

Again as Before: Reenactment

Historical reenactment is about the reproduction and naturalizing of history... then there are these counter-reenactments that are about keeping a wound open...

—Sharon Hayes, 2013

... [I]t really seems as though old Hegel, in the guise of the World Spirit, were directing history from the grave and, with the greatest conscientiousness, causing everything to be re-enacted twice over, once as grand tragedy and the second time as rotten farce...

—Friedrich Engels, 1851

This interdisciplinary seminar will explore the history, theory, and practice of reenactment in order to better understand its cultural ubiquity and allure.

Reenactments act out past events, sometimes to the letter, sometimes not, sometimes

on purpose, sometimes inadvertently. They

can take the form of dramatizations, celebrations, comedic hyperbole; some reenactments replicate and thus validate scientific experiments, and some repeat physical and/or psychical suffering.

Reenactment can thus be approached as descriptive of rites, as a genre of vernacular history that should itself be historicized, as requisite component of the scientific method, as integral to current understandings of trauma and its treatment, and as a technique

of representation. The seminar will study the relation of precedent events to their reenactment, the difference between live reenactments and technically mediated ones,

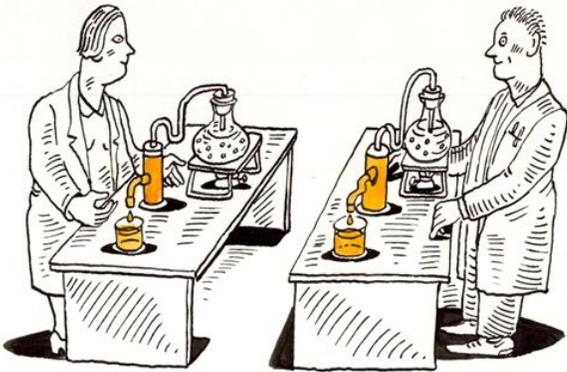
ARGUMENT-IN-IKEA REENACTORS



New Yorker cartoon, April 6th, 2019

and the presuppositions about subjectivity, sameness, time, memory, truth, and experience that undergird the concept of reenactment.

Reenactments are a staple of the contemporary world: from rituals of all kinds, pageants that reenact historical events, war reenactments and living history museums, to reenactments in documentary films and theatrical performance, media objects like



animated gifs, Instagram's Boomerang, the lip-synch app TikTok, and Twitter's now obsolete Vine, courtroom reenactments and reenactments of courtroom drama, and looping clips that anchor newscasts and also serve as vivid background.

Further, scientific experiments must be reenacted for scientific inquiry to progress: the results of experiments must be replicable. And yet there's currently a replication crisis: many scientific results

can't be replicated by other researchers conducting the same or similar experiments. The crisis has emerged not only because of errors and even outright fakery, but because of the general low esteem, for professional advancement, of replication studies. Would framing replication as reenactment illuminate the scientific method and the current crisis differently? Would applying some of the basic meta-scientific distinctions, e.g., the one between conceptual replication and direct replication, be useful to humanists working on historical reenactment and performance?

To survey reenactment's ever expanding field requires contributions from a wide range of disciplines: history, anthropology, psychology, visual studies, performance studies, film studies, documentary arts, art history, and the natural sciences. Seminar leaders John Muse and Vicky Funari will bring their expertise as media makers to the field, sharing the contemporary revival of reenactment in works as diverse as Joshua Oppenheimer's 2012 *The Act of Killing* and the web series and Netflix show *Drunk History*. Suffice to say, artists and filmmakers have long worked with reenactment: Robert Flaherty's groundbreaking 1922 film *Nanook of the North* is less the

documentation of Inuit life than the reenactment of typified actions that emerge as much from Flaherty's idea of said life as from Flaherty's Inuit informers. Artists have also more self-consciously engaged with reenactment. For example, in *The Eternal Frame* of 1975, the collective Ant Farm reenacted the Kennedy assassination, seeking neither to present new forensic detail nor enliven memory of the event, but to reframe if not stabilize its volatilized media image, Abraham Zapruder's compulsively repeated film of the assassination. Artists also use reenactment to reconstitute otherwise vanquished histories, as Jeremy Deller did in his



The Eternal Frame (dir. T. R. Uthco and Ant Farm Collective: Doug Hall, Chip Lord, Doug Michels, and Jody Proctor, 1975)

2001 work *Battle of Orgreave*, a grand reenactment of a 1984 strike and its violent suppression, which featured eight-hundred historical re-enactors and two-hundred former miners who had participated in the original conflict. Artists also use reenactment tactically and paradoxically to renovate works that have been considered singular, live, ephemeral, unrepeatable, survived only by their documentation; Marina Abramović, famously in her 2005 work *Seven Easy Pieces*, reenacted her own performances as well as those of Vito Acconci, Valie Export, Joseph Beuys, and others.

The seminar will also, with the help of workshops facilitated by theater practitioners, filmmakers, and curators, engage in reenactment as a research practice. Thus, reenactment will be treated as both an object of inquiry and a technique of inquiry. An exhibition at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery on reenactment will thematize this entanglement of object and technique and give the Haverford community an opportunity to engage with reenactment and the work of the seminar. As the faculty proposing this seminar also coordinate the *Strange Truth* film series, the latter will also be appropriately themed with visiting filmmakers and scholars joining the seminar when appropriate.

Reenactment then, ubiquitous and yet only newly theorized, is both a worthy topic of scholarly research and a way to conduct research, a way to make vivid and palpable objects and practices, particularly when these are replete with acts and circumstances that can be better known and understood through doing, repeating, and making public. This seminar will expose participants and the community as a whole to this growing literature as well as to various performance strategies, the latter through workshops with special guest artists and filmmakers and challenging prompts.

Filmography:

The Act of Killing (dir. Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

The Battle of Orgreave (dir. Mike Figgis, 2001)

Capturing the Friedmans (dir. Andrew Jarecki, 2003)

Chile, Obstinate Memory (dir. Patricio Guzmán, 1997)

La Commune (dir. Peter Watkins, 1999)

Danube Exodus (dir. Peter Forgács, 1999)

The Eternal Frame (dir. T. R. Uthco and Ant Farm Collective: Doug Hall, Chip Lord, Doug Michels, and Jody Proctor, 1975)

Far from Poland (dir. Jill Godmilow, 1984)

Fires Were Started (dir. Humphrey Jennings, 1943)

Free Fall (dir. Peter Forgács, 1997)

From the Journals of Jean Seberg (dir. Mark Rappaport, 1995)

His Mother's Voice (dir. Denis Tupicoff, 1997)

Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie (dir. Marcel Ophuls, 1988)

I Am a Sex Addict (dir. Caveh Zahedi, 2005)

An Injury to One (dir. Travis Wilkerson, 2002)

In the Land of the War Canoes (dir. Edward Curtis, 1914)

Jason and Shirley (dir. Stephen Winter, 2015)

Las Madres de la Playa de Mayo (dir. Susanna Blaustein Munoz, Lourdes Portillo, 1985)

Listen to Britain (dir. Humphrey Jennings, Stewart McAllister, 1942)

Little Dieter Needs to Fly (dir. Werner Herzog, 1997)

Lonely Boy (dir. Wolf Koenig, Roman Kroitor, 1962)

The Maelstrom (dir. Peter Forgács, 1997)
Mighty Times: The Children's March (dir. Robert Houston, 2004)
Nanook of the North (dir. Robert Flaherty, 1922)
Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story (dir. Todd Haynes, 1987)
The Thin Blue Line (dir. Errol Morris, 1988)
Tongues Untied (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1989)
Waiting for Fidel (dir. Michael Rubbo, 1974)
What Farocki Taught (dir. Jill Godmilow, 1998)
The War Game (dir. Peter Watkins, 1965)

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