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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 historia rerum gestarum (the narration of the things that happened). This is no coincidence.

—G.W.F. Hegel

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” —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. 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-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 oftentimes 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, overall the volume succeeds 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 each of the essays there is the idea that museums must do more in addressing the conditions of contemporary life and contributing to the nurturing of well being.

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 is 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 potently 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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2. History and Memory, www.indiana.edu/~re-capub/vr71vr72.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 Erickan 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
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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:

[The 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

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