Stephan Jaeger
The Second World War in the Twenty-First-Century Museum

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From Narrative, Memory, and Experience
to Experientiality

DE GRUYTER

For Priya

Acknowledgements

This book is the result of more than nine years of research into the narratives and representations of war and history museums, which originated in the summers of 2009 and 2010. While visiting museums in Berlin, London, Warsaw, and Kraków and looking for patterns in representations of the Second World War in different historiographical media, I became fascinated with visitors' 'readings' of museum space in contrast to readers of text and viewers of film. I realized the potential in using aesthetic and narratological reading techniques to analyze the reception of exhibitions as well as the constructive and performative nature of collective memories. This eventually led me to conduct fieldwork in 157 different museums and independent exhibitions on both of the world wars, the Holocaust and other genocides, human rights, war and military history, and some more general history museums and exhibitions. These exhibitions were located in fifteen countries, and the fieldwork was conducted between July 2010 and August 2019.

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Contents

Abbreviations

BWM = Bastogne War Museum in Bastogne, Belgium
CWM = Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Canada
DRM = Deutsch-Russisches Museum (German-Russian Museum) in Berlin-Karlshorst, Germany
HEH = House of European History in Brussels, Belgium
IWM = Imperial War Museum
IWML = Imperial War Museum in London, United Kingdom
IWMN = Imperial War Museum North in Manchester, United Kingdom
MHM = Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (Bundeswehr Military History Museum) in Dresden, Germany
MIIWŚ = Muzeum II Wojny Światowej (Museum of the Second World War) in Gdańsk, Poland
New Orleans WWII Museum = The National WWII Museum in New Orleans, USA
OSF = Fabryka Emalia Oskara Schindlera (Oskar Schindler Enamel Factory) in Kraków, Poland (permanent exhibition *Kraków – czas okupacji 1939 – 1945 = Kraków under Nazi Occupation 1939 – 1945*)
ToT = Topographie des Terrors (Topography of Terror) in Berlin, Germany
USHMM = United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., USA
WRM = Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego (Warsaw Rising Museum) in Warsaw, Poland

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Prologue

In the traditional war museums of the twentieth century, models of war toys such as tanks were often used as artifacts to depict real war machines in miniature. Second World War exhibitions[1] in the twenty-first century, however, take a markedly different approach to these objects. A brief look at three recent examples of toy tanks and vehicles in war museums – all related to aerial warfare – indicates a clear shift away from the imitation of military equipment and toward the display of stories concerning the cultural impacts of war. War toys have become much more closely related to the fate of civilians. These examples also indicate the multitude of aesthetic, emotional, didactic, narrative, meta-representational, and experiential functions that constitute the dimensions of representing the Second World War (and war in general) in the contemporary museum.

My first example is a toy truck on display in the Museum of the Second World War (MIIWŚ) in Gdańsk, Poland (opened in 2017). It can be found in a room in the section "War After All" that marks the beginning of Germany's 'total' warfare against Poland. The object's description reads: "Toy car dug out from under the rubble of a house destroyed in the German bombing of the town of Kalisz in September 1939" (see fig. 1). There is no indication as to whether the pick-up truck served a military or civilian function. It seems to be largely intact. Its color has possibly darkened, and if it ever had rubber tires, they are now gone. This toy is located in a small display case and is the only artifact in the room. It neither serves a meta-function reflecting on the relation of toys to war nor on the memory- and myth-making function of toys; there are also no elements of reenactment. The toy truck appears to symbolize childhood innocence and hope for a better future. The object's description emphasizes that the toy came out of the rubble almost uncharred. It survived the air-raid by the enemy and lives on, even if only as part of an artificial museum-display. Metonymically, it seems as if the Polish nation has risen completely intact out of utter disaster.[2] The narrative trope of emerging from the rubble makes this display particularly powerful, and it can presumably elicit emotions of pride and identification with the Polish national journey. The fact that the museum uses

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1 Note that this book, though otherwise written in American English, uses 'exhibition' throughout; 'exhibit' is only used, as is common in British English, to signify a single object or a limited arrangement of objects in an exhibition.

2 This is the design by the museum's original leadership. But in a subtle way its more humanist agenda fits the nationalistic agenda of the new leadership (see chapter 6.2 for further details).

Fig. 1 Section "War of Annihilation" with "Toy car dug out from under the rubble." Permanent exhibition. Muzeum II Wojny Światowej (Museum of the Second World War), Gdańsk (Photo: Author, 2017).

a toy as the only artifact in this room intensifies the message of the innocent being illegally targeted.[3]

In the Second World War section of the House of European History in Brussels (opened in 2017), the visitor encounters what appears to be a similar display to that in Gdańsk. In a vertical display cabinet, the museum exhibits three charred military toys from Dresden – the figurines of an anti-aircraft gun, a truck, and a tank – and a fragment of a sculpture taken from the ruins of Warsaw in 1945.[4] The anti-aircraft gun, truck, and tank are war toys unambiguously meant for civilian use. At the same time, unlike the truck in Gdańsk, the toys do not appear to have arisen from the rubble. While their shapes are more or

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3 Toys, games, and the topic of children and war are, however, present throughout the Gdańsk Museum of the Second World War. The museum allows the visitor to have considerably more open interpretations in other sections, regarding what a toy or war toy means in specific historical circumstances.

4 For the position of this cabinet see fig. 24 (at the beginning of section 3 on the floor map).

less recognizable, they are damaged or even destroyed. Whilst there are precise captions to identify these objects, the museum's tablet[5] relating to the display provides no additional information. The survey text for the section explains that the concept of 'total war'[6] "was particularly brutal in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe." The display is more interpretatively open than in Gdańsk, since the visitor can read the artifacts in at least two ways. The first is that in war, there is total destruction on all sides: none of the artifacts can be repaired; they are fragmented or dysfunctional forever. Along these lines, the war toys can be read metaphorically as representing the suffering of all children, and even possibly as condemning various parties for the suffering of children. The second reading is that the destruction of Warsaw points to German perpetration and highlights that it occurred prior to the bombing of Dresden, so that the artifacts at least partially express German responsibility for the resulting destruction of the city. Neither reading is made explicit by supplementary text; the readers must make these connections themselves.

The third war toy, a toy tank made by the company GAMA, is exhibited in the Bundeswehr Military History Museum (MHM) in Dresden (re-opened in 2011). The toy tank was damaged on February 13, 1945, and was later discovered on Dresden's Weberstraße. The description notes that today, a shopping center is located on the site of the findings and that mechanical GAMA tanks, which sent out showers of sparks, were among the most popular toys in the Third Reich. The exhibition also informs the visitor that such toy tanks were reproduced in West Germany in the 1950s. The museum's toy tank can be found at the very end of a large horizontal glass-display cabinet, located where the "War and Play" section leads into one of architect Daniel Libeskind's voids.[7] Opposite the tank is a parade of toys: soldiers and vehicles from the seventeenth century to the present, from tin soldiers, to Lego soldiers, to space warriors – all of which seem to be marching against the burnt-out tank (see fig. 2). In contrast to most of the museum's displays, the individual objects here are not referenced with exact source material. Neither are they set up in chronological order, emphasizing the anthropological and experiential message of the installation. They create an aesthetic impression of the power of children playing war. This is supplemented by a paragraph from the childhood of German writer and satirist Erich Kästner, who was born in Dresden, in which he expresses his love of playing at all kinds of war. The museum description notes that there is no need for historical accuracy

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5 For the museum's use of tablets that provide text and contextual information in twenty-four languages, see chapter 6.3.

6 See also chapter 8.

7 See also chapter 5.1.

Fig. 2 Destroyed Gama toy tank opposite to parade of war toys. Permanent exhibition. Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr (Bundeswehr Military History Museum), Dresden (Photo: Author, 2013, courtesy of Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr).

in play: "The child alone, almighty and godlike, determines the course and outcome of the war. The omnipotence experienced in play contrasts with children's experiences of helplessness in real war." The visitor who reflects upon the installation can experience some of the fun of playing as well as the sobriety of the real war as symbolized by the burnt-out tank. The artifact is even more powerful since its destruction replicates exactly how a real tank is destroyed in combat. That the tank is a concrete artifact from firebombed Dresden intensifies its authenticity and the perception that it stands metonymically for the real war. The installation creates an experiential stage for visitors to connect the past with their present attitudes or those from their childhoods. Would one allow one's child to play such war games? Did one love playing such games as a child? What are the repercussions of reality overlapping with a game scenario? The tank is ambiguous, oscillating between being a 'victim' of the Allied fire bombings and a 'perpetrator' metonymically pointing to German atrocities, between being a symbol of defeated evil and a symbol of such evil's afterlife in

post-war West Germany, and between play and reality. The museum also avoids a clear assessment of whether war toys should be approached critically or not.

To better understand the museums' staging of toys, the theoretical concepts of historical authenticity and of '*in situ*' and 'in context' displays are helpful. Eva Ulrike Pirker and Mark Rüdiger define historical authenticity in two ways: as witnessing and as experiencing the past (2010, 17). All military history museums aim to generate authenticity, but the form of authenticity varies between degrees of reconstructive authenticity based on material and human witnesses and simulative authenticity (Jaeger 2017b, 165). On the one hand, authenticity of witnessing can be achieved through first-hand accounts, historical places, or objects from the past. On the other hand, historical authenticity can be reproduced through simulations of the past. These simulations can be achieved through the use of replicas, historical reenactments, and through the evocation of authentic feelings that relate to the mood or atmosphere of the past. A second theoretical paradigm stems from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett who distinguishes between '*in situ*' and 'in context' displays. Both allow for different kinds of performativity and creation of space in displaying objects in museums. "In-context displays [...] depend on the drama of the artifact. Objects are the actors and knowledge animates them" (1998, 3). They are often set into a larger narrative such as "a story of evolution or historical development. The performative mode is exposition and demonstration. The aesthetic is one of intelligibility" (1998, 3). In contrast, she describes '*in situ*' displays as immersive and environmental. They privilege the experience of the past through dioramas, live displays, and the display of humans: "they recreate a virtual world into which the visitor enters" (1998, 4).

At first glance, all three examples of war toys fall under Pirker and Rüdiger's first category of the authenticity of witnessing in their role as historical artifacts that draw the visitor closer to the realness of the past. At the same time, they all seem to be 'in context' displays, since none of them are meant to recreate the space of a virtual past world. However, upon closer examination, each example establishes something that seems to simulate authenticity in the staged museum space as well as allowing the visitor to be immersed in past structures and to emotionally connect with the past. The Gdańsk Second World War Museum uses its toy artifact to establish a metonymic-narrative experience. The authenticity of the original artifact is only a stepladder for emotionalizing visitors toward the museum's narrative argument of Poland rising from the rubble.[8] The artifact

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8 See also the discussion about the Warsaw Rising Museum in chapter 3.2.

is staged as the lone survivor among photographs of destruction,[9] making it so that the museum simulates a sense of resistance and survival against a criminal 'war of annihilation.' It remains ambiguous whether the uncharred truck refers to the historical will to survive or whether it explicitly connects the visitor's present to the past through contemporary narratives and cultural memory. Similarly, the historical authenticity of the destroyed toys in the House of European History leads to a metaphorical experience that emotionally draws the visitor into the meaning and effects of total warfare. In their function as witnesses of authenticity, they simulate a universalization of warfare within the narrative context of the museum. Finally, in the Bundeswehr Military History Museum's toy parade and tank installation, the visitor is confronted with a temporalized scenario that requires individual interpretation in order to decide how toy war and real war overlap and what these potential overlaps mean. It is a meta-representational display that challenges visitors to immerse themselves reflectively in it and therefore allows for a structural (non-mimetic and non-historical) temporalization of past and present. The burnt-out tank as a witness to and creator of historical authenticity is an important vehicle for the installation to maintain its effect of historical reality. The scene between tank and toy parade performed here creates a structural experience of war, challenging visitors to reflect upon what relates to the past and what relates to their individual and collective memories in the present, upon what is real and what is re-imagined.

Generally, all three cases cannot be understood without considering the narrative techniques of meaning and memory production employed in each exhibition. None of them create a direct immersive experience, but all three trigger different emotional or aesthetic responses to structural or symbolic understandings of the past through the lens of the visitor's present. A structural response by the visitor – as seen, for example, in the installation in Dresden – first creates an aesthetic response with various potentialities that exceed the intent of the museum curators and architects. At the same time, the display supersedes a mimetic re-production of possible past experiences (by individuals or collectives). Consequently, neither mimetic immersion nor mere explication of context can grasp the aesthetic effect on the visitors in the examples provided. This means the dichotomy of '*in situ*' and 'in context' display, while helpful, is insufficient on its own. The visitor – entrenched in her or his own cultural memory and possibly challenged to reflect on its implications and biases – becomes a mediating con-

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9 Aside from the truck, the room only contains enlarged vignette-like photographs of bombed cities, an enlarged series of photographs of a German massacre of Polish prisoners, and a computer station providing further photographs and brief textual context about the bombed Polish cities.

sciousness in the museum space, activating different potentialities of artifacts, space, and constellations. To understand this process, this study has utilized and further developed the concept of experientiality for the medium of the (history) museum. This has the potential to advance the analysis of how exhibitions emotionalize the visitor; how they create proximity or distance to the historical subject-matter; how they balance or blur the historical understanding of the past with the cultural memory of the present; how they produce or steer ethical statements and narrative structures; and how they allow for reflection on methods of representing the past. Finally, experientiality is significant for how museums represent and simulate specific historical events of the Second World War in general. None of the toys analyzed – although all stem from the Second World War and relate to the destruction of aerial warfare in particular – seem to create an understanding or experience for the visitor that is specific to that war. The theme of war toys – often connected to the innocence of children – seems too universal to achieve historical specificity. Consequently, this tension between historical specificity and anthropological or universal arguments will be another core subject addressed in this study.

Chapter 1:
The Second World War in the
Twenty-First-Century Museum

1.1 The Museum between History and Cultural Memory

The core question of this book is how Second World War museums and exhibitions can help prototypical visitors from diverse cultures comprehend or experience the past in the twenty-first century. As the prologue has shown by example of war toys, there are multifaceted ways to involve the visitor in an exhibition, whether it allows for historical understanding or for universal emotional reactions that bring the past closer to the present. As the living memory of the Second World War fades, the museum has become an increasingly significant medium to connect past and present (see e. g. Finney 2017). In other words, it has become a medium of remembrance (see e. g. Makhotina and Schulze-Wessel 2015, 8 – 9; Thiemeyer 2015). The German philosopher Herrmann Lübbe argues that the increasing musealization of the late twentieth century is a reaction to the acceleration of progress in human society (1982, 2000; see also Koselleck 2004 [1979], 258 – 263). That is to say, Lübbe argues that the quicker society changes, the more it creates forms and institutions to save artifacts and structures from the otherwise would-be-forgotten past. Consequently, the loss of familiarity with the well-known can be compensated for by musealization. The museum functions as one of the institutions that allow the present to be connected with the past, which for Lübbe enables the process of progress toward the future to actually occur. Even if one objects to the 'progressive' nature of this development,[1] the trend toward temporalization of the past, present, and future seems to have further intensified in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative (social) and cultural memory (1992, 48 – 66) helps us to understand the role of the museum when communicative memory becomes increasingly ritualized, materialized, and institutionalized. Astrid Erll points out that memory occurs as both individual and collective processes: "[W]e have to differentiate between two levels on which cul-

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[1] See especially Andreas Huyssen's critical reading of Lübbe (2003, 22 – 24). Instead of Lübbe's compensatory argument, Huyssen argues that it is important to accept a fundamental shift in structures of feeling, experience and perception. He points out the moral and political nature of the discourse of musealization and how the museum can easily lose "its ability to guarantee cultural stability over time" (Huyssen 2003, 24).

ture and memory intersect: the individual and the collective or, more precisely, the level of the cognitive on the one hand, and the levels of the social and the medial on the other" (2010, 5). The collective level "refers to the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past" (Erll 2010, 5). It is important to note that 'memory' functions metaphorically when used in collective concepts such as cultural memory or Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*; societies or groups cannot literally remember. In this way, the museum functions as a composite multisensory medium that assembles other media within the museum space. It can reinforce a ritualized or institutionalized form of memory, or it can challenge visitors to distance themselves from the historical material and narratives it represents. Consequently, the museum can mirror the stored cultural memory of its time, or it can shape the formation of new memory patterns. It can work to enhance the functional and storage aspects of cultural memory (A. Assmann 2016 [2006], 38–42). Visitors can either learn about the past, develop their own war memories, or be steered toward preconceived narratives that comprise master narratives and cultural memory politics.

Contemporary museum and heritage studies researchers as well as museum practitioners, have advocated for a social justice approach in museums based on dialogue and debate: "[a] courageously reflective practice [...], based upon a radical transparency and trust, and practiced both inside and outside of the museum" (Lynch 2013, 11; see also Kidd 2014). For the representation of a historical theme such as the Second World War, this raises the complex question of how museums represent historical research, how they react to their influential role as carriers of cultural memory (A. Assmann 2007, 154), and whether they find ways to integrate pluralistic perspectives into their exhibition narrative. How have different communities constructed the cultural memory of the Second World War? Following memory trends in Holocaust (and later in Second World War) remembrance,[2] there has been an increasing convergence of history and memory in Second World War museums since the 1980s (A. Assmann 2016 [2006], 32). Visitors can certainly learn a lot about historical knowledge and facts; however, these museums also affect the visitors' personal memory and

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2 The tendency of history and memory to converge must be differentiated from earlier memory studies. In Maurice Halbwachs's social concept of collective memory, the relation of memory to history is sequential (1992 [1925]). History starts when living memory of the past ends. Pierre Nora picks up Halbwachs's differentiation: "(...) Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority" (Nora 1989, 9).

the cultural memory of nations and other groups. Second World War representation in museums has partially followed Holocaust representation in emphasizing individual experiences and memories to express the authenticity of witnessing and the irreducible plurality and diversity of those experiences (A. Assmann 2016 [2006], 33). Here, memory studies enhances history writing within the museum by emphasizing emotion and individual experience, by highlighting the function of history as a form of remembrance, and by adding an ethical orientation (A. Assmann, 2016 [2006], 34).

Actual events are less relevant to memory studies than what people feel and think occurred. Consequently, today, most museums representing the Second World War are hybrids of factual and contextualizing historical research on the one hand, and carriers of perceptions and memories on the other. These museums often conduct research to understand the content of represented events and to argue in an evidentiary mode that certain facts are true and certain historical events happened. Ultimately, they reflect the historical knowledge and the cultural memory of their time. This study analyzes the semiotic, aesthetic, and narrative techniques of Second World War representations in permanent exhibitions. Every museum analyzed here would likely argue that they represent historical facts. Some stress methods of oral history – see e. g. especially the New Orleans WWII Museum – and therefore highlight the convergence of history and memory. At the same time, many museums increasingly exhibit and narrate individual stories and give room to multiple and diverse voices. Whereas some of these voices can develop individualized aesthetics for visitors willing to engage with them, most voices are used as examples for historical groups and arguments. Thus they function less as individual memory than as individual carriers of a collective consciousness, which is part of the museum's memory construction.

Museums can mimetically simulate the past. They can either simulate historical perspectives of individuals, collectives (most commonly), or historical structures. Understanding and representing concepts and instances of violence, atrocities, death, genocide, trauma, loss, perpetration, victimhood, and guilt, among others, methodologically challenge museums to involve the visitor in the past reality of war as well as its current perception. This relates to the concept of 'difficult knowledge,' whereby museums challenge visitors to push beyond the preconceived boundaries of their collective selves (Lehrer et al. 2011; Simon 2004, 2011; Rose 2016; see also Macdonald 2008 for the concept of 'difficult heritage'). This study explores the ways in which contemporary museums bridge the gap between the present and the past by employing the aura of authentic objects, the medium of text, techniques of reenactment, the creation of scenes (both dioramas and scenes the visitor appears to populate), photography, audiovisual

material, digital sources, scenography simulating past spaces and atmospheres, effects of light and color, and works of art. Different agents or factors influence the mediation between the visitor and the past: rituals and traditions of cultural memory; the authority of eyewitnesses, and, at the end of living memory, their narratives and voices in text and video testimonies; material objects; the selection and construction decisions made by curators, architects, designers, and museum management; and the influence of governments and lobbying groups pursuing active memory politics. At the same time, this study argues that it is crucial to understand the representational potentiality of an exhibition space not only beyond the intentions of its makers and but also beyond the explicit experiences of those who have witnessed the past. Museums either create a spatial structure that visitors can activate by following multiple paths, or museum makers use particular techniques to restrict such visitor mediation in favor of steering visitors toward specific narratives, meanings, moral judgments, and emotions.

This book contributes to research on Second World War representation, memory studies and museum studies in two distinct ways. First, this study is the first to systematically analyze on a global scale – by example of the European theater of the Second World War – how museums allow contemporary visitors to comprehend and experience the history of the war. Unlike the most prominent Holocaust exhibitions in Washington, London, or Jerusalem, which have been researched extensively (Holtschneider 2011; Hansen-Glucklich 2012; Schoder 2014; Bernard-Donals 2016) or representations of National Socialist ideology (Macdonald 2008, 2013; Paver 2018) and the history of the Holocaust in memorial sites (Lutz 2009; Kleinmann 2017; Luhmann 2018),[3] most current Second World War exhibitions have received relatively minor systematic scholarly attention. In the German-speaking world, the major exception to this is Thomas Thiemeyer's descriptive and comparative media history (2010a), in which he analyzes exhibitions in France, Germany, Belgium, and Britain from the first decade of the twenty-first century.[4] He focuses on national differences and differences in political frameworks and representational forms between exhibitions on the two world

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3 See chapter 8 for the discussion of the representation of the Holocaust in Second World War exhibitions.

4 Consequently, the overlap with this book is limited to the discussion of the Imperial War Museum North and a prospective discussion of the Bundeswehr Military History Museum. The exhibitions in the Imperial War Museum in London, the German-Russian Museum, and the Mémorial de Caen have changed since Thiemeyer conducted his study.

wars (see also Thiemeyer 2013, 2019).[5] The debates and controversies surrounding post-Soviet public memory of the Second World War in Eastern Europe and former Soviet states have led to numerous studies about museums and memorial sites, which often emphasize a singular national cultural memory context (e.g. Heinemann 2017; Makhotina 2017).[6] More recently, a number of studies have analyzed the impact of memory politics and cultural diplomacy on contemporary exhibition design, especially in relation to transnational museums dealing with the Second World War[7] (e.g. Kaiser 2017; Clarke and Duber 2018; Hackmann 2018; Clarke and Wóycicka 2018; Siddi and Gaweda 2019).

Second, in relation to narrative, memory, and experience, this study develops the concept of experientiality (on a sliding scale between mimetic and structural forms). This contributes to existing theories regarding methods used for the reading of history museums. It also provides a textual-spatial method for reading exhibitions and understanding the experiences of historical individuals and collectives. The experientiality created through the interaction between the museum space and the ideal museum visitor helps us comprehend the representational and performative potential of each exhibition, even if an actual visitor can only realize parts of it. Other dimensions and categories – such as the function of museum objects, the use of space and architecture, the function of visual media, and multimedia elements – will be analyzed in terms of their relationship to narrative, memory, and experience. It is crucial to note that these categories do not automatically determine the following: whether an exhibition has the effect of openness or closure; whether it creates debate or manipulates the visitor into believing a single narrative; or whether it forces visitors through a pre-fabricated experience or helps them reflect upon their own position by employing an experiential approach. Simply identifying one particular representational technique as constructing the collective role of a country or a group in war – as victims, perpetrators, resisters/upstanders, collaborators, bystanders, victors, or losers – unnecessarily reduces the complexity of contemporary Second World War representation. This study also attempts to avoid judgment about which method is 'better' for representing the Second World War. Whereas there are cer-

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5 See also for the representation of war in the museum also the edited collections by Hinz 1997 and Muchitsch 2013, and specifically for the Second World War Kjeldbæk 2009 and Echternkamp and Jaeger 2019a.

6 See also the individual studies in the edited collections in Kurilo 2007; Troebst and Wolf 2011; Makhotina et al. 2015; and Bogumił et al. 2015, who assemble individual case studies focusing on specific Eastern European and German museums and memorial sites.

7 See chapter 6.

tain ethical or critical standards that can be described and assessed,[8] the objective of this study is to explore the range of representational possibilities and their potential cognitive, ethical, emotional, and aesthetic effects on the visitor.

In this introductory chapter, I first discuss the relevance of the Second World War in memory discourses and remembrance politics. I place particular emphasis on the tension between the national and the transnational, exploring transnational, multidirectional, and agonistic modes of memory (chapter 1.2). I then differentiate between different types of museums and contextualize different representational modes within current museum scholarship (chapter 1.3). Finally, I explain the selection of the twelve museums in six countries that form the center of this study's analysis and elaborate on my fieldwork (chapter 1.4).

1.2 The Second World War between National and Transnational Memory

The last three decades have led to an immense global memory and museum boom. History museums play a strong role in this, as they attract a mass audience (Beier-de Haan 2005, 7). Narrowing the scope down to museum representation of war, and particularly of the Second World War, confirms the general trend. Although the war ended seventy-five years ago, and most of its eyewitnesses have passed away, it is nevertheless a constant topic of public discourse and debate. The number of new museums and memorial sites representing and commemorating aspects of the war has multiplied in the twenty-first century. The 2016-edition of the French-authored military guidebook *1939 – 1945: guide Europe* lists 1,500 museums and memorial sites of the Second World War across Europe (Hervouet et al. 2016). The actual number of memorial sites is much higher; the book's selection is clearly French-focused and consequently includes only a fraction of museums and memorial sites in other countries. What makes the Second World War – and the Holocaust as often inextricably related – most interesting in comparison to other conflicts and historical events is that it is engrained in virtually every country's cultural memory and continues to be relevant for groups and nations in the present, even at the end of its living or communicative memory (see e. g. Flacke 2004; Echternkamp and Martens 2010 [2007]; Bragança and Tame 2016; Echternkamp and Jaeger 2019b).

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8 For example, following the *Beutelsbacher* consensus of 1976, German historical museums and memorial sites began to slowly commit themselves to a prohibition on 'over-emotionalization,' that is, to adopt a pedagogical model independent from indoctrinating visitors and/or from overwhelming them emotionally (Thiemeyer 2019, 33).

Take, for example, two recent controversies related to competing cultural memories of the Second World War. The first, between Japan and South Korea (as well as other nations occupied by Japan), concerns the commemoration of the so-called 'comfort women' – girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army in its occupied territories (Kimura 2016) – and actively influences contemporary foreign relations between these countries. The second is the debate concerning the Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation by the sculptor Imre Párkányi Raab, erected in Budapest in July 2014. The monument represents 'innocent' Hungary through a bronze statue of the Archangel Gabriel over whom a bronze eagle (representing Nazi Germany) towers. The memorial has triggered a protest movement, which has manifested itself in the hundreds of spontaneous remembrance notes and objects located opposite the memorial (see also Arnold-de Simine 2015). The latter case demonstrates – similarly to the controversies around the Gdańsk Museum of the Second World War in 2016 – 2017 (see particularly Machcewicz 2019 [2017])[9] – that the memory battles over the Second World War and its interpretations in Europe today have become a mirror for the tensions in some European countries between European-oriented democracies and authoritative nationalism.

Whereas the First World War might have had a renaissance through its centennial activities from 2014 to 2018, it only fulfils a function of defining national identity and cultural memory in certain countries, including Belgium, France, Britain, and Commonwealth countries such as Canada and New Zealand (see e.g. Kavanagh 1994; Beil 2004; Winter 2006; Wellington 2017, 261–318; Shelby 2018). Other wars are remembered on specific occasions or in specific countries in the form of founding myths. Only the memory of the Second World War, however, is constantly present in the popular imaginary as a global and total war, providing a multitude of narrative and remembrance possibilities. One can argue that for Western European countries the Second World War and the Holocaust "became crucial elements in a strategy to construct a sense of Europeanness" (Berger 2010, 134), while at the same time it is also clear that the universalization of memory and top-down politicization of the war by the European Union can be problematic (Berger 2010, 135; see also Tekin and Berger 2018, 2–6). The West German / contemporary German way of working through responsibility for the Holocaust is distinct from that of other nations, even those that must integrate collaboration into their memory processes (Kaiser et al. 2014, 143; Kaiser 2017, 528–529).

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9 See also chapter 6.2.

The Second World War can be represented from different national perspectives as the 'good war' (e. g. Terkel 1984). It can also be represented as a human catastrophe, or one can single out the Holocaust as an exemplary event that is either separate from or closely interwoven with the Second World War. Importantly, the war's global impact also adds perspectives from Asia-Pacific (see e. g. Chirot et al. 2014). The war allows for the representation of individual and collective heroics and valor. From the perspectives of countries that belonged to the Axis powers, perpetration and victimhood are complex issues. As a total war, it involved whole civilian populations as supporting the war effort and/or as civilian targets.[10] The long phases of occupation and perpetration of wartime atrocities allow for a strong focus on resistance and collaboration (Flacke 2004). Finally, the history of post-war Eastern Europe in which the Soviet Union made the Eastern bloc states its satellites (often seen and narrated as a second occupation), prolonged the war in the eyes of many countries. Consequently, following a more universal, liberal phase of cultural memory, this has become a major driving force of memory politics in Eastern Europe (see e. g. Bogumił et al. 2015; Makhotina et al. 2015; Chu 2019).

Wars are usually instances of state-organized violence. Historically, traditional military museums or war museums have displayed military trophies and emphasized valor and heroism, establishing identification with a particularly national perspective and memory (Westrate 1961; Kavanagh 1994, Zwach 1999; Thiemeyer 2010a, 95 – 102; Thiemeyer 2019, 30 – 34). Rosmarie Beier-de Haan uses the cosmopolitan theory of 'Second Modernity'[11] to identify three trends found in national historical museums and large historical exhibitions in the early twenty-first century. First, the process of globalization reduces the orientation toward nation states and national identity in exhibitions. Similarly, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider – regarding Holocaust memory – see a global trend toward "a shared consciousness and cosmopolitan memories that span territorial and linguistic borders" (2002, 91). Second, Beier-de Haan sees a stronger focus on individual rather than collective memory. Finally, she notices the reduction of academic or scientific knowledge in relation to experiential knowledge (Beier-de Haan 2005, 232 – 233). In other words, cultural memory partially replaces historical analysis and truth-claims. This third assertion clearly influences worldwide trends in today's Second World War exhibitions. The second trend is also observable: museums have begun to represent more individual voices, although many exhibitions continue to use them to construct collective perspec-

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10 See chapter 8.
11 Developed by the sociologist Ulrich Beck in the 1990s.

tives and narratives. Most interesting is Beier-de Haan's first trend, since Second World War exhibitions in almost all national contexts display an inherent tension between a focus on national perspectives, history, and identity and on transnational, global, or universal themes.

Even in explicitly transnational or comparative exhibitions, Second World War representation is almost always connected to the nation state or at least to national perspectives, sources, and themes. In other words, their memory seems connected to an antagonistic mode of memory (Erll 2009, 41–42). At the same time, cultural memory patterns of the Second World War tend to show structural affinities between different cultural memories. This allows for a comparative approach and discussion of transnational and universal memory patterns (François 2004). It also has the potential to overcome antagonistic memory patterns. This is not only evident through a focus on national artifacts, stories, and sources, but also through the high degree of generalization regarding other nations.[12] When, for example, Western European museums speak more precisely of German perpetrators, they mostly refer to Hitler, major SS leaders, and the collective of Nazis or Germans; no war museum – even today – discusses the debates surrounding the guilt and perpetratorship of other nations in-depth (see e. g. Thiemeyer 2013, 291–298; Thiemeyer 2019, 37–38).[13] If a museum highlights an enemy perpetrator – such as in the "Germans in Warsaw"[14] exhibition (see fig. 3) of the Warsaw Rising Museum– they are enshrined as one-dimensionally evil. Further analysis on what motivated such evil is not provided. Regarding victimhood, museums first exhibit their own group or national suffering as well as the targeted victims of the Nazi (or Japanese) enemy. Several of the museums

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12 Comparative exhibitions reflecting primarily on memory patterns are rare. Exceptions in the form of special exhibitions relating to the Second World are *Myths of the Nations: 1945 – Arena of Memories* (*Mythen der Nationen: 1945, Arena der Erinnerungen*), curated by Monika Flacke, which could be seen in the *German Historical Museum* (Deutsches Historisches Museum) in Berlin from October 2, 2004 to February 27, 2005 (Flacke 2004; see also Jaeger 2015a, 151–152); and most recently the exhibition *[War. Power. Meaning:] War and Violence in European Memory* (*Krieg. Macht. Sinn: Krieg und Gewalt in der europäischen Erinnerung*; the main title is also a play on words, since it can also be read as 'war makes sense'), which took place in Ruhr Museum in Essen from November 12, 2018 to June 10, 2019 as part of the EU-funded project UNREST (see the "Conclusion" below; see also Berger et al. 2019; Berger and Kansteiner 2019; Cento Bull et al. 2019, 620; Fernández-Maya 2019). The permanent exhibitions analyzed in this study that most obviously depict memory patterns of war are the Bundeswehr Military History Museum, the House of European History, and, to a slightly lesser degree, the Imperial War Museum North.
13 See chapter 7 for a further discussion on the representation of perpetrators and perpetration in Second World War exhibitions.
14 See chapter 3.2 and chapter 7.

in this study seem to overcome the national in different ways: by diversifying what comprises the national (Oskar Schindler Factory); by universalizing certain elements of the war, pinpointing anthropological and universal elements, primarily within the context of national history (Bundeswehr Military History Museum, partially the Topography of Terror); by depicting a multi-national, partially global scenario that is merely supplemented by a national perspective (Bastogne War Museum); and by explicitly displaying artifacts, images, and narratives from multiple nations simultaneously, which happens in different ways in the German-Russian Museum, the Gdańsk Museum of the Second World War, and the House of European History – the three museums that will be discussed as explicitly transnational museums in chapter 6.

Any museum exhibition about the Second World War attempting to break up the dominant perspective of a nation state must find other ways of structuring the history and memory of warfare to highlight regional, transnational, European, global, anthropological, or universal tendencies. The category of 'transnational memory' seems the most useful for analyzing Second World War museum representation. Transnational history and memory refer to a broad range of phenomena surpassing national boundaries (Tyrrell 2009, 454). They allow museums to go beyond the national without abandoning the idea of its importance: "Nation is therefore constitutive to the definition, not as its center, but as something that has to be overcome, implying that transnational is a category, covering everything that is not contained primarily within the nation state" (Jarausch 2006). The idea of the transnational can offer fresh perspectives, "a set of questions to be asked about the past that cut across the nation-state" (Jarausch 2006). Methods such as connected history, entangled history, *histoire croisée*, translocal history, and world history (Pernau 2011, 36–84), entangled memory (Feindt et al. 2014), traveling memory (Erll 2011), multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009) and agonistic memory (Mouffe 2012; Cento Bull and Hansen 2016), allow for the sketching, creation, and performance of non-nation-state paths.

Thus, there is first a type of transnational memory in museum representation leading to a progressive, all-encompassing transnationality in which nations move toward the transnational while nation-states potentially maintain a certain relevance. A second, open type of the transnational allows for multiple voices and perspectives, creating transnational constellations, which makes it possible to see comparative perspectives between national or regional narratives.[15] Trans-

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15 Narratologically, this can be analyzed through approaches of multiperspectivity. An open multiperspectivity allows for tensions between different viewpoints in a museum narrative versus a closed one in which different voices and perspectives are recognizable but eventually syn-

Fig. 3 Entrance area in exhibition "Germans in Warsaw." Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego (Warsaw Rising Museum), Warsaw (Photo: Author, 2013, courtesy of Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego).

national techniques of representation provide opportunities for the expression of structures and constellations that transcend the national. The question in analyzing historical exhibitions is thus whether the historical specificity of a nation or other group is maintained, or whether it disappears into a universal more abstract concept that surpasses the idea of the nation-state altogether. In other words, the contrast between the first and second type of transnational represen-

thetized. For multiperspectivity in historiography see Jaeger 2000, for the narratological concept in general Nünning and Nünning 2000.

tation is that in the former, the development of a transnational perspective leads to a closed perspectival structure (i.e. there is a distant bird's eye perspective that synthesizes different national voices); whereas in the latter, an exhibition can create co-existing tensions between the transnational and the national.

In this study, a concept that is particularly relevant to transcending or diversifying the national is the European (Pakier and Stråth 2010; Macdonald 2013), evident in the conceptual discussions about the development of the House of European History in Brussels.[16] Stefan Krankenhagen describes how Europe is imagined as "a common historical and experiential space whose abundance is ostensibly captured by the unique characteristics of the continent" (2011, 270). There is a need to legitimize Europe as a cultural-historical process, which can be one goal of such a museum: "Thus, from the many histories of Europe, there emerges the ordered and ordering image of a European 'unity in diversity,' of an imagined property of Europe as the legitimation of its present and future political composition" (Krankenhagen 2011, 270).[17] Cris Shore has identified three features of Europe's new iconography: the teleological orientation of the concept based on the nineteenth-century conception of history; the fact that the symbols of the new Europe replicate those of the old nation-states; and the paradox regarding the construction of a European cultural unity that is simultaneously present and still to be created (2000: 50–53; see also Krankenhagen 2011, 270–271). For contemporary Second World War representation, the challenge lies particularly in this second feature. The nation-state is the very foundation upon which the concept of the transnational is built. The teleological orientation of Europe highlights the problem of whether Europe – in the sense of the first type of transnational representation – is simply replacing the nation-state as a larger conglomerate in a progressive, linear narrative, and thereby threatening the existence of its nation-states: "The distinction between Eastern and Western Europe within an extended EU makes it much more difficult to anchor the history of European integration in museums located in the new member states" (Kaiser et al. 2014, 148). Consequently, the memory of the experience of National Socialism and fascism and the belief in the singularity of the Holocaust could change in the long-run as a consequence of the opening of the European Union to the East (Kaiser et al. 2014, 149).

Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen identify this universalizing tendency as a cosmopolitan mode of memory that contrasts to the increasing trend to-

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16 See chapter 6.3.
17 Sharon Macdonald has provided a very convincing analysis of the diverse processes for discussing a dynamic and differentiated European memory and consciousness, which recognizes commonalities and diversity, thus allowing for a "'multiperspectival' history" (2013, 40).

ward an antagonistic mode of memory, as discussed above. Similar to the second type of transnational memory, they propagate a third mode of the memory, the 'agonistic memory' (2016). This is based on Chantal Mouffe's discussion of an "agonistic approach to the future of Europe" (2012, 629), wherein she argues for a "pluralization of hegemonies" (2012, 639). Mouffe criticizes an all-encompassing European integration that is blind to "the process of the creation of collective identities" (2012, 630) and argues that, in an agonistic approach, an affective dimension needs to be considered next to a rational one. Consequently, European integration is unable to integrate regional and national forms of identity into its (cosmopolitan) framework without acknowledging necessarily conflicting views. Mouffe therefore argues against a cosmopolitan approach that organizes the unification of the world around a single model and that therefore does not know 'otherness.' In her agonistic model, a "multipolar world would acknowledge diversity and heterogeneity without attempting to overcome them through the imposition of a supposedly superior and more advanced form of political organization" (2012, 639).

Consequently, Cento Bull and Hansen define agonistic memory through four features. First, it avoids setting up 'good' against 'evil' by acknowledging the human capacity for evil within specific historical circumstances. Second, it relies on testimonies from all kinds of historical actors, including victims and perpetrators, to understand their experiences and motivations. Third, it recognizes how important affect and emotions are and advocates for empathy toward victims. Finally, it is attentive to historical context, the socio-political struggles, and the individual and collective narratives that led to perpetration of mass crimes (2016, 399).

Similar to the concept of agonistic memory, Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory is closely connected to the second, open type of the transnational, which relies on constellations. Rothberg argues against collective memory as competitive memory, "a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources," and develops a multidirectional memory that relies on "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (2009, 3). Rothberg directs his argument particularly against a nation-centered model of memory "in favor of a more open-ended sense of the possibilities of memory and countermemory that might allow the 'revisiting' and rewriting of hegemonic sites of memory" (2009, 310). Following his definition of multidirectional memory, the Second World War remains a memory discourse that almost inevitably seems to return to competitive memory, group identities, and national claims, as can be seen in metaphors such as Claus Leggewie's and Anne Lang's "battlefield of European memory" (2011) and Paweł Machcewicz's "war that never ends" (2019 [2017]). Thus, this concept is interesting for museums exhibiting the Second World War, since – if they intend to op-

erate transnationally – they can create constellations and associations between different war histories and memories. They can also create networking effects with various potential paths for the museum visitor, as discussed above.

At the same time, it is crucial that museums using transnational, agonistic, or multidirectional memorial strategies carefully maintain the historical specificity of different memory communities. Performing a circulating memory of different cultural signs, including ones that claim a strong national (or other group) identity, allows for simulated structural experiences of particular tensions in European Second World War memory. Consequently, this process can create secondary experientiality.[18] Rothberg's anti-competitive idea of multidirectional memory can therefore work on a micro-scale within actual museum exhibitions and in the circulating dialogue between different exhibitions. However, the dynamic re-writing of European Second World War memory will not eradicate nation-centered perspectives. Nevertheless, in twenty-first-century European museums, its temporalized model increasingly simulates multidirectional and agonistic memories that can display dynamic tensions between the national and the transnational, between the historical and the universal (see also Jaeger 2017a, 24–26).

1.3 Museum Types and the Second World War

In categorizing history and war museums, a variety of types are recognizable in relation to Second World War representation. In particular, there are (1) history museums, often object-based, (2) narrative history museums, (3) memorial museums, (4) memorial sites, (5) documentation centers, (6) experiential museums, (7) ideas museums, and (8) collector museums. These eight categories do, of course, overlap in actual institutions. Nevertheless, these categorizations remain useful for this study to help understand the different frameworks in which museums are created.[19]

The first type, a typically artifact-based history museum,[20] is particularly concerned with interpretation, contextualization, and critique (Williams 2007,

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18 See chapter 2.2.

19 Other factors will be considered within this study, such as the differences between public and private institutions, local, regional, and national institutions, and the differentiation between permanent exhibitions and special exhibitions.

20 Whether artifacts are displaced to auratically connect to the past or whether they are mere illustrations overshadowed by an often-didactic text depends on the style of the history museum (Grütter 1994, 82).

8). Gottfried Korff explains the expositional function that makes museums places of display: as sites of interpretation, they surpass simply acting as sites of preservation (1999, 270). The authentic object can stand in a synecdochic relationship to the past. Its 'thing-connectedness' transfers the cultural energy of the past to the visitors,[21] while allowing them to experience distance and alienation from that same past (Korff 1999, 269; for world war museums, see Thiemeyer 2010a, 263–274). History museums can either focus on artifacts and/or images, or more strongly on textual contextualization and commentary. Consequently, they operate closely to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's 'in context' displays, using exposition and demonstration as their performative modes (1998, 3). Nevertheless, it is clear that in order to allow the visitor to develop a synecdochic relationship with the past, the modern museum does not merely assemble artifacts in display cases, but stages the past (Beier-de Haan 2006, 192). If the staging of objects transforms into staging a scenography of the whole exhibition, the object-based history museum could quickly become a narrative history or an experiential museum (Korff 1989, 70); 'in context' style could shift to a more immersive 'in situ' style (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 3–4).

Second, there are narrative history museums, which are less interested in exhibiting a museum collection than in narrating specific stories through media such as original artifacts, images, or stories (Majewski 2011, 152). Narrative museums tend to gravitate more closely toward either history or memorial museums. For example, in Poland, a new genre of 'narrative museum' was developed in the first decade of the twentieth century, which differentiates itself from matyrological and monographic museums (Majewski 2011, 151–152). The main function of these museums is not the collection, preservation, and exhibition of artifacts, but rather the narration of specific stories through a diverse number of media. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (USHMM), which opened in April 1993 (e.g. Majewski 2011, 152), is often considered to be the archetype of narrative museums. Its founding director Jeshajahu Weinberg has emphasized the importance of narrative within the museum:

> The museum's primary objective is to communicate to visitors a particular chapter of history. To this end, the USHMM draws upon thousands of artifacts. But it uses these artifacts only inasmuch as they constitute building blocks that help compose the historical story line as a visual continuum. This approach is essentially an attempt at visual historiography, and thus, the USHMM can be called a 'narrative museum.' (Weinberg 1994, 231)

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21 Thiemeyer highlights that artifacts can be represented as authentic through either critical historical analysis and contextualization of the historical source, or through staging the artifact's aesthetic effects (2010a, 265–266).

In other words, in a narrative museum, artifacts, images, and scenography are functional. They work primarily to establish "a historical story line as a visual continuum." The emphasis on the concept of storyline and continuum in Weinberg's statement is significant. It suggests a linear, progressive narrative and the possibility that many stories and voices will be contained within one larger story. Put differently, despite the acceptance of the narrative structure of history,[22] Weinberg's statement implies the telling of one 'great story' in a single master narrative (Berkhofer 1995, 40 – 44). This seems less inspired by postmodern theory highlighting multiple stories than by nineteenth-century historiography, which championed such master narratives (White 1973). It also counterbalances a more recent trend in museum studies, and the representation of the Second World War in particular, to highlight the individual stories of historical people (Thiemeyer 2019, 29), or at least demonstrates the objective of containing all stories within a larger frame. Weinberg also attributes the success of the USHMM to its capacity to evoke emotions among its visitors. This corresponds with Majewski's observation that narrative museums often use specific staging techniques to advance their narrative message (2011, 152).[23] The evocation of emotions is achieved through narrative rather than through individual exhibits, and because "[the museum] succeeded in demonstrating the universal character of the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust" (Weinberg 1994, 239). One of the critical questions emerging from this claim is whether the visitor still has, or even should have, freedom of interpretation and different emotional reactions to the narrative being presented.

A narrative museum, however, can mediate a multitude of messages and ideologies. Here, it is telling that two of the museums that took cues from the USHMM and aimed for a similar form with which to frame their master narratives – the House of Terror (Terror Háza) in Budapest (2002) and the Warsaw Rising Museum – have completely different agendas than their American model. Instead of Weinberg's claim of universality, they aim to re-establish national identity narratives. A matyrological museum – in Poland, originally exhibitions in the German concentration and extermination camps as well as in prisons and other memorial sites – can be easily integrated in the concept of a narrative museum. This is demonstrated through the discussions surrounding the Gdańsk Museum of the Second World War and the contemporary Polish memory debates

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22 See the insights of the linguistic turn by philosophers and historical theorists such as Arthur Danto, Hayden White, Roland Barthes, and Paul Ricœur (e. g. White 1973, 1978; 1987; Ricœur 1984–85 [1983 – 1985], Rüth 2005, 16 – 52; Munslow 2007; Jaeger 2009).

23 See also Bogunia-Borowska 2016, 240.