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## CHAPTER 10

## Engaging Experiences of the Second World War

### *Historical Distance in Exhibitions and Educational Resources*

PIETER DE BRUIJN

In 1990 the Imperial War Museum in London opened an interactive exhibition called the 'Blitz experience' about the bombing of Britain's capital city by the German Air Force in the Second World War. The exhibition was one of the first of its kind and consisted of a reconstructed air raid shelter and a bombed London street brought to life with audio-visual effects and a character actor, all in order to recreate what it must have been like to live through this historical event.<sup>1</sup>

This type of museum display, that aims to bring the past nearby and stimulate emotional engagement through an immersive experience, is an important feature of today's museums: a trend that relates to the growing presence of digital media in today's society, which calls for the authentic aura of original artefacts to be supplemented by reconstructed and simulated environments.<sup>2</sup> These strategies are also often used in the educational activities and resources of museums in which they are thought to render the past more tangible and comprehensible to school students.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural heritage may very well help students in achieving a better historical understanding. The embodied learning experiences that cultural heritage practices provide would trigger affective responses and help people to 'enter another world'.<sup>4</sup> Some studies have indicated that immersive types of display stimulate visitors' imagination and can leave them with in-depth knowledge of the history presented.<sup>5</sup> Although some influential works in heritage studies literature have framed the terrain of emotion as a

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problematic aspect of cultural heritage, focusing on nostalgic, nationalistic and commercial tendencies in some heritage practices, recent studies have suggested the analysis of emotional issues as an important field of research, as it is a key element of how visitors approach cultural heritage.<sup>6</sup> Due to the relationship of cultural heritage with processes of identity-making, scholars have, however, also pointed to the exclusionary nature of cultural heritage, and the existence of a dominant discourse that would govern the construction of the meaning and practices of heritage.<sup>7</sup>

In history teaching methodology theories it has been argued that maintaining a balance between engaging students into learning about history and allowing enough room for reflection and learning is important to achieve historical understanding. For instance, narratives that emphasize individuals have often been regarded as useful tools to trigger students' interest and prior experience, but these should not draw attention away from larger historical structures and processes.<sup>8</sup> Theorists have also stressed the importance of providing multiple perspectives in order to offer students a richer account of historical events and to teach them how to adequately assess (historical) information.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter seeks to examine how museums actually create distance, proximity, engagement and detachment in their exhibitions and related educational resources, and how the strategies they use may impact the opportunities for exploring multiple points of view.<sup>10</sup> The chapter focuses on the exhibitions and educational resources for secondary school groups of the Airbornemuseum 'Hartenstein' in Oosterbeek in the eastern region of the Netherlands, and the D-Day Museum and Overlord Embroidery in Portsmouth, U.K.

First, I will define the concepts of historical distance and multiperspectivity, and describe the theoretical framework I have developed based on these concepts to analyse the exhibitions and educational resources. Next, I will explain the method underpinning this study, after which I will present the analysis of the two museums' exhibitions and resources, showing the strategies they use to stimulate proximity or distance, and engagement or detachment. I will also examine how the specific strategies of museum display used in the exhibitions are mediated in the educational resources, and will reflect on the implications of using these strategies for the opportunities of taking multiple perspectives.

### Historical Distance and Multiperspectivity

Since the emergence of history as a discipline in the nineteenth century, many historians and philosophers of history have reflected on the question of

how they themselves relate or should relate towards their objects of study.<sup>11</sup> In recent years such problems have been theorized through the notion of historical distance as a metaphor, referring to the time span between the present in which historians are writing and the past they are studying.<sup>12</sup> Some theorists have primarily emphasized that historians should maintain or create distance when studying the past in order to be able to re-enact the past 'objectively'. Others have focused on the problem of how historians who are working in the present make sense of the past with present-day values and concepts.<sup>13</sup>

Historian Mark Phillips has used the concept of historical distance to refer to the closeness or distance in which historical representations position their audience from the historical events and processes they describe.<sup>14</sup> Historical distance, according to Phillips, is constructed on a gradient ranging from proximity or immediacy to remoteness or detachment.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, historical distance is hence defined as the configuration of temporality and engagement in historical representations, with temporality referring to the distance or nearness of the past, and engagement pointing to the level of affective, moral or ideological commitment that is stimulated.<sup>16</sup> This definition creates a clear analytical distinction between temporality and engagement. Although temporality and engagement often go hand in hand, sometimes museum strategies only paint a vivid picture of the past without eliciting any form of engagement, while strategies that construct the past as temporally distant, on the other hand, may still evoke engagement.

The relationship between the past and the present has also been an important issue underlying theories of history learning, as authors have emphasized that it is important for students to learn that the past is not something found by historians in the present, but that historians create historical accounts based on evidence.<sup>17</sup> One of the concepts that has been stressed in these theories is the taking of the perspective of historical actors or historical empathy, which involves reconstructing how people in the past felt and thought based on evidence, in order to understand the past as a foreign country.<sup>18</sup> Some degree of distance towards the past is needed as it involves analysing the actions, motives and thoughts of historical actors, and not identifying with them.<sup>19</sup>

Several scholars have specifically pointed to the importance of multiperspectivity in historical perspective taking in order to acquire a 'richer and more complex' account of historical events and understand history better.<sup>20</sup> As a concept, multiperspectivity refers to: the different viewpoints of creators of historical accounts (e.g. historians); the various perspectives of people who witnessed historical events or developments and produced evidence which reflect their personal points of view; and different geographical scales, varying from local to global.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars have also noted



constraints regarding the implementation of multiperspectivity. Actually understanding the underlying values of people's points of view is a complex activity and presenting different perspectives could also cause students to be confused and suspicious of history. Moreover, the fact that inevitably a selection needs to be made could lead to the marginalization of certain perspectives.<sup>22</sup>

### Strategies of Historical Distance

Based on insights from history theory, narrative analysis and the work of sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel on the mental strategies of organizing the past, I have developed a theoretical framework on the configuration of temporality and engagement in historical representations with a specific emphasis on museum display in which I have distinguished two categories: narrative emplotment and mnemonic bridging.<sup>23</sup>

The first category covers the various narrative structures, plotlines and perspectives that creators of historical representations can use. Historical representations can, for instance, provide a synthetic view on the past (synchronic) or emphasize developments through time (diachronic).<sup>24</sup> Although it depends on the other narrative strategies that are used, synchronic approaches normally create more temporal distance than diachronic accounts, as they present the past as a separate, closed-off period in time, free from any connections with the present.

Furthermore, historical representations can contain different narrative plotlines, such as progressive, declining, zigzag and rhyming plotlines. Progressive plotlines, which provide a 'later is better' scenario, and declining plotlines, in which the past is depicted as superior to the present, create a linear connection between the past and the present and highlight their relation, in effect stimulating temporal proximity. Zigzag plotlines, on the other hand, which offer a combination of decline and progress plots, construct greater temporal distance through their emphasis on the multifaceted nature of the past. In rhyming plots, historical events are presented as fundamentally similar to present occurrences, fusing the past and the present, which generates temporal proximity.<sup>25</sup>

Narratives can, moreover, be told from the point of view of an anonymous agent who is not part of what is being narrated (external focalization) or from the perspective of characters who are participants in the events narrated (character focalization).<sup>26</sup> According to narrative theorist Mieke Bal, narratives using external focalization can appear to be more objective, as the subjectivity of the focalizer remains implicit.<sup>27</sup> The seemingly objective feel of external focalization generates greater temporal distance and emphasizes

a detached approach, whereas using character focalization can bring the past closer and can elicit emotional engagement more easily through its direct account of the experiences of historical actors.

The second category of strategies to configure temporality and engagement involves the use of mnemonic bridging techniques to create a connection between the past and the present. This concept refers to devices and strategies that are meant to preserve continuity between the past and the present, including people's physical surroundings ('same place'), 'relics and memorabilia', 'imitation and replication' (e.g. reconstructions, re-enactments and invented traditions), calendric fusion through anniversaries and commemorations ('same time'), 'historical analogies', and 'discursive tokens of sameness' (e.g. consecutive ordinal numbers and timelines).<sup>28</sup>

Most history museums focus on the second category of bridging techniques, using material relics to construct a physical connection between the past and the present. It has often been argued that such artefacts could make the past more tangible and even cause what Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga has called a 'historical sensation': a feeling of 'immediate contact with the past'.<sup>29</sup> Dutch historian Frank Ankersmit, providing Huizinga's notion with a stronger philosophical basis, has, however, argued that in order to undergo such an experience one would need to know a lot of historical context, as these 'clouds of context' conceal the 'real' past and must be broken through: an experience that direct contact with an historical artefact could provide.<sup>30</sup> Most people would probably not possess the necessary amount of knowledge to experience such a 'historical sensation'.

Museums often choose to present their material relics in display cases with individual labels providing information about them, a strategy that establishes more temporal distance than proximity as it draws attention to the interpretative nature of the exhibit and emphasizes the artificiality of collecting and exhibiting.<sup>31</sup> Drawing from an ethnographic study, archaeologist Siân Jones has pointed to the importance of addressing the interplay between the materiality of the artefacts and the past relationships they embody in order for people to be able to experience their authenticity.<sup>32</sup>

In their exhibitions and educational activities, museums also often draw from the other categories of bridging techniques. They use historical analogies to draw parallels between the past and the present and ask students to imitate historical actors through empathy activities. The past is also frequently replicated through *in situ* types of display that aim to include the larger reality that surrounds the object through reconstructions, replicas or re-enactments. Henrietta Lidchi has distinguished between simulacra, which solely rely on imitations of real objects, and reconstructions, featuring artefacts that are

authentic in origin or design; both types of display require little interpretation and communicate a sense of 'realness'.<sup>33</sup>

### Method

Based on the theoretical framework of historical distance and multiperspectivity, a qualitative scheme of analysis was developed to study the narrative structures, plotlines, perspectives and mnemonic bridging techniques included in the museums' exhibitions and related educational activities. In the analysis a distinction was made between the narrative plot structures present in the exhibitions, specific educational activities and the educational programme as a whole. This chapter focuses on two museums in locations that have gained significance since the Second World War as places where important historical events took place.

The D-Day Museum & Overlord Embroidery is located near Portsmouth, which served as an embarkation point for the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944 (termed D-Day) that marked the start of Operation Overlord, which heralded the liberation of Western Europe. The museum offers an exhibition that deals with the preparations and execution of Operation Overlord in chronological order, including a section on the experiences at the home front, and the so-called Overlord Embroidery that provides a similar narrative in thirty-four panels.<sup>34</sup> The museum is planning a full redevelopment that is scheduled to be finished in 2019.<sup>35</sup> For secondary schools, the museum offered activity sheets that students could use to guide themselves through the museum.<sup>36</sup>

The Airborne Museum 'Hartenstein' is located in the eastern region of the Netherlands, which formed the backdrop to the Allied military Operation Market Garden. This operation was meant to liberate this region in order to create an entry point into Germany, but the operation failed, as the resistance of the German forces proved too strong. The museum offers a formal exhibition with objects presented in display cases, several reconstructions and an elaborate simulacrum called the 'Airborne Experience'.<sup>37</sup> For secondary school groups, the museum offered the programme 'De Vriendschapsarmband', consisting of a self-guided exploratory tour through the museum and a pre- and post-plenary session in which this activity is introduced and reflected upon.<sup>38</sup>

The exhibitions were photographed and the analysis of the educational resources was based on printed materials. As the educational programme of the Airborne Museum also contained a pre- and post-plenary session that were delivered orally, a semi-structured interview with the educator was conducted as a member check.

### D-Day Museum (Portsmouth), 'Discovering D-Day'

Walking along the beach of Southsea, the seaside resort connected to Portsmouth, with a strong breeze coming from the English Channel and waves crashing over the path, one could almost imagine how a huge fleet of landing craft crossed that very same sea almost seventy years ago as part of the Normandy Landings on D-Day. This is where the D-Day Museum is located, only a few hundred metres off the coast. Although this setting provides an opportunity for proximity and engagement by stimulating a constancy of place, the museum has opted not to use the historical significance of its location.

The museum opened in 1984 and was primarily built to provide a home to the Overlord Embroidery, which was commissioned in the 1960s as a 'permanent memorial and tribute to the efforts and sacrifices of the Allies, but above all to the "national teamwork" here in this country which made D-Day possible'.<sup>39</sup> It was meant as a sort of 'reverse Bayeux Tapestry', which commemorates the Norman conquest of England in the eleventh century.<sup>40</sup> Historians of the Ministry of Defence Library wrote the script in 1968, while designer and painter Sandra Lawrence created the cartoons, which were then embroidered at the Royal School of Needlework.<sup>41</sup> The finished embroidery was originally to be put on display at the Imperial War Museum in London, but, after a tour through the U.S.A., Canada and Britain, was relocated to Portsmouth, due to its size and problems over getting planning permission for a new museum building.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Overlord Embroidery: National Identification*

The narrative of the embroidery stimulates a sense of national identification through its plotline and the perspectives that have been integrated. In thirty-four panels the embroidery narrates how the British prepared for the Second World War, how they suffered massive damage from German air raids during the Blitz and how the military campaign was planned and executed. As the Operation was a success and the Allied forces emerged victorious, the plotline of this exhibit can be characterized as being progressive. Together with the perspectives that have been included, this plotline contributes to its national sense of ideological engagement, as it shows how the entire nation – including women – collectively supported the war effort and fought back against the Germans. While the narrative does also include the Americans and Canadians by referring to the Allied Forces, the Germans primarily act as antagonists.

The sense of national identification as stimulated by the narrative is reinforced by its context as a 'reverse Bayeux Tapestry'. The idea of having two tapestries on display on exactly the opposite sides of the English Channel



emphasizes Britain's status as an island nation that was conquered by the Normans but that liberated Europe centuries later. This pattern reflects the overall memory of British military experiences in the Second World War, often drawing attention to events in which Britain stood alone, fought against the odds and got caught in a lot of trouble at the beginning.<sup>43</sup> In one text panel, the invasion is called an 'armada', referring to the maritime conflicts between England and Spain in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This phrasing stresses the importance of maritime events in Britain's national memory. These kinds of templates reinforce the national sense of ideological engagement elicited by the embroidery.

The questions in the educational activity sheets mediate the experience of temporal proximity this visual representation may provide by stimulating students to look closely at the panels of the Overlord Embroidery, and reinforce the ideological engagement by referring to some of the elements in the embroidery that emphasize that the British people and Allied Forces were all involved in this history. For example:

In Panels 1-4 write down ways in which civilians are shown helping the war effort on the Home Front in Britain.

In Panels 21-25 which nationalities are shown taking part in the fighting on D-Day?<sup>44</sup>

The Germans are not referred to, except for a question that asks for the name of commander Field Marshal Rommel.

Some questions aim to bring the past even closer and trigger emotional engagement through empathy-based activities that stimulate students to imagine what it must have been like in the past, which relates to the mnemonic bridging technique of imitation and replication. Students are encouraged, for example, to take the perspective of a French woman or man seen looking out of a window in one of the panels and are asked to describe what they would feel:

In Panel 17 imagine you are the French woman or her husband looking out of the window. Describe what you can see and how you are feeling.<sup>45</sup>

This first-person perspective not only encourages students to experience through imagination but also stimulates their affective engagement by having them think of emotions. A similar approach is taken by the question that asks students to find out more about the weather conditions on D-Day from the embroidery panels. It tells students more about the experiences of the soldiers and the severe circumstances in which they operated.

#### *Material Relics, Reconstructions and Facts*

The main exhibition of the D-Day Museum carries a similar focus on the Allied military perspective as the Overlord Embroidery, and also speaks of

an 'armada', reflecting Britain's national framing of the history of the Second World War, fostering a similar sense of national identification. This exhibition, however, primarily relies on a combination of bridging techniques to configure temporality and engagement.

Firstly, it uses the bridging technique of material relics by presenting artefacts 'in context' behind glass panels and encapsulated in interpretative texts, which emphasizes that they have been ripped from their original context, generating temporal distance. The analysis shows that instead of focusing on particular characteristics of the objects, the object labels and text panels primarily recount the historical events and processes the objects represent, treating the artefacts as illustrations.

Sometimes the exhibition aims to bring the past closer by interpreting objects through first-person narration. For instance, one label, referring to packets of Durex on display, offers an impersonal description of how they were used, while another recounts a soldier as saying that he was expecting to meet girls on the beach but eventually found that the condom was only to be used 'to put your compass and your watches in ... and put it in your helmet, so when you went ashore ... we wasn't going to get these things wet'.<sup>46</sup> Interpretations of the more descriptive first type, however, dominate the exhibition.

Secondly, in addition to this 'in context' type of display, the D-Day Museum also combines material relics with the bridging technique of imitation and replication, as several reconstructions have been incorporated into the exhibition using mannequins, props and original artefacts in recreated environments. For example, the exhibition features a reconstruction of a woman working in a factory, representing the fact that women were employed during the war in order to facilitate the war industry.

Although these displays are intended to provide a more vivid depiction of wartime events or situations and thus stimulate temporal proximity, visitors are still kept at a spatial distance and are only invited to peek at these scenes. These exhibits are based on modes of display that originated in the nineteenth century at World Fairs and folklore museums that presented episodes of people's daily life in the past.<sup>47</sup> From the section narrating the start of the invasion of France, however, the museum also begins to allow visitors to walk through these reconstructions. They pass through a recreated section of an aircraft carrier and encounter a jeep in 'a field north of Ranville in Normandy, just before dawn on D-Day'.<sup>48</sup> These reconstructions should be more immersive but are probably not elaborate enough to be convincing by today's standards.

The educational activity sheets primarily use the reconstructions and the large pieces of military equipment on display in a vehicle shed to teach

students more about the history of D-Day. Contrary to what the presentation technique sets out to do, these questions do not mediate an experience but approach the exhibits as evidence for retrieving historical information. From a reconstruction of the Map Room at Southwick House, the building in Portsmouth from where Operation Overlord was coordinated, for instance students only need to derive the date on which D-Day took place and from which three ports the invasion ships sailed:

Look at the replica of the wall map of the Channel at Southwick House near Portsmouth.

What was the date of D-Day?

Name three English ports from which invasion ships set sail?<sup>49</sup>

Although such questions implicitly attribute a sense of 'realness' to the reconstructions, they do not really mediate the temporal proximity they convey. Moreover, while the activity sheets mention the 'authentic wartime landing craft' that is on display in the vehicle shed, they do not touch upon the experience it can provide by walking into it and looking at video footage of soldiers sailing to France in a similar vessel. Instead, attention is drawn to other vehicles on display, and students are asked to describe what function they had.

To summarize, the D-Day Museum fosters a national sense of identification through the progressive narratives of the main exhibition and the Overlord Embroidery, and a notable absence of multiple perspectives. The museum mediates this engagement by highlighting the Allied and British civilian point of view and encouraging students to take a first-person perspective. The displays in the main exhibition create a bridge between the past and the present by using material relics, but these displays generate more temporal distance with the objects being presented in display cases and encapsulated in descriptive interpretations. Reconstructions provide a more vivid depiction of the past, but the educational activity sheets do not mediate this temporal proximity, nor do they add perspectives or provide room for reflection, as they focus on historical fact-finding.

#### **Airborne Museum 'Hartenstein' (Oosterbeek), 'De Vriendschapsarmband'**

At the edge of a park in the village of Oosterbeek in the eastern region of the Netherlands stands a nineteenth-century mansion that has been home to the Airborne Museum 'Hartenstein' since 1978. The mansion, formerly a hotel, served as the main headquarters of the British Airborne Division during the Allied military Operation Market Garden that took place in the

wider surrounding area.<sup>50</sup> Contrary to the D-Day Museum, the Airborne Museum does emphasize the historical significance of its surroundings in its exhibitions and educational resources.

#### *Personal Narrative and Material Relics*

One of the museum's educational programmes called 'The Friendship Armband' stimulates temporal proximity and emotional engagement through the narrative strategy of personalizing a particular perspective, by focusing on the personal story of two young Staff Sergeants, Richard William West and P.J. Allen, who both fought in the Battle of Arnhem. The programme combines this strategy with the mnemonic bridging technique of material relics, as it revolves around one object that is related to this story: an armband made of cotton with the Dutch flag and the word 'Orange' stitched on it, which Allen and West tore in half as a token of their friendship, meaning to reconnect them after the battle. Unfortunately, this never happened as West fell in battle. The attribution of a personal story to the object highlights some of the past relationships embodied by the artefact, which may contribute to people's ability to experience their authenticity.<sup>51</sup>

The object serves as a 'guide' for students to work on a historical enquiry in the exhibition. The main exhibition on the top floor of the Airborne Museum features material relics that have been presented in glass display cases, suggesting temporal distance, but the museum has interwoven them with many blown-up pictures of events that took place in the region, video footage of the events that is projected on some of the display cases, and quotes from German and Allied soldiers and eyewitnesses who give their take on the battles. Furthermore, the exhibition uses the mnemonic bridging technique of 'same place' by emphasizing in the introductory video that traces of the battles and fights that took place in the surrounding area are still present and that the events are commemorated and remembered on a regular basis.

The questions in the activity sheets that students use to guide themselves through the exhibition encourage them to investigate the objects, texts, quotes, photos, maps and video interviews in the exhibition to find out historical information, which should be used to decide whether a recreated scene in Allen and West's story actually took place or not. This evidence-based activity of historical enquiry stresses the act of 'historical craftsmanship', emphasizing a detached, reflective approach, which is reinforced through some of the questions that draw more attention to the interpretative texts in which the objects have been wrapped than to the artefacts and photos themselves.

Despite the evidence-based approach, most questions however stimulate temporal proximity by highlighting the authenticity of the objects and



the ability of quotes and photos to provide an insight into the past. Some questions encourage students to look closely at the objects and use them to acquire information about the past and get a better image of it:

Look at the display case with the lab coat.

What information can you find about the armband that is visible here? Make a drawing of the armband and describe it.

Look at the wall directly on the left with pictures and quotes from private Sidney Elliot at the top.

How were the allied forces received in Oosterbeek?<sup>52</sup>

Another assignment asks students to compare the significance of the 'friendship armband' with another armband on display, pointing to the specific history of this artefact and the past relationships it embodies.

The emotional engagement that is fostered by connecting the enquiry to the personal story of Allen and West is reinforced by some questions that encourage students to cognitively re-enact the thoughts of historical actors, hinting at the bridging technique of 'imitation and replication':

Look at the quotes on the grey bar.

What would the soldiers have thought when they left Great Britain?<sup>53</sup>

#### *Immersive Experiences*

In addition to the objects-centred main exhibition, which provides the necessary historical context, the museum offers several experience-based exhibits that heavily feature the bridging technique of 'imitation and replication'. On the sub-basement level, the museum has installed reconstructions that show how the Hartenstein Hotel was used as headquarters by the Allied troops, hence combining the bridging technique with an experience of 'same place'. It shows how, on the very spot where visitors are standing, wounded were treated in the emergency hospital at Hartenstein and how Major-General Roy Urquhart devised a strategy in a meeting with some of his officers. Similar to the ones at the D-Day Museum, these reconstructions still keep visitors at a spatial distance, reducing their level of immersion.

The basement level aims for a more immersive experience, inviting visitors to step into the footsteps of a British parachutist. After a video briefing of 'their mission', visitors enter a reconstruction of a plane, which they exit through the side door as if they are making a parachute jump. They then reach an elaborate simulacrum of the Battle of Arnhem, recreated by footage shown on giant projection screens, blown-up pictures, mannequins, reconstructions of houses, military vehicles and sounds. Although some of the vehicles included in the experience may be authentic, the museum has not labelled them as such and uses them to support the immersion.

Regarding this immersive 'Airborne Experience' the educational resource uses the same detached approach of historical enquiry as it does for the exhibition on the upper floors. Students have to analyse the experience as a film and write down whether they recognize scenes from Allen and West's story. This activity appears to defuse the experience of temporal proximity that the exhibit aims for, but also attributes a sense of authenticity to the simulacrum, without discussing it as a representation. According to the museum's educator at the time, reflecting on the constructed nature of the experience would be too complex for students, while the design of the experience is also based on thorough historical research so the information that students can derive from it would be similar to that on text panels in the exhibition.

#### *Deconstructing Narratives and Multiple Perspectives*

Although the resource revolves around the personal story of the two Allied soldiers, it also draws attention to other perspectives. The activity sheets encourage students to explore the experiences of civilians who got caught up in the conflict, and one question asks them to compare a German and Allied account of what happened during the battle. They can find this information in the exhibition that also contains various references to the point of view of civilians who got caught in the battles and to the German side of the story, most obviously so in the museum's collection of weapons, uniforms and equipment, where the German and Allied objects each take up one half of the room. Germans are also frequently quoted and a video screen shows interviews with German veterans in which they talk about their motivations and their – sometimes emotional – experiences. These interviews give a human voice to the enemy forces, generating temporal proximity and emotional engagement.

In contrast with this approach of multiperspectivity, the experience-based displays on the basement levels, however, mainly focus on the perspective of the Allied forces, and it would be difficult to explore others. This is particularly the case in the 'Airborne Experience'. Due to its first-person perspective, visitors are less likely to detach themselves from the history that is presented to them. Regarding the 'Airborne Experience' the educational resource does not attempt to search for multiple perspectives but to create a potential reconstruction of what Sergeants Allan and West might have encountered.

To sum up, the Airborne Museum uses the bridging techniques of constancy of place, material relics, and imitation and replication to stimulate temporal proximity. The museum's exhibition explores multiple points of view, including those of the Allied forces, German forces and civilians, but these perspectives are not present in the Allied-centred reconstructions and

simulacra, which aim to create an immersive experience of the past. The museum's educational programme reinforces temporal proximity by introducing a personal story related to a single object that may also stimulate emotional engagement, while opting for an educational activity that is based on historical enquiry, which encourages a more detached stance and defuses the immersive nature of the 'Airborne Experience'.

### Conclusion

Just like the Imperial War Museum with its Blitz Experience, museums in general increasingly draw on modes of display that provide a sensory experience and create a more tangible version of the past in order to make it better accessible and trigger the imagination. While this may be a good vehicle to engage young people into history learning, theories from history teaching methodology have also stressed the importance of multiperspectivity, which would require a certain degree of distance and detachment to allow for proper reflection.

The analysis shows that there are many different strategies to construct distance or proximity and engagement or detachment in various degrees. The exhibitions analysed in this chapter heavily rely on the bridging strategies of relics and memorabilia and imitation and replication to construct historical distance. Regarding the display of material relics, the exhibitions show different approaches, with descriptive interpretations generating more temporal distance, while interpretations which highlight specific aspects of objects or relate them to a personal story foster temporal proximity and engagement. The analysis also shows different takes on *in situ* types of display that vary in their degree of immersion, due to the use of, for instance, a first-person perspective or modern technologies.

How these strategies are mediated to school students depends on the educational resources and activities. The educational activity sheets of both museums studied in this chapter rarely stimulate the experience that is provided by their exhibitions. The D-Day Museum primarily encourages students to learn about facts from the exhibits on display. It seldom touches upon the authentic aura of objects and students are not encouraged to immerse themselves in the themed reconstructions. The Airborne Museum focuses on historical enquiry, which encourages students to take the detached stance of a historian. Even for the immersive 'Airborne Experience', the activity sheets focus on analysis and investigation.

Both museums show different ways of configuring temporality and engagement through the narrative pattern of their exhibitions. The D-Day Museum's progressive narrative and focus on the British and Allied

perspective stimulates a national sense of identification, which is mediated in the educational resource through specific assignments. The Airborne Museum's exhibition presents multiple points of view, but the accompanying educational programme primarily emphasizes a personal story, which fosters emotional engagement.

The narrative strategies show that the concepts of historical distance and multiperspectivity are closely related to each other. Depending on its presentation, a historical narrative that looks at the past through the perspective of a single (group of) historical actor(s) can stimulate a more intimate relation with the past than a narrative that looks at it from various angles. Constructing the past as nearby or in an engaging fashion may also influence the opportunities for exploring multiple perspectives. The Airborne Museum's reconstructions and simulacra that aim for immersion and engagement strongly rely on a singular, first-person perspective, which makes the exploration of other points of view difficult. In such cases, it might be better to fully exploit the engagement strategy in educational resources, as it is a unique characteristic of these exhibitions, and introduce other perspectives later in an environment with fewer stimuli.

Cultural heritage offers unique opportunities for experience and engagement that may help people in learning about the past. Strategies of stimulating temporality and engagement, however, need to be balanced out with distanced and detached approaches in order for the educational use of heritage to reach its full potential. The museums analysed in this chapter could create this balance by better supporting the experience provided in some of the exhibits, while adding perspectives and reflective activities for others, in order to help students understand the interpretative nature of these active expressions in today's historical culture. This way, cultural heritage can become an asset of history learning.

### Notes

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18. Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six*, 136–167; O.L. Davis Jr., A. Yeager and S.J. Foster, eds, *Historical Empathy and Perspective Taking in the Social Studies*, Lanham, 2001.
19. Seixas and Morton, *The Big Six*, 6.
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