

# 1 Reenactment and relative pain

## Reenactment

The Civil War isn't over, and that's why we fight. We fight to keep the past alive.  
—Chuck Woodhead, Civil War reenactor

Now he belongs to the stages.  
—Association of Lincoln Presenters' motto

I reenact things you've seen a million times before. Straight things, TV things, and medical things: These are the transactions that we all participate in and memorize accidentally. Then I wiggle my hand and wink and you know that everything I just said was in code, and the real truth is the sick or incredible way you feel.

—Miranda July, artist

The epigraphs above make evident a number of issues that attach to reenactment. The first, “The Civil War isn't over, and that's why we fight,” suggests that historical events, like wars, are never discretely completed, but **carry forth in embodied cycles of memory that do not delimit the remembered to the past.** For many history reenactors, reenactments are more than “mere” remembering but are in fact the ongoing event itself, negotiated through sometimes radically shifting affiliation with the past *as* the present. The next quote, “Now he belongs to the stages,” was the official motto of the Association of Lincoln Presenters (ALP) from 1990 to 1999.<sup>1</sup> The motto humorously underscores the theatricality of history and memory and suggests a “belonging” of history to a mobile or transient temporality of theatrical returns. And finally, filmmaker, digital artist, and performance-maker Miranda July's epigraph tells us that reenacting “straight things” – **common things that at first pass as natural or accidental – becomes reenactment when recognized as composed in code,** as always already a matter of reiteration. July reminds us that any enactment might be recognized as *re*-enactment – recognized as a matter of againness – through the manipulation of give-away signs of theatricality. Here a “wiggle” of a hand or a “wink” of an eye are theatrical gestures that give a scene away, prompting the recognition that seemingly discrete acts are never temporally

singular nor straightforward but double, triple, or done “a million times before.” If for ALP, history belongs to theatricality, for July, theatricality flips unconscious habit memory into “recognition.”<sup>2</sup> Prompting recognition of the returns of history in recurrence, theatricality simultaneously prompts a kind of queasiness – or, in July’s words, “the sick or incredible way you feel.”<sup>3</sup>

Let’s go through these three quotes again – in some cases more than once.

### Civil war isn’t over: one

“The Civil War isn’t over, and that’s why we fight” was reenactor Chuck Woodhead’s answer to my interview question “Why fight?” Attending the 1999 reenactment of the 1863 Battle for Culps Hill at Gettysburg, I had been surprised to find that most of the action took place in the woods at such a distance from spectators that nothing but puffs of smoke and occasional muffled shouts could be witnessed by those of us in bleachers at the National Military Park. The past, replayed, was not necessarily given to be seen. Rather, it was given to be experienced, or “felt,” by those who reenacted. Our witnessing was a kind of attention to the players’ actions that could not, in this particular case, rely on images or on sight. When the reenactors rode and walked out of the woods again, everyone in the bleachers cheered. But what had we witnessed? Mostly we heard stories afterward of what it had been like to replay what it had been like . . . afterward. That is, our witnessing was laced with a belatedness that felt strangely true to the efforts. We were witness, in this instance, to belatedness and a lack of clear images made palpable as experience. In fact, even at reenactments I attended that were far more visible, the experience of “watching” was almost always a not-quite-seeing, as we were witnessing *others* attempt to do more than watch from the sidelines of the future.<sup>4</sup>

Woodhead’s answer to “Why fight?” might at first seem to challenge the pastness of the past, if being “over” is one of the ways a secular, linear, or progress-oriented Enlightenment model of time disciplines our orientation to events that appear to precede the present. And yet, the quote might also suggest that it is the very pastness of the past that is never complete, never completely finished, but incomplete: cast into the future as a matter for ritual negotiation and as yet undecided interpretive acts of *reworking*. In this way, events are given to be past, or to become past, by virtue of both their ongoingness and their partialness, their incompleteness in the present.

If the past is never over, or never completed, “remains” might be understood not solely as object or document material, but also as the immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past: bodies striking poses, making gestures, voicing calls, reading words, singing songs, or standing witness. Such acts of labor over and with the past might include a body sitting at a table in an archive, bent over an “original” manuscript or peering at a screen, interacting with history as material traces positioned as evidence.<sup>5</sup> Or, such bodily labor might be – though this a far more contested problematic – a twenty-first-century body interacting with traces of *acts* as history: carrying a replica nineteenth-century musket on a historic battlefield, uttering the “phonic materiality” of a cry to arms, or engaging in surgical



*Figure 1.1* Contemporary professional doctors who are also reenactors, reenacting surgical procedures at the Civil War Reenactment Field Hospital at Hearthsides Homestead, Lincoln, RI. Photos: Hearthsides Homestead.

amputation practices of the 1860s.<sup>6</sup> In both cases – archive and battlefield – interaction with (and as) traces exercises a cross- or multi-temporal engagement with im/material understood to belong to the past in the present. Said more simply: **inside the archive or out, times touch.**

The status of touch is problematic, not least because it suggests *bodies* at least partially merged across difference – even, in this instance, temporal difference. To touch is not to become coextensive, to fully become that which is touched or which touches, but it is to (partially) collapse the distance marking one thing as fully distinct from another thing. “Even more than other perceptual systems,” writes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, **“the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity.”**<sup>7</sup> Reenactors who claim to experience a physical collapse, or at least a profound confusion of time, call the experience a “period rush,” or a “wargasm,” or say they are **“seeing the elephant”** or **“touching time.”**

All of this is enough, of course, to cause some (though decidedly not all) university-based professional historians significant anxiety. In an essay noting the dangers of historical reenactment for scholarship, Vanessa Agnew argues that reenactment can be accused of “eclipsing the past with its own theatricality.” In her formulation, as in others’, history can be overrun by the error-ridden embarrassment of the live body (here indicated as “theatricality”) reenacting the past in the present.<sup>8</sup> Alexander Cook agrees, **erecting, as if unproblematic, the classic mind/body split to suggest reenactment’s “persistent tendency to privilege a visceral, emotional engagement with the past at the expense of a more analytical treatment.”**<sup>9</sup> By this account, touch (“visceral”), and affective engagement (“emotional”), are in distinction to the “analytical.”<sup>10</sup>

In marked contrast to this view, recent scholars in queer historiography, such as Carolyn Dinshaw, Chris Nealon, Louise Fradenberg, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Dana Luciano, Heather Love, and Judith Halberstam build on materialist, post-colonial, psychoanalytic, and post-structural theories to argue for an inquiry and analysis that challenges received modern Western conventions of temporal linearity (conventions Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “modern historical consciousness” and Ann Pellegrini and Janet Jakobsen call **“secular time”**). Such scholars argue for the value of crossing disparate and multiple historical moments to explore the ways that past, present, and future occur and recur *out of sequence* in a complex crosshatch not only of reference but of affective assemblage and investment.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, there has been something of an “affective turn” in scholarship, coming close on the heels of the “performative turn” that arguably reached an apex in the 1990s. Patricia Clough is often cited for crafting the phrase “affective turn” and she links the turn to Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi, but the phrase appeared much earlier in feminist work by Kathleen Woodward, Lauren Berlant, and Linda Nicholson.<sup>12</sup> The affective turn is extremely interesting in regard to the fact that it seems to resist the binary still so virile in the linguistic ties of the performative turn – that is, the binary between writing or textuality on the one hand and embodied gestic repertoires of behavior on a seeming other. The affective turn resists replicating the body/text binary, but situates itself more interestingly in spaces

between such binaries – including self/other – as much affect is situated, like atmosphere, between bodies. Thinking through affective engagement offers a radical shift in thinking about our mobilities in dealings with the binaried landscapes of social plots (such as gender, such as race), undoing the solidity of binaries in favor of mining the slip and slide of affect as negotiation. As such, affects – and feelings and emotions (though the differences in terminologies vary between scholars) – are often described via words that indicate viscosity, tactility, or a certain mobility in the way one is *moved*. Kathleen Stewart, following Alphonso Lingis, suggestively writes of the “jump” of affect – the way affect jumps between bodies – crosses borders of bodies, getting into and out of bodies as if there were no material border of consequence even “if only for a minute.”<sup>13</sup> Teresa Brennan takes the jump as “transmission”:

Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and “felt the atmosphere”? [. . .] The transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The “atmosphere” or the environment literally gets into the individual.<sup>14</sup>

This jump has also been shown to be cross-temporal as well as cross-spatial, cross-geographic, cross- and/or contra-national. Affect can circulate, bearing atmosphere-altering tendencies, in material remains or gestic/ritual remains, carried in a sentence or a song, shifting in and through bodies in encounter. Sara Ahmed, preferring the appellation emotion to affect, writes of emotion as *sticky*. A viscosity that does not sediment in a body as singular nor exist as completely contained, stickiness is a leaky, even fleshy descriptor suggestive of touch (and being “touched” or “moved” become monikers of affect that signify a between bodiness and between objectness or between materialities of emotion that can jump, or travel, in time as well as space).<sup>15</sup>

The jump and the touch of affect have been featured in queer theory’s problematizing of identitarian politics, helping to unsettle approaches to the social that tend to sediment “identity” into solid-state positionalities. To be touched and to be moved indicates a level of libidinality in affective engagements in the social, suggestive of shift and slip. The Deleuzian notion of assemblage is also used in such work to unsettle the rootedness of identity, to gesture not only to mobility but also to the always already *crossingness*, or *betweenness*, or *relationality* of the sets of associations that make up something resembling identity. However, we can do away with arguments, such as Brian Massumi’s, about affect’s autonomy when we choose to invest in the betweenness or given relational aspects of affect.<sup>16</sup> The *stickiness* of emotion is evident in the residue of generational time, reminding us that histories of events and historical effects of identity fixing, *stick* to any mobility, *dragging* (in Elizabeth Freeman’s sense) the temporal past into the sticky substance of any present. To be sticky with the past and the future is not to be autonomous, but to

be engaged in a freighted, cross-temporal mobility. This is a mobility that drags the “past as past” (to quote Heather Love) – the “genuine *past-ness* of the past” (to quote Elizabeth Freeman) – into a negotiated future that is never simply *in front of us* (like a past that is never simply behind us) but in a kind of viscous, affective surround.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, jumpiness and stickiness are words that undo the step-by-step linearity of Enlightenment plots for autonomous, unfettered progress in an unimpeded forward march.

It is certainly possible to argue that any approach to history involving remains – material or immaterial remains – engages temporality at (and as) a chiasm, where times cross and, in crossing, in some way touch. For surely, to engage a temporal moment as *past and yet present in varied remains* is to engage across as well as in time – even to suggest, as Merleau-Ponty does, a certain logic of “reversibility.”<sup>18</sup> To find the past resident in remains – material evidence, haunting trace, reiterative gesture – is to engage one time resident *in* another time – a logic rooted in the word “remain.” Time, engaged *in* time, is always a matter of crossing, or passing, or touching, and perhaps always (at least) double. In the two examples above (the body accessing material in an archive and the body as an archive of material that might be accessed), the past is given to remain, but in each case that remaining is incomplete, fractured, partial – in the sense both of fragmentary and ongoing. Such remaining also presumes a threat, a site of contestation, a fight. In the archive, the fight is a battle to preserve the past in its material traces against the “archivolithic” threat that it might disappear.<sup>19</sup> Such preservation is pitched toward a future in which the past might be engaged in a future present as a site of concern – recalling Benjamin’s famous aphoristic claim that “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”<sup>20</sup> At reenactments, participants fight to “keep the past *alive*,” as Woodhead told me. The effort is to provoke an *in time* experience bearing some relation to “living.” It is as if some history reenactors position their bodies to access, consciously and deliberately, a fleshy or pulsing kind of trace they deem accessible in a pose, or gesture, or set of acts.

If a pose or a gesture or a “move” recurs across time, what pulse of multiple time might a pose or a move or gesture contain? Can a trace take the form of a *living* foot – or only the form of a footprint? Can a gesture, such as a pointing index finger, itself be a remain in the form of an indexical action that haunts (or remains) via live repetition? This is to ask: what is the time of a live act when a live act is reiterative? To what degree is a live act *then* as well as *now*? Might a live act even “document” a precedent live act, rendering it, in some way, ongoing, even preserved? An action repeated again and again and again, however fractured or partial or incomplete, has a kind of staying power – persists through time – and even, in a sense, serves as a fleshy kind of “document” of its own recurrence.<sup>21</sup>

A live reiterative act, such as a pointing finger indicating “look at that” or “it happened there” or “it will happen there,” casts itself both backward (as a matter of repetition) and forward (it can be enacted again) in time. We understand the gesture of the point, like the gesture of the waving hand, or any number of basic actions because others have pointed and waved before us (whether hard-wired

genetically or mimetically learned, the gesture or the action is *passed on*). Given this, can the time of any gesture or live act be (only) singular? What is the evidentiary status of the trace carried forward and backward in the form and force of affective, incorporated, “live” actions?

Of course, these are not new questions, but reiterative riffs on a theme that has long obsessed the academy. In the past forty years we have seen the development of memory studies, collective memory studies, and trauma studies – to name three obvious academic interdisciplinary scions of the concern that Fredric Jameson placed under the moniker “postmodern”: that we have collectively suffered a “disappearance of a sense of history.”<sup>22</sup> If, for trauma studies generally, the crisis of a “sense of history” is most deeply and dearly articulated post World War II, it can hardly be said to have been born there. We can recall Emile Durkheim’s 1897 study *Suicide*, in which he found the alienated modern subject in industrial capitalism to suffer a loss of connective tissue, a severed sense of social continuity. To search for ways to redress this loss, in his 1912 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim turned “back in time” to “elementary” man to see what civilization had possibly forgotten about connectivity – though the “back in time” implied by the word “primitive” was in fact contemporaneous time – across colonial space to the living practices of indigenous peoples in North America and Australia. Such geopolitics played out as chronopolitics complicates the socially constructed site of “the past” as ever *only* temporal, as Johannes Fabian has argued. It is always also a matter of taking, as well as having taken, *place*.<sup>23</sup>

Forty-odd years of postmodernity, or 500 years of modernity, is still too narrow a channel in which to chart consistently irruptive Euro-Western anxieties about history, memory, and loss. Further back (if that is the correct direction) in the Western imaginary, in the *Phaedrus* of 370 BCE we find Plato ventriloquizing Socrates with the sense of a “memory crisis” (to use Richard Terdiman’s phrase). The reader will object: Jameson’s postmodern concern over the “disappearance of a sense of *history*” is not the same as Plato’s riff on Socrates’ worry over the disappearance of a sense of *memory*. But, from either end of the long Western corridor binarizing history (composed in document) and memory (composed in body), the space between is layered with anxiety about verity, authenticity, falsity, theatrically, truth, and claim.

To gesture in such broad strokes to the (sticky) weight of tradition that inevitably freights my own inquiry here, is to assure the reader that I make no claims to comprehensive overview. In fact, the anxious tune has been so often played, and the slippery corridor between history and memory so often worried that Paul Ricoeur has recently asked whether memory and history are not now “condemned to a forced cohabitation.” He asks: “Has history finally melted into memory? And has memory broadened itself to the scale of historical memory?”<sup>24</sup>

Certainly if any space between history and memory ever really existed, it has, if not fully “melted,” become porous and transient. The resiliently irruptive rub and call of live bodies (like biological machines of affective transmission) insist that physical acts are a means for knowing, bodies are sites for transmission even if, simultaneously, they are also manipulators of error and forgetting. Bodies engaged

in repetition are boisterous aticulants of a liveness that just won't quit. Indeed, watching reenactment events it sometimes seems that participants do not suffer, as Jameson fretted, simply over a "disappearance of a sense of history," but rather that they suffer from a disappearance of a sense that history is that which disappears. Either way, at the crux, their live bodies are the means by which the past and the present negotiate disappearance (again).

If we have become somewhat comfortable with the notion of bodily memory (if not bodily history), and comfortable reading bodies engaged in ritual or repeated actions as carriers of collective memory, we are not entirely comfortable considering gestic acts (re)enacted live to be material trace, despite the material substance that is the body articulating the act. We do not say, in other words, that a gesture is a *record*, like a photograph or a written document or a tape-recorded testimony or a footprint – capable of registering in the annals of history. But neither do we say (though perhaps we could) that a photograph or a written testimony or a footprint is a live gesture, encountered between bodies in a cross-temporal space of the syncopated live (see Chapter 5). In any case, as the anxieties of Agnew and Cook make clear, a reenactment of the Civil War is not considered a *record* of the war, an artifact of the war, a document of the war despite claims that might be made for the war's affective *imprint* (not just its impression) on the social imaginary. This is perhaps because the words "document" and "evidence" and "record" are, by the repetitively assumed force of convention in cultures privileging literature over orature<sup>25</sup> (or archive over repertoire, to use Diana Taylor's words), habitually understood in distinction to the bodily, the messily, the "disappearing" live. That chronopolitics of race and gender haunt the privileging of document over embodied act should go without saying – but of course, cannot.<sup>26</sup>

### Civil war isn't over: two

"The Civil War isn't over," reenactor Chuck Woodhead told me, "and that's why we fight." Another reenactor standing near him added: "The history books don't get it right, so we have to." Still others fight to counter the "forgotten pages" – a fascinating phrase – of history books.<sup>27</sup>

Woodhead, a Desert Storm veteran, had made the trip in 1999 from Georgia to Gettysburg for the annual reenactment of the Battle at Gettysburg, and he told me that he reenacts the Civil War to keep it alive – fighting the battles again as Union or Confederate, variously.<sup>28</sup> "Because if we don't," he said, "it will disappear." I applied what I'd learned in graduate school to what he had said, and concluded that Woodhead lives by a rule opposite to the one accepted by so many art and performance theorists: that live performance disappears.<sup>29</sup> For Woodhead, live performance is the best mode of refusing to disappear; when an event is left to artifact and document alone, it vanishes. "Artifacts are dead objects," he said. "You don't get that *feel*." He began to recite for me a phrase he said he repeats to himself. He paused a bit, admitting that he was paraphrasing, and wouldn't quite get the original verbatim: "Those who fail to learn from the history of the past are doomed to repeat the same mistakes."



“Mistakes” aside, I recognized Woodhead’s reference: he was citing George Santayana. Santayana’s aphorism was first published in 1905 in his *The Life of Reason*, where we find the text: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>30</sup> Wikipedia (“the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit”) records this aphorism as one of the most often misquoted “remarks” of all time, and Wikiquote respectfully lists a variety of errors that constitutes the afterlife of the written word, such as:

- Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.
- Those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat their mistakes.
- Those who do not read history are doomed to repeat it.
- Those who fail to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors are destined to repeat them.

Of course, the irony in Woodhead’s oral recitation fascinated me because it came from a reenactor who repeats the past as exactly as possible. The standard trouble with orature is here illustrated: it “fails” to repeat exactly. But, is error necessarily failure? When is difference failure, and by what (geohistorical, chronopolitical) standard? And when, in the tracks of live acts, is a misquote or paraphrase a kind of revenant – getting it not so much wrong as getting it “live” in a complex crosshatch of cross-affiliation?

A conundrum presents itself: if repetition is what we’re condemned to do if we do not remember adequately, repetition *is also*, at least for Woodhead and compatriots, a mode of remembering – a remembering that, somehow, might place history’s mistakes at hand, as if through repeated enactment we could avoid . . . repetition. If Santayana distinguished “remember” from “repeat,” and if (as in a game of telephone in which Aristotle is whispering down the line) the Wikiquote misquotes distinguish “learning” from “repeating,” and if Woodhead distinguishes learning from *repeating the same mistakes*, might we say that repetition is what manipulates error in relation to an authenticity that invites, even demands, revision? Repetition with revision is a standard of oral history, and a standard that does not link difference always already to failure and loss. Thinking musically, we can remember that jazz “standards,” for instance, are not all written by jazz musicians and not automatically registers of loss – a topic we will return to in subsequent chapters. Perhaps the stakes in history’s mistakes are, as acknowledged in orature, as much a matter of the event as of the event re-membered, the event passed on. In this view, as in Aristotle’s, learning is a *matter* of working through mimesis – always already a generative matter of mistake.

Woodhead himself is an accomplished bugler and on the faculty of the National Civil War Field Music School. Though we did not talk about his music, I wondered about using musicality versus documentality or object evidence as ways of thinking about reenactment. Let’s consider the tune “Taps” – a tune that was played at the close of many of the reenactments I witnessed, including the 1863 Culps Hill Battle of 1999. The tune played is the same tune each time. That is: “Taps” *is* “Taps.”

When a bugler plays “Taps,” he or she plays *it* – the tune is not considered a “copy” of “Taps.” Even if poorly played by a less than accomplished bugler, the tune, if recognizable at all, even through errors, *is* “Taps.” That is, in playing music one does not (or does not only) *represent* playing it, which is not to say that music is never mimetic, but that the act of playing music is not, or not only, mimetic of music. Though one may be posing “as if” a Civil War bugler while playing, and arguably *representing* the Civil War, one is simultaneously *making* the music. The same goes for representing eating salt pork in a faux Civil War camp as well as, and simultaneously, engaging in the actual act of eating it. Both are true – real *and* faux – action *and* representation – and this both/and is the beloved and often discussed conundrum of theatricality in which the represented bumps uncomfortably (and ultimately undecideably) against the affective, bodily instrument of the real.

The question for theatre, as for reenactment, becomes: how do we ever confidently arbitrate the differences, especially when the frame is less than strictly delineated? The differences or the *lack* of differences between faux and real might not necessarily be failures or threats to the project of accessing, remembering, crossing the path of the past. With no proscenium arch, or theatrical black box, or even audience (at some reenactments) to provide the function of a frame reminding “this is only theatre,” or “just pretend,” or “merely play,”<sup>31</sup> the “period rush” reenactors’ reference can function like a queasy portal in time where a momentary forgetting might take place, where time and space seem to come undone, or overlap and *touch* to the point of confluence. To the point, perhaps, of habit – where habit is an act or set of acts learned so well they become *body* knowledge, though acquired through sometimes quite arduous rigors of what Bergson calls “effort” or “search.”<sup>32</sup> One learns to ride a bike, or learns to play the bugle, so that the skills acquired can become in-body habit. Forgetting is oddly a kind of prize at the end of the day – a skill, the hard-won step in the work of learning that enables becoming. When some things, like reading, *or even modes of critical thinking or patterns of analysis*, become habit-memory, they are skills, fully learned, available to call up as research tools or artistic craft. Sometimes skills or habits of knowing have to be unlearned, so that others can be acquired. For instance: a dancer deeply trained in classical ballet who wants to take up tae kwon do has to un-learn some habits of physical orientation. For instance: to approach time as potentially recurring, a scholar must suspend ingrained socio-cultural approaches to time as singularly linear and try to think outside of well-worn habits of thought. Or, for instance: to know something experiential about marching for days in snow or sleet, one has to at least momentarily suspend the habit of relying on plumbing, heating, dry clothing.

For battle reenactors, the act of putting their physical bodies into the (imaginative) picture, yields often unexpected results. In any case, according to Mike “Dusty” Chapman, of Virginia’s Stonewall Brigade (and an accountant at the National Gallery of Art): “I’m not there to have a good time. I’m there to learn and be miserable.”<sup>33</sup> Wargasm, apparently, is not necessarily blissful, even though it is full-on bodily engagement. As S. Chris Anders, a member of the Chesapeake Volunteer Guard, told Dan Zak of the *Washington Post*: “We’ve done picket post events where we’ve stood in the snow all night long in five-degree temperatures

[. . .] It's about having a deeper understanding. Today, everybody lives in climate-controlled environments with very little physical labor, for the most part, and you tend to *lose touch* with history in situations like that.<sup>34</sup> In an affective reverie, troubling the archive-driven tracks of a strictly linear approach to time, and manipulating the pitfalls and promises of anachronism like so many notes on a bugle, reenactors use their bodies to chase moments of forgetting where something learned (about time) becomes something played (in time), and where something played can touch or generate experience, even if “only for a minute.”

If the Civil War played is not *the* Civil War again – or, not exactly – still, the war played may be recognizable, circling around the past event, or jumping and sticking like a misquote of Santayana reminds us of Santayana, or a riff on a tune that, as in jazz, brings a precedent melody into play through improvisation often *off* note. The travels of Santayana's 1905 aphorism showing up, as it did, at the 1999 re-event of the 1863 battle of Gettysburg, begs an account of the generative cross-temporal travels of error, and the generative cross-temporal errors of travel. We “remember” Santayana's quote as the tracks of the misquote circle the authentic, riff the original, and, perhaps more like orature than like literature (unless one approaches literature as embodied), illuminate its afterlife as live. To repeat: it's not so much gotten wrong, as gotten live, in an ambulatory againness. As Wikipedia offers, Santayana's aphorism is correctly remembered as often misremembered – or, in remembering the aphorism, we remember, as I did on the Civil War battlefield with Woodhead, the *error* that becomes the aphorism's history. The history of the quote, like history itself, must always already account for, and be an account of, error. Considering “mistakes of history,” implied by Santayana's word “condemned,” and continuing in the vein of conundrum: wouldn't remembering history's mistakes necessitate wrestling with mistakes in the remembering? And what does remembering mistake, like mistaken memory, get *right* about history in the replaying? What place should error have in the “faithful” account?

### **Civil war isn't over: three**

Woodhead paraphrasing Santayana brought to mind Marx's famous and often discussed paraphrase in which Marx also can't quite recall an original. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, written in 1852, Marx wrote: “Hegel says somewhere that all great historic facts and personages recur twice. He forgot to add: ‘Once as tragedy, and again as farce.’” Leaving aside the proto-Wikipedian editing, or the parodic ventriloquy Marx performs on Hegel, Marx makes explicit the theatricality in any venture we come to call (historical) event – such as revolution. I chose here the De Leon translation (though it arguably mistakes the source) for the conundrum in the phrase “recur twice”:

Hegel says somewhere that all great historic facts and personages *recur twice*. He forgot to add: “Once as tragedy, and again as farce.” Caussidière for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the “Mountain” of 1848–51 for the “Mountain” of 1793–05 [sic], the Nephew for the Uncle. And the identical

caricature marks also the conditions under which the second edition of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is issued. Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but of such as he finds at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living. At the same time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battle cries, their costumes to enact a new historic scene in such time-honored disguise and with such borrowed language.<sup>35</sup>

Lest we too quickly assume that Marx's correction to Hegel's "forgetting" is only, or entirely, dismissive of repetition, we can recall, as Connerton does in *How Societies Remember*, that all events, even the seemingly revolutionary, are composed in citational acts and embodied reperformance of precedent.<sup>36</sup> Reenactment, which Connerton links to incorporation, is a vital mode of collective social remembering, and it can be a critical mode as well as a reiterative mode. Indeed, to return to Marx via Connerton, Marx's use of "tragedy" and "farce" in *Eighteenth Brumaire* points quite explicitly to the always already theatrical in any "great historic fact," as even the "once" of tragedy is, as theatrical form, already a matter of recurrence.

Tracking the publication history of *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Peter Stallybrass argues that Marx is engaging the always already belatedness of events, dependent as they are on representation of the past to forge, as in revolution, something distinguishable as new. Marx's comments, writes Stallybrass, are not entirely pessimistic, nor antitheatrical, as they are often regarded. Tragedy and parody are here both figures for the tracks of reiteration, indeed the *theatricality* necessary to collective action, or, the "twice-behavedness" of any communicative behavior.<sup>37</sup> As Stallybrass notes, acknowledging Marx's profound interest in Shakespeare and in parodic forms generally, "caricature, parody, satire and farce were far from negative forms for Marx." Making of Marx a proto post-structuralist, Stallybrass reads Marx's interest in the double "recurrences" of tragedy and farce as linked to Marx's political engagement in play and replay, or the "settling and unsettling of origins."<sup>38</sup>

Theatricality plays in the sometimes infelicitous realms of the not exactly real. It can be distinguished from performativity where saying something (like "I do" at a wedding) is doing something – where the "real" in the reiterative saying is fully accomplished. Theatrical accomplishments, on the other hand, are always only partial (and for J. L. Austin, always "infelicitous"), riddled with the seeming problem of the false (the problem of *seeming*). And yet, the errors in theatricality (the way the saying is not exactly or not entirely or not completely the doing if we remember the above comments about the simultaneity of the "real" and "faux"), are generative of a relationship to history that partakes of the double negative: a reenactment *both* is *and* is not the acts of the Civil War. It is *not not* the Civil War. And, perhaps, through the cracks in the "not not," something cross-temporal, something affective, and something affirmative circulates. Something is touched.

In 1858, in a document unpublished until 1941, Marx wrote that:

History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is men, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not ‘history’ which uses men as a means of achieving – as if it were an individual person – its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.<sup>39</sup>

To pursue their ends, to return to Marx’s paraphrastic reiteration of Hegel, “men” submit history to recurrence – with the result that any event is composed in repetition *for* revision: tragedy, farce, and the like. That is: “History” is itself one of the things “used” by “real, living men” – and for many of the Civil War reenactors I spoke with, history is, arguably, the battleground itself. History *is* the fight. When “men, real, living men” fight *historical* battles again, conscious of history’s necessary composition in recurrence, do they touch something strangely authentic, strangely real – which is the real of recurrence itself?

I lifted Marx out of the stream of writings on history, on repetition and revision, because the handy happenstance of his famous paraphrase allows me to ask about the “somewhere” (“Somewhere Hegel said”) where an original takes place in reiterative difference. But I might have lifted Freud on the reiterative returns of the forgetful tracks that trauma makes of battlefields as soldiers struggle to experience *for the first time* an event that already occurred. Or, for that matter, I could have lifted the historic personage of Aristotle, for his investment in mimesis as the way to improve upon history, to get it right next time in difference, after the fact of the error-ridden first. But this book is less about origins, or which Famous Founding Father had what great First insight First, than it is about the histories of our reencounters, and the reencounters with our histories, and what we make of them. A riff is a repetition of a familiar passage. Because Santayana, Marx, Freud, and Aristotle have been long in circulation on these topics – all of them writing when it was “men, real, living men” who published or otherwise archived the work of men and rarely the work of women – to bring their *passages* into play, to repeat their words in my words, might be to trouble them with the very theatricality and repetition they generatively engage. If what we make of them, in making of them again, is not only about the theatrical, but is theatrical – with all the effeminacies of error theatricality has historically implied<sup>40</sup> – then it will not be too far afield for a theatre historian and feminist, such as myself, to replay their questions *slant*. Emily Dickinson wrote in 1866, three years after the Battle at Gettysburg: “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant – Success in Circuit lies,” suggesting that the roundabout way such a thing as truth might best be accessed is through circulation – queer of straight and off center of “fact.” Infelicitous, perhaps. Theatrical. Poetic. And in any case, attending the 1999 1863 battlefield, in the heat of the day and the heat of the battle, it was precision that was both at stake and, constantly, undone by stray inadequacies: the sideways leaning inquiries of the nattering anachronistic detail. A detail such as myself. That I was (not) there in 1863, notebook in hand, meant trouble for any attempt at a fidelity that could not allow for significant slant.

I spoke to Woodhead for some time, and like many “Civil War buffs” (as the “enthusiasts” or “hobbyists” or “reenactors” are often called), he was very helpful, quite thoughtful and smart, and really interested in talking about what compelled him – and this was true of almost all the reenactors with whom I spoke. Yes, they strive to “get it right” and yes, they are after “that *feel* of authenticity.” But, Woodhead said, he knew full well that total authenticity was impossible. “One third of us aren’t barefoot. One third don’t have dysentery.” He didn’t mention death and dismemberment. He didn’t mention feminists from the future, notebooks in hand. Instead he said simply, “We’re into keeping the war alive.” And he added, “To keep telling the story history leaves out.” This was an interesting oral historical argument, and one in line with a sentiment I’d heard more than once in my conversations with reenactors (though Woodhead himself did not say it): the South “really” won, and reenactment (troubled as it was) was the twitching, vibrant, and deeply strange revenant of what *might* have been, yet to come. Like the fictive fact that it is Hamlet’s father’s ghost who returns to tell a historical “truth” that the record had erased, and like the fictive fact that Hamlet requires players to, through the farce of a clown show, trip the King into account of that truth, the performance event that is battle reenactment is part ghost, part clown, part tragedy, part farce, part hailing, part parting, part reuniting, part coming apart. Always and already vexed, in a crease between times, the affective histories affectively encountered and affectively negotiated are often more than two.

### Now he belongs to the stages: one

The second epigraph at the start of this chapter, “Now he belongs to the stages,” takes us in a slightly different direction. The phrase makes a joke by way of a purposeful misquote – altering Edwin Stanton’s oft-quoted famous words at Lincoln’s deathbed: “Now he belongs to the ages.” Here, the purposeful misquote underscores the past as given to play, to be played, upon “the stages.” The epigraph suggests that the past “now” belongs to the future, perhaps in the way a dramatic script, such as *Hamlet*, is both a product of its author but also exists as a blueprint for future live production(s). Think of the way a footpath is both composed of footprints (traces of past event) and also an index *to the future* with the sedimented (or, perhaps more properly, eroded) suggestion: “walk this way.” A footprint is thus a “scriptive thing.”<sup>41</sup> Or think of twentieth-century instruction art – such as Yoko Ono’s *Fly* – pitched to be taken up and tried. That is, the quote suggests that the past remains rather like a prompt, a script, an instruction, or a “training manual.”<sup>42</sup> The past remains both as trace and as a matter for the deferred live of its (re)encounter.

Of course, the motto’s very silliness, accompanied on the web by a photo of fifty Lincoln reenactors standing together in a field (with a single Frederick Douglas<sup>43</sup>) in their identical top-hatted, fake-bearded regalia, seems not only to render our inquiry farcical, but to underscore, flagrantly, its composition in *error*. The ribald, joking aspect of the scene seems the flipside of the melancholic structure of what Dana Luciano has termed “the time of Lincoln,” referring not only to the historic



*Figure 1.2* “Abes in the Grass.” A gathering of the Association of Lincoln Presenters, 2006. Photo: Mary Armstrong.

period of Lincoln’s presidency and assassination, but to a “transtemporal” mode of affective national belonging that thereupon took shape.<sup>44</sup> It seems the flipside until one recalls, however, the melancholic structure of camp performance that, in a significant way and as a mode of survival and belonging, sincerely eulogizes even as it ironically spoofs.<sup>45</sup>

For the moment, however, let us focus simply on the motto. “Now he belongs to the stages” might remind us not only that all evidence is theatrical (if we take “the stages” as a metonymic reference to theatre), but also that all evidence is deferred in time – encountered at *later stages*. Stages and ages are linked through a shared reference to temporality, with “age” meaning both a “distinct period of history” and “a very long time,” and “stage” meaning “a point, period, or step in a process” as well as “a raised floor or platform, typically in a theater, on which actors, entertainers, or speakers perform” (*Oxford American Dictionary*). Why stages? Why not canvases, or pedestals, or *pages*? Clearly, there is more to the error “stages” than the felicity of the rhyme.

Though a close reading of the Lincoln Presenters’ motto may seem to fall far afield the realm of historical authenticity in any shape or form, the matter of clowning, as of mimicry, is at the heart of the contest over whether historical

reenactment touches anything viable or legitimate in the matter of historical record. And though the Association of Lincoln Presenters purposefully claim the appellation “presenters” rather than “impersonators” or “reenactors,”<sup>46</sup> the humor in their appearances together as multiples points to some of the problems that attend history reenactment generally. Recall, as mentioned above, Vanessa Agnew’s disparaging argument that reenactment “eclipses the past with its own theatricality.” Such phrasing causes one to wonder if the theatricality that “eclipses” is actually a kind of revenant, part of history returned – a kind of immaterial artifact, even. After all, Agnew writes that it is the past’s “own” theatricality that threatens, somehow, through reenactment. Is she referring to the past’s own composition in recurrence, and a recurrence not only performative in nature but engaged in the infelicities and strident errors of farce, parody, and caricature? This kind of conundrum might suggest that to render the past in and through “theatricality” would be to get something right, touch something actual, something even authentic about it. If it was theatrical *then*, should it not be remembered theatrically *now*? And yet, of course, it is theatricality that Agnew disparages as always already excessive, whether that theatricality belongs to the past as the past’s own, or belongs to the reenactors who try to touch it – or, much more complicatedly, belongs *between* the two as a vehicle for syncopated time. In all cases, and sticky with Platonic affect or sentiment, theatricality appears to threaten the Ideality of the authentic – *even if the authentic had always already been theatrical*.

In fact, living history professionals, such as those who work at sites like Colonial Williamsburg, labor hard to segregate reenactment from “theatre,” because theatre, almost invariably being associated with debased sentiment and, therefore, fantasy, appears to negate any claim to authenticity.<sup>47</sup> As Scott Magelssen records a Colonial Williamsburg staff member to say: “Theatre makes [living history] play. Pretend. Not real.”<sup>48</sup> The Williamsburg staff member Magelssen cites is likely not a member of the ALP. The Lincoln Presenters are well aware, as their motto suggests, of the sometimes creepy crawlspace between the so-called theatrical and the so-called real. After all, they “present” Abraham Lincoln, a man who read and reread Shakespeare and attended the theatre consistently – literally to the very end. In 1863, a month after 50,000 died at Gettysburg, Lincoln wrote in a letter to actor James Hackett: “Unlike you gentlemen of the profession, I think the soliloquy in *Hamlet* commencing ‘O, my offense is rank’ surpasses that commencing ‘To be or not to be.’”<sup>49</sup> Lincoln’s preference for the imposter-father Claudius’s speech, though probably not born of identification, might surprise those who would prefer to keep their Lincoln for Hamlet, or for whom a confederate Hamlet might “rub.” At the very least we here see Lincoln navigating the touch between “fiction and friction,” to borrow Stephen Greenblatt’s words, looking for the swerve or slant of act in relation to event.<sup>50</sup> As Stephen Dickey of the Folger Shakespeare Library has written on a site intended for high school teachers:

The analogies with Lincoln’s own situation – presiding in this case over a national fratricide, agonizing daily over the death toll, and notoriously (perhaps even suicidally) heedless of his own personal safety despite being stalked by



various likely assassins [Hamlet hovers behind Claudius in the scene] – are too obvious to miss. Indeed, we would do well, I think, not to congratulate ourselves over discovering something secret here, but rather to assume that Lincoln himself perceived such analogies as clearly as anyone.<sup>51</sup>

Or perhaps the issue is not that Lincoln liked Shakespeare but that America – in history and literature classrooms — has liked its Lincoln Shakespearean, a sentiment spurred by Lincoln’s own writing style as well as by the “tragedy” of the Civil War. Either way the tangle of theatricality and history makes a hard knot to untie, and a union too bound to simplistically dismiss.<sup>52</sup> As Adam Gopnik has written:

Shakespeare suits liberal violence, with its corrupted currents, admirable ambition, and casual slaughters – and what makes Lincoln [. . .] admirable, if not heroic, is that [he] knew it.<sup>53</sup>

### **Now he belongs to the stages: two**

To return to the clownish motto of the ALP, serving over 100 members who claim to be “the busiest dead guys on the planet”<sup>54</sup>: it is the rhyming word “stages” rather than a choice for the rhyme of “pages” that makes the motto a joke.<sup>55</sup> “Pages” would simply reference history as we conventionally accept it, whereas theatre is (not surprisingly nor even incorrectly) debased for all the bodily (and bawdy) error it potentially includes.<sup>56</sup> And yet, what is it we accept when accepting history in the pages? Stanton’s statement “Now he belongs to the ages,” reprinted as fact in many a high school textbook, may be the “most famous epitaph in American biography,” and one “engraved in every American mind” – and yet, as Gopnik tracks the phrase for its history, he finds instead a tangled web of quote and re-quote and re-re-quote with nothing definitive at the core – nothing definitive *except* that “something like” these words were said.<sup>57</sup> The quote, that is, has *always* belonged to the stages.

Let us rehearse the scene. The words “Now he belongs to the ages” were the words Edwin Stanton, Lincoln’s Secretary of War, said at Lincoln’s deathbed. Or, were they? Some historians claim that Stanton’s words were actually: “Now he belongs to the angels.” The ideological stakes, of course, between belonging to History (“ages”) or to Heaven (“angels”) spells out a consistent American fault line that, perhaps, adds another kind of poignancy to the ALP motto. There is no absolute proof that Stanton said “ages,” nor absolute proof that Stanton said “angels.” In an age before mechanical recording, what was said and what was not said was a matter of oral account and belated reiteration – often contesting reiterations. Exploring the tracks of this quote, Gopnik, who takes us deeply into Lincoln’s love for Shakespeare, searches for clues as to which – “angels” or “ages” – might have been what Stanton *really* said. But after looking in the Bible and in the Bard, as well as in the voluble stack of history books on all aspects of Lincolnia, Gopnik decides to visit the very small room in which Lincoln died and try to account, as a reenactor might, for the *physical experience* of being there. His account

is worth reprinting, as it illustrates, I think, something about what the error (or the “befoggedness”) in reenactment perhaps gets right:

As the queue inches forward and I can see, at last, into the room that I have been reading about [. . .] I want to laugh. This place isn’t small; it’s tiny. They brought him here, to this back room, I had learned, because all the other rooms in the house were too messy for a President to die in, and yet: four people would make it crowded; six would overwhelm it; the forty or so who passed in and out, and the ten or twenty who crowded inside at the end would have turned it into the stateroom scene in “A Night at the Opera.”

In the brief moment given to each visitor to look inside, I wished for a machine that would be able to re-create every breath of air, every vibration that ever took place in a room. And then I knew that we probably would not have understood any better had we been standing there than we do now. Stanton was weeping, Lincoln had just died, the room was overwhelmed, whatever he said was broken by a sob – the sob, in a sense, is the story. History is not an agreed-on fiction but what gets made in a crowded room; what is said isn’t what’s heard, and what is heard isn’t what gets repeated. Civilization is an agreement to keep people from shouting “Fire!” in a crowded theatre, but the moments we call historical occur when there is a fire in a crowded theatre; and then we all try to remember afterward when we heard it, and if we ever really smelled smoke, and who went first, and what they said. The indeterminacy is built into the emotion of the moment. The past is so often unknowable not because it is befogged now but because it was befogged then, too, back when it was still the present. If we had been there listening, we still might not have been able to determine exactly what Stanton said. All we know for sure is that everyone was weeping, and the room was full.<sup>58</sup>

### **The sick or incredible way you feel: one**

In the third epigraph at the start of this chapter, Miranda July tells us that “straight things” – common things that at first pass as natural or accidental – become reenactment when recognized as composed in code, as always already a matter of reiteration.

I reenact things you’ve seen a million times before. Straight things, TV things, and medical things: These are the transactions that we all participate in and memorize accidentally. Then I wiggle my hand and wink and you know that everything I just said was in code, and the real truth is the sick or incredible way you feel.<sup>59</sup>

This July quote, lifted from the Lesbian magazine *Curve*, is perhaps most applicable to July’s early performance work such as *Love Diamond* (1998–2000) and *Swan Tool* (2000–2). These were pieces July called “live movies” (as opposed to performance art) and they included a great deal of mimetic interaction with screened images.

The quote suggests that enactment becomes recognized as reenactment, recognized as a matter of againness, through explicit theatricality. Something in the everyday, taken for present and authentic, assumed as a singular and “true” occurrence, can slip out of synch with itself by virtue of even the most minor acknowledgement of its composition in repetition. Here a “wobble” of a hand or a “wink” of an eye are stray details, theatrical gestures that give the scene away, prompting the recognition that seemingly discrete acts are never temporally singular nor straightforward but double, triple, or done “a million times before.” As such, theatricality, prompting recognition of againness, oddly prompts the returns of history in that it prompts recognition of recurrence.

We might say that July is performing the opposite action of Civil War reenactors. If Civil War reenactors try to trip the historical tale into a “now time” experience, July attempts to flip the real of “straight things” that we participate in everyday into a sense of historicity – underscoring their composition in precedent, their status as “living history.” Of course, this “flip” of temporalities, occasioned in both directions by a manipulation of theatricality, prompts a kind of “ontological queasiness”<sup>60</sup> – or, in July’s words, “the sick or incredible way you feel.”

The “sick or incredible way you feel” can move in multiple directions. As discussed, July accesses the queasiness of the moment when that which passes for original, natural, and real is exposed as (also) a matter of repetition. But in another register, history reenactors similarly refer to the queasiness they get on the flipside of the fake. That is, battle reenactors chase the overtly citational until it hits a point they speak of as “magic” and appears to cross from the theatrical (the pose *as if* back in time) to the actual (back in time). Many reenactors describe “special times” when “it seems really real” or when “you feel you have gone back in time and you are reliving a brief moment of history when it becomes real for an instant.”<sup>61</sup> Either way – into the real via theatricality with battle camp reenactors, or out of the real via theatricality with campy performance art – the double at the limen provokes the quease.

In the course of attending Civil War reenactments I interviewed many different types of people, from reenactors who hoped to literally and actually travel in time, to those who came to observe the trip, to those who hoped to interact with history without leaving the present.<sup>62</sup> Interviews revealed that a relationship between striking the pose and being the thing so posed (or acting the part and being the part so acted), held for many (participants and observers alike) a fluid or at least indeterminate capacity – a being in uncertainty, a being toward becoming, or unbecoming. Most were curious, some were dogmatic, but everyone I spoke with was deeply excited by their collective investment in a possibility: the possibility of time redoubling, returning in fractured or fugitive moments of affective engagement. And though some I spoke with did fight for “Southern justice,” many more fought simply for the *feel* of fighting, the *feel* of encampment, content that in the long run the Northern cause would (appear to) prevail (again).<sup>63</sup>

The *feel* – the affective engagement – is key. As stated earlier, reenactors who claim to experience a physical collapse of time, or at least a profound confusion of time – call their experience a “period rush,” a “time warp,” a “wargasm” (deeply

troubling word), or they borrow a phrase from the Civil War itself to say they are “seeing the elephant.”<sup>64</sup> It is important to note, however, that for most reenactors any experience of temporal return is, at best, partial and incomplete.<sup>65</sup> Most seemed deeply eager not to come off as ignorant of history, or as “bumbling idiot sentimentalists,” as one interviewee put it, or “nostalgia-heads” as another laughingly said. I encountered two equally prevalent modes for redressing the criticism reenactors feel is continually leveled at them (they are very aware and often concerned about the general perception that they are naïve): either they deny any claim to be historians, thereby hoping to escape the accusation that they produce bad history, or they defend the validity of their historio-mimesis by citing “extensive and rigorous research.” Most claim that they aim for what “book history” misses – live experience – and some say their live experience informs their understanding of what they “also read” in books. When I have asked what “live” means, I’ve been generally offered a version of “here, now,” meaning that reenactment is a form of “then, there” translated to “here, now.” When I’ve asked whether time actually recurs for them, I’ve been told “yes” more than once, but “no” just as many if not more times. The status of experience varies across participants and the investment in the verity of time travel varies as well. With both yeas and nays to the question of time’s actual (though always partial) return, I found a far more consistent sense across participants that whether or not time actually recurred, time did seem to bend, and almost all acknowledged a kind of touch or whisper or “shiver” of time seemingly gone ajar. Interestingly, this was an experience that most often occurred unexpectedly at a minor moment or in relation to a stray, unanticipated detail.

### **Beside the point**

I myself stumbled over an unanticipated detail that tripped me into a kind of queasiness. At a Civil War reenactment on June 4, 2005, at Chase Farm in Lincoln, Rhode Island (a site too far north for any *real* historical precedent, meaning that reenactors were crossing time and space), I came across a severed forefinger lying alone in a field. Though not at all in the head-space of a reenactor, I was brought up short and had to gasp coming upon this severed index lying forgotten and left behind. I also had to laugh, but only after the initial moment of shock when faux finger passed for forefinger – or when the precise jointure between the two was not yet decided. Of course, such a gasp seems completely silly, utterly farcical, with any hindsight. Still, for a minor and brief moment, I was actually somewhat confused, not expecting this bit of digital detritus, and the confusion itself, over a stray bit of banality, captured for me, even as I thought about it later, something of the “more than I bargained for” nature of the entire event. A digital image of this encounter now graces the paperback cover of this book as if to *point*, troubled index, at the trace of the future of the past.

At this particular reenactment there were likely more witnesses than cross-dressing reenactors over the course of the weekend’s entire event. But because reenactors often camped in the space, and spent entire days there, the witnesses who came and went more frequently seemed to pass though the space like ghosts



*Figure 1.3* Faux finger. Chase Farm Civil War reenactment, Lincoln, RI. June 4, 2005. Photo: Rebecca Schneider.

from the future. Because of this passing by, there were often fewer witnesses than reenactors at any one time.<sup>66</sup> I came upon the finger lying on the ground at a lull in an afternoon, between battles, where fewer witnesses seemed to be about. I found the finger some distance to the side of a faux surgeon's faux tent where a faux soldier lay in faux pain as his faux leg was faux sawed off. This finger must have been from some operation earlier that day. It had missed the bucket of faux blood by the surgeon's side, to which it must have been tossed, and I barely saw it as others, milling around between battles, passed it by. To tell it like it happened, I ended up sitting on the ground beside the bloody point, contemplating its farcical detrital gesture for quite some time. I must have cut an odd figure hunched there, as others shuffled past between the parking lot, the surgeon's tent, and the Civil War to witness something they considered "the event." But for a moment this impasse seemed to me, sitting there as I was, a bit lost in the field, to be the point of the event. Not that I could translate what the point might "really" mean, nor what it pointed toward or away from – before or ahead, ahead or behind. Or to the side.

One of the reenactors I had spoken with earlier that morning was just back from Iraq where he has been in medical service. Hobbling about the surgeon's scene on crutches (with a wound whose "reality status" I could not ascertain), he told me

that he felt that *this* war was “more real” to him. This war, I asked? Did he mean 1863? “It was a truer war, one worth keeping alive,” he said – but the two wars, and the multiple times, were difficult to sever in our conversation.

In fact, most people I spoke with reflected on the horrific aspects of war – aspects which seemed to me to bind participants together in some way – and more than once, as if to head off condescension at the pass, I was delivered the following mantra in a tone of “We know, we know”:

Of course we know that *our pain is relative* – none of us really die, and no one is badly hurt, one third of us do not have dysentery, most of us are much older than the average soldier’s age, etc., etc., etc.

But aside from the obligatory delivery of this mantra to outsiders, no one I spoke with seemed too deeply troubled by the persistence of inevitable error – the error of “relative” pain – of being *related*, but not *the thing itself*. And while the effort to erase as much anachronism as possible was enormous – and the lengths were often great to which reenactors went to shield the present from view, from sensation, from effect, from access – still, the persistent leaky drip of the present into their efforts to touch the past was not enough to thwart their enthusiasm. Indeed, though the persistent reminders of the twentieth (then, twenty-first) century were a problem, they were only as much of a problem as the mosquitoes in the evenings or the throngs of hovering no-see-ums in the heat of the mid-afternoons. To most, the present and the past were *both* possessed of leaky valves, the drip fed *both* ways (and probably more besides, as the Iraq War veteran testified), and so the effort to undo error was not overly troubled by error’s inevitability. Error could be, in fact, *the way through* to success: the error of the past in the now was twin to the error of the now in the past. Error itself, that is, became “as if” when the double drip of time began to complicate, to render slippery, the solid-state habit of thinking or experiencing time as a singularly linear, progressive march. If, in any gathering of reenactors, the first few cross-(temporal)-dressers seem anachronistic, across the stretch of a long afternoon or multi-day reenactment the garb of the present could also come to seem in error. Which error, in such a setting, can be seen as more erroneous becomes a matter of parsing the errors – not parsing the truths. And this, in itself, beckons a kind of instruction about time and its inadequacies, authenticity and its promiscuities, that without question can boggle the mind of any true believer in the linearity of time. The trouble with reenactment, it seems, is its capacity to flummox those faith-keepers who hold that the present is fleeting and entirely self-identical, or who hold that the movement from the present to the future is never by way of the past, or who believe firmly in absolute disappearance and loss of the past as well as the impossibility of its recurrence.

## Relative pain

Anachronism is at least a two-way street, with possibly more counter-directions than two. Because the manipulation of anachronism is the very stuff of the art or

act of reenactment, it can never be entirely banished from the project at hand – a fact that reenactors know intimately. An example might suffice: I have been repeatedly surprised by the kind of exuberance I witnessed when, at the end of several of the battle reenactments I observed, the various cadavers strewn about the field would get up, dust off, and, quite simply, *return to camp*. They did this without the dismay of failure (that is, they did not seem dismayed that they had not achieved the status of “real” cadavers!). In fact, on the contrary, they rose up with a surprisingly exultant joy. Spectators often cheered as the tired corpses, clearly pleased with themselves, ambled off to everyday life (albeit everyday camp life on the front in the 1860s). The image of 50 or 100 or 200 or 500 dead getting up and dusting off was powerful, and the sensation surprised me, provoking me to ask myself: “What did I think I was seeing?” And “Why did I not expect or foresee this?” And “Why does this obvious failure feel instead like success?” It was not that I, for a single moment, had thought that the reenactors were “really” dead – I had never thought that – it was just that I did not expect the simplicity, the gentle awkwardness of the collective climb to knees, to feet, and back to upright. Nor the strange satisfaction in the slow progress of the troops of the dead, now tired, to camp.

Obviously, there is no curtain or jump-cut on the battlefield to shield participants from the moment between the completion of the feigned death and the actor’s resurrection for the curtain call. Still, the “get up” caused a kind of surprise. Indeed, the resurrection – the moment of error when the dead (again) acknowledge that (again) they are not dead (again) – took on a valence hard to describe. It was a moment to imagine not just “as if” (as if dead) but “what if”: what if the actual dead on the actual battlefields of the actual Civil War had actually gotten up from their dead bodies and also returned to camp, or continued to walk across the centuries to meet the future (again) in some ghostly way? It was this kind of question (admittedly creepy, and not the stuff of “solid” inquiry) that was the “more than I had bargained for” aspect of witnessing these re-events. Clearly, the reenactors wanted to touch something they deemed authentic, real, and actual in experience – something about fighting and falling on the field that would be other than what they could glean from textual accounts, photographic images, or watching film actors reenacting on screen. They wanted to *experience it for themselves* and add to their historical acumen by way of their own physical engagement. But, despite the force of their drive to authenticity, they wanted to return *live* from the battlefield. Of course they did. What did I expect? In any case, precisely what they brought with them upon their return-to-the-now was now, for me, an open question.

The determination of what are acceptable levels of error vary from reenactment regiment to regiment, as does the rigor of investment in authenticity. In his 1999 *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, Tony Horwitz wittily narrates the escapades of “hard core” reenactors – those who seek, with religious zeal, an “absolute fidelity to the 1860s: its homespun clothing, antique speech patterns, sparse diet and simple utensils.” The hardcore have their own nickname for more mainstream reenactors. They call them “farbs,” short for fabricators. In

describing the intensity of attention to detail, and the force of mental and physical focus among the hardcore, Horwitz tells us that hardcore reenactors engage in “method acting,” but he also relates that more mainstream reenactors (the farbs) generally fear that method acting, taken to the extreme, would become “performance art”:

[T]he hardcore faith, taken to its fundamentalist extreme, would turn the hobby into a *performance art* that no one would want to watch – much less participate in. “They’re pushing the envelope in terms of authenticity,” the *Camp Chase Gazette* editor, Bill Holschuh, told me [. . .]. “About the only thing left is live ammunition and Civil War diseases. I hope it doesn’t come to that.”<sup>67</sup>

In fact, like Horwitz, those who write on reenactment often find themselves navigating a spectrum of reference to theatre (method acting, performance art) on the one hand and religion (fundamentalist or mainstream) on the other, with “history” sitting somewhere, and often quite uncomfortably, in between.

The issue of authenticity in these battles is vexed. More than one reenactor, even those who claimed to be experts in period history, spoke of “simpler times.” Many are apparently convinced that in the 1860s “women were women and men were men” – willfully ignoring the historical facts of gender crossing and the far from simple tangle of gender with racialization in the antebellum and wartime states. When I mentioned this in discussion with a number of interviewees at a reenactment in Connecticut in 2004 I sparked a heated argument and was kicked out of the sutler’s tent where I was conducting the interview. The fight to get the times right – to *touch* the Civil War – was for many an effort to go back to an idealized time, and the drive to authenticity was a drive to an authenticity that *should have been*, according to reenactors’ interpretations, not necessarily an authenticity that was. But any drive to “authenticity” will automatically be vexed, necessarily including strained and awkward attempts at mimesis – the *authenticity* of *mimesis* – such as blackface minstrel routines in the camp among white reenactors (attempting to authentically mime period acts of deliberate inauthenticity), or women cross-dressing as male soldiers and needing – even in the twenty-first century – to *pass*.<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Young writes of the case of Lauren Cook Burgess who brought a law suit against the United States Department of Interior when she was banned from participating in reenactments after being discovered cross-dressing as male at an Antietam Reenactment in August 1989.<sup>69</sup> She won her case, but her case made it clear at the time that despite the fact that women had cross-dressed and passed as men during the war itself, and despite the record of cross-dressing women soldiers at Antietam, reenactment communities often want a history sanitized of troublesome “error,” *even if those errors were fact*. So, too, writes Cathy Stanton and Stephen Belyea, potential trouble attends black reenactors:

African American reenactors present no threat to the reenactment community’s view of itself or of American history so long as they are depicting qualities such as gallantry, loyalty, martial decorum, and other “bedrock”



values. But when black reenactors' presence or discourse brings questions of race and morality to the fore, they inevitably disturb a community that prefers to avoid such issues and interpretations. [. . .] No matter how compatible they may be in many ways, they still represent moral and social dilemmas that most white reenactors have tried to expunge from their depictions of the Civil War.<sup>70</sup>

“Reenactment,” then, is not *one* thing in relation to the past, but exists in a contested field of investment across sometimes wildly divergent affiliations to the question of what constitutes fact. Clearly, the inevitable errors in (contested) authenticity mean that even though a reenactive action might “touch” the past, as any “again” can be said to do, that touch is not entirely co-identical to the past nor itself unembattled. It is both/and – not *one* thing. Another way in which reenactment is not *one* thing, but always at least double, is illustrated in the multiplicity of descriptors that attempt to articulate the actions. Is it theatre? Is it art? Is it history? Is it religion? Sport? Hobby? Pastime? Education? Heritage? Commemoration? While such questions can arguably be asked of any art form or expressive activity (lines of medial or disciplinary distinction are never completely discrete), the intensity of the blur can be quite high in reenactment practices. For instance, just before the reenactment of the Culp's Hill Battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 1999, I walked up to a large tent beside the battlefield and joined a gathered crowd for what I took to be a “living history” performance. It was open to the public, but most men and



*Figure 1.4* A renewal of vows at the Gettysburg, PA, Civil War Reenactments, 1999. Photo: Rebecca Schneider.

women in attendance were dressed in Civil War garb indicating that they were reenactors rather than spectators (or possibly spectators reenacting spectators). It took me a little while to figure out what was going on, but once I realized that it was a wedding, I was riveted. In fact, this was both a wedding *and* a reenactment of a historical wedding, and to complicate matters, the participants (Bob and Betty Fox) were already married but were (“for real”) renewing their vows from their own wedding.

It was palpable that for the Foxes, cross-temporality added to the verity and the depth of their claims and underscored the security they felt in their commitment(s). The more “then,” for them, then the more now. But I had to wonder what became of time: when the congregation reenacted prayer, were they also “really” praying? To be sure, when the vows were reenacted, they were also (according to Mr. and Mrs. Fox) really taken. Time was then *and* it was now as the minister said (again): “What God has joined together let no man tear asunder.” There is something of temporal slippage and temporal fold here that trips us fully into the paradox that the actual – *to be actual* – is a negotiation of reactualization, the enacted a matter of negotiating reenactment. For these participants there was no temporal quandary: their re-wedding would be one and more: then and then and now and then now again. And while this is “Performativity 101,” the blatancy of it at the Foxes *re-re-do* at the camp altar of “I do,” sent my own head spinning – even as the reredo, in all its civic religiosity, seemed to offer a deep peace of mind to the Foxes and their family.

After the wedding – wherein happening upon a performance I mistook to be “only” performance I had, as witness, unwittingly taken responsibility for the health of the vows of Bob and Betty Fox<sup>71</sup> – I went to the bleachers on the edge of the very large field to await the (re)start of the Battle at Culp’s Hill. I was thinking, to be honest, that there might be something more comforting in battle than in marriage. But the battle I “saw” again also threw my role as witness into some question.

I sat in the bleachers with about 250 other spectators. It was a blisteringly hot day. The battle was set for 4 p.m., but many of us were there well in advance, and most had been there all day and many for several days. The 97th Regimental String Band played and sang as if to ease the heat, and their song underscored the difficulty of fully forgetting, or severing, present-day meaning from prior-day language – except that the crowd, singing along, all seemed more than content to let the double resonance ring:

We’ll all be gay when Johnny comes marching home [. . .]  
All the Ladies will turn out when Johnny comes marching home [. . .]

I offer a brief section of my field notes here, by way of accounting for my own queasiness at the event, my own engagement with the undecideability of *what was happening*, and the difficult question of what was being recalled and what forgotten, *when* and *where*:

## Field Notes:

Hot – maybe 98 degrees Fahrenheit – and terrifically humid. Lots of folks seem to be giving up and going away. At 3:30 a pickup with a cannon on the back crosses the field – they must be getting it into position. An ambulance, too, drives to the edge of the field and waits. In this heat, apparently, “real” heart attacks can easily happen when overweight, middle-aged enthusiasts don wool and run with heavy weapons and other tack.

There is an announcement: “Ladies and Gentlemen, the battle has been delayed 1/2 hour. There’s been an accident out in Emmetsville Road and some of the people who we need to be here aren’t here yet.” The family behind me on the bleachers switches their conversation to complain about the delay. “We’ve been here in the heat being ‘real’— why can’t they?” I think about the implications of this statement – for this family, the reenactors won’t begin being real until they begin to reenact.

An overweight woman three rows down has brought a battery-operated fan/squirt gun. She’s spritzing herself and her equally overweight companion. A young man behind her, under his mother’s umbrella, reads *1000 Things You Should Know About the Civil War*. Time passes. The bandleader appeases the emptiness of time in advance of the “reality” about to take place. He asks over the loudspeaker: How many Yankees do we have here? A yay from the crowd. How many Rebels? Another yay.

The men behind me and to my left begin talking about ghosts. At first one tells about a woman in his church who claimed to have “experiences.” They said that it was weird, odd, strange. But then, after ridiculing the woman, they began to tell their own “experiences.” One tells of his Grandma – seeing her in his bedroom after she’d died. And then another story pours out – his wife’s grandfather’s legs . . . I can’t catch it all.

At five minutes of four we begin to see troops advancing in the distance. Over the loudspeaker the announcer offers a history lesson of the war leading up to Gettysburg. Numbers drop like beads of sweat. 75,000 Confederates; 95,000 Union; 80,000 animals. He tells us about the logistics of the campaign: 80,000 gallons of water a day. This lesson is long – people fade in and out. Folks in the audience exchange tidbits of fact – what they know about what the announcer says. The army continues to advance — but it is very hard to see. I think it’s the Union – but I can’t be sure. They are about a quarter-mile away, and they are not marching toward us, but toward a large wood at the other end of the field: Culp’s Hill. They’re marching *further* away. It takes them a long time. I look at the audience as much as at the field. The bleachers fall below me in a sea of T-shirt slogans: San Diego Zoo; Lone Lake Lodge; a back with “All the Flags of the World”; Barefoot Bobs; and a slew of Football teams.



The hauntingness of history, its literal in-bodied articulation, the boisterous and rattling ghosts of ancestors, and the queasy “something living” of the pastness of the past, return us to the transmission of affect in the jumping and sticky viscosity of time.<sup>74</sup> I remark again on the oddness of traveling to a site to sit in bleachers to *see* the Civil War in all its theatrically blooded againness only to find that what I had traveled to see was not to be seen – happening “authentically” in the woods. What I saw instead was literal *distance*. And distance was not wrong. But what I also saw with a kind of shock of proximity was not what I’d expected to find, nor where I’d expected to find it. Like the finger in the field and the “wound” of the war veteran returned from Iraq, the minor detail of the commodity handbag – a container for personal belongings – recalled the resilient strayness, the wanderingness, of events *not* given to account, be they “minor,” be they “forgotten,” be they too recent, or be they erased from official record. As an intense if unintentional marker of what had been removed from the American South, now seemingly accidental and even seemingly farcical at a re-scene of Southern secession, the Louis Vuitton Cherokee commodity was both anachronistic and not anachronistic at all. It sat still in/as a witness’s hands, undecideable, but resolute in its (re)cursive repetition. If the South might win . . . whose South, when?

### **Afterword**

An unattributed notice, published roughly two months into the new millennium in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* on March 8, 2000, illustrates perfectly the ongoing relation between reenactment, theatre, and the “work in progress” of War. The notice suggests something of the deeply political stakes that haunt “belongings” as our temporal affiliations play out in/on stages. The hazards of temporal return take a certain shape here, despite the promises that “doing it differently” might otherwise appear to afford in seemingly simple or simply straightforward humorous contexts (if humor is ever simple, ever straight, or ever forward). The queasiness of the following might caution us always to recall the masked force of seeming farce:

Anyone in Cleveland’s theatre district around lunchtime yesterday got a taste of the old days as a group of Civil War enthusiasts staged a mock battle to promote the opening of a play about the war. Yesterday, members of the 7th Ohio volunteer Infantry “battled” in the streets for about a half-hour from the Hanna Theatre building to the Palace Theatre, where *The Civil War – The Broadway Musical* opened yesterday and runs through March 19. Judges declared the winner: This time it was the Confederacy.