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*Historical Re-enactments.
Should we take them seriously?*

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I've had the fifteen minutes of fame that Andy Warhol promised all moderns: it was in August 2001 aboard a replica of Captain James Cook's converted coal barque, the *Endeavour*, while sailing in what he called 'the insane labyrinth' of the Great Barrier Reef. I was engaged in a BBC Television and Discovery Channel re-enactment of Cook's voyage of exploration up the east coast of Australia in 1770.ⁱ My high point as a TV historian consisted of a rant at the ship's First Officer for preventing us from drying our clothes on the rigging. It's appeared on all three versions of the subsequent TV series called *The Ship*, even though they were edited in very different forms for British, American and Australian audiences. My hissy-fit was exactly the sort of material our hairy-chested director hoped to generate when he outlined his vision of a new genre of 'extreme history' that we would pioneer. New or not, the formula was simple: assorted representatives of the twenty-first century pit themselves against some of the extreme physical and mental challenges of the past in order to entertain mass audiences. The latter are moved to laughter, awe or pity at our modern-day sufferings and failures. Some participants are ejected or fall by the wayside, the remainder join hands at the end to trill about how tough but rewarding it was to live in the past.

As mutinies go mine was extreme only in its triviality. I never came close to rivalling Fletcher Christian's agonized outburst to Captain Bligh, 'I am in hell. I am in hell'.ⁱⁱ Complaints about laundry are not the stuff of epics. Still, wet clothes can make you sick if you have to sleep in them, as we found out when one of our number was later airlifted from the ship with pneumonia. What irritated me almost as much as seeing my own televisual absurdities was the

anachronism of the whole affair. James Cook had known how vital it was to keep his crew healthy on those brutal voyages: he'd encouraged the sailors to wash their clothes daily on a line dragged behind the ship and to hang them out to dry on the rigging. But that was historical reality: reality TV demands idealized images.ⁱⁱⁱ Our professional crew and cameramen were afraid that the ship might look too homely with T-shirts flapping on the ratlines — 'like a bloody Chinese junk', one of them commented. All the same, I should have known better than to protest. In doing so I showed all the foresight of a Pavlovian dog, because it was obvious that the director itched to generate emotional crises. Successful extreme history depends on provoking someone — ideally a hapless middle-aged professional historian — to spit the dummy like a petulant child. The only reason that there was no coverage of a similar rebellion by an ex-FBI agent who left the ship after five days was that she threatened to sue the broadcaster.

So, as you can imagine, when three former shipmates, Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Agnew and myself, decided a year later to hold a post-voyage conference in the United States on the subject of re-enactment, we weren't exactly in objective frames of mind. The horrors and humiliations of our recent experience had welded us into a band of re-enactment-phobes. I opened the conference by showing a short homespun movie called *Scuttlebutt*, which consisted mainly of shots of three of us sitting in a variety of pubs venting our spleen against the TV series.^{iv} To my surprise, however, even *Scuttlebutt* attracted excited and intelligent discussion from the attendants — something that turned out to be a foretaste of the whole conference. None of us had dreamed that our casually-convened exploration of 'Extreme and Sentimental History' would turn into one of the most exhilarating historical discussions we'd ever had, and that it would attract clusters of TV and film producers, museum curators, professional re-enactors, literary scholars, cultural theorists, academic and public historians, philosophers, musicologists, linguists and others. Neither could we have predicted that this first conference would go on to generate scores more — in the US, Europe, Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

Five years on we historical seafarers find ourselves entangled in something like an international movement that has mushroomed alarmingly both in size and scope. We have tri-annual international conferences projected now at least until 2011; we've published two special journal issues dedicated to aspects of re-enactment; we've signed a contract with Palgrave press in the United Kingdom to produce a book series entitled 'History and Re-enactment'. The series has three volumes currently in the press, half a dozen more waiting in the wings and it commits us to publish at least two volumes a year for the foreseeable future. No less bizarre is

the fact that several veterans of the *Endeavour* series, including myself, have recently signed up to new research projects that entail using some form of re-enactment. How do we explain both this unexpected wave of international interest in the subject, and our own sad recidivism?

I.

It would be wrong to say that we've become complete converts to re-enactment history—far from it. Intensive exploration of the subject has confirmed some of our worst suspicions. However, even the fiercest critic among us now concedes that the modern fascination with re-enactment represents a trend within western culture that is older, deeper, and more interesting than we'd realized.

One of our colleagues, historiographer Mark Kolber Phillips from Canada, has helped more than anyone to illuminate the origins and significance of the historical form we blundered upon.^v He sees the rage for re-enactment as part of a fundamental shift in the shape and purposes of scholarly history, a shift which brings it into closer than usual alignment with its popular and public counterparts. Phillips traces this change back at least two centuries, to the period when Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers like Adam Smith, David Hume and Jean Jacques Rousseau began to explore the emotional dimensions of the past. Until then history writing had focused mostly on providing a record of events or on narrating the timeless deeds and universal values of heroes.

During the eighteenth-century, writers, artists, dramatists and poets began to experiment with new ways to bring their readers into connection with the passions, habitats and ways of life of ordinary individuals in remote times. Behind this interest was a new understanding of how the nervous system functioned to link ideas, associations, feelings and morals. The sentimentalists, as they sometimes called themselves, came to believe that flows of sympathetic emotion possessed a powerful capacity to shape social communications and moral judgements. Poems and novels, picturesque landscapes and sublime battle scenes, waxworks and marble sculptures, exotic museum artefacts and mechanical spectacles: all these representations were thought capable of exciting the sympathy of audiences and of transporting them to worlds otherwise distant in time, place and culture. Details of everyday life or domestic social

tribulations were thought most likely to trigger popular sympathies, enabling leaps across the psychological gap between the past and the present.

Following on from this sentimental tradition, Phillips argues, the key question for both popular and scholarly history has gradually become not so much what happened in the past as what it felt like to be there. Many scholarly historians have become less concerned with ‘things done’ — with grand narratives and sweeping chains of cause and effect — than with ‘things experienced or felt.’ Scholarly models of history writing adapted from the social and natural sciences, which presented history as an empirical and objective discipline for explaining events in the past and assessing their consequences for the future, have declined in numbers and importance. Their place has been taken by models borrowed from disciplines like literature, art, languages and anthropology, all of which tend to emphasize the importance of understanding meanings within the past rather than with explaining historical causes.

I’ve been implicated in this shift without perceiving its connection to the modern re-enactment vogue. As an undergraduate I was introduced by Manning Clark to the unorthodox theories of British historical philosopher R.G. Collingwood, who asserted that all history was the re-enactment of past thought. The task of the historian, Collingwood argued, was to reinhabit the minds of peoples in the past.^{vi} Edward Thompson, the father of the twentieth-century approach to history writing that we now call ‘history from below’, urged young historians like myself during the 1960s to rescue history’s losers — the objects, he said, of posterity’s ‘enormous condescension’. He inspired me to spend years grubbing through the archives of the British Public Record Office, trying to recapture the underground worlds of illiterate revolutionaries who’d plotted under the shadow of the government’s spy network, and ended their lives hanging from London’s gallows or filling the holds of Botany Bay transport ships.^{vii} But I also learnt that where published texts are nearly non-existent, some smudged scribbles of an informer, an arsenic-impregnated note to a condemned prisoner or a rough pike-head intended for Lord Castlereagh’s guts can carry more of history’s charge than all the words I could muster.

So, if our aim is to communicate the immediacy of felt experience in the past, where do we look beyond the printed word? Despite my earlier snootiness I can see that I have in fact flirted with several forms of re-enactment that grew out of public history performances or mass commercial entertainments. One of the best-known of these is what my *Endeavour* shipmate, Professor Jonathan Lamb, calls the re-enactive *pageant*. By this he means the public re-performing of past events that are thought to have had a formative influence on our national,

imperial or collective characters. As well as pageants, these re-performances can include state ceremonies, plays, museum displays, re-created battle sites, costume tableaux or even technical simulations of various kinds. They generally aim to stimulate feelings of patriotism or to arouse popular sympathy through commemorative displays of suffering and sacrifice. Foundational national moments and epic national battles, whether victories or heroic failures, are the most familiar to us — think of Gallipoli and the Kokoda trail. Our *Endeavour* series attempted a patriotic pageant when, at Possession Isle in the Torres Straits, we landed to re-enact the time and place of Captain Cook's raising of the flag over Australia in the name of the King. A young historian friend of mine, coincidentally named Alex Cook, still hasn't lived down being captured on film with a sympathetic tear stealing down his cheek. Though not the weepy type, Alex was typecast in that vein for the rest of the series.

I became interested in re-enactive pageants in a rather different context. Over the last several years I've been researching a book about a now neglected but once-famous eighteenth-century artist, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, who, half a century before photography, devised the first special-effects cinema, which he called the *Eidophusikon*.^{viii} This pioneering form of mass media grew out of a theatre project to create patriotic and sentimental re-enactments for commercial entertainment. While working as a Drury Lane scene-designer, de Loutherbourg began spicing up tired pantomimes by inserting scenes that simulated newsworthy real-life events such as the British military victory over the Spanish at Omaha in 1776. Here de Loutherbourg built mechanical automata dressed as armed sailors, who swarmed up siege ladders alongside human actors to the sounds and stench of actual gunpowder explosions.^{ix}

When, a few years later, de Loutherbourg began showing mechanical moving pictures for money in his specially built miniature theatre, one of the *Eidophusikon*'s best-loved scenes proved to be a mechanical and optical simulation of a sensational news story of 1786. Early in the year a fine new East Indies merchant ship sank in a terrible storm off the coast of Dorset with great loss of life, including the drowning of seven young girls on their way to find romance in India. Loutherbourg's 'Wreck of the Halsewell', the first ever disaster movie, was a direct forerunner in its painstakingly realistic detail of the twentieth-century blockbuster, *Titanic*. Despite the scene's importance, however, I found it difficult to convey to fellow historians how the first ever moving-picture theatre had operated. The visual and material character of de Loutherbourg's work seemed to demand that I try to show what his shipwreck scene might have looked like, even though I knew that the visual sensibilities of viewers of 1786 and 2006 were

worlds apart. My version of the *Halsewell* scene was cheap, quick and dirty, and much miniaturized compared with de Louthembourg's 8 foot by 6 foot set. Still, recreating it — even in this simplified form — taught us a great deal about the technical limitations and possibilities of pre-photographic moving pictures. We've now been asked to write a script about it for a British TV documentary and to develop our prototype for possible permanent exhibition at the Museum of London.

I've also dabbled with what is probably the most commonplace re-enactment genre, the *travel journey*. This usually takes the form of *re-tracing* notable expeditions and travels of the past, a key motif of travel writers and also of TV documentaries following in the wake, footsteps or trail of some famous explorer, poet, or seer. Re-tracing was of course the ostensible purpose of *The Ship* series, even though it showed less interest in tracking the original problems of the *Endeavour* voyagers than with driving us to twenty-first-century despair with hard tack biscuit that broke our teeth, salt pork that made us retch and sail manoeuvres on the top-gallant that filled us with terror — all of these, of course, matter of fact experiences for Cook's crewmen. Fortunately, not everyone has to get entangled in the fatuities of 'Big Brother at Sea' to be able to experience the rewards of this form of re-enactment, which has after all become a staple of modern tourism.

I tried one of these tourist re-tracings myself many years before the *Endeavour* project. In early January 1980 I sailed up the West Coast of Lake Nyassa, Central Africa, in a down-at-heel steamer, the *SS Ilala II* — a round trip which takes nearly a week because the Lake is an inland sea 365 miles long. I was making a nostalgic return to the country of my birth, Nyasaland, now Malawi, last seen in 1965 when I migrated to Australia aged eighteen. I was also following up a boyhood desire to retrace the stories I'd read of the terrifying land and water passage of the missionary-explorer David Livingstone up that beautiful slaver-infested coast in 1861.^x Despite poring over Livingstone's journals, I didn't at the time think of my voyage as re-enactment. Being the major means of mass transport during the rainy season the crowded *Ilala* was no luxury liner, but I intended a strictly deck-chair exploration. It was a slightly nerdy way of giving shape to an otherwise haphazard holiday — perhaps the commonest form of re-enactment that most of us undertake.

To my surprise the cruise did produce some strange reverberations between the past and present. Livingstone's voyage had been a miserable failure because of violent storms, tropical diseases and alarming encounters with tribesmen. A mixture of coincidence and the

atavistic nature of Central African politics ensured that my voyage up the west coast of Lake Nyassa turned out to be a more literal re-enactment than I'd expected. Like Livingstone, I ended up a victim of malaria and dysentery and, while he was threatened by armed Angoni warriors, I was menaced by the Malawi secret police because I'd befriended someone on board whose political connections and tribal affiliations were disliked by Dr Banda's brutal rightwing government. I'm not suggesting that this coincidence got me closer to what it felt like for Livingstone's explorers to sail up the coastline two hundred years earlier, but my re-tracing, if we can call it that, did produce some historical insights. If nothing else, the voyage brought me to a greater awareness of how Livingstone's history and my own remained tangled together within the grim political and social realities of contemporary Malawi. It wasn't pleasant, but at least I got to sleep in dry clothes.

Actually the TV series of *The Ship* featured some elements of a third major form of re-enactment. We *ex-Endeavour* shipmates call this the 'house' genre, after its most celebrated television incarnations — *1900 House*, *Edwardian Country House*, *Frontier House*, *Outback House* and so on. The intention is usually to entice twenty-first-century citizens to *relive* or *reinhabit* the conditions of the past for the purpose of entertainment or instruction. In museum, tourism and heritage circles this aspiration and approach is usually called 'living history'. It entails everything from offering public tours through restored country houses, to demonstrations of working historical farms, to the building and display of elaborate museological recreations of towns, villages and hamlets. Sometimes living history sites are stocked with professional actors in 'authentic' costume who impersonate actual characters from the past. At some of the most innovative modern 'living history' museums in the United States, such as the Living History Farms of Iowa, Colonial Williamsburg, Plymouth Settlement and Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, visitors become participants in, as well as witnesses to, re-enacted history. This usually entails either role playing or some degree of involvement in craft operations, such as hand throwing of pots or smearing mud on wattle and daub structures with specially supplied gloves. Sturbridge offers special historical adventure packages for children who take old-fashioned school lessons using slates and chalk, and play extinct forms of sports, dressed in antique costumes.^{xi}

On the *Endeavour* we didn't dress up in sailor clothes, and no-one played Captain Cook, though our director certainly had a touch of Captain Ahab about him. Still, we did practice some elements of everyday living history that would have been familiar to most sailors within the tough

world of the eighteenth-century British navy. We slept like a tropical bat colony on hammocks fourteen inches wide and eighteen inches apart, slung in a small forecastle heated by tropical humidity and a wood burning stove. We learnt to haul and ease 112 ropes in obedience to the captain's barked order, 'sharp up'. We climbed, mostly without safety harness, 140 feet up the rigging, to balance our stomachs on the thin t'gallant yardarm while furling and setting heavy canvas sails. And we tried to steer the tub-like *Endeavour* through a minefield of reefs, hoping that our efforts to simulate Cook's navigational genius based on sextant, stars and callipers were being secretly backed up by GPS navigation systems and modern charts. We were fine examples of living history if you overlooked the fact that Cook's crew had not consisted of lissome, TV-infatuated young men and women or grumpy geriatric historians, all of whom found the privations harsh, the lack of privacy asphyxiating, and the public humiliations of peeing down a tube on the deck excruciating.^{xii}

I must confess that I did engage in a private and informal experiment in living history during the late 1970s. With the help of some drop-out architect friends I decided to build a mud-brick house by hand, using many of the techniques of earlier goldminers who'd inhabited the neighbourhood just outside the historical gold town of Beechworth in North East Victoria. Though not explicitly intended as re-enactment, the project was motivated by a romantic wish to use the simpler building forms and natural materials at hand in the locality. There were, of course, limits to its authenticity. We resorted to using a petrol chainsaw, concrete footings, a modern damp course and reinforced glass windows. On the other hand, we did puddle the mud and straw by hand, shape it with a single wooden mould, and lay the walls with foot-thick mud bricks weighing seventy five pounds each. I scavenged and laid old convict bricks for the floors and rendered the inside walls with a mixture of blood, mud and cow dung, just as the early settlers had done. The supporting house frame, which the sceptical local Council required, came from huge peppermint gum logs left in the round, which we cut down from the local forest with a permit. I even allowed myself to be lowered down an abandoned eighty-foot well in an effort to clear the bottom of collapsed rubble.

All these were practical history lessons of a sort, though it was difficult to test their fidelity. When a local ex-shearer, lowering me into the well's depths, shouted out, "Never mind the copperheads down there, mate; the cold water makes 'em *real* docile. Just toss 'em in the bucket and I'll wind 'em up," I wasn't sure who was really being wound up. Still, I was proud of the finished house; it seemed to me an object of beauty, economy and comfort that blended

harmoniously into the local landscape. And it reminded me of the type of house I had sometimes lived in during my African boyhood. But the problem with living history is that while making occasional visits to the past might be exhilarating, permanent habitation can become tedious. And so it proved. I'd made no allowance for missing both the life of the mind and all the sensual stimulants of the modern city.

II

This nostalgic impulse, which seems to inform much modern re-enactment, is one of the reasons many historians are sceptical of its historical value. And it's fair to say that our scholarly re-enactment group includes a number of these sceptics. In Captain Cook's day nostalgia was thought to be a physical disease that gripped sailors who'd been too long at sea, producing an insane longing for the sights, smells, images and inhabitants of home. Now, modern cultural critics like Umberto Eco believe it has become a disease of the psyche, a mass affliction of our time. Moderns, he suggests, long to inhabit imagined worlds of the past rather than face the challenges of living in the present. The vast amateur recreational movement of re-enacting American Civil War battles or medieval jousts every weekend are, by this account, symptoms of a pervasive and disabling escapism. Living Museums, too, are seen to pander to such nostalgia by excising the discomforts, embarrassments or national wrongdoings of the past and assimilating them within narratives of national progress.^{xiii} Umberto Eco sees such chronic nostalgia as an especially American export. It derives, he believes, from the wistful longings of an empire on the skids, and of a people for whom consumerism has become a substitute for moral discipline, community commitment and global understandings.^{xiv}

Today's versions of re-enactive voyeurism are thought to differ from Rome's, however, in one significant regard. They have gone 'virtual' by means of the hyper-realistic special effects that can be achieved through visual technologies such as Computer Graphic Imaging and three-dimensional 'virtual reality' immersion. If CGI can graft photographically accurate faces of historical figures like Hitler and Stalin onto those of actors, if computer haptics can mimic our sensations of touch, if companies like Dale Air can process and sell chemically-created scents of everything from murder scenes to football crowds, how are we to know what is a genuine representation of the past and what has been manufactured to persuade? The artist John Constable hated the giant painted panoramas in Regency Britain because they aimed to trick the senses. But at least most Regency audiences were aware of the deception: modern mass

media has become technically too perfect for us to tell. Is it legitimate, for example, for Paul Greengrass, the director of the gripping recent movie, *United 93*, to graft real-life images of the two 747s plunging into New York's Twin Towers onto an otherwise brilliantly simulated movie re-enactment: a movie, moreover, in which some of the original air traffic controllers play themselves?^{xv} The real and the imagined have been sutured together seamlessly, and it is impossible to tell which is which. There again, does it matter?

A trenchant critic amongst our group, the British historian John Brewer, points to two other problems that inform most historical re-enactments.^{xvi} One is their tendency to project a naïve belief that human emotions are universal rather than subject to the shaping influences of time and place. Instead of working with and exploring the effects of our distance from the past, re-enactments pretend to eclipse it. Brewer calls this 'creative anachronism'. A similar point has been made by historian Inga Clendinnen in a recent debate with Kate Grenville, author of the Australian historical novel, *The Secret River*. Grenville claimed to have come closer to the feelings of her nineteenth-century protagonist by undertaking a short river boat trip herself, but Clendinnen disputes that the material conditions and sensibilities of two individuals separated by centuries can be replicated in this way. However empathetic we might wish to be, our actual feelings in such a case are really only those of a specific individual at a particular time and place in the present.

Brewer also criticizes the common re-enactment fallacy of equating literal resemblance with truth. Advances in technology during the eighteenth century saw the beginning of what he contends is modern re-enactment's fetish with perfect replication. Artists like Sir Joseph Reynolds and poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge disliked this mechanical tendency to copy the literal details of the past because it stifled the imaginative, moral and philosophical interventions of the creative artist, whose task was to idealize and ennoble his subject. It also catered to the untutored sensual appetites of the masses, instead of the cultivated expertise of the connoisseur.^{xvii} Exponents of modern re-enactment, Brewer argues, similarly overlook the fact that visual resemblance is actually an aesthetic style that is informed by the time- and culture-bound factors of taste and perception. Because the ideological underpinnings of realism are disguised within its aesthetic structure, we thus find its representations especially difficult to expose or debunk.

Some critics take a different line again, arguing that the recent burgeoning of historical re-enactment signals the death of history as an academic discipline and system of knowledge. It

has led, they argue, to the abandonment of the large-scale historical narratives and totalising social history analyses that gave history its academic and political value.^{xviii} In their place have bloomed countless micro studies of commonplace events and people, often emphasising empathy to the point of bathos. Once history no longer aspires to discover lessons from the past as a way to challenge and change the future, it has lost its reason to exist. To cannibalise Marx's aphorism, they believe that history is returning to us not as tragedy but as farce. Indeed, the Marxist literary theorist Frederick Jameson doubts whether most western moderns can even recognize or handle history at all. What we take to be history is no more than blank parody or pastiche.^{xix}

III

These are significant criticisms and they need to be taken seriously. The fact that I've just embarked on another large-scale historical project with a re-enactment component might therefore seem to be a triumph of hope over experience. But, on balance, the body of reflection produced at our re-enactment conferences by thoughtful academic critics such as Mark Phillips, Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Agnew, James Chandler, John Brewer, Paul Pickering and Peter de Bolla has convinced me that we shouldn't disregard the potential of the form because of some bad examples. Properly handled, re-enactment can offer important benefits for all historians both as a research tool and as a mode of communication.

One of my new projects-in-progress, 'Seeing Change. Environment and evolution in scientific voyages to the Antipodes during the age of Darwin', explores how the scientific and social ideas of four visiting British naturalists, Charles Darwin, Joseph Hooker, Thomas Huxley and Alfred Wallace, were influenced by their encounters with the landscapes, peoples and cultures of the Antipodes, and how these same ideas bear on our modern understandings of evolution and ecology. It's a collaboration between historians, scientists, new media experts, anthropologists, philosophers, literary scholars, film companies and museologists. The re-enactive element centres around our intention to revisit and film the sites of original scientific explorations. It differs from the *Endeavour* re-enactment, however, in two key ways: first, the physical and filmic retracing of our explorers' voyages will be used in combination with a variety of other research methods; secondly, we intend to work with, rather than try to eliminate, the

distance between the original nineteenth-century encounters and those of our own. We won't pretend that our experiences and feelings can replicate those of Darwin and company or that the landscapes, habitats and peoples we'll encounter will be the same as they saw two centuries ago.

Why then should we bother with retracing at all? One reason has already been suggested: it's surely undeniable that re-enactment can help us to grasp dimensions of past technologies and work practices that are often difficult to discover or understand by any other means. Even on the *Endeavour* we learnt skills of navigation, depth sounding, sail-setting and steering an eighteenth-century barque that no book could provide. Some critics dismiss such evidence as padding — the mere 'interstices of history' — but this is to overlook the importance of material things in shaping our worlds.

Otto Sibus, Director of the Max Plank Institute in Hamburg, gives a fascinating recent example. He and his colleagues attempted to re-enact Joule's famous nineteenth-century experiment on friction and heat. Despite following Joule's directions to the letter, their experiment failed repeatedly. Sibus concluded that either Joules had fabricated his results or something was missing. It turned out, after an exhaustive archival inquiry, that the vital elements until then hidden from history consisted of artisan skills and material circumstances present within Joules's own brewery. Things like an insulated brewing tower and the strength of a brawny drayman had been essential to make his heat experiment work, but Joules had thought it necessary to purge any mention of them from his formal scientific account because of the Royal Society's disapproval of the vulgar associations of trade and labour.^{xx}

The history of place, too, has surely always demanded physical re-tracings that can mobilize all of our senses. My teacher Manning Clark advised all would-be historians to first purchase a stout set of boots. Filming landscapes for viewers to see and interpret need not be mere spectacle; it can actually be a sophisticated research tool. To our scientist colleague Professor John Chappell, rocks, corals, earthquakes and glaciers are living texts — as they were for naturalists in the nineteenth century. To see rock strata or reef structures with the aid of an expert modern interpreter, who is also versed in Darwin's journal accounts and theories, can add multiple layers of understanding to the processes of history. In some instances those landscapes and habitats have scarcely changed; in others they have been transformed. Measuring and explaining such changes is centrally the stuff of history. Viewing these landscapes ourselves,

alongside the sketches and paintings done by our protagonists, also tells us something about the aesthetic assumptions in play during the mid nineteenth century.

The lessons we can learn from re-enactment are not only of a material kind. From cramming over fifty people into a 90 foot barque filled with provisions and sailing machinery, we discovered something of the mechanics of authority, hierarchy and order, as well as the constraints and possibilities of mutiny within such confined spaces. Undercurrents of sexual rivalry, jealousy and nostalgia on our ship made us more attentive to the oblique presence of similar factors in the journals of Cook, something which up until this point had escaped our notice. Through engaging in re-enactment we became more aware of how bodies, minds and senses interact to produce interpretation and experience, even though we knew only too well that our specific physical and psychic states don't correlate with those of the past.

And if, in truth, a re-enactment can never fully capture what it might have felt like to be there, we should perhaps try to make a virtue out of that shortcoming. One of the problems of re-enactment, some critics point out, is that it can make no allowance for the operations of chance and contingency, such as the advent of 9/11 in the middle of our Pacific voyage. But that very element of unpredictability can become a source of creative exchange with the past, provided it is frankly acknowledged. At Endeavour Reef off Cooktown, for example, an attempt by a few of our Aboriginal shipmates to hunt for turtles led to a moment of cross-cultural aggravation in the present, just as it had led Cook's sailors and local Murris to take up arms against each other two hundred years earlier. My coming down with malaria and dysentery off the coast of Lake Nyassa was certainly unintended, but it did help me to understand at least one of the sources of the terrible depression that gripped David Livingstone as he stumbled back to his base at the Shire Highlands.

All this is a reminder about the necessity of those of us who engage in re-enactment to be honest about our positions and perspectives in the present. Shallow reality-style formats can make the past look just like the present dressed in funny clothes, but reflexive re-enactments can overcome that silly brand of anachronism. Above all, they can remind us of how and in what ways the past can be such a foreign country. By estranging or alienating us from what we take for granted, they can underscore the fact that the past is not the same as now, and that history's inhabitants cannot be assumed to have felt or thought as we do. Re-enactment can also be humbling, by reminding us of our own fallibilities and shortcomings when compared to those of our predecessors. Progress is not inevitable and its assumed triumphs sometimes need to be

questioned. None of the historians on the *Endeavour* departed from the ship under any illusion that we had shared in the feelings or achievements of James Cook's crew. No amount of reading could have driven home to us so sharply the distinctiveness of our modernity. But we did all re-emerge into the present with a new respect for, and understanding of, the wooden world of our predecessors. That's an important historical lesson, and we needed a re-enactment to drive it home.

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- ⁱ Simon Baker *The Ship. Retracing Cook's Endeavour Voyage* London: BBC, 2002.
- ⁱⁱ Richard Hough *Captain Bligh and Mr Christian. The Men and the Mutiny* New York: Dutton, 1973, p. 159.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Annette Hill *Reality TV. Audiences and Popular Factual Television* London and New York: Routledge, 2005, esp. chapter 4.
- ^{iv} *Scuttlebutt: Remembering the Ship* Canberra: Humanities Research Centre and Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, 2004.
- ^v Mark Kolber Phillips, 'On the Advantage and Disadvantage of Sentimental History for Life', unpublished paper delivered at Conference on Re-enactment and Affective Knowing', King's College, Cambridge, 18 Feb. 2007. This paper will appear in volume three of the series, *History and Re-enactment*, eds. J. Lamb, V. Agnew and I. McCalman, London: Palgrave, 2008.
- ^{vi} R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946, esp. pp. 213-224.
- ^{vii} Iain McCalman *Radical Underworld. Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- ^{viii} For an overview of his career see Iain McCalman 'Magic, Spectacle, and the Art of de Louthembourg's Eidophusikon' in Ann Bermingham, ed. *Sensation and Sensibility. Viewing Gainsborough's Cottage Door* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 181-97.
- ^{ix} Iain McCalman 'De Louthembourg's Simulation: Re-enactment and Realism in late-Georgian Britain' in Paul Pickering and Iain McCalman *Historical Re-enactment and Realism* London: Palgrave, forthcoming 2008.
- ^x Iain McCalman 'The East African Middle Passage. David Livingstone, the Zambezi Expedition, and Lake Nyassa, 1858-66' in Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus and Marcus Rediker, eds. *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming September 2007, pp. 39-51
- ^{xi} Scott Magelssen 'Making History in the Second Person: Post-touristic Considerations for Living History Interpretations' *Theatre Journal* 58 (2006), pp. 298-301.
- ^{xii} Iain McCalman 'The Little Ship of Horrors. Re-enacting Extreme History' in *Criticism. A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts, Special Issue: Extreme and Sentimental History* Vanessa Agnew, ed. 46 (Summer 2004), pp. 477-86.
- ^{xiii} Richard Handler and William Saxton 'Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative and the Quest for Authenticity in "Living History"' *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (August 1988), pp. 242-260.
- ^{xiv} Umberto Eco *Travels in Hyper-Reality: essays* London: Pan Books, 1987, pp. 1-58.
- ^{xv} James Chandler 'Re-enacting 9/11' unpublished paper Conference on Re-enactment and Affective Knowing, King's College, Cambridge, 19-21 March 2007.
- ^{xvi} John Brewer 'Re-enactment, Realism and Spectacle' unpublished paper, Conference on Re-enactment and Affective Knowing, Cambridge, 19-21 March 2007.
- ^{xvii} Gillen D'Arcy Wood *The Shock of the Real. Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860* Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 1-15.
- ^{xviii} See for example Tristram Hunt 'Reality, Identity and Empathy: the changing face of social history television' *Journal of Social History* 39 (Spring 2006), pp. 843-858.
- ^{xix} Magelssen 'Making History in the Second Person' op.cit. p. 294.
- ^{xx} Heinz Otto Sibum 'Reworking the Mechanical Value of Heat: Instruments of Precision and Gestures of Accuracy in Early Victorian England' *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 26 (1995) pp. 73-106.