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Abstract:

The Second World War is omnipresent in contemporary memory debates. As the war fades from living memory, this study is the first to systematically analyze how Second World War museums allow prototypical visitors to comprehend and experience the past. It analyzes twelve permanent exhibitions in Europe and North America –the Bundeswehr Military History Museum in Dresden, the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, the House of European History in Brussels, the Imperial War Museums in London and Manchester, the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, Topography of Terror in Berlin, Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Bastogne War Museum, German-Russian Museum in Berlin-Karlshorst, Oskar-Schindler Factory in Kraków, Warsaw Rising Museum – in order to show how museums reflect and shape cultural memory, as well as their cognitive, ethical, emotional, and aesthetic potential and effects. This includes a discussion of representations of events such as the Holocaust and air warfare, as well as a discussion of the use of art in Second World War museums. In relation to narrative, memory, and experience, the study develops the concept of experientiality (on a sliding scale between mimetic and structural forms), which provides a new textual-spatial method for reading exhibitions and understanding the experiences of historical individuals and collectives. It is supplemented by concepts like transnational memory, empathy, and encouraging critical thinking through difficult knowledge.

See also <https://blog.degruyter.com/world-war-ii-museums-and-the-battle-for-memory-75-years-later/>

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