America under the name of Princess White Deer, used reenactment to destabilize potentially paralyzing stereotypes of 'Indianness' current during the early twentieth century. Through dance and costume, Deer conveyed a form of intentional hybridity at a time when Indian identities faced the challenge of cultural evolutionism and the belief that distinctive Native cultures could not survive. This was reenactment as a form of protest without words. Similarly the images Walker discusses in his chapter highlight both the difference between somatic experience and text and the potential of the non-verbal forms of reenactment.

At one level using reenactment might be seen to emerge from our enquiry as little more than the historian's equivalent to archaeological or anthropological fieldwork, an attempt to take up R. H. Tawney's well-known injunction to historians to lay aside their books in favour of a stout pair of boots.<sup>34</sup> The value of this conclusion should not be gainsaid. The noted biographer Richard Holmes has given us a vivid example of the value of reenactment, although he does not use the word, preferring what he calls 'foot-stepping' to describe his method. In his essay on Mary Wollstonecraft, Holmes writes of his dismay at reading a line in one of her letters in which she claims to have seen the king being taken to his execution in 1793 from her apartment window.<sup>35</sup> Having done his homework Holmes knew that the hapless Louis had travelled down a different street, one running parallel to Wollstonecraft's, on his way to the guillotine. The king's route had been close enough to form the basis of a good tale for her correspondent but was clearly false. This revelation profoundly shook Holmes' faith in his subject: if she lied about this, what else had she lied about? Was this proof positive that her letters were tainted? In Paris, tracing her footsteps, Holmes went to her apartments, and looked from the window that had formed the basis of her fallacious account. From here, however, it became clear that she *could* indeed have seen over the rooftops below to the king in doleful progress. Wollstonecraft was vindicated. Holmes' attitude to his subject was profoundly shaped by reenactment, a tingling endorsement of its value as a historical method.

At the same time, exploring the motives and intentions of re-enactors can provide a useful window into shifting cultural practices and contested values. If the gap between past and present is not narrowed by the mimetic realism of embodied reenactment, the study of reenactments at fixed points on the continuum between then and now helps us to map change over time and to understand the lived experience of those doing the re-enacting. Moreover the task of historians is not

only to seek to understand the past, but also to engage with the ways that it speaks to the present. In one form or another reenactment is here to stay. It demands our ongoing attention. In many ways then this volume is intended to set an agenda for taking reenactment seriously; to open a page, to raise a range of issues, and to invite others to join in the discussion.

## Notes

1. See [http://www.nares.org.uk/main\\_pages/Re-enactment.htm](http://www.nares.org.uk/main_pages/Re-enactment.htm).
2. See T. Horwitz (1998) *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches From the Unfinished Civil* (New York: Vintage).
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8. The characterization is Kate Bowan's.
9. Chapter 1 of B. Gibson (2005) *The Colony: The Book from the Popular SBS Living History Series* (Sydney: Random House) is entitled 'Time Travellers'.
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11. Designed by Scotland-based Traffic Games and released in 2004, JFK Reloaded' is described as a '3-D, First-Person Perspective, "Assassination Simulator"'. The player sits in the infamous Texas book repository with a gun and from the same vantage point as Lee Harvey Oswald attempts to replicate the magic bullet. Initially a cash prize was offered to anyone who could do so. According to the game designers it was intended to silence conspiracy theorists. See <http://www.cool.com.au/computers-technology/personal-computers/jfk-reloaded-revisited-20060414256/>. We are grateful to Lucinda Mathieson for this reference. See also J. de Groot (2006) 'Empathy and Enfranchisement: Popular Histories', *Rethinking History*, 10:3, pp. 391–413; B. Rejack (2007) 'Toward a Virtual Re-enactment of History: Video Games and the Recreation of the Past', *Rethinking History*, 11:3, pp. 411–25.

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21. P. Connerton (1989) *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 61.
22. See I. Anstruther (1963) *The Knight and the Umbrella: An Account of the Eglinton Tournament, 1839* (London: G. Bles). We are grateful to Alex Tyrrell for this reference. The Eglinton tournament was itself re-enacted in 1989.
23. Lamb has outlined this typology at numerous conferences and seminars since 2001. It appears in published form in his most recent book. See J. Lamb (2009) *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering and Chatto), p. 137. Paul Connerton also offers a useful typology: 'calendrical, verbal and gestural'. See Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, p. 65.
24. Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy*, p. 139; see T. Horwitz (1998) *Confederates in the Attic*, p. 8. See also D. Hall (1994) 'Civil War Reenactors and the Postmodern Sense of history', *Journal of American Culture*, 17:3, pp. 7–10.
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26. See N. Elias (2000) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). We are grateful to Michael Davis for this reference.
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28. R. Rosenstone (1995) *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Modern Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
29. *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1998) Season Two, *Civil War* 14:55. We are grateful to Suzanne Pickering for bringing this to our attention.
30. See for example S. Macintyre and A. Clark (2003) *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press). See also S. Gapps (2003) 'Authenticity Matters: Historical Re-enactment and Australian Attitudes to the Past', *Australian Cultural History* 23, pp. 105–16; A. Schwarz (2007) 'Nor This Year! Reenacting Contested Pasts Aboard *The Ship*', *Rethinking History*, 11:3, pp. 427–46.
31. The same is true of other disciplines. Drawing on the work of Michael Taussig some social anthropologists employ what they call an 'intuitive' approach in the face of fraught fieldwork conditions. Monique Skidmore, for example, has argued that the way to study the lives of those who live in an oppressive regime is to place yourself in danger alongside your subject and write about how you feel. To understand the 'affective dimensions of dictatorship', she writes of working in the field in Myanmar, 'I intuit the experiences of the Burmese people I have come to know well'. Her terror, she claims, allows her to experience theirs intuitively without having to name them. See M. Skidmore (2003) 'Darker than Midnight: Fear, Vulnerability, and Terror making in Urban Burma (Myanmar)', *American Ethnologist*, 30:1, pp. 5, 7.
32. See I. McCalman, 'Past Not Just the Present in Silly Clothes', *Sydney Morning Herald* (17 September 2007).
33. See also Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 72–104.
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First published 2010 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press, LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-0-230-57612-4 hardback

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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## Acknowledgements

This volume (and the Series of which it is a part) emerged from string of conferences, seminars, and workshops held variously in Nashville, Pasadena, Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, and Cambridge. Our thanks are due to those others who (in no particular order) presented papers and participated in conversations at and beyond the conference table: Andrea Bradley, Alex Cook, Jed Buchwald, Harry Liebersohn, Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Agnew, Annie Hesp, David Gruber, Paul Turnbull, Bill Deverell, Robert Rosenstone, Kim McKenzie, Dan Turner, Brian Deyo, Caroline Turner, Jonathan Mane-wheeki, Dadang Christanto, Vincent Carretta, Cassandra Pybus, Pat Hoffte, Julie Gough, Michael Mel, Adam Low, Toby Haggith, Tatiana Senkevitch, Ian Howard, Claire Roberts, Geremie Barmé, Mark Seltzer, Salima Hashmi, Helena Hammond, Michael Desmond, Anthony White, Helen Weinstein, Patrick Wildgust, James Chandler, Geoffrey Day, Madeleine Bunting, Ashley Hay, Beau Yancy Baca, Gordon Lang, Lynne Blundell, Jennifer Webb, Susan Steggall, Paula Hamilton, Lucinda Mathieson, Chris Linke, Yannick Thorval, Christine Hansen, Amanda Johnson, Tina Parolin, Vivienne Kelly, Robyn Ballinger, Michael Farrell, Otto Sibum, Jim Secord, Alison Winter, Jacques Rancière, Mark Phillips, Elizabeth Edwards, Kim Sloan, Stephanie Lindsay-Thompson, Dominique Sweeney, Will Davies, James Hurst, Melissa McEwen, Ivo Lovric, Anthony Garnaut, Travis Cutler, Mary Kilcane Cody, Anna Garretson, Laurence Gourievidis, Olwyn Beazley, Veronica Tuckerova, Roy Ritchie, Simon Baker, John Wyver, Jim Spriggs and Christopher Pinney.

Thanks also due to those who helped organise the moving feast – Leena Messina, Sally Kingsley and Sabrina Boschetti – and to those institutions which provided funding support: The Australian National University, the University of Sydney, California Institute of Technology, Vanderbilt University, Cambridge University, University of York, and the Huntington Library.

We wish to acknowledge the following institution and individuals for permission to reproduce images: Kanien'kehaka Onkwawen:na Raotiohkwá Language and Cultural Center, Kahnawake Mohawk Nation Territory, Canada, Stephen Gapps and Dan Hallett (copyright owned by Dan Hallett and Jonathan Walker).

Our sincere thanks to Michael Strang and Ruth Ireland at Palgrave Macmillan for their interest in a new subject and for their forbearance in the face of our tardiness.

Individual authors have included words of thanks, where appropriate, in their chapters. It is left to us to thank them for their efforts in bringing this volume to completion. Working in an emerging area such as reenactment studies carries risks as well as rewards. We are grateful to those willing to take the risk.

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