INTRODUCTION

Historical Consciousness

Theory and Practice

Anna Clark and Carla L. Peck

In recent decades there has been considerable international research into the meanings, uses, and consumption of the past among various peoples around the world. These memory studies have been fuelled not only by the nationally oriented work of Pierre Nora and David Lowenthal, among others, but also by the exploration of commemoration, trauma, and genocide as sites of history. Holocaust, and then postcolonial, studies precipitated an expansive research interest that was less nationally bound and more defined by ethnicity and experience. Both of these closely related fields have seen a wealth of theoretical speculation, semiotic analysis, and investigation of representations of the past and of those who produce them.¹

With that burgeoning field of research also began the important interpretive work of interrogating and making meaning from history sites, such as monuments, textbooks, remembrances, and exhibitions. The result of such scholarly attention meant these markers in effect became "works" of history, as laden with meaning as any text, and demanded critique accordingly: memorial architecture was analyzed and interrogated, syllabuses and textbooks were rigorously combed, commemorations and museum exhibits were re-read from critical perspectives, family histories were interpreted with a scholarly lens.² Building on the scholarship into these public historical iterations, feminist and postcolonial scholars also revealed the embodied power of the past, as memories of slavery, colonization, Indigenous histories, the Holocaust, and motherhood registered corporeally. Archaeologists and

ethnographic and family historians documented archives and material culture produced in the most vernacular of settings. Even "silences" became important historic sites—as gaps in the record that warranted interpretation and research.³

Taken together, this corpus of work into history-making, from the most powerful public narrative to the most intimate memoir, has come to be defined as "historical culture." The term encompasses histories produced by public institutions, bureaucracies, curriculum developers, governments, and professional and academic historians, as well as quotidian historical discourses of the everyday. And, its defining has meant that a diversity of historical productions—public and private histories as well as academic historical scholar-ship—has come to be seen as legitimate areas and moments for examination and research.

In turn, analysis of this history-making plethora required new methodologies—such as oral history, memory studies, museum studies, environmental history, history education or didactics, public history, and heritage studies—to begin to make sense of it. This included shifting the interpretive lens towards the public themselves, the "readers," "consumers," and "users" of that historical abundance. Along with those interrogations of history-making, then, came empirical studies into the significance of historical culture to the people who consume it.⁵ Such research asked implicitly, what does the history around us mean? How do peoples and communities engage with and produce history? In other words, can we read from historical culture a historical consciousness?

Thus, the concept of historical consciousness refers both to the ways people orient themselves in time, and how they are bound by the historical and cultural contexts which shape their sense of temporality and collective memory.⁶ "Human beings are history-makers," as the late Australian ethnographic historian Greg Dening ruminated. "Of all the systems that are expressions of who a people are, the sharpest and clearest is their historical consciousness." Jörn Rüsen, one of the most influential of historical philosophers, described historical consciousness as *making sense* of the past, where the "past is interpreted for the sake of understanding the present and anticipating the future." More than simply understanding how people think about history, this interpretation of historical consciousness also reveals history as fundamental to the ways we think about ourselves. The study of "historical consciousness makes it possible to understand how people *use* the past," contends Canadian historian Stéphane Lévesque.

So the term is a useful but slippery one, describing not only humanity's changing interest in its past, but also how people learn and engage with historical knowledge and practice over time. Historical consciousness covers "every form" of thinking about the past, Rüsen insists, from "historical stud-

ies" to the "use and function of history in private and public life." What unifies that breadth is the capacity of historical consciousness to recognize humanity's "historicity," insists Paul Riceour, "the fundamental and radical fact that we make history, that we are immersed in history, that we are historical beings." 11

Yet tracing the development of the concept, as John Lukacs stated in 1968, is deeply problematic: "historical consciousness (like the remembered past) is in itself a historical phenomenon and not only a psychological one (like memory)." Historical consciousness "is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard," elaborated the German philosopher Hans-George Gadamer. "Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist." Family and community histories, formal education, historical scholarship, public history, and popular uses of the past may be equal shapers of historical consciousness, but how they interact in its formation is surely up for debate. (Hence the diversely-themed chapters in this book.) We would also add that socio-cultural context and the politics of identity are equally significant in the ways people connect with and make history—and the question of whether historical consciousness can be used crossculturally, such as its capacity to engage with Indigenous temporal relationships, is a guiding concern of this collection.

Despite the fluidity of the term, and mounting questions about its universal application, "historical consciousness" has become a critical area of research in historical and memory studies, especially in relation to the field of history didactics. And Jörn Rüsen's now famous typology of historical consciousness not only indicates the different ways people use and think about history but also implies a certain ontogeny. The four categories of historical consciousness he defines can be read as points on an increasingly sophisticated historical spectrum:

- 1. *traditional* history recognizes the continuity of tradition—historical inheritance becomes a sort of prescription
- 2. *exemplary* history uses the past to instruct contemporary action and belief
- 3. critical history deconstructs any necessary continuity of tradition
- 4. genetic history historicizes difference across time

Significantly, however, none of these categories is mutually exclusive, and Rüsen himself emphasizes his model should be interpreted as a sketch of different modes of historical consciousness, rather than a prescriptive hierarchy.¹⁵

Indeed, the notion of ranking historical consciousness is problematic since it has important implications for the vernacular, multicultural, and subaltern history-making that researchers continue to study around the world.

"As long as we fail to acknowledge this intrinsic connection between the most sophisticated historical theory and the procedures of historical memory most deeply embedded in the culture and the everyday lives of people, we will remain caught in an ideology of linear progress," argues Rüsen, "which considers cultural forms of memory simply as interesting objects of study, rather than recognizing them as examples of 'how to make sense of history."

Rather than a hierarchy of historical consciousness that elevates some forms of historical engagement and connection over others, what is important here is the exploration of how they relate to one another, and how they might change over time. Rüsen's schema is no crude didactic prescription for developing historical consciousness, insists Peter Lee: "We are not being offered a ladder-like progression in which we move from one stage to the next, leaving the first behind." Indeed, people may hold different types of historical consciousness in tension simultaneously, thus the importance of *trying* to understand its complexity. After all, writes Australian historian Tom Griffiths, history "can be constructed at the dinner table, over the back fence, in parliament, in the streets, and not just in the tutorial room, or at the scholar's desk." ¹⁸

Nevertheless, Rüsen and others are unambivalent about the potential of historical consciousness to develop over time. And they see formal history education and learning in schools, universities, museums, and curated heritage sites, for example, as a means to facilitate that development. ¹⁹ Catherine Duquette, Peter Lee, and Andreas Körber have gone even further, each developing pedagogical frameworks of attainment in historical consciousness, with their own models of curriculum design and assessment. ²⁰ Such theoretical work reveals the pedagogical possibilities of historical consciousness, argue Carlos Kölbl and Lisa Konrad: models "help to clarify what is meant by the term historical consciousness," and they "help in assessing historical consciousness in a more transparent and a more methodologically consistent way." ²¹ Meanwhile, in jurisdictions such as Sweden and Germany, the development of historical consciousness is already a stated curriculum goal. ²²

Such theorizations about the dimensions and potential of historical consciousness—pedagogically, psychologically, and disciplinarily—continue to shape discussion of the term and its applications. These were addressed by Peter Seixas in a compelling volume, *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, published in 2004, which gathered leading thinkers such as Rüsen himself, along with James Wertsch, Roger Simon, and Chris Lorenz. That collection, motivated by leading theorizations of historical consciousness, in turn motivated important work in the field, and this volume is no exception.

Moreover, the utility of "historical consciousness" as a theoretical term has been mapped out *on the ground*, as it were, in research projects across a

variety of comparative and transnational sites, national settings, and familial or community contexts. Such scholarship explores the importance of history and history-making in human society, identifying markers and expressions of historical culture and practice (the "historical"); it is also driven by a desire to understand the ways history forms part of our collective and individual identities (the idea of "consciousness").

Pedagogical interest, in particular, has shaped several leading research projects in historical consciousness over the last twenty-five years. An ambitious study of the historical consciousness and political attitudes of nearly 32,000 teenagers, initiated by Magne Angvik and Bodo von Borries in 1991, surveyed students in twenty-five European countries, as well as in Israel and Palestine. While subsequent educational research has not replicated that impressive scale, it has continued to expand our knowledge of historical consciousness in diverse educational contexts and settings—from the historical views and perspectives of high school students in the Netherlands, England and France, for example, to a qualitative study of Indigenous histories and history education in Australian and Canadian high schools.²³

Indeed, several chapters in this collection reflect in detail on the relationship between personal and pedagogical historical questions. These include important projects to explore the formation and limits of historical consciousness in the classroom in Northern Ireland (Keith C. Barton and Alan W. McCully) and Québec (Stéphane Lévesque and Jocelyn Létourneau), the experiences of black students in the US (LaGarrett J. King), and a study of multiculturalism in Canada (Carla L. Peck).

Other national-based studies, such as Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen's groundbreaking inquiry into the historical attitudes of "everyday Americans," have helped to extend some of those discussions about the formation of historical consciousness into domestic and community life. Their exploration of vernacular histories, what they termed "popular history making," was prompted by a powerful social paradox: a sense of crisis in national historical knowledge dominated public and political discussions about US history, all while an explosion of historical production and consumption was equally apparent. Rosenzweig and Thelen's qualitative and quantitative investigation of around 1,400 Americans in turn influenced two subsequent national studies in Australia and Canada, which were completed using similar methodologies.²⁴

These national projects had several distinguishing features. First, by locating their research within the boundaries of a nation-state, they were able to contextualize their findings within national historical discussions and historiographies, as well as unsettle parochial public debates about the state of history in each of those jurisdictions. Second, by extending the survey groups beyond the classroom, the responses yielded rich data about the ways

historical consciousness changes over time, and how it is mediated through communities, social generations, and families, as well as by formal and public historical contexts.

Critically, those national projects challenged professional understandings about the ways history is practiced, and by whom. The research confirmed the distinct lack of community engagement with "official" national narratives and history education: participants in all three national studies often found it difficult to engage directly with the history they learned at school, for example, confirming public anxiety about historical knowledge being in a state of perpetual "crisis." On the other hand, their own stories and experiences generated very strong connections with the past, which revealed the power of collective and intergenerational memory in these communities and a flourishing popular contemplation of history. Respondents kept objects to pass on to their own children or grandchildren, participated in family reunions, and compiled genealogies; they visited museums, heritage trails, and historical societies; they talked about the past with their friends and families; and they avidly consumed history in the form of historical fiction, documentaries, video games, and popular history books. ²⁷

Taken together, such research noted uneasiness between disciplinary and vernacular historical practice. That distinction, between the tactile, familial, and experiential inheritance we get from local, personal histories, and the relative detachment seen in disciplinary or official History (with a capital "H"), has been widely noted in memory studies and public history.²⁸ In turn, this growing body of work into historical consciousness also demonstrated the variety and scale of popular engagement with the past that operated outside the boundaries of academic scholarship.²⁹

The ubiquity of these studies into memory, historical culture, and historical consciousness provided some scholars with a basis to their claim that we had entered a new "regime of historicity." Where previously the distance between past and present was widely recognized in the modern era (both by historians and the public), we now discovered that relationship no longer functioned in the same way. Were we now in an era of "the presence of the past"? And, if so, what might the consequences of that proximity to the past actually mean?

For several scholars, the profusion of contemporary history-making and identification, effectively merging ourselves with our pasts, is troubling. "Increasingly, the popular embrace of history is an emotional embrace, one that runs counter to the more critical understanding brought to the past by historians," noted the Australian historian Mark McKenna.³⁰ In a review of Rosenzweig and Thelen's *Presence of the Past*, moreover, the late historian Michael Kammen argued that despite the pressure to democratize the discipline of history, everyday historical understandings are not equivalent to

scholarly expertise: "family and pastness are clearly not the same as history and should not be casually conflated with it." The British historian John Tosh made a similar claim when he insisted that "thinking *about* history" and "thinking *with* history" are not the same thing. Such comments reveal an inherent tension in the ways "historical consciousness" is understood: whereas the scholarly need to understand and incorporate everyday "past-mindedness" into the corpus of the history discipline is imperative, it should not signal a retreat from understanding the distinctive skills of historical cognition.

Such critique does not mean that researchers themselves are oblivious to the tensions and challenges of historical consciousness in the field. Far from it. This collection includes some powerful and revealing reflections on the practice and articulation of that research. In his chapter, Peter Seixas revisits the *Canadians and Their Pasts* project, and gives compelling insight into some of the questions and tensions raised by such large-scale, collaborative, and grounded social research. Anna Clark's chapter into Australians' historical consciousness explores the intersection of personal and public narratives in that country, and notes some of the limitations of trying to map that at a community level. Na Li's chapter on the state of historical consciousness in China, expanding on the survey model originally applied by Rosenzweig and Thelen, similarly discusses the emerging impact of popular histories and a historically-minded public for the fields of public and disciplinary history.

Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse and Kaat Wils recount how an initial examination of Flemish history standards led to a number of rich studies into various aspects of historical consciousness, including the role of history education in shaping one's sense of belonging to national and supranational communities. This is a particularly interesting question in Belgium, a country with two dominant cultural and linguistic regions. Arthur Chapman similarly focuses on the role of history education and asks, "What modes of relationship to the past are enabled and developed through historical teaching and learning?" Through analysis of history curricula and studies with secondary school students and student teachers, Chapman argues that researchers must attend to the interplay between curriculum and pedagogy to better understand how historical consciousness is expressed in curricula and how this gets taken up by teachers and students in the classroom. Carla van Boxtel's chapter draws on her extensive research with secondary school students to explore how the development of students' historical reasoning can lead to a more sophisticated historical consciousness.

Researchers now find themselves at a difficult, but promising conjuncture. What sense can be made of the explosion of increasingly diverse collections of research and researchers? Can we begin to sketch the patterns that emerge from the empirical studies that have flowed from the theorizations of Jörn Rüsen, Roger Simon, and Jürgen Straub? Using Seixas's edited col-

lection, *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, as a starting point for our own, we conceived this book to tease out that intersection between the theory and practice, between research and reflection.

Contemplating Historical Consciousness asks leading scholars from around the world to reflect on their research and their practice—as historians, ethnographers, history educationists, social scientists, and demographers—to explore the possibilities and limitations of research into historical consciousness. It draws on three decades of research into historical consciousness—comparative, national, and local/intimate—to survey the field. What do we understand about historical consciousness? And what is still to be learned?

The volume is structured into three sections. Part I encompasses one of the vital fields of international research into historical consciousness—its implications for curriculum and pedagogy—and draws on the experiences of researchers working within and across nations and communities. Alan W. McCully and Keith C. Barton contemplate their own research *in conversation*, reflecting on years of collaboration into history education in Northern Ireland. Arthur Chapman (England), Karel Van Nieuwenhuyse and Kaat Wils (Flanders, Belgium) and Carla van Boxtel (the Netherlands) similarly explore the meaning and implications for historical consciousness in the classroom. Meanwhile, Mario Carretero's chapter reflects on research into historical consciousness at the beginning of an important project, rather than retrospectively.

Part II includes commentary on notable national and comparative studies in Canada (Peter Seixas), Australia (Anna Clark), the Pacific (Angela Wanhalla), and Francophone Québec (Stéphane Lévesque and Jocelyn Létourneau), as well as an emerging study of historical consciousness in China (Na Li). These chapters reflect on the process of doing work in national, comparative, and transnational contexts. They also reveal important continuities and contrasts of that large-scale research, and give compelling accounts of historical identities and communities, implicitly asking: what makes a national historical community? How do they compare? And how has the historical consciousness of those communities been examined? These case studies allow for reflection not only on the research projects themselves but also their reception in national and international communities; namely, how research into historical consciousness compares with public and official historical discourses in those jurisdictions.

Part III includes evaluations by Michael Marker and LaGarrett J. King on research into cultural and regional groups such as Indigenous and Black historical consciousness in North America. It also includes investigations by Anna Green and Carla L. Peck into diverse collective or social generations' understanding of history, as well as the ways historical consciousness is formed by the historical experience of events such as the Holocaust, as

Jordana Silverstein explores. In this final part of the book, the potential (and limitations) for researchers to understand the historical consciousness of particular cultural groups is particularly prescient: how is historical consciousness formed and passed on? And what is its relationship to broader national or collective memories? Does such research offer insight into the radical potential for historical consciousness studies?

Each contributor was asked to consider and evaluate the aims and conceptualization of their research, their methods, and their findings, as well as some of the tensions it raised. They were given five questions to guide their responses and research reflections.

- 1. What is your conception of memory, history, and historical consciousness?
- 2. What were the motivations for your research into historical consciousness? Who do you want to speak with and investigate? Why?
- 3. What research method did you employ?
- 4. What were the possibilities and limitations of this research?
- 5. What's left unanswered?

Some, like Keith C. Barton and Alan W. McCully, took these as the literal guides for their chapter, which results in a beautifully honest discussion about their still influential collaboration in Northern Ireland. Anna Green used her site of the family to explore these questions as distinctly generational, tying the practice of historical consciousness into the practice of family history itself. Mario Carretero interrogates the potential of the concept itself by exploring the place of historical context in present-day global politics. Others (such as Angela Wanhalla's piece on the Mothers' Darlings project) did not set out to conduct explicit research into historical consciousness. Yet they found that the questions their projects raised—in terms of historical inheritance, remembering and forgetting, and the ways histories are used and forgotten in the formation of identity—offer a rich sense of the potential of historical consciousness in the field.

Critically, the book also delves into the limits of historical consciousness. How does this western concept work in Indigenous contexts? Michael Marker's probing essay helps us think about this important question. Reflections by several contributors (Carla L. Peck, LaGarrett J. King, Arthur Chapman, Stéphane Lévesque and Jocelyn Létourneau) on the question of how minoritized groups in multicultural societies develop historical consciousness also provide important commentary on whether the term can be deployed in culturally diverse contexts. And does the concept have utility in non-western societies, such as China, which has its own strong sense of historical culture? Na Li's chapter offers some discussion here.

As you read on, you will see that each of the chapters is both scholarly and reflective, discussing and evaluating each contributor's own research of historical consciousness in the context of wider writings and theorizations in the field. Our aim was to provide readable, engaging, and thoughtful discussions into the range of research undertaken in historical consciousness, as well as the impact of that research. Western-centric research is counterposed with Indigenous contemplation, as well as projects in China and the Pacific. The results of small-scale qualitative projects are discussed alongside larger quantitative studies. Transnational and comparative research rubs, sometime uneasily, alongside research into local and family studies. Research on Holocaust memory is presented alongside everyday family historical engagement. The combination and the relationships between the projects show that the sum of this collection is more than its parts.

Taken together, these essays offer useful and engaged reflection on a burgeoning field of scholarship that is rarely synthesized or examined as a whole. Space and time obviously limited the scope of this collection—including chapters on historical consciousness in Africa, for example, or South America, or even a reflection on the concept's development in Germany, inevitably would have prompted further consideration. Nevertheless, we have thoroughly enjoyed seeing this book take shape, contemplating both the possibilities and limitations of research in the field of historical consciousness, as well as posing important questions about future directions. We hope it generates some useful discussion, as well as questions for further research and reflection.

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Carla L. Peck is Professor of Social Studies Education in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include students' understandings of democratic concepts, diversity, identity, citizenship, and the relationship between students' ethnic identities and their understandings of history. She has held several major research grants and has authored and co-authored numerous journal articles, book chapters, and books related to this work, including *Education, Globalization and the Nation*

(2016) and Teaching and Learning Difficult Histories in International Contexts (2018).

Notes

- 1. Nora, "Between Memory and History"; Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*; Silverstein, *Holocaust Historiography, Anxiety and the Formulations of a Diasporic Jewishness*; Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, "Introduction"; Wolfe, *Traces of History*.
- 2. Inglis, Sacred Places; Wertsch, Voices of Collective Remembering; Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning; Loewen, Lies My Teacher Told Me.
- 3. Butler, "Overcoming Terra Nullius"; Chakrabarty, "Empire, Ethics, and the Calling of History"; Green, "Intergenerational Family Stories"; Haebich, "Forgetting Indigenous Histories"; Sear, "A Thousand Different Hands"; Veracini, "Historylessness"; Wolfe, "Islam, Europe and Indian Nationalism"; Winter, "Thinking about Silence"; Welzer, "Collateral Damage of History Education."
 - 4. Ahonen, "Historical Consciousness"; Grever, "Fear of Plurality."
- 5. Carretero, Berger, and Grever, eds., Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education.
 - 6. Rüsen, "Historical Consciousness"; Seixas, "What Is Historical Consciousness?", 15.
 - 7. Dening, Performances.
- 8. Rüsen, "Tradition," 45–7. See also Lee, "Walking Backwards into Tomorrow"; Megill, "Jörn Rüsen's Theory of Historiography."
 - 9. Straub, ed., Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness, 50-51.
 - 10. Rüsen, "The Didactics of History in West Germany," 284.
 - 11. Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 274.
 - 12. Lukacs, Historical Consciousness, 15.
- 13. Gadamer, Truth and Method, 285. See also Clark and Grever, "Historical Consciousness."
 - 14. Ahonen, "Historical Consciousness," 698.
- 15. Seixas, "Introduction," 3–24. See also: Taylor, "Trying to Connect," 175–90; Taylor and Young, "Making History"; Wineburg, "Making Historical Sense"; Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*; Rüsen, "Tradition"; Rüsen, "Forming Historical Consciousness."
 - 16. Rüsen, "Preface," viii.
 - 17. Lee, "Walking Backwards into Tomorrow," 5, 33.
- 18. Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 1. See also Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 3, who writes: "The vernacular use of the word history thus offers us a semantic ambiguity: an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened."
- 19. Rüsen, "Historical Consciousness," 80–82. See also Ahonen, "Historical Consciousness," 699.
- 20. Duquette, "Relating Historical Consciousness to Historical Thinking Through Assessment"; Körber, "Historical Consciousness, Historical Competencies—and Beyond?," 42; Lee, "Walking Backwards into Tomorrow."
 - 21. Kölbl and Konrad, "Historical Consciousness in Germany," 26.
 - 22. Seixas, "Historical Consciousness and Historical Thinking."
- 23. Grever, "National Pride and Prejudice"; Grever, Pelzer, and Haydn, "High school students' views on history"; Clark, "Teaching the Nation's Story."

- 24. Angvik and von Borries, Youth and History; Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past; Conrad et al., Canadians and Their Pasts; Ashton and Hamilton, History at the Crossroads.
- 25. Sears and Hyslop-Margison, "Crisis as a Vehicle for Educational Reform"; Clark, "Teaching the Past"; Clark, *History's Children*; Nash et al., *History on Trial*; Symcox, *Whose History?*; Morton, "Teaching and Learning History in Canada"; Morton, "Canadian History Teaching in Canada"; Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*.
 - 26. Ashton and Hamilton, History at the Crossroads, 10.
- 27. Rosenzweig and Thelen, *Presence of the Past*; Ashton and Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads*; Rosenzweig and Thelen, "How Americans Use and Think About the Past."
- 28. Hamilton, "Memory Studies and Cultural History"; Jensen, "Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History"; Lowenthal, "History and Memory"; Lowenthal, The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History; Nora, "Between Memory and History"; Samuel, Theatres of Memory.
- 29. Welzer, "Collateral Damage of History Education"; Glassberg, Sense of History; Griffiths, Hunters and Collectors; Rüsen, "Preface"; Ribbens, "A Narrative that Encompasses Our History."
 - 30. McKenna, "The History Anxiety," 580.
 - 31. Kammen, "Carl Becker Redivivus," 234.
 - 32. Tosh, Why History Matters, 6-7.

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