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1. Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Boucicaut Master* (London, 1968), 104–05.
2. John T. Plummer with Gregory T. Clark, *The Last Flowering: French Painting in Manuscripts, 1420–1530, from American Collections*, exh. cat., The Morgan Library (New York, 1982).
3. John H. Plummer and Gregory T. Clark, “Beyond Use: A Digital Database of Variant Readings in Late Medieval Books of Hours,” <http://arthur.sewanee.edu/BeyondUse/index.php>.
4. Patricia Stirnemann and Claudia Rabel, “The ‘Très Riches Heures’ and Two Artists Associated with the Bedford Workshop,” *Burlington Magazine* 147, 1229 (Aug. 2005): 534–38, 538.
5. L.M.J. Delaissé, “French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry, Part I: The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke by Millard Meiss,” *The Art Bulletin* 52, 2 (June 1970): 206–12, 206.

Viviane Gosselin and Phaedra Livingstone, eds.
Museums and the Past: Constructing Historical Consciousness

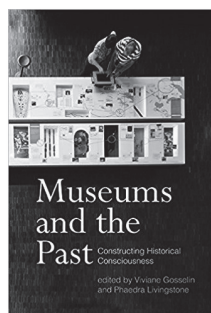
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History combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. It means both *res gestae* (the things that happened) and *historica rerum gestarum* (the narration of the things that happened). This is no coincidence.
 —G.W.F. Hegel¹

Concerned with the concept of historical consciousness—or, as the journal *History and Memory* defines it, “the area in which collective memory, the writing of history and other modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind merge”²—this collection of writings is focused largely on Canadian institutions and subject matter (despite the absence of any reference to nation in the title). The volume makes a solid contribution to what is a substantial, expanding body of scholarly literature investigating museums as sites of knowledge production and consumption.³ The editors, museologist Phaedra Livingstone and Viviane Gosselin, curator of

contemporary culture at the Museum of Vancouver, have assembled an impressive group of museum experts (including project managers, curators, and educators) and scholars from the disciplines of history, heritage, visual culture, and museum studies. The discussions, which range widely from close readings of institutional programming to the complex challenges attending the concept of public engagement, are effectively linked by the volume’s central premise: that historical consciousness can be developed or inculcated, and that it operates in the context of late capital-



ism and the challenges to narratives of nation-building and shared or unified consciousness. Comprised of fourteen essays that offer what the editors describe as “compelling juxtapositions” with each other, the volume is divided into three logically framed and linked sections. The first, titled “Programming Historical Consciousness,” presents case studies showing how markedly different institutions have worked to generate public interest in their exhibitions, whether travelling or permanent. Here, the focus is on the ways that museums have sought to change their methods of engagement with diverse audiences, acknowledging both the complexities of the past and its interpretations and the fact that history is always an intellectual and ideological construction. In Chapter Three, discussing *The Voices of the Canoe Project*, a web-based initiative supported by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of

British Columbia, authors Jill Baird and Damara Jacobs-Morris explain how this work was aimed at introducing students to Indigenous history, to Haida, Squamish, and Fijian material culture, and to the work of historical investigation and interpretation. Central to the project was the desire to explore cultural identity, epistemology, and practice by way of oral history, empirical research, and collaborative analysis. The goal, as the authors explain, was to “create a learning” where previously isolated traditions and scholarly practices—methodological and philosophical modes of being and thinking—could “live together” (a goal in keeping with the acknowledgement by museums and like institutions of the need to shed what might be called the static cultures of display and education in favour of technologically current and participatory modes of engagement). In contrast, Lianne McTavish’s consideration of the Torrington Gopher Hole Museum in Torrington, Alberta, in Chapter Four, demonstrates the promise, pedagogical and otherwise, of what are described (or categorized) as “ostensibly marginalized museums” and shows how a museum famous for its amusing, at times politicized dioramas of taxidermied gophers stays true to its popular idiosyncratic mission.

It is, however, Susan Ashley’s essay that offers the sharpest and most successful discussion of how museums seek to change their exhibition practices to address the complexities of contemporary society. Writing about the politically volatile situation attending the Royal Ontario Museum’s mounting of an exhibition of the Dead Sea Scrolls borrowed from the Israel Antiquities Authority, Ashley’s analysis is balanced, effective, and revealing. Prefacing her close readings of events with a brief history of the institution’s ostensible renewal under director William Thorsell and of a widely publicized new approach to museum practice replete with the aspirational tagline “Engage

the World,” Ashley narrates what was a clumsy and under-thought effort by the museum to broaden “public engagement” by way of a proverbial blockbuster exhibition. Rightly anchoring her discussion of the political turmoil occasioned by the exhibition of the scrolls by reminding readers of the contested and much criticized 1989 exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa*, Ashley brings necessary attention to the question of how institutions—born of the jangled layering of Renaissance, Enlightenment, imperial, and colonial ideologies—which are charged with the stewardship of cultural property and the mission to inform, educate, and enlighten diverse publics, are often-times ill- or under-equipped to do so.

The volume’s second section on “Measuring Historical Consciousness” considers institutionally generated data about viewer/visitor experience, from comment cards to mobile technology-driven exercises seeking to develop and quantify the historical thinking of youth. It is problematic, however, to presume that critical awareness of history as a mode of thinking and analytical lens can be effectively and thoroughly communicated and quantified, and that highly specific case studies can effectively address the larger concern of tracking historical consciousness and changes to it. Any consideration of the idea of measuring historical consciousness in the context of the museum (though addressed effectively, for instance, in the essays by Laurajane Smith on “emotional intelligence and registers of engagement” and by Lon Dubinsky and Del Muise on museums as “in-between institutions” fostering intercultural awareness) requires a larger frame of critical reference. That history as a subject is in steep decline in universities and that the knowledge of history seems to matter less to rising generations than other types of knowledge is not in dispute, and there is no assurance that

even the most adaptive, innovative, and self-scrutinizing institution can halt or repair this decline. Accordingly, the premise that a new museology holds the power to reverse larger intellectual trends seems under-argued or insufficiently contextualized. It is not that museums cannot introduce new strategies to inform and educate their audiences, but the questions of their effectiveness need to be considered in light of these larger realities.

It is logical, given the premise of the volume, that the question of “Instrumentalizing Historical Consciousness” is addressed in the third section of Gosselin and Livingstone’s book. Investigating how museums can serve as agents and advocates actively working for the development of historical consciousness while they must at the same time “frame historical narratives as ways to mobilize social change and achieve social justice,” this culminating block of essays is the most overtly ideological. In each of the essays there is the idea that museums must do more in addressing the conditions of contemporary life and bringing people to awareness about the operations of power, bias, and exclusion, with the goal of effecting real, beneficial and lasting change. In Chapter Eleven, Simon Knell writes thoughtfully and personally when he uses his recollection of a walk in Vancouver’s long-lamented Downtown Eastside as an introduction to a discussion of the role that museums can play in communities and the importance of culture in the nurturing of well being. In Chapter Twelve, Robert R. Janes, considering climate change and the depletion of natural resources, presents a forceful argument about the way in which many museums have avoided their responsibilities as sites of knowledge production and dissemination and have failed to act on the pressing issues of the day. And Jennifer Carter’s essay (Chapter Thirteen, “Out of the Box and into the Fold: Museums, Human Rights and

Changing Pedagogical Practices”) situates the reader in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, drawing attention to how evolving museum design—new thinking about circulation, the placement of installations, and the agency of visitors—can serve multiple pedagogical goals and influence thinking. The section is tantamount to a group call to action for a more overtly politicized museology.

The goal of the volume, to “consider how museography can increase historical consciousness and historical literacy in the public” (quoted by Janes, 224), is, of course, a worthy cause. However, the editors needed to be more deliberative in framing and honing the demands of the subject. First, the diversity of the character of museums in Canada is not sufficiently addressed, nor is the fact that given museums’ range in scale, typology, and mission, the relationship of thousands of institutions to historical consciousness varies vastly. And while no single volume could be expected to serve as a comprehensive stocktaking of the contemporary museum and the promotion of historical thinking, a case could be made for a volume that grapples more directly with the structural reasons for a widening lack of interest in the past, the concomitant rise of “infotainment,” the economic pragmatism of the blockbuster, and the constant struggle to balance the responsibilities of safeguarding cultural property while maintaining if not increasing attendance. These are, of course, connected phenomena and issues.

At its core, this volume demonstrates in myriad ways the need for museums in Canada (and elsewhere) to be attentive to the communities they serve, to be forward-thinking in their programming and educational efforts and transparent in their operations. However, while the essays in *Museums and the Past* offer useful, at times compelling insights about the challenges of nurturing historical thinking, overall the volume succeeds less as a call to the re-invigoration,

even re-awakening, of historical-mindedness in the context of public institutions. If historical consciousness is to play a significant role in productive or meaningful museum practice then any discussion of how it might be possible to change the historical sensibilities of museum goers through exhibition practices, programming initiatives, and other related institutional activities must be premised on a more aggressive and critical assessment of the decline of the importance of history across contemporary society. While there is no question about the validity of this collection of essays considering museums and historical consciousness—whether in Canada or elsewhere—the fact remains that the subject is too complex and too unstable to be potentially captured in a volume of this type, no matter how individually thoughtful the contributions or how deftly gathered and thematically organized.

These things said, the volume does invite reconsideration of the institutionally imbedded operations of public culture. Collective memory is vital to national (and arguably post-national) identity, civic mindedness, and the conscientious critically aware functioning of any society. The volume by Gosselin and Livingstone will encourage interested scholars, professionals, and citizen heroes to think about the place of history inside the museum walls and, it can be hoped, beyond them. ¶

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1. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. H. Glockner (Stuttgart, 1928), 97–98; English translation in Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History and Memory* 1, 1 (1989), 5.

2. *History and Memory*, www.indiana.edu/~rcapub/v17n1/17sb.html, quoted by the editors in their introduction, p. 5.

3. The volume is the fifth in the distinguished THEN/HIER Historical Consciousness and History Education Series. The History Education Network / Histoire et éducation en réseau is "the first pan-Canadian organization devoted to promoting and improving history teaching

by bringing together various constituencies involved in history education" (<http://ce.educ.ubc.ca/history-education-network/>). Other titles include *New Directions in Assessing Historical Thinking*, ed. Kadriye Erickson and Peter Seixas (New York, 2015), *Becoming a History Teacher in Canada: Sustaining Practices in Historical Thinking and Knowing*, ed. Ruth Sandwell and Amy von Heyking (Toronto, 2014), and *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, ed. Penney Clark (Vancouver, 2011).

Félix Nadar

When I Was a Photographer

trans. Eduardo Cadava and Liana Theodoratou. Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: MIT Press, 2015.

336 pp.

\$25.95 cloth ISBN 9780262029452

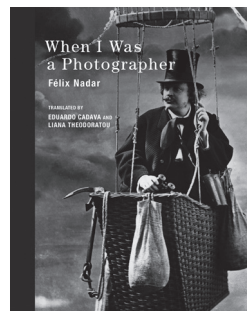
\$18.95 eBook ISBN 9780262330701

Charles Reeve

As the nineteenth century ended, the same seemed to happen to Félix Nadar's life in photography. Having sold his Marseilles studio in 1899, he published *Quand j'étais photographe* ("When I Was a Photographer") in Paris the following year, and an image from 1909 reinforces the sense that he has quit photography.¹ It shows him seated at a large table, pen in hand, examining us deliberately if not unkindly, with no camera in sight. Apparently, his work has shifted from photography to literature. However, since Nadar took the picture himself, it unsettles the pastness of the book's title. As Eduardo Cadava notes in his introduction to this lively rendering—the book's first complete translation into English—Nadar never stopped taking pictures, so the title "figures his death by anticipating it" (xiii). Or, as Rosalind Krauss suggests in "Tracing Nadar," a sensitive account of the awkward amalgam of science and spiritualism that influenced Nadar, maybe this "curious" title signals that photographers, like photography, had morphed from astonishing to unremarkable.² Perhaps Nadar wants to recover the "universal stupefaction" provoked only fifty years before by what he called that era's

"most astonishing and disturbing discovery—photography!" (2–3).

Given the competition—Freud, Darwin, steam, electricity, anaesthesia—privileging photography in this way might seem excessive. But one purpose of *When I Was a Photographer*, which comprises thirteen anecdotes



rather than a single autobiographical narrative, is to highlight photography's psychological impact. By freezing the world, photography captures things that our eyes miss. The camera trumps the eye, with effects that explode in Nadar's fourth chapter, "Homicidal Photography:" a young woman dies because "PHOTOGRAPHY wanted it..." (53). The incident concerns a wife who, having betrayed her husband, is dragged into abetting her lover's murder. However, instead of the acquittal usually produced by such cases, this one ends with the crowd demanding the wife's death and the judge, in what Nadar calls stupefying intellectual poverty, agreeing. The difference, Nadar argues, is photography's intervention:

[T]he service of the Prefecture has photographed the horror [of the battered corpse pulled from the water], and a devil of a journalist, always on the lookout, gets hold of the first print: since yesterday, people have been swarming the newsroom of *Le Figaro*, and all of Paris will pass by there. (51)

Photography, as Nadar says, pronounced "the sentence without appeal: DEATH!" (51).

And herein lies photography's interest for Nadar, elucidated slightly