Re-enactment’s (em)bodying of history

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Abstract

Despite academic protestations, re-enactment has become a highly popular mode of public history in museums, festivals, documentaries, movies, hobby groups and even school education programs. It is also emerging in numerous academic fields as a salient, albeit problematic, topic of analysis. Particularly amongst historians, however, it remains on the fringe, held at arm’s length – the charismatic, but troubled (and troubling) relative.

This dissertation questions some of the academic preconceptions regarding re-enactment, analysing the experiential, performance-based, and embodied aspects of the practice as areas of significant potential. How can we further elucidate re-enactment’s possibilities and pitfalls as a means of learning about the past, and present? In what ways could we understand the effects and affect of this way of knowing in and through our bodies?

The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of academia encourages us to utilise theories and methods from multiple fields to complement and address the limitations of each. I do so by utilising historiography, Anthropology, Philosophy, Dance Studies, and Performance Studies theory to comparatively analyse the historical sensibilities, methods, and issues of specific case studies: Danelaw Medieval Fighting Society in Sydney, Australia; the Earthly Delights Historic Dance Academy in Canberra, Australia; and the Jane Austen Festival in Bath, Britain. Before engaging in comparative analysis, this thesis offers an ethnography of each case study, endeavouring to understand how these people perceive what they do, how they do it, and why. These ethnographies consider themes that emerged through my fieldwork and examine how these re-enactors interpret and approach that golden chalice and Achilles’ heel of re-enactment: authenticity. This notion, I argue, is more complex and multifaceted amongst re-enactors than is often assumed, carrying significant implications for the relation between realism and affect, cognition and experience, past and present, in both re-enactment and History.
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Authorship Statement

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree.

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To set the scene

Many historians recoil reflexively from the idea of reenactment as either an irretrievably comical eccentricity or ‘dangerous tosh’. Greg Dening’s oft-quoted dismissal of the entire movement […] hangs in the air like Damocles’ sword over the head of any historian willing to at least begin by taking it seriously.

Paul Pickering (2010, 122)

As a woman of mixed heritage and dual citizenship, I find myself drawn to liminal (or, perhaps, liminoid) spaces.¹ I grew up embracing (and negotiating) the points of parity and divergence between multicultural influences, eliciting a sense of (co-, dis- and inter-)connection, which influence my research, practice and teaching. As both (or neither, or something in between) a performance scholar and historian, my theoretical leanings reflect a merging of disciplines, developed in response to an avid interest in sometimes conflicting, yet potentially complementary, facets of both (interdisciplinary) fields. Pertinent to this project is the space between these disciplines. This liminal landscape appears to be pervaded by binaries, occupied by the past and the present, the cognitive and the corporeal, the archive and the repertoire – but what of the messy, grey patches in between them? Disciplinary boundaries are being eroded by recent turns in scholarship, allowing tentative but rapidly expanding connections to emerge. These convergences seem to be leading towards a way to better traverse disciplinary and conceptual polarities, enabling us to more fully elucidate relations between then and now, body and mind, nature and culture, performance and history – and the means by which we know (through) them.

This project strides, skips and stumbles in this direction through a focus on what is often

¹The term ‘liminality’ was developed by Arnold van Gennep ([1908] 2004) and substantiated by Victor Turner ([1969] 2008). Deriving from the Latin word for threshold, ‘limen’, it was used by these authors to refer to what they perceived to be a middle stage in rites of passage, characterised by ambiguity and transition. Turner coined the term ‘liminoid’ to refer to what he considered to be less significant forms of ritual, those occurring outside of “traditional” and “Indigenous” societies, such as theatre. These terms have since been applied in numerous contexts in which the subject is ‘betwixt and between’ two different states/spaces/aspects. For more on this topic, see Turner ([1969] 2008) “Liminality and Communitas”.

termed historical re-enactment – the (re)performance of historical events, people, cultures, or activities. A highly popular pastime, performance mode, and (in some respects) a form of public pedagogy, re-enactment is emerging in scholarship as a potentially productive, albeit often problematic, means of rousing interest in history. It reflects, according to Vanessa Agnew (2007, 299–300), History’s broader affective turn.\(^2\) As Paul Pickering suggests in my opening citation, however, there remains a sizeable stigma attached to both the practice of re-enactment and to academic analysis that is ‘willing to at least begin by taking it seriously’ (2010, 122). While this is particularly the case in History, discussion of historical re-enactment is not unique to that discipline. As Sven Lutticken demonstrates, historical re-enactment is also receiving attention from practitioners and scholars across the Arts, often in response to a perceived negative correlation with performance art re-enactment. Lutticken claims that ‘for artists, [re-enactments] have become problematical models to be questioned and manipulated in order to make a difference in this increasingly dismal culture’ (2005b, 7). Historical re-enactment is also emerging as a (fringe) topic in English, Anthropology, Sociology, Folklore, Museum Studies, Film Studies, Tourism Studies and Literary Studies. There seems, however, to be a significant gap between discussions happening in Live Art and Theatre/Performance disciplines and other, less overtly creative fields. Bringing these discourses into closer interaction is a pivotal objective of this thesis.

Common to the discussion in almost all disciplines is a characterisation of historical re-enactment as ‘theatrical’, ‘somatic’ and ‘affective’. These elements, outside of Art and Theatre/Performance Studies, evoke widespread criticism and concern. The suspicion towards and derision of the corporeal methodology of re-enactment arguably stems, at least in part, from the enduring (if often unrecognised) influence of Cartesian dualism – Rene Descartes’ (1637)

\(^2\) As I will be frequently referring to ‘history’ as both a phenomenon and a discipline, I use a capital, i.e. History, when referring to academic Historical inquiry, to differentiate between the two. I do the same with other disciplines, for example, Performance Studies.
positioning of thought at the centre of human ontology, which led doing bodies to be polarised from and subordinated to thinking minds. And yet, a recent shift, related to the affective turn, is apparent in scholars’ tentative but growing endeavours to comprehend the significance of bodily experience in and for historical re-enactment. Agnew, who has been at the forefront of re-enactment’s recent rise in History and related disciplines, stated that: ‘it will be necessary to do for reenactment what has been done for other forms of history writing […]’. This will involve disambiguating experience and understanding and determining the extent to which affect can indeed be considered evidentiary’ (2007, 309). Many scholars, however, dismiss or disparage the potential efficacy of somatic/experience-based methods. Agnew herself, for example, argued that:

rather than eclipsing the past with its own theatricality, reenactment ought to make visible the ways in which events were imbued with meanings […]. Reenactment’s central epistemological claim that experience furthers historical understanding is clearly problematic; body-based testimony tells us more about the present self than the collective past. (2004, 335)

Drawing on and developing some of my other work on this topic (Johnson 2009, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015), I seek in this dissertation to problematise this resistance to ‘body-based testimony’, reconfiguring what I describe as the embodied, performative approach of re-enactment as its strongest source of epistemological potential.

The term ‘performative’ has been used in different and at times very particular ways, most notably by Judith Butler (drawing on J. L. Austin) in relation to gender. I use ‘performative’ and ‘performativity’ here to impart what I perceive as the multiplicity of meanings of ‘performance’ in re-enactment, including the bodily performing of historical pursuits and the theatricality created for

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3Descartes’ much repeated and paraphrased statement ‘I think therefore I am’ is, however, actually from a much larger concern. His theorisation is more nuanced and less polarising than the above citation (and its influence) suggest. Consider, for example, the following: ‘when I consider the mind, that is, when I consider myself so far only as I am a thinking thing, I can distinguish in myself no parts, but I very clearly discern that I am somewhat absolutely one and entire; and although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet, when a foot, an arm, or any other part is cut off, I am conscious that nothing has been taken from my mind’ (Descartes [1637] 2008, 120). This offers a less bifurcated understanding of the so-called mind/body split. My criticism of this polarisation refers, therefore, not to Descartes’ interpretation of ontological enquiry, but to the manner in which his work has come down to us in less nuanced summary.
and with such doings. The embodied and theatrical dimensions of re-enactment’s performativity are, I feel, inherently intertwined (Johnson 2009, 2014; Schneider 2011). I also consider a third aspect of performativity, which draws on Butler’s use of the term in connection with her notion of *sedimented acts*. In this endeavour, I utilise her understanding of the body as ‘a historical situation [...] a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation’ (1988, 52). Here, Butler develops Simone de Beauvoir’s (2001) assertion that gender is not something that one is but something that one becomes, to suggest that embodied identities are cultural constructs produced through ‘a set of repeated acts’ that result in a ‘repeated stylization of the body’ (Butler 1999, 43).

Her notion of *sedimented acts* extends Foucault’s (1980) notion of inscription and plays a crucial role in the process through which gender is constituted. My appropriation of Butler complements Rebecca Schneider’s (2011) use of these terms in connection with performance art and civil war re-enactment, but with a shift in direction and focus, as will be elucidated in chapter one and developed in chapter seven. In the latter chapter, I consider Butler and Foucault’s concepts in relation to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (2005) notion of *embodiment*, and how the resulting interpretation of body, experience and understanding can be utilised to analyse re-enactment as a methodology. By analysing ethnographic fieldwork with three case studies through an interdisciplinary framework, I explore the *performativity* of re-enactors’ attempts to understand another’s history – via both successes and failures – through, with, and in their (performing) bodies.

Readers familiar with work popular in Performance and Dance Studies (amongst other disciplines) will know that examining embodied and performance-based methods as valid ways of knowing is not so very aberrant, nor as intrinsically problematic, as much of the literature on historical re-enactment implies. The philosophical tradition of Phenomenology set the foundations for such inquiry in the early 1900s and forms part of the core theoretical and methodological underpinning of this thesis. More recently, a range of embodied and performance-based practices
are being interpreted as forms of social memory and historical (re)connection by, for example, Paul Connerton (1989); Susan Leigh Foster (1995); Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1993, 1998, 2005); Joseph Roach (1996); Freddie Rokem (2000); Rebecca Schneider (2011); and Diana Taylor (2003). Until Schneider’s work, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (2011), however, few, if any, scholars approached this in relation to specific, non-professional practices within so-called Western cultures.

Schneider’s book offers a ground-breaking theorisation of art and civil war re-enactment in the United States. Perhaps the most provocative aspect of Schneider’s work, which is stirring considerable ripples in current performance discourse, is her tackling of Diana Taylor’s much-quoted reframing of the relation between the archive and what Taylor terms the *repertoire*. Dancing with the concept of history as performance – in its unfolding, in its records, in its writing – Taylor asserts the importance of the repertoire – history more literally in and as performance, performance as an alternative (or complementary) form of archive (2003, 16–26). Following Taylor, I perceive the archive and the repertoire not as opposites, but as two intricate, mutually influencing parts of a whole, which together enhance our comprehension of history. This dissertation interprets the re-enactment groups studied here as part of, or connected with, the repertoire. In her work on re-enactment, Schneider flips Taylor’s conception of the repertoire as embodied archive by positing the archive as a form of material repertoire. Schneider (gently) critiques Taylor, claiming that her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, advocates a distinction between documents and performance, which, while intended to counteract the subjugation of the repertoire by the archive, instead, Schneider claims, functions to reaffirm it. I discuss Schneider’s significant contribution, which posits notions and poses questions my work seeks to further, in detail in the subsequent literature review chapter.

However, I do not wish to become too entangled in the recent flurry of debate surrounding
Schneider and Taylor’s claims for the dynamic between the archive and the repertoire. This
dissertation utilises the notion of the repertoire, but it is not an argument for or against Schneider’s
reframing. My project is, in part, a quasi-political one, questioning epistemological hierarchies and
binaries in and around History and Performance, and considering the socio-political implications of
these. But this thesis is also, perhaps more so, an anthropological/sociological undertaking, which
endeavours to unearth and understand perspectives from within a ‘field’. Who are these re-
enactors? What are they actually doing? For what reason(s) do they re-enact? How do they perceive
their practice, including, but not limited to, its relation with History? How do these case studies
relate to each other, to other forms of historical re-enactment, and to their representations by those
who study them?

There has been relatively little engagement with this aspect of the topic and an
underutilisation of ethnographic research methods which, I argue, are vital to answering such
questions. Asking these people what they think they are doing, and informing ourselves further by
doing it with them, can strengthen our understanding of the practice and its significance more
broadly. The relatively few attempts in this direction are written almost exclusively by
anthropologists or people who are, themselves, re-enactors.4 I am not, by hobby or profession, a
re-enactor, and hence my thesis offers an ‘outsider’ perspective developed through participant-
observation conducted for research purposes, a methodology which I examine in chapter two. My
intention is to counter a pattern in the literature of sweeping statements that tar the whole practice
with the same brush, producing generalisations on what is actually a diverse field, with areas of
overlap and interaction with other practices. Many of these variations can be understood as part of
a broader subculture of fandom, which I demonstrate in chapters four to seven. But, even within

4 For work by anthropologists utilising or advocating fieldwork to research re-enactment, see: Mads Daugbjerg (2013),
Richard Handler and William Saxton (1988), Wolfgang Hochbruck and Judith Schlehe (2010). For such work by re-
historical re-enactment, there is a range of forms, which warrant individual and comparative
attention. I will thus briefly outline key forms of re-enactment for readers less familiar with the
practice and identify where my case studies, which I will introduce shortly, fit within this field.

The umbrella term ‘re-enactment’ carries, as I have alluded to already, different meanings in
different spheres. Even within current discussion of historical re-enactment, the meaning of the
term – particularly regarding what it does and does not constitute, and what should and should not
be recognised as part of this practice – is contested by some scholars, particularly by those who are
themselves re-enactors.\(^5\) There is, however, a reasonably wide agreement that ‘historical re-
enactment’ is a term that can be used to refer to a large variety of practices, many of which this
dissertation does not examine. Agnew suggests a general, but not universal, consensus that re-
enactment ‘spans diverse history-themed genres – from theatrical and “living history” performances
to museum exhibits, television, film, travelogues, and historiography’ (2004, 327). As Agnew notes,
recent scholarship has used the term ‘re-enactment’ to refer to:

> everything from living history museums, technical reconstructions and ‘nostalgia’ toys (e.g.
tin figures, dioramas and architectural models) to literature, film, photography, video games,
television shows, pageants, parades and, reenactment’s most ubiquitous instantiation, social
and cyber groups devoted to historical performance. (2007, 300)

Broadly speaking, there are arguably four main types of re-enactment that are prominent in recent
scholarship: theatre re-enactment, performance art re-enactment, film re-enactment and what is
often referred to as ‘living history’. As already suggested, the first two are more prevalent in Art,
Theatre and Performance Studies work, whilst the latter two feature more in History and other
disciplines in or inclined towards the social sciences, and are more clearly forms of historical re-

\(^5\) As I discuss later, Cramer (2010) and Erisman (1998), for example, draw distinction between re-enactment and what they,
following their fellow participants in the Society for Creative Anachronism, term ‘re-creation’. Cramer argues that re-enactment is ‘a
genre in which a specific event is performed in as much detail and with as much "historical accuracy" as possible. […] Living
history is a genre in which an era, not an event, is performed, also with a great emphasis on historical accuracy, in order to convey a
sense of time and place […]. Recreation (the play on creation is intentional) is a make-believe activity in which various aspects of a
particular time period or periods are performed as a contemporary creation coded with period details, often romantic and
nonhistorical’ (25).
related to my case studies. ‘Theatre re-enactment’ (more commonly referred to as ‘performance/theatre reconstruction’) pertains to the restaging of historic plays and other forms of theatre, with a focus on recreating a portrayal as close as possible to the so-called original. Robert Sarlos’ practice of and scholarship on theatre reconstruction are particularly well-known examples of this form of re-enactment.\(^6\) Performance art re-enactments can mirror this approach but more often play with, subvert or critique the original event or performance, questioning or reinterpreting the past or commenting on the present or future. Examples include Rod Dickenson’s (2002) *The Milgram Reenactment* and Marina Abramovic’s (2005) performance series *Seven Easy Pieces*. Film re-enactments range from historical documentaries with scenes re-enacting key historical activities or events to historically themed reality television, such as *The 1900 House* (1999) and *The Ship* (2002).

The fourth type of re-enactment, often termed living history, was defined by folklorist Jay Anderson, an early (and passionate) proponent of the practice, as ‘an attempt by people to simulate life in another time’ ([1982, 219]). It is prudent to differentiate between what I perceive as two distinct, although at times overlapping sub-genres, which in themselves have many variations. The more socially accessible and integrated forms are the large-scale, public re-enactments that are generally commercially driven or state-sponsored and are usually site-specific works performed for an audience. Themed museums with costumed interpreters, period houses and recreations of villages, farms and other sites seem to be the most recognised forms in this category, both socially and in the scholarship. The Plimoth Plantation in the United States is one of the most famous examples of this form of living history and has received considerable academic attention.\(^7\) ‘Recreational re-enactment’ is a term sometimes used by its participants to refer to another type of living history –

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\(^6\) For more on this topic, see Sarlos (1984) “Performance Reconstruction: The Vital Link.”

(re)performances of historic events and pastimes by unofficial ‘history buff’ societies. These re-enactments serve as both a hobby and form of public pedagogy. Recreational re-enactments are often performed by and for their participants, rather than for an outside audience, but they can also take the form of public festivals, such as the Renaissance fairs particularly popular in the United States. While there are numerous styles within this genre, with varying attitudes towards accuracy, military re-enactments seem to have sparked the most academic interest, particularly those of the American Civil War, both within and outside the U.S.

There is a tendency in the field of living history to distinguish between so-called serious forms of re-enactment (generally representing a specific, historically significant event) and the (re)creation of romanticised, historical cultures and pursuits. The international medievalist group, the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), is the most prominent example of this. Wendy Erisman (1998) and Michael Cramer (2010) suggest that this form of the practice should be referred to as ‘recreation’, rather than re-enactment, as it does not usually attempt to re-enact a particular event, or play historical personages. This type of re-enactment has often been dismissed or mocked by academics and “serious” re-enactors alike, due to a perceived lack of attention to ‘historical accuracy’.

‘Authenticity’ and ‘historical accuracy’ is another key theme in both the literature and the practice, and one which I correspondingly explore in each case study. Questioning the dominant perspective, I suggest that re-enactors practicing what I term ‘recreational, cultural re-enactment’ privilege atmosphere and somatic experience over a strict adherence to accuracy by conscious choice, emphasising, as outlined above, a performative, bodily approach to history. What McCalman and Pickering (2010, 8) describe as the ‘vexed relationship between realism and affect’ in re-enactment is, however, by no means as simplistic in my case studies as my above description of their

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approach might suggest. The relationship between authenticity (including, but not limited to, realism) and affect is significant and is explored in chapter six and seven of this thesis.

All three of my case studies can be situated within the recreational re-enactment form of living history, and specifically, the ‘recreation’ or ‘recreational, cultural re-enactment’ style. Contrary to Cramer (2010) and Erisman’s (1998) assertions, I would argue that they can still usefully be termed ‘re-enactment’, because enactments of history are not confined to events but rather encompass everyday and extra-daily doings, including the creative, practical and martial arts, crafts and trades that these re-enactors learn and perform. But this style, or at least the examples of it studied here, demonstrate marked differences from historical event re-enactment, and the two should be differentiated between. I suggest the term ‘cultural’ to identify this form of recreational re-enactment because the subjects it focuses on mirror some of those validated in History by cultural historians’ focus on popular cultural traditions, social and cultural milieux, and historical experiences. There is, however, a clear and considerable divergence between the interpretive questions cultural historians ask and explore through these subjects and the way the re-enactors I studied mainly engaged with such topics. In a similar vein, this form of re-enactment could also be understood as recreational heritage and is certainly connected, in some respects, with the heritage industry, as demonstrated in chapters five and six. Historic dance reconstruction has not generally been considered as part of this field, but my research suggests that there are overlaps between it and the forms of historical re-enactment outlined here.

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9 Barba uses the term ‘extra-daily’ to describe a style of movement in performance that is, in a sense, between daily and expert, rendering the performer ‘powerfully present while not yet representing anything’ (Barba and Savarese 2006, 8). Extra-daily techniques do not transform the body; rather, they ‘literally put the body in form’ and are in constant tension and ‘dialectic relationship’ with daily techniques (8; 11). This term has been expanded to refer to different modes of performance which are similarly in-between the everyday and the virtuosic, for example by Schneider who frames civil war re-enactment as extra-daily behaviour. Schneider posits the extra-daily, through Barba, as ‘the basic signature of theatricality in transcultural perspective’ (2011, 11).

10 See, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis’ Society and Culture in Early Modern France (1975) and The Return of Martin Guerre (1983).
My first ethnography is of Danelaw Medieval Fighting Society (based in the outskirts of Sydney, Australia). It includes analysis of this group’s regular training sessions and their involvement in a ‘multi-group’ living history event, Beorg Wic, which is held annually on a rural property the group collectively owns in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales. I also consider some of the other groups present at the event, in particular, the Ancient Arts Fellowship, which organises the event, and the Fellowship of the Staple, which seems to be renowned amongst Australian medieval and Viking re-enactors for its level of historical accuracy.

The second ethnography is of Earthly Delights Historic Dance Academy (EDHDA), located in Canberra, Australia. This group reconstructs, teaches and performs historic music, dance and clothing from 1450 to 1900, organising and participating in regular classes; semi-regular workshops, balls, and performances; an annual festival; and occasional tours and other events around Australia, the U.S., Britain, and Europe. I particularly focus on their annual Jane Austen Festival (JAFA) and its variety of activities across dance, costuming, and literature, as well as their Historic Dance and Costume Tour of England.

This takes us into my third case study, which explores the event this tour culminated in – JAFA’s far larger, older sister in Bath, Britain: the annual festival run by the Jane Austen Centre. This event, although the inspiration for EDHDA’s festival, differs significantly to its Australian counterpart, not only because of its considerable size and diversity but also because of its touristic function and its use of authentic spaces and places. As will be explored in chapter five and six, these “authentic” places are not always, altogether real.

I have sequenced the case studies in this dissertation to commence with Beorg Wic as the smallest, most intimate, and closed-circle event I studied. This is followed by the slightly larger, mainly public events of EDHDA, which retain a strong, core community, and concludes with the far vaster scale and diversity of the international festival at Bath. The EDHDA’s tour of England and
involvement in the Jane Austen Centre’s festival is positioned to move the reader from Australia to Britain, as it did me – it was through my research of Jafa that I became aware of, and eventually a participant-researcher at, the festival in England. This sequence also reflects the spectrum in which these case studies may be placed – from most characteristic of recreational re-enactment to that which most blurs the boundaries between re-enactment, tourism, and fandom.

The choice of these particular case studies is significant. As mentioned, there is little literature on recreational, cultural re-enactment. Furthermore, the major event within each study offers an opportunity to examine a range of groups, providing context for the studies by assessing them within the ‘scene(s)’ in which they participate and by gathering a sense of their positioning within broader subcultural field(s). As Monaghan and Just recognise and critique, ‘many ethnographers, particularly in the “classic” accounts […] employed what came to be called the ethnographic present in which communities were frozen in time, outside any historical context, and without reference to neighbouring societies or encapsulating states’ (2000, 25). The case studies I examine are not, of course, discrete cultures but are part of subcultures in Australian and British society, connected to similar subcultures in other countries and, arguably, global, transnational communities. They should, however, be understood in a way that recognises and examines their individuality, whilst also interpreting them in-situ, with consideration of the context in which they are practiced.

As alluded to above, of my three case studies, the groups at Beorg Wic align most with what is typically considered recreational re-enactment (along with the Civil War buffs mentioned earlier). As Agnew suggests, re-enactors often favour ‘high-concept themes – Vikings, medieval knights, […] pilgrims and soldiers’ (2004, 327). Beorg Wic housed many such groups. Edhda, in contrast, is primarily a historic dance and music group – a form of re-enactment that is very much on the fringe, both in terms of its situation in (the outskirts of) the field and its complete lack of inclusion in the
scholarship on historical re-enactment. Similarly, while the importance of ‘period’ attire in re-enactment groups has elicited academic recognition, groups which devote themselves to costuming - such as one of the groups at JAFA – have also been largely overlooked. As will be demonstrated, ‘costuming’ is, for these re-enactors, both the making and the wearing of themed (but not necessarily historically accurate) clothing. The Jane Austen Centre and its festival in Bath offer a way to explore the (inter)connection between re-enactment and heritage tourism, facilitating travel between performance, history and tourism scholarship.\(^\text{11}\) It also enables comparison and contrast between two examples of the “same” re-enactment, demonstrating the diversity within the field, and facilitating a uniquely international comparative analysis of historical re-enactments.

Finally, in this introduction, I will offer a brief summary of each chapter in this thesis. Chapter one offers a review of relevant literature, focusing on historical re-enactment and its discussion in the “camps” identified above. Chapter two details my methodology, which, as I have already alluded to, is underpinned by a phenomenologically-inflected ethnographic approach. Chapters three, four, and five engage in ethnographic analysis of the three case studies: Danelaw and Beorg Wic; EDHDA and JAFA; and the Jane Austen Centre and its festival in Bath, respectively. As stated previously, each ethnography explores how notions of authenticity and historical accuracy function and are perceived and approached within each case study, as well as considering themes which emerged as significant through the process of fieldwork. An unexpected, but unifying, thread running through these examples of re-enactment is the significance of community and the (trans)cultural, introducing a secondary component to my thesis I had not foreseen.

The placement of these ethnographic analyses before the theorisation is significant, reflecting, as it does, the grounded theory approach I have pursued. As I elucidate in chapter two,

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\(^{11}\)Key texts which also pursue this objective include: Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s *Destination Culture* (1998); Jerome de Groot’s *Consuming History* (2008); and Scott Magelssen’s work on living history museums (2004, 2007, 2011).
while I entered my fieldwork with a hypothesis, a core component of my methodology was to allow analytical themes to arise out of my research. Not only does the structure of my dissertation mirror my process, but it also encourages the reader to become acquainted (as far as the limitations of text allow) with what these people do and how they portray what they do, before encountering my theorisation of them in relation to my research objectives. This is important for my aim of facilitating stronger analytical engagement with the specificities of the practice, rather than conveying preconceived and generalised perceptions.

Chapter six brings the case studies together, analysing them comparatively in relation to academic claims regarding historical sensibilities and representations in re-enactment, particularly regarding notions of nostalgia and heritage. Finally, chapter seven assesses the case studies in terms of methodology, epistemology and ontology. The first involves examining the use of, and relation to, traditional historiographical methods by these re-enactors. Chapter seven then seeks to understand the embodied and performative aspects of the practice as convergent with Taylor’s (2003) framing of performance as an episteme – as an embodied way of knowing. This will be approached through interweaving and, at times, negotiating points of (productive) tension between post-structural and (post)phenomenological theory, in particular, Michelle Foucault’s (1980) notion of inscription; Butler’s (1988) drawing on Foucault in her concept of sedimented acts and her development of J. L. Austin’s idea of performativity; Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (2005) argument for the primacy of perception and our embodied understanding and relation in/with/of the world; Edward Casey’s (1989) interpretation of the embodied nature of enculturation (and the encultured nature of embodiment); and Pierre Bourdieu’s (2003, 2010) notion of habitus. These form the conceptual underpinning, elucidation and development of the central notion, and argument, of this chapter: that aspects of particular re-enactment groups are developing, or could be utilised to develop, something resembling what dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster (1995) terms kinaesthetic empathy.
with bodies that no longer act. It is for these theoretical reasons that I specifically frame these re-enactments as *embodied* and *performative*.

Readers may, at this point, experience a “face-palm” moment. This dizzying array of theories and concepts might seem to be leading to an over-theorisation or a case of too many cooks creating a shallow skimming of a curdled surface. As I will seek to demonstrate, however, drawing these theorists towards (inter)action assists to address the limitations and shortcomings of each, both in themselves and in relation to this topic. Through such an approach, we might consolidate and enhance our understanding (or interpretation) of the relation between what Agnew described as ‘experience and understanding’, ‘affect’ and ‘evidence’ and, in order to do so, the connections between nature and culture, the corporeal and the cognitive, the past and the present. In so doing, I begin to assess how these re-enactors can, cannot, and could engage *kinaesthetically, performatively* and *cognitively* with (aspects of) the past.

Together, these chapters assess the potential of re-enactment ‘as a source and as a method,’ in concert with Pickering, who states that ‘despite its obvious pitfalls and dangers, there is much that a careful historian [and, I would add, ethnographer and performance studies scholar] can learn about context, about material conditions, about possibility, from re-enactment as a methodology’ (2010, 126–7). What effect does, or could, participating in activities derived from a past culture – seeking to eat foods they ate, dance steps they danced, joust like they jousted – have on our connection to and understanding of the past, and present? What significance does the performativity of re-enacting have for learning history and for the fostering of (sub- and trans-)cultural communities? If these activities bring us closer to those bodies that no longer act, how are they doing so, and with what significance?
Chapter One
(Re)viewing the literature

This chapter will explore significant scholarship which addresses how historical re-enactment has – and has *not* – been understood as a somatic, performance-based pedagogy and historiography. These key themes will be discussed in relation to three key areas of scholarship – History, Performance Studies and interdisciplinary collaborations, primarily between History, English/Literature, Cultural Studies, Sociology and Anthropology. I will also briefly address the earlier wave of literature on re-enactment, which sprang up briefly in Folklore and Museum Studies in the 1980s. Due to the limited academic work on recreational re-enactment, I have broadened the scope of this review to cover historical re-enactment more broadly, including living history museums and historical reality television shows. I do not, however, include analysis of how the techniques of these particular media forms and genres are being utilised; rather I focus on the engagement with the themes and ideas piquant to historical re-enactment more broadly, and my thesis in particular.

A recurrent and predominant notion in all these fields is that of *authenticity*, a concept too readily utilised as a means of claiming (and disclaiming) authority, both within and outside the institution. This notion raises questions which warrant further consideration. In what ways is authenticity understood and approached by re-enactors and re-enactment scholars? How do conceptions and approaches to this differ across and within academic and re-enactment histories? Is authenticity an essential component of epistemology? We need to acknowledge and rigorously engage with the role public pedagogies play in prying open the determined grasp academic history has on authenticity, opening our minds (and bodies) to the possibility that we are outgrowing the clutches of hierarchical, often polarised modes of knowledge. By engaging with these issues, I hope
to illustrate, as indicated in my introduction, the importance of bringing Performance Studies and History into greater communication, in order to more comprehensively contribute to the wider, burgeoning subject of embodied and performative ways of knowing, remembering, exhibiting and (re)creating the past.

I will first roughly sketch key academic turns in History that have influenced (and been resisted by) re-enactment scholarship, and with which I engage throughout this thesis. The core theoretical and methodological approaches of relevant scholarship will then be examined, both comparatively and with focused analysis of one or two core works from each discipline; the latter are selected for being either the most cogent or most representative examples. Through this, a critique of traditional historiographic perspectives, the anti-theatrical prejudice (including unawareness regarding the significance of, and ways to engage with, performance) and the continued discomfort expressed towards bodily doing in History (and other disciplines) will be substantiated. I will then evaluate significant themes emerging in the literature, aspects of the practice which have, until recently, been mainly criticised or disregarded. I posit these elements as essential to understanding the implications of the practice, and argue that they warrant considerable further attention, aligning with the emerging shift in perspective demonstrated by scholars such as Agnew (2004, 2007, 2009); Bush-Bailley (2013); Cook (2004a, 2004b), de Groot (2008); Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1993); Lutticken (2005a, 2005b); McCalman (2010) Pickering (2010); Schneider (2011); and Snow (1993). In so doing, the gaps and misconceptions in the research, and how my work endeavours to address these, will be established.

**Turning heads: the (in)significance of the ethnographic, performative and affective turns**

In our dedication to the archive, historians often overlook bodily, performance-based traditions of history, particularly those arising within the so-called Western cultures. Although various schools
and movements within the discipline have introduced new approaches, History remains a relatively traditional branch of academia. As Raphael Samuel argued over two decades ago:

History, in the hands of the professional historian, is apt to present itself as an esoteric form of knowledge. It fetishizes archive-based research, as it has done ever since the Rankean revolution [in the nineteenth century] – or counter-revolution – in scholarship. ([1994] 2012, 3)

Post-structuralist theorists have rigorously contested von Ranke’s notion of objectivity, but, at least within Western historiography, the adherence to the archive remains, as does the tendency to concentrate on sanctioned, traditional subjects and methods. The rise of the Annales School did precipitate a shift away from so-called great events and personages to the practices of “ordinary” people. This type of scholarship included analysis of performative events such as pageants and festivals as reflections of culture and ‘mentalités’. Such works, however, frequently contain scant description of the actual ‘doing.’ Just as the body has, in Western thought, mainly been subordinate to the mind, so too has action been relegated to a lower sphere than thinking. Foucault’s destabilising of the self-body dichotomy through his notion of cultural constitution through bodily inscription (discussed in chapter seven) provoked some change in perspective, but for many, the hierarchy remains. Furthermore, the notion of the body as an object, rather than as a lived subject, der Körper rather than der Leib, remains.12

The demarcation of what is (and is not) real history continues, and it is the few, rather than the majority, that break these conventions. While the ethnographic turn in History facilitated the study of numerous Indigenous communities, many of which have a rich repertoire of bodily, performance-based histories, this interest has rarely extended to embodied practices closer to home.13 Adherence to written history and the primacy of the archive, to the exclusion of somatic,

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12 For more on these and other interpretations and manifestations of body, see Edward Casey (1989) “The Ghost of Embodiment: on Bodily Habitudes and Schemata” and Anna Fenemore (et al. 2011) “Body.”
13 An exception to this was the flare of interest in ‘learning-through doing’ in the 1920s. This, however, was official education policy and not necessarily reflected in academia. For more on this topic, see Stephen Gapps (2003b) “Performing the Past: A Cultural History of Historical Re-enactments.”
performative traditions, restricts the means to record (and create) history to a (predominantly white, male) elite (Connerton 1989; Roach 1996; Schneider 2011; Taylor 2003). This conservatism has led many researchers to ignore the potential of embodied ways of knowing. There are, as the above-cited writers identify, significant political/socio-historical issues involved in ignoring or denigrating embodied histories. Historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis (1981) and Raphael Samuel ([1994] 2012) have criticised the tendency in traditional Western historiography to fixate on so-called history-making events (dominated by male agents), literally writing minorities out of history. Taylor encourages us to consider ‘whose memories, whose trauma, “disappear” if only archival knowledge is valorised and granted permanence?’ (2003, 193). Schneider empathises with Taylor and Connerton’s wariness of the power the written record housed in the archive has wielded over histories that are embodied in cultural traditions. She asserts that, in order to challenge the status the former holds over the latter, we need to further destabilise the binary between them – an endeavour I discuss in detail later in this chapter and pursue in chapter seven.

Reflecting a broader performative turn in scholarship, arguably precipitated by Erving Goffman’s influential work on social performance, Greg Dening reconceptualised history not as a text to be read, but rather as a performance that is created.

History – the past transformed into words or paint or dance or play – is always a performance. An everyday performance as we present our selective narratives about what has happened at the kitchen table, to the courts, to the taxman, at the graveside. A quite staged performance when we present it to our examiners, to the collegiality of our disciplines, whenever we play the role of "historian." History is theatre. (2002, 1)

The performative turn has not, however, often directed us towards considering the actual performing of history in western culture, particularly within live performance practices, such as recreational re-enactment. This reflects a broader rejection of the pedagogic possibilities of doing, stemming from the continued influence of the Cartesian split – mind as separate from body.¹⁴ Many

¹⁴ For more information on this topic, see, for example, Judith Okely (2007) “Fieldwork Embodied” and Rebecca Schneider (2011) Performing Remains.
amongst even the most progressive historians, who rose from their armchairs and embraced ethnographic method and sometimes even imaginative and performative historiographies, have rigorously refuted the ability of those outside academia to do the same, particularly vilifying attempts to do so through bodily engagement (see, for example, Clendinnen 2006; Dening 1992; Inglis 2008; Lake 2011). This was recently and potently demonstrated by ethnohistorian Inga Clendinnen’s (2006) denigration of historical-fiction writer Kate Grenville for utilising creative methods (similar to ones Clendinnen had used) to produce fictional (rather than ethnohistorical) narrative, which, Clendinnen argued, could not in any way claim historical veracity.  

Even Dening, who embraces the performative nature of history, paints re-enactment as simplistic, offensively illusionary, and detrimental to endeavours to understand both the past and present. ‘I am not much for re-enactments’, he expressed, as they:

tend to hallucinate a past as merely the present in funny dress. They give modernity and fashion a fillip by making the past look quaint. They patronise the human condition in hindsight superiority. They remove the responsibility of remedying the present by distracted, unreflective search for details of a past whose remedying will make no difference. (1992, 4)

And yet, the book to which the above belongs, Mr Bligh’s Bad Language, is structured by acts and scenes, rather than chapters, and Dening speaks of historical personages in terms of their performances in particular events. Perhaps this is why he seems at such pains to demarcate his own work from re-enactment, as one might assume Dening would support this performance-based mode of interacting with the past. While his approach to History aligns closely, in some ways, with that of many re-enactors, he states quite clearly that while he has ‘an ambition in this history of the Bounty to be ethnographic’ he hopes ‘this ethnographic history is not considered a re-enactment’ (1992, 5).

Reflecting what was, until recently, an almost uniform disciplinary dismissal of re-enactment, he awards less than one page to the topic and moves hastily on, in what is an otherwise thoughtful and eloquent work.

Dening’s critique is, in part, accurate; the problematic aspects of re-enactment must and have been discussed (see, for example, Agnew 2004, 2007; Agnew and Lamb 2009; Brewer 2010; Cook 2004; Handler and Saxton 1988; Magelssen 2004, 2007; McCalman 2004; McCalman and Pickering 2010). But, such responses also reflect a patrolling of our borders and anxiety about the rapidly shifting conception of history (Brewer 2010; de Groot 2008; Pickering 2005).

Schneider urges us to destabilise the binary between affective and analytical engagement by embracing and advancing the ‘affective turn’ in scholarship (2011, 35); a project my own work seeks to pursue. As discussed in the introduction, others, such as Agnew, are also recognising the significance of the concept of affect in understanding re-enactment and the need to evaluate its function and potential as part of re-enactment’s methodology (2007, 299-300; 309). I explore the notion of affect, in detail, in chapter seven.

While historians may be more prominent in the discourse on re-enactment than anthropologists, the effects of these turns are, arguably, more notable amongst the latter. It is only to be expected that anthropologists writing on re-enactment would utilise or advocate ethnographic fieldwork, but they also appear to be more open to the potential of the affective, performance-based nature of the practice. Handler and Saxton’s (1988) frequently-cited article is an early example of such work and one which I refer to throughout this chapter. More recently, anthropologist Judith Schlehe, writing with re-enactor and American Studies professor Wolfgang Hochbruck, argues that ‘it is of great importance […] that analyses [of re-enactment, particularly in relation to the inter- and trans-cultural] are grounded in empirical field research’ (2010, 8). Schlehe and Hochbruck suggest that the ‘contemporary proliferation of forms and formations of living histories as drama […] has to do with the affective turn in history’ and that the ‘theatrical and didactic possibilities of reenactment range far beyond “battlefield karaoke” or individual-scale identity politics’ (15). Embracing what they perceive as the theatrical nature of re-enactment, Schlehe and Hochbruck draw parallel between some forms of the practice and Brecht’s Educational Play, in which actors, through
performance, ‘learn about the thoughts, the feelings, the responsibilities and the perspectives of the roles and the functions these roles have – or had – in the society represented’ (15-16). In her work on American Civil War re-enactment, Mads Daugbjerg’s (2013) actively references fieldwork and ‘takes the role of objects and their experiential potential seriously’ (724), endeavouring to understand how re-enactors’ ‘experiential sense of authenticity comes about’ (2013, 728). Citing Handler and Saxton, she emphasises the centrality of experience and touch in re-enactment’s process of ‘patchworking’ the past – assembling and connecting ‘human actors, artefacts and places’ in an attempt to reach into the past in order to find meaning in the present (724-5).

The idea of history

‘History […] is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind.’


Although it was within a prominent school of thought within History that the ‘task of the historian’ was defined to be ‘to re-enact the past in [one’s] own mind’ (Collingwood 282), it is historians who have most protested the possibilities of re-enactment as historiography. As McCalman and Pickering recognise:

some historians have responded to reenactment with an admixture of bemusement and derision. Greg Dening’s irritated dismissal of the practice as the ‘present in funny dress' still echoes through the academy; Fred Inglis’s more recent characterisation of re-enactment as ‘dangerous tosh’ could become the bookend for Dening’s quip. In between, the profession appears to be bent on ignoring reenactment, as if by closing their collective eyes it will go away. It won’t. (2010, 2)

Much of the work on re-enactment written by historians has been on film re-enactment, either in the form of re-enactments within history documentaries, or, more commonly, historical reality television shows, such as the BBC’s 2002 series, The Ship, which retraces James Cook’s journey on The Endeavour. Some of the historians discussed here, including Cook (2004a) and McCalman (2004), analysed their experiences as participant-consultants on this show as part of broader discussions of historical re-enactment. While early works in this field focused on criticising and
dismissing the movement, historians soon began to address the question of whether re-enactment ‘should be taken seriously’, mainly via discussing its historical sensibilities and flaws as a form of historical inquiry (see, for example, Brewer 2005; Cook 2004a, 2004b; Hall 1994, McCalman 2004). For many of these critics, re-enactment is overtly nostalgic, reflecting an escapist function from the pressures of (post)modernity – a topic I address in detail in chapter six. Re-enactors’ perceived obsession with authenticity (discussed in detail below) is another key concern. Other central issues are: the collapsing of distinctions between past and present (Agnew 2004, 2007; Handler and Saxton 1988; Hall 2004; Hawes 1991); and a sacrificing of cognitive engagement for somatic, theatrical experience, which is mainly considered to be a problematic methodology (Agnew 2004; Brewer 2010; Cook 2004b; McCalman 2004).

Some historians have emphasised the importance of the ‘poetics’ of re-enactment and the historical sensibilities it portrays (Brewer 2005, 2010; Cook 2005; Gapps 2003b). John Brewer has gone so far as to claim that ‘any serious discussion of reenactment’ must address these themes, which offer a ‘more formal’ approach than an ‘ethnomethodological’ one (2010, 79). Iain McCalman is emerging as one of the foremost historians on historical re-enactment, but despite his experience as a consultant and participant in film re-enactment, he approaches the practice with wary steps and narrowed eyes. ‘As a professional historian’, he stated, ‘I’m sceptical about most reenactments because they pretend to bridge the gap between past and present’ (2009, 167). This captures an almost collective perspective amongst the few historians willing to address re-enactment of this kind. McCalman (2004) is, however, one of the few writers on the topic to address the physical conditions and activities of re-enactments he actively participated in.

Public historian and re-enactor Stephen Gapps (2003b, 2007, 2009, 2010) challenges the gulf historians such as Brewer and McCalman perceive between academic and re-enactment approaches to History. Gapps argues that the prevalent perception of re-enactment as ‘an obsession with the
objects of nostalgia, the creation of a setting of obsessive detail that will undoubtedly provoke a feeling or connection with the past’ is inaccurate, asserting that re-enactments function as ‘provocative performed histories that can generate historical understanding in a popular and accessible form’ (2007, 70). While some of his work suggests an underlying agenda to raise the cultural capital of his practice and that of his fellow re-enactors, he also critically analyses the limitations and problematics of the practice, demonstrating an awareness which, contrary to widespread claims, my research suggests is common amongst re-enactors. Gapps’ PhD dissertation provides a ‘cultural history of reenactment in Australia’, which reflects on the ‘pleasures, promises and problems’ of ‘dressing up as if from the past’ (2002, xxi). It is unclear whether Gapps conducted fieldwork for this research, or whether he drew only on his experience as a re-enactor, but in convergence with almost all of the work on re-enactment produced by historians (traditional or public), most of his pieces focus on re-enactments' historical sensibilities. His salient piece positing re-enactors as ‘mobile monuments' (2010) is, however, an exception. His writings offer one of the most comprehensive sets of work on re-enactment, rare in their focus on what we both term ‘recreational re-enacting’. Gapps, however, mainly examines the re-enacting of specific events, particularly civil war re-enactment which, I have suggested, are a related but separate form to the recreational, cultural re-enactment my own work examines.

Gapps’ work was at the forefront of a move towards critical reflexivity regarding the sense of threat and corresponding prejudice that re-enactment’s highly popular, accessible format elicits for some historians (Brewer 2005, 2010; Gapps 2003a; Pickering 2004, 2010; Schneider 2011). As suggested at the close of the previous section, some historians who criticised re-enactment in the past have mellowed their tone. McCalman and Pickering assert, for example, that ‘taking reenactment seriously as a methodology is worth the risk’ and ‘its potential is best explored through an interdisciplinary lens' (2010, 32). This ‘interdisciplinary lens’ is occurring in the form of edited collections.
Further afield: re-enactment as a widely multidisciplinary topic

Cross-pollination between disciplines is assembling a diverse range of topics and approaches in an increasingly interconnected forum. Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb led the way with a conference and subsequent themed issue of Criticism in 2004 and an edited collection, Settler and Creole Re-enactment (2009). The latter is the first in the series, Re-enactment History, to which McCalman and Pickering’s (2010) contribution also belongs. Lamb and Agnew are key players in establishing re-enactment as a contemporary topic of research on an international scale. The first two of their multidisciplinary gatherings examined what re-enactment is, its limitations as a form of historiography, how it reflects the present (rather than the past), and how we (academics) should respond to the practice. In Settler and Creole Reenactment, Agnew and Lamb, along with their contributors, sought to ‘survey new kinds of histories by breaking with traditional approaches’, framing re-enactment as a ‘new kind’ of ‘radical history’, which is ‘reanimating and representing’ the past (2009, ii). In point of fact, however, re-enactment is by no means new; it is the conceiving of re-enactment as a form of public history by academics that is novel. The essays traverse disciplines including Public History, Sociology and English/Literature, urging readers to reconsider not only ‘what we know about the past, but also how we know it’ (ii). The scope of what is considered re-enactment here is very broad indeed, including re-enactment in/as photography, national parks, reality television, heritage festivals, museum programs, art exhibitions, performance art, literature that re-creates the past through narrative, and cultural behaviours as re-enactments of past perspectives. Mirroring the trend in academic literature, almost none of the works in either of these publications examine recreational re-enactment. Their wide scope suggests an exciting shift in the literature but presents a danger of generalising varying practices under the re-enactment umbrella, particularly when the authors speak for and of all re-enactors and re-enactments collectively.
**Performance and/as history**

As the above suggests, the practice of historical re-enactment is becoming an increasingly salient topic, but it remains mainly on the fringe, held at arm’s length, or evaluated as a text, rather than engaged with as a performance. There have been, however, a few significant analyses of re-enactment within Performance Studies, including Snow’s *Performing the Pilgrims* (1993) and Schneider’s *Performing Remains* (2011). Both, in different ways, consider the historiographical significance of the experiential, bodily and performance-based methods of re-enactment. These two works also offer, respectively, one of the earliest and one of the most recent books on the topic from this discipline. I discuss *Performing Remains* in more depth than the other works in this review in order to reflect its current prominence in the field of Performance Studies and its relevance to my project.

The work of performance ethnographer and professional re-enactor Stephen Snow provides a stepping stone between the first wave of practitioner-led writing and the second wave of more concretely academic scholarship. In his 1993 book, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role Playing at Plimoth Plantation*, Snow utilises theory from Anthropology and Performance Studies to examine re-enactment as ‘ethnohistorical role playing’, a conception which, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, offers possibilities which warrant further analysis. Drawing on Schechner’s notion of environmental theatre, Clifford Geertz’s drama analogy (understanding culture as and through performance), and Victor Turner’s social drama model, Snow examines aspects of ritual in recreated village re-enacting, exploring the potential performance holds to persuade through illusion (xxii; 8; 48). Snow concentrates on how this form of re-enactment is a cultural performance, how it has transformed over time (particularly in terms of its increasing historical accuracy), and whether or not, and how, it can be considered ‘theatre’. He utilises an ethnographic methodology positioned from his insider status as an employee of the museum. This leads, at times, to statements which present his own assertions as collective experience, rather than
acknowledging the specificity of his interpretation or considering a wider range of perceptions from other practitioners. It does enable, however, cogent insight into the ‘backstage’ areas and aspects of living history at this museum.

Schneider’s *Performing Remains* (2011) is perhaps the only work in Performance Studies to substantially examine recreational re-enactment. Although historical re-enactment is not the sole focus of this work – it also explores performance art reconstructions, photography and the relationship between temporalities, history, memory, the record and the bodily, performative live – Schneider’s analysis of the practice, and these topics, is a significant contribution to the field. Her productive appropriations of concepts from Philosophy, Performance Studies and Historiography, and the arguments she offers, are useful in understanding not only her topics of photography, civil war and performance art re-enactments, but also the relation between performance and history in other re-enactment practices, and historiography more broadly. As this implies, Schneider offers a significant theoretical engagement absent from many other accounts. Drawing on queer theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and, of course, performance theory, she proffers a significant conceptualisation of re-enactment in terms of theatricality, repetition, and embodied, affective inquiry.

While the political dimensions of civil war re-enactment deeply trouble Schneider, she commits to a serious consideration of the practice as a form of history that is rare in the academy. Re-enactment (including both recreational war re-enactments and ‘replayed’ performance art) is defined in *Performing Remains* as ‘an intense, embodied inquiry into temporal repetition, temporal recurrence,’ and a popular, practice-based, public version of the academic ‘memory industry’ (2011, 1). In a succinct history of civil war re-enactment in the U.S., Schneider delineates between two standards of re-enactors, ‘farbs’ and ‘hardcores’; a ‘farb’ is a re-enactor whose practice lacks historical accuracy, whilst a ‘hardcore’ pursues authenticity almost obsessively (14-15; 54-55). Neither
of these terms was used by any of the re-enactors I spoke with, suggesting their use might be uncommon in Australian re-enactment circles. Farbs and hardcores are united, Schneider suggests, in two of their core motivations for re-enacting – a desire for simpler times and defined gender roles (55). The examples of re-enactment I studied are reasonably consistent with this, but I found the re-enactors’ relations with these themes to be more varied and complex than those Schneider experienced amongst civil war buffs. She also suggests that U.S. Civil War re-enactors are ‘fighting’ to ‘keep the war alive’ and that ‘many would say “it’s not over”’ (8). This worrying sentiment does not translate to the re-enactment groups I researched and seems less likely to be present amongst cultural recreational re-enactors in general, who, as I will demonstrate, often prioritise community, inclusivity, and enjoyment in their practice.

As mentioned in the introduction, Schneider cogently utilises Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity and sedimentation/sedimented acts – concepts I also appropriate, but in a different way. Schneider draws on the ‘temporal condition’ of sedimented acts – and more specifically the extension of this concept by Elizabeth Freeman in her positing of queer temporal drag – to trouble Western adherence to temporal linearity, disrupting the seemingly inexorable forward flow of time and the supposedly inherent ephemerality of performance (2011, 6-7; 102). Schneider suggests that in both performance art and civil war re-enactment, there are moments when the boundary between past and present becomes porous, through the repetition of sedimented acts, allowing affective experience to seep through (14-16; 32-35). Arguing against the supposedly inherent ephemerality of performance, Schneider asserts the ability of performance – social, theatrical and the many subgenres in between – to remain, through sedimentation and the repeated acts that create it. In this interpretation, sedimented

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16 In his brief thesis on Renaissance festivals, Matthew Johnson (2010) also utilises Butler’s notion of performativity. He uses the concept in conjunction with Carl Jung’s archetypes to argue that female ‘Ren Fest’ participants disrupt and invert the male gaze (in Laura Mulvey’s (1975) sense of the term), through performing archetypal figures, such as “the wench”. I have not addressed this work further because, although it includes promising fieldwork and ideas, there is a marked need to further develop the interpretation and utilisation of these notions.
acts are understood as ‘gestic compositions’ ([10], which function as a path to access the past, to critically re-perceive the past, and to record the past, bodily (6-7; 10-11; 92; 102). Taking a step further, Schneider reframes History as ‘a set of sedimented acts that are not the historical acts themselves but the act of securing any incident backwards – the repeated act of securing memory’ (104). What is significant here is not the positing of History as a play for power through control of the past – this is already widely accepted, especially amongst historians – but rather the emphasis on corporeal action, which ‘resituate[s] the site of any knowing of history as body-to-body transmission’ and thus (re)places the archive as a form of repertoire (104). The boldness of this claim, mentioned in my introduction, ripples through current Performance Studies discourse.

Schneider’s call to consider more closely the corporeal acts that form an intrinsic part of the historiographic process speaks cogently to the present reclaiming of body; indeed, discussion is increasingly moving in this direction. While my process as a scholar is certainly an embodied, performative act and I perceive the sources I utilise as performative, I do not consider them – as objects – to be embodied; being the product of and actually constituting performance are not one and the same, and I perceive a need to differentiate between them.

My application of sedimented acts differs from Schneider’s, focusing on Butler’s implicit suggestion of sedimentation as a performative process of embodied enculturation – or an enculturated embodiment – rather than its complication of temporality and the opportunities for ‘re-do’ and ‘re-vision’ it facilitates (Johnson 2015). My objective diverges from, but also, I hope, complements Schneider’s; I explore sedimentation in relation to the educative and sociological possibilities of re-enactment, grounded in embodied knowledge and, more specifically, the development of somatic sensibilities, which mirror Foster’s notion of kinaesthetic empathy and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. Essentially, my emphasis is on culture, pedagogy and ontology, rather than temporality, memory and record. These perhaps oversimplifying distinctions are far from binaries and can be understood as points of interconnection and overlap between our work, linked through performing...
bodies and the epistemological possibilities they (re)present.

Methodologically, Schneider frames her process as ethno graphic but clarifies that the product is not an ethnography; field notes do not feature particularly in *Performing Remains*. Exercising a critical self-reflexivity absent from many other works, Schneider explains that she attended re-enactments, but did not participate in them, and at times was confined to a highly restricted view of the proceedings. She also acknowledges and emphasises her political concerns and the way these influenced her research. While not a primary objective of her work, Schneider engages, to some extent, with re-enactors’ own points of view, offering a rare ‘outsider’ insight into recreational re-enactment, which considers ‘inside’ voices.

**What the folk say**

Although the practice is an increasingly topical subject for scholars of Performance Studies and History, re-enactment as a topic of academic inquiry has poked its costumed head up before – in the Folklore movement of the 1980s, following a few publications in Museum Studies in the 1970s. This ‘first wave’ of sustained scholarship on the topic mainly referred to the practice as ‘living history’, rather than re-enactment, which most likely derived from its focus on living history museums. Writers in this field tended to import their previous experience as living historians into their scholarship, often mobilising their work to champion the legitimacy of their practice as a democratic, populist form of history. At the forefront of this fledgeling movement was folklorist, public historian and re-enactor, Jay Anderson. His article ‘Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums’ (1982), his book *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (1984), and his edited collection *A Living History Reader: Museums* (1991)\(^\text{17}\) have wielded significant, if often unacknowledged, influence on subsequent scholarship. Many of the works in the edited collection, including chapters by scholars in Museum Studies, Historical Archeology and Anthropology, are

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\(^{17}\) Although originally intended to be a series, a second volume does not seem to have been released to date.
imbued with a distinctly folkloric flavour, frequently concentrating on the way re-enactment savours the everyday life of everyday folk. Some of the works from Museum Studies do, however, critically assess living history programmes at museums in terms their inclusion and exclusion of aspects of the past, and how the included aspects are represented (Fortier [1978] 1991; Hawes [1976] 1991). Establishing what has since become almost a trend, Anderson and his co-contributors focused, as alluded to above, on what I term institutional living history (in museums, established tourist sites and experimental archaeology programs) rather than on recreational re-enactment.

Anderson’s work sketches the history of re-enactment, mapping three key areas – living history in museums, living history as research (utilised in archaeological and historic sites) and more briefly, living history as a hobby. This differentiation is significant, as the divergences in and between forms of living history are often overlooked. Variations need to be acknowledged, however, within the third style of re-enactment considered by Anderson – the societies of hobby re-enactors, whom Anderson refers to as ‘weekend warriors’ (a term that has come into popular usage). As mentioned in the introduction, I believe we need to differentiate between historical re-enactors who re-enact events and those who engage, often more playfully, with a historical milieu, practicing what I term recreational, cultural re-enactment. Anderson (1982, 1984, 1991) emphasises both the pedagogic and entertainment aspects of living history, suggesting that the practice experiments with techniques to ascertain, interpret and represent history by the public, for the public. He perceives the three main functions of living history to be research, interpretation and play (1991, 3). This aligns with what he suggests is a custom common amongst (certain types) of re-enactors – to define their approach as a form of method acting (1984, 13). This perspective has been echoed by Horwitz (1998); Snow (1993); and Schneider (2011).

Anderson and some of his peers ground their research in observation. However, as their fieldwork consists of previous experience through careers in the industry, their methodology is not
ethnographic as such. A tendency to present their motivations and perceptions as reflective of those of all living historians inhibits modal variation and the multiplicity of voices and perspectives of their fellow practitioners.

**Re-enactment and authenticity: a troubled (and troublesome) relationship**

Amongst the many perspectives of and on re-enactors, authenticity is a much-vocalised theme. The obsessive pursuit of this unattainable goal by (certain types of) re-enactors is paralleled by an almost equal fixation on the (in)authentic by academic literature on the practice. Discussion of this topic centres on several sub-themes: the re-enactors' quest for authenticity and how this reflects an inauthentic present, how and why authenticity is pursued, why re-enactors can never achieve real authenticity, authenticity as a support for claims to pedagogy, and why such claims are built on unstable ground. Examining the lens through which researchers are viewing this topic enables valuable insight into how different schools of academic thought comprehend (and utilise) notions of the authentic. In such a reading, the preoccupation with authenticity is revealed as a battleground, where academics and public enthusiasts clamour for ownership of the past and the means by which we know it.

Re-enactors are commonly portrayed as “sticklers” for authenticity (Anderson 1984; Agnew 2004; Gapps 2003b; Hall 2004; Handler and Saxton 1988; Lamb 2008; Luticken 2005, Magelssen 2007; Schneider 2011). The term ‘authenticity’ is often used synonymously with historical accuracy, both in the scholarship and the practice (Anderson 1984; Agnew 2004; Gapps 2003b; Hall 2004; Handler and Saxton 1988; Luticken 2005; Magelssen 2007; Schneider 2011; Turner 1990). Scholars have generally been in accord that this so-called obsession manifests most potently in relation to ‘period’ paraphernalia – costume (including footwear, headwear and bags) and equipment, such as armour, weapons and eating utensils, with re-enactors often attempting to replicate such items in exact
detail (Agnew 2004; Elder 2009; Gapps 2003b; Hall 2004; Lamb 2008; Magelssen 2004; Schneider 2011; Schwarz 2010; Turner 1990). Authenticity has also been discussed in regard to other aspects, in particular, the set, language, and skills such as fighting, sewing and crafting (Handler and Saxton 1988; Snow 1993). The meticulous scrutiny of material intricacies – along with the (re)creating of (not always pleasant) experiences – led some scholars to conceive the practice as ‘extreme history’ (Agnew 2004; Lamb 2008; McCalman 2004).

As this indicates, authenticity is also associated with individual, somatic experience. Handler and Saxton suggest that there are actually two forms of authenticity in re-enactment – the first, what they term ‘isomorphism’ (exact replication) converges with interpretations of authenticity as accuracy (1988, 242-3). The second, they suggest, is attached to individual experience, through which living historians seek to connect with a more “real” sense of self and the world (243). This other form of desired authenticity, Handler and Saxton argue, ‘permeates living history but is not consciously understood by practitioners as central to the task of historical simulation’ (243). De Groot argues that personal experience is ‘the key to […] legitimacy’ in ‘historicised performance’, which he frames as the ‘keynote to contemporary society’s obsession with authenticity’ (2008, 103). Re-enactors’ pursuit of supposedly authentic experience and identity is discussed in chapter six of this dissertation. Similarly, Magelssen frames authenticity as a technique mobilised by living history museums to claim credibility and authority for their historical representations (2002, 23-4). This resonates with assertions from scholars such as Agnew (2007), Brewer (2010), Cook (2004), Daugbjerg (2013), McCalman (2010) and Pickering (2010) that re-enactors’ claims to a unique methodology are founded on individual, somatic experience. In parallel with Handler and Saxton, I found other underlying ways of perceiving and pursuing authenticity within my case studies, which were often not consciously articulated, but were nonetheless prominent and significant.
Some writers perceive genuine authenticity in re-enactment’s (re)creation of historic clothing and other period objects, residing in the link (however tenuous) they fashion with material cultures of the past (Anderson 1984, 1991; Daugbjerg 2013; Deetz 1984; Fortin 1984; Magelssen 2007; Nye 1984; Pinney 2009; Quinn 1984). For some, these items need to be genuine artefacts, but others perceive a historical resonance in recreated objects as well (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1993; Snow 1993). While significance is generally attributed to the objects themselves, experimental archaeologists in living history have written on the discoveries that may be made by recreating and actively using historic articles and technologies (Deetz 1984; Hawes 1991; Snow 1993). Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1993, 1998) perceives epistemological value in the process of recreating historic objects and Daugbjerg suggests that such objects do not ‘in themselves hold the magic moments or powerful experience […]’, but must be animated, worn, given life’ (730) – notions which my work further explores. These writers do not analyse (beyond passing comment) the process and significance of skill acquisition in itself (be it forging replicated weapons, weaving tapestries, or learning the steps and deportment of a Georgian dance) as a form of embodied knowledge. I examine and theorise these aspects in detail in chapter seven, demonstrating their importance to understanding re-enactment and its pedagogical potential and how we might assess both their potential and problems.

Discussion of authenticity has tended not to differentiate between different styles of re-enactment. Approaches to authenticity in living history museums, for example, are often distinctly different from those of civil war re-enactors. Both differ drastically from cultural re-enactment groups, which often celebrate a playful artistic license with the past, as reflected in the name of the largest society of this kind, the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) (Cramer 2010; Erisman 1998). Within my case studies, I found that ways of approaching, and conceiving, authenticity vary considerably, at times diverging from the historical accuracy that is the focus of much of the literature I have surveyed. Minute detail may be the lifeblood of “hardcore” re-enactors, but
authenticity is less essential or, as I will illustrate, assumes different forms amongst those I researched with, most of whom would fall into the “farb” or “mainstreamer” categories often referred to in American re-enactment and associated scholarship (see discussion of Schneider, above). My work demonstrates the diversity within each case study individually in chapters three to five and comparatively, in more detail, in chapters six and seven.

The perceived failure of re-enactment to achieve complete authenticity is often presented as evidence of the fallibility of the practice as a form of public historiography. The re-enactors’ quest for authenticity, however, is not lost. While non-practitioner researchers almost uniformly agree that an authentic invocation of the past is impossible, there are those that identify auxiliary components that (often unintentionally) achieve a certain level of authenticity. Handler and Saxton (1988) construe re-enactors’ desire for a holistic, authentic existence as an authentic reflection of contemporary society, a notion that reverberates through Hall’s (2004) and Turner’s (1990) assertion that re-enactors are trying to resolve a postmodern crisis of identity. Gapps (2003b), however, repudiates such claims, identifying a need to handle re-enactment with more practical gloves. Schneider (2011) understands re-enactment as authentic to the way its followers wish to imagine the past, while Brewer (2005, 2010) posits living history as poetic (rather than literal) truth. Snow (1993) describes re-enactment as a juxtaposition of illusion and actuality. Similarly, Lutticken (2005b) frames it as mythic history, advocating an infusion of “real” history to unleash its potential. One of the most affirming evaluations from a non-practitioner is Lamb’s (2008) assertion that re-enactment can partially but very accurately recreate historical circumstances when details and authenticity are rigorously pursued.

Those who have not been averse to getting their boots dirty have realised through their fieldwork that re-enactors are often very aware of the limitations of their practice and the infeasibility of achieving total authenticity (Gapps 2003b; de Groot 2008; Handler and Saxton 1988;
Schneider 2011). Handler and Saxton have suggested that re-enactors demonstrate a self-reflexivity in their conscious (re)creation of past peoples and events, and consider how re-enactors create and respond as self-as-other and self-in-other-time.

What few have tackled, however, are alternative readings of authenticity amongst practitioners, or alternative methods of assessing these approaches. Yes, authenticity is woven into the accuracy of the garments, armour and various apparatuses over which living historians labour, but what of the experience of authenticity (re)creating, wearing, harnessing or moving in/with these creations? Is an embodied authenticity evoked by shaping your body with bodily techniques of a bygone era, literally altering your physicality over time? Should we not also consider the sensual affect of historical cuisine on our palate, the texture of historical textiles on our skin, the authenticity that resides in sounds, smells and spaces? What of our affective engagement with historic music, dance, space and place? The inaccuracies and limitations of re-enactment are frequently cited to underline perceived inadequacies of this form of historiography, but if, as Schneider argues, something authentic may be found in/through disparity, may not the inauthentic in fact enhance our understanding, or be moulded to function pedagogically? These significant questions have not been sufficiently explored. This dissertation seeks to rectify this gap, embracing the multilateral seen amongst those who re-enact, rather than imposing a view from a “safe” distance, usually on high.

**It’s just a jump to the left: ‘time warp’, or warping time?**

Dancing hand in hand with authenticity and performativity is a challenging concept when dealing with the temporal: can history “come alive”, or already “be living”, in the present? Responses to this have been diverse. Most writers have retorted emphatically in the negative, but there are some who have responded in the affirmative, with a caveat. Re-enactors depict the sensation of being in the past as one of the core objectives of their pursuit of history: the idea being that if you immerse
yourself deeply in the authentic, you will experience a momentary, transformative sensation described by Horwitz as a ‘period rush’ and by many battle re-enactors as “wargasm” (Agnew 2004; Horwitz 1998; Lamb 2008; Schneider 2011). Anderson dubbed living history practices as ‘time machines’, celebrating their ‘potential to transport visitors mentally and emotionally into the past’ (1984, 17). He does, however, acknowledge the impossibility of ascertaining the authenticity of these (re)created experiences and advocates ‘resist[ing] the temptation to claim too much for our time machines’, although the latter seems inconsistent with some of his other assertions (1984, 189). Jackson and Kidd (2011) also consider the “experience” of another time at living history museums, suggesting that such museums provide an “encounter” with a past that is “brought to life” through the performance of heritage. The conception of re-enactment as a vessel for (imaginative) journeys into the past seems widespread amongst certain types of both re-enactors and living history professionals. In contrast to these other practitioners, Gapps criticises the false alignments between past and present pervading many television re-enactments (2007) and posits the ‘blurring of past and present’ as one of the key characteristics of re-enactment (2003b, xxi). He does, however, identify a potential to invoke the ‘always presentness of the past,’ without asserting that re-enactment is necessarily able to do so (2007, 70). In a more performance-orientated vein, Snow mentions moments where one’s real self and one’s adopted persona seem to merge (1993, 63).

The belief in a unique connection with the past seems to fascinate, amuse and/or alarm the non-re-enactor scholars in this area. Handler and Saxton speak of the ‘magic moments’ re-enactors feel they experience, achieved by creating a falsely cohesive historical narrative that does not, they assert, reflect the reality of the past, but rather re-enactors’ own fractured, postmodern present. The reflexivity of re-enactors, the authors claim, conflicts with their desire to experience the past, resulting in an inevitable (dys)simulation, an experience which jars with both then and now. Scholars in History and Literary Studies have tended to criticise the ‘conflation of past and present’ as an illusory path riddled with problematic potholes (Agnew 2007; Brewer 2010; Cook 2004a; Hall
Underpinning these works is an implicit assumption of temporalities as discrete entities, rendering the resurrection of the past impossible. Many frame re-enactors’ efforts to invoke the past as a simulacrum of history – a substitution of a signifier of the real, for the real itself, bringing into question the reality of the “real” and degrading the past to pastiche (Bush-Bailey 2013; Cook 2005; de Groot 2008; Hall 2004; Magelssen 2006; Pickering 2005). This notion is explored in relation to my case studies in chapter six. Deetz expresses a similar perspective through his positing of living history as what Boorstin (1962) termed a ‘pseudo-event’, which Deetz defines as: ‘the re-creation of reality to the extent that the image becomes the standard by which reality is judged (1991, 15).

There are a few, however, who question rigid barriers between past and present. Katie King perceives the past and present as inherently intertwined, creating experiences of multiple temporalities, which she terms ‘pastpresents’.

I think of pastpresents as quite palpable evidence that the past and the present cannot be purified each from the other: they confront me in each experimental historiography with interruptions, obstacles, new/old forms of organization, bridges, shifts in direction, and spinning dynamics. Neither nature and culture or past and present are actually easy to separate, and properly we may repeatedly question such separations. (2004, 459–60)

Similarly, Dayan (2009) questions distinctions between past and present, suggesting that imposing such differentiations paints the past as a position. Daugbjerg positions re-enactment in a ‘grey zone between now and then’ (2013, 729), while Kirschenblatt-Gimblett perceives in the practice a historical imaginary that enables a ‘double experience, an experience of then and now’ (1993, xvi). Schneider explores the relation between performativity and what she terms ‘temporal slippage’ – a bleeding of one time into another or, perhaps more accurately, a weaving of temporalities that defies a traditional understanding of linear, demarcated time. The closely related term ‘syncopated time’ (coined by Gertrude Stein) is also used by Schneider to describe this sense of the past in the present.

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18 This term is derived from Elizabeth Freeman’s ‘temporal drag’ and David Roman’s ‘archival drag’.
that re-enactors strive for. Schneider suggests that the past can have both ‘genuine pastness’ – be *passed*, be *in the past* – and yet also be ‘on the move, co-present, not “left behind”’ (2011, 14). In this way, she embraces a post-structuralist re-conception of the nature of time in order to develop an understanding of performance which questions its oft-quoted ephemerality, liveness and disappearance.¹⁹ This contributes to consolidating Schneider’s assertion of the ability of performance to remain, as a form of record in itself, through mimesis and flesh i.e. embodied memory (6). She draws on Freeman’s notion of ‘mutually disruptive energy’ to suggest that re-enactment is more than just a ‘simple negotiation’ or ‘remembrance’ of the past, as the past is already partially there, and the deceased are not entirely dead. The past is thus represented as a corpse that resurrects in and moves through mimetic bodies of the present, with a lingering presence ‘not entirely not alive’ (12). This resonates with Freddie Rokem’s argument that, when performing plays inspired by historical events or people, actors become what he calls ‘hyper-historians’ – witnesses of a past embodied in the present through the creative possibilities of theatre (2000, 13; 25; 192; 201-2).

Schneider adapts the term ‘interanimates’, coined by Fred Moten, to speak of this ‘inter(in)animation’ between ‘the live and the no longer live’, between the present and the past, between performance and documentation (7). This relationship is posed as a dynamic, co-productive one, where each is infused with new meaning through its interaction with the other. This prompts Schneider to wonder what anachronisms may be brought forward from the past, what remnants of past prejudices may be invoked in the present.

**Experiential evidence? Corporeality and affect as (questioned) epistemologies**

According to most writers, re-enactors justify their claims to a unique historiography by the experiential nature of living history – a quality, these practitioners suggest, that archival study lacks.

¹⁹These are longstanding, core concepts within Performance Studies, discussed, for example, by Peggy Phelan (1993) and Joseph Roach (1996). While they have been re-considered by scholars such as Philip Auslander (2008) and Diana Taylor (2003), Rebecca Schneider approaches these concepts from a markedly different angle to Auslander and with a slightly different emphasis from Taylor.
Such claims have evoked widespread consternation, particularly amongst historians, who as a whole, as we have already seen, contest the notion that a sense of a past culture may be tangibly (re)created in this way. These scholars exhort us to be wary of what they consider to be the deeply problematic foundations of the experiential and somatic, extolling the “necessary” virtues of reasoned, intellectual inquiry. We are reminded that experience is individual, and thus how could re-enactment invoke a collective experience of the past? (Brewer 2005; Cook 2005; Pickering 2005). While this is a valid question, Brewer’s assertion that re-enactors’ seem to have ‘forgotten the human mind’ is less so (2010, 82). Are our cognitive capacities not exercised when we engage in embodied activities, nor in the archival research in which many re-enactors participate to initiate or enhance their simulation? Even scholars who have participated in television re-enactments, such as Cook, Lamb and McCalman, suggest that a bodily, sensory engagement is less valuable than, or at least very incomplete without, what they term intellectual engagement, reflecting the subjugation of the corporeal that continues to permeate History. Cook criticises re-enactors’ ‘persistent tendency to privilege a visceral, emotional engagement with the past at the expense of a more analytical treatment’ as it diminishes the ‘critical distance’ deemed necessary and claimed to be achieved in “serious” History (2004b, 490). Regarding his experience as a participant-consultant in The Ship, McCalman claims that ‘if the voyage had explored the passions of the mind as well as the body […] – interrogating our psychic interiors as well as our aching muscles – it might have been less one-dimensional and repetitious’ (2004, 484). More recently he has, as alluded to earlier, altered his stance; he expressed a ‘suspicion’ that ‘the human body […] responds similarly to some physical afflictions across the barriers of time’ (2009, 167) and admitted encountering a ‘power that [he] would never forget’ (167).

Despite this denigration of the experiential, there have been, as I have mentioned, calls to reconsider the possibilities of the somatic and affective approach of re-enactment (Agnew 2007; Agnew and Lamb 2009; Bush-Bailey 2013; de Groot 2008; McCalman and Pickering 2010). De Groot
argues that the ‘prevalence of re-enactment throughout popular culture, in multiple varieties, suggest the importance of (bodily) experience to an understanding of history’ (2008, 104), asserting that re-enactors consume history as ‘something which may be put on, worn, a set of tools and behaviours which relate specifically in the first instance to the corporeal body and thence to ‘culture’ or modes of behaviour’ (105-6). Bush-Bailey suggests that although theatre historians have ‘an increasing appetite for somatic engagements with the past’, they continue to feel unsettled by live performance. She perceives a need to ‘acknowledge what we know but often leave to be realised by others: that text may be embodied and that, without the body, theatre is only a place of the imagination (2013, 296).

Christopher Pinney (2009) also recognises the value of felt experience, arguing for embodied, phenomenologically inflected histories. Anderson (1982, 1984); Deetz (1984); and Lutticken (2005a, 2005b) suggest that re-enactment should be understood not as less analytical, but rather as a shift from third person narration to first person experience and sensual immersion. Similarly, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett suggests that the ‘immediacy and detail’ of the approach more than compensates for the reduction in ‘historical comprehensiveness’ (1993, xvi).

A point which much of the scholarship from the last decade converges on is the idea that there is something to be learnt from re-enactment. What it is that is learnt, how these methods should be understood, and what value the process and product hold, are more disputed matters. Almost all of the historians and writers outside of Performance Studies concur that living history provides insight into the present, rather than the past. Some believe it offers insight into historical sensibilities (Brewer 2010; Gapps 2003a, 2003b; Hall 2004; Handler and Saxton 1988; Magelssen 2007). Cook (2004b) suggests re-enactment emphasises the incompleteness of our knowledge of both the past and present, while Lamb (2008) regards it as a reminder that our knowledge of the past will never be complete. Others have framed re-enactment as a democratic pedagogy, often perceiving an emancipatory potential that facilitates an accessible study of more obscure aspects of the past (Agnew 2004; Gapps 2003b; King 2004; Lutticken 2005b; Smith 2011). Gapps (2003b) asserts
that re-enactment should be utilised to learn from the past, while Turner (1990) suggests that the practice poses a challenge to the present. Historians are generally on the opposing side to folklorists and experimental archaeologists, with often almost polarised views on the value of re-enactment as a form of public historiography. They generally agree, however, that the practice is a very productive (and popular) means of rousing interest in history, which may lead those costumed bodies towards their “proper place” in the library, archives or classroom. Re-enactor-academics, in contrast, tend to represent re-enactment as a beneficial interpretative and pedagogic tool for historical study (Anderson 1982, 1984; Gapps 2003b; Snow 1993). The performative dimension of this interpretative process is, as Anderson recognises, crucial. As I argue in chapter seven, it is in its playful, bodily performativity that the primary pedagogic potential of living history resides.

Of course, there are those who champion experiential modes of learning, but they have rarely been researchers of historical re-enactment. Practitioner-academics argue that the sensory, embodied experience of re-enactment should be understood as a beneficial mode of learning (Anderson 1982, 1984; Gapps 2003b; Nye 1984; Snow 1993). Art and Performance Studies scholars Lutticken (2005) and Schneider (2011) assert that bodies – including re-enacting ones – are mediums for the procurement of knowledge. Converging with Agnew, Schneider conceptualises hobby re-enactment as a form of affective history, advancing the notion by suggesting that re-enactors’ generate an experience of another time through and in their bodies. The corporeal form is thus recognised as the means through which re-enactors might explore the ‘potentials and pitfalls’ of anachronism and navigate the possibilities, obstacles and issues of performing the past (1-2; 8-9). Although she recognises the connection which can be created between bodies of the past and bodies of the present, Schneider perceives this as a momentary, transitory sensation achieved through the porous line between past and present, and between performance and the “real”. While there are certainly “a-ha!” moments in re-enactment, I believe there is a bodily connection in re-enactment that is enhanced over time, through a (sustained) layering of present bodies with the
materials, movements and mannerisms of past bodies – an argument I elaborate on in chapter seven.

**History – always a performance?**

If the performativity of re-enactment was a stage production, one would say it was greeted with mixed reviews. Re-enactor-academics applaud the performative foundations of their craft, with some even framing it as living history’s greatest potential (Anderson 1984; Gapps 2003b; Snow 1993). Performer-academics have recognised the significance of this aspect, but have angled their analysis towards demonstrating why re-enactment is a performance, or how it relates to other forms of performance or art (Bush-Bailey 2013; Hoyne 2009; Lutticken 2005a, 2005b; Schechner 1985; Schneider 2011; Snow 1993). Historians and Literature scholars have, in contrast, and as I have indicated, often provided a more critical write-up of what they often term the theatricality of re-enactment, ranging from unconvinced (Cook 2004b; Elder 2009; Lamb 2008; McCalman 2009; Pickering 2005) to perturbed (Agnew 2004; Dening 1992). Some, such as Brewer (2005); King (2004); and Handler and Saxton (1988), ignore this aspect altogether.

Discourses on the performativity of re-enactment have formed three (interwoven) strands: theatricality, play, and (re)do. The terms theatricality and performativity are being used interchangeably by some authors to refer to the elements of re-enactment that resemble features (or techniques) of theatre and performance. Some writers have applied a theatre metaphor to consider what they term the *mise-en-scène* of re-enactment, discussing the “set”, “props” and costumes in relation to authenticity and/or the use of theatrical methods (Agnew 2009; Gapps 2010; Lamb 2008; Magelssen 2007; Schneider 2011; Schwarz 2010; Snow 1993). The ‘blocking’ of re-enactment has been largely excluded, except in censure of its perceived emphasis on bodily suffering and deprivation (Agnew 2004; de Groot 2008; Lamb 2008; McCalman 2004). Cramer (2010) likens SCA re-enactment
to theatre reconstruction while other re-enactors compare their process to that of method acting (Anderson 1984; Horowitz 1998; Schneider; Snow) – a simulation they utilise as a tool for interpretation (Anderson; Deetz 1984; Magelssen 2007; Quinn 1984; Snow). Schneider, too, perceives the practice as a form of method acting, and, along with other performance scholars, identifies the practice as a theatricalised embodiment and a form of environmental theatre (Lutticken 2005b; Schechner 1985; Schneider; Snow). Film re-enactments have concerned historians and literature scholars with their ‘docusoap’ dramatics, which, some imply, debase “real” history (Agnew 2004; Cook 2004a, Gapps 2007; King 2004; Lamb 2008; McCalman 2004). Gapps has suggested that the public associate visual mediums, including live and filmed performance, with authenticity – an often false correlation that can result in an uncritical acceptance of unverified information (2010, 60). The overt ‘theatricality’ of re-enactment has provoked concern that the past’s own theatricality will be obscured in its shadow (Agnew 2004) and that re-enactment may lack ‘the capacity to convincingly perform what it is not’ (2009, 306).

As Schneider (2011) argues, such assertions reflect an anti-theatrical prejudice, which often causes re-enactment to be wrongly dismissed as “merely theatrical”. Schneider perceives the theatricality of re-enactment to be inherently entwined with temporality, with a permeability and historiographical potential that challenges many academics. Magelssen (2011) also emphasises the potential of a performance-based historiography. Drawing on Freddie Rokem (2000), he suggests that, compared to writing history, ‘enacting’ the past enables stronger participation in the historiographic process and a more potent means of questioning dominant ideologies and identities. Schneider and Magelssen’s assertions here reflect the common discord between the perspectives of Performance Studies scholars, which they both are, and many of the scholars of History and English, once again demonstrating the importance of bringing these discourses into more productive interaction.
The playful nature of re-enactment as a performance-based practice has received numerous mentions but little analysis. Anderson (1982) asserts that play is a crucial component of living history’s method and objective. Agnew (2004) recognises re-enactment as a merging of learning and play, while Lutticken describes it as ‘a theatrical happening that seems to transpose the pressures of daily life into a form of play’ (2005b, 39). Handler and Saxton (1988) utilise a gaming term, ‘first person role play’, to define living history, differentiating it from re-enactment, which they claim is associated with historic battles. I concur with this significant distinction to the extent that the term re-enactment generally refers to the (re)performing of historic *events* and, sadly, due to the nature of history and how it has been (re)written, the events that have been considered notable are predominantly battles.20 This is, as referred to in my introduction, one of the reasons I suggest the term recreational, cultural re-enactment. Handler and Saxton’s gaming analogy resonates with Snow’s (1993) framing of living history as ‘roleplay’, and Agnew’s assertion that re-enactment ‘verges close to fantasy role-playing’ (2004, 328). Erisman (1998) and Cramer (2010) posit the SCA re-enactment’s as ‘serious play’; the latter also suggests that play serves an important transformative function, enabling participants to playfully engage with personas and lifestyles more adventurous, impressive or fulfilling than their own. Similarly, Matthew Johnson frames Renaissance festivals as ‘performative play [...] enabling who we wish to be in the present’ (2010, 40). Overall, navigating re-enactment’s playful nature has not been a popular endeavour but is one I address in this dissertation, particularly in chapters three and six.

Many writers are also hesitant to engage with the performativity of re-enactment in relation to another meaning of this term – performance as the (re)doing of past actions, activities and behaviours. A significant divergence between art-based and other humanities disciplines is once

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20 Possible exceptions to this include re-enactments of the voyages of the colonial period, such as the landing of the First Fleet in Sydney, and the journey of doctor-explorer David Livingstone on Lake Nyassa. Such events have been popular in heritage tourism and state-sponsored re-enactments. Given the negative consequences such voyages caused for the Indigenous peoples, however, I would suggest that these events may be construed as battles of a subtler, but perhaps even more deadly, kind – the war of white imperialism.
again apparent here. As discussed in my introduction, scholars within History and English/literature have polarised action and thought, framing re-enactors’ claims of understanding through doing as problematic (Agnew 2004; Brewer 2010; McCalman 2004). Although Lamb perceives successful re-enactment as a ‘special form of mimesis’, which emphasises realism, he refers to mimesis in terms of material replication, ‘the right fabric for the clothes, just the right food in the kitchen, and just the right lock on the gun’ (2009, 1).

In contrast to these views, Live Art and Performance scholars generally valorise the epistemological possibilities of corporeal practice and experience, even if they consider historical re-enactment to be a weaker and more problematic example of this approach than professional live art and performance practices (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1993, 1998; Lutticken 2005; Schechner; Schneider 2011). Lutticken suggests that re-enactors ‘learn by doing through the medium of play’ (2005, 33). Kirschenblatt-Gimblett recognises that ‘authenticity is located not in the artifacts per se […] but in the methods by which they were made – in a way of doing’ (1993, xv). Magelssen argues for the potential of ‘second person narration’ in living history museums – a ‘hands-on’ approach to history, in which visitors are actively involved in the ‘doing’, or performing, of history – advocating further involvement of spectators through Brechtian theatre techniques (2006; 2007). While Performance Studies theorists might consider ourselves “progressive” in these (and other) views, such affirmations in fact echo (and extend) perceptions voiced earlier by Museum Studies scholars and professionals (Deetz 1984; Hiemstra 1984; Fortin 1984; Nye 1984; Quinn 1984; Sebolt 1984).

The foremost literature on the topic, however, is Schneider’s argument regarding repetition, what she terms the (re)do of theatrical mimesis and reoccurring time. Drawing on Richard Schechner’s notion of ‘restored behaviour’, which both Schechner (1985) and Snow (1993) have applied to living history, Schneider frames all behaviour as repetition, in order to suggest re-enactment re-enacts the already re-enacted. Restored or ‘twice-behaved’ behaviour is rendered explicit by re-enactors, and thus more readily identified and explored. It is this continual
(per)formance of the past in the present on which, Schneider argues, re-enactment is based, is made possible.

Citation, repetition, and “twice-behaved behavior,” as the very material of daily behaviour, provide the basis for why and how reenactors can reenact at all. Think of it this way: battle reenactors can reenact the U.S. Civil War because they can place their bodies in the gestic compositions – the sedimented sets of acts – that U.S. Civil War soldiers composed when those soldiers were themselves behaving as they had been trained to behave, or as they emulated others to behave, behaviors likewise and at the time based on prior practices and precedent notions of what it means and what it might mean to fight. (10-11)

While all practices may be read as restored behaviour, there is a heightened, intensified and reflexive twice-ness in re-enactment that creates, Schneider suggests, an eerie experience of temporal blur. Discussing what she terms the ‘residue of time contained in repeated actions’ ([2], her approach draws on and extends Taylor’s (2003) notion of the hauntology of performance. Mimesis is thus understood by Schneider as a medium to explore the ‘transitive, performative, and cross-temporal real’ and a means to access the theatricality of the past (31). It should be noted that her discussion of ‘mimesis’ refers to the (re)construction of the ‘minute details’ of an event or performance, and her consideration of the theatricality of re-enactment is mainly focused on the theatrical nature of the copy, rather than the broader performative aspects of re-enactment. Her interest appears to be focused more on the product than the process, on examining performances that substantiate the idea that time and art are porous, and the relationship between these products and the socio-cultural and political climate in the U.S. This is a key divergence in our research, for my focus is directed towards the process of re-enactment – how re-enactors (re)do aspects of history and understand the past through these bodily, performative processes. Donning the hat (or should I say bonnet?) of a re-enactor, I endeavour to evaluate the possibilities of particular forms of re-enactment, through a phenomenologically inflected ethnographic methodology that I elucidate in the following chapter.
Chapter two

Though this be madness, yet there is method in it\textsuperscript{21}

Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the continent of meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.

Clifford Geertz (1973, 20)

The ethnographic and affective turns are directing us, as I suggested in the preceding chapters, towards a new path in historiography, exploring the possibilities of interacting kinaesthetically and performatively with the past (Agnew 2007). I have established the focus of my own inquiry in this direction – analysing the epistemological, pedagogic and sociological possibilities of what I term recreational, cultural re-enactment, considering how we might analyse the practice as a playful, public mode of historiography, which utilises embodied performativity. In so doing, I examine the potential of re-enactment ‘as a source and as a method’ (Pickering 2010, 126-7); but what of the methodology that I utilised in this research?

As indicated in the preceding, introductory chapters, ethnography forms a vital component of my methodology, contributing substantially to my inquiry, interpretation and illustration. Before getting my boots dirty in the field, however, I examined the published works of academic re-enactors as primary sources and the emerging body of non-practitioner scholarship as secondary source material. The literature review preceding this chapter assesses the validity and suitability of these sources for my research purposes and perspectives while recognising the inherent partiality – the inherent bias and incompleteness of all writing – including my own (Clifford 1986, 7; Geertz 1973, 29).

My historiographical approach reflects, as the above indicates, the ethnographic and cultural

\textsuperscript{21}This title derives, of course, from Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet}, circa 1600, Act II, Scene ii.
turns in history. Ethnohistory shifts the focus of historical inquiry from political and military events to society and culture through, as far as possible, the people’s own perspectives, behaviours, and practices. As the name suggests, ethnohistory frequently utilises aspects of ethnographic methodology to complement and enhance archival research, including, in some cases, active fieldwork in the (sub)culture or place being studied (McGregor 2014, 433). As McGregor (2014, 433) emphasises, however, ethnohistories often (although not exclusively) address Indigenous histories – a significant distinction between this important body of work and my dissertation. It is for this reason that I posit my thesis as being influenced by, rather than as ethnohistory per se. I am particularly influenced by ethnohistorians who have, in different (and at times, contradictory) ways, embraced performance and the performativity of history – Inga Clendinnen, Natalie Zemon Davis and Greg Dening. These writers demonstrate the cogency of Joseph Roach’s claim that ‘the pursuit of performance does not require historians to abandon the archive, but it does encourage them to spend more time in the streets’ (1996, xii).

Anthropology has also influenced Performance Studies quite significantly. Ethnographic practice at the University of Sydney’s Department of Performance Studies is founded on symbolic and interpretative Cultural Anthropology, particularly that of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Geertz’s model draws on semiotics to analyse symbolic acts and ‘clusters of significance’ in order to interpret social discourse and develop an understanding of a people’s ‘conceptual world’ (1973, 24; 26). Interpreting human behaviour as symbolic action underlines the importance of analysis which is ‘actor-oriented’ i.e. focused on the people we study – their words, actions and the specific circumstances in which they occur (14). Geertz conceives culture as context, as a public ‘acted document’ (10). Turner developed this concept further, positing culture as a process, perhaps even a ‘series of performances’, transposing culture, as Lowell Lewis (2013, 1) suggests, from noun to verb.
Shifting the emphasis from the performed document to the (re-en)acting of that document, Turner’s model places performance centre stage, as it were, analysing cultural performances as a way of understanding culture. In Performance Studies, this is complemented by the notion of the ‘is/as’ of performance, discussed by, amongst others, Schechner (2012) and Taylor (2003). Drawing on Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, Schechner posits performance as both a subject of study and a lens through which to analyse (Goffman 1974; Schechner 2012). Analysing objects of study ‘as’ performance allows us to interpret not only marked performances but also the everyday and extra-daily as performance. Whether attempting to glide into a Georgian ballroom in a Regency style gown, or tromping into the bush in a borrowed Viking-like tunic, my performative senses were engaged at all times, both in the field and during the work that follows. Behaviour, social interaction, movement, even the space itself, can productively be analysed as performance.

Ethnographic research has a range of methods on its tool belt. I gathered and interpreted my most valuable data through participant-observation – watching, querying and participating in the activities and events of the societies I studied. As Cooley and Barz suggest in relation to ethnomusicology, ethnographers ‘derive from fieldwork their most significant contributions to scholarship’ (2008, 4). This fieldwork was originally conducted with five case studies:

- Danelaw Fighter Society in Sydney and the Beorg Wic Dark Ages and Viking re-enactment camp in regional New South Wales
- Earthly Delights Historic Dance Academy (EDHDA) in Canberra, including dance workshops, balls and costumed teas but with focus on their annual Jane Austen Festival
- EDHDA’s Historic Dance and Costume Tour of England
- The Jane Austen Centre and their annual Jane Austen Festival in Bath, England
- The Beltane Fire Society and their annual Beltane Fire Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland

22 For a definition of extra-daily, please see footnote 9 on p. 15 of the introduction.
23 I use the term performative senses, rather than ‘lens’, to move away from the overemphasis on the sense of sight that pervades Western academia, discussed for example, by Walter Ong (1982). As Ness (2004), Okely (2007) and Spry (2006) assert, the ethnographic process engages all of the senses, calling us to reflect on and engage with this experiential process more deeply.
Due to the diversity and complexity of approaches and perspectives I encountered in these case studies, I excluded Beltane from this dissertation and folded EDHDA’s English tour into a single ethnography of EDHDA. My research experiences with these groups affirmed Geertz’ assertion that through ethnography’s:

> highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts [...] the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted [...] can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely about them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively with them.’ (1973, 23; original emphasis)

The ‘highly participative’ nature of Geertz’ model is worth highlighting, considering that the traditional mode of participant-observation is, rather ironically, to ‘stand aside from the action, take a point of view and ask endless questions’ (Jackson 1983, 340). Ethnography’s relatively recent turn to active involvement marks, as Sally Ann Ness notes, a ‘methodological conversion or paradigm shift, away from an emphasis on “objective” observation and toward one on embodied participation’ (2004, 123). The significant contributions of embodied participation to my research, and ethnography more broadly, is an important topic in itself, and will thus be returned to in more detail later in this chapter. But it must also be said that ‘standing aside from the action’ was important to my process as well. During my fieldwork, I attempted to balance active involvement with note taking, and when appropriate, also took photographs to act as memory prompts and potential future illustrations. When permission was granted, and I felt it was suitable and practical, I utilised audio recordings, in accordance with the ethics approval granted for this project.

Questionnaires and interviews ranging from casual chats to recorded, formal, structured discussions complement my fieldwork and were mainly utilised to clarify or enquire further into ideas, issues and questions that arose out of my participant-observation. Interviews and questionnaires provided an accessible avenue for me to approach how re-enactors conceptualise their practice, the benefits and limitations, motivations and objectives, and the perceived relation between re-enactment, popular and academic History.
While seeking patterns through ongoing comparative analysis is, as Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011, 177) suggest, essential to processing data, I endeavoured to accommodate a Geertzian focus on ‘inspecting events’ rather than ‘arranging abstracted identities into unified patterns’ (Geertz 1973, 17). As Theresa Buckland argues, the insights we develop through ethnography derive from our experiences, from our encounters with ‘people in the field’ (1999, 3; emphasis mine). I would suggest that these insights can also derive from our encounters with the place and space these people populate, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters. This grounded theory approach to coding, coupled with the participant-observation method used to collect the initial data, allowed me to address issues critiqued in the literature review, particularly the asserting of metanarratives removed from and often plucked prior to engagement with those for whom the writers make claims. I am not suggesting that broader theoretical assertions do not have their place – they tread their heavy footsteps through this thesis as well – but developing such claims after, and out of, practical, analytical engagement with a delineated study provides a rigorous methodology particularly applicable to this research subject (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011 188; Hughes-Freeland 1999, 120). Naturally, a hypothesis accompanied me into the field, but it is a vital aspect of my research that this provisional conjecture was, as Lewis advocates, ‘phenomenologically investigated through situated events […] in which relations are not assumed in advance but are interrogated empirically relative to their significant effects on participants’ (2013, 9).

The phenomenological nature of investigation Lewis refers to here is significant not only to the embodied participation involved in fieldwork but also to how we analyse and portray these experiences: the ‘graphy’ of (ethno)historiography. As vital as the participant-observation mode of research has been to my thesis, the writing methods and theories that express and fashion my assertions are equally important. Phenomenologically inflected ‘thick description’ pulses through
this thesis, illustrating and interpreting my fieldwork findings. Recent developments in ethnography underline the importance of attending to the kinaesthetic aspects of both the (sub)cultures we study and our experiences researching with them (Ahmed 2004; Conquergood 1991; Farnell 1999; Jackson 1983, 2012; Ness 2004; Okely 2006; Spry 2006). Ethnographers may, in general, be more actively participating as well as observing, but this embodied process is frequently not reflected in their writing (Ahmed 2004, 285; Clifford 1986, 13; Ness 2004, 131; Okely 2007, 65).

Ness argues for a reflexive, analytic engagement with the embodied experience of the ethnographer, asserting that if we ‘integrate the participatory experience into the ethnographic description... fundamental differences in understanding may potentially result’ (2004, 133). In concert with Ness, Ahmed suggests that ‘if the researcher’s own body is positioned in the research then the interaction can be made more explicit and the “facts” enriched by being set in a more detailed context’ (2004, 296). Examining the ethnographer’s presence and experience as participant-researcher also enables us to address the influence of our being there, softening the objectifying gaze of the traditional ethnographer by including one’s self in the field of view (Spry 2006). Adopting the approach advocated by these theorists, my ethnographies explore ‘the bodily experience of the fieldworker as research process and source of knowledge’ (Okely 2007, 66). I particularly utilise this approach when analysing the Jane Austen Centre’s festival (JAF) in Bath. Through critical analysis of my experiences as a participant-researcher, I respond to the challenge presented by this case study’s far larger number and range of individuals, groups, and contributors. This method – coupled with focused analysis of particular examples from the festival – enables me to avoid the hazard of generalising the widely varying approaches, purposes and perspectives of JAF’s several hundred attendees, from across the globe, in the confines of one chapter. As I will

24 The term ‘thick description’ was popularised within Anthropology by Clifford Geertz (1973), who borrowed from Gilbert Ryle’s (1971) philosophical use of the term. Geertz defined ethnography as ‘an elaborate venture in […] “thick description”’. This ‘venture’ involves moving beyond recording what one sees and hears, towards capturing the context and meaning of the experience for the people involved (Denzin 1989). For a discussion of the development and different understandings of ‘thick description’, see Joseph Pontegetto (2006) “Brief Notes on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept “Thick Description”.”
discuss further in chapter five, claiming to be able to speak for all these people would be problematic, in terms of both validity and ethics. The mode of analysis I instead exercise also facilitates self-reflexivity regarding the way my own interest in Austen and her works and my previous research participation in the Australian Jane Austen festival affected my experience and interpretation of this case study.

This embrace of embodied practice does not ignore Interpretive Cultural Anthropology’s semiotic mode of analysis. In this thesis, bodies and signs meet through thick description. Interweaving semiotic and phenomenologically inflected analysis creates a ‘binocular vision’ that enables me to explore both the verbal and the somatic, both symbolic significance and embodied experience (States 1987, 8). While seemingly discordant, semiotics and notions of embodiment can thus complement each other, spanning areas the other cannot bridge (Ahmed 2004; Ness 2004; States 1987). It is through thick description that ethnographers attempt to communicate the ‘stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures’, which ‘produce, perceive and interpret’ the cultural categories through which people experience, comprehend and construct their social worlds (Geertz 1973, 7). Thick description reaches towards that ‘speck of behaviour […] fleck of culture’, which distinguish between a blink and a wink, transforming involuntary action into gesture, rippling with significance (6). Endeavouring to write ‘thickly’ points a reflexive finger towards the creative process we engage in to present our work, reminding us that to research is to interpret, to perform an ‘imaginative act’ (Gertz 1973, 14-15. See also Clifford 1986; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). I thus present my ethnographies as fictio – not in the sense of being false, but rather as Geertz defines the term, as something ‘fashioned’ (Geertz 1973, 15). James Clifford reminds us that ‘to recognise the poetic dimensions of ethnography does not require that one give up facts and accurate accounting for the supposed free play of poetry. “Poetry” is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism: it can be historical, precise, objective’ (1986, 26). Far from detracting from its rigour or validity,
acknowledging and even embracing the creativity and fallibility of ethnography enriches our interpretations with critical reflexivity.

While utilising the potentials of this methodology, I am keenly aware of its limitations and disadvantages. Ethnography is a creative process, but it can also, at times, be a destructive one. It is vital to acknowledge and attempt to minimise, as Kirsten Hastrup argues (adapting Pierre Bourdieu’s term) the ‘symbolic violence’ we commit when using people as the paint for our pictures (2013, 123-145). Inherent to Anthropology is the risk of ‘treating the people we study as objects, mere means of advancing our intellectual goals’ (Jackson 2013, 51). In an effort to counter this, I endeavour to include a range of voices in my interpretation, using, whenever possible, my correspondents’ own terms and phrases and attempting to communicate the context in which the conversation/activity/event occurred. This multi-vocal approach, however, can never fully breach the gulf between researcher and researched, or render the interpretation objective or completely ethical. It is vital to be aware of the dangers as well as the benefits of multi-vocality, for as Lather argues, ‘in contemporary regimes of disciplinary truth telling, the concept of voice is at the heart of claims to the “real” in ethnography’ (2012, 136). There are, as I discuss in chapter seven, ethical issues involved in the taking and using of others’ voices.

Similarly, while semiotics and post-phenomenology are, I have suggested, cogent modes of analysis, there is a risk of over celebrating either of these approaches to the impairment of the other (Ahmed 2004, 287). A danger lurks in ‘reducing lived experience to theoretical abstraction’ and also in elevating embodied knowledge over all other forms of knowing (Novack 1995, 180). It could be argued that by participating in the activities I studied, my ability to observe (and certainly to record) what was occurring around me was, at times, affected. But I found, in alignment with Ness (2004, 131) and Paulson (2011, 149-50), that participating actually enhanced my observations, focused my awareness and enriched my understandings, facilitating a more reflexive criticality regarding my
research. This may in part derive from the embodied insights of what, as I mentioned in my introduction, Foster (1995) terms *kinaesthetic empathy*, a concept that will be explored in chapter seven of this dissertation. My methods of recording this embodied enquiry also impacted upon my research. Much of the detail that may be captured in video and audio recordings was lost in the comparatively slow process of scribbling across a page, which was the main way I recorded my fieldwork. The presence of my audio recorder during interviews may have influenced the responses of the interviewees, and of course, could not capture their physical reactions. But although it is important to consider these limitations, what is more significant, as Frank Hall reminds us, is ‘the sense of critical self-awareness one manages to keep in the process’ (1999, 131).

But I concur with James Clifford’s idea that ‘the vision of a complex, problematic, partial ethnography lead[s], not to its abandonment, but to more subtle, concrete ways of writing and reading, to new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical’ (1986, 25). While the multi-vocal, interdisciplinary, embodied research model I utilised has its limitations, these methods have also been demonstrated to be highly productive. The conception of culture described here reflects ‘a provisional (and partial) consensus emerging around the idea that culture is best understood as enactment, as a process, as a series of practices’ (Lewis 2013, 7). Performance theory and phenomenologically inflected participant-observation have been underutilised in research on re-enactment, as my literature review demonstrates. Embodied practice, however, is the leading model in contemporary ethnography, particularly in the fields of dance and performance (Ness 2004, 123). While embracing the embodied methodology described, I endeavour to address its limitations by interweaving complementary strands of ethnography, historiography, performance theory and semiotics in my analysis. I suggest that a continual hermeneutic back and forth-ness between words and bodies, theory and practice, application and reflection, may enable us to negotiate the unstable ground between the potentials and pitfalls and find the most solid path forward.
Chapter three
Getting down (under) with Aussie “Vikings”

Sweaty hands grip the steering wheel of my little, city hatchback, the Best of The Doors my only companion as I jounce along a bumpy dirt road in Australian bushland. Time to crank up the student air-con (wind down the windows), I think. Air – heavy with the dust and heat of the outback – barges in like an unwelcome guest, a slap in the face after the cool caress of the sea breeze I left behind in Sydney. Surely I should have reached the turn off by now? I risk taking my eyes off the road to quickly scan the directions I have been given for Dunhaven – the site of the Beorg Wic Viking and Dark Ages living history gathering. “Drive straight through the town of Bungonia […]. Follow Oallen Ford Road for a long way. […] Turn left at the sign saying MONGARLOWE.” My eyes snap back to the road as a driver confident or crazy enough to speed down these unsealed, winding, cliff-edged roads, tears past me. I continue for another twenty minutes before finally reaching the turn-off. Tyres skid on rough ground as I decelerate. My journey continues much as before, the seemingly endless road punctuated by not always successful manoeuvres around sharp corners, deep potholes and debris of not insignificant proportions. Finally, I pass the foretold “sign marked ROSE GLEN […] posted on both sides of a gate” and commence a keen look out for “the private road at the sign ROSE VALLEY.” After several false sightings, I find my target and clamber out of the car, keen to stretch my legs. Approaching the gate, I notice a cattle grid ahead of me (this is the first time I’ve ever had to cross one) and step from bar to bar gingerly. Reaching the gate, I grasp the large, heavy padlock in one hand and the instructions in the other. I punch in the numbers for “the mobile phone digits for DUMB” (after mentally translating the letters to numerals – how quickly technology moved from physical number pads to touch-screen qwerty keyboards!) I pull the padlock, but nothing happens. I press the numbers again but to no effect. After four or five attempts, I assume I must have the wrong code. “How long will it be before someone else arrives? I don’t even have phone reception here.” Fortunately, I only have to wait about fifteen minutes before an all-wheel drive pulls up. As the middle-aged, male driver walks towards me, I feel suddenly self-conscious – how odd I must look standing next to my little red car on this rural road, wearing period costume. I smooth my borrowed ankle-length tunic with a hand that would be blushing if it knew how. “Heading to Beorg Wic by any chance?” he asks, smiling. I sigh in relief – he must be a re-enactor and, although it feels very unusual to me to be in this get-up, surely it would not seem so out of place to him. “What gave me away?” “The camera.” He grins at his playful irony. “We usually get into garb once we get to the festival…” This triggers a new pang of
embarrassment at the unexpected reversal of being caught out in costume by a perfectly respectable looking re-enactor wearing jeans and a t-shirt. “I’m having a little trouble with the lock”, I confess, showing him what I had tried. “I think it just needs –”. He grasps the lock, gives it a firm tug, and it clicks open. “There we go, love, right as rain.” “Oh, thanks.” “Enjoy the festival”, he adds as I hitch my dress to climb back into my car. The roar of the engine is followed by The Doors: “people are strange, when you’re a stranger.”

Although I did not realise it at the time, this first encounter with the Beorg Wiccians foreshadowed many of the significant themes that would later develop from my fieldwork. Perhaps already apparent to the reader is a notion of community – a theme I was not expecting but one that kept resurfacing, and not only in this case study. One might also detect a playfulness in this encounter: in the name of the camp, “Dunghaven”, the password, “dumb”, and my rescuer’s teasing demeanour. This sense of play, along with an emphasis on “having fun”, was reflected more broadly in the way many of these re-enactors approached history and their hobby. At times, however, this was contrasted (or complemented) with the frequently cited dedication to what many re-enactors term historical accuracy. There is also something noteworthy about my journey there, about the way it highlights the remoteness of the property, the effort required to reach it, and what I would increasingly recognise as a demarcated space in which these re-enactors perform their pursuits and through which, they (re)create a sense of temporal(ised) place. There were also those slightly jarring clashes between clothed and costumed bodies, between the everyday and the extra-daily, the real and the imagined, the (hot, dusty) present and the suggestion of a (Viking) past. I will revisit these notions, and others, throughout this chapter and those that follow.

Beorg Wic, more formerly but less commonly referred to by its full title, Beorg Wic Under Munt (mountain), is, as explained on its website, an annual “three day living history event” run by the Ancient Arts Fellowship (AAF) (Ancient Arts Fellowship 2012). It takes place on the October

25 Please note, I use single inverted commas when quoting from scholarly sources and double inverted commas when quoting from fieldwork, interviews, and non-academic texts. I have also used double inverted commas for scare quotes.
long weekend, to utilise the Labour Day public holiday and enable more people to attend. On its website, AAF describes Beorg Wic as a time when “re-enactors from across the country gather for a long weekend [...] of feasting, crafting, fighting and archery” (Ancient Arts Fellowship 2013b). The year I attended, close to one hundred and eighty people from nine re-enactment societies gathered together to wage war, weave tapestries and wet their whistles at the recreated village tavern. It is held every year on a property owned collectively by the members of Danelaw Medieval Fighting Society, who, along with several other re-enactment groups, also attend the event. The

26 Labour Day is an annual public holiday in Australia, which commemorates the reduction of the workday to eight hours. In the state of New South Wales, where Beorg Wic is held, it falls on the first Monday of October.
encampment of numerous “villages”, set amidst a pine forest, is surrounded by other rural properties, national park and mountains. The nearest town, heritage listed Braidwood, is forty kilometres away. There is – as I was warned at one of the Danelaw training evenings beforehand – no electricity, no running water and no phone reception.

Before attending Beorg Wic, I had most often heard the site referred to as “Dunghaven” (even in the directory documents provided by AAF), but I had occasionally heard it referred to as “the Danelaw”. These varying names, their significance, and where Beorg Wic fits in, is explained on Danelaw’s website.

Understanding the names:

- *The Danelaw* is the name of the property.
- *Dunghaven* is the name of the encampment and village where Danelaw hosts its events.
- *Dungkeep* is the name of the fort at Dunghaven.
- What's with the names? The Dungbeetle is our club’s (Danelaw Inc.) official mascot. We proudly pay tribute the Dungbeetle because just like these industrious and under praised little insects, Danelaw too, toils relentlessly to push shit uphill. No matter how large the load nor how difficult the obstruction, both we and the intrepid dungbeetles just keep pushing even harder.
- *Beorg-Wic* is the encampment that AAF has reserved for hosting their October Long Weekend event named Beorg-Wic Under Munt. The two encampments are approximately 700m apart. Other groups have begun reserving areas in between for their own fortified encampments. (Danelaw 2012b)

As this suggests, there are specific areas at Beorg Wic that have been allocated to particular groups. Some feature hut-like structures (of varying degrees of historical accuracy) and fire pits built by members to substantiate their “village”. The campsites are a much-utilised space for re-enactors to socialise amongst their own society or entertain people from other groups. It is here that people prepare their daytime meals (over a fire) and relax during downtime – playing instruments, singing songs (from various periods), telling stories, and hand sewing costumes. As the night wears on, the “villages” become the site for intergroup liaisons, which, I am told, “go on aaaaaallll the time.”
Each year, there are scheduled workshops in various skills, crafts and trades from the period. The year I attended, they offered tablet weaving, wire weaving, hand sewing, brass work, rope work, forging, shoe-making and nalbinding (an ancient form of knitting). As well as the formal workshops, there were, as described on the Beorg Wic registration form, more casual “craft and converse” sessions for people to “work on recently gained skills, current projects or just to have a talk.” There were also scheduled combat sessions, fighter training sessions, archery, a market, a feast, and a bardic competition.

The organisers of Beorg Wic, AAF, describe themselves as a “Dark Ages re-enactment group […] which provides historical and educational displays” (Ancient Arts Fellowship 2013a). They are based in Australia’s capital city, Canberra. Their activities include not only medieval fighting forms – a highly popular form of re-enactment, both in Australia and globally (de Groot 2008; Cryan 2012) – but also archery, armouring, metalwork and crafts (a claim substantiated by the range of workshops they ran at Beorg Wic). Combat training is held twice a week and craft nights once a week, to coincide with the Tuesday night training.

Danelaw, in contrast, has a much larger emphasis on fighting, as their full name, Danelaw Medieval Fighting Society, suggests. They meet one night a week for training, take part in semi-regular displays at festivals, and participate in competitions at re-enactment gatherings. While fighting is the only type of re-enactment for which they have formal, regular meetings, Danelaw claims to also include and encourage crafts: “fabrics, textiles and that woven stuff”; armoury with their “resident (professional) blacksmith”; jewellery reproduction; and cooking, “food, food, glorious food” in their “two period beehive ovens” at the association’s property (Danelaw 2013). The group meets in a scout hall in a notoriously rough part of Sydney’s Western Suburbs. In this way, Danelaw
departs from representations (often self-perpetuated) of re-enactment as a middle-class pursuit (Blackmore 2007). Danelaw is, according to its website, one of the longest-running, still active medieval groups in Australia (Danelaw 2012a).

Seven other re-enactment groups attended Beorg Wic. They varied in focus from being almost completely concerned with learning historic martial arts – Swordplay, for instance, is a medieval sword fighting club that does not emphasise historical accuracy in their costumes, or include many of the other aspects or activities of living history, except at Beorg Wic – to groups like Europa, who aim to: “try to recreate life as it was over a millennium ago, with traditional crafts, games, cooking, and costume, as well as re-enactment combat using period armour and weapons” (Europa 2013). The historical periods these groups re-enact also vary greatly, from The Company of the Staple (referred to as simply Staple) who focus on a particular year and geographical location – 1376 Calais – to Danelaw, who feature four distinct periods in their repertoire: “Fall of Rome: Celts 600 AD, Dark Ages: Saxon and Norman 1000 AD, The Crusades: Crusader and Saracen 1200 AD, High Medieval: Knight and Squire 1400 AD” (Danelaw 2012a).

Beorg Wic was not my sole source of field research with this group. As alluded to above, I also observed and participated in training sessions with Danelaw. This choice was largely practical – while both AAF and Danelaw would have been interesting and appropriate communities for my research (as the organisers of the event and the owners of the site, respectively) Danelaw is based only an hour from where I was living, whereas AAF is located in another state, five hours away. In many respects, my research with Danelaw was my “in” to Beorg Wic, without which I may not have been allowed to attend.\footnote{This produced, in fact, an unintended facet of tension within a larger sphere of discord between some members and groups – an issue I will return to when considering the function(ing) of community.} Technically, all attendees are required to be members of one of the attending re-enactment groups. This is, ostensibly, for insurance purposes, but it is also, as the
president of AAF explained, an important part of creating a safe, comfortable environment, by knowing that everyone there is known to at least one of the groups. Trust is important in many re-enactment communities – camping in remote locations without modern conveniences, with belongings easily accessible, and with children in attendance, requires it. As it happened, I did not have to join a club, as my university provides public liability insurance and Sam, the treasurer of Danelaw, said the society was “happy to vouch for me”, feeling “comfortable to do so, having now met.” Once my registration was sorted, AAF gave me full access to participate in, take notes from and photograph all the workshops, the market, the bardic competition and all areas of the site. I was not allowed to participate in combat as I had not trained for a sufficient length of time, but they welcomed me to watch the matches and record them however I chose. The only conditions, which applied not only to me but to all attendees, were to “make an effort with costume” (wearing clothing that at least had the general appearance of being period) and to minimise what they called anachronisms: modern objects that clearly did not belong to the era, such as umbrellas, watches and plastic bottles. The use of period-appropriate dinnerware was also strongly encouraged, at least for the communal feasts. So, garbed in an ankle length, long sleeved, sack-like beige dress, with an earthy maroon overtunic and brown leather workman boots, I spent three days learning how to fight with a sword, spear and bow, forge weapons and jewellery, hand sew a tunic, embroider, weave wire, and drink out of a real cow horn “like any true Viking warrior”. I entered this “Viking” bushland eager to learn and interpret how this array of re-enactors conceive and approach their practice in terms of pedagogy, historiography, performance and embodiment. On reflection, I noticed two key reoccurring themes that I was not expecting to find, at least not with the significance and complexity with which they circulated in this temporary world of re-enactment – notions of community and the complicating of what these re-enactors called “h.a.”: historical accuracy.
Community for a dark age

A sense of community is the cornerstone of Beorg Wic. Re-enactment is often a very social activity, and many people stated that this was one of the main elements that drew them to their group and this event. In a questionnaire response, for example, a participant wrote that they joined “through a friend who is a member. I joined because I already enjoyed archery as a sport and wanted the opportunity to make more friends and learn more crafts” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Many re-enactors do practice their hobby, or at least the martial arts side of it, as a sport, and some participants, particularly ones from Swordplay, even listed sport as one of their main reasons for joining. As Erisman (1998, 149) suggests, some re-enactors get involved in the hobby as an extension of a related activity they already participate in – sports such as archery, fencing and historic dancing. As the above response indicates, however, the social opportunities re-enactment offers are equally, and often more important than the sporting ones (Carnegie and McCabe 2008; Erisman 1998).

Chatting in the kitchen at Danelaw fighter practice, Audrey, a short, plump and cheerful mother of two teenagers, who are also re-enactors, told me that “even if people can’t fight one week, they usually still come along, just to have a chat and watch. It’s a social thing too.” In response to a question regarding experiences that participants feel are significant to understanding the purpose of re-enactment, one of my respondents listed: “a few love partners”, “lifelong friendships” and a “brotherhood amongst some clubs” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). This sense of community and belonging was posited by many of these re-enactors as one of the most significant aspects of their practice. Many of the writers on re-enactment, including Erisman (58-64), Hall (1994, 8-10) and Handler and Saxton (1988, 242-243), associate re-enactment with a nostalgia for what are

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28 All questionnaire responses have been anonymised. I use ‘unpublished data’ and ‘interview by author’ to identify quotations derived from questionnaires and interviews, respectively, in distinction from those derived from fieldwork. Similarly, italics are utilised for fieldwork narratives and plain font for quotes from the fieldwork that are unaccompanied by ethnographic thick description.
romanticised as ‘better times’ and ‘stronger communities’. One of the re-enactors I spoke with at Beorg Wic, a teenager I will refer to as Bet, told me that she wrote her “major Society and Culture assignment on re-enactment” and that she had “a theory on belonging.”

We don’t have the same sense of community that we used to, and there aren’t as distinct cultures, so people are drawn to re-enactment to satisfy a desire for culture and community, that’s missing in current life. […] I have a thing, once I turn onto those dirt roads, I leave the rest of the world behind. It doesn’t matter what else is going on in my life; once I’m here all those worries disappear.

Bet expressed a strong sense of connection with the broader re-enactment community at Beorg Wic, as well as with her own group. This created, for her, a sense of belonging and contentment. Her theory resonates with many of the participants’ responses. One of my questionnaire respondents wrote: “it’s a great feeling with everyone being so welcoming; this has been huge for someone who is as self-conscious as me.” Another wrote “everyone is willing to help you with everything you need so it’s a community and a huge family, who wouldn’t want that? I’ve suddenly got 60 older brothers who are my support and a heap of older sisters/aunts for advice.” As this response suggests, the feeling of community is of a potency to lead many of these re-enactors to regard each other as extended family.

As well as offering a way to meet new people, re-enactment also functions as what several participants described as a family hobby that facilitates quality, family time. Several couples brought their children with them to Beorg Wic, ranging from toddlers to teenagers. A German woman who, despite not being a regular re-enactor, comes to Beorg Wic because her teenage daughter is involved, described the value re-enactment holds for children and families as one of the most significant aspects of the practice.

I love how children can be allowed to run in packs and learn the value of handmade stuff. It is good that they see how long it takes and learn self-reliance […] Re-enactment is broader

29 Such nostalgia derives, some argue, from a crisis of identity and a sense of a fragmented community prevalent in post-modernity (Boym xiv; Chase and Shaw 1989, 8; Hall 8-10). This notion and the function(ing) of nostalgia in my case studies are analysed in detail in chapter six.
than just a skill-based club and this allows families to have a unified hobby which gives scope for individuality.

While re-enactment functions as some people’s main social circle, other participants expressed a need for balance and emphasised that re-enactment was just one aspect of their life. Audrey put this very succinctly when she said, “it’s a hobby, you know, but we’ve got lives outside of it.” Sam elaborated on this subject at my first training session with Danelaw.

Sam: so, we train here, and then we take part in inter-club events and do demonstrations at shows. […] After we do a weekend of demonstrations, we take the next training off.

Me: to recover?

Sam: yeah, but also to be with our families. We’re everyday people; re-enactment doesn’t dominate our lives. After a festival, we have some time with our family. This is a hobby for us; we have normal lives, jobs and families too. So, if we trained Wednesday night, then did demonstrations all weekend, we take a night off – our family need our time too. It’s not all about physical recovery although that’s part of it.
During this conversation, as Sam prepared to train me in medieval sword fighting techniques, I noticed that I was the only woman in the combat area. Some writers have expressed concern regarding race and gender prejudice and (mis)representation in re-enactment (Hall 1994, 8; Schneider 2011, 8-9). In the quest for what is often framed as authenticity, do re-enactors place historical accuracy above gender and racial equality? Does re-enacting (re)invoke past prejudices and misdoings that malign the present? While these concerns are extremely important to address, as suggested in my literature review, they do not necessarily apply to the entirety, or even the majority, of the broad and varying field of re-enactment. The nature of the historical culture or event being re-enacted and the way the re-enactors approach this history significantly affects the way these social issues are represented and function.

On the occasions I attended Danelaw fighter practice, the sessions were male-dominated, particularly amongst those participating in active training. Of the dozen or so people there, only three were female. I only saw one woman fight. These re-enactors seemed to be conscious and regretful of this imbalance, and one of the men commented (quite enthusiastically) that I had “just doubled [their] female attendance.” What may be regarded as the traditional gender roles of the past seem to be still in effect in the “othered” time of re-enactment. For example, when I mentioned the lack of female fighters, Sam told me that “the women usually chat in the kitchen, and they make the clothes.” I found, however, that they all seemed excited to have another female fighter and genuinely keen to recruit more. My gender did not seem to elicit more lenient treatment; Sam encouraged me to fight with metal during my first training, and I came away with many bruises. Afterwards, I asked Audrey if women can participate in all the same activities as men, and she responded, quite passionately: “yeah! Of course! There aren’t as many female fighters as men, but there should be a few at Beorg Wic.” Audrey’s response reflects the answers I received from those at Beorg Wic I spoke with about the matter, all of whom were adamant that the girls could do anything the boys could. Some of the women seemed a little insulted by the idea that anyone would think
The morning after the feast, people laze around the wench bench – an area with a large log, directly in front of the fighting zone, which a group of female re-enactors have claimed to chat, eat and watch the fighting. One of the women sits to the side of this space, her partner’s head in her lap. As a melee is fought in front of us (all but one of the fighters being male), I comment that it seems to be very male dominated. A few of the women physically bristle, straightening up and turning sharply towards me. A strawberry blond lass with glasses interjects, “I fight! I fought this morning.” Another young woman, speaking quietly so as not to assault the ears of the hung-over man in her lap, says: “I usually fight, but I’m not feeling up to it today.” A third woman rallies to their defence: ‘there were two girls on the field earlier.” I apologise for my obviously false assumption. “I only wondered because there are so many more men fighting than women. But it sounds like this is purely by choice?” The women and even the suffering young man agree with strong yesses and vigorous head nods.

Following this unintended slight, Bet and I discussed how she became involved in re-enactment.

Bet: we went to a fair and there was a battle demonstration on, and I thought, I’ve got to do that. So, I kept at mum until she let me join. I used to fight. As a teen, I had a lot of anger management issues.

Me: so, it was a good outlet?

Bet: yeah, but once I got through puberty, I wanted to be a lady, and do lady things, like drink and sew. (original emphasis)

The marking of some activities here as female and, more specifically, with a particular version of classed femininity (emphasised by the “posh” voice Bet feigned to say “lady” and “lady things”) reflects a contemporary sensibility of historic class and gender roles. There is a sense here that, by exchanging her sword for a needle and goblet, Bet was seeking a defined and delineated conception of, and way of being, a woman – a (re-en)acted, fictive femininity, played and at play within the temporal(ised) place of re-enactment. This projects onto the past an imagined gender dynamic in which ‘women were women and men were men’ (Schneider 2011, 55). Conceptions of what constitutes being a woman or man are, of course, cultural constructs. While gender roles and relations in different eras might have been navigated in different ways than they are today, they did not hold the cohesive simplicity that such perceptions suggest.
Whether or not they are based on desires to play gender in particular ways, the activities at Beorg Wic are, to an extent, gendered – at least regarding participation. Based on their questionnaire responses and the conversations I had with them, most of the women at Beorg Wic prefer the craft and trade activities to the martial arts. One woman did, however, state combat as the part of re-enactment she most enjoyed, suggesting it offered her a way of challenging gender stereotypes and presumptions. “It’s fun and an adrenaline rush. It’s also an awesome feeling to beat down men and overcome the misconceptions of being female and shorter than most of the men” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). According to some participants, their practice facilitates fluidity between gendered activities by offering men the opportunity to enjoy activities usually perceived as feminine. Quite a few of the questionnaire responses from male participants mentioned being able to “dress up in awesome costumes” – something they “usually would be laughed at for doing” (outside of re-enactment) – as one of their favourite aspects of the practice (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Several men also mentioned costume making and crafts as activities they enjoy through their practice. From what I was told, quite a few of the men “get into sewing.” One of the women, when describing what she considers to be the most significant aspects of re-enactment, said that it is “one of the few places that males can indulge in bling without being considered effeminate. I love that [male] friends can ring me and talk about silk or feathers and swords” (unpublished data Nov. 2012).

While there is a predominance of male fighters and female craftspeople, there are men and women in both groups and members are encouraged to pursue the activities that interest them, regardless of the historical accuracy of them engaging in that pursuit. The arena is open to women, but not many take up the offer. 

Re-enactors are often portrayed to be (re)creating historic gender roles (or how they wish these roles to have been) (Schneider 2011, 55). The gender dynamics produced at Beorg Wic, however, are not of the past (real or imagined) but rather the present, reflecting a continued inequity in these relations. The predominance of male participants in activities that were
traditionally constructed as masculine, such as sword fighting, echoes a similar ratio found in many male-dominated occupations and industries. Consider the Australian Defence Force – according to data published online by the Parliament of Australia, women comprise only 12.8% of our permanent forces and only 1% of the Naval Reserves. Australia is not an anomaly in this regard; these statistics sit between those of the armed forces in the U.K. and U.S., whose female members represent 7.9% and 14%, respectively (Women in the Armed Forces 2014). The ways in which women and men participate in physical and creative activities, and engage with physically demanding and/or “risky” behaviours are a contemporary issue – both within re-enactment and across society. Such gender differences, as Iris Young (1989) argues, do not reflect an inherent or insurmountable difference in biology, physiognomy or “essence”, but rather socio-cultural expectations and delimitations of gendered ways of moving and being in the world.

Another concern expressed about re-enactment regards jingoism. A minority of participants said they felt an ancestral link with the cultures they re-enact, most of whom emphasised that this was not the reason they re-enact this group of people. One of the questionnaire responses, for example, answered the question “do you have/feel an ancestral connection to the culture(s) you re-enact?” with: “yes, but that's not why I do it. It's just kinda cool to tell people I'm descended from Vikings.” There were also people who expressed interest in re-enacting other cultures. One woman, for example, said that she was interested in “Persian/Arabic history” and practices “Middle Eastern dance.” A young Australian man, with what he identified as Greek and Hispanic heritage, wrote that he feels connected with the history because he re-enacts his “Greek heritage side as a Byzantium (medieval Greek speaking Roman).” Not surprisingly, there were also those who felt a connection with the (mainly) Scandinavian and British cultures being re-enacted. One man, for example, described himself as being “British through and through”, a Norwegian woman said that her and her son’s participation in Viking re-enactment were in “keeping with the family history”, and another woman based her SCA persona “in the small town [her] Grandfather was born in and the name [she]
chose was based on [her Grandfather’s] Grandmother.” Reconnecting to ancestral roots seems to offer a minority of re-enactors a stronger sense of identity. This was epitomised by a re-enactor who had migrated to Australia from New Zealand: “there is a strong sense that British European is a “default zero”. My family and I have been told we don’t have a culture […]. I strongly feel that everyone needs to know where they have come from in order to find their place in the world.”

This notion resonates with Anthropological theory on the lack of cultural identity in countries like Australia and New Zealand. Jackson suggests that:


I would clarify here that many Australians, as most readers will already be aware, do not have solely, or even partly, ‘European roots’ (I myself am of part Arabic extraction, through my Maltese line).

Furthermore, our inability to ‘identify wholeheartedly’ with the rich cultures of Indigenous Australians is to our detriment and, unfortunately, to the detriment of those people whose way of life was, and still is, repeatedly desecrated. The point Jackson makes here is that globalisation and ethnic diaspora are creating an international landscape where many people are geographically distanced from the countries of their origins. The significance of this manifests potently in Australia, where the non-Aboriginal majority lack an emplaced connection with our heritage, coming, as we do, so newly to Australia, from many different countries around the globe. This (dis)location is accentuated by the very young and painful nature of white settlement in this country – a past that most Australians do not wish to identify with and to which, in fact, many Australians have no ancestral or ethnic link. There are, however, older aspects of British history that people feel they can connect to without the shame that accompanies more recent history. Based on the range of ethnic backgrounds at Beorg Wic, the appeal of re-enacting these histories is not confined to those of Anglo-Celtic descent. While the iniquities of Australian Colonial history render this past problematic, other periods (or particular aspects of these periods, such as trades, crafts and martial
arts in the Dark Ages) offer safer ground to (re)tread (Gapps 2003a, 109-111). I unpack this idea further, with comparison between my three case studies, in chapter six.

Although a sense of connection with their ancestral past is significant for some of these re-enactors, the vast majority of Beorg Wiccians stated that their chief reasons for re-enacting were their enjoyment of the activities, particularly “dressing up”, and the sense of community it provides for them. It is important to examine the underlying, paradigmatic social issues in any practice by overlaying particular categories of analysis, such as race and gender, as I have endeavoured to do here. The responses I received, however, would indicate a mainly positive dynamic between issues of race, gender and inclusion. According to a female re-enactor at Beorg Wic, who identified as being of Turkish descent: “it doesn't matter what your background is when you're re-enacting, everyone is just equal. No one cares if you’re rich, highly educated, if your black/yellow/purple or have a religious background” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). None of the participants expressed any concern about compromising historical accuracy by facilitating equal involvement for people of all backgrounds and genders. Nor did I receive the impression that these re-enactors were celebrating “white” culture. This form of supposed authenticity – gathering to celebrate difference through exclusion – did not appear to drive the impetus of these people to re-enact their version of the past. There was, however, an underlying consciousness of issues of race, heritage, and gender in the contemporary world, and more specifically, in the changing and uncertain identity of a post-colonial, multicultural, gender-aware Australian society. This reflects a preoccupation that pervades, both positively and negatively, the current global climate. While attitudes and approaches to these issues varied a little between participants, most prominent was a sense of unification through shared (trans)cultural interest. Given its presence in my other case studies, this (trans)cultural connection seems to be a significant aspect of recreational, cultural re-enactment, or at least, these examples of the practice.

The idea that re-enactors prioritise (their interpretation of) authenticity, and a desire for
“simpler” social relations above all other concerns pervades, as I suggested in chapter one, much of the academic literature on the practice. My encounters complicate such portrayals; these particular re-enactors’ conceptions of and approaches to the past, and present, are more manifold and inclusive than such research suggests.

“H.a.”: historical, or hysterical, accuracy?

Historical accuracy, often perceived as the holy grail of re-enactors in both the practice and the scholarship, has become interwoven with notions of and claims to authenticity in living history. In the vast majority of both academic and practitioner works, the former is represented as the path in attempts to achieve the latter. This is so much the case that authenticity is frequently defined in this subculture as historical accuracy. Being completely “h.a.”, as the re-enactors I researched with abbreviated the term is, of course, an impossible aim, as many have emphasised and re-enactors themselves admit. But is historical accuracy the only way re-enactors attempt to evoke a sense of the authentic? May something authentic be found in and through other aspects of the practice? And is historical accuracy, in and of itself, the overriding component of re-enactment as a methodology, as it is portrayed by many to be? These questions, which informed or emerged from my fieldwork, form a significant part of this dissertation’s broader framework of inquiry and will be theorised more closely in chapters six and seven. Here, I address how historical accuracy is defined and judged by the groups I studied at Beorg Wic, in what elements of their practice historical accuracy manifests, how it is policed, and how the desire for authenticity is negotiated with the need to allow for practicalities and other objectives.

30 Note that “h.a.” was used by Beorg Wiccians as both an adjective and noun. The abbreviation thus refers to both ‘accurate’ and ‘accuracy’.
It has been suggested that dedication to authenticity is a criterion of “progressive” or “hard-core” practitioners, while flagrant anachronisms are associated with “farbs” (Horwitz 1998, 10; Schneider 2011, 54-55). Although commonly used in the U.S., these categories seem, as stated earlier, to be infrequently, if ever, applied in Australia. I never heard or saw these terms expressed at, or in correspondence about, Beorg Wic, nor at training with Danelaw (or with any of the re-enactments I researched). While historical accuracy is certainly a significant issue, which they often discuss, the re-enactors at Beorg Wic did not categorise each other, at least not into set types the way many re-enactors apparently do in the U.S. Groups were, however, sometimes spoken about in terms of their historical accuracy, particularly if they were an extreme example at either end of the spectrum. The first thing I learnt about the Company of the Staple, for example, is that they are “obsessed with being h.a.” This snippet of insight, posed as a point of contrast against which Danelaw could be defined, was gleaned whilst chatting with non-combatants in the kitchen of the scout hall used for Danelaw training. Audrey elaborated: “our approach isn’t as intense. We describe ourselves as eighty per cent accurate – we use the right material, authentic patterns, but we aren’t afraid to use a sewing machine.” If Danelaw sits in the middle ground, groups like Staple provide a marker for the deep end of “h.a.”

*In the early evening, the warmth of the day ebbs away as the light fades. Sue and Ellen (young women also in their twenties), and Rowan and Bob (men of a similar age), and I sit on logs around a campfire, flames crackling away. We are continuing an ongoing debate — did Max go overboard in his zoning of what he deems to be h.a. and non-h.a. tents? What should (and should not) be considered a sufficiently historically accurate tent? Does the material need to be accurate, or is the design sufficient? Can allowances be made to incorporate what we would now consider adequate shelter from the elements? As we talk, Bob, a Staple man, hand sews what appears to be a pair of strangely shaped shorts made from a rough looking material of a dirty cream colour. Rowan must have noticed my curiosity about these odd garments, as he interrupted himself to explain: “they’re historically accurate underwear.” I laugh, assuming he is joking, but Bob looks up and nods with a self-deprecating smile. “These bits of downtime are a great opportunity to work on your wardrobe.” Rowan recommences badgering Bob for his*
opinion on the tent situation. Although clearly hesitant to become entangled in the debate, Bob eventually concedes “it does seem a bit much.” “See, that says it all!” In answer to my questioning look, Rowan gestures emphatically to the garments Bob is diligently sewing. “When this guy is saying it’s too much, you know it is!” This was reinforced when the topic was again raised, around another campfire, with Rowan, Sue, Ellen and the treasurer of Danelaw, Sam. “When someone who hand sews his underwear says it’s being taken too far…” Historically accurate undergarments, it would seem, are considered above the call of duty even amongst re-enactors, or at least, all but the most “hardcore”.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are groups like Swordplay, mentioned earlier. After being enlightened on Staple and Danelaw’s respective levels of “h.a.” at my first training session with the latter, I enquired about costumes – what would be considered sufficiently “h.a.” for a non-re-enactor researcher to wear?

_Audrey, with a comforting pat, tries to set my mind at ease. “It’s just about making an effort. We don’t expect newbies to be spot on. But, like, we had this theatrical swordplay group start to come along to Beorg Wic, and they were wearing really frilly, flashy stuff, you know, like you’d get at a costume store. They’re not into the historical side of it like we are. And the first year, we figured, oh well, that’s ok, they’re new, but then they just kept doing it, five years later. That’s not respecting what we do.” Swordplay’s reputation is somewhat redeemed, however, by Rowan; “they’re a lot better now.” Despite her criticisms, Audrey is happy to give credit where it’s due; “that’s true, the ones that still come are pretty good now.”_

Audrey’s critique reflects a commonly held view amongst these re-enactors that gross anachronisms are acceptable at a beginner level but become increasingly less tolerable over time. Some re-enactors, however, continue to be comfortable committing “h.a.” faux pas. In a questionnaire response, one of the members of Swordplay actually defined the society, without any apparent qualms, as a “non-h.a. group.” The lines are often blurred between self-identifying re-enactment societies such as Danelaw and AAF and groups like Staple, who are “technically a theatrical period combat group” but still fall under the umbrella of re-enactment. The level of historical accuracy
seems to be a differentiating factor between groups. These Australian re-enactors might not have labels for specific rungs on the ladder of authenticity, but commitment to accuracy is still, nevertheless, used to categorise groups in relation to each other, and in so doing, define individual group identity.

In disparaging Swordplay’s lack of ‘period’ clothing as disrespectful to what they do, Audrey framed costume as one of the key components of Danelaw’s practice and the “historical side” of their re-enacting. Period attire is commonly recognised as the focus for re-enactors’ hankering for historical accuracy, as demonstrated in my literature review (Hall 1994, 10; Sparkis 1992, 59). Costume functions as a visible demonstration of a re-enactor’s level of commitment to historical accuracy, and in groups such as Staple, where “h.a.” is paramount, commitment to authenticity equates with commitment to their very practice. As Audrey’s responses suggest, the style and accuracy of costume are perceived as being very connected with one’s stage and level of involvement, with an expectation that commitment to these aspects will develop as a member’s immersion increases. This was emphasised by a long-time re-enactor at Beorg Wic.

Gavin: I have a theory of re-enactment, which goes in three stages. […] Most people start with the Dark Ages because it’s fun and the clothes are easy to make. Then as they start to get really into the costume making, and want something more challenging and pretty, they go to the Napoleonic period. Then, when they’ve got older and retired, they move to the ancients, because they just sit around, feasting. That’s my theory.

Me: and do others know this theory?

Gavin: yeah, it’s a fairly well-known theory of re-enactment.

The “h.a.” development process does have its limits. Sam’s response to my question, “do re-enactors become more h.a. as they continue their practice?”, reflects what seems to be a general consensus amongst those with whom I spoke: “generally, yes, but most people will reach a level of h.a. and decide that’s as far as they want to go.” Not everyone, in fact not many, it seems, will reach the heights of hand sewing h.a. underpants.

Although costume is the most apparent and often the most consequential focal point for
authenticity, props – such as dinnerware and drinking vessels – and equipment, particularly armour and weapons, are also significant to these re-enactors. At Danelaw fighter practice, in the lead-up to Beorg Wic, Audrey and Rowan prepped me on what I would need at the camp. After the practical items had been covered – three days of water and food; warm under-layers to sleep in; enclosed waterproof shoes (“remember you’ll be trudging around in muddy woodland”); and “socks, lots of socks. You might want two a day” – they moved on to what would be expected in the way of period props.

_Ticking the items off her fingers, Audrey rattles off a list of "must haves"_. “You’ll need a wooden or metal plate, bowl, knife, spoon, fork and cup. Just go to Vinnies and get one of those metal goblets they always have there. 31 They’re not good at night, though – they get really cold, or really hot if you go near the fire.” Rowan chimes in, “well, some people drink their mead warm...” “Right, so metal goblet near the fire equals mulled mead, without the spices”, I say, making a mental note. “Exactly. The bamboo ones you can get are alright; they’ll do.” Audrey nods, agreeing with Rowan. Mary, an older lady whose husband no longer fights because he injured his hip falling off a camel, joins the conversation as she enters the kitchen. “You just need to make sure the wooden ones are properly sealed.” Rowan clarifies this instruction for me: “or they’ll rot.” My face must be showing my apprehension because Audrey adds, reassuringly, “you can do it with a candle, with the wax, you know? It’s really easy.”

As well as such casual conversations regarding the expectations for Beorg Wic, more official guidelines for historical accuracy in costumes and paraphernalia were distributed by the president of AAF in one of several emails about the event. As the debate discussed around the campfire demonstrated, even tents can be considered an important element of creating h.a. re-enactment.

**Period and non-period camping areas:** the non-period camping area is to the right of the main entrance; the period area is to the left. Please note that unmodified Girl Guide tents (the ones that look like low-walled, bell tents) are not considered period. In an attempt to give the central, communal area a better ambience, it is requested that in the non-period area the canvas tents are closer to the path and kitchen area and the plastic tents are slightly further away from the main path. This isn’t an attempt to ostracise or punish anybody, it’s about generating atmosphere. (Pers. comm. Sept. 2012; emphasis mine)

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31 ‘Vinnies’ is an Australian abbreviation for the Saint Vincent de Paul charity stores.
There is a sense of theatricality here – of creating a “set” to elicit a stronger sense of place for the (re- en)acting. This is not, however, the staged performance of “theatre”; these re-enactors are negotiating with an organic site, reflecting something of Schechner’s (1968, 1973) practice of, and theorising on, environmental theatre. This style of performance diminishes demarcation of audience and performance spaces and utilises a location that mirrors the setting of the narrative/action, in an effort to immerse all involved in a real (feeling) environment. In the ‘found space’ of environmental theatre, ‘all the space is used for performance; all the space is used for audience’ (Schechner 1968, 48). This sense of theatricality – or what I posit as one of the three forms of performativity intrinsic to recreational re-enactment – parallels Snow’s (1993) analysis of the Plimoth Plantation living history museum. Such sites additionally feature a heightened interaction between performers and audience members, with onlookers sometimes becoming actively involved in the performance (Snow 1993; Magelssen 2002; 2006). At Beorg Wic, however, the demarcation between these two groups was, in a sense, not only diminished or even removed but rather moot; this was not a show, and there was no audience, per se. Although there were many micro performances within this macro performance, the private, unframed nature of the event resulted in a heightened movement between and merging of performer and audience positionalities. Instances of (temporary) distinctions, such as during the “battles”, quickly dispersed or altered, emphasising the fluidity of this performance.

The president of AAF’s instructions contain and elicited contradictions, intricacies and ongoing disputes of which I have described but a little. Despite Max’s claim that demarcating period and non-period spaces for tents was not intended to exclude or castigate, it caused offence, tension and argument in the lead-up, and during, Beorg Wic. The debate on h.a. tents was triggered by Danelaw members being told their tents “weren’t h.a. enough” to be in the main, period area of, as they expressed, “the property we own!” Apparently, even a couple of the tents from Staple (the group that hand-sews h.a. undergarments) were deemed insufficiently accurate. I was offered some
insight into the complexities and competing factors to be considered when trying to make or source
a period tent whilst chatting to Evan, a re-enactor from Europa, and his son, outside their “relatively
h.a.” tent.

Gesturing to the tents around us, Evan explains, “all these tents are speculations, because
we’ve only got illuminations […]. They wouldn’t have had brass eyelets and it wouldn’t have
been canvas, it would have been wool.” Evan’s son, who is chopping wood, snorts. “The wool is
ridiculous. We tried it once; it leaks and you get soaked.” Nodding, Evan mentions the tension
regarding the stringent standards for tents this year, questioning whether being h.a. is worth
being cold and potentially very wet. “So the Vikings didn’t use brass for eyelets?” “Their tents
didn’t have eyelets at all”, Evan explains in answer to my question. Pointing to a tent to my
right, he says: “that’s more h.a. just a slit entry and no eyelets. But it’s canvas.”

Despite the sin of canvas, this tent must have passed Max’s h.a. examination, because it was in the
main period camping area. Max was the only person officially policing and mandating historical
accuracy, but there were informal efforts amongst the re-enactors to lift each other’s game,
especially to help a “newbie”/potential recruit.

A group of men and women from various groups sit around a rough, wooden table, the stars and
candles our only light. We are eating the first course of the feast – a surprisingly sweet meat pie
with sultanas and cinnamon; salad with egg and flowers; and Swedish meatballs with a white
cheese sauce. My “plate” – a lid of a saucepan – wobbles precariously on its top handle every time I
approach my food. Scott, noticing my struggles, asks somewhat incredulously “is that a pot lid?!?”
“It’s the only thing I had that was either metal or wood...” I respond, laughing. “William, you’ve
got a spare plate, don’t you?” “Yeah, I’ll go get it.” William, who is already standing, having
given up his spot so that I could sit down, puts down his food so that he can retrieve said plate
from his tent. Once William is out of earshot, Scott pulls out a bowl. “Of course, you would have
been welcome to use this, but it’s much more fun making him go get it.” William strides back up
and gives me a bowl, a gesture that is somewhat diminished by Scott waving his spare bowl
around gleefully. William responds to my amused and guilty thanks with: “don’t worry, just don’t
let me see you eating out of a pot lid again.” I look with relief at my vaguely period bag, which
hides the metal milkshake cup I had planned to drink out of, and feel thankful I forked out the coin
for a drinking horn at the medieval market that afternoon.
Moments such as these point towards the fact that, despite the emphasis on community and communal sharing of goods and skills, there are, nevertheless, commercial and competitive aspects of this hobby, like most others. Despite the relative immunity my outsider status afforded me, observing the efforts of many of these re-enactors, and learning something of the skills involved in their practice, motivated me to reciprocate their efforts, at least to the limited degree available to me. Perhaps this was simply a matter of pride – even an outsider academic does not want to be considered the Australian equivalent of a complete “farb”. I suspect, however, it was more than this; that it was a blurring of insider-outsider relations, evoked by my immersion in the ethnographic process. Anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup draws on James Clifford’s assertion that identities are always relational and inventive, to suggest that ethnographic participant-observation can blur the
line between self and other, creating a liminal ‘world of betweenness’ (1992, 116–20). As Hastrup suggests, the ethnographic ‘world’ we enter is not ‘the unmediated world of the “others”’; it is a world experienced through, and (re)created by, intersubjective engagement – between researcher and researched, outsider and insider, self and other (117). Hence, as well as affecting those whose (sub)cultural world we enter, our own subjectivity can be partially, momentarily, affected. Surrounded by garbed bodies, eating medieval meals from medievalesque dishes, next to a (re)constructed medieval tavern, I did not wish to break the illusion that this unframed performance created. In my (mis)doing of medieval dining, I felt, for a moment, something of their desire for historical accuracy, for reasons that were my own, but for an effect that was shared.

Pot lids and milkshake cups aside, it must be said that the discreet use of some anachronistic objects, if hidden from sight whenever possible, was officially sanctioned in the h.a. guidelines Max issued to all attendees, via email, before the festival.

**Saturday and Sunday Feast.** The feasts are planned to commence at 6-6.30pm. The menu will be available at the tavern and kitchen for people with dietary concerns. Please bring your own feasting gear. For those people partaking in liquid refreshment, it is requested that the effort is made to keep non-period bottles out of view, with decanting into your favourite horn or jug as an option. (Pers. comm. Sept. 2012)

This notion of keeping anachronistic or non-period items “out of view” pervaded Beorg Wic. Whenever I requested to take a photograph, the participants would say something along the lines of “just let me hide the plastic” or “I’ll just tuck the plastic away for you.” The presence of certain anachronisms was accepted as something of a necessary evil at Beorg Wic, but there was still an expectation that people would endeavour to minimise the visibility of such spoilers, particularly for photographs. At my first Danelaw training session, I was told that cameras were perfectly acceptable “as long as it’s not hanging off your neck the whole time”; that is, as long as, when I was not using the camera, it was put away, out of sight (and mind). Audrey seemed surprised I would even feel the need to ask, exclaiming “oh yeah! I take HEAPS of photos!” When I arrived at Dunghaven and signed in with Sam, I thought it best to confirm that my (rather sizeable) DSLR was tolerable. The
response? “Go for it, just hide it when Max comes around.” This two-pronged attack on the supposedly inauthentic – using period rather than plastic wares, and, when anachronisms must be present, minimising their conspicuousness, was not, however, something that was enforced, but rather encouraged.

The tension between creating an authentic atmosphere and utilising anachronisms that facilitate or enhance one’s experience of that atmosphere was continually negotiated. The most apparent example of this was the way a blind eye was (and frequently needed to be) turned to not only the use of cameras but also video recorders. Participants were advised in advance that students from the Australian National University, Canberra, would be filming on the first day. Recording the event, particularly the combat, was very important to many of the re-enactors. There was a definite tension between the wish to reduce anachronisms (such as cameras) and the desire to have a record of the event. Erisman suggests that the history of the Society for Creative Anachronism is equally, if not more, important to those re-enactors than the history they re-create (1998, 274). This does not seem to be the case with the societies at Beorg Wic (certainly not Danelaw or AAF), but an interest in creating an archive of their activities seems apparent. Photos and footage are shared not only amongst friends, like holiday snaps, but also online, between re-enactment groups, as a way of demonstrating what each club and event “are about” and what they achieved: as record, recruitment advert, and bid for cultural capital, raising their “cred” amongst other re-enactors. The online sharing of such media – particularly footage of fights and other skill-based endeavours – also serves, as discussed in more detail in chapter seven, as a way of widening access to potential sources amongst re-enactors, facilitating knowledge, technique and skill sharing between re-enactment clubs across Australia, and internationally.

Both Danelaw and AAF were willing to compromise historical accuracy in regard to matters of health and wellbeing. Facilitating access to the menu for people with special dietary requirements is anachronistic in itself; awareness and accommodation of food intolerances were much more
limited in the Viking era than our own. The tension between health and safety on the one hand and historical accuracy on the other is an enduring challenge and point of contention in the broader re-enactment field. Considering their “eighty per cent accuracy” stance, I was not surprised to find Danelaw receptive to non-h.a. health aides. Indeed, they stressed the importance of such items and recognised this as a differentiating point in the field. As Audrey commented, “some groups won’t allow anything inauthentic. But we allow hearing aids, canes, glasses – health things are important! We don’t want you going grey and passing out from a coughing fit because you weren’t allowed to bring your puffer.” While AAF is closer to what Americans call “hardcore” re-enactment than Danelaw is, even Max (who some of the attendees described as a “tent Nazi”) made allowances when it came to health.

On the first morning of Beorg Wic, Sam guided me to the registration tent (which was, of course, h.a.) to sign in and meet AAF’s president, Max. In the conversation that followed, I asked Max if I needed to take my gloves off. “No, they’re ok – actually, look, take them off.” I explained that I have arthritis, which at times affects my hands, especially in the cold, so would appreciate being able to wear them, as long as it wasn’t too offensive to everyone’s sense of h.a. “Oh yes, I saw that on your form. That’s fine; we allow items for health reasons, like glasses, canes, et cetera.”

Some people find ways to accommodate health and safety concerns while respecting their h.a. code. Rowan told me that “one of the guys is a nurse and he’s so h.a. that […] he brings a full medieval medic kit!” I was not able to confirm whether this so-called medical equipment was actually “medieval” (in replication), but if it were, I am not sure I would have wanted to utilise this resource; medieval medicine included bloodletting by leeches, and we were all attempting to avoid the natural supply of these at the camp already.

What makes something h.a.? The most basic, and arguably important aspect of h.a. in the material culture of these re-enactors is the design. It is of primary importance that a dress, for example, is based on a detailed primary source description, or better yet, a genuine historic pattern,
or best of all, that the dress reconstructs an original found in an archaeological dig. Some re-enactors will attend museum exhibitions of historical clothing and artefacts to conduct research for this very purpose. The next level of h.a. incorporates the material as well as the design. The garment would ideally be made with a type of fabric known to be used for clothes of this style, during the period being re-enacted. If this is not possible, or is too difficult (due to the availability or cost of the material, or because the historical records are insufficient to ascertain what fabric was used), then one would utilise a fabric known to have at least been accessible to the people of that culture. The highest level of authenticity attends to the material, the design and also the process – creating the item using the same techniques and tools that were used “back in the day.” Hand-sewing (for all periods pre-sewing-machines) is a minimum here. One could also utilise, if knowledge permits, h.a. stitches and even h.a. sewing utensils. As my wardrobe was somewhat lacking in Viking accoutrement, one of the members of Danelaw kindly lent me not just one, but four costumes. These outfits, I was informed, were reasonably historically accurate: “the design and material are h.a., but”, the seamstress confided to me, lowering her voice, “they were sewn using a machine!” In this way, how these re-enactors conceive h.a. often became clear when discussing items or aspects of an item that are not period. A costume sewn on a machine, for example, would not be considered completely h.a. When staging authenticity, the production, as well as the product, plays a part.

As my fieldwork experiences demonstrate, complete accuracy was by no means expected. Indeed, some people perceived an over-attachment to h.a. as detrimental to the experience. When discussing historical accuracy with Sam, the treasurer of Danelaw, he emphasised quite passionately that “if you make people be obsessed with it all, it’s just going to turn them off. As long as you’re coming here and we can see you’ve made an effort, we want you to have a good time.” The notion that enjoying the practice is equally (if not more) important than striving for accuracy is one that kept resurfacing throughout my fieldwork with these re-enactors. In the questionnaires, everyone mentioned “fun” or “enjoyment” as a primary motivation for and/or outcome of his or her practice.
Some even expressed that having fun was the primary objective of Beorg Wic, for example: “the whole point is to have a fun [at a] medieval weekend and do it to your own h.a. standards” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). This aligns with Erisman’s assertion that recreational re-enactment is primarily a hobby and one that facilitates an interest in the fun side of history. This hobby is ‘a game – but an important one’ (Erisman 1998, 137).

As the experiences and conversations described demonstrate, the balance between fun and accuracy varies between groups. Danelaw certainly has a more playful approach than AAF. At Beorg Wic, I learnt of Sam’s rather bold protest against what he perceived to be the ridiculous nature of some of the policies that policed what they could and could not wear at another intergroup event.

Sitting on a simple, wooden bench in a modestly sized wooden hut, a few of us practise sewing techniques, guided by the instructor of this workshop, Amy. She gestures towards the “tavern” and the tapestry hanging across the width of its back wall. Amy tells us that she, with a group of other weavers, made the tapestry. At this point, Sam pokes his head in. “Ah, and here’s the hero of the central panel!” Amy exclaims, with a grand sweep of her arm towards Sam. “Would you like to hear the story that panel tells?” Sniffing gossip, a few of the participants respond with enthusiastic yesses. “Do you mind if I tell them?” “Sure, but I’ll deny it”, Sam replies and turns to leave. “No, no, stay, you need to make sure I get it right – I might not know all the correct details.” Amy tells us that the organisers of a re-enactment they attended stipulated that the minimum requirements for battle were helmet and gauntlets. “So, Sam went out on the field wearing only that... yes, only that.”

Sam’s flouting of the rules by exhibiting his naked body on the “battleground” can be interpreted as a carnivalesque moment in these re-enactors’ serious play, inverting and parodying the dominant perspective (or policy) through humour and chaos. Sam’s “nudey run” had been alluded to by some of the members of Danelaw, but this celebratory commemoration of his act of mocking rebellion was created by members of AAF. This reflects the fact that even within groups, commitment to h.a. often differs between members, as do perspectives on what constitutes h.a. and how h.a. particular (re)created objects and actions might be. In a response to my questionnaire, one of the re-enactors
wrote:

we have people in our group who are very HA and we have those who are “it could have been, there is evidence to support A and C so B could have been.” So, while it’s not as broad as SCA […] we do school displays and public events – it’s a fun way of learning/teaching a bit about history. There are always some interesting debates about what is accurate and what isn’t. (Unpublished data Nov. 2012)

Despite claims from academics, such as Brewer (2010, 81), that re-enactors’ approach to the past is completely somatic and uncritical, these re-enactors demonstrate a reflexive and evaluative engagement with historical knowledge and their attempts towards historical accuracy – and an awareness of the limits of both.

The terms ‘historical accuracy’ and ‘authenticity’ were used synonymously by many of these re-enactors, mirroring much of the literature on the practice. Diverging from most representations of re-enactors, however, Beorg Wiccians utilised the former term far more frequently than the latter, and almost always abbreviated it to “h.a.” I first encountered this abbreviation at the initial Danelaw training session I attended. Conversing with Audrey and Jim in the kitchen, Audrey used the term in a casual, familiar manner and seemed to assume I would know what it meant. On asking what “h.a.” is short for, I received two responses, almost simultaneously. Audrey: “historically accurate”. Jim: “hysterically accurate!” While half joking, Jim’s conception of the term reflects, to varying degrees, some re-enactors’ perceptions of others’ preoccupation with accuracy. It seems that amongst the Beorg Wiccians, there are those who measure up to the stereotype of re-enactors as accuracy obsessed sticklers for authenticity (a certain pair of undergarments spring to mind), but being this dedicated is far from the norm. While there is a pervading respect for those who have “done their research” in (re)creating clothing and accoutrements, there are those, like Jim, who consider it all a bit of a joke. Clearly, attitudes and approaches to authenticity amongst different
groups, and even within each group, are diverse.\(^{32}\) In general, accuracy is valued and encouraged (to varying degrees and measured by varying standards), and blatant anachronisms are heartily criticised (although some items are exempt from this). But, when it comes down to it, the most important objective for the majority of re-enactors at Beorg Wic, across all the groups, was to enjoy their practice. My research over that long weekend, and at the training sessions, confirmed what Sam said to me when I first arrived: “what it’s all really about is having fun. There’s no point being really into it and completely h.a. if you aren’t enjoying it.” H.a.: historically or hysterically accurate? That depends on how much fun you are having.

\(^{32}\) There was also, underlying the predominance of discussion regarding historical accuracy, another, far less articulated, but at times demonstrated sense of authenticity, which was interconnected with notions of community and a more “real” way of life, located in an imagined medieval past and (re)created in the (re)imagined medieval present of their re-enactment. Although the words ‘authentic’ or ‘authenticity’ were never utilised in relation to these notions, the suggested connection was clear. I discuss this form of authenticity, in comparative analysis with my other case studies, in chapter six.
Chapter four
An ‘austentatious’ history

With a small notepad and pen tucked into my belt and a camera over my shoulder, I head towards the men and women assembling on the dance floor. Sandra, the pianist who played at the preceding dance workshop, is once again at the keys, this time behind a black upright. A violinist has his bow and instrument poised. John, the teacher of that three-day workshop, has a microphone in one hand, and a hurdy-gurdy tucked under the other. The musicians and many of the dancers are in costume, but I notice almost as many who are not. John, in his soft, well-spoken voice, requests us to form a circle and join hands. He begins to walk us through the first dance, but a few excited girls continue to chatter amongst themselves. John interrupts his own instructions to gently reprimand them: “while dancing is about chasing and flirting, dance learning is about watching and listening. This wasn’t so important back in the day, as they largely knew the dances, but it is very important now.” The girls quieten down and John proceeds. We no sooner ‘set’ to each side, however, when two strikingly handsome young men, in full Regency regalia, stride into the room. More than a few appreciative murmurs ripple through the circle. The tall, full-figured woman to my right leans in towards me, exclaiming with hushed enthusiasm: “what hhhhaaandsome young men!” John (once again interrupting himself) says: “let’s keep the circle open for newcomers who want to join.” My elated neighbour, nodding her head vigorously, expresses her agreement with exuberance: “yes, yes, let’s open a space!” She leaps aside to create a spot between us, and (with a little less alacrity) the rest of the circle follows suit. One of the men comes to stand between us, raising my right and her left hand to rest gently in his gloved palms. My female neighbour’s in-draw of breath has barely had time to expand her ample and amply displayed bosom when two uncommonly pretty, young women enter the room. As our admired dance partner turns away to welcome the dainty, gloved hand that slips into his with a kiss, my neighbour’s grin takes a rather marked turn of its own.

33The pun ‘austentatious’ arose a few times during my fieldwork – in the names of one of the historically inspired dances in the EDHDA; in one of the performances at JAFA; and in an unaffiliated performance at the Jane Austen Centre’s festival in Bath.
In the warmth of an Australian April in the “bush capital” Canberra, the Earthly Delights Historic Dance Academy (EDHDA) hosts their annual Jane Austen Festival Australia (JAFA). Held on parish grounds in buildings that would only be considered historic “down under”, the festival celebrates all-things-Austen, with a particular emphasis on period dance and costume. For me, donning a Georgian style gown, learning to make a bonnet, fire a bow, write a Regency style letter and dance sets rather like those in the 1995 BBC mini-series Pride and Prejudice, were experiences I approached as ethnographic research. For the organisers and many of the participants, however, JAFA is:

an annual celebration […] where Austen and Napoleonic fans from all over Australia come and indulge themselves in everything Regency – including dancing, music, food, games, archery, fencing, theatre, promenades, grand balls, talks, workshops, costumes and books. […] Small soirees, concerts, a costumed promenade, theatre, archery, period games, fashion, food, lectures and of course LOTS of dancing feature over three days and four nights, plus there is an opportunity to attend a grand Jane Austen Ball! (Earthly Delights 2012)

While JAFA is EDHDA’s largest event and where my research of this group commenced, my fieldwork with EDHDA also included a three-day historic dance workshop, a Dickensian Christmas ball, a Jane Austen traditional afternoon tea, and a “historic dance and costume tour of England”, all of which are referred to in this chapter. While some attendees are members of the EDHDA, many are part of affiliated groups that regularly attend EDHDA events and form part of a wider network and community of dancers, costume makers/wearers and re-enactors.

EDHDA was created in 2006, emerging out of a decade of dance teaching and performing through John Gardiner-Garden’s band, Earthly Delights, and dance troupe, The Bourdian Heritage Dancers. The festival was initiated in 2008 by John and his wife, Aylwen. John holds a PhD in History

34 Although the hall, in which many of the activities of JAFA are held, is a more modern addition, the main church building and the former school house were built circa 1845. To put this in perspective, the oldest surviving buildings in Australia were built in the 1790s, following British settlement in 1788, and all of Austen’s novels were originally published in the Regency period (1811-1820).

35 Although an “outsider” to this practice, as a keen reader of Austen’s novels and watcher of their BBC adaptations, the allure of these activities was not lost on me. Hence, in this fieldwork, the marked delineation — so often a feature of the ethnographic process — between the usually distanced practice of the ethnographic researcher and what is arguably a more genuine, or more fully immersed participation of the “insider”, was somewhat blurred, or complicated. This emphasised, for me, the cogency of considering “outsider” and “insider” distinctions in terms of a spectrum, rather than a polarity, and one that is inevitably influenced by the contextual factors of both the researcher and researched.

36 A Jane Austen afternoon tea is, of course, an anachronism — the practice of a formal, afternoon tea did not develop until later in the nineteenth century. In Australia, we often refer to this tradition as “high tea”.
and runs weekly historic dance classes. He reconstructs, performs and teaches dance and music from the Renaissance, Baroque, Georgian, Regency and Victorian eras, utilising primary source material. At the festival, John teaches Regency court and country dance workshops, ‘calls’ the dances at the balls\(^37\), and performs period music, which he plays on numerous instruments.\(^38\) Aylwen works as a costumier – both professionally and as a hobby in the Australian Costumers’ Guild – and leads many of the costuming workshops at the festival, ranging from quick and easy bonnets, to historically accurate, period sewing techniques. Here, re-enactors and Austen enthusiasts can learn the skills to kit out their Regency wardrobe (and, of course, any other period of their choice). Aylwen also teaches costuming workshops and courses throughout the year. In contrast to the previous case study, in which Danelaw is a collective and Beorg Wic is a collaborative effort between many different people, EDHDA is very much John and Aylwen’s creation and its activities and events are mainly shaped by them. As will be demonstrated, in some regards these organisers are very particular and in others very flexible, but often their perspectives and approaches diverge (to varying degrees) from those of their participants.

In many respects, EDHDA is on the fringe of the re-enactment scene, not quite re-enactment, but also not quite not re-enactment. While EDHDA and JAFA are listed in the Australian Register of Living History Organisations (Cryan 2012b) and John referred to their activities as “re-enactment”, at other times John and Aylwen drew some distinction between historical re-enactment and their own practice. This reflects a broader position of being on the border, of “not fitting into neat boxes”, as they phrased it, not only in relation to re-enactment but also to Jane Austen appreciation societies, dance groups, historic music, folk culture, costume,

\(^{37}\)‘Calls’ is a dance term that refers to the announcing of the dances, and sometimes, the sequences involved in each dance. 
\(^{38}\)While I describe the dances taught as Regency, they were influenced by and sometimes borrowed from preceding periods and other countries, most prominently Scotland, France and Italy. As John Gardiner-Garden explained at one of his workshops, court, country and performance dances from numerous countries and decades were not isolated, self-constructed genres; they were dynamic, interactive ensembles, skipping across the culturally porous barriers between classes, nations and temporalities.
cosplay, and fantasy/science fiction fandom. This perhaps emerges from the interconnected and overlapping nature of these fields, or “scenes”, as John called them, which somewhat reflects the interrelation between cultural forms and genres in Regency and Georgian times. John noted the “interconnection between social dancing and theatre and the music scene” during the period, which EDHDA endeavours to “bring out in our re-enacting” (interview by author Dec. 2012). In doing so, EDHDA creates something of a microcosm of the arts then, and of intersecting historical and fan practices now. The (dis)connections between these fields re-emerge throughout this chapter and point towards EDHDA’s complex and at times contradictory relations with notions of tradition, authenticity and fandom.

To be continued… with(out) tradition

The concept of tradition was one of the most frequently and variably discussed topics of conversation at all of the EDHDA events I attended. Its value – both generally and within EDHDA and other historical dance and re-enactment practices – was the most prominent facet of these discussions. Tradition seems to function for many of the participants as a vehicle through which they connect with the past and develop a sense of grounding and community in the present. At JAFA, the official town crier of Canberra, Robert Marks, who “cries” (announces or heralds) at some of EDHDA’s larger events and re-enacts in the SCA, delivered a talk on the history of town crying and its relevance today. Robert suggested that “keeping alive an old tradition, I think, is particularly important because tradition – whilst we shouldn’t be ruled by it – it’s still nice to have some of that stuff around.” Referring to the activities at JAFA, the practice of town crying, and the

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39 Cosplay is a contraction of ‘costume’ and ‘play’, and refers to the practice of dressing up as characters from films, books, comics, and games, particularly from anime, manga, and science fiction. Cosplay is usually connected with an event, such as a festival or convention.

40 I have used a pseudonym to refer to the town crier and all participants except the organisers, John and Aylwen Gardiner-Garden. In terms of credit, I did this to acknowledge the Gardiner-Gardens. In terms of ethics and privacy, their details are already provided publically, through their EDHDA website, Facebook page and various advertising platforms. I utilise the same policy in regard to the following case study, for the same reasons.
re-enactments of the SCA, he suggested that “if we can bring back some of the traditions of the past that can help people have fun, be amused, and still learn things, I think it’s a good thing” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Robert (along with many other participants) demonstrates what Raphael Samuel describes as an ‘ever-growing enthusiasm for the recovery of the national past – both the real past of recorded history, and the timeless one of tradition’ ([1994] 2012, 139). The practice of these traditions in Canberra, however, is not a continuation or even (re)connection with local or national traditions, but rather foreign customs, transplanted from Britain through Australia’s colonial heritage – a notion I will return to later in this chapter.

The organisers of EDHDA are passionate about their research and revival of historic traditions of dance and fashion but, as alluded to above, they demonstrate a pragmatic and multi-thematic perspective. In some ways, John and Aylwen consciously resist and challenge certain aspects of their traditions whilst deliberately incorporating and even celebrating others. Discussing their early years “under the folk scene umbrella”, John expressed his desire to broaden tradition through innovation, to “stretch people’s ideas […] stretch their whole concept” of what historical dance was and is. He experienced a “constant frustration with [organisers of the folk events] always wanting things in boxes.”

I wrote so many […] proposals for interesting things that would have cut across the boxes but they just wanted […] displays of Estonian dance or German dance [or] the evening ball of the Scottish and the Irish […]. They wanted everything in the box. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

Although John and Aylwen criticised the restrictions imposed by adhering to tradition, they also frequently spoke about their practice in these contested terms, expressing the pleasure they felt in being able to re-establish and continue historic customs.

John: Arbo, from 1581, [is] a dancing master from southern France [who] ended up becoming famous for his dance teaching notes that he left in his bottom drawer. […]

Aylwen [laughing]: Imagine being known for what’s in your bottom drawer!
John: [Arbo] says, when you’re doing your circle dances […] , start with the slow ones because everyone can be involved […] and then go on to the faster ones […] . The old folk can drop out and […] the young folk can really come into their own. […] I found myself once being invited to lead Christmas entertainment at the High Court […] . I remember the organiser saying, could you please keep it very gentle while the judges are there? […] When they leave, you can loosen up and make it livelier. And I thought, my God, I am in a five-hundred-year-old tradition! […] That’s just what Arbo was saying to do, five hundred years earlier […] . So that’s why we also don’t mind having beginners and experienced dancers in the same room, because that’s actually how dances were designed to work. In the real situations […] that’s what you had. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

In contrast to the folk dancers he spoke of, John’s concept of tradition encapsulates not only the dance, music and clothing they endeavour to “keep going” but also the customs surrounding them. In EDHDA, (re)continuing tradition involves (re)creating something of the cultural milieu from which the tradition derives.

For others, tradition has a slightly different significance. Gordon Saaj, who participated in all of the EDHDA events and workshops I attended and teaches Australian bush dance, spoke of the EDHDA Regency balls in terms of “ritual”. He suggested that the modern practice of historical dancing re-invokes valuable social traditions, facilitating new acquaintances and what he perceives to be more “civilised” gender interactions. When asked what he meant by “civilised”, Gordon explained, “you get to meet the family […] I think that’s a really good aspect of it. At the Jane Austen Festival, you do see families, parents, children. There’s certain dance etiquette […] that’s very different [between] modern and historic dance styles” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Gordon feels that this more “civilised” or “wholesome” mode of interaction is epitomised by Austen, and expressed that this is what draws him to her novels. His views reflect the desire, identified by Cramer (2010) and Schneider (2011) and demonstrated by Bet at Beorg Wic, for simpler gender roles and relations amongst some re-enactors. And yet, they are also in keeping with cultural differences between Australia and his birth country, India, that should not be dismissed or criticised out of hand. Gordon was the only EDHDA participant who voiced a regard for traditional gender relations, but what did resonate with many other participants was the significance of manners and socialising.
It was within the (inter)action and etiquette of dancing that Gordon, and many others I spoke to, located their sense of tradition. Their notion of etiquette relates to both the protocol within the dances themselves, and to the social manners many of its practitioners, past and present, believe this style of dance can instil. “Manner and etiquette”, John told me, are “a dimension we put into our performance [when we] do a display.”

But, […] I can’t help but try to cultivate it in our workshops and even at balls [as well]. […] I want people to […] do a bow as a gentleman might or to take a ballroom hold as they may have […]. Because otherwise, you have – you might have – a rather slovenly twenty-first-century etiquette, while you’re trying to do dance of an earlier period and it just doesn’t go. Because the dance itself wasn’t something that, in its time, was just learnt as a dance that had the etiquette sort of spread across the top of it. Dance from all periods grew out of the etiquette – it’s really manners to music. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

While the focus here is on fostering etiquette to enhance the quality of performance in dance, many participants felt that these “manners to music” extend into everyday social life as well. Such a perspective was expressed at an EDHDA traditional afternoon tea, held in honour of Jane Austen’s birthday, on the day following a Dickensian ball.

A group of EDHDA and JAFA participants sit, backs straight, period attired, at white-clothed tables overlooking the picturesque gardens of one of Canberra’s most prestigious, historic hotels. A pianist in a black suit plays jazz tunes on a black grand, with a few classical pieces peppered through “to please these re-enactor folk we have visiting today.” I myself am wearing a Regency-inspired gown but, perhaps because of its fairly simple make, the dress seems to have slipped by, unrecognised. Attempting to make polite small talk as we sip our tea and partake of sandwiches, scones and petit fours, I am pummelled with questions regarding my research. I explain that I am “exploring the potential of re-enactment as a form of history and learning, how historical understanding might be developed through bodily practices.” Sandra, a petite, spirited woman who dances and plays the piano for EDHDA events, asks, somewhat incredulously “you can do a PhD on that?!” “You can do a PhD on almost anything, as long as you can demonstrate its contribution to knowledge”, I reply. “So, what is your research contributing?”, she blurts. The official photographer of JAFA, a mild-mannered, well-spoken, middle-aged man, diplomatically affirms the relevance of the topic, joined by a few others. A tall, slender, elegant woman, whose long grey hair is immaculately arranged upon her head, leans forward and tells me, earnestly, “but it’s more, forgive me for saying so, but it’s really the
social value, the skills of socialising, manners, interaction, that you really need from childhood, but so many people are missing out on now because of the busyness of our lives.”

For me, this was a reminder that our theorisations of those whom we study do not, necessarily, align with what the “subjects” themselves consider significant about their culture or practice. We can credibly and rigorously analyse a subject through our own theoretical lenses but we must, or should, also consider the “other(’s)” perspective. It was etiquette and socialisation, not historical understanding and/as embodied knowledge, that mattered more to these particular re-enactors.

In a similar vein, Aylwen emphasised the value of dance in fostering social skills and self-esteem. “When you’re dancing with someone, and you’re doing all this interaction, you’re feeling good, you’re developing eye contact, you’re developing all this confidence” (interview by author Dec. 2012). The benefits of dance, particularly in the transmission of traditional social etiquette, is perceived by John to be a tradition in itself.

They used to teach young men and women dancing not just so that they could dance together but also so that, in doing so, they would learn all the necessary manners, disposition and etiquette […]. It was absolutely necessary for everyone’s education, and that’s another motivation for us teaching young people […] because we think, well, maybe we’re giving them that little education that society otherwise neglects these days.

John was rather passionate about this subject and endeavoured to impress upon me the social significance of traditional dance etiquette. “Manners and etiquette were a way of enabling a whole hall of people […] [to] meet and […] socialise together, and to show what they have to show of themselves […] – in the chatting, their manners on the side, and in their performance in the dance” (interview by author Dec. 2012).

This social aspect of the practice – not only the skills it develops but also the opportunity for socialising and the sense of community it provides – was significant to many members. When asked about his motivations for participating in EDHDA, Gordon stated the “community feel of it.” He explained, “I’m an immigrant, and I have no family here […]. It’s a really good social aspect of
dancing: you get to meet people and get to know them” (interview by author Dec. 2012). These sentiments were echoed by others, including Canberra’s town crier, Robert, who told me that one of the aspects he most values about re-enacting is the “interaction with people. I’m very inspired by people; I like meeting new folk” (interview by author Dec. 2012).

While many of these discussions centred on the dance component of JAFA and EDHDA events, Aylwen stressed that the continuing of traditions and their benefits are very much a part of their practice as a whole.

It’s not just the dancing; it’s the food, the entertainment, everything. And sometimes, if you’re not going to all of the events at the festival and you walk outside, [you see] the girl and the guy who have just met in an earlier dance workshop walking around the garden chatting. [...] You see these cycles, and you think, yes, this is great, this is what it’s all about. And we do have mothers bringing teenage daughters and [the mothers act as] chaperones. [...] There was one family where there was a health scare [and the mother] couldn’t come [...] so the father brought his daughter [...]. He was there to get her involved, to chaperone, to get her to meet people. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

The importance these Jane Austen, historic dance and costume enthusiasts place on the social and community function of their practice mirrors the perspective of the Beorg Wic re-enactors. The social aspect of re-enactment has been little theorised in academic literature, but its prevalence in practitioner discourse reinforces Erisman’s (1998) assertion, discussed in the preceding chapter, that the sense of community such groups offer is a key attraction for participants. In the EDHDA community, the sense of social connection goes hand in hand with the valuing of, and desire to (re)connect with, tradition and (particular perceptions of) the past. This reflects David Harvey’s assertion that ‘the revival of interest in basic institutions (such as the family and community), and the search for historical roots are all signs of a search for more secure moorings and longer-lasting values in a shifting world’ (1992, 292) and the belief that these ideals existed, once.
The desire for tradition manifests not only in the participants’ harking back to customs of the past, such as the Maypole dancing at JAFA, pictured above, but also in their (re)inventing of contemporary traditions. Aylwen and John conceive their practice as a tradition – or an emerging tradition – in its own right. Aylwen, in particular, repeatedly referred to “the tradition” of EDHDA events, expressing her desire for them to continue: “we really are thriving on people helping us, and feeling it is a living tradition, you know, that this is continuing” (interview by author Dec. 2012).

This resonates with Cramer’s (2010) assertion that the history and traditions of the SCA hold considerable significance for its members, perhaps more so than the Medieval history they perform. It is not only old cultural traditions that these re-enactors want to keep alive – it is also their groups which, for them, become traditions in themselves.
Although (re)creating and continuing this old/new tradition seemed very important to John, he
often used the term ‘scene’ when speaking about their practice, mainly reserving ‘tradition’ to refer
to the historicity of dance and its continuations in the present. Narrating how EDHDA and JAFA
developed, John explained that his research interest in a particular area of dance led to his creating
a more substantial historical dance ‘scene’ in Australia.

I knew I wanted to learn more about this technicality, and there was nowhere to learn; no
one in Australia did it. I was reading all the books I could find and […] read one book from
Doretea Vert Loya from Poland, and I thought, she knows about this. So, we got her out here
[…]. We were determined to make the best scene that we could for ourselves. Other people I
knew […] turned their nose up at Australia […], better to dance over[seas, they said]. But I
thought, why don’t you just make what you want here? (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

John and Aylwen’s comments point towards three significant avenues of enquiry, particularly in a
(post)colonial culture like Australia: the (re)invention of tradition, the blending of ethnic and
cultural diasporas, and cultural displacement.

Invented tradition, to borrow Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, can be understood as a ‘set of
practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules […], which seek to inculcate certain
values and norms of behaviour by repetition’ and ‘automatically implies continuity with the past’ (1992,1).
Although their practice might move beyond “neat boxes” of time, culture and place, John and
Aylwen explicitly connect EDHDA with dance traditions and culture of the sixteenth to nineteen
centuries. Contrasting EDHDA to other dance groups, John asserted that many other instructors
warp the practice by ‘taking one dimension out of one period […]. They’ll take the English country
dance and make that their club form.’ This misinterprets and misrepresents Regency dance, he
argued, because:

It was always more combined […]. A ball would have couples do a two-person dance that
might actually be in the Baroque scene these days, […] followed by long-ways country
dances, which might, these days, be in the English country dance scene. [Back then, though,] it
was mixed; that’s how entertainments happened […]. In the real situations, for five hundred
years, that’s what you had. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

John claims an authenticity for EDHDA by drawing parallels between it and particular dance
customs of the past, connecting his practice with “this five-hundred-year-old tradition” by emphasising convergence in custom. He thus creates a sense of continuity between a British Regency context and his own. His bid for cultural capital, along with the above-cited views of some EDHDA participants, seems to correspond with Hobsbawm’s claim that invented traditions ‘attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past’ (1992, 1) and ‘use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion’ (12). And yet, as Mark Phillips argues, ‘most if not all traditions could be seen as invented, at least in their beginnings’. Hence, ‘any lasting tradition must be in a continual process of reinvention’ (2004, 5; emphasis mine). John’s argument relating to the overlapping, evolving and, in some ways, revolving nature of dance forms and periods aligns with Phillips’ conception of tradition as a process, as opposed to a ‘point of origin’ (17). Rather than interpreting EDHDA as an invented tradition, we can, following Phillips, more productively understand it as a (re)invented tradition, as part of the larger process of (re)inventing Regency dance tradition, which has occurred at various points after, during and, arguably, prior to the Regency period.

In Australia, of course, this reinventing process crosses not only temporalities but also continents. For me, this was highlighted at a ball held during EDHDA’s “historic dance and costume tour of England”.

_In the historic Guildhall of Winchester, John leads a “Jane Austen Dance Party”. The modestly sized, but impressively appointed room is filled with dancers, re-enactors and costumiers from Australia, England, Scotland, the Netherlands and the U.S. We are taking a refreshment break, and having just posed for the obligatory group photo in front of a painting of “good old Queen Liz”, we nibble on biscuits and grapes while John presents his series of historical dance manuals. He mentions several dances covered in his book on Regency dance, including the minuet. “Even in Sydney and Hobart, they were teaching this dance. Jane Austen refers to it in one of her early novels, and so does Dickens. Everyone must know at least one version of this dance.”_

John connects disparate geographies via a dance that traversed, and traverses, the oceans of distance between them, literally. With one brief reference to the minuet, he connects a modest dance scene
in twenty-first-century Australia with England, the Regency era and even Jane Austen herself.

As Phillips recognises, reinventing tradition is inherently interconnected with cultural transmission. The efforts of EDHDA to transmit aspects of Regency culture to twenty-first-century Canberra reflect what Joseph Roach terms displaced transmission, which:

constitutes the adaptation of historic practices to changing conditions, in which popular behaviors are resituated in new locales. Much more happens through transmission [...] than the reproduction of tradition. New traditions may also be invented and others overturned. (1996, 28)

Connecting contemporary and Regency reinventing of dance tradition does not dissolve the distance and difference of time and place, but it does reflect the desire, common amongst re-enactors, to narrow the gap. What is most at play in the EDHDA, however, is a yearning not to collapse temporal distinctions but rather to supplement what is often felt to be a lack of culture and tradition in Australia (and contemporary society more widely). This parallels the desire felt by many Beorg Wiccians to (re)locate one’s sense of self and society away from Australia’s short, troubled past and confused identity, towards what is perceived to be the more wholesome, cultured milieu of medieval chivalry.

While (re)inventing Regency and other historic cultural traditions “down under” might be perceived as simply fun, sweet, silly, or perhaps even misplaced, it also has a significant function. As Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw argue, ‘far from being half-remembered, quaint and archaic, tradition may be selective, with the past actively organised to speak to current anxieties and tensions’ (1989, 13-14). Whilst tradition (invented or otherwise) can generate oversimplified, romanticised and nostalgic representations of the past, it nevertheless holds significance for many people. John and Aylwen described their passion for “trying to reconnect people today with their history” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Alluding to the notion that radically advancing technologisation is creating a disconnect from our predecessors’ ways of life, John suggested that “often you feel young people think anything pre-DVDs is Stone Age, [...] They don’t appreciate how
much human achievement and creativity [...] was part of every generation for a hundred
generations” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Many participants felt that their dance and re-
enactment practices connect them with cultural traditions that are fading in “modern life” and that
“aren’t in the history books.” Robert, for example, asserted that in the SCA and EDHDA, “we’re
looking at what happened a long time ago and [...] how we can preserve some of the stuff there
[and] keep some of those traditions alive” (interview by author Dec. 2012). This perspective was
underlined by an experience “backstage” at JAFA.

Walking down the corridor in search of the lavatories, I bump into Robert, the man who has
been heralding the balls and major activities here. He is dressed in the royal blue regalia he
wears when on official town crying duties, complete with a tricorn (a three-sided hat popular
in Georgian times, resembling the headwear we might now associate with pirates). To my
surprise, he continues the English accent and vaguely ‘period’ language he spoke with during
his heralds. “If one seeks to avail one’s self of the facilities, one will find them further on to the
right.” I return to the hall just as Robert’s talk on town-crying commences. “The language
[modern town criers] use can be traced back centuries. [...] We recreate the tradition, the way
you wonderful folk bring Jane Austen’s world back to life.”

Chase and Shaw argue that tradition can signify an ‘important encounter’ with a form of history in
which ‘the past is represented in [the participants’] present through activities and practices, through
ritual and ceremony, and through ideas and beliefs’ (10-11). For many involved in EDHDA’s events,
the traditions they re-enact (augmented for some, but not all, by the associations with Austen) offer
these ‘important encounter[s].’

Whilst these traditions may carry social, cultural or symbolic significance for some of the
practitioners, the thorny issue of authenticity remains. As we have seen, even in their admission of
a (re)invented tradition, John and Aylwen seek to identify their historicised timeline of dances as
reflective of the activities of their chosen period. But, how authentic is their repetition,
particularly in such a divergent context? Contrasting folk dance to more modern styles, Gordon
claimed that contemporary dance forms do not have “the historical continuity” that “folk dancing
and historical dancing” hold. These older forms of dance have “history. [They’re] more multi-dimensional. There’s the dancing, there’s the clothing, there’s the manners, there’s the gentility […] so many different aspects” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Diverging from Gordon’s view, John argued that “what passes for social dance now is nothing compared to the heights it reached. […] What we sometimes these days envisage as folk dance is really a twentieth-century imagined construct” (interview by author Dec. 2012). As John seems to be aware, many supposedly historic customs we accept as authentic are themselves relatively recent inventions, imposed upon the past in response to needs of the present (Trevor-Roper [1992] 2012, 15-16; Morgan [1992] 2012, 99).

Nevertheless, many EDHDA participants, in parallel with those at Beorg Wic, utilise their practices to foster a sense of authenticity – of grounded-ness, continuity, community and tradition – which, although derived from a (re)imagined past, becomes, for them, real in the present. This resonates with Handler and Saxton’s (1988) suggestion that living historians seek an authenticity they locate in the past and Agnew’s assertion that re-enactment offers an ‘emancipatory gesture’ enabling participants ‘to select their own past in reaction to a conflicted present’ (2004, 328). The relationship between these re-enactments and the past, and how the latter is utilised in and for the present, will be discussed in detail in chapter six. For now, I focus on this concept of authenticity and the ways in which EDHDA perceive and approach it.

**Authenticity: admired, not required**

Authenticity and historical accuracy are notions that both merge and diverge in EDHDA, and their forms and degrees vary significantly amongst the society’s members. As the preceding chapter demonstrates, ‘authenticity’ and ‘h.a.’ was used interchangeably by many participants at Beorg Wic. In EDHDA, however, the relationship between these notions is a little more complex; there is a sense of historical accuracy as a form of authenticity and as a technique used to strive for authentic experience – but not, necessarily, of the past. EDHDA’s tagline regarding historically accurate costume – “admired but not required” – seems to reflect EDHDA’s broader approach to accuracy,
with a few notable exceptions, which will become apparent later.

Devotion to authenticity varied greatly amongst the members with whom I spoke, particularly between the organisers of EDHDA and the majority of its participants. Gordon explained: “some people take it more seriously than others. For me, the dancing and the social aspects are more important […] other people take [historical accuracy] more seriously” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Similarly, Robert informed me that “different people prioritise different things. For me, it’s more about the social aspect, and having fun. But for some people, the historical aspect and historical accuracy [are] very important” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Despite these claims, few of the people I spoke with prioritised historical accuracy of any kind in their practice. With the exception of John and Aylwen, participants mainly expressed their motivations in terms of enjoyment – of historic dance, making and wearing costumes, Jane Austen’s literature or, as I have discussed, the social aspect of the practice.

Although generally not concerned with this form of authenticity, most participants perceived costume to be a very significant component of the authentic. In fact, when asked about authenticity, many immediately equated the idea with costume. Gordon responded, “I’m not too concerned with the authenticity of my costume. […] I would certainly like to make myself an outfit but right now I’ve got other priorities” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Similarly, Danny said, “I’m not really into the costumes – I wear them but what I really care about is the dancing.” While these attitudes would pose a problem in some groups, it is not generally an issue at EDHDA events. As the tagline suggests, wearing costume is encouraged but not usually compulsory – at least for beginners. Aylwen explained to me that while over the years she and John have increased their attention to historically accurate costumes, they are conscious of not allowing this to be a barrier for beginners.

We were watching the bar going up, but at the same time, we had to watch that we were still including all the newcomers. […] We [tell] people when they first come along, ninety-five per cent might be in costume, but don’t be afraid if you don’t have one yet – and the key word is yet. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)
Aylwen, now a professional costumier, has a more marked and dedicated interest in historical clothing than most of her participants. Gordon told me that Aylwen “takes the whole thing very seriously” and John frequently referred to the costuming as “Aylwen’s department”. Aylwen herself expressed that she is “extremely interested” in researching and collecting historic garments, and travels overseas “to have a look at garments, to look inside them – how were they made?”

Aylwen’s “raising of the bar” was, in part, inspired by John’s attention to research in his dance reconstructions. Seeing John corroborate original and secondary sources prompted her to reconsider her use of commercial costume patterns. “A historian who’s trained will know, no, you don’t do that. You go back; you start looking at other patterns that might be available […] or you look at draping.” This process made Aylwen more aware of the inaccuracy of commercial costume patterns. “A lot of the patterns […] have [been] developed for the Halloween crowd. It’s a fantasised look; it’s not looking at the [original] structure.” I asked Aylwen what, in her view, constitutes a historically accurate costume. Her answer was framed in relation to process, rather than product, advising that one should “go back and look at original garments […] see what people were actually wearing” (interview by author Dec. 2012).

Aylwen considers research, preferably with primary sources, as essential for achieving suitably accurate ‘period’ attire – a perspective not shared by all EDHDA participants who sew their own Regency costumes.

After a fan making workshop, Aylwen, Louisa-May and I chat about historic costume making. Louisa-May tells us that she recently made a simple, Regency style dress that she “felt the lower classes would likely have worn” because the design of the sleeves was practical and the overall make and material would have been relatively affordable. Aylwen, frowning, rebukes this approach. “Just because it’s cost effective and seems practical today, doesn’t mean that they did it that way then.” Louisa-May mentions that she has since seen an original Regency gown of a similar style. Aylwen, however, says she prefers “to err on the side of the majority, the styles that most of the sources support, rather than what may have been a one-off.” She
tells us that John, “being an historian”, is meticulous about his sources when reconstructing

dances and that she was more relaxed about costume when she first started but now is at a
level where she feels she needs thorough research and more precise garments. “I don’t like to
pressure my students to have perfectly accurate clothing. The one thing I do insist on is
undergarments – they are so essential for creating the right posture.”

Fuelling this debate was, I suspect, a degree of rivalry, which elicited heavy brandishing of cultural
capital from Aylwen. The exchange does, however, reveal differences in perspective both within
EDHDA’s circle and between EDHDA and other re-enactment groups. Compared with many of the
attendees and groups at Beorg Wic, EDHDA is, in most regards, much less concerned with ensuring
its members wear (at least vaguely) accurate costume. When it comes to undergarments, however,
EDHDA is much more stringent. Accurate underwear might be “taking things a bit too far” for most
of those Viking and medieval re-enactors, but for the organisers of the EDHDA – in particular,
Aylwen – it is the first and most important step towards authenticity.

Donning pantaloons, a chemise and corset can have an immediate effect for a re-enactor –

enhancing one’s outer garments. This is, in part, an aesthetic matter – creating visual accuracy by
making the garments “sit properly”, as John phrased it. Similarly, Aylwen, fanning herself as we sat
outside at a sewing workshop at JAFA, commented: “I’m so hot in these undergarments, but they
make it look so much better.” As will be discussed in chapter six, the appearance of historical
accuracy – authenticity as an aesthetic – is significant, but more important here is the way such
undergarments contribute to structure, action and pedagogy. At Beorg Wic, “h.a.” underwear
contributes to the foregrounding of a bodily experience through which the re-enactor can feel
immersed in a medievalesque experience, but it does not particularly affect the performance of their
craft. In EDHDA, by contrast, undergarments are perceived to enhance the authenticity of one’s
bodily presentation and movement, and one’s understanding of the clothing and how it relates to
the dancing. This is as much a reflection of the difference in structure and function of
undergarments in the two periods as it is a reflection of different approaches to authenticity. I
explore the significance of wearing costume to the historiographic process of re-enactors in detail in chapter seven.

It was not only Louisa-May, Gordon and Danny who did not share Aylwen’s standards of and focus on authentic dress. Elaine, who attended JAFA and teaches English Country dance in Sydney, did not even wear a costume, authentic or otherwise, to the ball. She told me at a workshop earlier that day: “I’ll just wear something to suggest length and something on my head.” When I asked what sort of headpiece she had in mind, she explained “something turban-like. They were very popular at that time.” Elaine’s approach to dress reflects the difference in style between her group and EDHDA. Her classes are “more about the dancing” and “less historical than John’s.” Even amongst those more interested in costume, many had a fairly relaxed attitude towards accuracy.

*Sitting under a marquee in the church grounds in which JAFA is held, a small group of us learn how to make feather plumes. By happenchance, our activity is accompanied by church bells ringing for a Renaissance wedding, which has just poured out of the chapel. The leader of the workshop, Anne, instructs us to use “just an ordinary blanket or buttonhole stitch.” “I don’t know either of those”, I confess to Margaret, who sits on the plastic chair next to mine.

Margaret, her brows knotted in concentration, or frustration, mutters, “me neither. I don’t think I would have done very well in these times, Kate.” Anne, in a comforting tone, responds, “well this was very specialist work. Unless you were a milliner’s apprentice, you wouldn’t have had to do it. And it’s not period but… I’m perfectly happy for you to use a dob of glue at the end to bind it together.” Margaret and I share a relieved smile.

The glue was undoubtedly an anachronism, but it was not an oversight. It had been consciously considered, and deemed acceptable, due to its practicality; it was a handy shortcut (especially for those lacking in sewing skills, like Margaret and myself).

Another example of chosen inaccuracy occurred at the same workshop, when the head of the Canberra chapter of the Australian Costuming Guild, who described her group as “more historical than most”, recommended the Jane Austen section on simplicity.com for instructions on how to make a bonnet. This type of source, being from a mainstream, commercial pattern company, is
exactly the type Aylwen criticised for being frequently inaccurate. And yet, at another workshop, Aylwen taught us how to make “quick and easy” bonnets from a placemat. While Aylwen herself would never wear a placemat bonnet, she recognised that, for participants lacking in time or sewing skills, this was, like Anne’s “dob of glue”, a shortcut that would be appreciated. One of the ladies in the workshop expressed her appreciation of these none-too-authentic techniques: “it’s good because you pick up so many ideas – I would never have thought to use a placemat!”

Clearly, the guidelines Aylwen follows in her own work are not enforced, or even common, amongst other participants, particularly in the large, open, carnivalesque atmosphere of JAFA.

A sewing workshop at JAFA

Despite this relaxed attitude towards authenticity of attire, there were particular occasions when even those who do not care for costumes insisted on some degree of accuracy, if only briefly.

Having just finished an interview with John and Aylwen, I get a lift with them and Danny to the historic, luxury hotel where we are to have high tea. As we get out of the car, Danny eyes the large, over-the-shoulder canvas bag sitting heavily on my Regency(ish) gown with evident
disapproval. “Perhaps you should leave that in the car”, he suggests. I apologise, but the bag remains on my shoulder. “Don’t you have a reticule?” “A what, sorry?” “A reticule – a lady kept her bible in.” I belatedly realise Danny is referring to the small, dainty, draw-string bags Regency women carried personal belongings in. “I don’t, sorry.” By this time, we have entered the hotel and joined the others, who are waiting in the foyer. EDHDA’s official photographer suggests a photo on the grand staircase. It takes some time to suitably arrange these Regency-esque figures, but finally, all seems in order. Before the photo is taken, however, Danny turns around from his place in the front to cast a sweeping glance over the group. “Kate! Put your camera down!” The offending DSLR was sitting on the ledge to my right, where, I had thought, it would be out of view. “It will still be in the photo there, put it lower.” As I hurry to hide the camera (my second offence to historical accuracy for the day), an earlier conversation with Danny pops into my head. “I’m not really into the costumes”, he had told me.

This experience echoes those occasions at Beorg Wic when re-enactors’ seemed happy to pose for photos, once they had “got rid of the plastic.” Those encounters, however, were mainly in the “accurate tents” section, with re-enactors wearing sometimes strikingly accurate costumes. In this instance, the remover of anachronisms was someone who was – by his own admission in the small, relatively modern hall in which JAFA’s balls were held – not particularly interested in “dressing-up”. When (re)located in public and in front of a camera, however, historical accuracy (at least to the degree of removing obvious anachronisms) seemed to increase in importance. This was one of many instances which emphasised that in EDHDA, “authenticity” is dependent on context (and whether or not photographs – a visual, soon-to-be-shared-online record of the event – are to be taken).

Notwithstanding these rare moments of stringency, EDHDA participants comfortably compromise authenticity for financial and creative reasons, as well as for the practicality and expediency of that “dob of glue” and “quick and easy placemat bonnet”. For those who do not have the sewing skills to make their costumes themselves, the cost of buying or having Regency style clothing made for them can be considerable. The effect of this is threefold – prompting some to simply “rustle something up” the way Elaine did, encouraging others to acquire the necessary skills
to make their own garb, and facilitating creativity amongst others. Many of the attendees spoke of “trawling the op shops” (a common abbreviation of “opportunity shops”, the Australian term for charity stores that sell second-hand clothing and other items). “Treasures” found there, I was told, could be adapted to be more Regency or utilised for their material. In addition to clothing, these re-enactors frequently sourced accessories, particularly shawls, jewellery and hats, at charity stores and markets. “I cut up hats from op-shops and make them into something Regency”, one woman said.

Another told me that she purchased her “entire outfit” from an opshop. The utility of these stores seems to be widely recognised in re-enactment circles; they were recommended to me by numerous people within EDHDA, at Beorg Wic and at the Jane Austen Festival in Bath.

Almost all of the people participating in these discussions (and the sewing workshops at which they mainly occurred) were women. At Beorg Wic, there were many men, particularly from AAF and Staple, who had been inspired to learn to sew in order to make costumes for their hobby. Their newfound interest in sewing was often motivated primarily by their desire for historically accurate clothing and secondarily for fiscal reasons. In EDHDA, however, it seems to be the reverse.

John: They loved [the dancing], these young university students. And then we went to Queensland with them, to do a Renaissance show, at a Renaissance festival […]

Aylwen: […] They need[ed] something to wear. So the girls knew that they’d have to turn up on a Saturday morning to do their sewing, and I was going through […] what they were making. But the boys didn’t want to sew: oh! We don’t sew! And then I said, well look, we can quote how much it would cost. […] So I contacted a few different costumiers to find out how much they’d charge, and I worked out an average […]. Do you want to pay it now or in instalments? They turned up and started learning how to sew. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

What is pleasing about this example is its subverting of traditionally gendered activity. Whilst in Danelaw the making of clothes is predominantly, but by no means exclusively, handled by women, in EDHDA, Aylwen ensures that male dancers pull their weight with the needle.

Due to the large and interconnected nature of historic dance and re-enactment circles, adaptability to different levels of authenticity is sometimes necessary if one wishes to attend intergroup events and festivals. In this particular case, the organisers of the Renaissance festival
requested historically accurate costumes for EDHDA’s performance. For many groups and events, wearing a costume is the base level of mandatory accuracy. Standards might vary considerably, but a show of effort is expected, and often required, in order to create the veneer of visual authenticity, however shallow, that a costume is believed to bestow.

As well as creating a sense of authenticity amongst the participants, historical costume can also function as a marker of authenticity to the audience of a re-enactment. According to Aylwen, “as soon as you go out into the public in a costume and you’re part of a recognised group, they’re going to believe what you’re doing is correct. They’ve got no other source” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Costumes can create a visually recognisable image, rendering the dance or re-enactment more identifiable and comprehensible for an audience without knowledge of that particular practice or history. Thus, on a certain (if only minor, visual) level, the action by association becomes authentic - or able to be perceived as such. The significance of costume in the way onlookers presume authenticity manifested not only in discussions within the EDHDA community but also outside it, both in Australia and, as the following illustrates, England.

Many of the tour members have worn Regency dress for our visit to Stourhead – a vast estate close to the Welsh border, boasting a particularly grand Georgian home and eighteenth-century landscaped gardens. We stroll through the grounds, the vivid hues of the autumn leaves reflected in the lake beside us. Pausing by a temple of imposing classical design, our guide – a well-spoken, educated English woman of maturing years – turns towards us.

“Looking at you all there, you just look so right!” We continue on, but two women stop us to ask why most of the group is in costume. John, betrayed only by a slight twinkle in his eyes, responds, “we’re filming a newly discovered Jane Austen.” The women seem to believe him, but he folds and shares the real reason. Later, as we approach the grotto, a balding man, wearing headphones and unfortunately short shorts, stops jogging to look at my costumed companions. His gaze moves to Erika, whose striking blue gown is trimmed with lace and accompanied by a bonnet, parasol, gloves and, at present, something less-than-authentic in her right hand. “It’s so strange to see a lady dressed like that using a phone!”

Although these tourists were only in costume, the guise this clothing lent them, with its veneer of
historicity, bestowed them with authenticity and authority in the eyes of many we passed. Any perceived anachronisms – such as Erika’s phone and our clearly visible cameras – were rendered strange, becoming secondary to the Regency impression the costume created. And yet, the Regency outfits, not the cameras or phones, were, of course, the real anachronisms in this twenty-first-century National Trust site.

Imposing perceptions – and preconceptions – of authenticity can, ironically, lead directly to the inauthentic. Examples of such misconceptions and inaccuracies were demonstrated by the folk dancers discussed by John earlier and by the organisers and attendees of a Robert Burns Night in Canberra, at which the EDHDA performed.42

John: We went to do a show at the Burns club (a Scottish cultural club), and we dressed in Regency costumes. […] We felt a bit out [of place]. […]

Aylwen: Everyone was wearing kilts!

John: It was a Burns night, celebrating Burns’ birthday, so Regency dress was perfectly suitable. But everyone in the audience was wearing modern, Scottish folk dress […] because that’s what they associate with Scottish culture. And so I felt a bit “out” because we weren’t Scottish in this image of Scottish[ness]. […] But when we walked out, there was a big picture of Robert Burns, dressed almost the same as me […] because that’s what people wore. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

Despite the fact that Regency dress was entirely appropriate, indeed, more historically accurate for this Burns’ Night, the kilt was deemed by those celebrating to be the “natural” choice – a view widely held throughout Scotland and its international diaspora. At play here was a tension between being historically accurate, as John and Aylwen were, and a sense of being authentic to Scottish heritage – to a particular, romanticised and (re)invented notion of Scottish-ness. As Trevor-Roper asserts:

whenever Scotchmen gather together to celebrate their national identity, they assert it

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42 Robert Burns Night, also referred to as Robert Burns Supper, is an annual celebration of the Scottish poet Robert Burns, usually held on or near January 25th. While most common in Scotland, this celebration is also held in places of Scottish diaspora, including Australia.
openly by a certain distinctive national apparatus, [the kilt, but this is] not the original, or the distinguishing badge of Highland society. Indeed, the whole concept of a distinct Highland culture and tradition is a retrospective invention. (2012, 15)

As I have demonstrated earlier in this chapter, nostalgia and the (re)invention of tradition can and frequently do colour representations of the past. It seems nostalgia and (re)invention can also, at times, confuse the evaluation of authenticity, blurring the differentiation between real and imagined histories.\(^{43}\)

As alluded to earlier, there are other facets of EDHDA’s approach to authenticity, most notably, the dancing. Whilst costume facilitates individualised levels of commitment, and is Aylwen’s domain in this society, the authenticity of the dancing is largely controlled by John, who reconstructs and choreographs the dances, teaches them in the classes and workshops, and calls them at the balls. Many of the dances we learnt on the first day of the three-day historic dance workshop had been reconstructed by John from descriptions of dances in the historical manuscripts found in the aforementioned dance masters’ set of drawers, amongst other sources. He recommended that we, too, consult primary sources, especially the French and Italian, which, he said, often contain more detail than the English ones. While one of the attendees of the workshop also reconstructs dances from original sources, the other participants utilise more contemporary dance manuals, online guides, or, more commonly, rely on what they are taught by their dance instructors.

As intimated earlier, John’s concept of authenticity rests heavily on context – the cultural milieu, the social conventions, and the etiquette of the time – this is where he places importance. At a dance workshop, John told us to “think first of the context, then the intricacies” (conventions and

\(^{43}\)I explore the notion of imagined history in relation to the Jane Austen Festival in Bath, Britain, in the following chapter, and to the function[ing] of nostalgia in chapter six. The tension between accuracy and authenticity is one that I explore further in chapters six and seven.
etiquette), “then the dance itself.” Although rigorous in the research he undertakes to reconstruct dances, his treatment of the dances themselves, at least in his teaching, is more fluid. While teaching us one dance, for example, John decided to change one of the movements as he felt it would work better another way. “It’s a genre”, he told us, “let’s not get too tied down in the dance itself.” This reflects an interpretative rather than replicative approach to reconstruction, which locates authenticity in the genre (the style of the dance) rather than the exact form, and in an understanding and (re)performance of the conventions, etiquette and meaning surrounding the dance. For John, the meaning of a dance resides, in part, in the function it served. He explained to us, for example, that one of the dances he taught us was “a social mixer, to get people interacting.” For authenticity in EDHDA, understanding these meanings is equally if not more important than the steps and formations of the dance.

EDHDA participants also learn dances choreographed by John, which utilise steps and movements from ‘period’ dances in new sequences and to new music, which he composes. This occurs, in part, because of John’s passion for choreography and composition, but it also responds to the wider interests of the group. EDHDA “mixes things up a little” by infusing the dances with a contemporary twist in order to appeal to younger participants.

John: Every month we had four weeks of workshops and a ball. It might move from a Romeo and Juliet Italy, fifteenth-century, to a Marie Antoinette 1780s Paris, to The Three Musketeers 1625 France and England. Pirates of the Caribbean – there’s a bit of a fantasy theme, we found this worked very well.

Aylwen: The fantasy for advertising.

John: For stimulating the imagination, the young people’s imagination. […] We put on a Young Victoria ball [in response to the 2009 film of the same title]. I worked flat out for weeks planning and researching the dances and buying from overseas the relevant music so we could do all the dances from England in the 1830s when Albert and Victoria were courting. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

Aylwen alludes here to the commercial aspect of their practice; a function of some forms of re-enactment (in particular, living history museums and tours) that is discussed in chapter six. Within
EDHDA, the theme of a ball might be from a movie, to expand their participant base, but this would not prevent John from endeavouring to retain some kind of historical accuracy – utilising, for example, authentic Victorian dances. In EDHDA, using contemporary popular culture, even fantasy, taints but does not preclude authenticity. As John explained: “we cater for both historical connoisseurs and parties – people think we can only do one or the other, but we can do both.” In this way, EDHDA transitions between “hardcore” and “farb” re-enactment, and is sometimes both, simultaneously.

This fluid approach to historic dance – and to Austen’s literature – has elicited criticism from other groups. As mentioned earlier, some folk groups criticised EDHDA’s dances for not, as John phrased it, “staying in the box.” In a similar vein, Aylwen received what she described as “a wonderful email” from a Jane Austen literary society based in Sydney, expressing “complete disapproval of [JAFA’s] activities” (original emphasis). The correspondent accused the festival of being:

a bit too frivolous […], not taking [Jane Austen] seriously enough; there’s not enough respect for literature. [But] there’s a lot of people who’ve come through the door and have watched the movies and are in love with the idea of romance and happy ever afters. […] People – we see it on Facebook – they go back to Sydney, and they join the Jane Austen Society Facebook group, and they say, let’s dress in costume and meet up […]. But then you’ll see, a couple days later: nothing. It’s a bit of a downer for them. […] This is what I say to people: we’re not there – the festival is not there – to study Jane Austen’s books. What we’re there for is to celebrate her life. (Interview by author Dec. 2012)

EDHDA’s notion of and engagement with Austen’s “life” does not pertain to specific occurrences or events the author experienced but rather “her time” – (aspects of) the cultural milieu in which she lived and of which she wrote. This connects with a concept of authenticity that frequently surfaced at the Jane Austen Centre’s festival in Bath, which I explore in detail in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, there is an irony in the lack of focus on Austen’s literature at JAFA. The year I attended, there were only a handful of talks on Austen’s literature and their modern transformations, although there has been significantly more in subsequent years. Austen’s novels
also featured in performances adapting, parodying or drawing inspiration from these works, and this has continued in the festivals that followed. Despite this, dance and costume remain the predominant elements of the festival and EDHDA’s many other activities and events.

Rigorous in their own practice, and critical of ignorance, particularly concerning dance convention and etiquette, John and Aylwen nevertheless perceive a value in accommodating impulses of a more playful and pop-culture orientation, as the above examples demonstrate. EDHDA’s engagement with popular and alternative culture reflects what Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills consider to be pivotal to what they term ‘aca-fandom’ (practices that attempt to merge academia and fandom), in that EDHDA ‘acknowledges and explores our emotional connections to popular culture and the way it functions as a resource in our everyday life’ (Jenkins 2010; Hills 2012). EDHDA utilises a diverse array of sources – from reliable, primary source material, to popular culture, including fiction – to enhance the appeal of the practice, foster a sense of tradition, and connect with multiple subcultures and practices.

EDHDA negotiates and renegotiates the friction between historical accuracy, authenticity, practicality and creativity, responding to the differing interests, stages and commitment levels of both the organisers and the participants. As suggested above, the elasticity in how John and Aylwen allow participants to approach authentic attire and behaviour contrasts starkly with their rigour in their own (re)creations. For most of those involved in EDHDA and attending JAFA, the primary motivation is enjoyment, deriving from a love of dancing, costume and/or Jane Austen, which for many, does not necessitate, or even include, much concern for accuracy. Because JAFA attracts a range of participants and is deliberately flexible to accommodate this diversity, the stance on authenticity is not fixed; it is an ongoing, dynamic process that shifts and moulds to fit the

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44 I expand on this notion of re-enactment as aca-fandom and, more specifically, in relation to the ‘fan-scholar’, in chapter seven.
particularities of each situation, the people involved, and where their enthusiasm resides. Does this
detract from EDHDA’s historical accuracy? Yes, it does. But as we have seen, their claim is not to
accuracy but authenticity. Does a lack of accuracy detract from authenticity? That depends, as will
be further illustrated in the following chapter, on how one defines authenticity and what one wants
to be authentic (in relation) to.
Chapter five
Jane Austen’s England

They arrived in Bath. Catherine was all eager delight – her eyes were here, there, everywhere, as they approached its fine and striking environs, and afterwards drove through those streets which conducted them to the hotel. She was come to be happy, and she felt happy already.

Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1817), cited by Visit Bath (Jane Austen’s Bath 2016)

Come and visit Jane Austen’s country with us this September, as we celebrate 200 years of *Pride & Prejudice* in England.

Aylwen Gardiner-Garden (EDHDA mailing list 2013)

Virtualities, even in the presence of actualities, show that which can otherwise not be seen. Tourists travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, 9)

EDHDA’s historic dance and costume tour of “Jane Austen’s England” culminated in the attendance of the annual Jane Austen Festival in Bath, to which John and Aylwen contributed a “Regency down under” dance workshop. That year’s festival was of particular significance, being the two-hundredth anniversary of the publication of Austen’s most beloved novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. Given the author’s connection to Bath, in both her life and literature, I was intrigued to explore how this history might manifest and unfold. How would notions of reconstruction, re-enactment and authenticity be perceived, approached and experienced here, in the homeland of “Austenmania”? How, too, might notions of heritage and place emerge? What role, if any, would the touristic overtone of the festival play in all this?

The Jane Austen Festival (JAF UK) is organised by the Jane Austen Centre in Bath. Its website describes the festival as “nine glorious days of costume, music, drama, dancing, food, fashion, talks, tours and fun at a variety of venues in and around the city” (The Jane Austen Festival 2014a). The event precedes EDHDA’s version by seven years, and was, in part, the inspiration for it (Scanlon 2012, 19). At its conception in 2001, JAF UK was a weekend festival held at the Jane Austen
Centre. By 2013, the scores of events spanned nine days and numerous venues and included workshops on Regency clothing, makeup, manners, entertaining, dance and music. There were also theatre productions, concerts, dance performances, staged readings, walking tours of Bath, day trips to historic houses and villages, themed breakfasts and dinners, talks, costumed balls, a fashion show, a fair, and a promenade. The promenade has opened the festival since 2004, and is the festival’s largest event, attracting several hundred Regency attired participants each year. The Jane Austen Centre’s festival dwarfs EDHDA’s in every respect, having a far larger number and a broader range of events, venues, participants and contributors.

The scope and diversity of the festival facilitate and to a certain extent, necessitate, diverging objectives and perspectives. Amongst the contributors are re-enactors, professional “living historians”, amateur and professional actors, academics, musicians, tour guides, dancers and dance instructors, costumiers and aficionados of all things “Jane” (as festival contributors regularly referred to the author). The hundreds of participants range widely in age, occupation, nationality and objectives for being there. Whilst under the umbrella of re-enactment and fandom, JAF UK does not restrict its marketing to re-enactors, historic dance enthusiasts or even Austen fans, claiming, on its Facebook page, to have “something for everyone”, including tourists who happen to be in Bath during the event (Jane Austen Festival Bath 2014). JAF UK is, as Carnegie and McCabe describe living history festivals more generally, ‘a celebratory, experiential context for a range of consumers including locals, tourists and re-enactors’, occupying ‘an interstitial position where people with different identities, social backgrounds, and motives collide’ (2008, 364-5).

So, what brings all these people together? One might assume a passion for Jane Austen’s literature, but this would oversimplify the matter. Not everyone at JAF UK is enamoured with Pride and Prejudice, not even all the contributors.
A group of around twenty people stand together in the courtyard between the Bath Box Office and the Roman Baths. A couple of people are dressed in Regency costume, while the rest of us are more casually attired. Our tour guide, a well-dressed lady with short grey hair and a certified guide badge, introduces us to the “Sex and the City Walking Tour” we are about to embark on. “How many real Jane aficionados do we have here?”, she asks. A few hands shoot up, followed by a few slower, more hesitant lifts. Looking around – my own arm half raised to indicate my in-between status – I notice that less than half the people here have raised their hands. The guide, her eyes also tracing the upheld arms, comments, “I myself enjoy Jane Austen, but would not describe myself as an aficionado. I am not a Jane Austen tour guide – I lead tours of Bath and its history, including a little Austen.”

This experience represents something of the diversity of attitudes, purposes and approaches that pervade the festival. Communities are rarely, if ever, discrete and bounded (sub)cultures – despite their misrepresentations in early ethnography – but JAF UK is particularly not so. Given the diverse motivations and interests of the contributors and participants, the range and breadth of activities and experiences, and the array of approaches and perspectives, I do not presume to be able to portray these several hundred, diverse people in the intimate fashion of the preceding two case studies. Continuing to analyse my fieldwork with these re-enactors, and the way they represent what they do – both in person and in media/online – I respond to the difference of this case study by including more analysis of my experience as participant-researcher. As outlined in my methodology chapter, this reflexive analysis of the ethnographer’s embodied presence converges with the approach to participant-observation advocated by Ahmed (2004), Ness (2004), Okely (2007), and Spry (2006). Before conducting this fieldwork and analysis, I wondered whether, considering the scope of the festival, there would be a dominant theme or through-line in this case study, as I had encountered with (or interpreted from) my others. What, if anything, would be JAF UK’s conceptual linchpin?
The Jane Austen Festival: “event, historical place, entertainer”

Of the many themes and discourses that emerged from my fieldwork with JAF UK, the concept of ‘heritage’ underpins almost all of them. Given the location (history steeped Bath) and the fact that the festival celebrates one of England’s most beloved authors, the centrality of this concept is hardly surprising. Jane Austen’s well documented (and well utilised) connection with Bath falls within what is often termed ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (Alivizatou 2011, 82-93). JAF UK, as a large living history event performed in a (particularly) appropriate historical setting, represents a:


unique combination of two meaningful cultural themes: heritage and festival. Heritage, in terms of foregrounding a sedimented past, a historical and archaeological significance, and festival in terms of foregrounding a present embodied site of popular culture.’ (Hannam and Halewood 2006, 29)

Let us first consider the former theme, with a focus on heritage and/as tourism and its connection with notions of ‘place’.

Whilst there are local residents amongst the attendees and organisers of JAF UK, there are a great many more who travel across Britain, and the globe, to attend. The EDHDA tour I travelled with to Bath included people from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. At a Regency themed soiree, we met another tour group (much larger than ours) who had journeyed from the U.S. During the festival, I met other participants from these countries, as well as from Scotland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, China, Japan, India and various parts of Britain. Although ostensibly a literature, dance and living history festival, JAF UK also functions as a prominent tourist attraction. The tours and visits on offer in the festival programme reflect the accommodation of and marketing towards the tourist. In 2013, there were daily, themed walking tours of Bath, including the aforementioned “Sex and the City”, as well as “Jane Austen’s Bath”, “Shop til we drop!”, “Location, Location, Location”, “The Unsavoury Tour” and “A Walk with Death”. There were coach tours to Lacock (the BBC’s Meryton in the 1995 Pride and Prejudice mini-series)

45 Self-descriptor of the Jane Austen Festival on its Facebook page (Jane Austen Festival Bath 2014).
Stoneleigh Abbey, Snowshill (a historic town and manor house in the Cotswolds) and a number of “very popular local and Hampshire tours” (Herring 2013). There were also events at local attractions such as Kinwarton, a Regency bathhouse; period house museum No. 1 Royal Crescent; the Holburne Museum, “Bath’s art museum – for everyone” (The Holburne Museum 2014); and Sydney Gardens, “one of the few remaining 18th century pleasure gardens in the U.K.” (Parks and Gardens 2016).

Interweaving heritage and tourism, JAF UK explores and employs the intangible culture and material history of Bath, and may be usefully conceived as a form of ‘heritage tourism.’ Michigan State University Museum (2014) offers this definition:

many tourism efforts focus on cultural OR natural resources. Heritage tourism offers an umbrella covering both. Heritage tourism encompasses elements of living culture, history, natural history of place and the natural environment that communities value and steward for the future. Natural and cultural heritage elements make a community and region unique. They are keys to community character that draw residents and visitors alike.

JAF UK attracts visitors to Bath in a twofold sense – enticing visitors to (come to) Bath, and also appealing to visitors of Bath. Literary tourism has become, as Stijn Reijnders (2011, 4) comments, a recognised and increasingly popular form of tourism, with many official tours and private travel arrangements focused on an author, novel, show or film. These tours are mostly structured around visiting sites imbued with significance by their connection with (the visitors’) object of fandom. On their web page on JAF UK, Insight Guides (an international travel publication similar to Lonely Planet) suggests:

Austen’s representation of the city has captured imaginations and today, her legacy is one of Bath’s major draws. […] Her association with the city is celebrated at the Jane Austen Centre. In this Georgian town house, you can find out more about Bath in Austen’s time and the importance of the city in her life and work. (Alex@Insight 2013)

As this site proclaims, the Jane Austen Centre is a tourist attraction in its own right. The centre’s calendar obviously culminates in the festival, but activities are on offer throughout the year, including a tour of “Austen’s Bath” by costumed guides, in which one can “enjoy being shown Bath’s fascinating history and associations with Jane Austen and her family”, as well as a “bespoke service”
for group visitors (Group Visits 2014). There is, the centre claims, “nothing that our specialist walking tour guides like better than to show off our beautiful Georgian city to interested visitors. Let us take you to places mentioned in Jane Austen’s letters and her novels” (Group Visits 2014). With “knowledgeable staff, a period atmosphere, maps, books and exhibits on costumes” (Alex@Insight 2013), as well as costumed attendants, costumes for visitors to try on, complementary period biscuits to taste and a period inkwell to write with, the centre utilises many features of living history museums, albeit on a very modest scale (there are only two exhibition rooms, both of humble proportions).

“Every visit to the Centre begins with a live introductory talk where you can discover many fascinating facts about Jane Austen.” (The Jane Austen Centre Guide 2013)

There is, however, a generous supply of the expected tourist/fan kitsch, which is marketed in “The Jane Austen Centre Guide” and purchasable at the centre and online.

Before you leave, don’t forget to pick up a souvenir in the gift shop. We have a wonderful selection of Jane Austen related books, stationery and gifts to tempt you. Perfect for present ideas or mementos of your visit. You can also shop online at www.janeausten.co.uk
Bestsellers include a three-dimensional Jane Austen cookie cutter and matching Mr and Mrs Darcy cushion covers. The centre also offers a “lovely, award winning Regency Tea Room”, so that “during your visit you can take time to relax and enjoy real leaf tea, homemade cakes or our famous Tea with Mr Darcy” (The Jane Austen Centre Guide 2013). In the introductory talk offered at the centre, a member of staff informed us that the centre tried to purchase Austen’s former residence at number 25 Gay Street to be their premises, but the owner of the dentistry located there did not wish to sell. Hence, the centre came to be located in a very similar Georgian townhouse “mere doors away” from where “Jane lived after her father’s passing.” Bath’s Austen and Georgian heritage offer a potent tourist attraction, which the centre and festival extensively utilise in their events and advertising.

The Centre at 40 Gay Street in Bath houses a permanent exhibition which tells the story of Jane’s experience in the city between 1801 and 1806 and the effect that living here had on her and her writing. Gay Street is the ideal location for the Jane Austen Centre in Bath, set between two of Bath’s architectural masterpieces, Queen Square and the Circus. (Jane Austen in Bath 2014)

A location that oozes “authenticity”; an exhibit that is accessible, useful and enjoyable; and a smorgasbord of Austen and Georgian-related experiences, insights and paraphernalia are, perhaps, the features on which the centre bases its claim of being “the perfect starting point to an exploration of Jane Austen’s Bath.” In this way, the centre actively utilises its location to enhance its own and the festival’s appeal and status, reflecting the way ‘certain types of re-enactment or historicised performance emphasise their locational uniqueness in order to sell themselves as special’ (de Groot 2008, 129).

On their website, the centre recommends other heritage organisations, including the Building of Bath Collection, the Fashion Museum, No. 1 Royal Crescent and the Old Theatre Royal, as well as local accommodation, dining and shopping options (Other Links 2014). The Centre frames itself and the festival as part of the broader heritage culture of Bath, thereby utilising and
contributing to Bath’s established tourist industry. Although this could be perceived simply as a commercialised marketing mechanism, it also reflects and responds to a convergence of interests within related sectors. As Carnegie and McCabe argue, ‘(re-)presentation of cultural heritage in these formats creates a unique set of interactions between landscapes, local communities, tourists and heritage organisations’ (2008, 355).

While the Jane Austen Centre and Festival actively foster and utilise Bath’s tourism, the converse is also true. Visit Bath describes the destination as a “vibrant city of festivals and events”, noting that “Jane Austen fans enjoy the festival dedicated to her in September” and encouraging readers to “get your bonnet at the ready and practise your waltz” (Bath Festivals and Events 2016). The website features the Jane Austen Centre in their “Things To Do In Bath” segment, urging tourists to “purchase your tickets for the Jane Austen Centre – a must visit for any fan of the author” (Jane Austen’s Bath 2016). In this way, Visit Bath, The Jane Austen Centre and even, to an extent, the participants of the festival, work together to (re)create the heritage on which Bath tourism is founded.

It is not only framed performances and exhibitions of heritage that elicit tourists' attention. During the festival, there were many moments when participants became living, moving sites of interest for other tourists.

*Six hundred Georgian garbed bodies stroll past grand, Georgian buildings as we weave our way from the Royal Crescent lawn to the Parade Gardens. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of phones and cameras are held above the heads of the crowd that has formed to watch this walk, all lenses pointed in the direction of us gowned and bonneted women, and the somewhat smaller number of men in breeches, coats and riding boots. As we wander along, chatting amongst ourselves, passers-by stop to watch or take a snap. We round a stone-paved corner, and a tour bus pulls up. Two dozen tourists come tumbling out, cameras firing away.*
To some extent, this drawing of a (potentially intrusive) crowd is the point. To promenade, even in Regency times, is to perform (recall Mr Darcy’s comment to Elizabeth and Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*: “your figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking.”) This twenty-first-century promenade was an explicit performance, intended for an audience (it does, after all, advertise the festival, as well as offer participants an opportunity to exhibit). The performativity of this activity was framed by an environmental set – gathered, as we were at the beginning, in the cordoned-off lawns in front of the prestigious, Georgian buildings of Bath’s Royal Crescent. This performativity was emphasised by the master of ceremony who, dressed in full Regency regalia, announced the commencement of the promenade in a booming voice, with language and a reference that interwove past and present. “Ladies and gentlemen, be pleased to draw near. My lords, gentlemen, ladies, gentle folk all. Those wanting to take part in this promenade in the year of our Lord 2013, be pleased to draw near. We will depart through the gates. God save the King.” 2013 it may be acknowledged to be, but the language and the monarch harken back to a Georgian past.

Despite the framing of this event as performance, reactions to the camera-wielding crowd varied amongst participants. Michael, a historic dance teacher I met on EDHDA’s tour of England, commented that it “feels like we’re on display in a zoo.” Laura, who looked visibly uncomfortable with the attention of the crowd, agreed earnestly. Given the smile on his face and in his voice, however, Michael seemed, unlike Laura, to enjoy being exhibited. This was further demonstrated an hour or so later, after a gathering in the Parade Gardens, when we made our way to the Guildhall “Fairye”.

*We are stopped by a large group of Chinese tourists, who literally block our path whilst they take a fast succession of photos. We are no sooner allowed to pass, when a smaller group of Indian tourists ask Michael and his wife, Erika, if they might take their photo (Michael and Erika are far more finely dressed than the rest of our small circle). While Erika obliges reluctantly, Michael readily agrees, performing a pose of exaggerated grace; shoulders squared,*
his left hand resting regally on the cane planted elegantly before him. Head high and slightly turned to reveal his profile, he arches one brow. “A bit of play-acting”, he says.

Michael’s willingness to perform was echoed by other festival participants, including a young woman who wore a Regency dress, bonnet and a large badge declaring “Team Willoughby.” When asked by a twenty-first-century dressed observer if the badge was supporting John Willoughby from Sense and Sensibility, the Regency clad woman replied in a mock prim voice, “well, I am Marianne Dashwood!” (one of the protagonists of the novel, who is courted and forsaken by Willoughby before marrying Colonel Brandon). Mary, another participant in the promenade, expressed the appeal she perceived in being the viewer, rather than the viewed, when we noticed people watching us from a corner café. “That’s the thing to do – sit in a café and watch the nineteenth-century go by.” These examples also illustrate the way attendees of JAF UK transition between modes of participating and observing, as both performer and audience, exhibit and beholder, tourist and tourist attraction, sometimes simultaneously.

As suggested earlier, another important aspect of heritage is the notion of place. Bath is, as Visit Bath proudly proclaims, the “only destination in the U.K. to have the whole city designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO” (World Heritage Bath 2016). This city has been listed, since 1987, as a “‘cultural site’ with outstanding universal value and cultural significance” (World Heritage Bath 2016). The cultural and historical value of this place is, as one would expect, a substantial part of its appeal as a heritage tourism destination. As Historic England identifies, the historic environment is a significant component of England’s attraction to overseas tourists and a considerable contributor to local and national tourism. Their research suggests that “more tourists plan to visit historic sites than go to museums, theatres of sports events” (Heritage and Tourism 2016). Many of the activities at JAF UK were similar to those at JAFA, but the historic environment of Bath imbued these events with a particular poignancy.
I arrive at the Pump Room for the masquerade ball, a thrill of excitement pulsing through my Regency-clad body. I walk through the passageways to find myself stepping into the courtyard of the ancient Roman baths. When I read that the reception would be held outside, I had not expected this. The flame lit lanterns cast the costumed bodies in a soft, flickering light, reflecting off the green waters of the bath. A resounding, polished male voice announces that the ball will commence shortly. I navigate the uneven stones of the eroding, ancient floor beneath me, presenting myself to the doorman. He announces me, and I enter the majestic hall of the Georgian Pump Room. As I weave my way through the men and women hovering on the dance floor, I meet the doorman of the Jane Austen Centre, who led a dance workshop I participated in a few days before. His round, ruddy face is as cheerful as ever, and he greets me cordially. “My dear, how would you like to partake of the waters?” Although I am far from certain that this is permitted, I cannot resist the opportunity. He comes back later with a small glass of cloudy water. “I warn you, one does not drink it for the taste.” The liquid is warm and somewhat sharp in my mouth and, as I swallow another sip, I silently agree with him. And yet, the romance of this experience, and the historical, cultural and spiritual significance of the substance I am consuming, is tangible.

This was, for me, a striking example of the way re-enactors consume history – sometimes, as in this instance, literally. Although, as de Groot (2008, 122) suggests, the literal consumption of the past is commonplace at many living history museums (including the Jane Austen Centre), this particular experience was no common fodder, even amongst the re-enactors. At a dance workshop, Richard (the man who had offered me “the waters”) described this masquerade ball, with its exceptional location, as “something else.” Many others expressed a similar perspective, including the co-organiser of EDHDA and JAFA, who framed the ball as “something not to miss.” Not everyone, however, regarded this ball as exceptional. In response to Richard’s glowing description, a petite, older lady wearing pigtails blurted: “so is Farthingales!” (Farthingales being the other main ball of the festival, held in The Assembly Rooms). This play for cultural capital revealed, for a moment, the battle present, at times, behind the lustrous pasts (re)presented in this field (de Groot, 240).
The architecture in Bath is strikingly emblematic of the Georgian period and, as the above field experience suggests, contributes significantly to one’s affective engagement with the Jane Austen Festival. As Insight Guides writes of Bath, its “stunning, well-preserved Regency architecture immediately conjures up associations with Jane Austen and her six novels and it is easy to imagine her genteel characters promenading around the Pump Rooms or along the Royal Crescent” (Alex@Insight 2013). And yet, the historicity is not located within the built environment, so much as it is re-created in people’s experiences of these sites. There is a sense in Bath, perhaps particularly during the festival, that the ‘heritage is not the historic monument, archaeological site, or museum artefact, but the activities that occur at and around these places and objects’ (Smith 2011, 70-1). I would complicate this a little, however, and suggest that, at these sites at least, heritage is not only the historic object/place. There is heritage in these sites – both as original, ‘period’ spaces and meaning invested places – which embody an emplaced, manifest historicity. This authenticity, however, lies latent, dormant – a potential historicity, activated by engaging (with) the past, through the written, oral, performed, exhibited, technologised histories that we (re)create and, most crucially here, by our embodied experiences with and in these places. As Daugbjerg argues, ‘the physicality of sites and materials […] work in concert with their human invigorators’ (730).

These sites can be understood, to use Pierre Nora’s now almost ubiquitous term, as lieux de mémoire – as sites of memory, where ‘memory crystallises and secretes itself’ (1989, 7). At JAF UK, heritage converges with Nora’s concept of memory, which ‘takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects’ (9). Lieux de mémoire become ‘available in concrete sensual experience […] Even an apparently purely material site […] becomes a lieu de mémoire only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura’ (18-19). What occurs during JAF UK goes a step further. When the historic dancers hold a costumed “Regency” ball in the Pump Rooms of the Roman Baths, they are not only placing themselves in an authentic site; they are also further emplacing the cultural heritage of that site, through the authentic way of moving in the space,
(in)formed by not only their dancing but also the effects of their ‘period’ garments. The re-enactor enters the site as a *lieu de mémoire*, but through their performative (re)doing, the space becomes, if only briefly, a temporalised place, something approaching (but never reaching) what Nora calls a *milieu de mémoire* – a real environment of memory, which, at JAF UK, manifests in and through cultural heritage.

With some exceptions, the *affect* of this kind of experience is facilitated by the maintenance of the site. On a practical level, protection of these venues in the face of commercialisation and development is significant not only for dancers, re-enactors and Austen fans but for tourism in Bath more broadly. Heritage sites are able to remain as such because of a practical process – some might even say a battle – of protection, preservation and (re)creation, which can often require active articulating of and arguing for their significance and use. This was highlighted for me when the tour guide on the Sex and the City walk informed us that the council “nearly turned Royal Crescent into council offices! They had no regard for the architecture. It’s only thanks to the Bath Preservation Society that Bath looks the way it does today.” ‘Heritage’ and particularly ‘heritage tourism’ have become, for many, bywords for ‘kitsch’ and the commodification and/or (over)romanticisation of the past (de Groot 2008, 4-5; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 153, 156; Lowenthal 1989, 21-3). As the tour guide’s comment suggests, however, heritage sites and events, such as those connected with the Bath Preservation Society and the Jane Austen Centre, serve an important function – they display and protect the value (and valuing) of these historic places by engaging visitors (and their funds). Kirschenblatt-Gimblett notes that ‘heritage organisations ensure that places and practices in danger of disappearing because they are no longer occupied or functioning or valued will survive. [They do] this by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference’ (150). The Bath Preservation Society saved the particularly fine example of Georgian architecture and streetscape that is the Royal Crescent in this fashion. By locating a period house museum at and naming it after No. 1 Royal Crescent, English Heritage assisted to define and demonstrate the historical significance of this
location, thereby contributing to its protection. JAF UK augments this sense of historicity through performance, gathering several hundred people every year to promenade past these period buildings in Regency costume and drawing hundreds more to watch them. While heritage appears to be old, it is ‘actually something new [...]’, a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past’ (7). This does not mean, however, that Bath’s heritage is simply an invention of the present. Rather, it suggests that heritage requires action, it needs to be performed, through a process of conservation, innovation and (re)creation.

Of course, experiences of such places and their (re)created histories are significantly affected by our knowledge of them and the meaning(s) we attach to them. There were several occasions when I was struck by the history of my surroundings – seeing, smelling, navigating the physical, manifest presence of a site, knowing, learning or encountering its intangible, lingering past.

We continue weaving our way along the cobbled streets of Bath, as our guide points out numerous places of interests, peeling back some of the layers of history around us. As we walk through the high, rounded archway of the Guildhall market, she informs us that the building was constructed in the nineteenth-century, but that the location has been a market since Roman times. The American tourists near me exclaim at this longevity, expressing a sense of awe that I, too, feel pressing upon me. After walking for a few more minutes, our guide comes to a halt, turns towards us and bids us to climb the steps of William Scott Art Gallery. “I want you to get the view. I think most of you know you are looking at Pulteney Bridge. Jane lived at the end of this street for three years.”

Our guide’s highlighting of this particular place by bringing us to a stop, and positioning us in a spot where we could loiter (being out of the main thoroughfare) and better see (being elevated on the steps), communicated the significance she attached to the site, and expected us to, as well. It would seem that many of these participants perceived a historicity – whether felt or purely factual – in this place, given the number of photos they took here and questions they asked. Such experiences are, of course, often augmented by an interest in Austen’s works, or the author herself. In such moments, I was particularly aware of my own relation with Austen and the way it impacted upon my
experience as participant-researcher. As a child and young adult, I read many of Austen’s novels and watched several BBC adaptations of her work. As an aspiring writer, I deeply admired – and still admire – the prodigious success of this female author in a male-dominated literary (as well as social, cultural and political) sphere. To be on a street where she once lived and wrote was an evocative moment for me, causing a sense of slippage between participant-researcher and wholly immersed participant. The young woman in Regency dress who stood beside me seemed to experience her own strong response to this experience, murmuring in an almost reverent tone, “wwwwoooowww!”, before hastily reaching for her camera.

There is, in such places, a lingering presence, an *experiential remaining*, which relates to what Taylor (2003, 73; 142) terms the *hauntology* of performance, and what Schneider (2011) calls *performance remains*, (re)embodied through the ‘redo’ of re-enactment. These remaines, Schneider suggests:

might be understood not solely as object or document material, but also as the immaterial labour of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past [...] . 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. (33–35)

The lingering presence, or experiential remaining, that one can feel in Bath at certain places, in certain moments, is evoked through the (inter)animation of physical sites by and with cultural heritage and bodily, and embodied, (re)doing.

A desire to visit these places and experience a similar reaction is one of the most common motivations to attend the festival, particularly for first-time participants. The *affect* of being in places connected with Austen – whether resulting from a lingering sense of presence, an emplaced historical residue, or simply the knowledge of her having been there – was spoken of by many participants and contributors.

*Our tour guide brings us to a halt outside of the New Theatre Royal, which, she informs us, was built in 1805 – before the publication of both Persuasion and Northanger Abbey. As our
heads tilt upwards to take in the majestic Georgian building before us, our guide explains that “the theatre was very important for social interaction. Thursday was the best day to go, as you would probably bump into somebody.” We learnt earlier in the tour that socialising and networking were crucial for young men and women “in lane’s time”, especially when in Bath, as Northanger Abbey reflects. An American woman stops chatting with her friend to ask, “did women continue to go out after they were married? I suppose they didn’t need to if they’d already snagged a guy.” The guide replies, “perhaps not as much, but they definitely did go out. Don’t forget, when you come to Bath, you’re on a holiday. So you might go out every night! [...] By Jane’s time, private parties were all the go.” She turns back towards the theatre and indicates for us to do the same. “Lady Russell would arrive at the front, where the modern entrance is. People paying a pound to be in the pit would be at the far side. This side was where the middle and lower gentility would enter – where Jane would most likely have entered. This is the second oldest continually-running theatre in England. I’ll tell you something; you can so feel her here.”

The felt significance of sites connected with Austen, communicated by our guide, and echoed by responding nods from a few of the participants, was also emphasised at a soiree at 95 Sydney Place, which Aylwen and John Gardiner-Garden had organised, in collaboration with the manager of the establishment. Our host was eager to emphasise the historic importance of the property’s location in relation to Austen.

We sit around an impressively proportioned, grand wooden dining table, in what we’re told is an authentically decorated Georgian room. Our host, a tall, greying gentleman with a suit and polished English accent, introduces us to this Georgian-themed guest house and local surrounds. “I think you’ve already gathered from Jane Austen that people would sign in at the register at the Assembly Rooms, and then come to Sydney Gardens to have breakfast at the hotel there. And the people already in Bath would parade up and down and decide whether or not they wanted to give their card to socialise with them.” In the lingering light of this Spring evening, I can still discern the trees of Sydney Gardens, opposite. After a few more snippets of history and a viewing of the original downstairs kitchen, we are led upstairs for the evening’s performance. A young woman sits behind a piano, while an older man and woman stand behind a lectern. “We welcome you this evening to 95 Sydney Place, almost in view of number 4 Sydney Place, where the Austens lived.” Almost collectively, many of the heads in the audience turned towards the windows, necks craning – mine amongst them.
The Sex and the City walking tour and the soiree at 95 Sydney Place were two of many events in the festival that gathered people together (most of whom shared an interest in at least one of the histories at play) in historical places to communicate (and, at times, elicit) cultural and historical insights through performance. These ‘convergence[s] of people, places and performance […]’ facilitated what Carnegie and McCabe describe as ‘a unique consumption experience’ (2008, 352), evoking a liminal sense of temporal(ised) place. The claim that living history can connect its participants with the past will be assessed in chapter seven. For now, I will only touch upon the notion that, during such festivals, there are moments when ‘tourists enter into the scene with a heady sense of “being there”, capturing an essential part of the lifeculture of the locality [and] some sense of “real” meaningful experience’ (McCabe 2004, 1). The sensation of being immersed in a locale, connecting with (aspects of) its lifeculture – in this case, with an extra-daily present, inflected with an extra-daily past – extends beyond people who are (primarily) tourists; it is accessible, potentially, to all bodies “being there”, including researchers.

It is evident that the history and culture of Bath, embodied visually and spatially in its Roman and Georgian architecture and roads and intangibly in the re-enactment of accessible parts of its cultural heritage, enrich one’s experience of the Jane Austen Centre and its festival. Conversely, the centre and festival contribute to the sense of place in Bath. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues:

> tourism stages the world as a museum of itself, even as museums try to emulate the experience of travel. Indeed, museums – and the larger heritage industry of which they are a part – play a vital role in creating the sense of “hereness” necessary to convert a location into a destination. (1998, 7)

As alluded to above, The Jane Austen Centre – functioning as it does as a living history museum and celebration of Jane Austen and, through her, Georgian and Regency Bath – not only elucidates and promotes Bath’s literary heritage, but also helps create this heritage, and the sense of place to which
it contributes. This heritage is ‘a cultural process or performance that is engaged with the
construction and reconstruction of [a] sense of place’ (Smith 2011, 80).

The significance of these places, what transforms them from a location to a destination, is
not, at least for The Jane Austen Centre and Festival, wholly grounded in the ‘real’. As well as
exhibiting Austen’s lived experience in Bath, JAF UK celebrates Bath’s manifestations in her novels
*Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. The sense of place in ‘Jane Austen’s Bath’ derives from both
factuality and fictionality – from both the actual locations and their evocations in fictional scenes,
made meaningful through the interaction that unfolds between the characters in these moments.
The emplacing of fictional scenes in real locations – both through reference in the novels and
through filming in their televisual adaptations – creates these sites of fictional reality, cemented by
the significance they are attributed by fans. When we were at Great Pulteney Street, for example, we
learnt from our guide that as well as being where Jane actually lived for some time, it was also the
street in which the lodgings of several of Jane’s characters are set.

The Allens in *Northanger Abbey* take lodgings in Great Pulteney Street, indicating that they
are wealthy. This street (and its implications) are important to the plot – it causes Isabella’s
brother to assume Katherine is worth pursuing. Mrs Allen is too lazy or stupid to warn her
not to ride out in a carriage alone with a young man. It is on this street that Catherine, riding
along in the carriage, sees her friends and is desperate to go to them, because they won’t
understand why she’s broken her engagement.

This merging of fact and fiction was also evident at the beginning of the walk when one of the
participants was likened to a character from *Northanger Abbey*.

*Standing outside the Pump Rooms, our guide talks to us about their use in Jane Austen’s time
and in her novel, Northanger Abbey. A (rather accomplished) busker plays her violin nearby.
“People always turned up at one o’clock, because that’s when the music played. Catherine and
Mrs Allen come to the Pump Room and promenade up and down for an hour. How else do you
meet somebody? It is here that Catherine meets Isabella and her mother, Mrs Thorpe, a school
acquaintance of Mrs Allen – any acquaintance is better than none. Jane describes Mrs Thorpes’
girls as ‘smart’ – a coded word, perhaps, for a bit racy, a bit free and easy.” Our guide indicates
that we should follow her. Just outside the square, she asks us to pause for a moment. “You’ve*
just come under the famous archway that Isabella rushed through in the pursuit of two young men.” A few women in the group make surprised, appreciative comments, while one or two others nod their head, as if already aware of this. We recommence our walk, and our guide continues, “this is Cheap St – ‘cheap’ means market street. This, which is now a quiet street, was one of the busiest.” At this moment, a woman in a Regency style, red coat and bonnet comes rushing up and joins us in a fluster. A tall American man asks, grinning, “is this Catherine?” Our guide, casting her eye across the woman’s boldly coloured garments in an exaggerated look of appraisal, replies, “perhaps Isabella.”

Such intersections of reality and fantasy (or rather, fiction) pervade the festival. The co-organiser of EDHDA and leader of the historic dance and costume tour, described in the preceding chapter, was very excited about having the group stay at 95 Sydney Place, because it was the house used for Sir Walter Elliot’s in the 1995 BBC film adaptation of Persuasion (a fact that was repeatedly emphasised to us by the manager of the establishment at the soiree). These experiences illustrate the significance of the opening quote of this chapter: ‘virtualities, even in the presence of actualities, show that which can otherwise not be seen. Tourists travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places’ (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 9). The events at JAF UK align with Reijnders assertion that iconic literary works function as anchors of collectively imagined pasts, conflating literature with notions of heritage (2011, 8; 14). I suggested earlier that a historic site, through the performative process of (re-en)acting, can become a temporalised place, and temporarily perform, for those involved, as something approaching a milieu de mémoire, where memory is understood as cultural heritage. How do we interpret, however, the significance and experience of sites that derive their sense of place not from history but from fiction? Reijnders, developing Nora, posits what he terms ‘media heritage sites’ as lieux d’imagination, which, ‘for certain groups within society serve as material-symbolic references to a common imaginary world’ (14). He suggests that visiting such locations enable tourists to create – and place – a meeting of imagination and reality, made meaningful by the interconnected, yet often contrasting, relation between them (8). These sites offer the possibility of an experience ‘in which the world of the imagination temporarily comes
together with – or perhaps perfectly contrasts with – the sensory experience of physical reality’ (7). This is, I believe, what occurs for some of the participants of JAF UK. The event diverges from the kind of media heritage tours Reijnders writes of, however, in that it is a festival, involving not only far greater numbers of people, but also, people who are commonly costumed, who engage in ‘period’ activities and not only suspend their disbelief, but also often actively participate in and perpetuate the make-believe. Reijnders perceives a ‘temporary and carnivalesque transgression of [the] inside/outside border’ and, one assumes, between fiction and reality (77). There is, at the Jane Austen Festival in Bath, a pervasive, at times potent *carnivalesque* atmosphere, fired by the gathering and interacting of great numbers of fans. Many members of this transitory but revisited community utilise this to destabilise the dominant reality/fiction dichotomy, inverting its usual hierarchy and enabling fantasy free (or less restricted) reign – if only for a few, fleeting, sited moments.

In this way, The Jane Austen Centre and Festival deliver on the implicit promise made by many heritage sites, to create an ‘experience that is more real, more immediate, or more complete, whether [...] an actuality [...] or a virtuality [...] or both at the very same place’ (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 131). At JAF UK, this sense of being more real, immediate, and complete was derived from our embodied engagements with the authentic, (re)animated in physicalities and (emplaced) histories, both factual and fictional, real and imagined. It is towards this key concept, authenticity, that this chapter now turns.46

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46 Of course, there was also much in Bath that was *not* authentic, which at times jarred one’s sense of immersion in this historic environment. After the masquerade ball, I weaved my way through the remaining Regency clothed bodies in the Georgian Pump Room, past the ancient Roman Baths, to leave this “world” and hop into a (motorised, not horse-drawn) cab, under the electric lights of street lamps and store signs. This was one of many such experiences. In many cases, however, the modern intrusions were often hidden, for me, in the shadow of Bath's visible history. The need to analyse contextual specificities with critical reflexivity again comes to the fore here. Having grown up in Australia, far removed from and with very little experience of Britain, or any European country, the relative authenticity of this place in relation to Austen and her era impressed upon me in a way it might not for someone accustomed to such surroundings. This points towards a further line of enquiry – how the backgrounds and previous experiences of different re-enactors affect their engagement with and experience of their practice; a topic beyond the scope of this thesis.
**Authenticity: a novel notion**

The assertions made in the above section prompt questions regarding where The Jane Austen Centre (and the festival more broadly) locate authenticity, and how authenticity and historical accuracy are identified and defined. Answers to these questions are not clear-cut, and indeed, are sometimes contradictory, for nowhere is the festival’s diversity more apparent than in its approaches to and perceptions of that supposed talisman of re-enactment, in part because the people involved are not all, or even mainly (self-identifying) re-enactors. As indicated in the previous chapters, these two terms, authenticity and historical accuracy, are often conflated by both re-enactors and the academics who write about them, and yet, they can be and are distinguished between, often implicitly, in the way they manifest and are referred to. As my ethnography of Beorg Wic highlights, conceptions and attitudes regarding authenticity vary even within one relatively contained and connected circle of re-enactors. How vast the scope for divergence, then, in this eclectic, largely individualised assortment of historic dancers, Jane Austen fans, re-enactors, musicians, actors, theatre-goers, concert-goers and tourists, augmented by the vast number of largely independent and varying events that comprise JAF UK.

Hence, I submit the following observations and interpretations as specific examples of particular subsets of the festival, and although reaching some broader understandings, I do not claim to be able to synthesise or simplify the whole spectrum of perspectives involved. With such a plethora of generalisations regarding re-enactment and living history already circulating, it is important, I believe, to bear the specificity and incompleteness of the following analysis in mind.

It is interesting, in this context, that the term 'authenticity' did not appear to be articulated during any of the festival events. Nor was any part of the festival that I encountered described explicitly as (in)authentic. Do JAF UK’s contributors and participants, therefore, not concern themselves with authenticity? Perhaps not – well, not in the discourses within and surrounding the events themselves, at least not overtly, and certainly not in the way that some other re-enactors
often do. The Jane Austen Centre’s permanent exhibition (which I, and many others, visited during the festival) does consider authenticity, despite the fact that I noted only one instance where the word was used, which will be discussed shortly. In many cases, this notion was not absent but rather positioned “offstage”, out of the spotlight, or simply “dressed” differently. Magelssen argues that ‘museums make their presented history “real” […] through their very authority as educational institutions’ (2004, 65). By not overtly claiming historical accuracy, the Jane Austen Centre implicitly implies – and enhances – its authority. Its cultural capital, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s term once again, is framed as given, without need of vocalisation, by social agreement between the visitor and the visited institution. In other aspects, however, the Jane Austen Centre engages in what Magelssen calls ‘authoritative acts of enunciation’ (63), highlighting its authenticity by association (of place, person and product), as will be demonstrated below. It is important here to distinguish between authenticity and historical accuracy; at JAF UK, in parallel with JAFA, the terms are not interchangeable.

Conceptions of authenticity centred on Jane Austen at the majority of the festival’s events. These branched into authenticity connected with Austen’s life, novels and, somewhat ironically, BBC (and other) film productions of her works. There are three main mechanisms discernible in the way authenticity is conceived, approached and utilised at JAF UK – locating authenticity within Austen (related) sources, deriving authenticity from these sources (to apply to subsequent representations), and being authentic to Austen-related sources.

Austen’s life as a focus of authenticity was particularly apparent at the Jane Austen Centre.

A young woman, dressed in period attire, gives an introductory talk to the centre’s exhibition, which Laura and I have just entered. The presenter tells us that Northanger Abbey and Persuasion are both set in Bath (as we have heard in many places already). Persuasion, we are told, “was written after Jane lived here and shows Bath in a very different light.” She guides us through key places around England that Jane Austen graced with her presence, pointing, at times, to the map
that hangs behind her and below an Austen family tree. “There were many clergy figures in her
daily life; that’s why they crop up in her books so much.” Austen, she tells us, portrayed the gentry
quite favourably, but did ridicule them a little. After a brief account of Austen’s brother and her
sister, the presenter turns towards an iconic portrait of the author, displayed next to her on the
wall. By it, is written: “thanks to Cassandra” (Austen’s sister). “As it’s the only authentic picture we
have of Jane, all of our artistic representations are based on this. Despite being only postcard size,
the original hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London.”

As the speaker advised us, the portrait at the centre is a copy. The location of the original, England’s
National Portrait Gallery, communicates its authentic value, particularly given its humble
proportions and style. The authenticity here is not, however, only attached to the original; as the
“only authentic” visual image of “Jane”, this copy is also valued. The authenticity seems to be
located, by these fans, as much within the (transposable) depiction of Austen as it is within the
original itself. The significance of this piece is evident in the language used to describe it, and in the
expression of gratitude to the artist, Austen’s sister, endowing it with another rung of authenticity.
In the exhibition, a sense of an amicable relationship between Jane and Cassandra Austen is
conveyed through this portrait, and more particularly, through correspondence between the sisters.

On its website, the centre cites a letter written by “Jane”.

Elizabeth has given me a hat, and it is not only a pretty hat, but a pretty style of hat too. It is
something like Eliza’s, only, instead of being all straw, half of it is narrow purple ribbon […]
Jane Austen to Cassandra
Queen’s Square, Bath
June 2, 1799. (Jane Austen Dressing Up 2014)

Similar snippets of correspondence between the Austen sisters feature on the walls in the
exhibition, reflecting the value the centre locates in her letters.

Such loci of authenticity also serve as sources to derive authenticity from. Featuring Austen’s
discussion of a bonnet on their website on dressing up at the centre renders the activity authentic
by associating bonnet wearing with the author (naturally, the centre’s costumes include bonnets).
Similarly, including the location of the writing, Queen’s Square (highlighted on both their website
and walking tour map as being close to their establishment) casts the location of the centre and Bath as a whole in the glow of authenticity. Their aforementioned description of the centre, which “houses a permanent exhibition telling the story of Jane’s experience in the city […] and the effect that living here had on her and her writing”, mirrors this (Jane Austen in Bath 2014). The centre’s Regency Tea Room, and the dance classes and balls of the festival, are similarly lent authenticity by connecting them with Austen. By visiting, “you can learn about the main entertainments of Jane Austen’s day; dancing, socialising, card games and tea drinking” (Online Brochure 2016).

There is, however, a tension underlying the celebration of “Jane Austen’s Bath”. The centre and festival highlight Bath’s presence in Austen’s life and works and allude to the authenticity this provides them, but the author herself disliked Bath, quite openly. This is acknowledged in the Insight Guides review of the festival.

In Austen’s day, Bath was in its pomp as a fashionable place to see and be seen, although the author herself had little love for the place; having departed for good, she remarked: "it will be two years tomorrow since we left Bath, with happy feelings of escape!" In her novels, she often portrays Bath as a tiresome, petty city that is only good for gossip, parties and balls. In Northanger Abbey, one of her characters reflects Austen’s views: "I get so immoderately sick of Bath … though it is vastly well to be here for a few weeks, we would not live here for millions." (Alex@Insight 2016)

The discordance of simultaneously celebrating a person in and through a place she was relieved to escape, and the possible inauthenticity (in terms of being faithful to Austen) of doing so, may be soothed for those involved by focusing on Bath’s positive connotations. The centre utilises and emphasises this connection as far as feasible (and perhaps slightly beyond), claiming that “during your time at the Jane Austen Centre, you’ll learn how Jane was fascinated by Bath, mentioning it in all of her novels, as well as making it the principle setting of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion” (What is the Jane Austen Centre? 2014). Although the author’s former interest in Bath declined greatly after living there, the fact remains that she did live, dance, and even write there, and Bath, tiresome though it may have become to Austen, remains a site of romance for two of her heroines.
The desire to be faithful to Jane Austen, and therefore, in this view, authentic, was evident in the untitled documentary on loop at the exhibition, which was made specifically for this purpose in 1999. “If we profess to be her admirers”, the presenter proclaims, “we owe it to her to pursue the truth.” This conveys endeavouring to represent Austen’s life “truthfully” as a responsibility of all fans of the author. One might question how this sense of “truth” is defined and achieved. In the documentary, it is pursued, in part, by including people associated with the author or her novels. The narrator, Amanda Root, played Anne Elliot (the protagonist of Austen’s *Persuasion*) in the BBC’s 1995 adaptation of the novel. Root is a leading figure in British classic and period dramas, and her filmography includes *Jane Eyre, Daniel Deronda, The Forsyte Saga, Midsomer Murders, A Touch of Frost, Foyle’s War* and *Agatha Christie’s Poirot*. During the documentary, she interviews Austen’s great niece, Diana Shervington, who informs the viewers about Austen family holidays in Lyme, a tourist destination that features in *Persuasion* and is where Shervington lives. The documentary clearly attaches authority to this descendant of Austen, who in turn lends authenticity to the documentary by her presence in it. The film also seeks to uncover something of Austen’s character – her “true” nature – through her novels. As readers, we get to know “Jane” – a sense of what she may have been like – through her fiction, and, the documentary suggests, “*Northanger Abbey* very much gives the impression that even in her early twenties, she was an observer, an outsider.” The novels are thus represented as primary sources, providing authentic insight into the author herself. Note, however, the equivocacy of the narrator’s words, “gives the impression that”. Even when drawing conclusions, the desire to be authentic to Jane – in this case, not to presume to know this great figure too well, or to speak too much for and of her – overcomes the temptation to speculate. At least, it does in this instance. The documentary is not immune to romanticised speculation: “we know she lived off an allowance of twenty pounds per year. But then, she didn’t need to be the poor relation; she could have set her hat at finding a husband […]. Jane Austen was too much a romantic at heart to marry for financial considerations.” While Austen did, as the documentary informs us, break-off an eligible match, its explanation, which
it presents as a statement, is (idealised) conjecture.

When navigating the slips and trips of fact and fiction, evidence and speculation, accuracy and faithfulness, many parts of the festival tacked back and forth along a spectrum of correctness and conjecture. This was particularly the case during a performance at the soiree at 95 Sydney Place.

*Under the high ceiling of a Regency themed room in this Georgian house, a middle-aged woman and an ageing man, accompanied by a young, female pianist, sang a number of tunes from the Georgian (and neighbouring) period(s). They introduced or concluded each piece by explaining its connection with Austen. “This is a song Jane Austen and her siblings would have sung.” [...] “We still sing Rule Britannia, but many of the songs would have been more pastoral, and this song is typical of that.” The female singer, Miss Greenhill, sang with her hands loosely clasped in front of her, vivid expressions animating her face. Her male counterpoint was similarly vibrant. Miss Greenhill picked up a piece of paper from the lectern in front of her and proceeded to read from a letter written by Austen (which, coincidentally, I also heard quoted by an attendant at the centre earlier that day). The male singer noted, in reply, that, “a woman, it is said, should have a knowledge of singing, dancing and the languages”, to which Miss Greenhill responded, “but this will not help a woman find a husband.” At this point of the performance, the singers’ approach turned more interpretive. “I’d like to think she heard this opera and this duet, and she had it in mind when writing Marianne and Colonel Brandon” (a couple in Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*). [...] “Perhaps she even had Don Giovanni in mind when she imagined Mr Wickham.” After reciting “Faithless Sally Brown” (complete with Mummer’s accent): “we’d like to think Austen would have liked this, but the author was born in 1799, so it’s a bit of a stretch.” Evidenced authenticity was restored in the next two songs: instrumental pieces I had seen on the piano at the Jane Austen Museum at Chawton House. But then, introducing an operatic number: “by a little bit of fanciful thinking, it’s possible that John would have taken Jane along to see it at Covent Garden” (John being Jane Austen’s brother). And finally, towards the end of the show, they turned again: “Cooper – Jane’s favourite author of verse. Dr Johnson and Shakespeare were, we are told, her ‘favourite in the other thing’.”

In their desire to connect their music with Austen, the authenticity (and credibility) of the performers’ representations varied greatly. They framed their event, however, not as a musical reconstruction or historically accurate concert, but as a playful performance, connecting with
Austen through both period music and, to a lesser extent, the “spirit” of her novels and characters. “To me, the spirit of Miss Mary Crawford is ruling this evening”, the female singer informed us, because, like that character, their show has “a serious surface with a cheeky, flirty undertone.” The focus of these performers was not history, heritage or even literature, but music, enhanced through playful reference to Austen’s life and works. Their primary purpose was not to inform but to perform, and the singers’ playful mode of conveying (and creating) musical connections to Austen reflects this.

Playful representation was also present in engagements with another key locus of authenticity at JAF UK – Austen’s literature. The Mary Crawford Miss Green referred to is the heroine of Austen’s Mansfield Park. Here, Greenhill utilises one of Austen’s characters as a framing device, connecting the tone of her performance with (one of) Austen’s novels. Her performance was not entirely authentic to Austen’s life or time, but it could be interpreted as authentic to the “spirit”, or tone, of her literature, as Greenhill lays claim to in the above quote.

There were many such moments, and places, that intertwined fact and fiction, the authenticity of the experience being related to both Austen and her characters. Another occurred during the aforementioned walking tour.

Following our guide, we reach Milsom Street, which was, we are told, “once strictly residential.” “By Jane's time”, however, “this had become the premier shopping street, as it is today. Isabella stopped here to try to attract male attention.” We come to a halt, to “take in” this location. “Number 2 figures in Jane’s books. In Persuasion, it is where Captain Wentworth realises he’s jealous.” With a cheeky smile, our guide adds, “there’s nothing like a bit of jealousy to rouse a little interest.” But, it seems, this Number 2 has further significance. “Number 2 was a bakery, almost like a café. They were famous for their custard tarts – one of Jane’s favourites.”

Here, as elsewhere, our guide, like our singer, slips between tales of the life and times of “Jane” and the lives of the characters she invented. Because Austen wrote of places she actually lived, there are many such crossroads in the authenticity game that connect her, as a historic figure, with the characters in her novels.
As the above field experience demonstrates, Austen referred in her literature not only to general areas but also specific locations. Of course, the exact location of some of these sites is not definitive, even if they are represented as such. It is very possible that some of these places were the inspiration for locations in Austen’s novels, rather than the precise setting. Many of the sites have changed significantly since Austen’s time, and some of them were obviously depicted by the author with a little artistic license, leaving out the less desirable attributes.

Continuing on our walking tour, we reach The Cross Baths, which, we are told, have been baths since Roman times, but were rebuilt in the eighteenth-century. They are opposite what were once the stables for the White Hart Inn. “This is where Mary Musgrove sees Sir Walter Elliot and Mrs Clay taking a walk through the stables. Stables are another area where you can have a bit of a ‘how’s your father?’” Our guide looks towards the young woman wearing red, Regency attire, whose breathless late arrival had caused a bit of a stir earlier. This “Isabella” is chatting with a young, dark-haired man, also in Regency garb, her body angled close to his. “Her reputation was already in tatters” our guide jests dryly, one brow raised. Returning to her topic, she explains that, by situating Mrs Clay and Sir Walter Elliot’s walk by the stables, Austen communicates that “Mrs Clay is not a reputable woman.” We walk around to stand outside what used to be the front of the White Hart Inn. She shows us a picture of what it looked like “in Jane’s time.” “Inns were places families would stay for a few days or for longer by young, single men, but weren’t a place to stay for an extended period. This was the best [inn].” She turns and points towards a window. “This is where Anne would have looked out of to see Mrs Clay and Mr Elliot.” We continue walking towards the Masonic temple, which was formerly a theatre and is now open on selected days for public viewings. “It was a very small theatre, rectangular in shape, with people seated facing each other. So, when Catherine is sitting opposite Mr Tilney, after having unintentionally slighted him, they really couldn’t escape each other. The theatre was a place where friendships could be made and flirtations continued. It was also a place where prostitutes came – Jane would have seen these women, even if she never spoke of them.”

As we (re)traced Austen and her characters’ steps, this re-enactment interwove the author’s reality and fiction, what her literature included, excluded and alluded to. In so doing, our guide imbued the sites with significance, through the (inter)play of subject and object, then and now, and history real
and imagined.

The interconnecting of fact and fiction also occurred in the kitchen of the period house museum, No. 1 Royal Crescent, during a lecture titled “Were the Austens Upstairs or Downstairs?” After outlining the different classes and their general standards and ways of living, the speaker situated the Austen family within this social hierarchy.

So where do the Austens fit? They were gentry, but not well off; except for Jane’s brother, who was adopted by other relatives in need of an heir and became richer than Mr Darcy. Jane Austen would have been involved in the kitchen, by necessity, as the Austens didn’t have enough servants; unlike Mrs Bennet, who was offended by Mr Collins’ suggestion that her daughters helped cook the meal. There was, however, still a marked difference between the Austens and the servant class.

The speaker utilised Austen’s characters to illustrate the author’s own position in society. She went on to tell us that Austen “did have to live on Trim Street briefly – a very disreputable part of Bath”, where prostitutes lived and worked. “Jane was aware of social differences and where she fitted” and reflected this in her novels. The presenter then quoted Fanny Dashwood from Austen’s Sense and Sensibility: “all together they will have five hundred a year! Their housekeeping will be nothing at all. They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expenses of any kind!” In the interweaving of Austen’s life and literature, her books are, for these contributors, a valid source and reference point.

Drawing on Austen’s books in this way was a common technique at the festival. At the soirée, the male singer played on Mr Bennet’s words (made famous by the BBC’s 1995 production) to his daughter Mary, in Pride and Prejudice. “Ms Blossom [the pianist] is going to exhibit on her own, as if she hasn’t already exhibited so well accompanying” (original emphasis). Similarly, in a makeup workshop titled “How to Get the Regency Look”, the demonstrator, as she was gathering colour from a makeup box, told us to “crush up your beetle. Use petroleum jelly as a primer if your skin is dry.” She demonstrated on the model as she continued, “if you layer it, it will last longer. Apply the blush in a ‘C’ shape from the temple and back. As Lady Katherine de Burgh said, ‘it’s practise, practise, practise.’”
Here, the presenter made a playful, contextual reference to the use of ground beetles as rouge in the Regency period and cited a character from *Pride and Prejudice* to colour her point. These moments of intertextuality summoned the past – as narrated by Austen – in our present, not through an ignorant collapsing of temporalities but through a playful, post-modern exchange between reality now and the fiction of then.

Three of Austen’s novels were far more frequently utilised in this way than her others: *Persuasion, Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The frequent referencing of the first two is hardly surprising, given their already discussed Bath setting. The third is Austen’s most popular novel and was enjoying, as I have mentioned, the two-hundredth anniversary of its publication. Correspondingly, many of the activities and events were connected with this novel. This included a workshop performance of a new stage production of *Pride and Prejudice*, adapted to be performed by two people.

*Sitting downstage left in the Mission Theatre, the director tells us that this production is “in rehearsal, not ready for the world yet.”* Jo (one of the two actors) wrote most of the adaptation and “tried to avoid” using words that weren’t Austen’s. “We don’t have our set here – we need you to use your theatrical imaginations.” The set, we learn, will be on an angle, and the actors “will move through it to indicate “new” locations.” She gestures towards the plastic chairs on stage. “This is a beige chaise lounge [...]. It’s all kind of grey and beige and beautiful and tasteful.” We are shown the opening scene, and I admire the clever use of costume – Jo’s dress pins back to reveal breeches underneath, to transition between male and female characters. Similarly, the male actor’s coat, worn open when performing a male character, does up to look like a dress when he “becomes” Jane Bennet and other female characters. After performing the scene, the actors take a seat on stage, and the director poses to the audience: “so, we introduced a lot of characters here, are any of them not clear?” A member of the audience suggests that Mary was indistinct. Murmurs and nods of agreement ripple around the room. “We depict Mary playing a flute because Jo plays the flute so well.” A few people voice what I, too, am thinking: Mary is repeatedly and at times poignantly associated with the piano, in both the book and the BBC show, so changing her instrument causes confusion. Both the director and actors, however, seem resistant to this feedback. The director, standing up, suggests, “let’s
rewind and go back in time. Jo missed the part where she usually introduces Mary with a gesture (she indicates towards the music stand). Let’s run it again with that and see what you think.” The scene is re-performed, and some members of the audience respond a little more receptively. The male actor, nodding with satisfaction, comments, “often it’s the absolute precision of a gesture that solves a seemingly knotty problem.”

There is a dichotomy here between the actor-adaptors’ desire to “stay true” to the novel, in terms of dialogue and narration, and her willingness to change an iconic aspect of Mary’s character because of her own ability with the flute. Despite the fact that this departure did not sit well with many amongst the audience (whether for reasons of clarity, accuracy, or both), for those creating the (re)presentation, convenience and opportunity seem to trump authenticity, in this instance.

Contradictions also pervaded the third focus of authenticity at the festival – BBC and other film and television adaptations of the novels. As the Jane Austen Centre Guide recognises, “new audiences continue to discover the delights of Jane Austen via film and television adaptations.” Pride and Prejudice was prominent in this subset of authenticity as well, particularly in the dance events.

In the Georgian Guildhall, the Jane Austen Dancers, a group local to Bath, celebrate “P and P’s” anniversary with a themed dance workshop, “Danced with Pride in 1813”. I am in ordinary clothes, but many of the participants are in Regency attire. Speaking into a microphone to amplify her voice throughout this vast hall, the dance master explains, “as you may have guessed, this workshop is Pride and Prejudice themed [...] It will have dances from the shows and movies, as well as dances we’ve researched from 1813.” The dancing commences with a performance, accompanied by a tune played several times in the BBC production. The second dance is also to a song I recognise but cannot place from where. The third dance, we are told, is to a song called “Contradance 38. Jane was 38 when Pride and Prejudice was published.” The dances whirl past, until we reach the final number, “the dance [both the music and steps] that Lizzy and Darcy danced together.” These are, of course, the Lizzy and Darcy of the BBC’s 1995 version.

In its performing of authenticity, this workshop transitioned between contextual, literary and pop-culture versions of “Austen-ness”, which functioned as a structuring theme, object of fandom, and means of authentication in and of the event. The most enthusiastic responses from the audience were
elicited by the dances from the widely popular 1995 mini-series of *Pride and Prejudice*. An experience of authenticity was evoked, for many participants, by the iconicity – the visual and aural recognisability – of dances featured in twentieth-century productions. These dances may well be twentieth-century constructions, inspired by, but not necessarily derived from, the period. This was also demonstrated at the post-promenade performance in the Parade Gardens, when the dance teacher of the girls performing commented that “some may recognise the tune, others may recognise the dance. All of you who have seen the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* will have seen Elizabeth Bennet dance this with Mr Collins.” The tune is played several times throughout the series and would be instantly recognised by fans of the show. This BBC version also made an appearance at the 95 Sydney Place soiree. Following one of her songs, Miss Greenhill asked the audience: “how many recognise it from BBC’s P and P?” Most of the room indicated recognition, some with vocal enthusiasm. As I will explore further in the following chapter, engagement with television and film adaptations featured prominently at both Jane Austen festivals.

The authenticity attached to and derived from aspects of reconstruction in Austen-based shows and films was not limited to music and dance; it was also perceived to be embodied in the actors who played key roles in these performances. In her festival review, the organiser of JAF UK wrote: “we were thrilled to welcome back Adrian Lukis (Mr Wickham) […] performing Austen duologues in the portrait gallery of the Holburne Museum” (Herring 2013). Recruiting the actor who played the charismatic but morally flawed rogue of *Pride and Prejudice* to perform duologues and readings was a source of both excitement and authenticity for the organiser and many participants. Similarly, on the web page narrating the history of the festival, the writer reminisces about the “wonderful readings given by Ben Whitrow (*the best ever Mr Bennet*) partnered by Amanda Root (Anne Elliot) and then Joanna David (Mrs Gardiner)” (History of the Festival 2014; original emphasis). As mentioned earlier, Amanda Root, the narrator of the documentary played at the Jane Austen Centre, also played Anne Elliot in the 1995 movie version of *Persuasion*. A clip from the film,
featuring Root as Elliot, is included in the documentary. Although festival goers are obviously aware that these actors are not actually Mr Wickham or Jane Elliot, authenticity is still attributed to them as signifiers of Austen’s characters. There are, of course, no “real” Mr Wickham and Jane Elliot. So, their representations in the adaptations are arguably every bit as “authentic” as the characters conjured in the reader’s imagination during their reading of Austen’s novels; conjurings which can feel almost real in their vividness. There were also a select number of “originals” on exhibit at the centre. Visitors can “see the actual dress worn by Sally Hawkins as Anne Elliot in the 2007’s Persuasion, as well as scripts and memorabilia from the 1995 version” (The Jane Austen Centre Guide 2013). The films offer accessible and attainable sources of “original” pieces for Austen admirers. These stand in for what may be considered more historical artefacts connected directly with Austen. Artefacts of any kind were rare at the centre and even more so in the festival. The limited number of displayed objects, however, does not necessarily detract from the authenticity or appeal of the festival, or even the exhibit. As Jackson and Kidd argue, ‘visits to museums and heritage sites have in recent years become […] less about the object and more about the experience: an “encounter” with a past that is “brought to life”’” (2011, 1). Indeed, none of the participants I spoke with mentioned artefacts amongst the attractions of the festival; most people spoke of the balls, dance workshops, performances and opportunities to visit sites connected with the author and her works. As we have already seen, if authentic objects were scarce, authentic locations were in abundance – particularly because this authentication extended to locations where Austen adaptations were filmed.

Common to the three loci of authenticity outlined here (Austen’s life, Austen’s novels, and the film adaptations) is a concentration on places, objects and experiences connected with them. The prominence of these places in festival events, marketing and discussions reflect the sense of value that many of the festival’s contributors and participants attach to them. Locating authenticity in places connected with the author’s life, as opposed to her narratives, is arguably more credible when looked at through the eyes of the historian, and yet, as Cohen suggests in relation to tourism,
the question ‘is not whether the individual does or does not “really” have an authentic experience […] but rather what endows his experience with authenticity in his [sic] own view’ (1988, 378). At JAF UK, authenticity does not necessarily correlate with either historical accuracy or reality. Rather, authenticity is conceived in terms of what Charles Guignon describes as the ‘core meaning’ of the word – an ‘original’ or ‘faithful to an original’ (2008, 277; emphasis mine). As has been alluded to throughout this chapter, at this festival, these “originals” are most often not strictly historical, but rather fictional, located in the tales told and themes explored in Austen’s literature and their adaptations. In this sense, visiting the setting of a scene from *Persuasion* or *Northanger Abbey* (in book or on screen) does evoke authenticity, in that it is faithful to a genuine product – an intangible original, woven into and through a fictitious world of Regency romance.

While dancing at Regency themed balls in the grand Assembly and Pump Rooms may not reflect the reality of life for the majority of people in early nineteenth-century England, or even the day to day reality of Jane Austen’s own life, it *does* reflect the lives lived by many of her characters. The romanticised, sanitised ideals of fiction may not be accurate depictions of English *history*, but they have been and are being fashioned into English *heritage*. Visibly preserved in the tourist sites of Bath and (re)invoked by the activities of the festival, the authenticity of this heritage ‘lies not in its physical fabric, but in the legitimacy given to the social and cultural values we imbue places of heritage with through the performance we construct at them’ (Smith 2011, 80). Some of these Jane Austen fans locate authenticity within a fiction, an authenticity that extends to real places and objects because they are connected with that fiction. As oxymoronic as it may seem, “new originals”, such as Austen film adaptations, are also perceived as authentic. Most significantly, they function as sources for tangible authenticities for their fans: objects, sites and, unlike the novels, characters embodied in the “real” people, actor or re-enactor, who played them.

There is a tension between these particular conceptions of authenticity (as connected with
Austen and her stories) and historical accuracy (understood as capturing the details of the past correctly). As I have already suggested, the latter is the form of authenticity most widely connected with re-enactment, both in the practice and the scholarship and is often (somewhat problematically) utilised synonymously with authenticity as it was at Beorg Wic. At JAF UK, however, “h.a.” did not hold the prominence it exhibited at Beorg Wic, and when it did emerge, it did so by moving away from, and at times contradicting, the romanticised fiction of Austen’s stories, towards the less than romantic aspects of her reality. Historical accuracy, at JAF UK, is found in the details of the author’s life conveyed at the Jane Austen Centre – unmarried, financially challenged, she died at a young age, cause uncertain. It is found in the statistics in the Sex and the City walking tour: one-third of the population lived below the poverty line; one-in-five women were forced into prostitution by financial hardship; although they never appear in her novels, prostitutes were present in Jane’s own life, even (as we were told in “Were the Austens Upstairs or Downstairs?”) in the very street in which, at one point, she lived. It is also found in the information performed in the etiquette workshop: Georgian streets were littered with horse faeces, people deliberately snubbed each other and urinated at the dining table.

Authenticity at JAF UK, on the other hand, is frequently affective, experiential and in many respects and cases, not completely real, stemming, as it does, from an original source that is, itself, fiction. Authenticity is approached by being there, in the very place where Northanger Abbey’s heroine, Catherine, is whisked away from the man of her affections – a literary moment which, like the ethnographic present, is frozen in a perpetual now that may, by reading its present tense, always be revisited. Except, of course, this moment never happened. Authenticity is felt in action, by dancing in the Pump Rooms, where Jane herself danced, accompanied by the very song and dancing the very dance during which Lizzy and Darcy locked eyes, hands and wits at the Netherfield ball in BBC’s televised production of Pride and Prejudice.
This is, in part, an authenticity created by fandom, attached to objects (both tangible and intangible) of worship (in a modern, secular sense of the word). It is also the authenticity of emplaced cultural history, experienced in both *lieux de mémoire* and *lieux d’imagination*, both of which embody a literary heritage heightened by nostalgia and fantasy. It is towards these notions that the next chapter turns.
Chapter six
Presenting the Past

The past works in society and culture in ways that historians rarely comprehend. [...] The ways in which non-academic audiences understand and engage with the past are far more complex than we imagine.

Jerome de Groot (2008, 6)

Polarizing historical objectivity and nostalgia in memory work as if they are respectively the cardinal virtue and sin of historiography is to underwrite simplistic versions of the concept of nostalgia.

Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (2006, 926)

Having engaged in ethnographic analysis of the three case studies, I now shift focus to assess these groups comparatively, in relation to issues prominent in the scholarship on re-enactment. This chapter explores ways in which the re-enactors I researched perceive and represent the past and its relationship with the present. I do this by further examining discussion and ideas amongst practitioners, analysing aspects of the activities they engage in, and comparing these with academic claims regarding re-enactment. Underpinning this chapter is a continued endeavour to acknowledge and reflect diversity, to address some of the frequently neglected divergences and disparities, as well as the parallels, within and across varying forms of living history. What historical sensibilities do these groups demonstrate? Are these views and approaches shaped by nostalgia, and if so, to what extent and in what ways? What significance do notions of identity, heritage, and place hold here?

The two most prominently discussed issues relating to how re-enactors understand and approach history are their employment of a somatic, experiential mode and their response to and perpetuation of a nostalgic mood, producing a simulacrum of history. The former will be explored in the following chapter, where I consider the pedagogical, methodological and epistemological
dimensions of these practices. The latter will be assessed here, with particular emphasis on the often overlooked variations in conceptions, applications, functions and effects of nostalgia. I do not attempt to either refute or support the pervading criticism of re-enactment as a form of nostalgia. As I have made clear, I believe sweeping claims about a varying field are problematic, irrespective of whether they align with my interpretations of the case studies examined here. As such, I consider the varying ways nostalgia has been and could be conceived and demonstrated in re-enactment, by both academics and re-enactors.

Some sense of nostalgia for the past was portrayed by many of the participants in the groups and events I researched. In some instances, this seemed to be only an underlying influence, at others, a very apparent and at times openly acknowledged motivation and approach. My experiences with these re-enactors did, in some ways, mirror the manner in which others have theorised the relation between nostalgia and living history. In other ways, however, my fieldwork questions particular claims regarding the pervasion, function and cause of such nostalgias. Amongst those studied here, the processes and effects of nostalgia were not as simple, monochromatic, prevalent nor even as inescapably detrimental to the (re)making of the past as has been frequently portrayed in some circles of academia.

Before exploring the presence and products of nostalgia amongst the participants in my case studies, I will first address how the concept is represented within academic literature. The notion of nostalgia appears frequently in recent discourse on history, memory and heritage, with slightly differing meanings and emphasises. Before the nineteenth-century, ‘nostalgia’ referred to an intense feeling of homesickness, to the point of malady, for a (usually) distant location (Chase and Shaw 1989, 1; Pickering and Keightley 2006, 922). Since the 1800s, the connection between nostalgia and place has grown tenuous. Boym suggests that ‘at first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually, it is a yearning for a different time’ (2001, xv). In fact, the meaning itself shifted, from a ‘placial’ to
a temporal longing and from a medical ailment to an affective response typified by a heavily rose-tinted impression of the past. Chase and Shaw suggest that it is not a temporal shift that is longed for, per se; rather, it is a different way of perceiving and experiencing the world: 'the home we miss is [...] a state of mind' (1989, 1). This desired mental state is frequently associated with, if not necessarily any particular time, then a (current) sense of “the past”, read as less complex, less fractured, less isolating than the present. (Re)locating “home” temporally – whether in the perceived milieu of a particular historic culture or in a state of mind projected on previous periods more generally – reflects a sense of disconnect from the present, according to Chase and Shaw (1989), Pickering and Keightley (2006) and Hall (1944). These feelings of discomfort and displacement in contemporary society are precipitating a desire for what are seen as simpler, more cohesive times and a way of life, and experience of the world, that these times supposedly facilitated. This view of the past is not, of course, necessarily accurate. Nostalgia is often felt for a home that is not distanced, or even lost, but rather fictional: ‘a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed' (Boym 2001, xiii). In this reading, nostalgia is a way of compensating for a ‘sense of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy’ (xiii) or, as I would argue, a shared fantasy. The shared communal nature of much of the re-enactment I have studied is key to the attraction for and experience of participants and is often at least partially derived from romanticised representations of both then and now.

These nostalgic reactions are generally perceived to be triggered by the particular conditions of modernity (Boym 2001; Chase and Shaw 1989; Pickering and Keightley 2007; Hall 1994). Nostalgia is almost exclusively conceived as a uniquely modern phenomenon, as either a reaction to the modern, industrialised world or a symptom of the post-modern condition, which is viewed as an integral component of contemporary experience. According to Boym, for example, nostalgia is ‘at the very core of the modern [...] it is coeval with modernity itself’ (xvi). Those who link nostalgia
with modernity often suggest that the former is caused by the pace and structure of life since the industrial revolution and, in particular, the corresponding sense of having less cohesive communities and life-worlds. Chase and Shaw, for example, draw on Durkheim to discuss the supposed fracturing of society, identity and experience amongst industrialised populaces triggered by modernity, suggesting that a sense of fissure engenders a false notion that what we lack now, must have been available then, when things were different (read better). Those entangled in nostalgia, they argue:

conjure up a past defined not by the painstaking investigation of the historical record but by positing a series of absences, of negatives. If we now have *Gemeinschaft*, there must have been *Gesellschaft*; if our consciousness is fragmented, there must have been a time when it was integrated; if society is now bureaucratised and impersonal, it must previously have been personal and particular. 47 (1989, 8)

There is a sense here of nostalgia as denial – of denying the present by attempting to retreat into a re-created past. Those who romanticise the past in this way (including, but as the literature makes clear, by no means limited to, some re-enactors) seem to also deny the realities of that past.

Lowenthal observes that:

What we are nostalgic for is not the past as it was or even as we wish it were, but for the condition of having been, with a concomitant integration and completeness lacking in any present. No one ever experienced as ‘the present’ what we now view as ‘the past’ [...] the past as reconstructed is always more coherent than when it happened. (1989, 30)

What is most interesting about Lowenthal’s argument within the context of this chapter is his implicit critique of what others have posited as an inherent relationship between nostalgia and modernity and particularly post-modernity. While Lowenthal himself describes nostalgia as ‘part of the fabric of modern life’, he also acknowledges the presence of nostalgic representation in cultural products of the pre-modern, such as English pastoral literature, which dates back to the sixteenth-century (1989, 18-20; 27;). Following Lowenthal, we could ask: do Renaissance and Neoclassical art

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47 *Gemeinschaft* translates literally as ‘community’ and refers to a sense of close social connection and shared traditions between individuals. *Gesellschaft* translates as ‘society’ and refers to a less intimate, more formal mode of social interaction.
and architecture not suggest a strong sense of nostalgia for, and idealisation of, the Classical world? Should the presence of pagan Celtic mythology in medieval literature – particularly in the Arthurian cycles – not be considered nostalgic references to a “lost”, fantasised past? Furthermore, many of the criticisms levelled at nostalgia, including its commodification and falsification of the past, are being conveyed as specific to a very contemporary, (post)modern sensibility. But, as Lowenthal notes, such assumptions reflect a lack of historical knowledge on the topic: ‘critics wrongly assume that their complaints apply uniquely to nostalgia today. The nostalgia that pervaded nineteenth-century Britain was bitterly assailed for quite similar sins’ (27).

What is closer to being particular to post-modernity are the current trends in academic attitudes towards nostalgia and nostalgic practices. While criticisms of nostalgic representations, as Lowenthal demonstrates, pre-date our own post-modern period, there has been a marked rise in the prevalence and vehemence of negative analyses of nostalgia as a social phenomenon. The shift in perception from nineteenth-century health condition to twentieth-century emotional state lowered nostalgia’s status from something worth scientific examination to a frequently mocked social phenomenon, arguably capitalised on by the heritage industry. Demoted from condition to symptom, nostalgia lost credibility, and yet its significance to academic discourse has increased. Its prevalence in scholarly discussion reflects, Pickering and Keightley argue, its social prevalence (2006, 922). Whilst for some time regarded as a fairly harmless, if inane, diversion, nostalgia has been increasingly portrayed as either absurd or dangerous, spreading a problematic desire for something unattainable and often non-existent. A nostalgic impulse is now rarely ‘prized as precious memory or dismissed as diverting jest’ and has become ‘a topic of embarrassment and a term of abuse’ (Lowenthal 1989, 20). Lowenthal goes so far as to assert that ‘just as nostalgia shed its seventeenth-century scientific skin to become a nineteenth-century symptom of social rather than medical malaise, so within the last few years has it lost its innocence and become a social pariah’
Nostalgia is considered to impinge upon more reasoned, accurate perception by over-romanticising an imagined, simplistic past. The negative consequences of this have elicited considerable critique since the late 1980s, with ‘diatribe upon diatribe denounc[ing] [nostalgia] as reactionary, regressive, ridiculous’ (20).

Reacting in this way, however, can halt our ability to engage more rigorously with practices such as re-enactment, by allowing (over)generalising preconceptions to colour our analysis. Such criticism, while by no means always unfounded, are in many cases, or at least in the cases that I have examined, exaggerated, distorted, or myopic. These shortcomings derive, in part, from unfocused applications of the term ‘nostalgia’. Assertions that nostalgia creates romantic, emotive misrepresentations of the past – misrepresentations which are ‘reactionary, regressive or ridiculous’ - are, in some cases, founded on the critic’s emotive response to a perceived situation, rather than thorough research on actual cases reflecting and/or generating nostalgic influence. Gaps in understanding of the development and diversity of the term nostalgia and the practices of the nostalgic contribute, as Lowenthal argues, to the ‘current antipathy to nostalgia [which] reflects ignorance of its origins and diffusion’ (20).

With this in mind, it is important to recognise that ‘our present usage of the word [nostalgia] is [...] distinctly modern and metaphorical’ (Chase and Shaw 1989, 1) and that our current conceptions of the term are very much that: current, and, perhaps most significantly, contextually specific (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 296). Our modern applications and interpretations of nostalgia, even within academia, vary considerably. The term – in parallel with the living history, re-enactment and heritage practices it is commonly coupled with – carries different, at times contradictory connotations. It is associated with a romanticised, “disneyification” of other times and

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48 One such disturbing moment happened early in my research when a colleague, in the formal discussion following the paper I presented on Celtic re-enactors, rather emphatically and very rhetorically “asked”: “but aren’t they all just fascists?!”
cultures, an approach critiqued for editing out harsh realities, prioritising entertainment over accurate information. And yet nostalgia is also linked with celebrating these same harsh realities and derided for facilitating a claimed infatuation with unpalatable, masochistic aspects of the past. It can be a seeking of authentic experience or a tactic for commodification, a motivator and product of historical and cultural preservation or the debasement and damaging of history and culture for commercial profit.

Living history and re-enactment are central spokes in the umbrella of nostalgic practices such works examine. The perceptions just discussed are applied both to nostalgia generally and to living history, re-enactment and the heritage industry specifically, reflecting the interconnected nature of these terms in contemporary academic discourse. Hall goes to the extreme of framing the whole field of re-enactment as a form of nostalgia, stating: ‘reenacting at its root is a subspecies of nostalgia […] while nostalgia may take many forms, reenacting is an exercise of the nostalgic impulse especially well-suited to the social, political, and economic turmoil of late capitalism’ (1994, 9). In a slightly less emphatic interpretation, Handler and Saxton (1988) suggest that attempts to connect with an idealised past, which they posit at the core of re-enactment, are prompted by the postmodern sense of fractured, inauthentic experience. People who practice living history, they argue, perceive lives in the past as having been more centred, ordered and complete, believing that these ‘historical worlds’ had a ‘narrative coherence’ lacking in the present.

Living historians seek to re-experience history because they expect thereby to gain access to lives and experiences characterized by the wholeness that historical narratives can provide. Living history thus overlooks the fact that the people presented in historical narratives would not have experienced their lives as coherent stories, nor the times in which they lived as unified historical eras, periods, or epochs. (251)

As these authors note, misconceiving the way people of the past experienced their lives is similar to presenting the varied and complex experiences of so-called natives as representative of ‘integrated
cultures’ (251). According to Handler and Saxton, these inaccuracies occur because living historians confuse, or conflate, the telling of history, with real experience.

Living historians latch onto the satisfying configurational unity that a good plot provides, and read it into the world represented by the narrative rather than seeing it as a function of narrative representation. Thus the life of the past is seen to possess an authenticity that we find impossible to experience in the present. (251)

Their discussion of the idea amongst living historians that past lives were actually lived with the structured, cohesive, completeness with which they are represented in historical narrative clearly draws on and develops similar arguments to those related to nostalgia, outlined above. Handler and Saxton’s criticism of the tendency to conflate past and present, historical narrative and actual lived experience aligns with Jameson’s well-known argument regarding the postmodern pervasion of historical simulacra. Drawing on Plato and Baudrillard, Jameson suggests that hyperreal simulations obscure and, to an extent, replace the significance and reachability of the original, which, perhaps, never really existed (Baudrillard [1981]2001; Jameson [1991]1997). Hall also engages with Jameson, suggesting that re-enactment ‘manifests the postmodernist taste for the simulacrum in a nearly pure form’ (10). In order to assess this claim, we need to consider to what extent re-enactors are actually pursuing realism of representation.

Handler, Saxton and Hall’s assertions are fairly reflective of an array of perspectives on re-enactment. Even Anderson, who overtly championed living history, perceived a widespread presence of nostalgia amongst fellow practitioners. He suggested that 'a need to escape from the tyranny of abstract time; a nostalgic preference for the past – usually a particular epoch; and a curiosity about the nitty-gritty nature of everyday life in a specific historical period' are three key 'reasons (and results)' of living history (1984, 183). To a certain extent, Anderson captures here one of the contradictions common in re-enactment – a nostalgic embrace of a broad, sweeping picture of selected, often sanitised aspects of a romanticised past, accompanied by a keen interest in minute, often mundane, detail: the 'nitty-gritty nature of everyday life' (183). Much academic work
on re-enactment identifies with one or the other, without exploring the co-presence of contrasting approaches to learning about and representing history. Is this juxtaposition further evidence of a highly problematic methodology, or could it be construed or even utilised as a point of productive tension and supplement? This question will be explored in the following chapter.

There is, as I have suggested, considerable variation when one looks closely at re-enactors and their perspectives on the past and present. Divergences are evident across different forms of re-enactment, amongst groups within a shared ‘scene’ or style of re-enactment, and even individuals within one group. I will assess these divergences first in relation to Danelaw re-enactment society and the multi-group living history event, Beorg Wic. These are the closest of my case studies to the styles of historical re-enactment more commonly discussed and clearly defined within academic literature. The historical sensibilities of the re-enactors at Beorg Wic sit between representations of so-called serious, specific event re-enactors, and the more carnivalesque style of ‘SCAdians’, but are more closely placed to the latter. In her PhD thesis (1998), Erisman, a re-enactor in the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), considers whether SCA members attempt to relive an ‘emplotted past’, as critics such as Handler and Saxton suggest. She considers it unlikely that many, if any, SCA participants undertake such an endeavour, given that SCAdians attempt to re-create a general, cultural milieu, and do not depict actual people or events (64). While I support Erisman’s questioning of this blanket assumption, the situation is slightly more complex than she allows. Both arguments oversimplify and polarise a more intricate, overlapping spectrum of variance. When I conducted fieldwork with Sydney-based chapters of the SCA, I found that although they do not (usually) perform historical figures or occurrences, many of the members develop personas based on historical data (however loosely – the amount of research and detail varied amongst participants). SCA personas often have developed backstories, and the structure of the SCA places them within a (romanticised) social hierarchy, (re)modelled on a feudal system of the Middle Ages ‘as they ought
to have been' (What is the SCA? 2016). In this sense, many participants within the SCA are connecting with a fictional (or mythical) narrative, which is very much embedded in, and contributing to, the strong sense of community and belonging that Erisman acknowledges to be at the core of the society (21). Although many of the groups at Beorg Wic diverge in some respects from the SCA, most of these clubs can be understood as what Erisman (1998) and Cramer (2010), after their fellow Scadians, term ‘re-creation’ – practices that, as I explained in my introduction, perform historical milieus, rather than specific events. In Australia, the SCA and other medievalists, including Danelaw and AAF, participate in shared events, and it is not uncommon to be a member of more than one group in this scene or to move from one into another. Two of the people I spoke with at Beorg Wic were also current members of the SCA, and most of the people in Danelaw had fought SCA members.

In contrast to the SCA, personas are rare amongst Danelaw, AAF and SMAC members. I encountered a few people at Beorg Wic who spoke in very generalised ‘period’ talk, or ‘in character’ with their costume. This was not done for the entirety or even the majority of the three-day event, but rather on a few occasions, for very brief periods. A young man at the forging session, for example, asked: “may I escort thee to thine workshop, m’lady?” and then returned promptly to modern day language (and gender relations). The most enduring engagements with character/storyline that I noticed were a series of brief but re-occurring comments regarding a young couple who had dressed up from period-cultures on opposing sides of a war.

Perched on logs, Sue, Ellen and I watch armoured re-enactors clash swords, spears and shields in the forest glen before us. Ellen is teasing Sue, as the style of her garb derives from a different culture to her boyfriend’s, Rowan. “You do realise your costume places you in the enemy culture? You must be a spoil of war.” Picking up an apple from the pile of food before us, Sue counters, “I like to think that although he may have won me as a spoil of war, he made an honest woman out of me.”
One could argue that such moments are examples of the oversimplified, surface depictions of hand-picked pockets of history that re-enactment is criticised for.49 These are very simplified, surface engagements, from both a performance and historiographic perspective. And yet, when I observed such occurrences, they were not being claimed as historical simulation, but as play – the sense of fun the treasurer of Danelaw frequently emphasised as a core objective of their club. These re-enactors were engaging playfully with what they knew was not the past, in order to create humour and light-hearted entertainment.

The people I spoke with only knew of one attendee of Beorg Wic who had developed a persona. Most people prefer to have the freedom to dress up in a range of costumes and use a range of weapons from multiple periods and cultures within the Middle Ages.50 This approach aligns with Gapps’ suggestion that Australians tend to re-enact multiple histories, rather than focusing on a more specific time and culture, which he claims, is more common in the U.S. (2003a, 109-11). Is this propensity for a multi-temporal, multi-cultural mode indicative of the fractured nature of consciousness and identity of postmodernity, in which one is, supposedly, ‘compelled to change roles like the jackets of his wardrobe’? (Anton Zijderveld 1974, 71). Given that almost all of the participants I engaged with at Beorg Wic listed “dressing up” as one of their favourite aspects of re-enactment, and that many framed wearing, and ideally making, costumes and armour as pivotal to living history, the enjoyment of ‘garb’ offers an equally, perhaps even more feasible, explanation. Discussing the SCA, Sparkis suggests that costume may be ‘the most accessible and easily manipulable mode […] in this form of play’ (1992, 59). Scholarship on living history commonly forgets that recreational re-enactment is just that – recreational. Groups who do not re-enact events

49 Such confessions also speak to the fantasy of re-enactment, the ‘live-a-day’ (a week, a month) as someone else – as the actor in a play of your own choosing. I explore this notion in “Performing Pasts for Present Purposes. Re-enacting as a Bodily, Performative Tradition of History” (Johnson 2009).

50 The exception to this was Staple, who re-enact a specific year. As members from Danelaw, SMAC and AAF informed me, however, this group is not typical amongst this re-enactment community.
but participate in martial and craft activities, and in particular those that subordinate accuracy to enjoyment, engage in social play (with an element of skill acquisition and development), more than (attempted) simulation. This is not to say that no simulating occurs – the “h.a.” section of the tents at Beorg Wic and the feasts in, and spilling out of the tavern, certainly attempted to create and immerse participants in a 'period' environment. But while we can argue that re-enactment has a degree of pedagogical and historiographical interest and perhaps even merit, the fact remains that for many people in many public groups, it is primarily a hobby. At least, this is how the members of Danelaw perceive and emphasise their pursuit.

As is the case in many hobbies, the most common reasons for participation relate more to everyday desires (enjoyment, satisfaction, exercise, community) than to psychological issues or urges. This form of re-enactment is, as Roy Turner argues, 'a pleasure structure' (1990, 130) or, as de Groot phrases it, a “serious” leisure pursuit' (2008, 107). When discussing their motivations for and favourite aspects of their practice, the most common responses from re-enactors at Beorg Wic pertained to the social aspects and to the martial activities as a form of sport. This parallels Erisman’s findings with the SCA. As mentioned above, dressing up also featured prominently amongst the favourite activities. In terms of simulacra and realism, most Danelaw re-enactors avoid blatant anachronisms but do not pursue strict accuracy in costume or accoutrements, as demonstrated in chapter three. As we saw, groups such as AAF and Staple did, however, place a higher degree of importance on accuracy. Given Danelaw’s comparatively relaxed attitude towards historical accuracy, its focus on martial arts, and its lack of historical personas, it does not seem credible to impose an attempt to (re)create the perceived cohesive narratives of past lives, or an unintended creation of simulacra, on its participants. I found little evidence of this amongst the other groups at Beorg Wic, although my findings might alter if I conducted more sustained fieldwork with them, as I did with Danelaw.
However, although none of the participants' responses indicated that they considered lives in the Middle Ages to have a strong narrative coherence — in the sense of being experienced as cohesive and complete — some of the re-enactors did express appreciation for what they perceived as a stronger sense of community and family in “those times”. As discussed in chapter three, one of the re-enactors, Bet, shared with me her theory that “we don’t have the same sense of community that we used to, and there aren’t as distinct cultures, so people are drawn to re-enactment to satisfy a desire for culture and community, that’s missing in current life.” Bet’s perspective is one that features prominently in the scholarship on re-enactment. Erisman, for example, interprets the key motivation and function of recreational re-enactment to be ‘a search for lost ideals and for a meaningful community in an alienated age’, arguing that this search ‘underlies the whole existence’ of such groups (1998, 21). This overstates matters. There are, as my ethnographies demonstrate, diverse reasons for the existence of the groups and events that I have examined. Erisman suggests that this yearning reflects American culture, but, as both the literature and my fieldwork demonstrate, this so-called cultural trait is not specific to the U.S. Lowenthal, in contrast, critiques claims that such nostalgic impulses are specific to any Western country, asserting that ‘yearning for a lost state of being’ is evident ‘the world over’ (1989, 27). I cannot speak for re-enactors around the globe, but I can confirm that the desire for a stronger community manifests amongst some re-enactors in Australia and the U.K.

Whether or not a majority of re-enactors long for this ‘lost state of being’ is debatable, but the feeling of belonging and being a part of a community do seem to be prevalent amongst the desired outcomes of these re-enactors’ practice. The idea that community is an aspect that has lessened in contemporary life is also prominent here. Such perspectives were mentioned (in varying ways and degrees) by all but one of my questionnaire respondents from Beorg Wic. In answer to a question regarding participants' favourite aspects of re-enactment, Rachel, for example, wrote:
lives today are very stressful. It is great to go to an event, usually where there is no cell phone reception, and become the person I want to be rather than the person you have to be at work [...] Re-enactment is broader than just a skill-based club and this allows families to have a unified hobby which gives scope for individuality. (Unpublished data Nov. 2012)

Here, Rachel touches upon four relevant and interconnected ideas: her perspective on contemporary life, the corresponding functions of re-enactment, a sense of public versus private self, and the significance of family participation in this hobby. Rachel frames living history as a therapeutic counterpoint to the stress of modern life, converging with Bet’s theory. Does this convey a negative view of the present, a perspective that, as discussed above, is often claimed to pervade nostalgia? Perhaps, and certainly more so than any of the other responses I received. Rachel's response also suggests a locating of authenticity within the nostalgic experience of re-enactment, which is portrayed as unachievable in Rachel’s “real life”; she “becomes the person [she] want[s] to be rather than the person you have to be at work.” This aligns with Handler and Saxton’s interpretation of living history as a response to contemporary values, which urge the discovery of self through authentic experience (1988, 247). And yet, of all the people I spoke with, and those who completed questionnaires, only Rachel and Bet expressed a perspective along these lines. This, therefore, appears to be a minority view.

What was more commonly mentioned by participants was the sense that re-enactment was a beneficial family pursuit, and that the re-enactment community functioned “like a family.” Engagement with any secular group or club activity could bring about a similar sense of community – joining a choir, for instance. This cross-generation engagement seemed to be a significant drawcard for those involved in these re-enactment communities. Chase and Shaw claim that ‘we have lost faith in the possibility of changing our public life and have retreated into the private enclaves of family, and the consumption of certain “retro” styles’, suggesting that ‘perhaps this is why nostalgia has recently become so pervasive’ (1989, 3). Their argument paints a rather bleak picture of public identity. Rachel’s dissatisfaction does not extend to all of her “real” life; rather it is
specifically directed towards the pressures and expectations of the role she must perform at work. Her positive reference to the lack of phone reception (and thus connection with the outside world) suggests that events such as Beorg Wic function for her (and some others) as a form of refuge. However, many people appreciate camping, spa resorts, and yoga and meditation retreats for similar reasons; are these attempts to (temporarily) escape contemporary society as well? Quite possibly. Perhaps there is a closer parallel between hobby re-enactment and other, more mainstream activities that take participants out of their everyday life than is generally acknowledged.

Underpinning nostalgic desire, as it has been depicted in contemporary literature that emphasises a desire for the supposedly unified, comprehensible completeness of the past, is a perception that, before modernity, ‘thought fused with action’. That is, people were able to think and act in unison, free from the fragmented consciousness of the divided, less authentic present (Lowenthal 1989, 29-30). This integration of mind and body, thought and experience, is central to many Eastern practices. Interest in these practices, such as yoga, meditation, butoh, and aruyveda, has been growing exponentially in the so-called West across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Locating authenticity in “the other” is problematic and, in some ways, continues the deeply concerning perspectives on native cultures portrayed in early ethnography. However, if we put the idea of authenticity aside for a moment, and consider an attraction to the way in which the practices mentioned above promote mind-body connection, the hobbyist re-enactor may share a similar impetus, and their practice a similar function. The epistemological significance of an endeavour to integrate mind and body in re-enactment is explored in chapter seven. As well as facilitating and furthering more mainstream, socially accepted hobbies, living history camps like Beorg Wic function in tandem with other, more socially-accepted ways of connecting with nature, family and self. Hall links re-enactment with a broader revival of interest in community, family, religion and historical roots, and posits the resurgence of such interests as part of a widespread
endeavour to ‘manufacture an ever fixed mark’ in the uncertainties of postmodernity, ‘through the personal experience of “authenticity”’ (Hall 1994, 9. See also: deGroot 2008, 119-21). Perhaps, rather than an attempted escape from the present, these practices are functioning, for some of the participants, as a reprieve from, or reinvigoration of, particular aspects of everyday life.

Whilst there was certainly a degree of nostalgic romanticising of the past at Beorg Wic and in Danelaw training sessions, there was also an acknowledgement of the less appealing aspects of medieval societies. This emerged in the first Danelaw fighter session I attended.

_I am chatting in the kitchen with a few of the members who are taking a brief rest from training or had come along to watch. The fighters are in between rounds of a melee. Jeff, wearing protective padding and a sweaty brow, pops in, along with his metal sword, for a drink. Jeff and I are having a broken discussion, in between rounds, about the different types of medieval armour, their advantages and disadvantages, how they were used in medieval times, and the way they are utilised in re-enactment today. “If we wear chainmail in a fight, we’re protected from a sword - [the chainmail] would prevent most sword gashes. But if a spear hits chainmail, that’s a point, because the spear would go through.” Jeff wipes the sweat off his face with his sleeve, and shifts focus. “Urg, I need a shower already. Can you imagine how much they would have smelt back then? The English prided themselves on not bathing – they saw it as what dirty people needed to do. That’s why you had women wearing lots of perfume and powder – to cover the stench.” I tell Jeff that this reminds me of a primary source I read in an undergraduate history module, in which an English gentleman criticised the French for being such a filthy race that they needed to bathe every week. This was, the writer went on to emphasise, an irrefutable sign of the French’s lowlier, unclean nature, compared with their English neighbours, who very rarely needed to wash at all. Unfortunately, I cannot recall who the author was, or when or for what it was written, so am unable to point Jeff towards the text, which he is interested to read._

This conversation suggests numerous things, including the fact that Jeff’s interest in the Middle Ages extends beyond jousting knights and glorified war, to some of the more mundane, less palatable aspects of life in that period, such as hygiene (or lack thereof). It also suggests an engagement (however preliminary and possibly uncommon) in considering cultural attitudes and
race relations. Jeff’s willingness to discuss and his desire to learn about aspects of the past do not fit neatly into the “clean and shiny” category that is often claimed to constitute re-enactment.

That experience is indicative of a series of encounters in my fieldwork with Danelaw and at Beorg Wic that question dominant academic representations of medieval re-enactors as puerile, “wanna-be” knights or ladies, lacking in any real interest or knowledge in history.

_Sitting around the 'wench bench' at Beorg Wic, I speak with Bet and three other teenage girls, whilst watching a melee. Bet, who is considerably older than the others, raises how “completely different” life was in “those days”. “It was pretty normal for lots of people to sleep in one room – no way we would have had our own bedroom back then. Like, you'd be sharing a room with your parents, seeing them naked, hearing them having sex right in front of you.” One of the girls screws up her face in evident distaste: “that would be weird!” Her friend replies, “no, it's just how things were then, it was just part of life.” Bet agrees: “it's all relative – what you're used to, you know? But then, if you think about it, with the whole tent thing here, we end up seeing and hearing a lot of stuff that isn't that different to that, really.”_

In their comparing of life then, and now, the girls implicitly suggest that the experience of camping at Beorg Wic simulates something (a less desirable something) from the medieval world they re-enact, in a perhaps unintended way. Their conversation demonstrates a departure from nostalgia by bluntly acknowledging aspects of the past which are uncomfortable for them, contrasting this particular example unfavourably with the present, and considering (to a limited extent) similarities and differences between experience then, and now, and between here, at Beorg Wic, and there, in their everyday lives. Such examples contradict claims that re-enactment prioritises visceral and theatrical engagement to the exclusion of reflective and analytical consideration, ignoring any unsavoury aspects in the process. It also problematises the ‘here’ experience. There are two here(s) – the here of Beorg Wic, where community is differently experienced, and the here of the participants “normal” or everyday existence, where environmental and socially structured practices preclude or restrict cross-body, cross-generational, cross-community engagements on the fairly visceral level that these women were able to experience at Beorg Wic.
For some, learning about the past, and participating in these historic activities, actually highlighted the advantages of, and their own preference for, the present. One participant listed “a greater understanding of where we have come from” and “appreciating the modern world” as significant reasons for, and gains from re-enactment (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Another participant wrote that the practice “has taught me how lucky we are to have all our mod cons and that life must have sucked mightily during the medieval period” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Far from romanticising the past, one respondent expressed that, for him, re-enactment “dispels some illusions and makes you think about aspects of the culture you usually wouldn’t” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Others demonstrated interest in scholarly aspects of the period and awareness of some of the grossly unethical acts in “the age of chivalry”. “My first love is the Crusades”, wrote one respondent, “the mixture of east meets west, the differences and similarities of the religions that met, the spirituality meeting the mundane, the atrocities committed in the name of a higher being” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). That same participant wrote that he is “very much” interested in history and that he “enjoy[s] reading how much we have technologically moved forward, but not so much as people.” This comparative analysis of different aspects of the past and present does not align with criticisms claiming re-enactment is devoid of any critical engagement.

There is arguably a stronger, and yet in some ways less problematic, sense of nostalgia within EDHDA. This particularly manifests in the romanticisation of the past. JAFA presents itself as “an annual celebration […] where Austen and Napoleonic fans from all over Australia come and indulge themselves in everything Regency” (Jane Austen Festival 2012). John and Aylwen are open and reflexive regarding the celebratory nature of their engagement with (aspects of) the past, and the fact that many of their participants identify as fans. Aylwen commented that JAFA is aimed at and attracts “people who love dancing Jane Austen, dressing Jane Austen, reading Jane Austen, watching Austen films.” While I would argue that an element of fandom is common in many ‘scenes’
(associated groups) in the living history, literary heritage and broader heritage fields, JAFA can be more explicitly related to fandom than more traditional re-enactment groups such as Beorg Wic. As Aylwen alludes to above, attendees of JAFA travel from around Australia to “fangirl” (or less commonly, “fanboy”) and are not necessarily regular historic dancers, re-enactors, costumiers or cosplayers, although some identify as both Austen fan and one or more of these other “types”. This fan-based mode of engagement is significant, because whilst Aylwen may claim that they “indulge themselves in everything Regency” (emphasis mine), this is clearly not accurate. Attendees may participate in a number of Regency activities – dancing, making and wearing period attire, letter writing, archery, promenading, and partaking of Regency food and games – but all these are of a particular kind. Far from representing “all things Regency”, they reflect a very select, largely class specific, sanitised sliver of that era – a romanticised world of Bennets and Mr Darcys. It is important to note here that the organisers do not posit JAFA as (only) living history, or indeed any form of public history, per se. As we saw in chapter four, EDHDA’s aims and functions are more multifaceted, or perhaps convoluted, than that, and John and Alywen exhibit a degree of critical awareness regarding the way their events interweave history, fiction and popular entertainment. Events such as JAFA do not demand historical accuracy of their participants – the focus is on enjoyment.

There remains, however, a problematic risk that some people might perceive the activities at JAFA, and indeed Austen’s literature, as accurate reflections of Georgian and Regency life. As discussed in chapter four, the wearing of authentic looking costumes at EDHDA events, and the framing of these events as part of their “historic dance academy”, has caused some observers and even participants less familiar with Regency history to attribute an authority and accuracy where it

51 ‘Fangirl’ and ‘fanboy’ are terms frequently used in a diverse range of fan subcultures, as both noun and verb.
52 Many of the annual attendees of JAFA are also members of EDHDA and/or the Australian Costuming Guild. As discussed in chapter four, this festival also draws people from the SCA and other, smaller hobby re-enactment and historic dance groups around Australia.
is not founded. The attachment of authenticity to the visual – in this case, clothing – connects with Gapps’ assertion that people often associate visual media with authenticity, a frequently incorrect correlation that can lead them to accept unverified information as factual (2010, 60). It is not only the visual that trips the ability to identify the (in)authentic, however. John informed me that people frequently mistake his choreography and compositions for authentic originals, even when he and the other performers involved are not wearing even vaguely accurate costumes. On numerous occasions, he was unable to convince people that these works were his own, modern creations. Eventually, John fabricated a historical culture to emplace his dances and songs – a creative, performative invention which, he informed me, many people accepted as real. In a largely separate but parallel stream to his EDHDA and JAFA work, John taught, performed and published under the banner of Bordonian heritage, (re)discovering its “lost” dances. This deliberately ironic, yet convincing, copy was created as a parody but accepted by many as “real”, creating a simulacra of historical and fictive pasts. The ethical concerns of this act are challenging to assess and depend, to a significant degree, on whether we read John’s endeavour as art or re-enactment/heritage/history.53

There is a (less politically meaningful, but nevertheless socially significant) element here that resonates with Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s work, particularly The Couple in a Cage. In this museum-based, travelling performance art piece, Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco exhibited themselves as natives from a supposedly undiscovered, but actually imaginary, island, in a satirical critique of traditional ethnography. In their process, they realised that many amongst their audience/viewers perceived their performance as real.54 While the invention of the Bordonian Heritage Dancers does not compare with The Couple in a Cage in terms of artistic, cultural or political impact, they both point towards broader issues in cross-cultural and cross-temporal translation and reception. The

53 Despite the connotations of this ‘or’, I do not intend to polarise art and re-enactment or art and history. As I suggest throughout this thesis, all of these fields have areas of overlap, which are more significant than often acknowledged.

54 For more on this, see, for example, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) “The Ethnographic Burlesque” and Diana Taylor (1998) “A Savage Performance: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's ‘Couple in the Cage.’”
"Couple in a Cage" reveals a troubling continuation (and popularisation) of an ethnographic gaze towards, and problematic misunderstandings of, so-called foreign cultures and cross-cultural engagement in the present, whereas the latter deals more with the desire for cultural authenticity and the slippage between history and fiction. In both cases, the fictitious framing was ignored by some in favour of painting these works (and "the other" they portray) with a simplistic, nostalgic hue of the supposedly authentic. Such misapplications suggest much about the cultural and historical sensibilities of each event’s audience. Do these responses to John’s fictitious Bordonian cultural heritage and Gómez-Peña’s fictitious island inhabitants suggest a tendency towards simulacra amongst audiences – an inability to differentiate between copy and original, current creation and real history/culture? Arguably, the answer is yes, amongst some. But this does not equate to an affirmation of Jameson’s claim that we postmoderns are ‘condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself forever remains out of reach’ (1997, 24). What it does strongly suggest, however, is a yearning to (re)connect with cultures – present or past, real or invented – deemed less troubling and more authentic than our own. In these instances, this desire seems sufficiently potent (or ignorant) to allow those affected to disregard the reality buried beneath the fiction, and the perception and behaviour embedded in its acceptance.

Within EDHDA practice, the potential danger of simulacra is facilitated and augmented by the participatory and partially immersive environment created by Jafa’s period clothing, music, food, dance and other activities referred to in Austen’s books and/or adaptations. With the exception of a few talks delivered by specialists outside of the EDHDA/Jafa community, the majority of activities arguably contribute to the “disneyification” of history, for which the heritage industry and hobbies are so commonly criticised. And yet, this (acknowledged) falsification of the past can actually reduce the risk of creating a simulacrum. The explicit framing of the events as fandom, rather than (only or mainly) living history or literary heritage, accompanied by the
inauthentic setting and the liberal approach to costume and accoutrement, render the events less a replication and more a playful (re)imagining. While not without any element of simulacra, the collapsing of copy and original, simulation and history, past and present are minimised by the conscious departure from representational realism. The nostalgic portrayals of Georgian and Regency society are further complicated by the fact that the past being romanticised derives from fiction – from the particular, rosier aspects of life that Austen selected to explore in her novels and which have been highlighted in television and film adaptations. In terms of the positivist critique of heritage identified by Laing and Frost (2012, 70-1), JAFA commits at least two of the commonly discussed “offences”: ‘the recreation of a selective past’ (Timothy and Boyd 2003, 4) and promoting ‘fantasies of a world that never was’ (Hewison 1987, 10). And yet, by reflecting the selective, often romanticised representations of society that pervade Austen’s novels, literary heritage festivals such as JAFA and its mother festival, JAF UK are, in a sense, being authentic – through their engagement with fictive pasts – to Austen and her fiction. Does this ironic authenticity to the object of fandom partially validate the overt nostalgia of JAFA, or does it serve only to further render the so-called real Regency past in pastiche?

Amongst EDHDA participants, opinions varied on whether or not the practice functions as a form of escapism from modern life and/or an experience of time travel. John Gardiner-Garden made passing references to “time travel” on a few occasions but elucidated that creating a sense of being in the past was not one of the main goals of his work. Both John and Aylwen indicated, however, that an impulse to connect with the past and other ways of life was common in their community. Many of the participants agreed. Gordon, for example, felt that “when you go to the Jane Austen [festival], it’s like you’re in a different time. You experience many aspects of that culture, not just one element” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Similarly, Robert, Canberra’s town crier, suggested that JAFA brings “Austen’s world back to life” (interview by author Dec. 2012). But it is not only the “world” of Austen’s novels that is being resuscitated. EDHDA holds a variety of themed balls throughout the
year, which, although considerably smaller than JAFA, are regarded, according to John, as other opportunities to feel “transported”: “people from the public com[e] just because they want to be transported back to the time of Young Victoria or Pirates of the Caribbean or The Three Musketeers” (interview by author Dec. 2012). Converging with the Jane Austen events, these themed balls do not represent periods of history but rather settings from a fictionalised or, in some cases, outright fictional past.

The desire to immerse one’s self in these created environments is evidently, as John expressed, fantasy. These people may not be attempting to escape the present by connecting with the supposedly more complete experiences of the past, but their re-enactments do function as a form of escapism similar to that of fantasy fiction and period-dramas. A majority of my participants expressed an interest in fantasy and/or science fiction, with many also indicating an enjoyment of anime and/or gaming. A connection between these fields is clear, both in terms of the crossovers amongst participants and the way these practices appropriate and inform each other. This link between fantasy and history in re-enactment mirrors that in film, literature and computer games. According to Gapps, this merging of genres was precipitated by and is indicative of the historical-fantasy fiction craze that swept the literary world after Lord of the Rings (2002, 274; 2003, 110). It is also apparent that many participants in these fields share some degree of dissatisfaction with, or discomfort in, contemporary, mainstream society. It is less clear, however, what aspect(s) of society are the cause of that discontent, whether or not people actually want to escape, and if so, how prevalent and potent this yearning is.

Amongst EDHDA participants, attitudes towards the present and the past, and how their practice connects with these perspectives, are by no means uniform. This was highlighted in a conversation I had with Aylwen and Danny, a long-time participant and avid historic dancer.
Following my interview with John and Aylwen, Danny and I chat about steampunk. Danny comments that there is “definitely” a link between re-enactment, historic dance, fantasy and “sci-fi” scenes. “We tend to have a shared interest in the alternative; it’s an alternative culture, you could say.” Hearing this, Aylwen calls out from the computer, “an alternative to modern life.” The puckering of Danny’s brow and snappy shake of his head suggest that Aylwen’s addition discords with his interpretation. “No, just alternative. I just want to say alternative.”

This would suggest that for some practitioners, their hobby is functioning more as an alternative subculture to the mainstream than as a nostalgic escape from a postmodern malaise. Not all of the participants are interested in experiencing a sense of escapism nor in the “fantasy element” (which refers to both the connection with fantasy fiction and the fantasy of the immersive experience). As we saw in chapter four, Danny is not “really into the dressing up”, and although he does wear costume to events, what he really enjoys is the dancing and socialising. Danny’s interest, in parallel with many others, spans historic dance, fantasy and science fiction, but unlike the majority of the people who share these passions, he is not particularly interested in crossovers between these genres. As Gordon commented at one of the balls, “some people are more practical, they don’t like the fantasy feel of it all. I like it, but not everyone does.” Another attendee of the ball, who at the time was undertaking a PhD on historic foods, emphasised that while she enjoyed the dancing, she did not “get caught up” in “all the rest of it” because she is “very practical”. It is interesting that she used the same word as Gordon – “practical” – to differentiate herself from those more interested in the romanticised past. There is an apparent divergence amongst participants in terms of their reasons for and focus in their practice and the cultural and historical sensibilities that are, in part, influenced by these factors.

The popularity of creative representations of these fictional pasts parallels the popularity of romanticised pasts in general in Australia. As mentioned in chapter four, there is comparatively little engagement amongst Australians with the history of our country. Figures in the Australian Register of Living History Organisations suggest that medieval British and Viking cultures re-
enactments groups are by far the most prominent in Australia (Cryan 2012a). This lack of connection with Australian history is mirrored, it seems, by a similar waning interest in traditional Australian dance: ‘bush dancing’. John believes that “the bush scene” and “the image of the Australian bush” is no longer what “young people” connect with; rather, they are “connecting with the latest movie” (interview by author Dec. 2012) Responding to this, EDHDA held monthly balls that embraced a new, popular film release as their theme. This changing repertoire, offering a new theme every month, often based on popular historical fiction and fantasy films, joins Beorg Wic in supporting Gapps’ argument that Australian re-enactors often prefer to engage in multiple histories (2003a, i09-11). If John’s interpretation of his participants’ motivations and interests is accurate, the majority of the younger members of EDHDA are nostalgic for pasts that are products of the audio-visual present. This could be read as another example of the postmodern pastiche, but it also suggests that while an element of nostalgia is at play here, fandom is playing a more significant part in influencing the historical sensibilities of the less informed and experienced ‘new recruits’ and one-off attendees. In this analysis, nostalgia plays the supporting role to fandom’s lead.

As stated in the previous chapter, the scale of JAF UK, with its diverse range and number of activities, approaches, perspectives and people, render an all-encompassing interpretation and generalisations of analysis problematic to claim. The structure of JAF UK differs somewhat from JAFA and markedly from Beorg Wic in its individualisation of both organisation and participation. Beorg Wic is a private event, exclusively for re-enactors who are members of the particular groups that attend, and although JAFA is a public event, it is small scale, and a significant proportion of its attendees are part of the extended EDHDA network. All three festivals offer different forms of activities, each run by an individual or small group(s). All of those at Beorg Wic, however, are run by members of the re-enactment societies that annually attend the festival, and while a few of the talks and workshops at JAFA are led by people outside of EDHDA’s network, these are in the minority.
JAF UK, in contrast, has dozens of contributors, many of whom are unaffiliated with the Jane Austen Centre and some of whom are internationally based. As I alluded to above, this, coupled with the varying degrees of Austen and Regency fandom amongst those involved in the festival at Bath, their significantly diverging motivations and levels of involvement, and the immense dispersal of places and cultures from which the participants originate and travel from, would render any offering of a collective conclusion within the confines of this chapter untenable. Hence, rather than (mis)interpreting the whole, I offer this as an analysis of how several specific (and prominent) aspects of the festival contribute to a gathering of diverse historical sensibilities, from diverse – if, to varying degrees, affiliated – (sub)cultures, groups and individuals.

In its many dalliances with the past, JAF UK extends across a broad spectrum of historical representation. The balls, soirees, dinners, public breakfasts, concerts, theatre productions, visits to estates and, of course, the grand promenade through town, do convey, however, a blatantly selective and romanticised version of Regency culture, derived from the fiction of Jane Austen. While both Beorg Wic and JAFA offer activities more common amongst their period’s gentility, the festival in Bath approaches such activities with much greater aplomb, to a standard that reflects upper-class society far more expressively, exclusively and expensively. This is, in part, a result of the festival’s location. As illustrated in the previous chapter, dancing amidst the Georgian architecture of Bath’s guildhall, assembly room, and Roman baths generates an impressive and authentic atmosphere and aesthetic, particularly when contrasted with JAFA’s location – a small church hall and grounds in a suburban part of Australia’s bush capital, Canberra. In this way, some of the events at JAF UK move much closer to creating simulacra than those of Canberra’s JAFA. The grander level of the activities at Bath also reflects a much larger budget, on both the side of the organisers and attendees. Aylwen’s finances for JAFA and associated events are very tight, partly because of lack of government and corporate funding, but also because of the limited funds of many of her
participants. JAF UK, in contrast, is a well-established, well-funded event, with a significant number of middle-class tourists (literary heritage or otherwise) to support the higher ticket prices and to purchase merchandise from the Jane Austen Centre.

There was a heightened sense of nostalgia revolving around *Pride and Prejudice* the year I attended, due to its being, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the two-hundredth anniversary of its publication. As Laing and Frost suggest:

> the date and anniversary are particularly important for the process of remembering. They have an almost talismanic quality in capturing the imagination of the public. Indeed, significant commemorations [...] present a rare opportunity to publicise authors and the activities of their fans. (2012, 31)

The significance of the anniversary was part of what spurred Aylwen and John to organise EDHDA’s historic dance and costume tour of England. It seems that the anniversary drew many other literary tourists and fans to the festival that year; the promenade was “even bigger and better” than previous years, with “numbers at around 600” (Herring 2013). In “this very special year”, the festival as a whole attracted, as the organiser informed us at the final talk, “one of the biggest crowds we’ve had so far, which might have something to do with it being the two-hundredth anniversary of *Pride and Prejudice*” (original emphasis).

It is apparent that JAF UK, converging with its Australian counterpart, frequently approaches the past with an openly celebratory manner. In many of the activities at Bath, as at Canberra, the past being represented is not Georgian or Regency history, but rather literary heritage and, in particular, the fictitious worlds created in Austen’s literature and propagated by television, film and theatre adaptations. At Bath, however, the interest in Austen herself comes much more the fore – as a literary figure, as a female literary female and, perhaps significantly, as a British, female literary figure. There appears to be multiple purposes and effects at play here, prompting a few significant questions. To what extent are these nostalgic, glorified renditions of “all things Austen” promoting “traditional” British culture and identity? To what extent are they facilitating
international enjoyment and engagement with a female writer and her works? Might Austen’s fictitious worlds, and recreations of them, be regarded as having become, or currently becoming, transcultural? There is only scope here to touch upon these large areas of enquiry.55 For now, I will offer a few brief observations.

I mentioned in chapter five that participants of JAF UK come from across Europe, the U.S., Canada, Australia, Africa and Asia. Clearly, the appeal of celebrating this literary heritage transcends a British or even colonial context. One could argue that part of the allure of Austen in Britain and its “white” colonies, such as Australia, stems from jingoistic sentiment. For some, this might be the case. In their study, Chase and Shaw noted a connection between identity and nostalgia – a longing for the past of one’s ancestors. They discussed how:

one participant insisted that nostalgia involved a special way of being involved in the past: one had to be connected to the object of scrutiny, perhaps through kinship or through a broader feeling of identity, such as class affiliation. These were in some way my people and my present therefore was bound up in their past. (1989, 2)

This sense of temporal connection through shared genealogy, class or other marker of identity can be troubling. There is also a (less worrying) level on which this shared ancestral/class connection seems attributable to the recent flourishing of family history projects and other nostalgic impulses to better know the past as it is connected with particular aspects of one’s present identity. As Harvey argues, ‘the search for historical roots’ reflects ‘a search for more secure moorings […] in a shifting world’ (1992, 292). But this does not explain Austen’s popularity amongst the many participants at JAFUK of other racial origins.

Austen’s literature arguably contributes to a (particular) British sense of identity and heritage. These books, and perhaps more particularly, adaptations of them, have also played a significant role in the forming of public perspective on Britain and its past. *Pride and Prejudice*, in

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55 I explore these questions more fully in: “Senses and Sensibilities. Performing British Identities in a (multi)cultural Landscape” (2012) and “Rethinking (re)doing. Historical Re-enactment and/as Historiography” (2015).
particular, functions as a national and international icon of British literature and, to an extent, popular understandings of ‘quintessential Britishness’. According to de Groot, the BBC’s version of *Pride and Prejudice*:

traded upon a particular type of idealised nostalgia associated with the genre and with Austen […]. It delivered a version of Englishness, and its massive popularity, alongside the rest of the Austen-industry, confirmed that this conceptualisation of an airbrushed Austen-lite past and national identity was desired by a wider public. (2016, 228)

While the selective process of representation certainly creates a glorified (re)construction of Regency society, the primary agenda of JAF UK is not jingoistic, but rather idolistic, reflecting the fan’s propensity to idolise their object of fandom. As I explained in chapter five, the aspects of Regency culture that Austen commonly portrays, and which are most often engaged in at both Jane Austen festivals, are frequently performative: dance, deportment, dress, dining are the mainstay of her novels. Through these embodiments, therefore, reconstructions – on screen and stage and at festivals such as these – attain a degree of authenticity for, and in, their fans. The relation between performance and authenticity is explored in chapter seven. As stated earlier, for some participants, their ancestral links to the culture portrayed – however (in)accurate that portrayal might be – may contribute to their attraction to re-enacting these cultural and fictive histories. The main bridge between twenty-first-century participants and the Regency culture of history and fiction is, however, not one predicated on ethnicity or ancestry, but rather on a shared passion for Austen, or more particularly, her stories, in their many media forms. This reflects what Kirschenblatt-Gimblett describes as an ‘era of historical identification by consent […] rather than descent’ (1998, 200).

For many, particularly those for whom English is not their primary language, Austen’s “world” is not experienced directly through her novels, but rather encountered through one or more of their many adaptations. The Dutch dance teachers I met on the EDHDA tour of England, for example, first encountered Austen through film versions, which inspired them to read the books. Similarly, Gordon informed me that he had watched “all the shows and movies” but had not read
the books, as he found the language challenging, which convoluted the narrative for him (interview by author Dec. 2012). There is a tension at both of these Jane Austen festivals between varying versions and meanings of “Austen-ness”. For some, it is her works, as literary masterpieces, which are of interest. For others, it is the characters and their (ever-so-romantic) interactions that appeal. Then there is the broader enchantment with “Jane Austen’s England” and its highly romanticised way of life.

The commodification of literature (and other aspects of culture and history) through a globalised distribution of media and merchandise has, and arguably should, be criticised. These commodities are often perceived to be formed by nostalgia or even to be a form of nostalgia. As de Groot identifies, the ‘packaging and commodifying of the past have been critiqued as the “nostalgia mode”, where nostalgia without purpose becomes an empty trope within an overly mediated society’ (2008, 249). The global, figurative expansion of Empire through mediatised, commoditised subculture can damage the distinctiveness of local cultures – a topic too large to tackle here. What it has enabled, however, is the sharing of culture on a scale that has facilitated the formation of globalised communities, connected, in this case, through their fandom (or for those less passionately committed, through shared interest/appreciation). Erisman explores more localised (or, at least, nationalised: across the U.S.) instances of recreational re-enactment groups as imagined communities, connected through their practice, whether or not they ever share a physical space (1998, 22-23). This borrows from Benedict Anderson, who identified nations as imagined communities, myths constructed out of virtual or mediated (rather than immediate) connections. A nation for Anderson ‘is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (2006, 6). Re-enactment groups are not geographically bound, as Anderson’s imagined community of nationals might be. The increasing affordability of travel seems
to be expanding and strengthening a range of imagined communities, facilitating what I described in chapters four and five as transient but often enduring networks of people from various places, who gather for particular event(s) on an often infrequent but reasonably regular basis, to celebrate that which brings them together. The internet has further altered these imagined communities, creating virtual societies, which precede, intersect, and/or continue “real life” encounters in a virtual space, online.

Perhaps in response to these international, online engagements and the young fan base this encourages, the nostalgia surrounding Regency romance at Bath’s JAF was, at times, revamped with a contemporary spin. This was particularly apparent in the “sexing up” of the past, in particular, sexualisation of and through Regency romance. On the Sex and the City walking tour, our guide informed us that, in the Regency period, until one was married, “there was little mixing between the sexes, so every interaction was filled with sexual frisson” and showed us several sites where such encounters occurred in the novels and their filmed versions. Engagements in, and places of, less respectable liaison were also discussed, to which I will return later. Another activity, The History Wardrobe (a catwalk style fashion show of Regency wear) includes an annual Undressing Mr Darcy segment, which Herring (2013) describes as “always a hit”. In his talk on Pride and Prejudice, John Mullan, a professor of English at University College, London, spoke about the well-known, and widely appreciated “Andrew Davis lunge pool scene”. This refers to the scene in the BBC’s 1995 miniseries, when Colin Firth’s Mr Darcy emerges from the lake, dripping wet and “indecently” clad (in only a light shirt and breeches!) to be met by Elizabeth Bennet, who, blushing whilst glancing down at his wet, gripping lower garments, stumbles, “I didn’t expect to see you, sir” (Pride and Prejudice 1995; original emphasis).

Are these sexualised adaptations, and the festival’s engagement with sexualised representations of literature and culture, examples of the heritage industry operating as a ‘cult of
pastiche and parody […] which deliberately falsifies authentic memory”? (Hewison 1987, 145-6). Mullan’s talk suggests that he does not consider this to be the case. He argued that although “the film versions put in explicit sexual references […], it’s there already; it’s there in the novels.” He referenced, by example, Austen’s describing of the scandalous Lydia as being “very fond of her husband”, which, he asserted, is “saying something funny about the physical bond between them” (original emphasis). As mentioned in a fieldwork extract in chapter five, the Sex and the City walking tour guide made a similar claim about the Thorpe girls in Northanger Abbey, suggesting that Austen’s description of these girls as ‘smart’ is coded language for being not quite respectable in their conduct with men. Mullan further evidenced his claim by discussing the sexual underbelly of Brighton in the novel and comparing Lydia’s trip there with current teenage parties and holidays.

Imagine now, any father in this room, that your sixteen-year-old daughter wanted to go to Brighton with a seventeen or eighteen-year-old friend. You would say no no no Brighton! Place of sin! Of course, now we are supposed to let our teenage daughters go to parties unchaperoned, but back then! See, Brighton – always a place for you know what, however much you want to talk around it […]. I won’t mince my words; the seaside is sexy in Jane Austen.

Mullan’s efforts to validate sexualised readings and representations of Austen aligns with de Groot’s assertion that the BBC’s 1995 adaptation of Pride and Prejudice is ‘more complex’ than criticisms allow. This miniseries:

introduced elements of soap opera, considered the dynamics of sexuality during the early nineteenth century and introduced a highly erotically charged scene with Colin Firth emerging soaked from a lake. This updating of the elegance of Austen was of a piece with contemporary academic rethinking of her work which emphasised the irony, the edgy challenge of her writing, and her self-dramatisation. (2016, 228)

As Mullan and de Groot imply, sexualising the past, whether in adaptations or festival events, does not necessarily detract from the authenticity or value of the representation. It can, in fact, contribute to developing our understanding of social and literary meanings in the original context, and the relation between varying forms of romance in the past and in the present.
Simply introducing a sexual dimension to the festival does not, however, contribute much towards moving away from the pervading nostalgic influence and impact of romanticism. And yet, there were examples of frank, unglorified assessment of the realities of “Jane’s England” at Bath – including the examples of historical accuracy referred to in the previous chapter – some of which achieved their accuracy of representation via sexuality. During the Sex and the City Walking Tour, our guide impressed upon us the dichotomy of relationships in the Regency era.

Amongst the gentle classes, all interaction between men and women was geared towards marriage […]. On the other end, however, was prostitution. One in five women in Regency England were prostitutes. […] Lower class women would try to get into domestic work, but if they couldn’t, they would often go into prostitution. They were there for men who couldn’t get nice women – much as today. 56

While our guide’s polarising of so-called “nice women” and prostitutes is problematic, she demonstrates a creditable historiographical approach by addressing some of the aspects “Jane” left out – the darker side of gender relations, the gulf between classes, and the grim nature of employment for many working women in this period. She instructed us: “don’t have this airy-fairy notion that Jane wouldn’t have known [prostitutes], she would have seen them, even if she never spoke with them.” As we walked, she explained the hierarchy of Regency prostitution: “these women ranged from kept mistresses to madams at establishments, to women you could take to an inn, and then the very lowest of the low, the prostitutes you could just take down an alley for a quick three-minute rendezvous.” As she guided us around Bath, she did not only point out places of significance in Austen’s life, novels, and adaptations. She also highlighted places of inequity and struggle in that period – a bordello, the red light district, an alleyway typical of the type that men “would pop down with a prostitute for a quick go at it” and hovels, where “a whole family would live in a tiny, one-room lodging. A bit like a shanty town in third world countries.”

56 Here, however, even the Sex and the City walking tour – obviously a reference to the HBO television series – avoided the more ‘racy’ ideas of its namesake by missing or avoiding the fact that those with a “nice wom[a]n” (or man) could go to a prostitute to satisfy sexual desires or practices that their “nice” partner might not be prepared to do, or simply to engage with a range of sexual partners.
Issues of unemployment, poverty and prostitution were also discussed in the “Were the Austens Upstairs or Downstairs?” talk at No. 1 Royal Crescent period house museum. The speaker impressed upon us that although being a servant was an arduous position, “they were the lucky ones”, as the alternatives for many were to “whore” or starve. The speaker also discussed the unattainability of many everyday products we take for granted today, for all but the wealthiest people in Regency England.

Tea was very expensive and generally kept in a locked cabinet. It was [...] very much a drink of the upper class. It was not like today, how we just go and put the kettle on whenever we feel like a cuppa. [...] Ale was drunk as a cleaner alternative to water because the [water] supply was so dirty. Sugar was very expensive and serving sweets and desserts were signs of wealth. Pineapples were [...] so exclusive that they were used as a table display [...]. Spices were used to mask the rancid taste of dairy and meat. People were often smelly as neither their clothes nor their bodies were washed regularly. Even though the rich seemed a lot better off in this period, it was all about appearances.

The expense of such items, and their subsequent restriction to an economic elite, was also discussed by an actor-historian in his first-person, living history style talk, “Honours of the Table”. This was delivered in character (as Mr Adams, a Regency butler and head of The Adams Academy) and, like his other talk on “The Art of Etiquette”, was presented as if it were a class for those aspiring to gentility. Using and playing with both present and past tense, he spoke to us of the common practice of spitting into a spittoon over dinner (much criticised by the French, apparently) and the “taking of the snuff” after the meal. He particularly emphasised the mundane, somewhat unseemly aspects of life that Austen excluded from her novels. Standing next to a table laid in the Regency manner, Mr Adams told us of the less frequently discussed aspects of dining in “his” time.

Due to the lack of facilities you folk are accustomed to, a woman would, when dining, ease one’s self behind a screen, often in the same room, and leave it to be dealt with by the servants. You’ll never read it in Jane Austen, but the chamber pot was brought so that the men could make free use of it. If a gentleman had partaken of too much wine, it was perfectly permissible to pass water beneath the table. If someone told you that you are an admiral of the narrow seas, they were saying, you have wet my feet. There was also the bourdaloue, which was specifically designed for women to make use of in this way. You will not see this written by Jane Austen, but it is absolutely true – they did piddle in Jane Austen’s time. But with their gowns and underwear, how were ladies to use the bourdaloue? It was quite common to go what you might call “commando” and wear stockings with an open crotch.
He also worked to counteract the highly romantic portrayals of gender relations in Austen, informing us that “after dinner, the ladies retire to the withdrawing room for tea, while the gentlemen continue the manlier pursuit of drinking […] and sit about looking at chapbooks: loose leaf folios of pornographic prints. You won’t see that in Jane Austen, will you?” By focusing on some of the aspects of life that Austen excluded, “Mr Adams” not only highlighted the romanticised, selective nature of her representations but also built credibility for his own. Utilising a first-person living history approach, this actor-historian sought to convey a picture of the past delivered in a theatrical form but with content grounded in realism.

These examples do not dissipate all concern regarding nostalgic romanticising of the Regency past in these festival practices, but they do contradict claims that portray all nostalgic forms, and particularly living history and the heritage industry, as uniformly ‘ersatz, vulgar, demeaning, misguided, inauthentic, sacrilegious, retrograde, reactionary, criminal, fraudulent’ (Lowenthal 1989, 27). As Lowenthal argues, many of these criticisms misunderstand nostalgia or exaggerate its flaws (27). Based on my fieldwork, these criticisms are at least partly inaccurate, due to, ironically, their oversimplification and generalisation.

The ways these practices, practitioners, participants and audience members represented and connected with the past were diverse and, at times, disparate. As I have shown, many of the aforementioned conceptions of nostalgia and its influence on re-enactors are reductionist and do not necessarily recognise the complexity and variations of nostalgic modes, levels, causes and effects. As Pickering and Keightley suggest:

nostalgia is not all of a piece. It is subject to circumstance, motivation and interests, and over both time and space, to degree, variation and change. […] It is not so much its lack of specificity that is the problem as the tendency to see it in a singular and deterministic way. The problem is in not accepting and keeping in play its multiple senses and manifestations. (2006, 929)
Claims that connect post-modernity with a marked increase in nostalgia – in terms of both frequency and degree – seem reasonable (if not yet properly evidenced), but claims that nostalgia is specific to modernity are fallible. A relationship between nostalgia and the forms of re-enactment and heritage festivals I examined seems clear; there was a tendency amongst many practitioners in all of my case studies to slip into a nostalgic mode. It is important, however, to emphasise the modality here; nostalgia was a tendency, which manifested in relation to particular aspects, at particular times, and not a perpetual perception applied to all elements, by all people, in all situations. There is some evidence to suggest that nostalgic motivations and representations are common in many re-enactment groups and even many living history museums. The implication made by scholars such as Handler, Saxton and Hall, however, is that this is the *modus operandi* for all practitioners. This, at least amongst the participants I encountered, does not appear to be the case.

What is most commonly desired by the nostalgists amongst the groups discussed here, is a perceived ontology many of the enthusiasts associate with the pre-modern, rather than the realities of existence of any era or, more particularly, a sense of wholesomeness and wholeness associated with stronger communities and active tradition. These sentiments were much more manifest in Danelaw, Beorg Wic, EDHDA and JAFA, than at JAF UK. Nostalgia for the past does not always equate with a desire to depart the present. As Lowenthal argues, nostalgia does not ‘necessarily connote despairing rejection of the present. Few admirers of the past would actually choose to return to it – nostalgia expresses longing for times that are safely, rather than sadly, beyond recall’ (1989, 28). Some participants expressed that the appeal for them is the activities themselves, as skills or hobbies, and not in the perceived experience of the world that others feel drawn to. Of course, these two can be (and were at times) connected. There were also those for whom living history serves to actually heighten their appreciation for the present and their understanding of how difficult life was in “those times”. There is a complex interrelationship between feelings of nostalgia,
attitudes towards the past and present, and how re-enactment and heritage practices function in relation to these. Amongst these re-enactors, what seems much more prevalent than a desire to escape into the past is an endeavour to utilise traditions of earlier times to enhance the present. This aligns with Pickering and Keightley’s argument that although nostalgia is commonly understood as ‘a desire to imaginatively return to earlier times’ and is frequently associated with ‘acute dissatisfaction with the present’, this is, in fact, only ‘one side of the story’ (923). Nostalgia can also manifest as ‘not the desire to return but to recognise aspects of the past as the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future’ (921). This form of nostalgia is particularly seen at Beorg Wic and in the dance community connected through EDHDA.

While there were examples within all of the case studies of nostalgic romanticisation, glorification and/or “disneyification” of history, there were also notable endeavours to consider and even emphasise the realities of the past. While many have criticised re-enactment for its lack of reflexivity regarding its treatment of history, there are forms of the practice that have elements in which some participants demonstrate a consciousness of the playful, incomplete, at times paradoxical, and even inaccurate nature of their engagement with the past. As de Groot recognises, ‘the hobby is paradox, and relatively self-consciously so. […] It is at once a postmodern pastiche of history while it is also just a leisured way of engaging with one’s present self’ (2008, 107). Whilst his application of this interpretation to the entire field is problematic, de Groot nevertheless recognises something of the multi-faceted nature of re-enactment, of the way it does (or can, at times, amongst some people, in some styles) engage with both past and present, history and hobby, inaccuracy and authenticity. Clearly, historical sensibilities within these living history and literary heritage groups vary. They are not uniformly nostalgic, nor is the nostalgia uniform. The levels, forms and functions of this symptom are diverse, as are its relations with how the past and present are perceived and portrayed.
Chapter seven
Senses and sensibilities: experience and/as epistemology

It will thus be necessary to do for reenactment what has been done for other forms of history writing [...] This will involve disambiguating experience and understanding and determining the extent to which affect can indeed be considered evidentiary.

Vanessa Agnew (2007, 309)

We can read history, watch history and even, at times, witness history unfolding, but can we experience history? Re-enactors frequently justify their claims to a unique historiography by the experiential nature of living history, a quality, they suggest, archival study lacks. Not surprisingly, such claims have evoked considerable critique from academic historians, as discussed in my introduction and literature review. Chief amongst the subjects of criticism is re-enactment’s fundamental tenet – that experience can function epistemologically and that it can, in some way, connect the present with the past. Scholarly discourse responding to the experiential aspect of the practice is beginning to centre on a particular theme: affective history (Agnew 2007; McCalman and Pickering 2010). Agnew posited contemporary re-enactment as being ‘indicative of history’s recent affective turn’, offering a significant contribution to academic understanding of the practice (2007, 299). And yet, Agnew links the affective turn with a surge in ‘historical representation characterized by conjectural interpretations of the past, the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on affect, individual experience and daily life rather than historical events, structures and processes’ (299).

The experiential and affective nature of re-enactment was thus framed, almost from the outset (of its recent rise in academic discussion) as problematic: a history that is ‘conjectural’, which collapses the “proper” temporal distinctions, and represents the merely ‘individual and daily’, as implied by

57 Please note: this chapter develops, draws on, and in some instances, reproduces, work I have published elsewhere. See: Johnson 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2015.
their demarcation from ‘historical events, structures and processes’. Whilst many of Agnew’s concerns are valid and warrant addressing, her response also suggests a very particular – and traditional – approach to history and a rather negative reading of affect that reflects much of the work on re-enactment.

Agnew acknowledges, however, the need for further research on this contentious aspect of the practice – not only acknowledges but indeed calls for this. In the opening quote of this chapter, she identifies an imperative to elucidate the relation between experience and understanding and to rigorously consider the degree to which affect functions, or could function, as a form of substantiation in historical inquiry (2007, 309). This perspective is echoed in McCalman and Pickering’s edited collection, Historical Re-enactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn (2010), which, as its title suggests, engages with affect and experience (amongst other aspects) in re-enactment. My current chapter continues and seeks to deepen this engagement, particularly focusing on the relation between experience and understanding. It considers how elements of the experiential are functioning in particular examples of these practices, and how these elements, which have perturbed some scholars, may be productively assessed as part of an embodied, performative methodology through an interdisciplinary theoretical frame, in particular by applying theories derived from Philosophy, Performance and Dance Studies. How can re-enactment invoke a collective, authentic experience of the past, when we understand experience to be individual, subjective and contextually specific? (Which immediately begs the question: whose past, and for whom?) How could re-enactment be considered a legitimate, educative methodology when the techniques through which it represents the past are overtly theatrical, somatic and affective?  

58 This question in itself reflects a pervasive prejudice in academia: why should theatricality and corporeality on one hand, and validity and pedagogy on the other be mutually exclusive? Disciplinary differences become apparent here: the same elements that have posed a marked problem for many historians are (to varying degrees and in differing ways) being embraced, or at least engaged with, in relation to other practices in Performance and Dance Studies, amongst other disciplines. For more on the academic prejudice against performance and the somatic, see, for example, Rebecca Schneider (2011) Performing Remains and Edward Casey (1989) “The Ghost of Embodiment”, respectively.
Conversely, what productive possibilities might an experiential methodology offer for learning about the past? We need to consider the possibility that our reactions to these issues reflect as much on our own biases as they do the re-enactors’. In phrasing a partial response to these questions, and Agnew’s challenge, this chapter considers the relation between archival, ethnographic and re-enactment methodologies; between cognition and embodiment; and between history and performance.

There is a need to first briefly clarify what, precisely, is meant by affect in the discourse on re-enactment, and by both affect and embodiment in this dissertation. Dominant conceptions of affect have shifted over time, and continue to vary in different disciplines and discourses, and even within them (a fact that re-enactment scholarship often skips over). The ‘affective turn’ in the humanities can trace its roots back to Spinoza’s notion of affectus ([1677] 2001) and its development by Bergson ([1896] 2004), and Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 2005), and explores the body’s ability to affect and be affected. Some theorists use affect almost synonymously with emotion, others markedly differentiate affect from emotion, while yet others use it to refer to a broader notion of the experiential, both bodily and emotional. Agnew does not define her usage of affect in ‘History’s Affective Turn’, but she seems to connect it, as the quote above suggests, with individual, subjective experience, and one might conclude she refers to both emotional and bodily experience (2007, 299). The room for further specificity in Agnew’s article reflects its vanguard positioning: the nuances and possibilities of affect as a methodology in and for historical enquiry are still in the early stages.59 As McCalman and Pickering note, ‘the impact of the “affective turn” on study of

59 The study of emotions – in particular, the way they were felt and perceived – is emerging, however, as a significant area of historical research. The History of Emotions (as it is termed) examines emotion as a social phenomenon, which differs from the analysis of affect (including, but not limited to, emotion) as a methodological/epistemological technique. It signifies, however, an increased openness to and prominence of emotion as a valid topic of Historical inquiry. For more on the History of Emotions, see, for example, Anna Wierzbicka (2010) “The History of Emotions and the Future of Emotion Research.”
history did not occur until […] the new millennium’ (2010, 7). These authors are more explicit regarding their use of the term, stating that:

for humanists ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ are, rightly or wrongly, more often than not treated as synonymous. The sense in which ‘affective’ is used in the title of this book – ‘having the quality of influencing the emotions’ – is regarded by Oxford’s renowned lexicographers as obsolete, a further indication of its recent emergence in academic discourse. (2010, 7)

McCalman and Pickering frequently refer, however, to re-enactors’ desire to ‘experience history somatically and emotionally – to know what it felt like’ (2010, 6), as do other authors in the collection. In this dissertation, I utilise affect to refer to both the emotional and the bodily. My focus is directed more towards the sensory and somatic, rather than sentiment, but I will argue that these aspects in re-enactment are, or can be, interconnected. Key to this is an understanding of the notion of affect as a ‘substantive shift [that] returned critical theory and cultural criticism to bodily matter, which had been treated in terms of various constructionisms under the influence of post-structuralism’ (Clough 2008, 1; emphasis mine). This ‘bodily matter’ is crucial here, not in the sense of a biological mass, but rather regarding matters of the body: of lived, bodily experience.

This brings us to the other key term needing clarification; ‘embodiment’ (or, as it will be more frequently utilised here, in its verb form, embodied), converges with ‘affect’ and ‘performativity’ in its differing, but often very particular uses in different fields. In the interests of clarity, I align my use of ‘embodiment’ with Edward Casey’s (1989, 207) reading of the phenomenological theory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty: ‘the lived fact of experiencing the world from and in and with just this body, my body’ – embodiment as sensory, corporeal perception, experience, understanding and, I would add, agency. And yet, as will be explored later in this chapter, I wish to (re)consider the implications of ‘just this body’, addressing the specificity of embodied experience, whilst allowing for the possibility of intersubjective affect, experience and
understanding, enabled by our common embodiment and the possibilities presented by material and performative culture.

**Don’t think, just do?**

Before addressing the “rebellious” element of re-enactment, I wish first to examine the ways in which particular re-enactment groups utilise accepted pedagogic and research methods of a fashion less removed from academia than often assumed. Brewer claims that re-enactors ‘are about doing things, not about thinking things’, capturing a common perspective in the scholarship, which the above subheading responds to (2010, 81). The groups I studied, however, demonstrated widespread desire to develop individual and communal knowledge. While this particularly manifests in the learning and sharing of practical skills, so-called intellectual forms of knowledge (a contestable distinction) are also present.

EDHDA very much emphasises its role in knowledge and skill acquisition, almost defining itself as a community of skill sharing. This is seen in both their regular dance and costume activities and events, and at JAFA. At a bonnet making workshop at JAFA, Aylwen, the co-organiser, suggested that this is at the core of “what [they are] doing; [they are] just trying to share what [they] know.” She expressed hope that “next year more people will come forward and share their skills.” Reflecting on the motivation behind establishing his first historic dance and music groups, John explained that he:

> did a postdoc in America for a year and that gave me different dancing every night of the week: everything from Morris dancing to Scandinavian dancing […]. I [came] back to Canberra after that postdoc with a big desire to share all of these dance forms […]. I was being introduced to musicians [who] wanted to play French Bourrée […] or […] Finnish Quadrilles, but [they did not have an audience because] there was no one who [danced] them. […] It got me into some of the folkloric groups here as well. So I started dancing with local Finns and Slovenes as well as running my own dance workshops with these musicians.  

(Interview by author Dec. 2012)

Here, John illustrates not only his desire to share his expanded dance repertoire with others but also
the way the teaching and performing of these dances brought people from different traditions and (sub)cultures together.

John and Aylwen’s sharing of dance and costume making skills are interconnected. The costume making facilitates the dance and vice versa. In the EDHDA, teaching and learning do not only occur in designated workshops and at official events. This is demonstrated by Aylwen’s experience, referred to in chapter four, of (firmly) encouraging and enabling young male dancers to equip themselves with the techniques needed to make their costumes for a performance. For some re-enactors, learning certain skills arises from necessity, rather than initial interest. For many, however, costume making is a hobby in itself, and living history groups offer a way to develop this ability in a cost-effective way. A number of the regular attendees of EDHDA events are also members of the Australian Costuming Guild, who run workshops at JAFA and whose Canberra branch is closely affiliated with EDHDA. Aylwen described how she, in turn, learnt the beginnings of her skills in and passion for historic dressmaking from an older, Slovene friend in the folk scene.

I was making a costume […] and I was getting bits of help from her […]. I remember gathering, like the pattern said […] and I showed it to her during one of our dance practises. She looked at it and made me unpick the whole thing. […] She said, this is how you do cartridge pleating. So that was the beginning of actually taking a little more care. […] My only regret is that she is not here because there’s so much more I could learn from her. But I think sometimes you don’t realise just how valuable some of the teaching that’s happening is right at that time. (Interview by author Dec 2012)

These skills become something of a repertoire that is handed down and expanded across generations and associated groups.

As indicated earlier, it is not only practical skills that are shared but also so-called intellectual knowledge, via talks on numerous Regency and literary-related topics. In the 2014 JAFA, there were four PhDs amongst the speakers, including a professor. The topics include ones of an academic tone: “Conservation and Storage” (delivered by a member of staff from the National Museum of Australia); “Jane Austen’s Pelisse” (presented by a former curator at the Museum of London);
“Mansfield Park and Education” (Dr Heather Neilson); “No Moral Effect on the Mind. Music and education in Mansfield Park” (Dr Gillian Dooley); “The Genius of the Place: Mansfield Park and the improvement of the estate” (Professor Christine Alexander); and “Mansfield Park and the Navigable World” (Professor William Christie). Framed as lectures, these talks contradict portrayals of re-enactment as a purely somatic, theatrical endeavour, suggesting interest and participation in so-called intellectual as well as experiential areas of learning.

Similarly, the Jane Austen Centre’s annual festival in Bath included a number of academically informed talks. Some of these merged theatre and lecture techniques, in a similar style to a performative lecture, in particular, the actor-historian’s talks explored in chapter six. Despite the titillating name, the “Sex and the City Walking Tour”, led by a National Trust accredited guide, was, while perhaps not academic, certainly informative and well informed. As was ‘Were the Austens Upstairs or Downstairs?’, which discussed food, class and professions in the Regency period, and whose presenter holds a Masters degree in History. The most illustrious – or, for a scholarly audience, most academically credible – lecture was given by John Mullan, the aforementioned Professor of English at University College London, and a specialist on Austen’s literature. Mullan comparatively analysed representations of social values and norms in the novels, particularly focusing on family and gender relations, and how they compare (or contrast) with current society. As already communicated, the festival also included a number of talks and demonstrations on historic dressmaking and makeup, as well as dance workshops. These were all, given the nature of the event, more formal, ticketed activities, rather than the communal sharing of skills, which occurs more organically (and free of charge), at times, through EDHDA. It is possible and perhaps probable, however, that at least some of the many historic dance and costume groups that contribute to the festival in Bath have similar learning opportunities within the smaller community of their regular practice.
Beorg Wic has less emphasis on what are generally considered intellectual activities than either of the Jane Austen Festivals. There were no talks offered at Beorg Wic in the year I conducted fieldwork with them, nor are any included in Danelaw’s regular practice. Many of the participants do, however, attend a bi-annual medieval conference, which includes lecture-style presentations on diverse aspects of the period, as well as more practical workshops and living history activities. At Beorg Wic itself, as mentioned in chapter three, there were a number of workshops offered in period trades and techniques. While Danelaw’s regular meetings focus on weapon wielding techniques, many of the members participate in workshops offered by other groups, including the regular arts and crafts sessions run by the Ancient Arts Fellowship (AAF). Other groups who attend the event deliver costuming sessions as part of their societies’ regular practice.

A forging workshop at Beorg Wic

The fact that these groups include workshops and talks in their practice does not negate claims that re-enactment sacrifices thinking for doing and credible historiographic method for experiential “time travel”. Such criticisms are based not only on the presence of practical pursuits but also on the
perceived absence of intellectual engagement behind the ‘conjectural interpretations’ represented by, and derived from, these practical activities. Sharing and reading sources on a range of historical matters is, however, a key part of the practice of the groups with whom I have researched.

AAF’s regular newsletter includes an “interesting reading” section, with links to sources on a variety of topics. Some of these are a far cry from the academic material one might hope to be included here but a surprisingly large percentage are credible sources, some of which would even be considered scholarly. In a newsletter from June 2012, for example, there are five recommended “readings”. These include a link to a kickstarter project to “build a more realistic fight engine for video games”. Although a non-scholarly, popular source, it is co-founded by a fairly well-known writer of speculative history, historical fiction and science fiction, Neal Stephenson. Although Stephenson’s “geek cred” may either raise or diminish the status of this text in the eyes of academics, the source is not intended as a historical reference, but rather as a general interest piece. It also reflects the aforementioned connection between re-enactment, gaming, and what might be described as broader “geek” subculture. Later in the “interesting reading” section, there is something approaching a source we might consider suitable for historical inquiry: an analysis of particular fighting techniques recorded in an authentic medieval source, the *i33 Manual*, which was written by a medieval fencing master and court advisor in Germany in the 1400s. Although the modern examination of this primary source appears on a blog, the author, Jens P. Kleinau describes himself as a researcher, professional fencer and an instructor of historical European martial arts. According to his blog, Kleinau “researches, transcribes, translates and interprets medieval and Renaissance fighting manuals” (2012). He does not include details regarding his education, but he cites a chapter he has written, “Visualised Motion: Iconography of Medieval and Renaissance Fencing Books”, for a (then) forthcoming scholarly publication, and a conference paper.

This connection with scholarship is not isolated. There are also discussions of and links to
academic journal articles: ‘Changing Views of Vikings’ (Hofstra 2003 on Changing Views on Vikings 2012) and ‘What the Vikings did for fun? Sports and pastimes in medieval northern Europe’ (Gardela 2012 on Oar Walking 2012). The recommendation of these readings in AAF’s newsletter does not necessarily indicate that all, or even a majority of, re-enactors read academic history texts, but it does suggest an interest in and some degree of engagement with reliable, written sources amongst at least some of the participants at Beorg Wic.

There is more to this than a bit of reading on the side. The use of research methods not so very distant from historiographic methodology inform, to varying degrees and with varying efficacy, many of the activities these re-enactors engage in. In Danelaw and at Beorg Wic, some level of research was evident in the acquisition of fighting capabilities. At my first fighter session with Danelaw, I asked the group’s treasurer where their combat moves derive from. Sam informed me that “the techniques we use are derived from the i33 – a whole lot of techniques were actually recorded on a scroll during the Middle Ages – and we base our fighting on that.” He specified that Danelaw’s fighting methods are “not from a particular period: we draw on techniques from multiple centuries” and that some fighters do, at times, adapt them for practicality or safety.

Some of [the instructions] say to attack the nose or neck, like this [sweeps his arm towards my face, then at my neck], but because we are using metal weapons, we don’t hit to the face or neck. So, ours are based on eight of the core movements, simplified, but effective. Some of the guys will be able to tell you all about all the techniques of the i33. You’ll see Tom [gestures to a tall, male figure engaged in combat] do very intricate sword patterns, but whether you go [arcs his sword up and down in a graceful, elaborate movement] or WHAM [thrusts his arm forward, with forceful directness], it’s still a point.

Strict accuracy is not essential in Danelaw’s practice, but an authentic foundation, grounded in reliable, primary source material, is considered vital, both within their group and for intergroup events. The ‘i33’ that Sam referred to here is the same manual referred to in AAF’s recommended readings, and is, according to the re-enactors I spoke with at Beorg Wic, the touchstone for contemporary medieval combat. It is, however, mainly through such contemporary, secondary sources that Danelaw and Beorg Wic participants access the i33 manual, being without the ability to
read Old German. The translations and interpretations utilised by these groups derive mainly from the work of other re-enactors and medieval martial arts practitioners, such as Kleinau.

Some level of research also underpins the costume, props and set of these historically inflected performances. As discussed in chapter three, Danelaw is relatively relaxed regarding anachronisms, but other groups are more precise in their re-creations and the sources they use to form them. During a chat in the historically accurate tent section at Beorg Wic, I was informed about some of the more rigorous approaches to costume.

You see Robert from the Huscarls – everything he’s wearing came from a grave discovery in the Caucasus Mountains. Most people try to stick to a particular region and time. Sarah’s clothes are all from a certain graveyard, so that puts a fairly precise time to it. York is a great one, lots of archaeological digs there. It’s good soil, see.

These re-enactors (re)create their costumes by replicating particular, verified examples from the period. While a select number are fortunate enough to visit museums containing such sources, most rely on evidence online. Many of the re-enactors I spoke with consider the internet to be a useful tool for the finding and sharing of knowledge and resources. While we might criticise the internet for flooding readers with often inaccurate information, the rush toward digitisation of secondary and primary sources in recent years problematises squeamishness regarding online resources and research. Furthermore, not everyone has the economic or cultural capital to access primary sources and in Australia, geographical distance presents a further obstacle. Also, as demonstrated by AAF’s newsletter, many of the online sources being utilised are credible and some scholarly. According to re-enactors at Beorg Wic, the internet has “really enhanced the re-enactment scene, especially in Australia, because we don’t exactly have digs here for us to learn from.” I was told that “ten, fifteen years ago […] societies were doing two hundred year periods. Now they’re doing decades [or even] four years!” Groups such as Staple, Danelaw and AAF utilise these sources not only for clothing but also for other material aspects of their practice.

For some re-enactors, the research process – regardless of whether or not we would consider
it sufficiently rigorous – is one of the most satisfying aspects of the hobby (Gapps 2003b, 2007, 2009, 2010). Many re-enactors consult and interpret primary sources in a process not entirely divorced from the methodology favoured by historians. The enjoyment of research was particularly captured by a Beorg Wic participant in a questionnaire response to: what do you enjoy most about re-enactment? He wrote: “the research and making. To be able to figure out what the documentation means and make a close approximation so it ends up looking like the original” (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Others shared their experiences of being involved in re-creating tools, weapons and structures from primary sources, and the challenges and pleasures involved in this process. One fellow, in particular, demonstrated what I could not help but regard as a surprising degree of critical reflexivity, in relation to both the benefits and limitations of the sources utilised and, correspondingly, the re-creations produced from them.

All these tents are speculations because we’ve only got illuminations to go on. Although there was a Viking ship discovered with a tent-like structure on top – another tent at Beorg Wic is based on that – we don’t actually know it was a tent. It could have been a tent, or it could have been the cabin […] We do take some liberties with ‘h.a.’. Take my tent – they wouldn’t have had brass eyelets and it wouldn’t have been canvas, it would have been wool […]. So, the design’s h.a., as far as we can tell, but the materials aren’t.

Essentially, the style and amount of research amongst re-enactors at Beorg Wic varied greatly across and even within groups, ranging from almost non-existent (relying on very limited instruction from others), to a critical engagement with a range of reliable primary and secondary sources comparable with an undergraduate level of study.

Approaches to research also vary in the EDHDA. Those of its founders, John and Aylwen, are notably academic. As intimated earlier, John consults authentic period sources on dance, including manuals, letters, etiquette books and prints, often translating them from French and Italian into English. Through comparative analysis of sources, both written and visual, John reconstructs dances for use in his teaching and performance repertoire. He has published fifteen works on dance, most notably a ten-volume series, Historic Dance. These works are not scholarly in the sense that they are not peer-reviewed and are self-published. Their main readership is comprised
of historic dance instructors and reconstructionists (as John referred to those, himself included, who reconstruct historic dances from primary sources) and some particularly keen students. They are, however, intended as more than a manual. As well as a learning and teaching tool, these books offer a resource for understanding the historical context and significance of dance genres and numbers, which John critically analyses.

Research is intrinsic to John’s reconstruction of the dances, but it also informs his pedagogical style. None of his workshops that I participated in, either in Australia or England, were solely, or even mainly, devoted to the physical components of dance. Rather, discussion of historical and historiographical aspects was interspersed throughout the practical learning, interweaving the thinking and doing polarised by Brewer. In these workshops, John argued for the importance of situating dances within their genre and understanding how dances reflect and depart from the conventions of that form, rather than learning individual dances in isolation. He frequently referred to the relation between the dance and its historical context, including historical events, gender expectations and relations, and social customs and interests.

The significance John places on ‘thinking things’ was evident in the way he encouraged participants of his classes to consider context first, then “intricacies” (the style and etiquette of the dance), and only then “the dance itself” (the actual steps, figures, formations, and holds). Both in his books and workshops, John demonstrated critical reflexivity by analysing gaps, discrepancies and variations in the sources, identifying instances of probable bias, emphasising the interpretive nature of reconstruction, and acknowledging instances where his interpretation is less substantiated than he would wish, or where he had taken some artistic licence. In instances of the last of these, he would demonstrate the original, explaining its difference from his alteration, and for what aesthetic or practical purpose he decided on the change. Accuracy is important, but he is more concerned with authenticity in relation to, as I stated in chapter four, the genre and the milieu of the dance than particular individual steps and figures. In this way, his approach diverges from “hardcore” re-
enactors who focus on being “h.a.” in every minute detail of the product.

Other participants at this workshop, many of whom are also dance instructors, informed me that this style of teaching is unusual in the historic dance scene, which more commonly focuses on “the actual dancing” and “sometimes costumes a bit too, depending what style and group you’re with.” The atypicality of EDHDA reflects two matters. Firstly, although this work is primarily a hobby for John, it has been shaped by his PhD-level education in History and so, although not a complete anomaly, his approach is more rigorous and academically inclined than some re-enactors and (hobby) historic dancers. Secondly, as demonstrated in chapters fours and five, there is a diverse spectrum of historic dance practice, in which the degree of overlap and identification with re-enactment and, for that matter, other forms of fandom, vary widely.

Similarly, EDHDA’s historic dance and costume tour of England is not a representative example of tourism. One of the chief purposes of the tour was to enable Aylwen, and other historic costume enthusiasts, to study original period clothing, in order to enhance their costuming. Gapps describes this research to (re)production process as ‘wearing the contents of your research as costume’ (2010, 52). On the tour, we visited a number of historic houses and museums where Aylwen had pre-arranged study tables to examine authentic garments from the Regency era. Here, all of the ladies, and Aylwen, in particular, examined the items in detail, discussing, enquiring about and making notes on the design and construction. These study tables also included talks from the archivists, who explained in what contexts and by what sort of person they were likely to have been worn and how they compared with other garments of the period. One of these sessions also included discussion of the processes of preservation and display, and how these competing objectives are reconciled at that museum. The validity of the research process here is apparent. The archival research these costumiers and dancers were conducting would not be misplaced in an academic research project on material culture in Georgian England. What is more contestable is whether or
not this credible methodology is being utilised to significant epistemological effect. This is not to suggest that the study of clothing is not a valuable form of knowledge in itself. However, it might be considered more valuable – from an academic perspective – if this focus facilitated understanding of the clothing as material culture: a matter I will return to in the next section.

Although they appear to be a minority in their field, the approach of hobby practitioners such as John and Aylwen, and the aforementioned Kleinau, reflect an increasing overlap between particular aspects of fan hobbies and academia. This has recently prompted scholarly consideration of the notion of the ‘fan-scholar’ and ‘aca-fan’, mentioned in chapter four (Hills 2012; Zubernis and Larsen 2012a, 2012b). While ‘aca-fan’ is more often used to refer to academics who research their object of fandom, ‘fan-scholars’, according to Hills, utilise ‘academic concepts within their writing, outside the licensed spaces of “pro” academia’ (2012, 15). Hills posits this in relation to other sectors of fandom, but, as I have argued, re-enactment can be conceived as part of this field (Johnson 2014a).61 The notion of the ‘fan-scholar’ readily applies to some re-enactors, despite their practice being less immediately and widely recognised as a form of fandom than more iconic examples, such as cosplayers. In assessing the processes and products of the ‘fan-scholar’, we should consider not only writing, as suggested by Hills but also material and intangible fan creations, including the re-created items and performance-based activities, of re-enactment. John seems to sit somewhere between these forms, being a scholar and a fan who utilises his scholarly training in, rather than producing scholarship on his practice – the Historic Dance volumes do not analyse his practice, but rather dance in particular historical periods.

Re-enactment is, as I have demonstrated, criticised for being both unrealistic and too

61 Relations between re-enactment and other forms of fandom are beginning to be considered. As referred to in my literature review, Agnew (2004); Handler and Saxton (1988) and Lutticken (2005a, 2005b) liken re-enactment to fantasy and/or video-game role-play, whilst Gapps (2003b) perceives a correlation between this practice and the rise of fantasy and science fiction.
realistic – both sloppy and obsessive in its representations of the past. This reflects both the varying nature of the practice, and the pervading tension identified by McCalman and Pickering between realism and affect in re-enactment (2010, 8). We should not dismiss the limitations and problematic aspects of what is frequently a selective approach to authenticity, which is also, at times, selecting (risking exclusion based on contextual factors such as gender, race and economics). However, we might also acknowledge the more positive component here. Something of the rigour academic historians value in archival research reverberates in (some) re-enactors’ attention to authenticity in particular re-creations. I am not suggesting that re-enactors in general, or even the majority of those I researched specifically, conduct research through thoroughly academic methodologies, nor that they engage in the same, or even a similar, degree of rigour. The presence of so-called intellectual activities and the use of research methods in these three forms of re-enactment do not provide academic validation for re-enactment more broadly, or even for these particular case studies. They do, however, refute sweeping, generalised claims that re-enactors’ rely solely on the somatic.

Assertions regarding the absence of intellectual inquiry, even of the traditional, Cartesian variety, are simply unfounded. As demonstrated here, some of the research undertaken by some re-enactors parallels the research processes of academic historians: utilising and at times comparatively and critically analysing primary and secondary source material, in the form of both written documents and verified artefacts. In their representations of history, re-enactors may or may not be fabricating the past, but some re-enactors are pursuing aspects of historiographic research and intellectual, as well as somatic, engagement in order to do so.

(Re)thinking (re)doing

A significant part of the challenge in assessing the pedagogic and historiographic validity of re-enactment is the variation in how methods of knowing – learning, teaching, remembering,
researching and recording – are defined, acknowledged, and stratified. As demonstrated thus far, these examples of re-enactment utilise some aspects of accepted pedagogic and academic methods. I would argue, however, that the enhancing of these re-enactors’ knowledge and skills extends beyond activities of a traditional learning/research orientation. An alternative but complementary form of historical understanding can also be engendered through some of the somatic and performance-based activities of these re-enactments, and not only those specifically framed as pedagogy. Something of epistemological significance is occurring through the experiential process of these practices, in moments of apparently purely affective engagement. To substantiate this claim, I will analyse fieldwork examples, engaging with critical and philosophical theories that consider ways of knowing developed through performance, embodiment, and cultural and historical activities, experiences, skills, and habits as both valid and significant. In so doing, I question rigid demarcations of doing and thinking.62

The theatrical or what I term performative nature of re-enactment is, I have argued, its strongest source of epistemological potential (Johnson 2009, 2014b, 2015). Differentiating between ‘theatrical’ and ‘performative’ is significant here, not least because of the disciplinary differences between theatre and performance and the fact that re-enactment aligns more with the latter.63 My assertion of the value of re-enactment’s performativity is underpinned by Taylor’s (2003, xvi) concept of performance as an episteme, a way of knowing, which posits performance as both a subject of analysis and a lens through which to analyse (2003, xvi; 3). This mode of thought is currently expanding and flourishing in arts and other practice-based research. Performance as an episteme includes and interweaves artistic and embodied practice, reconfiguring re-enactment’s most criticised aspects as potentially productive, cohesive features. Re-enactment’s performing of

63 There is also another sense of performative at play here, which I elucidate later in this chapter.
historical culture – performing in both an artistic sense and as a physical enactment of historical activities, techniques and experiences, particularly those inculcated into the body over time – may thus be perceived as a way of examining and connecting with the past.

Performance in re-enactment functions as both methodology and record: an embodied archive of historical skills, trades, arts and, as I will argue, culture (Schneider 2011). Dancing with the performed nature of history, Taylor asserts the importance of what she refers to as the *repertoire* – history more literally in and as performance, performance as an alternative (or complementary) form of archive (2003, 16-26). Following Taylor, I perceive the archive and the repertoire not as opposites but rather as two intricate, mutually influencing parts of a whole, which together enhance our comprehension of history. Prefiguring Taylor’s (2003) notion of the repertoire, Connerton (1989) frames bodies as vehicles for memory and remembrance, participating in and absorbing what he terms ‘bodily practices’ – embodied histories that resist and refute what would otherwise be the dominion of the written record. Re-enactment’s dual historiographical functions – as a way of knowing and (re)membering – operate through the embodied, experiential nature of performance, with and in performing bodies.

As suggested above, these claims do not sit well with much of the scholarship on historical re-enactment. Brewer disparages what he perceives to be a common belief in a universalised nature of corporeal experience. Re-enactment, he claims:

seems to be part of a widespread assumption that language and thought are culturally and temporally specific while feeling and somatic experience are in some sense timeless, an adjunct of human nature. To fight as a seventeenth-century soldier […] is to replicate and indeed inhabit [his or her] ‘experience’ through performance. (2010, 81)

This perspective pervades much of the literature – some are interested in the “strangeness” of the somatic, others are not, but almost all are troubled by its limitations. Negative reception aside, Brewer’s recognition of the centrality of performance and somatic experience in re-enactors’ efforts to ‘inhabit’ the past is important, substantiating Agnew (2007) and McCalman and Pickering’s (2010)
calls to further assess affect in re-enactment and to examine its methodological implications.

Having briefly addressed the very different positions on these modes of experience in performance and history, I will now analyse how these aspects of the practice were engaged with in my case studies, before offering a theorisation of their methodological and epistemological function. As I have referred to previously, costume is, for many re-enactors, pivotal to creating an immersive, ‘period’ experience. The participants I spoke with emphasised the significance of attire to their corporeal process, as this field experience particularly illustrates.

_Sitting in the garden around a table strewn with materials, needles, instructional pages and cups of tea, a group of women chat while sewing bonnets together in a workshop at JAFA._ Susie (who is wearing a Regency dress and bonnet) and I are talking about re-enactment as a way of learning about history. _She is a member of the Australian Costuming Guild and of the medieval re-enactment group, the SCA._ Susie doesn’t miss a stitch as she tells me, “the thing is, you learn about the period just by wearing the costumes, they really shape your movement.” _I am about to ask how important the historical accuracy of the garment is, when she adds, “if you make the costumes how they actually made them, they work like clothes, not like costumes.”_

On the one hand, Susie’s comments bring to mind Dening’s critique of re-enactment for ‘hallucinating the past as merely the present in funny dress’ (1992, 4). Simplifying the past as something able to be encapsulated in a costume – no matter how historically accurate the garment may be – is problematic; a pretty dress does not a Regency lady make. On the other hand, while some re-enactors speak of moments of feeling as if they had been transported into the past, Susie made no such claim; she suggested costumes can be worn as a learning aid, not a time travel device. Nor does she liken them to Mary Poppins’ bag. Susie did not assert that costumes carry links to all aspects of the past – she connects them specifically with clothing and movement, with material and embodied culture.

_The ‘material turn’ in historiography considered the significance of material culture in_
understanding the past, the ‘idea of material as evidence’ (Rappaport 2008, 289; 293). Important here was an interest in the way material culture intersects with other forms of cultural expression, reflecting and affecting mores, customs and attitudes. This includes, of course, not only the literally material, such as apparel, but many other objects, including crockery, utensils, tools, jewellery, and bric-a-brac. Similarly, the possibility of encountering the authentic through historical artefacts and the practical insights that can be gained through these objects have been theorised. Re-enactors’ costumes are not, however, originals from the period – they are convincing (re)creations, at best. Gapps argues that authenticity is woven into the historical accuracy of objects – the garments, armour and various apparatuses that re-enactors labour over (2010, 52-3). Might there also be something authentic – and epistemologically significant – in the (bodily) process of creating (and utilising) these items? Discussing the Plimoth Plantation living history museum, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett suggests that ‘authenticity is located not in the artifacts per se or in the models on which they are based, but in the methods by which they were made – in a way of doing, which is a way of knowing, in a performance’ (1993, xv). This resonates with Taylor’s notion of performance as an episteme. If we apply these notions to re-enactment, performing past cultures (both the physical performing of historical activities and the theatrical performativity created for and by these doings) may be perceived as a way of exploring history.

As well as residing in the process of making, I have suggested that something authentic and epistemologically significant is evoked in the experience of using these items, through the affective, experiential ‘doing’ that re-enactment has been criticised for (Johnson 2009, 2014b, 2015). This hypothesis is substantiated by the perceptions of some of the re-enactors I researched, as the following fieldwork experience at Beorg Wic demonstrates.

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64 See, for example, Deetz (1984) ‘The Link from Object to Person to Concept.’
The “battle” having just finished, costumed men and women drift back towards their tents or the tavern. I loiter near the “wench bench”, continuing to chat with Aaron, Lisa, and Rowan, who are enthusiastically discussing re-enactment with me. “And shoes! If you really want to learn about the past, you’ve got to wear the shoes. They actually make you walk differently! You don’t –”, Rowan demonstrates by taking a ‘step’ with his hand, palm first, then fingers, “– you STOMP!” He pushes his hand down, flat and hard. Lisa agrees, “yeah, and you’ve got to use your toes to balance. The first time I wore them, I was walking like this –”, she moves gingerly, taking small, slow steps, ‘testing’ the weight on her toes with hesitant care. The youngest of the group, Aaron, adds, “they are quite slippery!” “Really?” I ask, habitually. Rowan affirms “yeah. Well, they’re completely flat and smooth.” Rowan and Aaron obligingly hand me their shoes with a little look of pride – not everyone at Beorg Wic are wearing historically accurate footwear. The leather soles do look oddly flat, being without any of the surfacing used to provide grip and the customary curve for the foot’s arch common in modern footwear. If anything, they are slightly rounded, convexing ever so slightly outwards, towards the ground. I run my hand along their utterly smooth and, yes, somewhat slippery length, imagining how it might feel to walk in them. Rowan breaks my contemplation. “It changes your whole posture as well.” Lisa, nodding, adds, “and sometimes you need to put your arms out to walk.” Rowan, smiling in recognition as Lisa walks as if on a wide tightrope, tells me “it works really well when you’re wearing a cloak, and you’re holding your cape out with your arms.” The others nod, giving enthusiast “yeas”. “Cos, youknow, there’s that whole ‘take awalin myshoes’ thing.”

Their claim that such shoes alter how one stands and walks, changing “your whole posture”, aligns with theory in somatic practices, as well as podiatric, chiropractic, and osteopathic science. But, we might ask, so what? Wearing historically accurate shoes make re-enactors move differently while wearing them, but so do high heels. How do such differences engender an understanding of history, other than assisting the wearer to recognise that people wearing flat, leather shoes would most likely have walked in a different way than people wearing runners?

For varying reasons, shoes – and other forms of clothing – were raised by participants from all of my case studies as significant to their practice. Aylwen echoed the importance of shoes, which she primarily linked with quality of execution in dance.

*Within hours of our historic dance and costume tour reaching Bath, we are at the Fashion*
Museum, examining Georgian and Regency garments and accoutrements at a private study session. The facilitators, two well-dressed, well-spoken women, bring a few pieces out at a time for us to inspect with gloved hands. Three pairs of small, narrow shoes, notably pointed at the toe, are placed on the table before us. Mary comments, “they’re very nice, but I’m never going to wear pointy shoes like that!” Louisa-May, nodding, agrees: “they’d be bad for your feet!” Aylwen, who, as it happens, is wearing pointed shoes now, responds “you need pointy shoes to hold your feet in for dancing. It’s actually a functional feature—it’s weird, but they’re supportive.” Louisa-May, leaning in towards me, whispers, “I don’t think Aylwen’s view is reflective of most dancers’. “

It’s to do with the angle of your foot and heel. Take Baroque dancing – you have to control where your foot is. You need the support and control of the fitted, pointy shoes that pull your feet in.”

Clearly, there were conflicting views here on the utility of pointed shoes. As a teacher and performer of historic dance genres from 1450–1900 and a professional costumier, Aylwen’s stance was shaped by a more informed perspective, considering function and effect, rather than immediate, physical experience. What is apparent here is an interconnection between garments and dance, which was further elucidated by John.

We interacted with some re-enactors in the civil war scene in America, and I think they […] knew that with polka of that period, the arms should be down. You can’t raise arms in that 1860s dress because you’ve got the ladies dropped shoulder […]. But […] the polka, of course, came before that fashion, and it carried on after that fashion, and although we might all dress up to the upper class, there were other people who weren’t wearing that dropped fashion. […] I showed [my extension class] an 1840s polka […]. The shoulder was not dropped in the 1840s; there was a lot of free movement and the whole dance involved bringing across the Almond heritage from the eighteenth-century, which was a lot of arm movements in the air […]. You were allowed all this freedom to do fancy arm movements in the 1840s and 1850s and then it dropped out. Because dances go through phases, and sometimes it links in with fashion and sometimes it’s a two-way effect. And then in the 1890s, you get the arm movements coming back in, in the dance halls of Paris. It’s quite a wild dance, and the dress allowed it. (Interview by author Dec. 2012; emphasis mine)

John’s “two-way effect” is significant. Connerton discusses how fashions of particular periods are designed to accommodate or confine the movement and presentation of bodies as befits the customs and expectations of the culture (1989, 32–7). This is apparent in dance but is also present in broader society. Connerton argues that in many periods, clothing not only indicated social factors of
the wearer – gender, class, age, occupation – but also reflected and \textit{produced} expected traits of both body and behaviour. He demonstrates this by analysing how women’s apparel in the Victorian era ‘helped to mould’ female conduct.

“No one but a woman”, wrote Mrs Oliphant in 1879, “knows how her dress twists about her knees, doubles her fatigue, and arrests her locomotive powers.” Tight skirts and sleeves, crinolines and trains, floor-length petticoats – they all arrested her locomotive powers. But no encumbrance was more graphically constricting than the tight-laced corset, worn almost universally in England and America throughout the nineteenth century […] The defenders of tight-lacing spoke of ‘discipline’, ‘submission’, ‘bondage’ and ‘confinement’; the epithet ‘straight-laced’ survives as a memento of a time when wearing a corset was seen as a moral imperative. […] Both opponents and defenders of the corset were in a sense in agreement: it was designed to constrict the diaphragm and change the configuration of the body […] This raises the whole question of what we mean by the constitution of social categories, by bringing into the open the double meaning of the term ‘constitution’. For the Victorian clothing system did not only signal the existence of categories of behaviour, it also \textit{produced} the existence of those categories of behaviour and kept them habitually in being by moulding bodily configuration and movement. (33-4; emphasis mine)

Connerton’s reference to the multiplicity of meanings of the term ‘constitution’ is an important point that is returned to later. For now, I focus on his point regarding the way clothing shapes bodily movement and behaviour.

The emphasis Connerton places on corsets was paralleled by Aylwen and John, with a different focus. They argue that undergarments, including the corset, are vital to creating a proper presentation of costume and body for historic dance and are an important part of the pedagogy.

John: I think Aylwen really does a service for the people who do her courses, because [they do] actually encourage them to think of the costume from the bottom up, from the undergarments to the outer garments, and she’ll start her workshops with the undergarments.

Aylwen: The chemise, then the corset.

John: Because then they sit properly, and they make sense – if you don’t have the right undergarments, the outer garments won’t make proper sense. […] I remember when we were doing the Baroque workshops […] [it allowed the dancers] to get the swish of the dress and the feel of it.

[…]

Aylwen: With baroque dancing, if you don’t have aballetic background, it’s incredibly difficult to try and get this [\textit{raises her arms up and out, elegantly}].

John: [\textit{clarifying}] The posture.

Aylwen: […] With ballet, when you’re younger, you’re learning all this gesture with your
arms. But with normal social dancing you […] just hold them […]. But when you put on all these garments, suddenly you need to do something with your arms because […] if you’ve got hoops down here, you can’t hang down; you’ve got to actually put your arms out. (Interview by author Dec. 2012; original emphasis)

The effect here is not as simple as making the dresses look better and prompting people to raise their arms. Undergarments, according to Aylwen, mould one’s posture, dancing and “whole way of moving”, making the delivery and experience more authentic. This perspective was shared by a historian and curator at the Fan Museum we visited in London: “I hope you have the proper underthings, so you get the right shape and movement. The sources suggest that the undergarments are the most important piece in really getting the dances.” While undergarments might contribute to a better aesthetic, their main significance, amongst re-enactors, clearly relates to both the experience of wearing them and the practical outcomes this carries for one’s movement.

McCalman and Pickering have identified a ‘vexed relationship between realism and affect’ in re-enactment: a contradiction between what is perceived as re-enactors’ obsession with historical accuracy in their costume and props and their pursuit of somatic experience (2010, 8). My field research and Connerton’s theory suggest, however, that the relation between realism and affect in re-enactment can be productive and interconnected: realism enhancing the affective experience, affect enlivening the realism. Together, realism and affect facilitate re-enactors’ sense of connection with the past. This was particularly underlined for me by one of my fieldwork experiences at JAFA.

On the night of the festival ball, my friend and I both wear Regency dress. My hired, green satin and black lace gown, despite being designed for a far ampler bosomed woman than myself, is one of the most beautiful dresses I have ever worn. As we step through the entrance, the official town crier of Canberra greets us in period dialogue, requesting our names and titles so that he may announce us. The chatter amongst the candle-lit hall hushes as his authoritative voice rings out. “Lady Margaret and Lady Katherine of Victoria Park”. Trying not to shuffle or hunch, Margaret and I enter to polite applause. Much to my relief, the next dance is called, and we hurry to avail ourselves of refreshments. Sitting down, the tightness of my corset squeezes my ribcage, digging into my shoulder blades, forbidding me to slouch. My shoulders,
accustomed to hunching over a computer, are forced to mimic the metal rods of my undergarments, straight and strong. My core muscles tense with the effort of sucking my stomach in, flinching away from the corset’s constrictive grasp. Stomach in, shoulders back, fabric and steel combine to sculpt my body into a supposedly more feminine form. My eyes roam the room, noticing that there are other ladies not dancing and that they too are sitting or standing near the wall. A few of them are even embroidering! I feel a little conscious of our lack of partners – something that doesn’t usually bother me – and I hope we will be asked to dance. A young Indian man I met at a dance workshop approaches, apparently at ease in his waistcoat, stockings and breeches. He offers me his arm with mock ceremony: “shall we have the next dance?” With a refined gesture quite unlike my usual way of moving, I place my arm gently on his. As I go to stand, however, I forget to hold up my floor length dress and stumble on its length. Hiding my embarrassment, I try to glide to the dance area in what I can only hope is a ‘period’ way, mimicking the metal rods of my waist, whether I’m dancing or just walking. As I approach, I notice that the other dancers’ bodies are kept in an expectant posture. I am not used to this, and feel a little self-conscious about my own body. But whereas Foucault would have understood individual identities as resulting from such period clothing plays a central role in creating these stories […] Transforming looks and body posture, they take on the role of time travel devices’ (2010, 22-23). She briefly suggests that, through such clothing, re-enactors bodies could be understood as being historically inscribed, in the Foucauldian sense.

This field experience converges with Susie’s assertion, cited above, that “you learn about the period just by wearing the costumes – they really shape your movement.” There is a sense here of learning through my (in)experience of shaping and moving my body ‘in period’ by unifying object and activity, garment and dance, and my corresponding (in)ability to do so – a significant notion I will return to later.

Discussing historical reality television show Outback House, Anja Schwarz asserts that:

“period clothing plays a central role in creating these stories […] Transforming looks and body posture, they take on the role of time travel devices” (2010, 22-23). She briefly suggests that, through such clothing, re-enactors bodies could be understood as being historically inscribed, in the

Foucauldian sense.

Taking a lead from Foucault, one might almost describe [the participant’s] body as ‘totally imprinted by history’ and produced by the disciplining regime of Victorian undergarments. But whereas Foucault would have understood individual identities as resulting from such
inscriptions, *Outback House*’s re-enactors are thought to remain their twenty-first-century selves, ‘using’ their bodies’ subjection to 1861 conditions so as to bear witness to the past. (23)

This indicates a slight misreading of Foucault, given he (mainly, with some inconsistencies) critiqued the notion of what Schwarz has termed ‘individual identities’ (emphasis mine), arguing against subjectivity in his assertion of the historical, discursive constitution of normalising identities and experience. Applying Foucault’s notion of the social (and ultimately, political) construction of body and identity to interpret re-enactors’ corporeal engagement with the past through material culture is, however, an avenue I have also explored (Johnson 2009). In doing so, I recognised that this theorisation, on its own, is limited and somewhat problematic, due to the same reason it is useful: the way Foucault conceives – and does not conceive – body and subjective experience. The (dis)advantages of utilising Foucault to understand re-enactment warrant further consideration than Schwarz’s passing comment provides (her focus being on other matters). A comprehensive analysis of Foucault’s ideas on these topics – and the many ways they have been interpreted – is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. What I undertake here is a working sketch of how we might appropriate aspects of Foucault (and others) whilst acknowledging and beginning to address the shortcomings, limitations and (dis)parities of these appropriations.

Bodies and their relation to knowledge, power and subjectivity, underlie much of Foucault’s work. He argues that knowledge and power create and subsume, rather than just repress, individuals and subjectivity and that ‘the body’ is the primary site of this historical inscribing. He acknowledges what has been translated as ‘the soul’, which, he argues, encapsulates body: the psyche is not *internal* to the body, but rather on and around the body, and thus is subjected to – and formed by – the same social and institutional values. ‘It would be wrong’, he argues, to:

say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within, the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those that are punished […] The soul is the prison of the body. (1979, 29-30)
There is, for Foucault, no internal psyche and correspondingly, sexuality is not an internal, true identity, but rather a historicised, discursive construct, inscribed into a body forced to express this external creation of identity. ‘The body is’ he argues, ‘directly involved in a political field; power-relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs’ (25). Foucault’s (re)configuration of body and psyche reduces the Descartian dichotomy and, to some extent, enhances the significance of body. This more significant body is, however, still a passive one. Foucault does not allow an accessible mechanism for body (or psyche) to shape society and culture beyond a potential to resist dominant discourses. Nor does his theory permit, as alluded to above, a significant capacity for individual consciousness or selfhood. ‘Discourse is not’, Foucault argued, the:

majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined. […] It is neither by recourse to a transcendental subject nor by recourse to a psychological subjectivity that the regulation of its enunciation should be defined. (2002, 60-61)

The nature and extent of this ‘discursive’ construction are, however, open to debate. Aligning with Joanna Oksala (2004), I interpret Foucault’s argument for a discursive body as not confined to linguistic structuring, but rather as encompassing cultural construction more broadly – an interpretation which is relevant for the intertheoretical analysis to follow.

There are many aspects of body that are absent from, or underdeveloped in, Foucault’s work. Specificity – consideration of whose body, the particularities of this body – is not addressed, although he does move in that direction when he considers sexuality. Active engagement with body in its fleshy, sensory form is largely absent in Foucault’s writings, and he has little time for lived experience more broadly, although his consideration of body in pain and pleasure seems, nevertheless, to touch upon these topics (Oksala 2004, 97). Foucault actively critiqued the phenomenological and existential notion that lived experience is pivotal to the way we understand the world, overtly framing his stance as a reaction against phenomenology.
If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice. (2005, xv)

Foucault attempts to deny any materiality of body independent from or preceding cultural construction. Judith Butler asserts that Foucault ‘wants to argue – and does claim – that bodies are constituted within the specific nexus of culture or discourse/power regimes, and that there is no materiality or ontological independence of the body outside of any one of those specific regimes’ (1989a, 602; emphasis mine). This does not necessarily suggest that bodies lack corporeal form and experience, but rather that this materiality is indivisible from the socio-political, discursive forces that shape bodies and their inscribed behaviours, values and identities. There is, however, a contradiction here, for Foucault’s positing of body as surface to be written on, the ‘inscribed surface of events [...] totally imprinted by history’ (1980, 148) implies a substantial form existent before – and thus separate from, at least temporarily – inscription (Butler 1989a, 604). The inconsistencies in Foucault’s work, while problematic, reflect its unfinished state; as Oksala notes, Foucault passed away before he finished elaborating his theories (113).

Clearly, a Foucauldian reading of re-enactors' embodied process is not a “neat fit” or is, at least, far from a complete one. How can re-enactors ‘us[e] their bodies’ subjection to [...] conditions [of a historical culture] so as to bear witness to the past’, as Schwarz claims, if they lack subjectivity? Furthermore, how can one argue for the epistemological possibilities of re-enactment’s affective, bodily methods by connecting them with Foucault’s notion of inscription, when said theorist sought to discredit the significance of such experience – and subjective experience as a whole? As Sally Ann Ness argues in relation to dance studies:

the benefits of his particular brand of interpretive analytics [...] would seem to come at a relatively high intellectual price [...]. It is the price of choosing conceptuality as the sole basis for understanding how human beings do [...] It is the price of denying actual embodied
experience, subjective, pre-subjective, or ecological, as anything but a pre-critical, naïve starting point for culturally focused inquiry. (2011, 28)

We might, however, utilise Foucault and avoid paying this (too steep) price by adopting an intertheoretical stance, which seeks to reconcile these tensions through reinterpretation via complementary approaches.

There seems a potential to appropriate Foucault for a body that does as well as is done to in cultural construction – a body that participates in its constitution as an ‘inscribed surface […] totally imprinted by history’ through the lived experience he sought to deny. This reinterpretation, while clearly departing from his expressed objectives, is supported by Oksala’s idea that Foucault’s framing of bodily pleasure as ‘a counterattack against normalising power’ presumes an ‘experiential understanding of body’ and represents an ‘effort to rethink’ the constructing of experiences through and as historical conditions (97). Here, Foucault moves towards a concept of experiential bodies as both open to and defying cultural constitution (113). In this act of appropriation, I engage with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, in particular, his notion of embodiment and its development in post-phenomenology. My focus here (de)parts from a (purely) Foucauldian reading of re-enactment, whilst retaining contact with his notion of bodily inscription and the evident convergences with Connerton’s work, utilised above. Despite Foucault’s expressed intellectual antagonism towards phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty’s approach to embodiment offers a way to unravel and develop Foucault’s interpretations of body and experience in relation to their function in re-enactment and the possibilities they present for both the practice and the wider study of history.

At its most basic level, phenomenology is the study of human experience and perception – how we experience and perceive the immediate world, the phenomena, around us. In Stanton Garner Junior’s words, phenomenology seeks to:

redirect attention from the world as it is conceived by the abstracting “scientific” gaze (the
objective world) to the world as it appears or discloses itself to the perceiving subject (the phenomenal world); to pursue the thing as it is given to consciousness in direct experience, to return perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment. (1994, 2)

Merleau-Ponty developed the work of phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger to emphasise the significance of corporeal experience to consciousness. Articulating the embodied nature of the way we perceive, Merleau-Ponty asserted that our relationship with the world is essentially a kinaesthetic one – mediated by our senses and our (bodily) (re)actions. This places embodiment at the centre of being. The body is:

what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there. […] Bodily existence […] continually sets the prospect of living before me […]. The body expresses total existence, not because it is an external accompaniment to that existence, but because existence realizes itself in the body. (2005, 147-8)

In this reading, embodiment denotes the way we experience, perceive, understand and constitute an intersubjective world through, with and in body, or what Merleau-Ponty often calls ‘body-subject’. This hyphenated term indicates the interconnection he perceived between body and mind, sensation and thought, self and world. As alluded to above, Merleau-Ponty argued that our body is instrumental to the way we not only experience but also interpret the world. Body is ‘the fabric into which all objects are woven and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of [our] “comprehension”’ (235).

For Merleau-Ponty, this ‘world’ is not an object of our cognitive creation, nor is it a composite of totalising forces that frame and create our being; or, perhaps more accurately, it is not only these things. These aspects contribute towards a world that is embedded in (but not wholly constituted by) our lived experience, as our lived experience is embedded in our interacting with and in the world. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, ‘the world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible’ (2005, xvi). Self and world, subject and object are, in this interpretation, interconnected; ‘inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly
outside of myself” (363).

Merleau-Ponty does not claim that our ontology is confined by bodily experience. Rather, he suggests bodily experience and cognition are intermeshed; the bodily is cognitive, the cognitive is bodily: ‘every perceptual habit is still a motor habit and here equally the process of grasping a meaning is performed by the body’ (2005, 153). Similarly, his emphasis on embodied experience, cognition and (inter)subjectivity does not deny cultural construction, but nor does it erase the pre-discursive; rather, it interconnects them, positing bodies as active participants in – and fundamental to – the process of constitution.

The distinction between the two planes (natural and cultural) is abstract: everything is cultural in us (our Lebenswelt is “subjective” (our perception is cultural-historical) and everything is natural in us (even the cultural rests on the polymorphism of wild being). (1968, 253)

Incarnate meaning precedes culture nature distinctions, and, as Merleau-Ponty alludes to and Casey (1989, 209) confirms, one might even argue that this dichotomy and the closely related mind-body binary are, in fact, modern abstractions.

This theorisation both parallels, and markedly differs from, Foucault’s ontological perspective. Merleau-Ponty and Foucault share a desire to destabilise dichotomies between psyche and body, interior and exterior, self and world. Both conceive body and bodily identity as historical ideas, rather than natural entities. While Foucault denies the subject as anything but an externally constructed fiction and poses body as a mainly passive recipient/product of socio-political forces, Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, emphasises subjectivity, framing subject as body (or body as subject) and this body-subject as both inscribed by and inscribing culture.

Why this sojourn into philosophical debate? Quite simply, it is pertinent to analysing how re-enactors might precipitate and participate in a (re)inscribing of body and bodily ways of knowing, through subjective, embodied experience. As my simplified snapshot above illustrates, embodiment, as a category of analysis, ‘collapses distinctions between mind and body, subject and
object, self and world, interiority and exteriority, thought and sensation’ (Mascia-Lees 2016, 154).

The reconfiguring of these binaries (re)places Brewer’s critique of re-enactment as being ‘about doing things, not about thinking things’ as misplaced, reflecting and perpetuating what I, along with others, perceive as a false polarity, falsely stratified. By destabilising the binary between (mental) cognition and (bodily) experience, which pervades much of the work on historical re-enactment, we can analyse the practice as a doing as knowing, with and through a substantial theoretical underpinning. Through the notion of embodiment, we can more rigorously consider some of re-enactment’s embodied, performative activities as a process of making sense through senses – of knowing, bodily, the past (or aspects of) through bodily sensation. (Re)conceiving historical inscription as embodied in the sense not only of being embedded in the body but also engaged with by the body, enables us to consider how a re-enactor might (in)form her body-subject through affective, corporeal experience.

Over four decades after the original publication of Merleau-Ponty’s The Phenomenology of Perception, Casey argued that ‘the human body as it is lived by human persons’ remained, at that time, one of the most overlooked topics in academia (1989, 208). Since then, engagements with notions of embodiment in numerous discourses and fields have achieved much towards addressing this. Bodies – in their fleshy, sensory doing, being and feeling – continue, however, to cause queasiness amongst many scholars, as evidenced by reactions to historical re-enactment. And yet, if the topic of lived experience is anywhere near as significant as Merleau-Ponty and countless others have argued, then the somatic, experiential nature of re-enactment – and of history – is an element we need to engage with, if only to consider how embodied practice could be developed for greater effect (and/through affect).

I have pursued this objective by analysing how, through (re)doing activities from past cultures – in this case, dancing steps they danced, sewing like they sewed (by hand, without velcro!) - re-enactors might develop an experiential relation to past bodies (Johnson, 2009, 2014b, 2015). In
the experience of dancing, described earlier, I found that the restrictive clasp of the corset and the encompassing length of the gown heightened my awareness of the ‘period’ garments I wore and the way I moved with(in) them. They impressed upon me the way clothing shapes not only the physical appearance of our bodies but also the ways in which we can(not) move. The consciousness of my bodily posture and motion was augmented by moving in a way I am not usually accustomed – in the assemblés, dos-à-dos, and rigadoons of Regency dance, for which the style of dress I wore was, in part, designed. Merleau-Ponty’s framing of embodied experience as our primary way of being in and experiencing the world proposes a ‘common understanding of being, formulated through anatomical similarity between subjects, realised within a shared world’ (Card 2011, 139). This suggests that our experience of the world is shaped by the specificities of our bodies – colour vision through eyes at the front (rather than side) of our head, a limited yet refined range of hearing and smell, opposable thumbs that allow us to grip objects – shared features which produce some degree of shared, similar, or relatable experience.

Foster draws on this notion to suggest that historical research can reanimate past bodies whose traces remain in the archives, creating ‘a kind of stirring that connects past and present bodies’ (1995, 7). Through their research, historians can, she asserts, develop ‘an affiliation, based on a kind of kinesthetic empathy between living and dead but imagined bodies’ (7). Foster emphasises that this is not a mystical experience but rather a very bodily one: ‘rather than a transcendence of the body, it’s an awareness of moving with as well as in and through the body as one moves alongside other bodies’ (10). I have argued that a similar, perhaps even more poignant form of kinaesthetic empathy can be developed through embodied practice – in the case of re-enactment, by (re)doing activities and (re)creating similar experiences from the period being studied (Johnson 2009, 2014b, 2015). In a very practical and tangible way, that corset, and the experience of moving with(in) it, gave me a (partial) embodied sense of (a particular class of) female bodies of the Regency past – of the way they were presented, how their movement may have been shaped by their
clothing, and how those garments reflect the ways in which they were expected to move and behave. The felt physicality of this, coupled with the sensory experience of listening to period music on period instruments, tasting Regency flavours in Regency dishes, and seeing other bodies clad in period clothing, invoked for me a (partial) sense of a Regency lady’s experience of being (or particular aspects of it).

But there was something equally enlightening in recognising the gap between embodied experiences, the recognition that when I ripped off that corset, there was no social expectation for me to return to it. That the temporary sensation of having my ribs crushed, stomach forcibly held in, back rammed into a posture that for me felt unnaturally straight, is not an ongoing process that would eventually alter my physiognomy – and way of breathing – permanently. Similarly, in the moment I tripped on the dress – in that moment of failure – I understood something of a Regency woman’s experience because of the very gap between my way of moving and hers, moulded by the different aspects of our different times and cultures. As Card suggests, embodied knowledge derives not only from experiences we align with but also those we do not recognise (2011, 140). This is not to say that Regency ladies never tripped on their gown, but unlike the majority of women of that time and class, I was without the embodied familiarity of dressing and moving in this way. Growing up, I did not receive instruction from a dance master in the proper dance styles, which was, as EDHDA’s co-organiser John noted, considered so essential for ladies and gentlemen of the period. Nor was I accustomed to wearing and moving in a corset and a floor length dress. Neither have I been shaped, in my body or behaviour, by the contextually specific social expectations of gender and class, as a real-life equivalent of Emma Woodhouse would have been. As Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000) demonstrated, social values, expectations, customs, and behaviours are interconnected with the demonstration of these customs and behaviours through our bodies. Reflecting on these differences, and my own ineptitude, produced for me a certain understanding of bodily and cultural experience, of my present and an other’s past. This is an area in which the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty
falls short: in the consideration of how the particularities of differing bodies and identities affect experience, perception, and cultural conditioning.

In my (mis)doing of Regency dance, I felt that my concurrent experiences of re-enacting and conducting ethnographic fieldwork blurred. Although not identical, there were crossovers between the methodologies I was utilising and researching. As anthropologist Judith Okely argues, when in the field, it is ‘frequently the very recognition of the anthropologists’ incompetence that makes them realize how special the labour [i]s’ (2007, 69). I read ‘special’ here not as (or only) distinctive, but also as significant – as a means of cultural insight. The foregrounding of bodily experience for me derived, in part, from this experience being ‘marked’ or ‘framed’ in a way that it most probably was not for Regency dancers, being, as it was, part of their extra-daily existence. This marking separated my experience from hers, but it also heightened my awareness of my bodily doing and feeling and my subsequent analysis of experience and culture then, and now.

One of the central concerns regarding re-enactment as public historiography hinges upon the impossibility of ever completely recreating an experience from the past (Brewer 2010; Handler and Saxton 1998). Experience is, after all, both individual and contextual. But difference does not necessarily negate understanding if we engage critically and reflexively with the disparity. This is an area of practice that these re-enactors could, by and large, develop further. If we accept ‘the fact that re-enacting can never fully capture what it might have felt like to be there’ we can, as McCalman and Pickering suggest, ‘make a virtue of that shortcoming. The very element of unpredictability […] can become a source of creative exchange with the past, provided it is frankly acknowledged’ (2010, 13). Schneider (2011) does so by questioning the belief that inaccuracy and incompleteness undermine authenticity, offering a metaphor of re-enactment as ‘misquote’ – as not the event (or other enactment), yet something akin to it. This presents a way to understand the practice not as wrong but rather ‘live’, an embrace of the dynamic ‘againness’ of performance (42), as a pedagogy of failure. Performance allows more ‘mistakes’ than History does, and, as Schneider insightfully
recognises, sometimes in disparity (between my experience and hers, between the actual and the mistaken, between accomplishment and failure) something authentic emerges (13). If there is knowledge to be gleaned from the gap between the (re)performance and its source, between our bodies and theirs, then those moments when re-enactment inevitably falls short of converging then and now (as it so frequently does) may offer significant moments of learning. The pull of the thread, the jab of the corset, the trip of the dance offer the doer a way into the has-been-done.

Re-enactors have described intense moments of felt historical connection, moments when they feel almost as if they actually were in the past, as if they really were, for a moment, the historically inspired persona they perform. In such moments, the performativity of re-enactment evokes a poignant and transitory affective response in the re-enactor, through a suspension of disbelief and an embrace, as I have argued elsewhere, of the make-believe of theatre (Johnson 2009). Actors prize these moments when the self and the character fuse and confuse, but perhaps of stronger epistemological – and ontological – significance is the tangible, kinaesthetic empathy and bodily (re)actions interconnected with, to return to Foucault, a form of cultural inscription that is enhanced over time, through a moulding of present bodies with the materials, movements and mannerisms of past bodies. This can be understood as akin (but not equivalent) to Judith Butler’s notion of the cultural construction of bodies and bodily identity through sedimented acts – a central component of the performative processes through which gender is constituted.65 Drawing on Foucault, Butler reconceives gender as ‘the legacy of sedimented acts, rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence, or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic’ (1988, 523). Cultural values and expectations, Butler argues, accumulate on, in, and through body. This sedimentation is produced by, and produces, a ‘set of repeated acts’, which inflict a ‘repeated stylization of the body’ and embodied identity (Butler 1999, 43). Working in correlation with the (re)production of gender

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65 As stated in my introduction and literature review, in her seminal work on performance art and civil war re-enactment, Schneider also utilises a notion of ‘sedimented acts’. She applies the term, however, in a different sense and with a different focus, as elaborated in chapter one of this dissertation. For more, see: Schneider (2011).
'enacted on a large, political scale', *sedimentation* occurs as part of a:

more mundane reproduction of gendered identity [that] takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence. Consider that there is a sedimentation of gender norms that produces the peculiar phenomenon of a natural sex, or a real woman, or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in a binary relation to one another. (1988, 524)

While Butler’s focus is on the social constituting of gender and its significance for the imposing of gender and sexual norms, the above makes apparent that this construction extends to other categories of socio-cultural identity and experience. Re-enactment of the form studied in this dissertation (re)creates some of the ‘repeated, stylised acts’ of past cultures, *(re)membering*, through embodiment, the historical practices which instituted these ways of doing. In this way, re-enactors might – and, I would argue, *do*, at times – connect with and utilise an understanding of body as ‘a historical situation […] a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation’ (1988, 521). I am not, of course, suggesting that re-enactors conceive their practice in relation to Butler’s reading of Simone de Beauvoir (2001), but rather, I posit this concept as a lens through which to analyse the dynamic between body, culture, temporality, and knowledge in re-enactment.

Exploring such notions demands we recognise – and consider the implications of – the significant difference between the repeating of stylised acts in the context of re-enactment and in the everyday performativity of socio-cultural (and thus, political) sedimentation. The former acts, performed, as they are, out of context, can only resemble their past repetitions, for although they carry aspects of historical mores, they are divested of the weight of the wider historical conditions in which they were, before, repeated. If re-enactment is a form of cultural constitution, it is a partial, *micro* (sub)cultural (re)construction that can never override the *macro* cultural constitution of everyday identities, behaviours, and customs, the innumerable accumulations of which are
sedimented with far greater force, frequency, duration and import, than the playful, chosen repetitions of a leisure activity. This issue of choice is significant, not only because it further reduces the socio-political stakes of re-enactment’s form of *sedimented acts*, but also because it discords with Butler’s (slightly inconsistent) denial of the subject’s ability to participate in its constitution and the distinction she increasingly drew between *performativity* and performance. Butler communicates that performativity occurs within ‘a highly regulatory frame’ and not at the volition of a choosing subject. Embodied identities are not an open choice; there is ‘only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very “taking up” is enabled by the tools lying there’ (1999, 185). That is to say that the socio-cultural conditions of one’s given context confine and create one’s processes of social, bodily becoming.

When re-enactors learn and execute skills and activities from the past, they engage in a deliberate (re)doing for the purpose of pleasure that must be distinguished from the repetition of everyday, subconscious, social conventions enforced through cultural expectation (and the denigration of those who do not conform). Learning and employing “h.a.” sewing and shoemaking techniques and how to move with and in these “h.a.” garments and footwear, while executing “h.a.” sword fighting techniques, might, for example, not be an overtly framed performance, but it is a performance none-the-less: a (re-en)acting. These particular repeated, stylised, and stylising acts do not constitute identity, gender or otherwise, enacted, as they are, in the context of play, for entertainment. They derive, however, as demonstrated through Connerton, from particular historical, social, and cultural behaviours and expectations, which propagated, reinforced, and constituted a regulated frame that once was – in this case, in medieval and Regency pasts. We can also interpret leisure activities – including, but not restricted to, re-enactment – as part of the much larger socio-cultural, historical situation which moulds, and to whatever extent controls, our embodied identities, beliefs and behaviours. In this way, re-enactment can arguably contribute to
re-enactors’ cultural *sedimentation* and, to return to Merleau-Ponty, their ‘historicising’ as *body-subjects*, navigating and embodying past corporeal skills and understandings in the conditions of the present. Butler suggests that body, for Merleau-Ponty, is:

>a “place of appropriation” and a mechanism for “transformation” and “conversion”, an essentially dramatic structure which can be ‘read’ in terms of the more general life it embodies […]], a modality of existence, the ‘place’ in which possibilities are realized and dramatized, the *individual appropriation of a more general historical experience*. (1989b, 86)

The re-enacting body performs a heightened yet playful engagement with the way all bodies enact, re-enact, and reinvent culture and history. What I am suggesting here does not carry the political and social significance of Butler’s use of *performativity* and *sedimentation*, but it carries import for understanding re-enactment as a methodology and the way processes of entertainment, as well as of overt social and political structures, contribute to the shaping of bodily being and doing in and of the world.

One might wonder if this interweaving of post-structuralism and phenomenology through notions of *sedimentation, performativity, inscription,* and *embodiment* is too problematic. There are certainly points of contention here, but they can produce, I believe, productive tension. As the above citation suggests, Butler herself coupled aspects of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty’s theories; the influence of Merleau-Ponty’s notions of lived experience, corporeality, and embodiment are especially apparent in her early work, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’ (1988).

Nevertheless, the way Butler perceives the relations between culture, nature, body, and subject present challenges for the present endeavour. Underpinning my interpretation of re-enactment as a methodology is an argument for a body that is both cultural and natural, and which participates in the discursive constitution of bodies and culture, through lived experience. As Foster articulates, ‘the possibility of a body that is written upon but that also writes […] asks scholars to approach the body’s involvement in any activity with an assumption of *potential agency to participate* in or resist whatever forms of cultural production are underway’ (1995, 15; emphasis mine). The ‘potential
agency’ of a body actively involved in cultural constitution would seem, however, out of joint with Butler’s (1999, 2014) claim that body and identity not only conform to but are also formed by signifying practice.

Following Foucault, Butler’s notions of *performativity* and *sedimented acts* (mainly) reject a natural or biological concept of body, asserting, in a compelling appropriation of J. L. Austin, that bodies, and specifically, gender and sex, are discursive products. As demonstrated above, for both Butler and Foucault, discursivity includes cultural, bodily acts, as well as linguistic ones. Indeed, Butler emphasises the importance of these corporeal doings for *performativity*, arguing that ‘gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self’ (1988, 519). However, *sedimented acts*, like Foucault’s *inscription*, do not, according to Butler, embed into an organic body, interacting with biology to develop identity; rather, they *constitute* bodily identities and even subjectivity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that ‘gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts […] that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (1999, 43-4). Following this, in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler claims that ‘tacit normative criteria *form the matter* of bodies’ and explores how we might ‘understand such criteria not as epistemological impositions on bodies, but as the specific social regulatory ideals by which bodies are trained, shaped and *formed*’ (2014, 54; emphasis mine). The subject is, for Butler, correspondingly constructed: ‘the materialization of norms requires those identificatory processes by which norms are assumed or appropriated, and these identifications *precede and enable the formation of a subject*, but are not, strictly speaking, performed by a subject’ (2014, 15; emphasis mine). She does, however, mitigate the seeming extremity of this assertion by clarifying that ‘to claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body’ (2014, 10). There is discord in Butler’s work
between her phenomenological and post-structuralist impulses and correspondingly, between her theorisation and my appropriation of it.

These disparities can be reconciled by adopting Casey’s positioning of Butler’s cogent concepts within a reframing of the relation between nature and culture. In a post-phenomenological paper on *embodiment*, Casey questions Butler’s subjugation of nature by culture, expressing that:

> in the very face of Butler’s convincing constructionism, I nevertheless want to ask whether there are modes of embodiment that resist being reclaimed so quickly or so well – that are not the ghostly creatures of the “prior delimitation of the extra-discursive”, much less the residua of certain texts. Are there not aspects of bodily being that, if not undecipherable, or uninscribable, are still not the mere positings of discursive or textual practices? (1989, 208)

Casey’s reclaiming of embodiment as lived, subjective experience *as well as* discursive product is pivotal in this effort to utilise Foucault, Butler, and Merleau-Ponty together to interpret re-enactment as an embodied, performative epistemology. As opposed to conceiving culture as demarcated from, and entirely constructing of, nature, Casey argues that culture and nature might be better understood as inherently intertwined, meeting in the *lived* body. He suggests that the essence of body ‘lies in its very capacity to be at once thoroughly natural and thoroughly cultural’ (208). Body, in this reading, is a ‘dense matrix of nature and culture’, a reading that acknowledges the significance of both cultural construction and fleshy, sensory corporeality (208). Neither one nor the other constitutes body; rather, body and bodily identities develop from the inextricable interaction between them. If this sounds familiar, it should, for the foundations of Casey’s argument were formulated much earlier by Merleau-Ponty, in his assertion, cited above, that ‘everything in us’ is both cultural and natural.

One might ask of this theorising of re-enactment the same question posed by Taylor in regards to the repertoire: ‘why this insistence on the body?’ (2003, 86). As Taylor responded, ‘because it is impossible to think about cultural memory and identity as disembodied. The bodies
participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain
taxonomic, disciplinary, and mnemonic systems’ (86). Claiming it is ‘impossible’ to even consider
cultural memory and identity divorced from embodiment is, one must acknowledge, an
overstatement, but there is certainly a compelling case for recognising and exploring the
interconnection between bodies, memories, and identities. Bodies, as Merleau-Ponty articulates, are
imbued with and imbue the socio-cultural, and through this, history, memory, and identity. It is
with this sense of body as the site in which culture and nature (inter)act, suggested by Merleau-
Ponty and developed by Casey (along with Foster, Novack, Card, and others), that I utilise Butler’s
notions of sedimented acts and performativity and Foucault’s concept of inscription.

This resonates with Connerton’s work on bodily practices as a form of memory, referred to
above. Connerton enriches Foucault’s concept of the body politic by recognising the agency of
bodies, elucidating an interrelationship between material, ideological, and embodied culture. Bodies
are, he argues, ‘socially constituted in the sense that [they are] culturally shaped in [their] actual
practices and behaviour’ (1989, 84). He suggests that people embody history via what he terms bodily
practices – activities through which we participate in and absorb culture. But the relationship
between body, performance, and culture is not one-way. Butler perceives a possibility (that
somewhat contradicts her wider argument, discussed above) for bodies to resist and subvert
dominant cultural constructions through performance – in particular, drag performance and its
potential to expose and question heteronormative values and behaviours through demonstrating
their constructed nature.66 Taking this bodily vein further, dance theorists such as Cynthia Novack
have utilised phenomenology to argue for the body’s ability to absorb, enact, and also shape culture,

66 It must be conceded, however, that Butler makes the distinction here by placing ‘drag’ outside of ‘framed’ performance:
‘on the street or in the bus, [a non-normative gender] ‘act’ becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no
theatrical conventions [no frames] to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed, on the street or in the bus,
there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no
conventions that facilitate making this separation’ (1988, 527).
through both everyday and extra-daily movement and performance. Culture is, Novack argues, embodied, ‘movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate [...] In these actions we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it’ (1990, 8). Bodies – in their sensory, affective, experiential perceptions and behaviours interconnected with “intellectual” processes – actively participated in and contributed to the historical cultures re-enactors attempt to re-enliven through their own physicality.

Repositioning Foucault and nudging Butler further towards a (post)phenomenological framework of embodiment opens more complementary dialogue with Foster’s concept of kinaesthetic empathy and notions of embodied knowledge more broadly. It is the (subtle, partial, but repeated) altering of re-enactors’ encultured embodiment which enables and augments the potential for kinaesthetic empathy with those lived bodies no longer present, and their lived experience of being in and of the world, embracing (not ignoring) temporal, social, and cultural specificity. Interpreting inscription and sedimentation as the embodied enculturation of a participating subject shifts these notions towards Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. Wacquant suggests that Bourdieu’s notion of the body is a ‘socialised body’; it is not ‘an object’ but ‘the repository of a generative creative capacity to understand, and the bearer of a form of “kinetic knowledge”’ (1992, 20). This is an encultured body-subject that exercises agency and develops embodied knowledge and psychosomatic conditioning in response to one’s surroundings and experiences, enabling one to be better navigate a social world. These corporealised, cognitive systems constitute habitus: ‘cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world’ as ‘internalized, embodied social structures’ (Bourdieu 2010, 470). Bourdieu here extends Merleau-Ponty’s assertions regarding intentional arc and maximum grip. Merleau-Ponty argued that:

my body is geared into the world when my perception presents me with a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they expect from the world. This maximum sharpness of perception and
action points clearly to a perceptual ground, a basis of my life, a general setting in which my body can co-exist with the world.\(^67\) (2005, 225)

These are not consciously employed skills but rather deeply ingrained (or, to connect with Butler, *sedimented*) ways of being and doing through which, as they are refined, one increasingly comes to exercise by habit in a mode that feels natural. In Bourdieu’s words, *habitus* is a ‘way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and in particular, a disposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination’ (2003, 214).

As a habituated, embodied knowledge, *habitus* can involve, as Greg Downey states, ‘forms of material change to the body, an avenue in which past training becomes corporeal condition’ (2010, 25). Bodily changes acquired through a particular practice can influence the way practitioners perceive and respond to the world more widely: ‘embodied knowledge shapes the subject […] affect[ing] a person’s kinaesthetic style, social interactions, and perceptions outside of the game’ (23). The embodied knowledge and conditioning of re-enactors – developed through an interconnected process of affective experience and the acquisition of skills – can alter the way these people move, act, and perceive both within and outside of their practice: their way of being in and of the world. Their changing habituations can also elicit new acquisitions of tastes and notions of distinction (to borrow from Bourdieu), interconnected with the material and intangible culture they engage with through (re)creating, and re-enacting with, ‘period’ garments, shoes, tools, weapons, techniques, skills, and activities. By developing a *habitus* influenced by and responding to some of the contextual conditions of the past, they invoke and potentially/eventually emulate some of the cultural values and expectations to which these are attached in their present embodiment. As Bourdieu stated:

*the body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. What is*

\(^{67}\) For more on Merleau-Ponty’s notions of intentional arc and maximum grip, see, for example, Hubert Dreyfus (1996) ‘The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Embodiment.’
‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is. (Bourdieu 1990, 73)

*Habitus* is ‘history made flesh, a corporeal enculturation’ (Downey, 23).\(^\text{68}\)

This is not to suggest that re-enactors are becoming historical figures (or their romanticised stereotypes). By inscribing their bodies with ‘period’ garments, shoes, and tools, and (in)forming their bodies with ‘period’ ways of moving and behaving, however, re-enactors may alter their way of (inter)acting with and through socio-cultural customs, expectations, and conditions. As Bourdieu argues, ‘strictly biological differences are underlined and symbolically accentuated by differences in bearing, differences in gesture, posture and behaviour which express a whole relationship to the social world’ (2010, 190). In parallel with the discussion of *sedimentation*, I would emphasise that this altering of re-enactors embodied enculturation does not erase or overcome the other, more primary aspects of their ontology. These changes can contribute, however, to embodied knowledge grounded in corporeal, cognitive being, through doing, developing a liminal, or, at least, liminoid way of being-in-the-world, ‘betwixt and between’ present self and past other. In a sense, what I am suggesting here is the opposite of claims for and criticisms of re-enactment as “time-travel”. What occurs in re-enactment is very much of the present – and it is this present-ness that provides its strongest potential for understanding a particular, and frequently overlooked, aspect of history: lived experience. Re-enactors are not transporting themselves into the past, nor are they becoming a Civil War soldier, a medieval knight, or a Regency lady. The practice may, however, facilitate an ongoing development of a kind of kinaesthetic empathy and *habitus* that alters not only the physicality of those re-enacting bodies but also aspects of their embodied enculturation. Through

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\(^{68}\) Downey draws heavily on neuroscience to support his assertions. The convergences between Philosophy and Science in this area are fascinating and offer significant possibilities for cogent, mutually beneficial exchange to both fields. Herein lies a danger, however, for the humanities. Within the hierarchy of knowledge, humanities subjects are already frequently subordinated to science. If we begin to utilise scientific evidence to substantiate our theoretical analyses, we risk further undermining the perceived validity of the qualitative research we undertake. Obviously, this concern is not intended in an Orwellian ‘humanities good, science bad’ view, nor is it intended as an argument to preclude neuroscience and the value it may offer to our work. But it is intended as a cautionary expression and a recognition that it would be prudent to be very conscious and critical of the way we utilise this work.
this, some sense – a partial, performatively framed sense – of past experience can develop, which, if critically analysed, can provide insight into that past, and the re-enactor’s present.

For scholars outside of the more overtly artistic disciplines, some of these claims might be hard to swallow. Yet in many respects, they converge with the core research method of Anthropology: ethnography and, in particular, a phenomenologically-inflected or ‘embodied’ model of ethnographic participant-observation. In this methodology, as Okely states, ‘the anthropologists’ conscious and hitherto unarticulated bodily adaptations are disentangled, and research is examined as a process of physical labour, bodily interaction and sensory learning which constitutes a foundation for the production of written texts’ (2007, 65). This posits ‘the bodily experience of the fieldworker as research process and source of knowledge’ (66). Consider the similarities between Okely’s description of this form of fieldwork and the analysis of some of the processes and perspectives of re-enactors’ engaged with in this thesis.

Knowing others through the instrument of the field worker’s own body involves deconstructing the body as a cultural, biographical construction through a lived and interactive encounter with others’ cultural construction and bodily experience. This is not merely verbal, nor merely cerebral, but a kinetic and sensual process both conscious and unconscious […]. The anthropologist learns anew to sit, talk, stand, walk, dress, dance and labour at hitherto untried tasks. […] This process is often counter-intuitive when compared to the anthropologist’s original cultural socialization yet, after extended participation, may become instinctive. Narratives reveal the anthropologists’ transformations through embodiment and emerge as vital paths to knowledge and the writing up of cultural alternatives. (77)

Key tenets of ethnography as a research process – in particular, participant-observation – are being increasingly engaged with, both in practice and theory, in Dance and Performance Studies.69 Ness notes that a ‘methodological conversion or paradigm shift, away from an emphasis on “objective” observation and toward one on embodied participation currently characterises the leading work in

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69 Although the following is, perhaps, an oversimplifying generalisation, applied ethnography seems to have been influential in many Performance Studies departments in, for example, the U.S. and Australia, whereas in the U.K., a closely related methodology, *practice-based research*, appears to be more widely used.
the cultural and cross-cultural study of dance’ (2004, 124). She argues that ‘there is something new to be learned, some otherwise inaccessible understanding to be gained […] through the methodological shift to embodied practice’ (124). I am suggesting that, in re-enactment, the ‘inaccessible understanding’ that might be obtained (or rather, approached) relates to the lived experience of people from the past and in the present – aspects of their being in and of their temporal, social, embodied world.

In ‘The Making of the Modern Body’, a special issue of leading new-historicism journal, *Representations*, editors Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur noted that ‘scholars have only recently discovered that the human body itself has a history.’

Not only has it been perceived, interpreted, and represented differently in different epochs, but it has also *been lived differently*, brought into being within widely dissimilar material cultures, subjected to various technologies and means of control, and incorporated into different rhythms of production and consumption, pleasure and pain. (1986, 23; emphasis mine)

While historians have been largely hesitant to engage with body through somatic practice, they have, as the above suggests, become much more open to considering body as a topic for analysis. Similarly, although the fleshiness of embodied ethnography has not been embraced by many historians, the discipline has, as discussed in chapter one, taken an ethnographic turn and is increasingly recognising the validity and benefits of participant-observation as a model of research. There are significant differences between how re-enactors and academics are practicing their respective forms of participant-observation. Missing, or in some cases, more limited, amongst these re-enactors, for example, is the rigorous analysis that follows ethnographic fieldwork. Considered through this lens, however, aspects of re-enactment that have ruffled academic feathers do not, in fact, diverge as radically from academic methods as they are often presumed to.

The likening of re-enactment more generally to ethnography is not even particularly novel. Agnew, adopting Lowenthal’s (1985) well-known adage, suggests that ‘the past is literally a “foreign
country” that the reenactor – as eyewitness and ethnographer – tours, stages and describes on behalf of the audience’ (2007, 304). Snow (1993) extends this comparison further, suggesting that practices at the Plimoth Plantation living history museum are strongly influenced by ethnography, utilising methods of participant-observation to understand culture. In claiming re-enactment as a form of ethnographic participant-observation, we need, however, to acknowledge the significant limitation of this comparison: the past is less present, and thus less able to be immersed in, than the cultures studied by anthropologists. The past might be a foreign country, but it is one we cannot visit, populated with people we cannot speak with, and whom we cannot even see (or hear, or smell, or touch), at least, not in the flesh. Re-enactment is a form of participant-observation, but one in which the “researchers” are not observing, speaking or participating with their subject of study, but with the reanimation of those selves through their selves.

I have largely refrained from becoming involved in an extended critique of the many areas for improvement in re-enactment because such matters have, as demonstrated throughout this dissertation, already been discussed so extensively by others. There are, however, a few particular historiographical and ethical issues (for people past and present) that need to be acknowledged here. My experience of wearing and moving in that green dress as a young, female, university student in the twenty-first-century in Australia’s warm climate diverges significantly from the various experiences of women in a British climate in the early 1800s. As stated before, experiences, while often communal in nature, are also individual and contextual. Arguing for the epistemological and ontological significance of kinaesthetically induced empathy in re-enactment and, in a sense, for embodied, performance-based practice as a broader methodology presents a danger of falling into another binary and of ignoring the many limitations and problems of a bodily approach to knowing. There is also a risk here of not distinguishing clearly enough between the potential for, and the achievement of, embodied insights. As Ness argues in relation to dance research:
embodied practice does not necessarily yield an understanding […] that is fundamentally different from observationally weighted methodologies. [Participation] may simply lead to a more detailed, more articulate understanding of human movement, or it may produce no apparent difference whatsoever. (2004, 133)

These re-enactors did, at times, observably blur fact and fiction; in some, but not all instances, this was deliberate and playful. Their engagement with fact and fiction was not a destabilising of a binary; rather, it was an obscuring of a spectrum, an interplay between evidenced interpretation, conjecture, and imagination. The style of re-enactment frequently practiced at large, public festivals, evidenced by the Jane Austen Festival in Bath, seldom signposts what is and is not authentic and nostalgia inevitably colours the history portrayed. Svetlana Boym points towards the consequences nostalgia carries for historical representation, the danger of it becoming ‘an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure’ (2001, xiv). Some of these re-enactors are representing the past without any real accountability, and the ethical implications of this need to be considered. Dwight Conquergood (1991) and Kirsten Hastrup (2013), amongst others, highlight the symbolic violence ethnographers inadvertently commit through fieldwork. Writing on others is twofold – in writing about Aylwen, the co-organiser of EDHDA, I rewrite her, “stealing” something of her identity for my own purposes, even as traces of my work rewrite her, leaving an unintended, and very minor, but undeniable mark.

Are attempts to performatively (re)create historical cultures a means of engaging with often-overlooked aspects of history, such as the so-called domestic pursuits of cooking and sewing, or are they a form of misinterpretation, invasion, and theft, the way ethnographies of contemporary cultures have been theorised to be? We know that when working in minority, disadvantaged or vulnerable communities, we need to be especially attentive to reducing the potentially detrimental effects of our research, in both collecting data and presenting our interpretations. Do we owe figures of the past a similar concern? After all, they are not here to question or verify our representations or offer alternative readings. When re-enacting culture, there is also a need, which Schneider (2011)
emphasises, to ensure that prejudices and misconceptions regarding race, gender, or sexuality – or any other aspect of identity – are not (re)presented, unless done so in a critical pose. These issues, however, are not specific to re-enactment – written history is fraught with many of the same problems. As in all methodologies, the limitations and problematics of re-enactment need to be continually wrestled with, but that wrestling should not negate the potential of the practice. We can insist on analytical rigour whilst recognising the value of (per)forming bodies and what can be learnt when one (mis)steps – every habituated embodiment juxtaposed with every trip and gasp that occurs under the weight of one’s failure to perform as other.

Re-enactors do not polarise their different ways of knowing; they interconnect the intellectual and bodily as complementary and non-stratified facets of knowing. The research and theory engaged with in this chapter suggest that, in parallel with this perspective and in contrast to the dominant concerns in the literature, re-enactors’ affective mode of engagement is not, necessarily, divorced from so-called intellectual understanding. The pervading influence of conceptions that stratify nature and culture, body and mind, living and static archive, are the dichotomies causing many to struggle with the experiential nature of re-enactment. Together, the theorists engaged with here enable us to reconceive the (inter)dynamics between mind, body, nature, and culture in re-enactment, paving a path towards assessing, and accessing, the epistemological possibilities of the practice. This potential, I have argued, resides within the cultivating of kinaesthetic empathy; the altering, however minutely, of embodied sedimentation and habitus; and in the process of knowing by a (performative) doing, which, like all performance – from social to theatrical – is always a (re)doing, of both past and present.
To conclude, for now; and then?

As this thesis has claimed and many before me have asserted, the academy has, or has had, a tendency to think in polarised, and stratified, dualisms: past and present, nature and culture, body and mind, affect and the so-called intellectual. And, of course, between the archive and all of the intangible modes of recording, researching, and remembering the past that have, within Performance Studies and related disciplines, gathered under the collective notion of the *repertoire* (Taylor 2003). As we have seen, perspectives on these topics are opening, expanding, increasingly engaging with the grey – the continuum between past and present, affect and intellect. Many of us are thinking, more and more, in terms of spectrums, overlaps, interconnections, and a blurring of boundaries – between disciplines, between cultures, between theory and practice, research and teaching, and between the conceptual binaries this chapter opens with. My project has sought to engage with and contribute to these theoretical developments, through a focus on historical re-enactment – or, more specifically, recreational, cultural re-enactment. Of course, conceptual binaries – albeit shrinking ones – remain. These manifest and are confronted differently in different disciplines, as this dissertation illustrates. There is a notable gap in the dominant perspectives on embodied and performance-based ways of knowing – both as a subject and a methodology – in the two disciplines this thesis most responds to, Performance Studies and History. The preceding chapters have sought to highlight these divergences and to bring the largely disconnected scholarship between these two camps into closer communication.

Of course, there is a danger of falling into another dichotomy here: between History and Performance Studies. There are, in fact, points of parallel and collaboration between these two disciplines, which this thesis seeks to cultivate. Furthermore, interest in historical re-enactment, as demonstrated in chapter one, is not limited to these two fields. The interdisciplinary nature of the scholarship, which spans areas covered by Anthropology, English, Film Studies, Folklore, Heritage
Studies, Sociology, Museum Studies, and Tourism Studies, demonstrates that historical re-enactment as a topic of inquiry is relevant to many across the academy. The recent “wave” of discussion of historical re-enactment, however, has arguably been most prominent within Performance Studies and History, particularly regarding the “live” variety practiced in living history museums, heritage festivals, and amongst hobbyists. My dual engagement with History and Performance Studies reflects my own positioning in both disciplines – developed, in part, by a liberal arts education.

I have argued that disciplinary differences have considerably influenced the ways in which the somatic, experiential, and performative elements of re-enactment (and other related practices) have been interpreted in these fields. This divergence is hardly surprising, given the nature of these themes and their markedly stronger relationship to the field of Performance Studies. Performance scholars have, of course, a vested interest in asserting the epistemological and pedagogical value of such methods. Similarly, academic historians possess, as Brewer (2010) and McCalman and Pickering (2010) note, a motivation for questioning what are considered to be non-scholarly forms of historical methodology and practice – an impetus heightened by recent growth in the presence and popularity of public historiographies.

This points towards a convergence in History and Performance discourses, a common persistence of presumptions and prejudices regarding lay practices, perceived in contrast to their professional equivalent in the production of knowledge, art, or both. In Performance and Dance Studies, this manifests in a tendency towards treating re-enactment in professional arts contexts positively, in contrast to the derision or dismissal of historical re-enactment. Historians are, as discussed and demonstrated previously, increasingly embracing ethnographic and sometimes even

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70 For examples of the positive treatment of re-enactment used in live/performance art and dance, see: Lutticken (2005) *Life Once More* and Schneider (2011) *Performing Remains*. 
more overtly creative, arts-based methods of research and writing, whilst refuting the ability of those outside academia to do the same. Even where traditional dichotomies between bodily, affective, performance-based engagements and reflective, intellectual, written epistemologies have been traversed, there persists a predilection for demarcating and generalising the experiences and significances of the supposed other – those who (re)do history rather than (re)write it. In both disciplines, there has been a reluctance to acknowledge the similarities between the methods used by re-enactors and the way academics and professional practitioners investigate the past. There is also a propensity to overlook the vast variation of forms of re-enactment and the varying sensibilities and customs that are demonstrated and utilised across and within these forms.

My thesis has endeavoured to acknowledge, demonstrate, and analyse some of this diversity, focusing on what I have termed recreational, cultural re-enactment and its overlaps and interconnections with other “scenes” in and related to the broader field of historical re-enactment. The use of participant-observation has been crucial to this objective, enabling detailed, ethnographic analysis of recreational re-enactment from an outsider (non-re-enactor) perspective, in one of only a few such accounts across all forms of living history. The comparative evaluation of particular case studies, from different countries, seems to be unique to this project. Primary in my work has been the exploration of the case studies in relation to both key themes in the scholarship and key themes that emerged from my fieldwork, acknowledging and engaging with concepts and perspectives from within the subculture.

The individual and comparative analyses conducted in this dissertation reveal points of parity and divergence between these examples of the practice and suggest areas of commonality in the wider practice of recreational, cultural re-enactment. Participants from each case study demonstrated a range of ways of conceiving and approaching historical accuracy, suggesting a more complex,
multifaceted, and varying relationship with ‘authenticity’ than is often presented in the literature. At Beorg Wic, there was a tension between the pursuit of historical accuracy and “having fun”. The attitudes towards “h.a.” demonstrated by Staple (the authentic underwear sewers) and the leader of AAF in regards to demarcating areas for ‘period’ and ‘non-period’ tents reflect common representations of re-enactors as “sticklers for authenticity.” Assertions regarding the importance of enjoyment by members of Danelaw, epitomised by Sam, who protested against the regulation to wear gauntlets in all “battles” by running onto the field wearing nothing but these, demonstrate a more *carnivalesque* approach, inverting and parodying dominant perspectives through humour and chaos. This highlights the significance of play in the practice. As we saw, EDHDA has an official tagline regarding accuracy, at least in relation to costume: “admired, but not required.” Aylwen, the co-organiser of EDHDA, does, however, insist on period undergarments for her regular dancers, in order to create the “proper structure” for dancing. In both EDHDA and the groups at Beorg Wic, there was an expectation that members develop the historical accuracy of their garments and accoutrement as they progressed in the practice. While expectations and standards of historical accuracy varied across the many activities in the Jane Austen Centre’s festival in Bath, period costume was required for all of the balls and the majority of participants wore elaborate Regency attire. As this suggests, the importance of costume in the pursuit of authenticity was apparent in all three case studies, aligning with literature on the practice more broadly.

At Beorg Wic, historical accuracy was also raised in relation to fighting techniques and the (re)construction of weapons and buildings. In EDHDA, the quest for authenticity also manifested in the dance instructor’s insistence that participants understand the genres of the dances and the cultural milieus in which they were practiced, in order to (re)enact contextually appropriate manners. He argued that etiquette was fundamental to these dance forms and thus to authentic performance of them. At the Jane Austen Centre’s festival in Bath, there was a conception of
authenticity that moves away from historical accuracy towards connection with, and faithfulness to, pasts which were, at times, explicitly fictional. This is seen most prominently in the layering of an actual location with a sense of (fictional) place. These sites are imbued with significance through their association with fictional settings; many participants attached importance to these lieux d’imagination, much as they did to the lieux de mémoire in which Austen lived. This authenticity was not linked exclusively with the original fiction but also extended to its mediatised form in film, unsettling traditional relations between original, copy, and adaptation.

The lack of uniformity in matters of authenticity reflects a diversity of motivations amongst re-enactors, and the purposes of the practice itself. In all my case studies, re-enactment functions as a vehicle for experiencing a sense of being in – or of – the past through affective engagement; and yet, for a majority of participants, this was not their only, or even primary, objective. My research suggests that recreational re-enactment has other, more concrete functions, which parallel more “mainstream” pastimes and interests. The groups and events studied here provide opportunities for the participants to develop skills in arts, crafts, and trades, most prominently in costuming but also in weaponry, armoury, and the (re)creating of other period items such as jewellery, tents, and tapestries. This was framed as a significant drawcard by many participants, particularly those who were not economically privileged enough to be able to afford these often costly pursuits through more formal education. In a similar vein, these groups are also functioning as an extension of sports, with many people becoming involved through a prior practice of sword fighting, archery, or historic dance.

Particularly in the case of the Jane Austen festivals and especially the one in Bath, re-enactment also operates as a form of fandom, encouraging participants to celebrate and connect with Austen’s literature. In these cases, it is more often the fictional “worlds” and characters, than the books as works of literature, which are being idolised. Perhaps because of this, the appeal of
“dressing up” like Austen characters is very prevalent amongst, and potent for, the participants of JAF UK. Wearing costume is also a key motivation for a majority of the re-enactors at Beorg Wic, and in a less overt way, that event is also a gathering of fans (of history, medievalism, Vikings, knights et cetera). Given the similarities and crossovers between recreational, cultural re-enactment and cosplay, it seems likely that fandom may be a feature of many styles and instances of the practice.

Public pedagogy is a core purpose of many of the groups and organisations studied, facilitating, as they do, the sharing of knowledge and skills and through this, the study of history (or what we may term cultural heritage) via a range of methods – creative, physical, and intellectual. In the case of EDHDA, re-enactment also serves as a way of (re)connecting with traditions, aiding their (re)continuation (and in some cases, (re)invention). An important aspect of this for many participants is the fostering of social customs and values and in particular, the manners and behaviours associated with these. Interconnected with purposes of pedagogy and tradition in these case studies, particularly the groups at Beorg Wic and JAFA, is a social function, demonstrated most prominently by the pursuit of what many participants perceive as a more traditional and stronger sense of community. At Beorg Wic, there was a sense of a broad connection between all of the societies present, gathering together the smaller, more pronounced communities formed by each group. These communities are, for many participants, a key component of their social network and their attraction to re-enactment. There was also a sense of being connected to a broader field of re-enactors, both nationally and internationally, and a sense of identification with (and often involvement in) fantasy, science fiction, and anime subcultures, as well as other re-enactment groups.

A similar expression of community was present at all of the EDHDA events, both in terms of individual dance, costume, and re-enactment groups and ‘scenes’ and a broader, national and
international community of historic dancers. This community appears to be part of a larger field encompassing re-enactment, folk, costuming, and cosplay, but the degree to which groups and individuals identify and interact with these vary considerably. The Jane Austen Centre’s festival in Bath functions as an annual, international gathering of historic dancers, Austen fans, re-enactors, costume makers and cosplayers, with many participants attending every year, or close to. This was particularly the case amongst many of the dance groups, whose events suggested a more solid sense of community; but many of the activities at the festival carried a sense of a transitory, but re-visited, collective. The overarching importance of the community function of these case studies, most notably in the way it manifests in Danelaw and at Beorg Wic, mirrors Erisman’s (1998) and Cramer’s (2010) claims for recreational re-enactment, through their practice in and analysis of the SCA in the U.S. This suggests that this social function may be pervasive in recreational re-enactment groups in different cultural contexts.

The notion of heritage is a key theme in both the literature and the case studies but once again, perceptions here differ. Concern has been expressed that re-enactment is a jingoistic practice that celebrates white heritage and excludes people of other ethnicities, either due to, or under the guise of, historical accuracy (Schneider 2011). This seems to be sadly accurate in some cases, but I found no evidence of this in the groups and events I studied. The participants of all three case studies are multicultural and not once was ethnicity (or any other contextual factor) raised in a negative or problematic light. At both Beorg Wic and JAFA, participants from diverse backgrounds expressed a feeling of support and belonging in their re-enactment communities and the belief that, in these groups, “it doesn’t matter” what race or religion one is (unpublished data Nov. 2012). Some of the re-enactors at Beorg Wic dressed in period clothing from Mediterranean cultures and some of the talks at the Jane Austen Centre’s festival emphasised the cultural influences and benefits from
China, Japan, and India on and in Regency England. This contributed at least some degree of diversity, enriching the historical (re)presentations.

Similarly, there were no gender limitations or prejudices evident in any of the activities. There was, however, a predominance of male fighters at Beorg Wic and a predominance of female dancers at EDHDA’s balls and those at the Austen festival in Bath, reflecting traditional gender norms. All of the participants I spoke with, male and female, asserted that this gendering of activity was a reflection of participants’ interests, rather than a policy of exclusion, and that men and women were actively encouraged to participate in all activities. Overall, these case studies depart from the troubling gender and race representations and relations that have been perceived in some forms of the practice.

The relative freedom from socio-political issues in these groups is in large part due to the nature of the histories being engaged with and the way participants do so. In all instances, it is romanticised aspects of heritage or cultural history (rather than what is more commonly considered to be History) that are being performed. These “histories” are all of comparatively safe – or politically less loaded – periods. Although the Regency era, with its gross mistreatment of the lower classes and the atrocities committed in the expansion of Empire is, in fact, a very confronting and troubling period, it is not the Regency past, per se, that these re-enactors perform. At both JAFA and JAF UK, it is dance culture and, particularly in the latter, the openly sentimentalised, fictional Regency-ness of Austen that are re-enacted. The selective and idealised representations occurring in all of these case studies present their own considerable historiographic issues. Despite their pedagogic function, however, these are not official educational or archival programmes and do not claim to be entirely accurate or comprehensive histories – or, in some cases, history at all. Whatever epistemological and ontological claims I present here, these groups and events are, primarily, modes of entertainment. While there were instances of efforts to represent the past more accurately,
overall these performances were much less a depiction of history than they were active, creative engagements with aspects of cultural heritage. It is the self-confessed, often explicitly embraced, romanticised approach to the past that connects diverse re-enactors in the present with each other and with something of history. This is a heritage divested (to whatever extent that is possible) of ethnicity, bridged not by racial lineage but through shared fandom.

There is, certainly, a sizeable serve of nostalgia in this fan-based approach. The nostalgic mood appears to be a prominent component of historical sensibilities in many instances of re-enactment and one for which the practice has been vigorously criticised. Conceptions of nostalgia and its influence on re-enactors (amongst others) have, however, been largely reductionist, frequently failing to recognise the complexity and variations of nostalgic modes, levels, causes, and effects. As demonstrated in chapter six, nostalgia is a tendency that manifests in relation to particular aspects, at particular times and not a perpetual mode of perception applied to all elements, by all people.

Claims regarding the nostalgic impulse to escape into a rose-tinted past, which is perceived to have a completeness of experience lacking in the present, oversimplify the way participants view both the past and the present. What seems to be most commonly (but not exclusively) desired by the re-enactors discussed here is an ontology they attach to the pre-modern rather than the realities of existence of any particular era. Most particularly sought after were a sense of strong community and active tradition. These sentiments were more manifest at Beorg Wic and JAFA than at JAF UK, due in part to the aforementioned scale and diversity of the latter.

Nostalgia for the past does not, however, always equate with a desire to depart the present. Living history can also serve to heighten appreciation for modernity and an understanding of the challenges and limitations of life in the past, in contrast to a more comfortable present. The appeal of recreational re-enactment can also be located in the activities themselves, as skills or hobbies,
rather than in a perceived experience of an alternative world. Of course, the two can be (and were at times) connected. In the cases studied here, what was more common than desiring to escape into the past was an endeavour to utilise traditions of earlier times to enhance the present.

Similarly, while there were examples within all of the case studies of nostalgic idealisation of history, there were also notable endeavours to consider, represent, and even emphasise the realities of the past. Although many have criticised re-enactment for its lack of reflexivity, there are, as my case studies illustrate, forms of the practice in which some participants demonstrate a consciousness of the playful, incomplete, at times paradoxical, and even inaccurate nature of their engagement. Clearly, historical sensibilities within groups, forms, and ‘scenes’ vary. The levels, forms, and functions of nostalgia in re-enactment are diverse, as are the ways the past is perceived and portrayed.

A far greater number of cases in both countries would need to be studied in order to formulate a comprehensive interpretation of the relation between Australian and British re-enactment. There is, however, one apparent and concrete difference in my case studies, which is likely to apply to many others – the significance of place. Medieval and Regency re-enactors in Britain are more likely to be able to utilise genuine, period spaces, which add an authentic setting and significantly enhance the immersive experience. It is not only the structure and features of these spaces which augment the experiential authenticity of re-enacting at such sites. It is also the lingering, palpable presence of temporal(ised) place, of the experience of being in these lieux de mémoire, in touch, literally, with their emplaced histories. The authenticity of these locations can derive from both history and fiction. In the case of the festival at Bath, sites that featured in Jane Austen’s life, her novels, and even their adaptations in film, are utilised by many participants as sources of authentic experience, facilitating the desired connection with the Regency romance of Austen.
Australian re-enactment, by contrast, does not allow for such emplaced experiences as Australians rarely re-enact their own history, as chapters three, four and six reflect (Gapps 2003a). In this sense, Australian re-enactments of medieval and Regency culture are immediately less authentic than many of their counterparts in Britain, Europe, or even the United States, where many groups are animated by their own history. More significant than this issue of inauthentic place, however, is what underlies it: (dis)placement. Globalisation, migration, and the diasporic implications of both are creating a global landscape where many people are geographically distanced from the countries and cultures of their origins. While the atrocities of Australia’s colonial history render this past deeply inappropriate and unappealing as a subject for play, other periods of British and European history and, more specifically, themes we associate with these periods, such as medieval chivalry, Viking exploration, and Regency romance, hold widespread appeal. They can facilitate, as my case studies demonstrate, a potentially unifying rather than excluding means of connecting with heritage in a multicultural present, fostering inclusive tradition and transcultural community. As discussed in chapter six, the satisfying of a need for tradition and community seems pivotal to all of the Australian groups and events I studied. This seems to be, in part, a response to the young, uncertain and somewhat troubled sense of identity that permeates this nation. It is also, however, a broader reaction to a more globalised sense of rapid change, creating what is often perceived as a far less rooted, less bonded societal connection. The potential of re-enactment to be utilised for socio-cultural cohesion in a similar way to applied performance and community arts projects is an area that warrants further research.

As I have elucidated, the relation between re-enactment and performance is significant. I have posited re-enactment as being *performative* in three senses: as theatrical (or, more accurately, performance-based); as the performing of bodily acts, evoking sensory, embodied experience; and as a form of micro-cultural construction through ‘a set of repeated acts’, which result in a ‘repeated
stylization of the body’ and embodied identity (Butler 1990, 43). This application appropriates Butler’s understanding of ‘the body’ as a ‘manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation’ (1988, 521) but aligns this with Casey’s emphasis on the lived, embodied experience (and agency) of this enculturation. This frames aspects of re-enactment as potential, partial, and playful (re)inscription, altering, however minutely, present identities – or, more specifically, ontologies – with a fragment of a particular version of medieval, Regency, or other past. I have argued that the theatricality and corporeality of re-enactment’s performativity are interconnected, mirroring a broader, inherent relation between performance and bodies. Together, these two aspects of re-enactment’s performativity enable the third, more challenging, component. Contradicting criticisms elicited by the so-called theatricality of re-enactment, the bodily, performance-based approach of the practice can, as others have begun to explore and this dissertation seeks to further, be interpreted as its key source of potential as a methodology – specifically, I have asserted, as public pedagogy and epistemology. This conception of re-enactment can be understood as akin to Taylor’s notions of the repertoire, and of performance as an episteme, and Connerton’s complementary concept of bodily practices. While diverging markedly from traditional archival methodology, a performance-based approach to learning, knowing, and recording history corresponds with the contemporary interpretation, made prominent by historian Greg Dening, of history – in its unfolding, in its records, in its writing – as performance.

In order to respond to current calls to assess re-enactment as a methodology by elucidating the relation between experience and evidence, affect and the intellect, it is necessary to (re)consider the relation between mind and body and between culture and nature. I approached this by encouraging further interaction between post-structuralist and (post)phenomenological theory, drawing on Foucault’s notion of inscription, Butler’s concept of sedimented acts, Merleau-Ponty’s idea of embodiment, Casey’s argument for body as the intersection of culture and nature, and
Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. The oft-quoted somatic, affective nature of re-enactment – what I have understood here as its embodied, performative approach – is validated by a theorisation that interconnects body and mind, nature and culture, fleshy corporeality and signifying discourse. This intrinsic correlation enables the study of both, through each other. It also facilitates engagement with an aspect of history still often overlooked by academic historians: lived experienced.

The embodied knowledge of re-enactors – potentially developed through an interconnected process of affective experience and the acquisition of skill – may begin to alter, however minutely, the way these people move, act, and perceive in and outside of their practice, their way of being in and of the world. By developing a habitus influenced by and responding to (some of the) contextual conditions of the past, they invoke some of the cultural values and expectations to which these are attached in their present embodiment. This (subtle, partial, but continued) altering of re-enactors’ embodied enculturation augments the potential for kinaesthetic empathy with those lived bodies no longer present, sedimenting something of their lived experience through and in re-enactors’ corporeal forms. Re-enactment can never completely capture the experience of people in the past, or even come close. This gap, however, can be utilised to enhance understanding; kinaesthetic empathy can be created by recognising disparities as well as convergences between bodies and cultures, by engaging with those moments of failure. This embodied empathy enables insight into both past and present, and the (dis)parity between them. In the examples studied – contrary to claims that re-enactment is characterised by a collapsing of past and present and a universalising of experience – temporal, social, and cultural specificity is embraced, by being embodied. Similarly, the perceived tension between realism and affect in re-enactment is, at least within my case studies, a productive interconnection: realism enhances the affective experience, affect enlivens the realism. Together, realism and affect enhance these re-enactors’ sensation of past cultures – or elements thereof.
As with most research, my investigations raised points that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. The possibilities of play and imaginative engagement in re-enactment, although touched upon here, offer an avenue for further research, as does the role of fandom in re-enactment, its relation with other forms of fandom, and the notion of re-enactor as ‘fan-scholar’. Comparative analysis of a greater range of forms and instances of re-enactment, across countries and cultures, might enable a more comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences between different styles of re-enactment and to what extent and in what ways these vary in different locales. As alluded to earlier, there appear to be parallels between re-enactment and practice-based research. Investigating this avenue might offer another fruitful way of conceiving and assessing the pedagogic and epistemological possibilities of re-enactment and how practice-based research might be further utilised for public engagement. This brings us to another path for further exploration: the implications of re-enactment methods for the academic study of history – a topic relevant, to a certain extent, to research methodologies but more pressing, I would argue, for the ways in which we teach and (re)write the past.

On the topic of methodologies, while I have argued for the advantages of ethnographic research, it is also important to recognise the limitations of this method. As discussed in the preceding chapter, ethical issues are raised by the conducting of fieldwork. The fashioning of people’s experiences into academic writing from which the author gains benefit is an ethical challenge that needs to be acknowledged, reflexively analysed, and carefully handled. Although I have endeavoured to engage with re-enactors’ perspectives, my ability to do so is curtailed by many factors: my comparatively minor immersion in their field, the challenges of reproducing experience in writing, and my academic perspective and objectives. These factors, however rigorous the critical reflexivity, inextricably colour fieldwork experiences and the subsequent interpreting of them. Similarly, the interview and questionnaire responses I received will inevitably have been influenced
by the framing of my questions and the social, cultural, and power dynamics between myself, the interviewer and them, the interviewees. Even when observing and participating “as any other” re-enactor, the environment itself was altered by my outsider, researching presence in it. What is offered here is thus, to adopt Hastrup’s framing of ethnography, ‘not the unmediated world of the “others”, but the world between ourselves and the others’ (1992, 116). The ‘world’ of these re-enactors is the object of my analysis, but it is also, inevitably, an ‘intersubjective creation’, moulded in and through the liminal space of interaction between self and other, re-searcher and re-enactor (117). It is for these reasons that my ethnographies are presented, as outlined in my methodology chapter, as fictio – not as something false but rather, as Geertz defines ethnography, as something fashioned, recognising the interpretative processes through which they were created (1973, 14).

This project has sought to foster communication between a range of voices between disciplines and between academia and practice. Negotiating these at times conflicting perspectives and areas of research has been fundamental to interpreting and, I hope, better understanding this form of public history, through a focus on recreational, cultural re-enactment and its relation with scholarly historiography and other methodologies. There is, as I have endeavoured to demonstrate here, something of epistemological value in the experience of re-enacting itself. Re-enactment’s possibilities, however, do not expunge its limitations nor the problematic elements of the practice that others have noted. As Novack argues in relation to Dance Studies, there is a danger in both extremes, in ‘reducing lived experience to theoretical abstraction’ and in elevating embodied knowledge over all other forms of knowing (1995, 180). This is piquant for both re-enactors and for those of us who analyse the practice. And yet, for many re-enactors, as this thesis has made clear, their practice is primarily a hobby and engagement with community, and they may well suggest that academics, like me, are over-theorising or simply missing the point. As suggested above, it is
important to acknowledge the positionality and limitations of our conceptual interpretations and negotiate our (my) relationship with re-enactors' own, varying perspectives on the practice.

It is hardly surprising that re-enactors are enthusiastic about their practice and process, but for those who do want to be “taken seriously” by scholars, it would be prudent to channel their excitement towards methodological rigour and self-reflexive, constructive criticality. If re-enactors complemented their embodied knowledge with critically reflexive analysis – tacking to and fro between how embodied and cultural experiences parallel and how they diverge, what works and what fails, what they can relate to and what they cannot – they could develop a deeper understanding of both past and present. On the other hand, we should not discredit a practice because it features somatic, performative techniques; rather, we might consider what implications – and perhaps even areas of potential enrichment – such an approach could have for our own disciplines. As Pickering states: ‘despite its obvious pitfalls and dangers, there is much that a careful historian can learn about context, about material conditions, about possibility, from re-enactment as a methodology’ (2010, 126-7). It is increasingly pertinent for scholars interested in history to analytically engage with other ways of understanding the past, given the ever-growing popularity and variety of such forms in the public sphere. Once again, a continual back-and-forth-ness – between application and reflection, theory and practice, endorsement and critique – may enable re-enactors and academic historians alike to negotiate the unstable ground of ‘doing’ history and find a fruitful way forward.

I have argued that the potential epistemological significance of the affective, experiential aspects of re-enactment are interconnected with an ontological shift: a subtle altering of ways of being in and of the world. This is not to claim that such change is a definite or in any way absolute outcome of the practice; it is a possible process, not a guaranteed product. Furthermore, this process can only ever be partial, by which I mean both subjective, in the sense of being individually
variable, and incomplete, very incomplete. This thesis posits re-enactment as a limited and irregular episteme – a way of knowing riddled with pitfalls and yet, as I hope I have demonstrated, considerable possibilities as well. The potential significance of embodied ways of knowing stretch far beyond re-enactment, emerging, as they are, in a multiplicity of fields, through discourses on and practices of pedagogy, methodology, epistemology, and ontology. Whilst retaining criticality regarding the aforementioned limitations, academic discussion of historical re-enactment is moving towards joining this interdisciplinary foray; it is about time.
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