

Mathias James Silk Husom

## **A Touch of Alterity**

A Study of a WWI/II Re-enactment Group in the  
West Country of the UK

Master's thesis in social anthropology  
Supervisor: Hans Martin Thomassen  
May 2023



Mathias James Silk Husom

## **A Touch of Alterity**

A Study of a WWI/II Re-enactment Group in the West  
Country of the UK



Master's thesis in social anthropology  
Supervisor: Hans Martin Thomassen  
May 2023

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences  
Department of Social Anthropology



Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology



## **Abstract**

This thesis approaches historical re-enactment as heritage practice. Through doing re-enactment people partake in activities which help them connect with their history. By living, eating, and doing activities which soldiers went through during WWI/II they connect with their heritage. Through doing re-enactment they learn about the history in ways that in their own views no book will teach them.

The thesis is based on a six-month long field fieldwork among a group of people in the west country of the UK who re-enact as British WWI/II soldiers. In their view they are honouring and commemorating British soldiers who either fought or died fighting in battle. Through their actions they are performing and teaching the audience on the life of soldiers. They become living museum pieces which allows not only themselves, but also the public to become hands on with the history. For re-enactors historical accuracy is paramount for their portrayal. Staying true to the history is important to give the audience as well as themselves the most realistic vision of WWI/II as possible. This fosters a skilled vision (Grasseni, 2004) in my interlocutors, constantly narrowing down details on what is right and wrong. They further discuss their findings or engage in discussions about correct representations with each other.

Re-enactment allows for a space where re-enactors can create their own community. It brings likeminded people together and allows them to connect with each other. Through doing re-enactment they create their own *communitas* (Turner, 1977). However, they also connect with soldiers who have undergone the same activities as they do. Not only connecting them with each other, but further with the soldiers of yesterday. Re-enactment also allows for the creation of battlegrounds, at a place there never were any battles. The battlefields of France are transported into the UK. Allowing re-enactors to create spaces of remembrance. Allowing both the public and re-enactors to experience the past in ways, and places it never happened.



## **Sammendrag**

Denne oppgaven tilnærmer seg historisk “re-enactment” som gjennomføring av kulturell arv. Gjennom å gjøre re-enactment deltar folk i aktiviteter som hjelper dem å komme i kontakt med deres historie. Ved å leve, spise og gjøre aktiviteter som soldater gjennomgikk i først og andre verdens krig forbinder de seg med deres kulturarv. Ved å gjenskape fortiden lærer de om sin historie på måter, som etter dem vel og merke, mener ingen historiebøker kan lære de.

Oppgaven er basert på et seks måneders langt feltarbeid med en gruppe mennesker vest i England som gjenskaper soldater fra første og andre verdenskrig. I deres syn hedrer de og minner de britiske soldater som kjempet og døde i kampene. Gjennom deres handlinger opptrer de og lærer publikum og livet til soldater. Ved å bli levende museumsgjenstander lar de seg selv, samt publikum ta del i historie. Historisk nøyaktighet er avgjørende for en troverdig fremstilling. Å være tro mot historien er viktig for å gi seg selv, og publikum den mest realistiske visjonen av første og andre verdenskrig som mulig. Dette fremmer en «skilled vision» (Grasseni, 2004) hos mine informanter, som gjør så de stadig ser mer detaljer på hva som er rett og galt. Videre diskuterer de disse funnene med hverandre og deltar i diskusjoner om hva som er korrekte representasjonen med hverandre.

Re-enactment åpner for et rom der de kan skape sitt eget felleskap. Dette bringer likesinnede mennesker sammen og lar dem komme i kontakt med hverandre. Dette skaper et *communitas* (Turner, 1977). Samtidig knytter de seg også til soldater som har gjennomgått samme aktiviteter som de gjenskaper. Ikke bare kobler de seg med seg om hverandre, men også videre med gårsdagens soldater. Re-enactment gjør det mulig å lage slagmarker på steder det aldri var noen slag. Slagmarkene i Frankrike blir transportert og gjenskapt i Storbritannia. Dette tillater for å skape rom for erindring som lar både publikum og informantene mine oppleve fortiden på måter og steder det aldri skjedde.





## **Acknowledgements**

I would first and foremost like to thank all my interlocutors, which helped me get into the re-enactment. With a special thank you for lending me enough kit to get by so I was able to partake in the activities. Without you guys I would not been able to do this! Thank you also for all the wonderful memories we shared doing re-enactment, living in the trench, fighting the Germans, and laughing around a campfire singing songs.

I wish to thank my supervisor Hans Martin Thomassen for giving me comments on my thesis and pushing me in ways I didn't think of before. Furthermore, I want to thank Carla Dahl Jørgensen for the immense help during writing seminars!

I would also like to thank Lita Martine Frydenlund for reading through my thesis, giving me valuable comments! Without you I would have truly been lost.

I would like to thank all my classmates. Especially the ones I have shared a reading room with. Thank you for all the wonderful times we have had at the reading room! While it is good to now be finished, the times will still be sorely missed!

I would also like to thank my family and especially my mum for all the uplifting comments through the course of this master. Thank you for always reminding me to continue my work, even when times seemed dark.



## **Table of Contents**

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	What is Historical Re-enactment/Living history .....	2
1.2	Earlier research on the topic of historical re-enactment .....	5
1.3	Getting into the world of re-enactment.....	8
1.4	Methodological techniques.....	10
1.5	Ethical implications .....	12
1.6	Structure of the thesis .....	13
2	Reliving the past .....	15
2.1	The Great Dorset Steam Fair .....	15
2.2	Blaenavon .....	29
3	Presenting the “correct” past .....	33
3.1	Looking like the past .....	36
3.2	Skilfully recreated past .....	37
3.3	Touching the past.....	41
3.4	Sounds of the past.....	44
3.5	Doing the past wrong.....	45
3.6	Reproduced vs original past .....	46
3.7	“STAND TO” .....	48
3.8	Commodification of the past .....	51
4	Performing the past.....	55
4.1	Becoming a soldier .....	55
4.2	Teaching the past .....	57
4.3	A product of our time .....	59
4.4	Tommie ergo sum.....	60
4.5	Learning and identifying with the past.....	62

5	Communities of the past.....	67
5.1	The new guys.....	67
5.2	An extended family in the making .....	69
6	Heritage, history and remembrance.....	75
6.1	“Lest we forget”.....	75
6.2	Heritage of the past.....	79
7	Conclusion.....	83
7.1	Limitations of the study and further research .....	86
	References .....	87

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1 Sleeping on the fire step.....	18
Figure 2 Being ordered to stand to .....	20
Figure 3 Cooking beans on a homemade cooker .....	21
Figure 4 Graffitied walls .....	26
Figure 5 Singing in the trench .....	27
Figure 6 Cart made by Tommy .....	39
Figure 7 The 24 hour ration pack .....	40
Figure 8 Attacking the German position .....	71
Figure 9 Backside of Commemoration stand at the Great Dorset Steam Fair .....	77



# **1 Introduction**

Some people gather nuts, others collect stamps or Legos. Still, others collect history in the form of war memorabilia pertaining to the two world wars. In fact, the latter group does not only collect history but also take an active part in the re-enacting of this history, turning history into heritage. Living themselves into situations and experiences soldiers might have gone through during their campaigns. Heritage, according to Michael Mochocki, is not history, not about the past per se but rather about our relations between the present and the past (Mochocki, 2021, 9).

This thesis approaches re-enactment as a form of heritage practice. It explores how, why and with what effects a small, imagined community of people from all walks of life, living in England's scenic west country turn history into heritage by re-enacting as British forces during WWI/II. In their own words, what they are up to is to pay respect to, remember, learn, and commemorate dead British soldiers who gave their lives so that the next generation of British citizens could have theirs.

What I hope to achieve through these explorations, is to investigate the status of history, and the re-enactment of history, today. Some scholars argue that there has been a recent affective shift in how we view and engage with history and that re-enactment is one of the indicators of this affective turn (Agnew, 2007; Landsberg, 2004; Korsmeyer, 2019; Brauer & Lücke, 2020). Other scholars (Armstrong & Coles, 2008) argue that there has been a recent commoditised and consumerist shift in how we view and engage with history in ways that makes re-enactment practices also an indicator of democratized and commoditized tendencies. What Paul Armstrong and Janet Coles means by history undergoing a democratization process, is that it has become more hands on, letting ordinary people take part in the reconstruction of history (Armstrong & Coles, 2008, 65-66). The marketing of some of these public events as a sort of entertainment or a fun and exciting day for the whole family. Not to speak of the market for buying and selling of re-enactment gear, speaks of the commodification of history.

That leaves us with the affective turn, that is opening for people to experience the past without ever having lived in it. To experience alterity by sensing it, literally speaking getting in touch with alterity by feeling it, touching it, re-living it, embracing it, surrounding oneself with stuff that previously belonged to this alterity. In other words, to get a touch of this alterity. Touching it gives both re-enactors and the audience a sense of being there and of taking part in that history. Juliane Brauer and Martin Lücke describes re-enactment today as practices that treat history as

experiences. Experiencing history can be done through one's own body by touching it, feeling it, re-living the day-to-day mundane life of a soldier, getting inside a soldier's head by learning about how that must have felt. Surrounding themselves with stuff that previously belonged to this alterity, or skilfully made tactile reconstructions of that alterity by re-enactors (Bruaer & Lücke, 2020). In this way coming to know it and connecting to it through one's own senses, basically travelling back in time through touch (Korsmeyer, 2019) and fostering a skilled vision (Grasseni, 2004). Through touch re-enactors re-live the past, giving re-enactors and the audience a sense of both being there and of taking part in that history turned into heritage.

I hope to bring this out by inviting the reader into one re-enactment group in the UK. Exploring what they are up to, that is what they say, what they do, and what they say they do. In doing so, we will also meet members of other re-enactment groups on occasion. Through this work I hope to show that historical accuracy is of concern at every level of re-enactment and is used somewhat as a gauge to differentiate between good and bad re-enactors. The main thesis questions will be: How does re-enactors through re-living and experiencing the past engage with their heritage? And how do re-enactors negotiate historical accuracy?

## **1.1 What is Historical Re-enactment/Living history**

Historical re-enactment is first and foremost a hobby where people dress up in historically correct uniforms or outfits and act as if they were historical characters. Most people that partake in this hobby are also collectors of historical artifacts. Re-enactment becomes a way for them to show off these collections. However, while doing re-enactment they often enter a role, setting up a play in which spectators can come and see the objects used in realistic settings. Letting spectators get a view into, in the case of my fieldwork, different aspects of being a soldier in WWI/II. Giving the spectators an insight into everything from doing drills, cleaning weapons, disassembling and assembly of weapons, to general camp life. Re-enacting becomes a way for people to immerse themselves within historical periods, going into a role and in that way live the life of historical characters. This last aspect here is more concerned with the term living history, the name itself implies that people live the history itself, embodying and acquiring knowledge of history, through doing.

Historical re-enactment, and living history are two different distinctions, but are very related. While re-enactment is more of an educational theatrical performance, following scripts. Living



history on the other hand is more related to recreating living conditions and generally do not follow a planned script. Re-enactors often go from the role of a re-enactor to living historian, depending on the immersivity they try to obtain (Rodriguez, 2016). Throughout this thesis, I will use the term re-enactment to describe both terms. I do this because my interlocutors tended to use the terms interchangeably, but mostly used re-enactment when describing what they were doing.

Re-enactment events is itself a whole business. Where within the hobby you have the re-enactors themselves, the boots on the ground, but also event organisers. The re-enactors themselves quite often do not earn any money at all doing re-enactment. If they do, it is often compensation for fuel, or food. Some events are charity events made by local councils, like many of the armed forces days that are being held around the country. However, event organisers do not necessarily make that much money. Expenses and the organising of things such as rent of land, food stands, portable toilets, and all other amenities needed for an event, is time consuming and sometimes expensive. Sometimes, such as one event called White Horse used all their profits to donate to Royal British legion. It is also worth to note that re-enactors are usually the ones that own the vehicles that they bring to the events. In a business sense using re-enactors seems to be a good choice as it lessens the financial burden of making an event. As well as it lets the re-enactors show off their collections for free.

Events are usually marketed as “history comes alive” for educational purposes, as well as for commemorative reasons. It has evolved into a huge business, encompassing more than just re-enactors and event organisers, especially WWI and WWII re-enactment. People re-enacting earlier periods quite often need to produce their own equipment, making tunics, and generally being more creative in producing their equipment. For WWI and WWII most items are available to buy online, as well as the fact that many objects remain in very good condition to this day. Lessening the general need to produce uniforms and objects, however, re-enactors portray great skill and creativity for producing objects that generally is not available for purchase. These online stores usually come in different price ranges depending on the quality.

Historical re-enactment is something that has been around for a long time, the romans used to stage famous battles in their amphitheatres as a form of public spectacle. In Sweden with Skansen, as well as Norway with Norsk Folkemuseum, living history museums have existed since the late 1800s. These museums focused on heritage, being a nationalistic project showing performances, such as dances, as well as arts and crafts as heritage events. David Dean explains

these museums as a response to fears that pre-industrial societies were being threatened, or disappearing (Dean, 2020, 120). Even in religious teachings, some of the rituals is based on re-enacting events of the bible, such as the communion. Given this, re-enactment is certainly not a product of modern society. Albeit re-enactment still conveys itself closely to performing the heritage of the nation. However, the method remains the same, having an open museum, which lets people have a peek into the lives of historical characters. Letting the public see for themselves, as well as experience how life was like in different eras. Having people stand in as actors, living the life, role playing as historical characters. Letting spectators almost time travel back in time to the historical eras. Letting them learn first-hand how people lived.

Re-enactment in the UK is somewhat seasonal, with the biggest bulk of events usually being hosted between March and September. Apart from November where re-enactors often partake in events commemorating remembrance Sunday. Re-enactment is further somewhat situated within something I would like to call the remembrance business. Remembrance in the UK is held as nationwide day of commemoration to the soldiers who died in war. It is generally held on the second Sunday in November, but originally was set to be held on the anniversary of the end of WWI. 11 o'clock on the eleventh day of the eleventh month. During remembrance Sunday most tv presenters as well as the public buy poppies to put on their jackets. Villages and cities alike hold commemorations where they put down flowers on the local cenotaph, doing acts such as holding of two minutes of silence and parades. While not being able to take part myself, mostly because my field period was over. I was told by many of my interlocutors that remembrance Sunday was an important day for re-enactors.

Many re-enactors get invited by their local villages, or into bigger towns, to put on their WWI/II kit and take part in the commemoration. Serving as living reminders of the soldiers who have died, letting the public get a physical reminder to their memory. Mark Imber and Trudy Fraser states that this way of carrying out remembrance, is directly connected to the way remembrance Sunday started off right after WWI. Imber and Fraser explains this model as the '1919 model'. Noting that some of the most recognizable features of today's remembrance were deeply controversial when they were implemented (Imber & Fraser, 2011, 385). Remembrance was as much a topic back then as it is now, Jay Winter notes that by 1918 most towns and villages in Britain was affected by WWI, becoming what he calls communities of bereaved. To make sense of this mass death Caroline Winter explains that thousands of memorials were created across the world to create social memories to honour the dead (Winter, 1995, 6; Winter 2009, 607). Catriona Pennell and Mark Sheehan notes that commemoration and remembrance of the first

world war has had an increase in the last decades, as well as reaching new highs during the centenary anniversaries of WWI (Pennell & Sheehan, 2020, 22).

The battlegrounds of WWI were already a place of attraction while the war was still ongoing, the French upper class often went to watch the battles from afar, and the first Michelin guidebook came out in 1917. Many of the battlefields had been made into places of pilgrimage. Most of the dead did not get repatriated home, prompting their family members to visit the battlefields to mourn. The battlefields also became a place of recreational tourism, because of these reasons the battlefields became a mix of public and private places of remembrance. The British travel agency Thomas Cook organised trips as early as 1919 to the battlefields, in which within that year alone some 60.000 people visited. Still to this day the battlefields of WWI remain a popular tourist destination with numbers up into the millions of yearly visitors (Berge, 2015, 99; Pennell, 2018, 174). Trond Berge has conducted fieldwork among British people who undertake trips to battlefields, describing the act as an aspect of dark tourism. Berge elucidates that these tourists get something someone will never get from reading books. It allows people to comprehend it in a bigger picture how it was, seeing where it happened. Stories somewhat does not only become stories anymore, but it also becomes real. People get to see exactly where and how it looks now, almost as if a spirit of the fallen still resides there (Berge, 2015, 106).

## **1.2 Earlier research on the topic of historical re-enactment**

Richard Handler and William Saxton notes that a dominant concern for re-enactors is authenticity. The term is often referred to when there are discussions regarding a group's ability and wish to remain legitimate. Towards the spectators and other groups alike, but also within the group itself. Handler and Saxton argue that for re-enactors authenticity means historical accuracy. Acts which are authentic simulates a historic place, scene, or event perfectly (Handler & Saxton, 1988, 243). Handler and Saxton further claim that re-enactors subconsciously exhibit a second conception of authenticity. Authentic experience, which is to be achieved through doing living history. Where individuals themselves feel that they are connected to both the real world and their real selves. They further allege re-enactments makes practitioners seek an authentic world, because as they claim, for many our everyday experience is unreal, inauthentic and therefore alienating (Handler & Saxton, 1988, 243).

Handler and Saxton further argue that there is often an explicit rejection of written history as the best source of history. Stating that re-enactors rather take the stance that experiences and

embodied knowledge lets them know more of the history. Handler and Saxton further contend that re-enactors get a more holistic approach to researching history (Handler & Saxton, 1988, 248). For them re-enactors also make narratives out of historical accounts, which are envisioned and structured as a readable thing, as if it were a chapter in a book. Arguing that re-enactment is today's recreations of yesterday's stories, exemplifying them as products of our time (Handler & Saxton, 1988, 252).

Patrick McCarthy argues that the authenticity which re-enactors are seeing, is a form of self-realisation. For McCarthy re-enactment creates pockets of narrative conference in a world in which re-enactors are dislocated and alienated. McCarthy argues that re-enactment becomes psycho-religious, where the authenticity is directly connected to a feeling of exoticism and nostalgia. Dressing up and re-enacting has the effect of purifying its participants from modernity, transporting them back to a place in which they feel they belong. He also points out that behind the whole search for authenticity, there is also a quest for the dollar, highlighting that re-enactment has an aspect of commercialism (McCarthy, 2014, 107).

Anne Brædder, Kim Esmark, Tover Kruse, Carsten Tage Nielsen, and Anette Warring claims that authenticity is a culturally produced construct, meaning authenticity is something that is negotiated and created between actors in constantly shifting contexts. They argue that re-enactors are fully aware they cannot create perfect simulations. Rather they create approximation of how it was, making staging processes, with an aim to construct interpretive frames (Brædder et.al., 2017, 172-173). Stephanie Decker describes such negotiations as bridging discourse. Decker found that groups partake in discourse which allows them to negotiate when they have ideas which differ. This discourse she argues allows members to coexist, while keeping the ideals of what is authentic flexible and open for discussion. Through partaking in bridging discourse Decker argues that groups can demonstrate to others that a wide range of behaviour can be authentic. As well as redefining the groups ideology, redefining their behaviour, which allow groups to survive with a diverse membership (Decker, 2010, 274).

Brædder et.al. further note that for WWII re-enactors authenticity has to do with not only the authentic look, but also the authentic feel. For their informants, it is important to look the part, wearing the correct uniform, even down to their underwear. Other things such as piercings and tattoos should not be visible, as well as the gender needs to match the character which is being portrayed. This further includes the age of the re-enactors, where the older re-enactors need to re-enact for example as a major and not a private. They note that authenticity is created in

relation to other re-enactors, for them it is more authentic to portray a group of soldiers. Where most are privates with a few officers, so it more closely resembles an actual unit from WWII. Groups which have a convincing and authentic presentation are deemed as serious re-enactors (Brædder et.al., 2017, 176).

Brædder et.al. additionally note that identification with the war is crucial for the re-enactors. For their informant's re-enactment is about creating an authentic space, a place in which they can visit, as if it were real. Their informants explain that re-enactment is a form of time war, a sort of time machine which lets them travel back in time to visit and experience WWII. However, for them there are parts of the war which they do not want to revisit. The hellish and nightmarish conditions soldiers had to go through, the genocides, war crimes and the nazi ideology are some of the things that are not part of re-enactment events. For their informants, it is bizarre to re-enact the dark sides of WWII (Brædder et.al., 2017, 176).

Jay Anderson notes that re-enactment can act as a medium in which people can act and behave in ways is not socially accepted in our contemporary world. For example, dressing up in armour and fighting each other with swords, or in the case of my fieldwork getting together, living in a tent for the weekend, shooting blanks and driving around army vehicles (Anderson, 1982, 291). Vanessa Agnew marks re-enactment as a shift in history, arguing that there has been a shift in how we view and engage with history. Agnew argues that re-enactment is one of the indicators of this affective turn (Agnew, 2007, 300). Agnew says that although re-enactment centres itself on the iconographic moments, and presumes the past as it really was, re-enactment is always a performance which is in search of a storyline (Agnew, 2007, 303).

Dora Apel explains that re-enactors come from all walks of life, and notes that one of the appeals of re-enactment is precisely the disregard it has for distinction in class and profession. However, she further notes that an overwhelming majority of re-enactors are white and male, with low participation of females, as well as an even lower participation of blacks. She places re-enactors into three different categories, farbs, mainstream re-enactors, and the hard core "authenticity Nazis". The farbs being those who spend little time or money maintaining the authentic portrayal, the mainstream being the ones who fall in between, they often look authentic but might not be as extreme to wear period underwear and such. The last group seek the most immersion, going into the extreme in the way they do their portrayal. They go to the extreme with their impressions, even down to the way the seams are sown. As well as always staying in character (Apel, 2012, 49).

### **1.3 Getting into the world of re-enactment**

While still in Norway I found a website where re-enactment groups put their contact detail on for people to message them about events or other inquiries. I used this website to message multiple groups, to see where I could get an entry into re-enactment. Most groups did not message me back. If I did, they were often very keen, however, many groups only met once a month. Which I at the time deemed to be too little. Eventually I came into contact with a group which was based in the west country that seemed keen for me to come and study them. First contact happened via email, before quickly going over to Facebook messenger. In which I got sent a kit list on all the equipment I would need to have a complete set, as well as a list of the events which were planned for the year. The kit, I was told I did not need to worry about, and that they also may have a spare uniform in my size. Therefore, if I did fit, I would not need to buy anything. The group consisted of people from all walks of life. What later would become my key informants includes, Arthur, 24-year-old recruitment officer for the army. Ethan, a 23-year-old film student who had just graduated from university. Stanley, a 23-year-old-soldier for the army. Harry, a 63-year-old retail worker. Jacob a 40-year-old construction worker. Tristan, a 27-year-old, who also is a soldier for the army. And Tommy a 52-year-old electrical engineer. The rest of the group usually took part at events irregularly throughout the season.

After finally being able to move to England, I was ready and excited to attend my first event. The event was at the Weston Helicopter Museum, I came in and started to look around for the group. After a little bit of sightseeing, I saw them in the distance, took a deep breath, before going over greet the people I was going to spend time with the next six months. Arthur greeted me first. I had previously been in contact with Arthur through Facebook since he is functioning as the leader of the group. Arthur eagerly started to talk with me about re-enactment, why he does it, as well giving a general outline of the hobby. Before quickly taking my measurements, to see if he has any uniforms that I could borrow. I was taller than he previously anticipated so he did not think he had any uniforms that would fit me but would check.

The next day I once again met Arthur, he had looked over his spare uniforms and found that none would fit me. Given this I would need to buy myself my own uniform. Arthur instructed me to go to a web page called What Price Glory, since they had decent uniforms for relatively cheap. I was instructed to buy both WWI as well as a WWII uniform if I wished to take part in every event that they had planned, the rest of the equipment Arthur had so I could borrow. The

sizes the website had available was either too small, or too big, I decided to go a little bit big, so I could get it tailored later. The uniforms cost me £350 and the tailoring a further £100.

The general feel of this first event was also rather strange, while I was someone who was going to become an integral part of the group, I was still an outsider. I was there as a spectator. Even the times when I was talking with the group, I was there standing outside of the rubber barbed wire which were cordoning off their space. I was at this very time only a part of the public and were treated as such. While I was at the event for the whole of the opening hours both days, I probably only spent about four hours talking with the group. I was not let into the space they were inhabiting. I also got a feeling that I was encroaching too much on them and decided to take it slow and let them be for the time being.

A week after the Weston helicopter museum event there were going to be an event called the living history fest. I was originally supposed to attend this event, however, my uniforms did not get delivered in time. I was told by Arthur that since I had no uniforms, I could not attend the event with them if I only had civilian clothing. The event was also way closer to London, therefore traveling back and forth as a spectator was out of the question. To be able to attend therefore requires having the correct equipment, which in turn also acts as a form of gatekeeping. People who do not have the money to acquire the equipment becomes effectively excluded out of the hobby.

Another week passed and a new event was held at Caldicot Castle, by this time I had gotten my uniforms. Which at this time still needed to be tailored since they were ill fitting. However, it was at least a uniform, so this time I would be able attend with them, and finally start my entry into the group. While it still was somewhat awkward the event went down well, I was let in as an integral part of the group. This time I felt somewhat of a connection towards them, as we were there together. I was not only a person who was standing on the outside watching in. I was on the inside. However, this time I observed what they were doing when there was no public around. I was not just shown equipment as laid out and pointed to by Arthur. I was allowed to wear them, to handle them with my own hands in a close setting. I was at this time an integral part, which would continue for the course of my fieldwork. However, I was still very much the new guy as trust within the group did not come only by wearing a uniform, it had to be earned, which would become evident later.

My role as a researcher was often discussed by my interlocutors, often jokingly likening me as an undercover journalist. This tag was something I wanted to be rid of as quickly as possible, I

did not want them to think I was only there to write bad things about them. Rather I wanted them to think that I was genuinely interested in why someone would want to use so much time and money on re-enacting WWI/II. Therefore, I relaxed on writing in my notebook while we were having more chilled out sessions. Especially at trips to the pub, or when events lasted into the evenings and the beers came out. I rather resorted to noting things down on my mobile phone during these times. While doing this I could somewhat uphold a sense that I was not jotting down everything that was being said. It could be passed off as writing a message to someone. However, from an ethical perspective this is somewhat questionable. In one way it led the conversation flow better since it allowed me to take down notes without obviously doing so. But on the other hand, I was observing without anyone really noticing, which may have resulted in writing down things which some may not have wanted recorded. However, everyone knew I was there as a researcher, I never gave out that I was anything else, as exemplified by the many times I was addressed as an undercover journalist.

#### **1.4 Methodological techniques**

As a main technique in social anthropology, I as many others gathered data by participant observation. Doing participant observations means to interact with people in their social lives. Engaging oneself directly and sensorially with the environments, such as to learn my interlocutors' lives (Ingold, 2014, 387-388). Through embedding myself within the group, I became more than just an observer but also a participant. I became someone who took part in the same activities as my interlocutors, I was in the action so to speak. This also entailed that I had to partake in all the duties in which a re-enactor is expected to. Which includes things such as talking to the public, doing my own research, and acquiring equipment. I never became as good as my interlocutors on the subject that was discussed at events. However, over time I got better at it, and by the end I could somewhat hold my own when asked questions by the public. In many ways the method my interlocutors try to obtain the knowledge of the past is through the same method. By living and experiencing the past they, as anthropologists do, argue they get a deeper understanding as to how and why people did as they did. Arguably what they are trying to obtain is some sort of historical ethnography.

Since I became an integral part, I also became friends with my interlocutors. Becoming friends can as Philippe Bourgois noted, ease the tension, making asking questions which otherwise would be seen as provocative easier (Bourgois, 2003, 12-13). Given that re-enactment is a thing



we also need to feel on our bodies to understand I also observed my own participation. In the ways of how this felt on my body. However, a downside to this is that my own experiences is in focus, it is my subjective experience and not my interlocutors experience. However, the atmospheres as the ones produced by re-enactment are interpersonal. They are as Ben Anderson points out, affective. Meaning it has transpersonal intensities, bodies as such inflicts emotions upon each other (Anderson, 2009, 80). Therefore, even though my own experiences are somewhat my own, it is still in relation to others, since they are somewhat created in relation with the other participants.

Another method at attaining data was from doing what James Spradley have noted as informal ethnographic interviews. Interviews which occur when the researcher asks questions while conducting participant observation (Spradley, 1980, 123). I gathered much of my data by asking questions while partaking in the activities, always questioning what was happening, as well as doing observations. I tried conducting a series of structured interviews, these did not work out that well. By the time I conducted the interviews my interlocutors and I had already become good friends. My interlocutors gave answers which I already had heard many times before, answers that they thought I wanted to hear. The setting of these structured formal interviews was also too stiff, I found it hard to ask them questions that made them open up to me. This may have been influenced by poor interviewing skills from my part. It often loosened after we had a pint, however, by this time the group often went into other discussions, discussions which I did not plan for. Therefore, even though the structured interviews did not work out as they should, they quickly turning into something else. What they turned into did on the other hand work well for getting into the inner mechanics of my interlocutors thought. Letting them freely discuss amongst themselves, and with certain input from me, brought up themes which would otherwise have been unspoken.

I also took fieldnotes during my fieldwork, however, as noted further above these were not necessarily only taken on paper. While I had a field book handy in my pocket, it was mostly used at night or when I managed to sneak away for a little bit, trying to remember most of what had happened during the day. I also had a diary in which I wrote down more personal things, so that I could later reflect over my fieldnotes in relation with how I was feeling (Sanjek, 1990, 108-110; Bernard, 2006, 391-392).

Re-enactment is often a physical activity, and often requires a full engagement with the activity. This made it hard to take notes at times, since there was no time to really sit down and do it,

before later in the evening. This could imply that things may have been forgotten during the times where a lot was happening, and I could not get to my notebook. However, as time went on this became easier, jotting became easier as I started to get more used to it. Jotting as a method entails that the researcher scribbles down small words, such to make a mental note which can be elaborated on further later (Sanjek, 1990, 96). Through jotting, if it were on my phone or on my notebook, I could later sit down and write it out in a more detailed fashion.

## **1.5 Ethical implications**

Doing research on other people always requires oneself to somewhat be vary of the ethical implications. With regards to research ethics in Norway I made a request to NSD and got it accepted, in relation to this I also made an information letter detailing what my project tried to find out. At first, I had plans on handing out information letters to everyone, I saw quickly given the amount of people, that this was not feasible. While my key informants, as well as those taking part in more structured interview settings got this information letter. With the rest I used the aspect of presumed acceptance. During my time in the field, I aimed to be as open as possible on why I was there, introducing me as a researcher from Norway, expressing fully why I was there. From then on, I could see when people were weary of talking to me, accepting this, seeing it as a sign they would not want to be recorded.

At first, I thought there were going to be a lot of people who would be somewhat reserved when they knew I was there to research them. However, it was quite the contrary, people seemed very eager and open to speak to me about re-enactment. Often stating that it is a misunderstood hobby, expressing that they feel most people think of them as a bit weird. The undercover journalist tag was something that ensued the whole fieldwork. However, while it made me reflect on my conduct, it was often said jokingly. The re-enactment society have previously had news reporters come in to later write about what they deem is overexaggerated and untrue statements, sometimes outright lies. Hearing this I made it as evident as possible I was not there to spread lies. Expressing I was there only to record what they were doing, what re-enactment meant for them.

Because I did not want to seem too pushing into matters which may have been seen as controversial at the start, I bid my time. The start of my fieldwork, from an ethical perspective, regarded itself more into becoming a recognized face at events. It was very apparent that this did not take long, by my third or fourth event where I took part people seemed pleased to see

me, chatting openly to me. I had way quicker than I thought become a household name in the community. However, while I did meet new people all the time throughout my fieldwork, I mostly spent time with those who attended most events. Quite quickly I became someone who was trusted, someone they spoke to, I was not someone who was viewed as an outside threat. Which further exemplifies the aspect I noted earlier from Bourgois, while he did research among crack houses in Harlem. He found that one needs to get close with one's interlocutors, it is through this you get to the inner workings of how things function. It is through the immersion in the social life of our interlocutors, that we reach accurate descriptions (Bourgois, 2003, 12-13).

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

Chapter two gives two accounts of re-enactment events. The first event aims to bring the reader into how an event can play out. It shows how re-enactment lets its participants re-live and experience the past. The second event is meant to give the reader an insight into the heritage aspects of re-enacting. Telling the story of an elderly couple who re-enacts to portray the ones who decided to stay in the UK during the war.

Chapter three discusses what can be considered correct representations. It argues that for an accurate portrayal objects and re-enactors need to be historically accurate. The chapter further argue that objects can temporarily bridge the gap between the past and present. Objects can bring awareness of the past. It further argues how reproductions and original objects have different values. Furthermore, some objects cannot be sourced in an original manner, making re-enactor needing to creatively create objects. Original objects are symbols outright for the era they come from, they are remnants of that past, making them a visual reminder of the heritage they represent.

Chapter four discusses re-enactment as a form of performance. For the performance to be right objects need to be in the original setting. With re-enactment being performed to an audience means they themselves need to go into a role. Through re-enactment an alterity is produced and re-enacted towards an audience creating a spectacle. Not only is this spectacle towards an audience it is furthermore produced towards themselves. Creating acts which aim to teach them the lives of soldiers during WWI/II. The chapter further argues that while they cannot reach the true reality of partaking in WWI/II, they reach approximations. Which further helps them understand more of how it would have been like. Furthermore, through understanding how it

was, they can connect to the family stories they have heard about. Connecting them with their family heritage.

Chapter five discusses re-enactment as something that has the possibility to create a *communitas* in its participants. The chapter starts with giving an account of an initiation rite. To become a trusted part of the group they test new members to see if they are capable to be trusted. Furthermore, by performing together the groups become teams, overcoming struggles as a group. Which further allows them to connect to become more than just friends, they for the time being becomes a sort of family. Through doing re-enactment they for the course of the weekend differentiate themselves becoming a *communitas*. The chapter further discusses that through doing the re-enactment they connect with soldiers who have been through the same struggles in the past. Creating a belonging, not only to their heritage, but the soldiers therein.

Chapter Six discusses remembrance and heritage practices. Remembrance is an important aspect of re-enactment, for many commemorating the dead is an important reason as to why they re-enact. Through re-enactment places get constructed to become places of remembrance within the UK. Letting people to experience the battlefields at places they never were. Places which never saw any action at all, but now has become places of remembrance. It further discusses that heritage is not history, while created from history it is something that is created for someone by someone.

## **2 Reliving the past**

Carnegie & McCabe describes re-enactment events as heritage events, whose main purpose is to present aspects of a specific culture's history onto spectators, framing them in a specific era (Carnegie & McCabe, 2008, 351-352). Re-enactment events take many forms, it mostly depends on what kind of organisation is behind arranging the event, or if it is supposed to commemorate some type of battle. It can range from armed forces days, where the main event is showing off the armed forces, to battles aimed at re-enacting the D-day landings to private events, running in the woods and setting up camps. Every event is different, but every event is also similar, being that they aim to show and teach people about history. The events can be classified as sort of pop-up museums that aims to teach people history through lived experiences. On private events re-enactors go to greater lengths at trying to live as a soldier did during the war, being immersive. While immersing oneself into the life of a soldier is also done during public events, it is less often the case. More often it means being in character during the day to be a living museum piece, and at night drink with uniforms on.

What follows is a description of two events. The first one is the Great Dorset Steam Fair, an event where the group was in a realistic WWI trench in the middle of Dorset. This one is written to its full extent, aiming to reveal how a typical event can play out. The other one is an account when I met with some re-enactors who have decided to re-enact as the people who stayed in Britain. The ones who were left behind, so to speak. I aim to show here that re-enactment is not only about soldiers. For my interlocutors re-enacting is an important way to tell the stories of the regular citizens as well.

### **2.1 The Great Dorset Steam Fair**

The account of this event is meant to give an example in to how an event can play out. It further tries to show the camaraderie and community re-enactment creates, as well as how they try to live into the situations. Learning the experiences and how this is also beneficial for their performance. In this case the group was trying to immerse themselves in how it would be to be a soldier in WWI. However, it is through the objects present that lets people feel as if they were there, it is through setting up the stage that the feeling of alterity appears.

The Great Dorset Steam Fair is a huge fair with a lot of other things happening apart from the re-enactment. The event itself consists of mostly vintage steam engines of various sizes and

forms. The event has one of the best trench systems in the country, and was often referred to by the other people present as the best and most authentic trench system they have ever been in. The trench itself is built after German specifications and is meant to resemble a trench the British forces have taken over after driving the Germans out. Not only did this make a good impression for the re-enactors themselves but also for the spectators that came through to look at the display. The group and spectators alike often noted that it was almost as if being in the war themselves. Being cramped within the close passageways, with people playing soldiers all around made it a display that felt real and lived in. Going through the trench there were lots of different posts, where the groups that were present for the weekend held different talks about the tasks they were performing for the weekend. Together with my group was another group called the Queens own Royal West Kent's.

To get to the event I hitched a ride with Stanley. Stanley who usually is part of the group had decided he was going to join another group for this event, since he could not be bothered to sleep in the trench. The trench at the site was adjacent to another piece of land where there were re-enactors. However, at this site there were mainly people re-enacting WWII. Albeit there were some other eras present, most notably a centurion tank<sup>1</sup>. At the WWII site there was a pub, café, bombed out houses and other items strewn around. Making it resemble a bombed-out city, which made a great backdrop for the re-enactors to be in. During the whole event this was also the place where a singer performing well-known 1940s hits. Something that I by now had learned accompanied every event.

We arrived rather late because getting into the event itself proved to be quite the hassle, the organisers demanded that we needed armbands to be able to get in. However, we didn't have any, and we had never been told that we needed it either, essentially stranding us there unable to get in. We called Arthur who had already gotten in, he told us that they just came in no problem. A wild goose chase ensued after the guy in charge of us re-enactors. Eventually we got a hold of him, and he came up with the armbands. We put on the armbands and drove down to the place the trench was at.

After getting down there we promptly put on our uniforms and met the rest of the guys with our gear. Meeting Tommy, he quickly told me to get the bright orange armband I got at the gate off. Since I didn't need that anymore, and it didn't look right when you are supposed to look like a WWI soldier. The night we arrived was technically the second day of the event, with the

---

<sup>1</sup> A tank used by British forces after WWII with use up until the 1990s.

event having started on Thursday and lasted until Monday. The group I was in all arrived on the Friday, and for this day there was going to be a “night in the trench” display. We arrived just in time for the display. To get into the trench we had to go through the long line of people waiting to get into the trench to see us. It felt like we were arriving in the trench as actual soldiers, the feeling was almost surreal and felt movie like. Walking through with all my kit felt like I was really going towards the front in a way, anxious for what was next in store for us, full of optimism and excitement.

For the “night in the trench” display we lit candles, placed them on the top of the trench and stood there to give an experience as to how a night would be in a trench. Always on the lookout for Germans on the horizon. However, there were no Germans on the horizon, only the rest of the fair. It was noted by most of my interlocutors that the feeling of sitting here in a trench, trying to act properly, while having the wurzels, a well-known local Somerset band, playing in the horizon gave a strange feeling. We were at that time a matter out of place, immersed within WWI but somehow not at the same time.

The public were coming through as we stood there looking over the horizon, talking to each other. Tommy and Arthur sat down and started chatting. Chatting in this sense is not the modern term of talking to each other, but rather using a candle on the seams of the uniform. While they were doing this, they were telling the public what they were doing was chatting, and that this is how the term chatting in the modern sense came to be. A chat in WWI terms means a group of soldiers talking to each other while using their fingernails or a candle to burn at the seams to kill lice. Arthur explained that because of this slang the word chatting came into the modern way of meaning to speak to each other.

After the “night in the trench” display was finished, the re-enactors were mostly free to do whatever we wanted to do. The wurzels were still playing so the group decided to be good Somerset lads and go down to listen to them while having a cider. Because as I was told, Somerset lads are cider drinkers. While listening to the Wurzels much of the public wanted to take their picture with the “army”, we happily obliged. Most people stared at us while we were walking past, some making remarks that the Germans are not here, among other things. One guy asked us how long we have been serving for, in which Tommy quickly said, “well it’s over a hundred years since the war started so a bloody long time by now”. It did not take long before everyone was tired from the day and we decided it was time to head back to the trench for some well-deserved sleep.

The sleeping arrangement for the night was done so the group would be as authentic as possible during the weekend. They themselves expressing it is so rare they get to be in a trench of such quality. Hence why they will try their best to remain as authentic and immersed as possible, as to learn how it was themselves also. The event therefore can be seen as two sided. Teaching the public of the soldier's gear and what they did, but also for themselves. By sleeping and living in the trench with only period items to keep them going, immersing themselves within a WWI setting. For the whole weekend the group were to sleep, as the soldiers did during the first world war, on the fire step. Which is a form of bench/step, where you could stand to see over the trench. The fire step itself was not that wide, hence the people who were a bit wider slept on the floor using a ground tarp as cover and the great coat as a makeshift duvet. It was not comfortable.



**Figure 1 Sleeping on the fire step Photo taken by author August 27 2022**

The feeling of laying there can only be described as surreal. Looking up at the starry night sky, being cold and miserable on the floor. The noise from the rest of the fair in the background gave a feeling of being there, but also a feeling of not being there. One can say that in this moment the past, being in a trench, living there as a soldier, but also the present, music, noise, and lights from the fair, blended. Making a special moment where the past and present converge into a wholly new experience, which was not WWI but also not the present.

The next day everyone happily chatted about how it was to have slept on the fire step the night before. With most if not everyone, not getting much sleep. However, Tommy noted this was authentic since most soldiers didn't back then, and that was what they used the day for anyways. During the first world war the soldiers would most likely use the night to repair the barbed wire, being on post, or otherwise being busy and it was during the day that the soldiers had the time to sleep. Therefore, if someone did want to sleep during the day, we were able to do so, since soldiers would have done the same.



Everyone started to do their morning routines, getting out the guns they had stored in the cars for the night, and otherwise just getting something to eat. The other group that we were sharing the trench with had brought a period field kitchen and was making food for cheap for the re-enactors. Ethan and I did not have money to pay for the food, since we had brought tins of beans to eat instead. We did however not have any way of heating them up. Thinking quickly Ethan thought that the kitchen could probably let us heat the beans on their grills. Deciding to test our luck we scurried through the trench over to the kitchens, tins of beans in hand. Next to the field kitchen there were two guys who needed someone to watch their kit while they went back to the cars to get the rest of their stuff. Ethan and I happily obliged. They also had a fire going so we could heat our beans while they were away. When the guys came back, we had a quick chat while we were finishing up our food. They were explaining that they were happy to have been able to join, they were re-enacting the navy and there were not that many events they could go to. They thought it was great to be able to join this one, especially since it also had such a great trench system.

Right after Ethan and I came back to the others one of the seniors in the other group screamed “STAND TO!” meaning go up to the trench, point the guns over and stand watch, in case an attack comes. Of course, an attack never came since there weren’t any Germans on the other side. Being ordered to “Stand to” is done every first light and sunset, since these are the times, an attack was most likely to occur. However, for the event it was explained it was done so the public waiting to get in could see all our helmets and guns sticking up from the trench. Not before long the public was pouring through the trench and the job of being a living piece of history came to.

Most of the day went into standing there and talking to the public on what the group had brought. Tommy, an avid re-enactor who have been doing re-enactment for many years, so many he even often explains that “I have fought the first World War three times longer than it actually lasted!”. Tommy has as many other re-enactors collected a great deal of equipment over the years, and for the event he had brought a de-activated Lewis<sup>2</sup> gun. Therefore, for the weekend the group was re-enacting a Lewis gun section, which means the group should consist of some people manning the gun, and other riflemen who serves as support. Most of the talking to the public was done by Tommy and Arthur, the two members who had the most knowledge,

---

<sup>2</sup> A light machine gun used by the British during WWI

as well as the ones who have been doing re-enactment for the longest. The others did what they wanted to do, reading, eating, or talking to each other.



**Figure 2 Being ordered to stand to. Photo taken by informant August 28 2022**

The trench at this point started to look quite lived in and would become more and more so over the weekend. With empty cans, bottles and other equipment laying around. Making an atmosphere, and feeling of someone really living there, because we really were living there. Whilst interacting with the public Tommy often told them that they were now standing on his bed. Eagerly showing them how we had slept through the night as well as other things we had done while the public's eye wasn't watching us.

Not only did the experience further the knowledge and immersion of the single re-enactor, but it gave first-hand knowledge for Tommy. Such so he could explain it to the public, furthering their knowledge as well. I was told by Tommy that "This is why I do it myself, feeling it on my body, so I can understand it myself, and through using myself, I can explain it to other people". The body is used as an instrument for the learning on how people had it in the trenches, and through trying to live through some of the experiences, one might learn some of the hardships the soldiers faced. By sleeping at the spots Tommy could tell spectators that "you are standing on my bed now", making the space feel much more alive and something more than just a scene.

Through the day the group mostly talked to the public about what we were portraying. Showing what soldiers of the first world war did on the daily basis. Our main task for the weekend, apart

from the Lewis gun section, was to represent the regular Tommie during the first world war. The reason why the British troops were called Tommie's I was told was because during WWI the most common name in Britain was Tommy. A great deal of the doing of re-enactment is not doing the battles, shooting at each other. But rather sitting around, doing the daily activities. However, this was also noted by my interlocutors as to one of the reasons why people spectate re-enactment, but also why they themselves do it. Reading the books, they explained, did not catch the bigger picture. You don't get the hours upon hours which people were sitting around, talking, chatting, eating, sleeping. The mundane day to day life is invisible within most historical media, and through re-enactment they catch this day-to-day life, by living through it themselves.

Doing re-enactment gives them knowledge on the day to day lives of soldiers, and in their own view gives them a more holistic and bigger picture and understanding on what really went on, what it really was like being a soldier. For example, most of the day went into making food, or otherwise reading or eating. However, making food, in an authentic way is not as easy as it may seem. Ethan and I made a provisory oven on which to cook food on, by using an old pineapple tin. Using the bayonet to stab holes so air could run through it. Further we used dried-up wicker that was used to make the walls as firewood before we held a mess tin with beans over the fire so we could get a hot meal. The group did all this, in front of the public, and this was the display. This was the mundane, the day-to-day life that you don't see in books, don't hear of in histories, apart from here on display. This in a way is how the display becomes authentic, because it is all these small things that people see, which builds the atmosphere. Not only does it make an authentic view towards the public, but it is making an authentic feel for the people doing it, furthering their knowledge on how it could have been as a soldier.



**Figure 3** Cooking beans on a homemade cooker.  
Photo taken by author August 27 2022

When the trench had closed for visitors, all the re-enactors were ordered by a screaming sergeant to "FORM UP FOR FLAG DOWN", meaning to go to the flag, line up and salute it

when it goes down. Since it was the other group initiating this the group I was part of did not really want to take part, but to hold a good stature they decided to reluctantly join. Everyone kitted up, putting on their tunic, webbing, helmet, and rifle, before marching in a line, with Tommy in front to the flag. We formed up with the other group, did a quick rundown of what was going to happen. I only having drill with a rifle once before was a bit nervous because I did not want to do anything wrong and look like an idiot.

After a little bit the officer of the Kent's shouted "SQUAD ATTENTION!", everyone in the correct timing, went into attention. The officer took this moment to commend us for the good job that had been done today, as well as for the night in the trenches earlier. After some words of praise and some information on what would be happening later, the officer started shouting commands again "SLOPE ARMS". Everyone quickly changed the position of the rifle from next to the body, into the shoulder. And then another command "PRESENT ARMS" changing the position of the rifle once again to the front of the body, as well as the position of the legs into one being in front of the other. This is a position meant as a salute, in this instance towards the flag being lowered down. While the flag was being lowered a bugle was being played by one of the Kent's. After the flag had been lowered the officer shouted "SLOPE ARMS" again and everyone put their guns to the shoulder once again. Before the officer gave one final order "SQUAD, DISMISSED!" everyone faced left, before marching on for two steps and dispersing, going back into the trench.

After going into the trench, the display for the day was finished, this meant we were pretty much free to do whatever we wanted to do again. Most of the guys were tired after the day so the mood was quite relaxed with everyone just wanting to sit down for a little bit. We quickly started packing everything into the cars for storage, such as the guns so they were securely placed, before going back and getting some food. Again, the Kent's had a possibility for us to buy food, some took advantage of this with that day's menu was some sort of stew.

Ethan and I decided to go visit the WWII group that was also at the event. Since they were planning to do something that they often do at events, which is a shared casserole. Everyone brings one tin of their preferred stew, and it is chucked into a shared casserole and eaten by everyone. While at the WWII stands, we talked about what we had done during the day. Them expressing that they were beginning to get sick and tired of the constant singing. Next to their stand was the stage where songs from the 1940s were being sung all day, which they thought were good for the first hour, but after 2-3 times hearing the same songs, it was getting somewhat

tiresome. The rest of the night was somewhat uneventful, the fairground was big. Most of us wanted to go around it, but with everyone being as tired as we were, we quickly went back to get some sleep, most were already back in bed by 11pm.

For the second night everyone slept well, with everyone was so exhausted from the first day, as well as the lack of sleep. The days the itinerary was mostly to do the same as the day before, keeping the display up. However, around mid-day there was going to be a walk around the showground. The walk around was going to be with all the re-enactors, and we were going to be walking behind WWI tanks as if we were advancing in formation. For the event there had been brought in two replicated WWI tanks, one of the tanks is from the Bovington tank museum, a tank which were used for the movie "War Horse". The other one was called Damon II and was made by a non-profit organisation, coming all the way from Belgium. I was told by the makers of the tank that Damon II used to be a tank that was a local attraction in Poelkapelle in Belgium but was taken as a trophy during WWII by the Germans. These tanks were to drive in front and all of us re-enactors were to walk in file behind them in the main showground. The main showground was a big field where during the day most of the steam engines were driving around. However, for this display it was only us, as well as the WWII groups with the centurion in the field.

We were split into groups and because my group had the Lewis Light machine gun, we were also tasked to carry the ammunition boxes. Essentially making the whole group carrying something pertaining the Lewis gun. We formed up in lines behind each tank staggering the line to make it look more professional. Staggering means to keep one space open in front of each person, making the line somewhat zig zagging. We started marching after the officer in charge of us shouted "SQUAD MARCH!" after a little bit of marching he shouted again "KEEP DISTANCE FROM EACH OTHER". Everyone made distance from each other, this was done as a tactic, and is still used. If there were to be a contact with an enemy everyone was already spread out, minimizing the damage that could be done. We were also told that we need to stay behind the tank's tracks, so to use the tank as cover. However, this was easier said than done when the tank needed to make turns on the limited showground. The officer when we strayed ran back and forth, shouting at us to "GET BEHIND THE TRACKS!", which created even more chaos. We were already trying to get back into position, but when he screamed, we needed to run to get back into position. After about a 10 minutes' walk, we were done and went back into the trench to continue our duties as soldiers again. Later on, this walk was ridiculed by the group, Tommy even saying that it was "an utter shit show". With the reason being that there

was little command. And the little command we got came from screaming conflicting orders. Which in the middle of a showground with tanks driving around, as well as some good distance between us, did not really work out well and rather quickly turned into chaos.

Quickly after we came back the public started pouring through again. While this was happening the other group often came through with tea to fill up our cups. While sitting around drinking their tea Tommy and Toby got into a discussion about mugs, and especially towards what the correct mugs are. Toby, a 35-year-old engineer had brought a mug which for most purposes looked correct. During WWI and most of WWII tin mugs were of a white colour, with a blue ring around the top. Tommy looked at Toby's mug, noting that it could have been an authentic WWI mug, but most probably not. The handle of the mug had a different shape at the bottom than early WWI mugs. Noting that the mugs with this specific handle started production in 1917, therefore while it could have been used in WWI it most probably was not.

Gripping the moment of chatting about whether objects are reproductions or not, I asked if my cap badge was original. I had bought a cap badge from an online auction for £2.50, thinking I may have made a bargain since for me it looked original. Tommy quickly looked at it and saw immediately that this was a recast, meaning it is a reproduction, usually sold by museums. Tommy took off his own cap badge to show the differences, these mainly being that the stamp was present on his and not mine. As well as the fastener that was soldered onto the badge itself looked way less messy on his than mine.

Tommy has done re-enacting for years, which he said has accustomed him to the small differences in kit, making him good at pointing out reproductions. He told me that one of his favourite pastimes is going into museums to just think about what all the objects are worth. Looking closely at every item, noticing new things all the time, even spotting a few fakes here and there. Looking at museums and researching original pieces for him is a way to make his presentation better, and further make it more realistic. But ultimately it is through using the objects that he learns the use value of the objects. As he explained "it is through using them that I really get a feel for why these objects are used and why they carried them". And this is where re-enactment for him comes in, through living and using objects in a real setting he gets to know these objects not only in their aesthetic value, but also in their actual use value.

Life in the trench was rather monotonous during the day with sitting down, reading, talking, eating, and speaking to the public filling the day. At random times during the day an officer from the Kent's came to scream some random orders at us, this did not get a good reception by

the guys, feeling that it was unnecessary. At some point during the day a field priest came to visit us, he gave each of us a little book with some verses from the bible. The priest also went and blessed every single one of us and asked us if there was something we wanted to talk about, none of us had anything to talk about. There was going to be a sermon a bit later in the day, in which the priest, who is also a real priest, was going to hold a sermon. I took the time to ask the priest why he does re-enactment, whence he told me that he was always interested in history. By taking part in some events, he saw that priests were not really being re-enacted, so he decided to fill that hole. Being a priest in real life lets him fulfil his real-life role in a re-enacted setting. We all decided to join the sermon later.

Everyone marched over to the priest's tent and lined up the same way as during the raising of the flag, only this time without our guns. An officer accompanying us shouted "SQUAD ATTENTION", in which everyone went into position, and the priest started his sermon. Going into the sermon I would have thought it was going to be set as a WWI sermon, in which the priest would have talked as if in WWI. However, the sermon took more into account modern problems. Asking us to pray for Ukraine and the soldiers that have hardships over there, as well as praying for every soldier that have died during conflicts. There still were some aspects of the re-enacting present, the priest asked every one of us to remember to read the texts in the "bible" he had given out to us earlier. And that when life may seem tough, when bombs are falling and bullets are flying on top of your head, to remember to pray and that God is always looking down upon you. With the sermon coming to an end the officer shouted once again "SQUAD DISMISSED", where everyone as earlier took a left turn and dispersed before taking our places in the trench again.

The rest of the day was rather uneventful until it was time for the flag to be taken down, marking the end of our day. An officer came over the top of the trench shouting down at us to "FORM UP FOR FLAG DOWN" where each and every one of us kitted up and went over the flag. Most of the group I was in could not be bothered doing the drill, most of us did not really want to go over there at all, but to keep up appearances we did. To be able to not do the drill we had brought all the equipment for the Lewis gun. Meaning all the drill we needed was to move our legs, since we are holding the ammo box and the gun. The officer shouted "SQUAD ATTENTION" before talking about how the day had been, commending our good conduct during the day. Furthermore, saying that everyone is to meet in the pop-up WWI pub for some pints since someone it was someone's birthday. The officer shouted again "SQUAD! SLOPE ARMS" before the bugle started playing and the flags was lowered. After the flag had been lowered the

officer once again said “SQUAD DISMISSED” in which everyone went back into the trench and started packing down for the night.

The scorching August Dorset heat had taken a toll on most of the guys during the day, by this time the trench had tarps hanging over, making a makeshift roof, bottles and empty tin cans were strewn about. Kit draped over the walls, and the walls had been graffitied with regimental signs, using charcoal left over from the fire and chalk. The trench had by us living in it for the course of the weekend turned into something that looked lived in, because it had been. It was there we had been eating our food, sleeping, drinking, and reading. Since this was the last night, the group were spending in the trenches, Arthur took the opportunity to have a photoshoot with all the guys, as well as taking videos of us coming over the trench. It is rare for them to be able to get such good photos and videos of them in a trench. Most trench systems within the UK are alright when in the trenches themselves, but usually looking over them are quite the immersion breaker. With most having no immersive elements looking over the trench. That makes opportunities like they had at this event far and few between, meaning they try to make the most out of it while they are there.



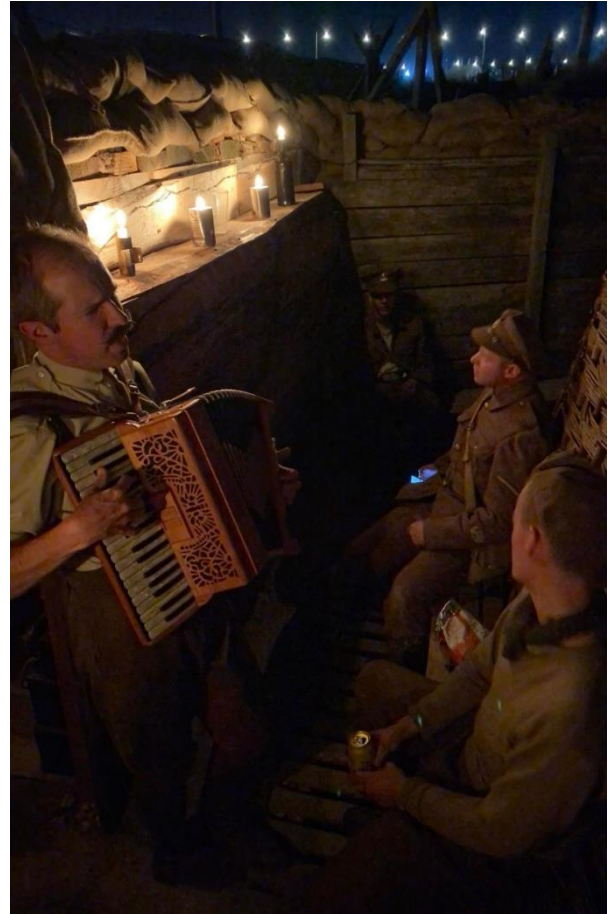
**Figure 4 Graffitied walls Photo taken by author August 28 2022**

Arthur had brought a couple of bottles of cider to drink in the trench, given this was our last night a “right piss up” was in line. Arthur had pulled off the labels and cleaned the glue off the bottles, giving them as he himself said a “proper WWI look”. Allowing him to take authentic looking photos of us sitting around, drinking, and chatting to each other. By doing it this way we were not posing for pictures, we were sitting around, drinking, and chatting. The photos became realistic, they captured the moment as was, and not as a staged act. Sitting in the trench, just talking about life was a strangely comforting and connecting experience. At one moment it felt like we were soldiers, just chatting happily, being in the moment.



Next to our position in the trench there was a guy who for the weekend had re-enacted as an officer in a dug out, telling people all there is to know of a junior officer in WWI. He had brought an accordion for the weekend, so that he could play and sing songs in the trench at night-time. A recurring aspect of many events is the singing of wartime songs, especially songs that would have been sung by soldiers.

This night was no different, with everyone starting to get sauced up on the rum rations, as well as ciders and beers, the singing started at full blast. The lyrics of the songs often point to the general misery of the life of a soldier, but also of optimism, what they miss, wanting to go home, and longing for the civilian life. For example, the lyrics of the song “When this lousy war is over” speaks specifically to the miserable conditions of the trench, longing to go home and be done with the life of a soldier. Arthur told me that “by actually having been in the trench for the weekend, the songs speak more to me, I have also done this in a way”. So, when they sing, “no more shivering on the fire step”, they are able to connect with it, since they know how shivering on the fire step feels, giving the song an emotional and personal aspect. The songs in this way reach a higher meaning than just some catchy tunes, it becomes something that is connecting them with the soldiers who sung these songs in the past.



**Figure 5 Singing in the trench. Photo taken by author August 28 2022**

The singing lasted most of the night with everyone being in a jolly mood, the ambiance was great, and everyone bonded over being there together in uniform. For aesthetic purposes we had put candles on top of the empty bottles, as well as having lanterns on the posts of the wall, which gave the atmosphere a cosy and intimate feeling. The feeling of sharing this moment only with us, with the rest of the hustle and bustle of the rest of the fair around us, we were our own thing down in the trench. Our own little community of people who were out of place. Arthur noted that “it is strange, the peace we are having here, while on the horizon you have

one of the busiest fairs in the country, while being in here you do not notice the rest, we have our own little bubble here”.

When the time was right the party died down and everyone quickly tucked in to go to sleep, the sleeping arrangements for the third night was the same as the two nights before. When we woke up it was time to start once more for the final time to man the displays and welcome the public. This last day was a bit of a strange one. In the rest of the trench, many of the Kent’s had probably had one too many the night before so many had decided to sleep in. My group on the other hand, while still having had a couple the night before was unscathed of the hangovers. Arthur and Toby spoke badly about the Kent’s behaviour, saying that it was unprofessional of them to have been so drunk that they could not re-enact the day after. Us being all good the next day was a testament to the group’s integrity as re-enactors.

After two whole days of roughing it, everyone had started getting a little stubble, as well as generally started looking dirty. Arthur gave us an order to wait with the shaving and washing so we could do that on display for the public. Therefore, as the public rolled through, we took turns getting cleaned up. Arthur had set up a washbasin using his mess tin, underneath he put the homemade cooker Ethan and I made two days prior. Using our cooker, we could have hot water for washing our face as well as for use when shaving. This is another example using of rather ordinary activities to make it feel more realistic, both for the re-enactors as well as the audience. After everyone had a shave, the water was emptied, and we went into our roles again. Ethan and I continuing our cooking show for the public, while the rest went into showing the equipment of a WWI soldier.

The day went by rather quickly, suddenly it was time for everyone to start packing down all the things to prepare for the journey home. Coming home from an event is always a good feeling, since sleeping out even though when it is in a tent, is not comfortable for most. After a weekend of being up early, and going to bed late, there is nothing better than to fall down into the sofa to relax. My interlocutors told me that they have different rituals in a way when coming back from an event. Arthur when he gets back, the first thing he does is to take off the uniform, laying on the ground for a bit. Before going in the shower, going straight to bed, and then take care of the kit the next day. Others like Ethan like to straighten everything out as quickly as he gets home, sorting everything out before having a well-deserved “kip”.

What this event has shown is that through living in the trenches, acting as soldiers, eating as soldiers, and sleeping as soldiers the group had learned knowledge on the life of a WWI soldier.

However, what is paramount for this alterity to be felt is through the stage that it was set. The trench, fire step, all the items the re-enactors had brought made it feel real. It is worth noting that the public also came into this alterity, they could have felt as to how it would have been as well. Albeit it is the re-enactors who really lived themselves into the past. By attaining this knowledge my interlocutors could act as living examples for the soldiers, they had been through something that is as close as the real thing. The knowledge they attain is arguably not something groundbreakingly new, it does however allow them to discuss more freely the life of a soldier. Since they have first-hand knowledge on how the life of a soldier would have been like.

## **2.2 Blaenavon**

In another place in the UK in mid-August, the group was re-enacting as WWII soldiers at an event at the Blaenavon Ironworks. The event was set to show life during the 1940s, having re-enactors dressed as everything from a British soldier to policemen to housewife all the way to the German Wehrmacht. The site featured a building where rooms had been converted into period replicas, reflective of different historical periods. The building also housed a recreated company shop, showing what people working at the ironworks back in the day could buy for their measly pay. The company shop had for the event been turned into a makeshift bar. In front of the room that had been set up to look like the 1940s there had been set up a table where at this time only Ava sat.

Stanley, Tristan, and I decided to sit down with Ava to chat about the day. Ava, a woman in her late 60s, had brought with in her wicker basket with some tea and biscuits in, she eagerly accepted our company. Ava gave each of us a cup of tea and started chatting about the day. Ava rather quickly started to show us all the different objects she had brought for the event. Objects which were meant to show how life was for the general public during WWII. While explaining to us about the daily life of the WWII housewife, Stanley reminisced about that time. In his view, while it was harder back then, it is still a time to be proud of. For Stanley the 1940s was a time where Britain was something to be proud of, as he said, “Britain held back against Hitler, I am grateful of what they did back then, without them we wouldn’t be here today”.

During the day, Ava had held talks on the housewives of WWII whilst re-enacting as a regular housewife. She held long talks during the day on the daily lives of the housewives that was left back home. Ava said herself that “while they had it hard, it was living you know, I think that people now have it too easy. They struggled but that held them together”. Ava decided to re-

enact as a housewife because she wanted to show how the normal people had it back then. For Ava the history books and other media only show the big parts, the leaders, or soldiers, but the people back home were also important. As Ava herself explained it to us “I show people how most people were, it is important to show how life was back home as well”. After a little while of drinking tea and eating biscuits Rupert decided to come join us. Rupert who is Ava’s husband had decided for the weekend to re-enact as the home guard. The couple played the role of the people who stayed back in Britain, one as a housewife and the other home guard. Rupert poured himself a cup of tea, before joining our conversation on Britain during WWII.

Rupert added that “my granddad used to be home guard, he is one of my biggest role models, that is why I re-enact as a home guard”. Tristan who also has family members who served as home guard during the war, asked why his granddad did not go into the army proper. In which Rupert added that “he was too old and did not really want to leave his wife, you know I look pretty much as he probably did, even if I am now 20 years older than he was while in the home guard” laughing and tapping his belly. We came quickly into discussing about what Rupert thinks of the UK back then compared to now. Rupert answered that “I feel that the UK now should look back and try to regain the sense of solidarity they had back then. It was an easier time, but also a hard time. That is why we re-enact to show the struggles they went through”. Looking over to Ava, with Ava nodding back acknowledging that is also a reason why she re-enacts. Rupert added that “I would not want to live back then however, I do fairly enjoy the technologies we have now, life is ultimately easier now, but I do look back and feel that the sense of solidarity has been somewhat lost”. Ava quickly added “And that is why we do re-enactment, so people can get to understand them (people from the 1940s), the memory of them is being lost when they die out, people don’t have the same close connection anymore”. As she further exemplified “My mom and dad were alive during WWII, they told me personal stories about that generation, for the generations born now they are only distant stories, that is why for me re-enactment is important, teaching the young generation”.

What this case shows is the heritage that re-enactment can bring. For Ava and Rupert showing the life of regular people back then is important. Since it allows people to understand how it would have been back then, allowing people to connect with that past. What this case also shows is an aspect of the democratization of history. Re-enacting allows Rupert and Ava to tell their story, the stories that isn’t written down, the stories which are pertaining to their family heritage. Stories which for them is something that is getting forgotten.

I have now shown two very different events. The Great Dorset Steam Fair was more of an immersive experience, living into the life of a soldier. It gave my interlocutors valuable knowledge as to how life could have been. Knowledge which further could be used to explain and show the public. By embodying the knowledge, they could envision the alterity they try to portray. The public was also able to see and experience this alterity by going through the trench. For the weekend, WWI was recreated in a field in Dorset. Making a space in which people can experience and feel how trench life would have been like. While Blaenavon shows more of the heritage part of re-enactment, the day to day lives. Letting the spectators see for themselves how life could have been like back then for the normal person. People who for those who does not have family members who served can connect to. For the convincing portrayal of an alterity re-enactment needs to however show a correct past.



### **3 Presenting the “correct” past**

This chapter aim to give an outline as to how getting in touch with alterity requires historically correct representations. These representations can come from objects, but also the bodies of the re-enactors. Reaching a historical correctness requires a holistic aspect for it to feel right. A correct representation requires both the objects and the re-enactors to look correct. This requires re-enactors to research faithful representations, obtaining skilled visions. Further allowing re-enactors to partake in bridging discourse, allowing the re-enactors to effectively reach shared concepts of historically accurate representations. Objects are not necessarily something that is readily available either, compelling re-enactors to get creative and make objects themselves. Objects or historical artefacts are also remnants of the past, letting people who get in touch with them to figuratively time travel. Since there is always a need for new objects, as well as the fact that re-enactment events cost money, there is an argument to be made for the commodification of history.

For my interlocutors being authentic is of the utmost importance. Edward Bruner conceptualizes four definitions of the word authentic reproduction. Firstly, authentic as pertaining to something that is credible, and convincing, which he says is mainly the aim for museum professionals making a credible site for the public. Secondly, to make a complete and immaculate simulation of a period, a completely historical accurate depiction of an era. Thirdly, an original, something that is not a copy, an original piece. In this sense all reproductions are not authentic. And fourthly, something that is authorized, certified, or legally valid, this pertains that something also has the ability or power to be able to authenticate, making way for authority. This fourth definition sets up the question of who can authenticate, rather than what is authentic (Bruner, 1994, 400).

I have found that all these definitions define how my interlocutors use the term authenticity. For my interlocutors, authentic usually pertains to the second definition, but there are instances where the word is being used to cover all the definitions. It is used as a term for an original piece but also for reproduction pieces which looks like the real deal, further confusing the term. I will for clarification purposes use the term authentic in the way my interlocutors use it, to refer to something that either is original or looks like the original. Pertaining specifically to a historically accurate description, regardless of original or reproduced quality.

Looking correct, and having the proper items is necessary for the authentic portrayal of what they are trying to represent. Without it, the professionalism, as well as the quality of the

presentation the group gives out wanes. Re-enactors are often invited to events, meaning if they get a bad reputation they will not be invited back. Some people are taking the quest for the correct representation to the extreme. These are the people my interlocutors referred to as stitch Nazis. Stitch Nazis are people who go on an extreme length to be authentic, down to the minute detail. The name makes a joke that they count the stitches to see if its correct to what the uniforms originally was. Which correlates with what I mentioned Apel noted during the introduction. These people are however ridiculed within most groups, most of my interlocutors claimed that if you have a relatively correct looking uniform, it's good enough. While they state this, how they discuss between themselves seem to suggest the opposite. Often cracking jokes about the people wearing bad quality uniforms and whatnot, ridiculing them, describing them as "shit" re-enactors.

Re-enactors through doing re-enactment gets a different viewpoint, they obtain a skilled vision, seeing things which for others are not noticeable. For example, at the Great Dorset Steam Fair, which was described earlier. Toby had brought a mug, which by a quick examination Tommy could say was a late war mug compared to early war, because the handle was somewhat draped at the bottom. Late war mugs do not have this draped bottom at the handle, giving away that this mug must have been made from 1917 onwards. It is through the continued learning through doing re-enactment that my interlocutors attained this skilled vision. While for most the mug looked like any other mug, it is white with a blue ring on top, but the small details give away important clues to what that mug is.

Furthermore, at an event called WarAg a part of the event grounds was reserved for stands of merchants, where they could sell everything from buttons to deactivated guns. While having a walk around with Ethan and Rory, Ethan quickly found a cap badge he found interesting. Taking a glance at the item Ethan asked the seller what he would want for it, the asking price was £15. Ethan discerning that this was a reproduction told the seller "I see by solder of the fastener here that it's a repro, £15 is too much, I'll take it for £5". The seller looked quite perplexed, as he thought it was an original. Ethan took off the cap badge he already had in his cap, showing the seller the tell-tale signs. The seller sold it for £5.

This near constant discourse of what is considered an authentic portrayal changes their perception, teaching them a skilled vision. A skilled vision in the sense Christina Grasseni puts it, a vision "not as a disembodied 'overview' from nowhere, but as a capacity to look in a certain way as a result of training" (Grasseni, 2004, 41). Grasseni notes that exercising skilled visions



means to be a part of a community or network which have shared aesthetic sensibilities, principles of what is considered good practice, as well as ideological stances or political interests (Grasseni, 2009, 11). By doing re-enactment, my interlocutors train their perception and knowledge. By becoming more and more knowledgeable to are able to spot fakes, or to pinpoint which period the items come from.

Most of the research re-enactors do to make their equipment correct is through historical pictures and manuals. While partaking in an event at the end of August, Arthur and I decided to walk around the event grounds. While walking around we stumbled upon a group who re-enacted British WWII forces, Arthur quickly pointed out problems in the portrayal of a group. While the group for me looked to be a bunch of soldiers, Arthur quickly pointed out that they had mismatched equipment on. Arthur explained that some had equipment for the early 1940s, while others had late war equipment, some even had post war equipment. Arthur further noted that the group they are trying to re-enact as did not see service before 1944. They had “Blanccoed”<sup>3</sup> their equipment the wrong shade for that period of the war. Some even had a colour which were not used until after the war was ended. Arthur said, “it just looks wrong, while most people don’t see the difference, for me who knows it is wrong, its inauthentic, they are now just effectively spreading a portrayal which is plain wrong”. Arthur in this case used his skilled vision. The knowledge Arthur has gotten through years of doing re-enactment allowing him to quickly spot when things are “wrong”.

On the other hand, later that same day Harry explained that the manuals that explains how it should be, often was a utopian and idealized state to begin with. A sort of blueprint of how it should have been. Harry explained that soldiers wore mostly what they had gotten when they got drafted. And as Harry further said, in the later parts of the war everyone was basically a jumble of different uniform patterns, colours and kit. However, re-enactors use these manuals as a guide to further build their equipment out from, forming their portrayals down to specific dates.

These are examples of what Stephanie Decker noted with the concept “bridging discourse”, which means that within groups there is discourse, allowing the members to negotiate when their ideas differ. Through bridging discourse, they reach a common notion of what is authentic. This entails that the notion of authenticity is something that differs from group to group. Making

---

<sup>3</sup> Blanccoing is a method to clean and paint equipment the right colour, with a specialized compound called Blancco. Blanccoing also had the effect of partially waterproofing canvas material.

what is considered authentic a socially laden concept (Decker, 2010, 274). Harry's remark here is trying to discuss why they may still be authentic, even though technically wrong. However, in the case above, the guys who had post war equipment will always be wrong. Through partaking in bridging discourse, they also become a community who have a shared perception of what can be considered an authentic portrayal.

### **3.1 Looking like the past**

Looking as a real soldier becomes a key factor into the aspect of being, as well as presenting oneself as a realistic soldier. This requires re-enactors to not only look but also act as a soldier. This means getting an appropriate haircut, shaving one's beard and generally look presentable. Acting as a soldier however is up to each individual to figure out, this means not to swear in front of public, as well as acting in a way that generally would be deemed respectable. Harry explained it as "try to be as gentlemanly as possible". One might say that what they are trying to capture is, in the Bourdieuan terms, the habitus of the past.

Pierre Bourdieu expresses that the body itself believes in what it plays, but it does not represent what it performs, nor does it memorize the past, but it rather enacts it, bringing it to life. What is learned by the body Bourdieu means, is not something it has but rather something it is (Bourdieu, 1990, 73). An argument to be made is that my interlocutors already have a perceived knowledge of the conduct of a soldier. Therefore, what they are re-enacting is not something they strive to learn, but rather showing something which they already know. They are acting out what they themselves deem appropriate. Given this, they only reproduce what they already know, making portrayals that are culturally specific. The portrayals only continue already embodied mannerisms.

Looking correct is part of their quest to be authentic. The moment when all members have the correct appearance can be seen as a point where they look the most authentic. An authentic portrayal does not only rely on the objects and clothes, but it also relies on the appearance of the people present having the correct haircuts and beards. Beards in general is considered a big no, and even during a weekend it is expected, especially by the people who are more into authenticity, to at least shave once to continue to look the part. Long hair is also considered a big no. As exemplified by Tommy when he said, "a pet peeve of mine is people with long hair, come on at least try". Re-enactors therefore tends to at least shave during events. The fact that there is usually no running hot water around, results in re-enactors turning to the way soldiers

would have shaved during the war, by pure necessity. Shaving with no more than a small mirror and using the mess tin as a makeshift wash basin. Some even heat some water in their mess tin to get hot water for their shave as exemplified earlier during the Great Dorset Steam Fair.

The group I conducted my fieldwork in had a high percentage of young people compared to other groups. Which was noted by many as a good thing, especially when considering an authentic portrayal. As most soldiers who partook in the war would have been young. As Harry said, “During WWII you would not have loads of 50-year-old blokes with beer bellies running around would you”. While having older members was criticized when considering an authentic display, it was not necessarily frowned upon. No one was saying they should not re-enact, but rather that from a perspective of an authentic view it is wrong.

By being mostly 40-year-olds, a fully authentic display arguably cannot happen, they are too old, or too much on the heavy side. In such cases all the equipment will make no difference at all, it is their bodies which are inauthentic not their equipment. However, this does not seem to matter too much. The group I conducted fieldwork in chose to let the older people serve as officers, maintaining what they argue were a higher grade of authenticity. Arthur explained it as “letting Harry be an officer, you know he’s 60, he wouldn’t have been a regular soldier, but an officer, that is plausible, at least then we can look authentic”.

### **3.2 Skilfully recreated past**

Many re-enactors display great craftsmanship and creativity in the objects they create. Re-enactors use their skilled vision to create objects from different household objects. At an event at Caldicot Castle there was a guy who displayed the early days of what would later become the SAS in Britain. He had decided to re-enact because he came from the area the SAS are headquartered. For him, by doing re-enactment he can honour their history and the men who made it all possible. Accompanying him was the same vehicle they utilized in northern Africa, along with firearms and other equipment they would have used. The guns themselves were of course, as much of the other guns re-enactors use, deactivated. However, he had brought some homemade “bombs” which they would have used on planes and other objects they wanted to blow up in northern Africa.

The “bombs” looked to be a small burlap sack, which had an explosive component inside and when a fuse was added could explode. Carrying live explosives can be considered quite

dangerous, if not outright illegal. To work around this, he used playdough, coloured it using food dye, as well as giving it the correct scent. The object was not only as close to what the original would have looked, but also how it would have smelled. The only difference was that it did not go boom. The guy had made something that looked so authentic that in the presence of an unknowing spectator, could if he wanted to claim it to be real.

Carolyn Korsmeyer notes that reproduced objects are used to give a feel and touch of an original, without using an original. She explains that reproductions give a means to see an original piece through it, whilst also supporting the values that concerns preserving original artifacts. Reproductions are usually sufficient for the purposes posed, which in the case of re-enactment is to show the public what it would have looked like. She further argues that the past is maybe best preserved through items that simulate the real objects, original objects are often fragile, and reproductions lets them be preserved. However, simulations can by no means replace what the original artifacts represent. Their importance and the experiences the original artifacts exude is not transferable into its representations (Korsmeyer, 2019, 6-7).

Another example of the ingenuity in re-enactment is Tommy who made a WWI cart for the Lewis light machine gun. Not that many of these carts to have survived since the war. I was told by my interlocutors that the carts were not that well liked during WWI. The wheels sunk into the bombed-out mud of the battlefields and was deemed rather useless. Another reason why many of the carts have not survived, is that the carts were mostly used early war. The carts were also often repurposed as stretchers for wounded soldiers, since the wheels made it was easier to carry bodies, than to carry them on ones back. Therefore, by the main reason of just general attrition, many of the carts did not survive the war in good condition, with most being discarded as junk post-war.

Because of the extreme scarcity of these carts, Tommy decided he was going to make one from scratch. This was easier said than done. Since there are difficulties finding carts that are available to go and take measurements of, Tommy would need piece it together by himself. Painstakingly going through old photographs, old drafts, drawings, as well as manuals on what should be inside. Tommy took the measurements by looking at an old manual, knowing a constant in that picture, which was the gun itself. He could measure by looking at the length of his own deactivated gun, and from there figure out the rest of the specifications.

Daren had done the research, and through this attained the knowledge needed to make the cart. Through researching Tommy had articulated a form of skilled vision. After taking all the measurements he built it out of wood and used old bike tires as wheels, and at the end painting it in the correct colours. What Tommy had made was a piece which looked like the original, and by it being the only one around it drew big crowds, even though it was not an original. He had used the skilled vision which he obtained by doing the research, to make something that other people would not have been able to. What this further exemplifies, is that sometimes there is a necessity to make a reproduction, since the original objects simply do not exist anymore.



**Figure 6** Cart made by Tommy. Photo taken by author July 2 2022

Another example includes recreated 24-hour ration packs which during one of the private events Arthur had sourced. The guy who had made them had done extensive research on ration packs and how to make the different foodstuffs within the ration. The rations packs consisted of the same items that would have been in a 24-hour ration pack during WWII. The guy who had made these had used his skilled vision to make something that was as close to the original as possible. Which allowed my interlocutors to eat something that was an authentic reproduction, something that helped make the event become more realistic.



Figure 7 The 24 hour ration pack. Photo taken by informant May 5 2022

However, some homemade pieces can appear rough around the edges. Some objects may be so rough that they are outright made the display seem less authentic. On the Weston helicopter museum there were one guy who had made “dynamite” sticks out of pieces of wood. He had printed out the label for dynamite and glued it on so it would look like a stick of dynamite. However, during the day, it happened to rain, making the paper soggy and falling off. While on a walk around, Arthur noted this quickly and said, “he could at least throw them away now, it looks bad when it’s like this, he just looks like an amateur”.

Another example on how some objects in some cases can reduce the authentic feel is Arthur’s Bren<sup>4</sup> light machine gun. The gun itself have been scratch made, which means it has been made from the ground up by a guy who makes it. The Bren originally uses 303. Rounds ammunition, but to be able to use it as a blank firing gun it needs to use 9mm rounds. To accommodate this the magazines have been repurposed and a 9mm magazine from a Sten<sup>5</sup> sub machine gun have been fused straight through. Which have resulted in a part of the magazine to protrude from the top of the original magazine. This has changed the silhouette of the gun itself, which to the dismay of Arthur means it “doesn’t look as authentic does it”. However, it being able to make sound, as well as looking somewhat like a Bren makes up for it. Also, the fact that getting a

---

<sup>4</sup> A light machine gun used by the British during WWII and beyond.

<sup>5</sup> A lightweight sub machine gun used extensively by the British during WWII.

hold of an original Bren that can shoot is slim to none for a normal person. It requires hard to get to certifications and licenses, which is only available for armourers, making Arthur's gun the next best thing.

### **3.3 Touching the past**

Objects can reach a sacralised state, especially when they are original objects and if they can be traced back to have been in combat. Original objects have already been imprinted with a history, the objects become the reminders, the survivors of the war. While touring Harry's house to look at his rather massive collection, Harry showed me an old "rifle" which had been dug up in northern France. The "rifle" now not more than mere piece of scrap metal with some wood fittings, had great value to him. Harry explained that "It has a history, that is what I like by it, it has been there, in the hands of a soldier who most probably died, it is a real symbol of the war". It being dilapidated was not relevant at all, being an object that had a history was enough to give it value. In a way the object lives on in the history of this imagined soldier who had died. Nobody knew the true history of this rifle, but it being found on an old battleground gave it credibility as a relic of the war. The appearance of different objects can help give away an authentic feel. Korsmeyer notes that the passage of time can leave visible marks on objects, like chips or breaks. The visible appearance of wear gives an experience of it being real (Korsmeyer, 2019, 43).

While attending an event in Wales the host had decided to do an auction on his surplus equipment. In front of me, strewn over the ground was tattered, mothed and otherwise raggedy objects for sale. I saw no real apparent value in these objects and would rather discard them as junk. However, by observing the other people present that was far from the truth, they were running around almost as if they had hit the jackpot with what was in front of them. For one guy a mothed and ragged trouser was worth the 15£ asking price. Asking him afterwards why he would buy this item at this price considering the whole left leg was practically destroyed. I was told, "this is original material, I can use this material to patch up other pieces of equipment I have, it may not be of use as it is, but it has other uses".

The item itself, or rather the fabric is what was of value, it being of an "original" quality, and not being a reproduction piece gave it value regardless of the state it was in. Others explained that they would want items which are tattered. I was told by a middle-aged re-enactor that "It would get a little bit destroyed while going through a bloody war wouldn't it, it being tattered

only gives it a more authentic feel”. And while I thought the items to be at the pricey end, I was told it wasn’t really that expensive compared to what other people ask of the same items online. Here you didn’t need to pay for the postage either.

Carolyn Korsmeyer through Georg Simmel writes that, ruins, or artefacts is just the present form of a past life. An object itself contains its own whole history, whilst holding the object we are touching its history. We are bringing, in the instant of touching the object, the past into an aesthetically perceptible present. Korsmeyer goes on to define touch as a central role in the encounter. Touch, Korsmeyer says, seem to invoke a thrill when touching something old and rare. The touching of certain objects gives people a sense of being there. Like in a case Korsmeyer describes where Dan Lewis, a curator for a library, touches original books by Darwin or Newton. She describes these experiences as times where the gaps of time have been bridged momentarily, almost as if bringing the past into today. Furthermore, by being at historical places or touching historical objects, one gets a sense of taking part in that history (Korsmeyer, 2019, 23-26).

In the case of my interlocutors what Korsmeyer is stating seems to be true. Often it was noted that objects had been in use by people before, and that by holding these objects one gets closer to the people who once used these objects. Often telling me “You are holding a piece of history there”. In this way what is history is exactly objects like this. What this is insinuating is that objects embody the history they have witnessed, in the case of Harry’s “rifle” explained earlier the gun has started to embody this imagined soldier, therefore also the war. Touching the “rifle”, also means touching the war in some capacity.

The touching of objects is an action that is believed to have a lasting effect on the artifacts, through touch objects receives some sort of value. However, with most objects having been touched by many people, the act of general touching does not necessarily attribute the object value. The question is rather touched by who, and where. In the case of re-enactment objects touched or used by soldiers in a war setting attributes greater value. This is consistent with Korsmeyer’s claim that reproduction can never match the value of the original object. This believed spirit the objects have will not be present (Korsmeyer, 2019, 71-72).

A reproduction does not contain the embodied value that originals have accrued over the years. Two objects may look the same, but one is 200 years old, and the other is 5. The 5-year-old object will never be as old as the other one. Objects can be said to inherit both age value but also historical value. Age value is more concerned with objects showing that they embody the



marks of time, in the ways that they show that they are old. Historical value on the other hand is attached to objects because they represent a specific stage of some cultural creativity. On the one hand age value lets the object be damaged by wear and tear, however letting it be in its present form, showing age. Historical value on the other hand promotes the reconstruction of objects into their original form, showing how they would have looked like back then (Korsmeyer 2019, 80).

Korsmeyer notes that touching historical artifacts is attributed to almost traveling in time, as through touch we are attempting to go back in time. However, she notes we never really go back in time, the present does not magically disappear but through the action of touching an object we are getting a heightened sense or notice of the past. In one way the past and present blends, bringing the past into the present, but not removing one or the other (Korsmeyer, 2019, 72). Touching and handling historical objects constructs a blend of the past and present. Constructing a state where they coexist, producing a wholly new experience, not the past but also not the present. Blending of the past and present exists in most cases of re-enactment, the modern public looking in, or through re-enactors using mobile phones. There is never a hundred percent realistic display, however some come very close, but in these cases the rules the re-enactors set on authentic practice are very strict.

The rifle that Harry had dug up was of the right age value, it had been in use, it had the wear and tear to show that it's been in the ground for the last hundred years. This differentiates it from other objects which do not have the same story. A rifle which has been in a storage facility does not show the same damage. While the rifle in storage is arguably of a better "quality", giving it more use for re-enactors when showing off an authentic display. However, the age value is still not there, the two items can therefore be of the same age but still inherit different values from the use they have had over the years.

From this one can say the objects embody the use that they have had. While one is now just a piece of scrap, the other is pristine, one has history whilst the other has not. For most people who just want to show off the piece as an aesthetic object, the pristine one has more value. But for the people who value the history behind the objects, the mangled one may have a higher value, just because it has the history. There is also another aspect and that is of an aesthetically sensible one, while the pristine one might have well been in the war, you would never know. However, the damaged one embodies this, it is damaged. We can see and feel the damage that has been done to it. Valuing objects because they have a history Korsmeyer claims requires a

more robust sense of the continuity of the object, and knowledge that this object is the one and the same that has persisted over time (Korsmeyer 2019, 181).

Objects construe value over time, through age objects starts embodying its past, as in the case when it gets damaged. Or they may be taken care of in such a way that they become pieces of good quality. My interlocutors as shown does not necessarily care if they are destroyed, sometimes items being somewhat tattered makes them more worth. They also become protectors of the items. Protectors of the past as in the case of Harry's "rifle" items which show a history which should not be forgotten. History will always be inscribed within the objects and live on in their current states. Touching objects also become something that bridges the gap between the present and the past, making people more acute and aware of the history the objects represent. One temporally connects oneself with that timeline. At one point or another a soldier held that rifle, now it is Harry's turn.

### **3.4 Sounds of the past**

At many events auditory sensation is an integral part of the ambience, the music and the occasional pop of blanks being fired, sets the mood for the event. The music present at events are usually the 1940s melodies that most people characterize of that era. Jo Tacchi elucidates that radio sounds serve as a filler of space and time. Radio sounds can further be of help to not only establish but also maintain identities and is also used as a marker of time. Furthermore, she explains through Steven Feld that sound is a way to express shared feelings and emotions (Tacchi, 1998, 35).

The soundscape that is being made at events, factors into the authentic feel of the event itself. It helps participants at these events gain a sense of belonging to it, awakening memories to the era itself. What is being awakened can be said is the concept of the 1940s. It serves as a backdrop, grounding the spectators to the era they are supposed to be witnessing. While attending one of my first events at Caldicot castle Arthur explained that the music would later be giving me nightmares. As Arthur himself explained "the songs are nice, but after 20 times in a day it can be a bit much". But that these songs are songs everyone know, and what many people, themselves included, often correlate with the sounds of the 1940s. The songs themselves have become a sort of essence symbolising the 1940s. However, it can be argued that the "memories" these songs invoke are heavily influenced by the popular media's depiction of the era from movies and tv shows. Invoking culturally specific depictions of the 1940s.

Such memories can be described as prosthetic memories, memories which are memories of past lives they have not necessarily lived. Alison Landsberg notes that mass culture has changed the way collective memories are made, opening for people to inhabit different social spaces, practices, and beliefs to create shared social frameworks. Structuring imagined communities which aren't necessarily nationally or geographically bound. Landsberg notes that memories remain a sensuous phenomenon, gathering that it is experienced through the body, and derives most of its power through affect (Landsberg, 2004, 8). However, speaking through Jean Baudrillard, Landsberg gives a critique, where Baudrillard will say that simulations would mean history would have stopped. Landsberg on the other hand note that history has never been "real". History, like most knowledge, is and has always been interpreted and mediated through narratives. New technologies only change what is counted as "real" experiences. As well as the aspect that these technologies make people increasingly able to experience the past without having lived it (Landsberg, 2004, 47-48).

### **3.5 Doing the past wrong**

In the world of re-enactment there is a word that is directly connected to improper representations, this word is farb. While at an event called WarAg after a battle was finished, Arthur had gone back to the car to collect the cleaning equipment for the guns. Ethan and Rory were getting ready by putting down a ground tarp so to have a clean place to clean the guns. Arthur quickly came back with a bottle of WD40 and a roll of cotton for cleaning the guns. WD40 was not something they would have during the second world war. This was quickly noted by Ethan saying "of course you brought a farby can" mocking Arthur's choice of cleaning solution. However, there wasn't a real issue that this can was "farby", everyone used it to clean the guns, but it was referred to as "the farby can" whenever someone wanted it.

I asked them afterwards why they did not use equipment which would have been deemed as authentic. Arthur explained that sometimes they could not really be bothered going through the hassle of doing it the authentic way. WD40 works well enough, and that they were not doing this for the public. In this case they only needed to clean the guns. The guns were not being cleaned as part of the display, if it was part of the display for the public, I was told they would have done it authentically. However, a paradox of this is that during the private events, which are events only for them, they strive to do it as authentically as possible. During these events

there is no question whether to use authentic cleaning solutions or “farby” ones, even though the public is not there.

What the above example shows is that the wish to be historically correct only stretches so far before becoming redundant. Re-enactors pride themselves on showing the most authentic vision of the war as possible. However, when that becomes too much of a hassle, they would rather resort to modern methods of fixing things, bringing in inauthentic objects. Another example involves a lighter, while trying to fire up a cooker to cook up a can of beans. After several times trying to light the fuel with matches, Rory gave up. He proclaimed he was going the “farby” way and quickly made the fire with a lighter. While there was an attempt to be authentic, the second it became too difficult to do, he resorted to an easy, but “farby” way of doing it.

The word “farb” seems to be a word they reach to when excusing an action that is considered inauthentic. It becomes the way to justify the reasoning behind why they do it this way. By saying it they proclaim they know that what they are doing is wrong and inauthentic for what they are trying to portray. Using it to justify the action they are doing, even when it is wrong. Because of this farb is therefore a word that concerns bridging discourse.

Bridging discourse as discourse which main purpose is to come to common perceptions of what is authentic (Decker, 2010, 274). By using the word farb, my interlocutors show that they know that it is wrong, therefore also ultimately also knowing what is correct. Which furthermore shows a skilled vision, through knowing what they are doing is wrong. However, it is still worth noting that it is still important to be authentic. Being too incorrect, even when stating that they know what they do is wrong is still considered a bad thing if it happens too often. Re-enactors allow for a little wiggle room in what is considered acceptable. Being deemed as a professional re-enactor still requires a great deal of work, it still requires the re-enactor to stay true to the portrayal they do.

### **3.6 Reproduced vs original past**

For re-enacting purposes reproductions are most often used, mainly because they are readily available and usually of decent enough quality. If a reproduction piece gets destroyed, it's not like it was a real historical piece to begin with. However, sometimes re-enactors desire a well-worn quality. For some, objects showing their age gives it a higher sense of authenticity, as the object being tattered is closely related to it feeling like an authentic piece. Therefore, the piece

having age value gives it an appearance of being something used in battle, and furthermore gives the re-enactor legitimacy as an authentic “soldier”.

My interlocutors often told me they prefer original equipment because it is also of a better-quality material and that the “repro shit” broke down too quickly. Original equipment often come in sizes that is too small for modern bodies, making it difficult to find something that fits for people who are tall, or have a big belly. Re-enactors are often on the bigger side, making it difficult to use the original equipment. Because they did not make uniforms in “fat bastard” size as they called it. Some re-enactors even weather down their reproduction equipment for it to look worn. Using methods such as a group did at Caldicot castle, by burying their Denison smock<sup>6</sup> in the ground for a couple of days before digging it up. This gave the appearance that it had been through some wear and tear, without really having been through anything.

Sometimes there are requirements on what they can wear, for example at Monty’s Men. Monty’s men is an event where they try to their best put on a week’s long exercise with the most authentic feel as possible. To be able to attend they have strict rules on what to wear, claiming a lot of reproductions are not authentic enough, excluding them in the process. However, the material cost this requires is for some too much, especially cost wise. Monty’s men require that everyone has the proper uniform, the cheap reproductions from popular sites like Soldier of Fortune does not cut it. These uniforms are deemed not good enough, and they require either original uniforms, or uniforms from a place called What Price Glory Europe. Uniforms from this site now cost 314 euros to buy, as well as VAT and shipping costs. They also require its participants to buy a “tam o’ shanter”, which is a type of hat used by Scottish troops, as well as the correct badges to put on the uniforms. On top of this the price of the event itself is £180. This does however, include food for the week as well as all other expenses paid, but does not include transport to and from the event.

The amount needed to be paid for the week, if you don’t already have all the necessary equipment is over 500 pounds, which many people said just isn’t worth it. Ethan said that “no way I’m paying that much to be miserable in a field for a week, I can do that by myself for free!”. A paradox in this is that the people who have enough expendable money for these events, are usually older. These people do not necessarily have the physique to be running around, sleeping rough and eating little for a week. While younger people on the other hand, who are fit enough for the event does not have enough money to attend. My interlocutors often noted

---

<sup>6</sup> A jacket used by British paratroopers during WWII.

this aspect when I asked why there are mostly middle-aged men in the hobby. Giving the reason that young people, while better from an authentic view, do not have enough disposable income to get the right equipment.

For many of my interlocutors, the authentic portrayal that Monty's men require is too much. They cannot be bothered to be authentic down to their underwear. Something Monty's men requires of their attendees. What this rather exemplifies is the will to be authentic only stretches so far before becoming too much. None want to be seen as a "stitch nazi", however, they want to be deemed as professional re-enactors. Re-enactors who are authentic but not too authentic. Becoming too inauthentic makes their professionalism reduced, resulting in people viewing them as bad re-enactors. Re-enactors therefore constantly negotiate their professionalism. Being "farby" as noted earlier is one of the strategies they perform to continue this professionalism without being fully authentic, to a degree. However, it often requires being authentic enough, correct enough, having kit which are correct to the period, without pointing it out to others. Re-enactors often buy new gear, building on what they have, and over time their equipment becomes more and more authentic.

### **3.7 "STAND TO"**

The group had set up a position down a hill on a private event. The private event was meant for the participants to experience the life of a soldier in WWII in Europe. Earlier that day, we had been attacked at our earlier position in some bunkers up the hill. We had been pushed back from that position and retreated down the hill, while the Germans overtook the bunkers. At the bottom of the hill the group started quickly to dig down, making slit trenches, which are trenches that is only big enough to lay down in. As well as setting up a position for the Bren gun at the top of the hill, to work as a lookout. The morning was rather uneventful, with the group sitting around, making food, generally chatting while still on the lookout for the Germans. During the day the forward lookout post with the Bren gun was rotated on, so nobody got worn out in the hot May sun.

At around mid-day the lookout post saw the Germans starting to mobilize over the hill, quickly signalling down to the rest of the group to be ready for anything. Suddenly shots were fired from the Germans, Arthur shouted "STAND TO", everyone scurried quickly down into the trenches, ready to fight back, quickly putting in ear defenders. Silence broke out, the atmosphere was tense, everybody laid with their rifles pointing towards the top of the hill, ready to shoot at

anything that would appear. Not before long we saw helmets rising over the horizon, all hell broke loose, everyone started shooting at the enemy. The sound of rifles and the rhythmic sound of machine gun fire filled the air before they quickly retreated.

Whilst retreating the German officer could be heard shouting commands at his troops over the horizon. While not being able to discern what was being said, it still made for a perfect set up which changed the whole atmosphere. For a moment it truly felt like being in a firefight against actual Germans. There was a feeling of excitement but also of anxiousness as to what was happening next, were we being attacked again? Were we advancing? Or were they retreating for good? After a little while it was apparent that it was the latter. No more attacks came, and the group was back to trying to shy away from the hot May sun underneath the tree next to our position.

In the case above the feeling of the past, came because of the whole setting. In many ways it was the material aspects around us, that made the atmosphere. Ben Anderson notes that “atmospheres are the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge” (Anderson, 2009, 78). Anderson further goes out to explain atmospheres as having affective elements. Meaning it can be seen as bodies inflicting emotions and feelings upon other bodies. These bodies do not necessarily need to pertain to human bodies, but also towards nonhuman discursive bodies (Anderson, 2009, 80).

In the case above, the Germans affected us, it made us perk up and fight back. With everyone being on the edge, and everyone living themselves into the situation, it made for an atmosphere which felt like a real firefight. While it is a product of our time, the material aspects made it into something that made it feel like WWII. The same feeling of excitement could have happened if we were using 21<sup>st</sup> century equipment, but it was the material aspect around us that set the stage. In this case, the material aspect was paramount for it feeling like WWII, however, it is in unison with everyone also having the right mindset that made it feel real.

Michal Mochocki notes that “The power of material heritage is best visible in the sensationalisation of touch and physical proximity to original heritage objects” (Mochocki, 2021, 42). Furthermore, what this entails is that the ability to reminisce is itself engendered by the embodiment of consumption. The physicality to the objects itself and the sensuous touch to those objects stimulates sensory and physical experiences. Experiences which structures a past (Mochocki 2021, 42).

By surrounding themselves with historical artefacts they transport themselves into a place that feels like WWII. A past which is structured through the objects they surround themselves with, inadvertently “transporting” them back. They are touching, handling, and otherwise using the objects in settings they were originally used in. Making it possible for my interlocutors to live into the situation. It becomes as Laurajane Smith notes about heritage performances “not only physical experiences of ‘doing’, but also emotional experiences of ‘being’” (Smith, 2006, 71). However, what is important to note is that this does not necessarily require the use of original objects. Mochocki further notes that believable replicas can still generate an illusion of it being authentic (Mochocki, 2021, 43).

Some objects do hold immense affectionate value for some, for example medals for Stanley. Stanley does not like when people put medals on their chest, because in his view they did not earn those medals. Medals are something the military still give out to this day and is something that symbolises personal traits such as valour and honour. In short, they symbolise the merit of a soldier. Something Stanley does not think can be re-enacted. Driving back from an event Stanley told me “I find it sickening you know, being a soldier myself, these medals have value to me”. For Stanley they are not just a decorative object, it holds value more than just its material value, it has symbolic status. Which for Stanley represents not only what soldiers did, but what they currently do. He further said, “I have friends who have gotten those medals, they earned it, that guy at the event has been eating cheeseburgers, he has not earned it”.

The medals are a symbol that also connects yesterday’s soldiers to today’s soldier, it is a marker that represents values of high regard. And for Stanley, this bridges the portrayals of the hobby, of today’s soldiers with the historical soldiers they portray. Actions for him becomes something that pertains to someone’s value as a person, not something that can be mimicked, and re-enacted. Doing so means stealing the valour of soldiers who have earned it. However, there are others who discussed this aspect with Stanley, Arthur for example stated that while they may not have earned it themselves, it was a way for them to be able to use their father’s medal, commemorating their father’s deeds.

Korsmeyer notes that culture resides in the hearts, minds, and practices of people, but culture is also accrued within objects. Entailing offences which is done towards objects, such as destroying them or pillaging them, can be seen as an offence on the people (Korsmeyer, 2019, 123). Which entails that objects can be seen as representing a society. Historical artefacts represent the history of that society. My interlocutors in this view are protectors of history since



they collect and take care of the objects. Objects of a bygone society, or a lost way of life. Objects that embody and hold this notion of national pride for them. The objects they collect and take care of is a symbol of a lost time, by taking care of historical objects they are keeping their memory alive. Not only objects but also symbols of regiments can hold affectionate value for them. The patches they have on their arm, as well as the cap badge they have on their hat symbolises regimental unity. It symbolises a history of soldiers, its more than just a piece of metal or cloth. It connects the people re-enacting temporarily with the soldiers of the past. Placing themselves within that continuity, they for that time is part of the history that cap badge hold.

### **3.8 Commodification of the past**

Tommy who is an avid collector of war memorabilia sees his collecting not as spending money, but rather as an investment. While at an event at Taunton, Tommy and Harry came to talk about how much their collections are worth. This was the first time Tommy had brought out his cart as well and therefore showed some of the knickknacks he had bought to fill his cart. While showing off a small tool to change the barrel of the Lewis gun, an item that is quite rare and expensive. Tommy explained to Harry that he was lucky to get this for around £50 not too long ago, and soon it will be worth over £100 pounds. Jokingly stating that his wife will be angry when she finds out but when she understands its value it will be alright. For Tommy the objects become not only collectables to be used, but something he can make money on later.

While for now, he is only collecting and does not really intend selling them. However, as he himself explained “give it 20 years and I will be a rich man”. Harry on the other hand is already well into his 60s and has now started selling off his collection to make money on it. However, while he often sells off his surplus equipment, he usually buys back just as much soon after. He is as re-enactors often joke about “bitten by the re-enactment bug”, further joking that “you can never get enough kit”. Collecting becomes an obsession for my interlocutors, however, it also serves as a form insurance.

Commodification entails something has been made into a commodity. Commodification shows that objects have become part of a market, becoming sellable. Commodities are objects which have economic value (Appadurai, 1986, 3). Re-enactment gives objects value to more than just its aesthetic purposes. Furthermore, it gives objects use value, since re-enactors utilize the objects in their intended use, rather than only as an aesthetic object. Original objects are

however irreplaceable, one cannot go back and make more original uniforms, webbing, or cap badges. Reproductions have taken over as the main objects in use by re-enactors. If a reproduction does manage to get damaged, it is easily replaceable. This aspect of the hobby shows that there will always be a demand for new objects since wear and tear will always be a concern.

There is also an argument to be made that the events themselves have undergone a commoditization process. Many museums also do cost money to enter. The learning of history itself has been made into a commodity. Something which can be consumed by the masses if they are willing to pay for the entrance fee. Almost every event has some sort of entrance fee for the public, ranging from £5 up into £15. However, most events are free for re-enactors. My interlocutor's perspective is that they are at events to perform a duty, as without their participation there wouldn't have been an event in the first place. Some events do cost money for re-enactors to take part in, quite often the cost of going to these events is towards food, fuel or other expenses which need to be paid.

There have been events that have charged an entrance fee for re-enactors. For my interlocutors this is considered bad practice. When events do start to ask re-enactors for an entrance fee it usually marks the end of the event. Re-enactors from this perspective resist the commodification inwards towards themselves. While they inevitably partake in the commodification of history, they do somewhat resist it. Most events cost money to uphold, all from renting the grounds, hiring in entertainment. All down to necessary amenities such as portable toilets. All these things need to be paid for, so while this has the effect of commoditizing these events, it is from a place of necessity.

Events become places of learning history. Through re-enactors repackaging and selling history towards the masses, history becomes something that can be consumed by consumers. Events are also marketed as a fun and exciting day out for the whole family. In short one can say that history has been packaged as a sort of entertainment. Paul Armstrong and Janet Coles mention that history has undergone a democratization process. Doing history has become more hands on, letting ordinary people take part in the reconstruction of history (Armstrong & Coles, 2008, 65-66). What this means is that history itself has become something that everyone is able to construct, it is not something that is of concern for only professionals. However, this opens for a discussion around historiography, and the re-enactments value towards capturing the "real"

history. On the other hand, democratization allows more people to be hands on learning history. By capturing more peoples interest, the general breadth in biographies will arguably be bigger. For my interlocutors, when tasked with the question about the danger of presenting the wrong history. They explained that in their view academic history often tells the grand stories. Stories that do not consider the man on the ground. Re-enactment is for them a way to show as well as experience the stories told by their family members or through other stories, and not the history books. Doing re-enactment becomes a way to tell the stories they know, a way for them to tell their history. As well as experiencing history by using their own bodies as tools for understanding. Historians within the hobby still hold great deal of respect and is viewed as a legitimizing factor on objects and portrayals. Historians become the professional who can authenticate their portrayals. However, there are clear dangers with this democratized approach, since at times there are no authenticating authorities behind the claims made. Allowing for potential misinformation to be spread.

Igor Kopytoff notes that culture ensures some things never become commodities, resisting the forces of commoditization. He explains that such objects have become singularized, being pulled out of the commodity sphere, to become a non-commodity. However, this does not mean that an object is not a commodity, but rather that an object has become sacralised, or reaching a state where it is somewhat priceless state within that society. However, some objects can become re-commoditized (Kopytoff, 1986, 73-76). Jacob had been given all the equipment left after an old veteran from his family. The family knew Jacob would not try to sell the items. For Jacob the items have too much history, someone has used it. They are someone's family heirlooms, so he only acts as a caretaker. The items had reached somewhat of a sacrilegious state. For the family the items were irreplaceable, it was their grandads, or dads. The artefacts embody him, making the items priceless for them. By giving the items to Jacob, they knew the items would be used to show the history and in turn showing his story, instead of being sold for profit to someone else. The family in this sense has deliberately taken the items away from the commoditized sphere. The items are still items of inherent value, they have not lost their commoditized state, but they have in Jacob's hands become decommoitized. They have been removed from the market sphere.

In this chapter I have discussed what constitutes as correct representations. Objects are paramount for the accurate representation, objects also hold the ability to capture the awe of the spectator. However, it is worth noting that re-enactors while arguing they need to stay authentic,

still do not go to the extreme. Becoming what they deem to be “Stitch nazis”. Touching objects lets people temporarily bridge the gaps between the present and the past, making people more aware of the past. I argue that the act of doing re-enactment, while not an object per se, also has that ability to bring more awareness of the past towards its spectators. In re-enactment there is a breadth of reproduced equipment. Most of this equipment is bought from online sellers, for example uniforms and the like. However, when objects are not able to get a hold of, such as Tommy’s cart or the SAS bombs, re-enactors use their skilled vision to create them from scratch. Nonetheless, this requires meticulous knowledge. Arguably when re-enactors do not inhabit the skilled vision their reproductions will also not be good enough. Objects can also be symbols of either personal qualities or a temporal connection with a regiment. Regimental badges are something that connects everyone who have worn that badge. Medals on the other hand is something that pertains to soldiers’ values, it is something that for Stanley need to be earned. However, some re-enactors use their fathers or grandfathers’ medals, showing them off to commemorate their deeds. Given that re-enactment is something that is done in front of an audience means it is a form of performance. The next chapter will exemplify how re-enactment is performed towards an audience to give them a feeling of alterity. However, this performance is also targeted towards themselves, through the embodying and doing of the past.

## **4 Performing the past**

### **4.1 Becoming a soldier**

During a private event in late August the group was training on how to effectively patrol a woodblock. The group was divided into teams, one group being led by Gareth, a 40-year-old police officer. Gareth's group was going to be tasked with clearing the woods for any enemies that may be present. The other group was led by Stanley, and had the task of hiding in the woods, acting as the enemies. The patrolling group consisted of 7 men, while the other only had 3. The reason for this uneven divide being that this was going to be exercise into clearing the woods, not defending against an enemy while in a position. After one group had gone through, we switched around, so everyone eventually got to try every task. Gareth quickly gathered all the men, gave us tasks, I was tasked with being the man in the back. Gareth briefed us that there had been sightings of Germans in the woods, and that we had been given the task of clearing these out. After making sure everyone knew what we were going to do Gareth ordered us to fall out behind him.

Going into the woods we snaked us through the trees, keeping a keen eye out for any enemies. The group suddenly stopped. Gareth had spotted something up ahead. Being the last one in the line I turned around to cover our rear. An order came up through the line, enemies had been spotted about 100 yards in front of us. Gareth gave the order to face the enemy, and everyone formed a line towards the enemy. Tristan and I were given orders to flank while the others were to act as covering fire. Earlier in the day the group had trained on giving out fire orders. Gareth using this new knowledge shouted "ENEMY, 100 YARDS, NEXT TO PATH RIGHT AHEAD, FIRE AT WILL". Everyone started letting out blanks, Tristan and I took this as our opportunity to strike, quickly coming to our feet and started running to flank the enemy. After a little bit of stumbling, almost falling and a lot of sprinting, we stood next to the enemy who quickly raised their hands and surrendered. After the ordeal we had a quick debrief on what we did wrong and right, with Stanley praising us for initiating the flanking move.

Goffman illuminates that individuals can be convinced of their own acts, making them their own audience, forming them both into the performer and observer of their own show. Re-enactors try to learn history by doing, they try to embody the experiences of the past. Making them in this case observing and learning of their own show, as in the case presented above. The group trained on the tactics of WWII, for the main purpose of learning the tactics of WWII. Goffman further explains that performers can form teams, which means that performers get

together and co-operate into realising performances. While in a team, there are two basic components, firstly that at any moment any member of the team has the power to uncover the play and disrupt it with improper conduct. Every member needs to work together, making a reciprocal relationship that entails that everyone needs to know, as well as look and act correctly. Secondly the team needs to maintain a specific definition of what they perform to their audience. The members regard each other as people who are, as Goffman puts it, “in the know”, meaning they know what is happening. People who a particular front cannot be maintained towards, in a way the play is already unravelled for them (Goffman, 1956, 50-51). By doing the event as a team my interlocutors can effectively learn together how it is to be a part of a WWII squad. The private event had the sole purpose of teaching how it would have been like to be a soldier, especially a soldier as part of a squad. What they learn from the event can be used later, to give a more realistic performance towards an audience. Making as Goffman exemplified a group who knows what they are supposed to do, trusting that everyone is “in the know”.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe performances and other realities as finite provinces, places where reality can be inscribed with other meanings and modes of experiences. This new reality can envelop the being from all sides, these transitions to new realities is often marked by the falling or rising of a curtain. Spectators are transported into a new world with new meanings and order which is different than everyday life. After the performance is done, spectators return to their everyday life, returning to reality. Berger and Luckmann further explain that all these finite provinces are characterized by the turning away from everyday life, changing the reality into something new (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, 39). Re-enactment gives people a way into the exploring of other realities, by creating a space where people can both see and experience the past in ways which involves bodily experiences as well as performances. It becomes a way for re-enactors to break with their everyday life, and for a weekend become something else entirely, or at least partly. As in the case presented earlier, my interlocutors trained as soldiers, learning what to do if they ever were in that reality, even though they never will be.

The role my interlocutors play involve that they must have a great deal of knowledge about the war and the life of a soldier. They need to convincingly portray a soldier for it to feel realistic for the audience, as well as towards themselves. This requires a great deal of research. The case above is an example of such research, doing it for themselves, training for trainings sake. Because of the deepened knowledge my interlocutors have on the given subject, they become

someone who have a somewhat specialised knowledge on the subject they are interested in. They become experts in the given subject, being able to explain the history towards the spectators.

Berger and Luckmann notes that specialists are individuals who have specialities within a specific type of knowledge, in the case of my fieldwork WWI and WWII (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, 95). The public, which is interested in learning about history, go to these specialists of the knowledge to learn that history. While my interlocutors most often do not have any academic qualifications in the field of history. They are perceived by the public as people who possess such expertise on the subject. However, within the hobby itself re-enactors still value the historian's knowledge more than they do themselves. Inside the hobby the historians are still the people with the specialist knowledge.

## **4.2 Teaching the past**

At one of my first events, I witnessed a woman who had brought a folder containing extensive documents on her father's whereabouts and movements while he was in the war. I was speaking to a group of people who re-enacted as glider pilots before she appeared and talked with them at great lengths. Her father had been a glider pilot during the war, hence why she came to talk to them. While talking she was sharing the documents and telling them the story of her father. The re-enactors took great interest into what she was telling them, telling them stories they knew also. The re-enactors were able to show her the objects her father may have used, making the woman get first-hand knowledge of the use of these objects. Which as she explained gave her a deeper perspective on the experiences her father may have had.

Re-enactment events become a space where these people can come together. The re-enactors, already having knowledge as well as wanting to learn more history, and the public who have personal stories about what is shown. People can in this way learn and discuss their heritage in a meaningful way, with likeminded people. What the woman took part in can be seen as an example of how history have been democratized. Using her own stories through her father allowed her to take part in bridging discourse with the re-enactors. Allowing them to discuss and educate each other, her with her stories, and the re-enactors letting her get in touch with that history through handling objects.

At an event called WarAg the group decided to train on the disassembly and assembly of guns, this time the Bren gun and Sten gun. Arthur put down a ground mat just behind the rubber barbed wire, before instructing everyone on the correct order of disassembly and assembly. After everyone had understood the basics, the group started practicing. Since later there were going to be a competition on who could do it fastest. Ethan started to get cocky and decided to challenge Rory for a one-on-one match to see who could assemble and disassemble the Sten gun the quickest. Arthur brought out another Sten gun so they could have a head-to-head match to see who did it quickest. Sitting head-to-head, Ethan and Rory went on to compete who could do it fastest. The match was close, but Rory came out as the winner in the end. While competing the public started quickly to gather around the group. Arthur took this opportunity to make this a display towards the public. Standing in front explaining what the group was doing, becoming a narrator to the action that was happening in front of them.

David Dean exemplifies two forms of performance used by re-enactors, which is first person and third person performances. In first person performances the distance between past and present collapses in on itself, making it somewhat of an original. Through first person performances the re-enactors go into the role, immersing themselves. Role playing that they live in that period, using the correct clothing, tools, and other equipment. Given this the spectators also need to somewhat roleplay, they are seen as outsiders coming in, but not necessarily outsiders from the future. The purpose of these performances is to capture the spectator's imagination, making them feel as if they were witnessing everyday life. Third person performances on the other hand are looser, only acting as informed guides rather than an actual personification of a character. During these performances they speak of the past in past tense rather than as happening right now, opening for discussions about similarities and differences between the past and present (Dean, 2020, 121-122). Arthur in the case above used a third person performance, while the rest of used first person. When the rest acted as a living display, becoming a first-person performance only doing the acts. Arthur could inform the public, becoming a narrator to what we were doing. Most often re-enactors use both types of performances during events, often switching roles compared to what suits them best at the given moment. Sometimes both may also be applied at the same time as the case above.



### 4.3 A product of our time

During an event in June, we came to discuss the difference between the generation that lives now compared to the ones in the 40s. Harry explained that in his view they lived fully different lives. Claiming that whilst he is living as a soldier for the weekend, he still lives in 21<sup>st</sup> century. As he himself explained “At the end of the day they were still in the 1940s, they struggled to get by, and from my family’s experiences, they were poor, they did not even have a radio”. Harry took a quick break to take a drag of his cigarette before continuing with, “I drive home in my new Vauxhall with heated seats to get a cup of tea, heat up some dinner before I turn on the telly, my world is completely different, I will never understand how it was back then”. The conversation quickly turned into how it would have been like to be a soldier on campaign. Tommy quickly added and said “While I have some understanding how it is to be soldier, I will never fully know how it was. They were there day in day out, I’m in a field blowing off some gunpowder for the weekend, in no danger whatsoever”. Everyone nodded and seemed to agree with Tommy’s view, they will never truly know how the life of a WWII soldier was. However, as Stanley further added “neither would I truly want to know how it was, I am quite content with the life I am living now, however, it is to those men that I now enjoy the peace I’m living in”.

Juliane Brauer and Martin Lücke describes re-enactment as practices that treat history as experiences, something that is possible to be created or recreated. Building on the perception that re-enactors can emotionally and tactfully reach authentic feelings. Which promises that they could approximate actions, thoughts, and emotions of the historical characters they try to perform. They argue that through doing re-enactments the re-enactors can emotionally get experiences of alterity. However, they further note that feelings and emotions have history, that our emotions are contemporary forms, which makes interpreting them difficult. Since we already interpret historical memories from our own learned emotions. The fact that we have grown up in the circumstances that we have, makes us inopportune to fathom the whole sense of emotion, or the way the historical characters communicated them. However, we can get a sense of them (Brauer & Lücke, 2020, 53-54). Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann notes that everyday life is maintained in embodied routines, which they explain is the essence itself of institutionalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, 169).

Re-enactment is a way for people to break with these embodied routines, learning new ways of understanding reality. For example, as Tommy explained during an event in July “Doing re-enactment I actually feel on my body how it was, I can leave my daily life behind for the

weekend, I feel that I understand better how it was to be a soldier”. For Tommy we can never truly know how it was back then, as he said, “I was born in the 70s, I can never truly know how it was live back then”. However, through doing re-enactment he could imagine and through using his body as a tool, get embodied knowledge on the practices. Tommy was never institutionalised into everyday life of the 1940s, meaning he never would truly feel how it was. Re-enactment becomes a practice which can give them a glimpse, it lets its participants feel and imagine how it would have been like. Albeit it will arguably never catch the true history, re-enactors will never truly feel how it was like.

#### **4.4 Tommie ergo sum**

As alluded to earlier re-enactors comes from pretty much every walk of life, from store clerks, office workers, policemen, students, and soldiers. Therefore, it is difficult trying to figure out a typical person who re-enacts, since there is no such thing. However, when they are re-enacting, everything is broken down. Appearances of class or status disappears, rendering the individuals akin to each other, apart from the hierarchy within the groups. Nonetheless, it is still worth noting that most of the people who participate is generally from the middle class. After being confronted as to why this is, most of my interlocutors expressed that one needs disposable income to take part in the hobby. Much of the kit costs quite the bit of money. Given this fact, the lower classes cannot access the hobby, since it becomes too expensive. This was also noted as a reason why there are fewer young people in the hobby as well.

Because of the mix of class, a police sergeant can end up being commanded around by a student. Being realistic to the role can be argued to mean that the people present need to break down one’s expectations around class and status. Being authentic becomes a mindset one needs to attain to uphold it, it is going into the role of being a soldier and thinking differently for the weekend. Going into the mindset that for the weekend, my interlocutors are not who they normally are. Stanley goes from being the 23-year-old dispatch officer, to be Stanley the WWII private. Although I will still not classify it as a rite of rebellion in the terms of Max Gluckmann (Gluckmann, 1963, 112).

One’s own commitment to staying immersed is closely related to the amount of realism one feels from an event. For example, during the Great Dorset Steam fair that was explained earlier in the thesis. It was only because the people present wanted to stay as immersed as possible that the realism appeared. They could have decided to go into tents, or RV’s but they did not.

Tommy explained it this way “I need to get into the role, otherwise I will be my normal self in a costume, not a soldier would I”. However, they do not entirely go into the role of an imagined soldier, they are not making up a character of their own, it is as explained earlier still them. Or as Arthur said, “I am still me, just me as a WWI soldier, yes I am in a role as a soldier, but I am still me, I do not try to impersonate a character”.

There is another closely related hobby called live action role play (LARP). LARP is more concerned with living out fantasies. Making characters which often have elaborate backstories (Mochocki, 2021, 16). My interlocutors are adamant what they are doing is different than LARP. Stanley explained it as “In LARPing they truly believe they are someone else, a character. I am still me, I become a soldier, but that is not really a character”. While still going into the role, they are not role playing someone else entirely, they are still themselves. Only now in a WWI uniform trying to act like if they themselves were in WWI. In other ways they are embodying the soldiers, as well as embodying the experiences of soldiers. Bringing this into light through their own bodies, however, still being themselves. By using their own bodies as a tool, they are learning, and educating others, by using the tools and equipment of soldiers. In other words, they are experiencing the past through themselves.

While setting up camp at an event called White Horse, Jacob came to explain what he himself learns by doing re-enactment. Jacob gave me the tent and pegs, before pointing out a good space to where I was going to set up the tent. Jacob had brought his WWII jeep for the event, a jeep which he is immensely proud of. Jacob said, “I have used it as a hearse for funerals, it is perfect for that, as well as perfect for the old veteran”. The jeep has been used for the funeral of a re-enactor, but also for an old veteran of the regiment the group re-enacts called Steve. Jacob often visited Steve in his elderly years while living in a care home. Jacob explained “I am re-enacting his regiment, he actually did the things that I am here re-enacting as”. Through re-enactment Jacob has, as many others, become an avid collector, which let him connect with Steve in a different manner.

While setting up his camp cooker to boil a kettle to make some tea Jacob said “One time when I was visiting Steve, I had my regimental tie on, he quickly recognized it. I gave him that tie”. Jacob further explained that through doing re-enactment he feels he understands the struggles of the soldiers he has heard so much about. Jacob said “Doing re-enactment I now understand what Steve told me at the care home. I understand more of what he must have gone through fighting against Hitler”. Jacob, however, knows that he will never fully know how it was, first

and foremost since he was not there. But also, because he is born in a different age, or as Jacob himself put it “I’m not an old geezer like Steve was, I’m born in the eighties, we are products of two different times, and he fought in the bloody war as well”.

Michael Jackson notes through using Kuranko society, that men and women can see themselves through the other. This mimeticism, is based on bodily awareness of another through using oneself and one can through this bring a reciprocity of viewpoints. For Jackson, creative freedom and the interpretation in mimetic play is confined with the habitus of the participants. Furthermore, Jackson argues that bodily patterns can give rise to mental images as well as instilling moral qualities (Jackson, 1989, 130-131). I propose that through bodily practices my interlocutors catch mental images, as well as viewpoints of historical people. As in the case of Jacob, he inhabits and has a different habitus than Steve had, they are fundamentally two different products of two different societies. This aspect is also noted as explained by Tommy earlier in this thesis. However, it is through the bodily mimeticism they attain the bodily awareness of others. They use the embodied knowledge they attain through re-enactment to catch a glimpse and sympathize with a soldier’s experience during WWI/II.

#### **4.5 Learning and identifying with the past**

It is through the embodied knowledge that re-enactors get their sense of truly being there, by doing the actions soldiers did during the wars. My interlocutors often told me one of their main motivations of doing re-enactment is to mainly learn what their family has gone through. As well as learning through their own bodies how it really was. But also, to use the objects that soldiers used in their intended capacity. Allowing them to learn how these objects were used in a realistic setting. As Benjamin, a 16-year-old schoolboy explained while we were digging the trenches on a private event “My granddad was in the fields of Europe, this is the closest I can get to understanding that for myself”. By doing and performing they are somewhat learning this knowledge that my interlocutors somewhat seem to think has been lost.

Bodies can be used as tools for memory and remembering through participating in physical practices. Performing functions as a form of method but also a form of record for re-enacting, making it possible for re-enactors to archive historical skills, trades, art, and culture, through the act of performing and doing (Johnson, 2020, 171). In my own experience as well, I felt that I got a deeper understanding of the subject by doing. By digging trenches, sleeping in it, as well as being on the lookout for the enemy I felt I understood more of how it would have been like.

Through doing I also learned that the entrenchment tool, the little spade all soldiers are issued, is a rather useless piece of equipment. I for the weekends felt at times almost transported into a situation of war. However, it is worth noting that in my own experience moments of heightened immersion lasted only moments, before realising this was only play again. Nonetheless it is still through the doing and using of history one gains an experiential relation to past bodies.

Re-enactors however understand they will never reach the true history of being there, by the fact that they are not there. They are not getting shot at, they haven't been on campaign for months. Or as Stanley jokingly said, while digging a trench at a private event "Yesterday I was eating maccies with my missus, today I'm digging a trench, Monday come I will be back doing what I normally do, I will never have the same experience as they had". This does not mean that it is not possible to get a sense of realism by doing re-enactment. However, it illuminates the fact that this is only a weekend thing. A weekend of immersing themselves, learning of the period but never truly living in the period, before going back into normal life.

Under most events re-enactors are aware this is just a hobby, and getting into the mindset is often difficult. Nonetheless, there are moments where everything blends, and a period of heightened immersion occurs. During these moments the re-enactor is temporarily transported into a sense of blending with the past that they perform. My interlocutors often talked vividly about these moments, and that moments like these are why they re-enact. Barney, a 25-year-old agricultural engineer, told me a story of when he attended the event Monty's men. Barney said, "We had just set up our Bren position, and down the road a half-track came speeding towards us, at that moment, the fear I felt was real, just scurrying up to my feet and running for my life, moments like that is why I re-enact". For one second, Barney felt real emotions while re-enacting, he was scared, he in that moment as he said, "got a taste for how it could have been to be a soldier during WWII fighting the nazi's". While the hobby is safe, since they are not actually being shot at, moments like the one Barney experienced can still incur strong emotions.

Other moments of realism include when we were defending a bunker at one of our private events. Inside the bunker Barney, Arthur and I had set up a Bren position, where Barney acted as the main gunner, and I was loading the magazines. Over the horizon we heard a voice shouting in German. The three of us quickly perked up inside the bunker, ready to fight back against them. After a little while an MG started blaring in the distance, we started cowering in the bunker, instinctively trying to dodge the bullets, no bullets were being fired at us. We spotted the Germans starting to advance, Arthur ordered us to fire. "RATTATATAT" sounded

from the Bren, firing in bursts towards the Germans. We were scurrying around inside the bunker, shifting from window to window trying to get the best shot at the Germans. “CLICK” sounded from the gun, the magazine was empty, I took out a magazine and reloaded the gun. Before picking up my rifle again, firing shots towards the Germans. Barney continued his fire towards the Germans, and I continued my reloading of the gun.

The sound in the bunker was loud, we were shouting at each other, screaming out where we are seeing the Germans. Working as a team, fighting for our lives together. The whole experience felt like a fight or flight moment, where we decided to fight. Not after long, the Germans who had reached our position threw a “grenade” in the bunker, killing us. Arthur ordered us to stop our defence, telling us to lay down and act dead, finishing the act. As quickly as it started it was over, laying there on the ground, adrenaline flowing through our bodies.

Moments of heightened immersion are moments where they are transported back in time in a way. Moments where the real and modern life breaks down and they get transported to something else. As in the case presented above the three of us got transported into a place where we were supposed to fight. We felt in that moment a reality which involved fighting against the Germans. While this is our experience, it is our moment, nobody else have felt this before. However, it is by being in a WWII setting made us feel like as if we were fighting in WWII.

Katherine Johnson goes to the length of stating that through doing re-enactment, culture can be inscribed in re-enactors, if this happens gradually and is an ongoing and regular practice. Johnson further states, through using Judith Butler, that through performance cultural values and expectations accumulate on, in and through the body. Which through repeated acts can inflict a repeated stylization of the body, and further an embodied identity (Johnson, 2020, 171-172). This entails that through doing continued re-enactment, it through time can change their inner identity, adding the re-enacted perspectives onto what they already have. However, what this would make is a blended identity, an identity which is a blend of both a present, as well as a historical one.

It is worth noting that most of my interlocutors present themselves on social media in their WWI/II uniforms, they publicly represent themselves in a re-enacted fashion. Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul D’Ambrosio coins a term called profilicity. They explain that in earlier times identity came from the social roles one was generally assigned to at birth. Identification came by internalizing and going into the set roles. Now in modernity, society is more dynamic. Social mobility is increased, and people have more choice in choosing their profession, marriage, or

religion. Social role became viewed as a sort of mask, hiding our true inner identities. The authentic self became viewed as what one is after the mask had been taken off, our true inner self. They further argue that today we apply something they call second-order observation. This entails that we no longer only look at people directly, but rather how they are publicly seen by others. We now form our identities by curating profiles, which are images that are presented for second-order observation. Letting people see you as oneself would like to be seen (Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2012, 10-17). Through visualising themselves outwards through the re-enacted personality, it can be argued that the soldier identity is how they themselves wants to be perceived. Taking pictures of themselves doing war related activities is also something they often partake in, pictures which they later digitally age so it looks like it would have been taken in WWI/II. These pictures are further posted on social media, presenting themselves as if they were in the war.

In this chapter I have discussed re-enactment as a form of performance. Since re-enactment is something that is acted towards audience, re-enactors need to act as if they themselves were soldiers. However, to act out in a correct way re-enactors train with each other to further their knowledge. They literally step into alterity to understand what is going on. Letting them learn how they should act, which further helps their performance. This entails that re-enactors also act out with each other, becoming convinced of their own acts, and because of this are learning history by doing. Furthermore, by attaining this knowledge re-enactors perform this towards an audience. However, re-enactors understand they can never truly grasp how it would have been like to be a soldier during WWI/II.

Re-enactors need to stay immersed, one's own amount of commitment to stay immersed correlates with how realistic it feels. People need to immerse themselves with the alterity to make it feel real. Through performing and experiencing the past my interlocutors embody how it would have been like. Through embodying practices of the past, they can mimetically understand how it would have been like, catching glimpses of the viewpoints of historical people. By having family members which have gone through the wars my interlocutors can create as sense of connection and belonging to these stories through re-enactment. Re-enactors will never truly experience the past as it was, they are from two different times, and re-enactors are currently not in a war. However, what they create is something that blends the practices of the past with practices of today. They become somewhat of a blended identity. In the next chapter I will continue the discussion to involve re-enactment as something that is able to create a *communitas*. Becoming part needed to be proved, trust did not come by just wearing the gear.

Further the communities that are being made through the performance of re-enactment creates a *communitas* in my interlocutors. They become a community that is connected to the past for the weekends, becoming something more than just friends.



## **5 Communities of the past**

### **5.1 The new guys**

Somewhat quickly into my fieldwork I took part in a private immersive event, where the main purpose was to learn the life of a WWII British soldier while on campaign. For the event we were going to defend, but also attack the enemy. Who in this case was a group who was re-enacting as Germans. The aim of the event was for the participants to learn the equipment but also the tactics. Feeling through themselves how it would be like being there from a first-person perspective. Learning the worth of every single piece of equipment that they carry, so they could later at events have first-hand knowledge to be able to teach the public better. Going into the event I was very new to the group, making most of the members somewhat wary of me. Some like Stanley perceived me as an ignorant researcher from Norway, lacking the sufficient knowledge and who would just be a nuisance for the group. Together with me, we also had Benjamin who was a first timer for one of these events. Benjamin has an interest in the hobby because of his grandfather's involvement in the war. Benjamin and I was therefore in the same boat, as somewhat untrusted. Making us outsiders, people who needed to gain the trust of the group.

After quick introductions from everyone we started the painstaking work in setting up our positions. The field the event was set had three bunkers which had been built while the site was still a military airfield. We decided to use these bunkers as a defensive position and quickly started digging trenches. Arthur came out of one bunker, with a pickaxe and a shovel in each hand, looked around and gave it to Benjamin and I. Stating "you are the new guys, let's set you to work". Arthur pointed out where he wanted us to dig the trenches and left to do more administrative work, such as going over the plans with Stanley. As well as talking to the man in charge for the Germans. We continued this backbreaking work for a couple of hours without no real break apart from us taking the occasional breather. While we were digging everyone else was either put on "stag" duty, meaning to be on the lookout for Germans, or generally lounging around talking with each other.

After a while Arthur came over and delegated someone else to dig the trenches, before quickly giving us more orders. Now we were to fetch water for the group. Arthur gave us a couple of 30 litre water tanks, as well as everyone's canteens. Arthur pointed us in the direction of the faucets, some 200 meters from our position and let us to it. When we came back there were new jobs awaiting us, getting the large packs from the parking lot, and lining them up. These large

packs contained equipment such as a great coat, blanket, or other useful items. We quickly got them and lined them up. After we had done that Arthur was not really satisfied with the placement of them and asked us to move them to a new place. While Benjamin and I had been doing this the rest of the group had somewhat leisurely been sitting around talking with each other, watching us get ordered around.

After lining up the packs once more, more backbreaking work was waiting for Benjamin and I. While we had been running around, filling water, and lining large packs, the rest of the group had managed to dig the rest of the trench. The trenches needed more cover, and we were asked to fill up sandbags to put in front of the trench. We quickly started doing it, never expressing any animosity in doing any of the activities, Benjamin and I started to gain the respect from the rest of group. I overheard the rest praising our efforts, commending us for not complaining and just doing what needed to be done. After a little while everything was done, the trenches were dug, the sandbags filled, we had water, and everything was in order. Benjamin and I were finally allowed to join the rest in the bunker and for the first time in 4 hours allowed to sit down and relax. Benjamin and I in this case were put through a process, where we got the bad jobs, since we weren't trusted. We were put to the test in a way, needing to prove ourselves before gaining their trust.

Benjamin and I in this case were set through a sort of rite of passage, we were separated from the rest in the case of being the "new guys". Such rites can be understood through Victor Turner, who further developed Arnold van Gennep's notion of rites of passage. Firstly, there is separation, where the participants are separated from their normal social lives, stripping them of social status and remaking them into something else. Secondly the margin, or limen, literally meaning threshold, in this stage the participants is in the space of liminality which is a place in between their past and what is to come. And thirdly the stage of re-aggregation, during this phase the participants re-enter, social life, with in the case of rites of passage a higher or altered state of social being (Turner, 1979, 466-467).

While they explicitly say do not have any initiation rites within the group, they subconsciously and involuntarily put new people through tests, which in result can be seen as sort of rite of passage. Something which in the end changes their social status within the group to be someone of a higher status, also meaning they can be trusted and respected. New people are separated, they are put to doing the menial jobs others would rather not do. Liminal in the way they are proving themselves. And reaggregated, by having proved themselves and gained the others trust

and respect. While people are not separated physically, and still inhabit the same physical space, as well as looking the same. They are separated through the way they are acted upon, being treated as someone who is not a part, but still a part. We were treated differently in the role we inhabited while being “segregated”. While in this phase Benjamin and I took on the role as a servant as Goffman puts it. Aiming to please the others, helping them, and only acting when requested to act, being careful not to act out of line (Goffman, 1956, 95).

In this case both Benjamin and I had managed to accomplish the tasks we were given well, making us become trusted members rather quickly. However, it is worth to note that the opposite can happen, while the hobby is generally quite forgiving in what constitutes its members. Letting mostly everyone take part as long as they have an interest in the subject. If members are not able to gain this trust, given that they either were bad at the job, or generally not interested enough in following orders. They can reach a state where they are somewhat ostracized, effectively excluding them in some manner.

## **5.2 An extended family in the making**

Through doing re-enactment my interlocutors position themselves within a group, separate from the rest, making a *communitas*. Re-enactors can experience a sense of *communitas*, not only within the hobby but furthermore to the historical characters they try to re-enact. I will argue that re-enactors often try to connect with their grandfathers, and other family members. This stems from a wish to feel a sense of belonging to their family history. *Communitas* can be understood as a form of social state where people undergoing a liminal phase can form a sense of social unity and equality. People undergoing the liminal phase can transcend from their normal social roles and come together in a state which Victor Turner called *communitas*. A state which can be characterized by a sense of shared purpose, identity, and support for each other. This feeling of togetherness, can make the people in it feel more connected towards each other, creating a sense of camaraderie (Turner, 1977, 132-134).

At an event called WarAg the group was set to partake in a battle against the Germans, before the battle there had been a plan to how this skirmish was going to happen. WarAg is set at the same field that the group had held its private event some weeks earlier. Therefore, the group already had some training into how the land was laid out, as well as some training into where to attack from. However, this time we also had the help of another group re-enacting as British

soldiers as well as some mortars, and a Bren carrier<sup>7</sup>. The plan for the skirmish was for us to come up from the hill so the public could see our silhouettes come up over the horizon. In front of us was going to be the Bren carrier, with us using that as a cover for our push towards the bunker where the Germans had set their position. The Germans on the other hand had an anti-tank gun set up at their position, they were to fire the gun, setting the Bren carrier out of service making us retreat. After we had retreated the mortars would fire and pyrotechnics which had been set up in the field by an armourer would explode, making loud bangs as well as giving off smoke. Before we once again would come running up from the hill and attack the German position, defeating them. Under our attack some were also supposed to die, the ones who were too young to fire blanks, or did not have blank firing guns got this job, in this case Benjamin, Joey and Brad.

After everyone had heard the plan, we set it in motion. The announcer spoke over the loudspeaker that a skirmish was going to be happening soon around the bunker. Hence, we quickly went down the hill to make ready for the action. While down there we split us up into pairs, making teams who were to stick together. I got bunched up with Ethan, and we started chatting excitedly over how fun this will be, checking over our equipment seeing that everything was correct, before awaiting further orders. Everything went according to plan, we got ordered to get in a zigzag line, before marching up the hill behind the cover of the Bren carrier. There was a loud bang, and smoke started pouring out of Bren carrier, everyone quickly ran back and laid down at the top of the hill, making us barely covered. Before we got ordered by Arthur to “FIRE AT WILL”, everyone stuck their heads over the hill and started firing back at the Germans. The sounds of rifles firing, an MG42<sup>8</sup> in the distance and shouting filled the air. The mortars started firing and the field started exploding and smoking. I looked over to Ethan, he was cowering behind hill, really living into the impression that we were being shot at. While everyone knows there are no true danger, the atmosphere still allowed for a feeling of fear to be present.

We got ordered to start advancing, forming a line towards the enemy. The left side of the line started advancing while the right laid down covering fire. Before it was time for the right side to advance and left cover. After a little while the group had advanced through the field, before being ordered to “FIX BAYONETS”. Everyone fixed their bayonets before quickly being ordered to “CHARGE”. Everyone stood up and started charging towards the enemy, shooting

---

<sup>7</sup> An armoured troop carrier used by the British

<sup>8</sup> A German light machine gun used during WWII and beyond.

occasionally towards the enemy. While the group was charging Benjamin fell, dying, same did Joey, we were now close to the enemy position. At the German trench Brad died somersaulting into the trench. Not before long Ethan and I stood with two Germans covering in, what at the time seemed to be genuine fear in front of us, talking to us in German. Ethan screamed to them “TO THE WALL” pointing his rifle to the wall. The Germans with their hands up quickly went over to the wall, in which we stripped them off their weapons and effectively took them as captives. Everyone worked well as a team and we quickly had the situation under control, winning the battle. As quickly as it started it was done, we shook hands with the Germans commending their efforts and went over to debrief with the rest of the group. Everyone quickly started chatting about what they had done, sharing their experiences with each other, especially commending Brad’s death rolling into the trench.

The skirmish made us work together, while everything was scripted from before, it still required us to work and rely on each other as a team. After the skirmish the moods were lifted, everyone seemed closer to each other as well as everyone felt a shared sense of purpose. During the skirmish everyone was in the same *communitas*, we had formed our little community in the field. While performing the skirmish, the group formed a *communitas* in which they worked together for a common goal. For the 15 minutes it lasted, the group was transformed into soldiers attacking a German position. They formed a community separate from the rest, they became WWII soldiers.



Figure 8 Attacking the German position. Photo taken by informant May 28 2022

During the creation of the skirmish above there were never any discussions as to who were supposed to win the battle. The narrative it is telling will often, if not always, be that the allies win the battle. Especially when it is towards a spectating public. As my interlocutors themselves explain, the public does not like seeing the Germans winning. The Germans are the enemy of the nation, it is them the troops overcame. The narratives being made is as Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing notes. Providing ways of understanding how the world is constructed temporally, which also gives a way for people to understand coherence through time (Rapport & Overing, 2000, 284). The narrative the public will be told is therefore always the allies remaining victorious over the Germans. Even though the Germans most definitely won some of the battles during WWII.

Re-enactors at events differentiates themselves from the public by going into the role of a historical character. In this way segregating themselves and forming a new community. While they are in this liminal space, they can explore new environments. Liminal in the sense Turner puts it, a state someone is in when they are betwixt and between their normal day to day life. Changing social and cultural state, going into a time and place where anything might happen. Liminal spaces are also full of potential, and creativity, creating spaces where everything can happen, play is the innermost subject, liminal spaces may be filled with plays of ideas, words, symbols, or metaphors (Turner, 1979, 467). During this time, they can experience the past in a way which is helping them experience and learn of the past, as a community. They get in touch with the past by re-enacting together as a community of the past.

The feeling at events often changed the second everyone put on their uniforms. Prior to this everyone was only talking to each other if they already knew each other. After putting on the uniforms, everyone seemed chattier, more outgoing, going around speaking to everyone, showing each other what they have on, or what they have improved. Engaging in bridging discourse with each other. Harry explained that he feels a difference between being in civilian clothes to being in his re-enactment uniform. Together with a change in the mood, Harry also feels a deeper connection to others and stated that “we become this sort of big family, we become for the weekend, a little 1940s community”. It was often noted by others, especially of the older generation, that re-enactment becomes this sort of family, they often referred to the other re-enactors present as “my big re-enactment family”.

Re-enactors at events do, for the weekend, create their own community, with some living into their different roles. For example, at Blaenavon some re-enacted as policemen, other soldiers,

and other housewives as in the case of Ava that was noted earlier in this thesis. For the weekend they played out their roles, the policemen went around upholding the “peace”. Even arresting one or two civilians who were messing with them for “disturbing the peace”. While walking around, the policemen chatted up the other re-enactors, asking them if everything was in order. Before continuing their leisurely stroll around the event grounds, keeping the peace. Others played out as Ava and Rupert did, sitting around, making food, and showing the public what they could get with their measly rations. And others, such as my group, were showing life as soldiers. For the weekend, they all were part of this group of people who all were pertaining to the 1940s. They formed a community out of place. A piece of the 1940s, transported back from time, to live out daily life in Blaenavon for the weekend. They were all in a space in which they all had something in common, forming a *communitas*. For the weekend they were in the 1940s, living life as if they were in the 1940s.

*Communitas* is invoked in the people who take part in re-enactment. In their view more the group become more than just friends, they also become family. Tommy who has taken part in many immersive events over the years, explained that “I have gotten friends for life because of this, they’re more than just my friends. They have become my brothers, we have overcome stuff together, that has made us more than just friends. They have become people that I would trust my life with”. This sort of camaraderie seems to be more akin to the camaraderie that often is associated with military personnel, becoming people who not only are friends but are brothers in arms. The fact that what they are re-enacting is similar to what military personnel train on is another aspect, which rather puts it closer in terms with military bonds. The re-enactors themselves explain that it is through the digging, tiredness, and just generally being in misery together that builds these strong bonds. They overcome hardships together as a group. This can be seen as a form of *communitas*. By being in this liminal space they form brotherhoods, as well as friendships, which continue after they have gone out of that space. Making lasting relationships, in which they become closer than just friends, one might say that they form a lasting *communitas*.

Given that *communitas* gives a sense of belonging and social unity. I would want to further this claim that through doing re-enactment, one gets a sense of *communitas* to everyone who has undergone similar activities in the past, making in a way temporal sympathies. Re-enactors claim that they do re-enactment to learn the history, but also to sympathize and understand the struggles the people they re-enact went through. Often these people are also their family. There is also an aspect of solidarity with soldiers in general. Giving honour to the people who have

died fighting, rather than forgetting them. The feeling of *communitas* stretches not only to the group itself, but also to all soldiers. The endeavour they go through, makes them sympathize and feel on their bodies how it was, affecting them emotionally.

Doing re-enactment and connecting with the past transports them, somewhat temporally while not physically, but emotionally reconnects them with the past. Through re-enactment my interlocutors get in touch with past, feeling as if they were time travelling, making them connect with their heritage. Like Benjamin who as explained earlier through doing re-enactment, he could get a deeper understanding of his granddad. The stories were not necessarily only stories anymore, he came to sympathize and get a feeling of connection to it. This aspect was noted by many others. Tristan for example explained that while he is doing re-enactment, he feels a sense of connection towards the history, and that it is through doing re-enactment he gets that connection. This connection, Tristan explained affected his view of himself. Tristan as a soldier in the British army has been on multiple deployments. Through doing re-enactment, Tristan feels closer to the soldiers of previous wars, commemorating, and remembering their sacrifices. Re-enactment becomes a way for him to connect the practices he does today with the practices of soldiers throughout history. For Tristan, as well as for Stanley and Arthur, who are all serving members of the army, re-enactment becomes a way to understand and get a connection to the soldiers that came before them.

In this chapter I have discussed re-enactment as something that can create a *communitas*. While they explicitly do not have any initiation rites, groups such as the one I took part in does test its members. As if checking if they are good enough to become part of the community. Through performing together, the group creates teams, working together overcoming struggles. By overcoming struggles together as a team, they connect at levels deeper than just a friendship. In their own words they become a family. At events they become a community, forming a *communitas* which they feel belonging a social unity towards. Furthermore, by doing re-enactment they further feel belonging to soldiers who have undergone similar experiences. Forming a form of temporal *communitas* with the soldier they are attempting to portray. Through using the same objects, doing the same activities, somewhat fighting the same enemies, they are trying to embody the experiences from the past. Effectively connecting the re-enactors emotionally through their own experiences amongst themselves as well as to other soldiers. The following chapter will first discuss the commemorative elements of re-enactment before discussing what is history and heritage. Re-enactment is for many a way to honour the past and connect with their heritage.



## **6 Heritage, history and remembrance**

### **6.1 “Lest we forget”**

Re-enactments often constitutes acts of commemoration towards dead soldiers. Remembrance of the past is an important aspect of commemorating and celebrating the past. During an event at the Weston helicopter museum, there was a commemorative parade planned to mark the end of the first day. Over the speaker an announcer made it known that it was nearing the end of the day, and kindly asked the public to make way and stand on each side of the runway. At the end of the runway the re-enactors came rushing in from every corner, quickly starting to line up with their respective groups. At the front was an old army jeep, with an old veteran called Reggie in it. After the jeep there were more veterans in line bearing flags, followed by the re-enactors behind them, with the German re-enactors last.

When everyone had lined up there was a bit of silence, with everyone standing around waiting for what was about to happen. After a short silence the person in charge gave the order, “PARADE ATTEN-SHUN, SHOULDER ARMS”. The parade quickly did the right movements, going into attention and those who bear arms, mostly the re-enactors, shouldered their arms. After another short silence the one in charge shouted once more “PARADE SLOW MARCH!”. The procession started marching after the car in front. It was quite evident from the stumbling that the veterans had not done drill in quite some time, but quickly they came to and marched in order. The parade lasted only about 50 meters in which another command came from the man in charge “PARADE HALT”. The procession stops and one more command comes through “PARADE, LEFT FACE”, everyone turns left.

After a short silence the voice of the announcer once again comes blaring through the speakers, “Let us hold a 2-minute silence in commemoration to our fallen”. After this announcement, a command came from the man in charge of the parade, “PARADE, SALUTE”. The parade started saluting, flagbearers lowered their flags, and bowed their head, the rest of the parade also started bowing their heads. The public also took a stance with their head lowered looking towards the ground. During the silence the atmosphere changed, it was a solemn feeling, the fun and excitement that had filled the air earlier had been replaced with an eerie feeling. Everyone was in contemplation, not a sound was present apart from the rattling of flags and the dim sound of the highway next to the grounds. The silence made for a moment for contemplation, and remembrance.

After the two-minute silence a new order was shouted out “PARADE ATTEN-SHUN!” before quickly again “PARADE FALL OUT!”. The parade dismissed and quickly went about the rest of their day. When the parade was finished, with everyone starting to get back to their respective spaces one final message came from the loudspeaker. The announcer thanked the public for the attendance for the day, further giving information that donations towards the Royal British Legion would be much appreciated, informing where they are located.

Through the parade the re-enactors together with the veterans commemorated dead soldiers. Through parading they firstly re-enacted the pomp and splendour of military parades. By walking in in procession before having a symbolic two-minute silence. A silence that let people silently contemplate on remembering the fallen. It sets the stage for allowing commemoration to happen. The whole mood shifted in the way that it was suddenly a serious affair, it was not about showing off guns, uniforms, and tanks anymore. The parade made a setting which shifted the mood, making a space which allowed the people present to remember the past, commemorating the fallen. Letting their memory live on.

Re-enactment and its events bring remembrance tourism into the UK. Constructing spaces where people can reflect and remember the war, without the need to travel to earlier battlegrounds. As noted by Trond Berge during the introduction, people partake in trips to earlier battlegrounds as a form of dark tourism. Berge notes the battlegrounds become places to make memory and history (Berge, 2015, 100). Re-enactment creates such places in the UK, creating spaces where the re-enactors, as well as the public can create memories and history. It does however create this space at places where there never were any battles, places where nobody fought, places where the war is only re-created. However, the recreations become spaces where my interlocutors and spectators alike can effectively remember and experience the past. Which similarly to what Berge notes of WWI battlefields in France, creates a landscape of remembrance (Berge, 2015, 100). Re-enactment events therefore still serve as a powerful advocate to convey a feeling of remembrance towards the public.

Arrangements are often made to evoke a sense of remembrance in the audience. For example, at the Great Dorset Steam Fair. Just outside the exit of the trench there was a pit of sand and a sign with “In commemoration to our fallen – Lest we forget” written on it. Furthermore, people could purchase paper poppies from the Royal British Legion stand located outside to place in the pit of sand. The poppies gave the crowd a chance to write messages to lost loved ones. By

the end of the weekend the stand had amassed a great deal of poppies, with the names belonging to soldiers who have died during war, or other people of importance to them. The poppy has further become a symbol of dead soldiers and prove as a powerful remembrance tool. While originally symbolizing the dead of WWI, since poppies grew en masse on the upturned soil of the battlegrounds in France. The poppy has later been adopted to become a symbol for all dead soldiers. The saying 'Lest we forget' is also something that is of great importance, becoming a sort of mantra for remembering fallen soldiers.

Re-enactment lets places like the trench on the Great Dorset Steam Fair become places of remembrance, within the UK. It transports the feeling of being there, to a place it never was. The battlefield of France is no longer in France, it is transported to a field in Dorset, letting more people experience it. For many, going to France can be too far, however, a one-hour drive is more possible, as well as more affordable. My interlocutors often talk about transporting people back in time, transporting people back to the battlefields. Letting them get a personal feel of how it was to be there without being there. Literally letting people touch that alterity, transporting people back in time letting them experience the past in ways it never happened. What this exemplifies is another aspect of the democratization of history. It further lets more people get hands on with the history, letting more people experience and learn about the history.

The Royal British Legion is connected to almost every re-enactment event. At every event I went to they had stands where people were able to donate or buy items. The Royal British Legion is a charity organisation and is the biggest organisation to host remembrance activities in the UK. They also support veterans and servicemen alike, being a place where personnel connected to the military can get support. My interlocutors are avid contributors towards the Royal British Legion, deeming their work to be very important.



**Figure 9 Backside of Commemoration stand at the Great Dorset Steam Fair. Photo taken by author August 28 2022**

Showing support to the armed forces is at its core in re-enactment. The armed forces are viewed for many as the source in which Britain has defended its freedom. As Harry explained during Taunton Armed Forces Day “Without our armed forces and the men which served therein, Britain would not have been the same as it is now”. Remembering and commemorating the armed forces becomes a way to praise Britain as it is, through what it was. The men and women who have served for the country becomes almost mythical beings, upholding Britain. Especially the men who served to protect the country against one of the biggest enemies throughout the ages, the Nazis. Paradoxically, re-enactors do not really mind people who re-enact as Germans.

In Britain there is also a sprawling community of people who re-enact as the Americans. I was quite intrigued when I saw what seemed to be a column of Americans driving past us at an event called White Horse. Asking Harry why people do re-enact Americans he explained that “They have a lot of cool kit, and their uniforms are more comfortable than the wool the British uniform is made of”. Harry who previously have re-enacted as the Americans further explained that he did the switch to British because it feels more right. As he himself explained “I am British not American, I don’t do re-enactment to only play around, it is important for me to show our history also”. Another explanation to why people are re-enacting Americans came from Arthur, who explained it as “you see them in the movies you know, it is their story which is often showed, therefore people want to do that, since that is what they have seen of WWII”.

This is in line with what Alison Landsberg explained through prosthetic memory, people are used to seeing the Americans on the tv and film. Landsberg notes that memories are not necessarily only constructed through lived social contexts. They are also created through engagement with media, such as film. Prosthetic memories are public memories felt privately (Landsberg, 2004, 19). through media people get a personal memory of the war, in this case through the Americans. This can help them feel more connected towards those memories.

Jay Winter mentions that memory, even the memory we think as collective, is individual. However, how we discuss memories are socially bounded. When individuals recollect memories pertaining to their personal, familial, or national affairs, they are wrought with images that stems from their social experiences. Memories are socially framed, when people congregate to discuss the past, people enter a domain that is not of one’s individual memory (Winter, 2006, 57). Winter further notes that history sells. The marketing on memory has paid off, somewhat thanks to films, books, articles, the internet, and television. However, ultimately what helps the sale of these forms of media is somewhat the family histories people have (Winter, 2006, 69).

Re-enactors connect with these pasts, often noting aspects such as “my granddad used this” and “my granddad wore a similar uniform”. Making the objects as well as the activities something related to their lineage, connecting them with their roots. Touching the objects, wearing them has the ability for my interlocutors to sense this alterity, making them connect with their past. By feeling as if they were there themselves, they embody what they believe what their family members experienced. Or when people have no familial connection, the experiences of their fellow countrymen, the countrymen who fought and died for them.

## **6.2 Heritage of the past**

Michal Mochocki notes that heritage is not history. Heritage is not about the past per se, but rather our relation between the present and the past. The present times decides and selects an inheritance from an imagined past, whereby the aspects of history which are deemed valuable to the current generation becomes heritage. Heritage is something that is produced and is as John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth notes, a product that is shaped from history. Furthermore, all heritage is someone’s heritage. Heritage is inherited, not something one gains, it therefore excludes completely or partially the ones which is not part of it (Mochocki, 2021, 8; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996, 20-21).

While partaking at re-enactment events I observed that other ethnicities than white British people were not participating at events. If they were there they were often there as spectators. I saw in total one person of another ethnicity re-enacting, whereby he re-enacted as an American. The aspect of ethnicity is something I often tried digging in, since I quickly took note of the lack of other ethnicities. The responses I got usually started in the “I don’t know, good question”, but later developed into “they probably have no connection to it”. Exemplifying what Tunbridge and Ashworth notes, in this case re-enactment is in such ways events which more targets people’s heritage rather than history.

While among the re-enactors there are few people of other ethnicities, they are as noted sometimes represented among the ranks of the spectators. Engagement in collecting and re-enacting may stem from a desire to connect to familial and ancestral legacies and forging a deeper connection with said heritage. However, the history that re-enactors show, can be of interest to everyone who is genuinely interested in the subject, regardless of ethnicity and background. As Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot has written “History did not need to be mine in order to engage me. It just needed to relate to someone, anyone. It could not

just be The Past. It had to someone's past" (Trouillot, 2015, 142). Partaking in the consumption of history is not necessarily only a matter of connecting with one's heritage, it also concerns itself with the consumption of knowledge of history itself. For some it does not matter whose history it is, but rather what that history means to the people it is about. However, as was evident in my fieldwork, a personal connection to said history helped when trying to consume it.

Most re-enactors are men. There are few women taking part in the hobby and if they do, they often re-enact the female jobs, such as nursing, secretaries, or as the housewives that was left home. The women I observed re-enacting often were the girlfriends or wives of re-enactors. However, this is not to say that they did not have an interest in the hobby from before and only re-enacted because of their spouse. These women often noted they already had an interest in the hobby and happened to meet their spouse or significant other at an event. This discrepancy cannot be explained through general heritage alone. British heritage is British heritage regardless of gender. While digging as to why women take less part I was often confronted with "they may be just less interested in guns and vehicles, guns and cars is more of a man thing". However, re-enactment encapsulates more than just guns and vehicles. The media about WWII often depicts the soldier, not the housewife, or the female nurse. From the concept of prosthetic memory, people may then not have a connection to that part of the war. This may be one aspect as to why women take less part, the memory, or the imagined memory romanticizes the heroic male soldier.

The attempt to research history requires the true history, not the embodied experiences by modern people. Researching history cannot be freshly created by doing something today, and requires scouring through written records, or to conduct interviews with the actual people that was there. While they can learn and get a deeper understanding of the subjects they are trying to understand, they arguably can never learn something new by doing re-enactment. Their own experiences are their own experiences. The full life of someone 100 years ago, and all the embodied knowledge they had, is something us living in the modern world can never fully grasp. Re-enactment is only a form of imagination, an imagined thought of how things were. In many ways it becomes a research tool for trying to understand historical persons. However, to do things correctly one needs to already have knowledge on the objects one is about to use. One needs to already have read or heard it from other sources. For example, my interlocutors scour through training manuals, written accounts, and stories to understand how things were used. Only after they know this do they try to re-enact it. The re-enacting only becomes a way for them to get first hand embodied knowledge. However, the main knowledge comes from the

previous research, the embodied knowledge they learn is only secondary. Nonetheless, the knowledge they get from the actual doing provides invaluable insight into how things might have been, as well as giving them actual experiences which can be retold to spectators. It becomes as Kate Bowan has noted, a way for people to imagine how people felt (Bowan, 2020, 109). These experiences further allows them to connect with the stories they have read and heard about, connecting them with the past.

The spoils and remnants of societies past, especially a society in which one claims inheritance towards, legitimizes one's connection towards it. Simone Weil wrote that "A collectivity has its roots in the past" (Weil, 1952, 7). Further she added that "we possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated and created afresh by us" (Weil, 1952, 48). For my interlocutors, what it means to be British lies within these objects, they are their material legacy, the physical reminders of a British past. The past ultimately also includes the people who lived in Britain, people who is also their family members. Through re-enacting them, as Harry explained, "get closer to understanding my history, while I celebrate it". Historian David Lowenthal notes that parallels between personal and national identity likens family heirlooms of people to national monuments. And through using Danish archaeologist Jens Worsaae, exemplifies that the remains from previous societies binds people more firmly to their native lands. Holding objects in the hand, in his case a sword, makes one understand that their forefathers have lived there since time immemorial. While in this case there was talk about the swords of Danish Vikings, this is also applicable towards the objects made during WWII (Lowenthal, 2015, 96).

For a more modern example Ana Carolina Balthazar mentions that people use historical objects marked "made in Britain" to feel more connected to Britain. For her interlocutors the history of these objects, as well as the people who made them, have been transcribed into the objects. Giving the objects character, which also make them more connected towards the notion of Britishness. This character is the temporal and indexical property of the historical objects (Balthazar, 2017, 222). For Balthazar's interlocutors, using these objects as well as living in the period houses meant connecting to a national past. Collectively producing relatedness and belonging to the UK. The objects are their heritage, through the objects the people live on and the objects themselves becomes a symbol of heritage. Arguably my interlocutors use objects in the same manner as Balthazar's interlocutors. However, for my interlocutors' reproductions are still of concern, nevertheless, original objects still hold the most value. Through objects they construe a temporal understanding of their own heritage. And through touching these objects

they touch this alterity, making themselves part of the chain of heritage. Through doing activities they are also connecting to their heritage. While Balthazar notes that they use objects to connect to history, my interlocutors also use embodied experiences the same way.

I have now discussed re-enactment as a remembrance practice and how re-enactment connects with their heritage. For my interlocutors the remembering of their forefathers is an important aspect of re-enactment. Furthermore, remembrance tourism can be accompanied with the act of going to and visiting the previous battlefields, in a form of dark tourism. Re-enactment on the other hand brings this tourism back to the UK. Setting up spaces where the public can be in awe, experiencing the battlefields where there never was a battlefield. Remembering the soldiers who died is important, not only because it relates to their own heritage, but also their national heritage. Soldiers have become mythical heroes, the ones who died are the ones who allows us to live the life we live today.

History is not necessarily heritage, while interconnected, heritage is a produced concept. A product shaped from history, something that is created for someone. While history arguably cannot be created through doing, it can however give embodied knowledge on how it was, serving as a research tool. On the other hand, it cannot create something totally new, given that it will always be the experiences of someone in our day and age. Objects are something they use to connect with their heritage, the remnants of the past are our roots and connection with the past. Through re-enacting my interlocutors celebrate and get closer to their heritage by doing. While they use objects to reach their heritage, they also use the practices to understand them more. Embodying and experiencing the past in ways which connect them with their heritage.



## **7 Conclusion**

I have shown through this thesis that through re-living and experiencing the past my interlocutors connect with their heritage. Not only do they connect with their heritage. They furthermore produce and reproduce a certain heritage through their actions. A heritage which commemorates and praises the soldiers, giving in to the view that they were protectors of the country. They are putting up a play and a performance towards an audience aiming to teach not only the audience but also themselves about the past. Through embodying the experiences of the past, they are experiencing and learning through themselves how it could have been like. Making personal experiences that connect with the stories they have been told by parents or grandparents. Connecting them with their family heritage, or the stories they have heard through media such as movies, tv shows or books. However, these memories can instil prosthetic memories within people, making them connect with a history which are not necessarily theirs. Which may be one of the reasons as to why so many people decide to re-enact as Americans.

Through re-enactment people are also connecting with the nation's past. Making connections with a national past that further their claim towards that heritage, placing themselves in a way in the timeline of the nation. They have done the things that was done in the past, they have the same experience. They have temporally connected with the past through their embodied knowledge. However, this knowledge requires objects of the past. Objects which embody that knowledge, objects that hold symbolic value about the past. Through using objects, they connect with the past, temporarily bridging the gap between the present and past. While not time travelling in its full regard, it brings the past into the present, making a blended reality. A reality in which both the present and past inhabits. Making a space that lets my interlocutors connect with the past, through touch and experiences.

Through the continuous doing of re-enactment my interlocutors further reach knowledge of the past, which over time fosters a skilled vision within them. This skilled vision lets my interlocutors spot fakes, as well as what is considered authentic portrayals. These skilled visions are furthermore used to make reproductions that are true to the originals. However, reproductions will never embody the same values that original objects have. Nonetheless reproductions are more able to show the life as it were. Reproductions are not destroyed, they have not lived through a war, they are pristine. Which arguably is better when considering a portrayal that is meant to teach the public how it was.

Re-enactment has made experiencing and re-living the past as somewhat of a commodity. The fact that most events cost money to attend. As well as the marketplaces of historical artifacts and reproductions, speaks of its commoditization. While re-enactors themselves often do not earn any money by doing re-enactment, they are still part of the mechanism that does market and package the experiences towards an audience. They view themselves as collectors of history. Collecting and taking care of historical artefacts. Becoming protectors of the artefacts. Given this, they further become protectors of the heritage those artefacts represent. Which in the case of my fieldwork is artefacts pertaining to WWI/II. The objects themselves become visual reminders of the heritage they represent; they are in their own right the physical surviving symbol of that heritage.

Through re-enactment my interlocutors perform the past in ways which they deem to be the correct. However, it is through everyone having the right mindset that the past can be portrayed correctly. This does not mean they go into a fictive character, rather they only adopt the role. They are still themselves, only now as a WWI/II soldier. Through immersing oneself within the situations they mimetically understand others. However, they will never truly understand how it was to fight in the actual wars, by the fact they are not in them. Nonetheless, re-enactment lets my interlocutors get “the next best thing”. Reaching approximations as to how it would have been like, letting them safely explore aspects of the war. Sleeping in a trench is still sleeping in a trench if it is done now or a hundred years ago. While they do not feel the true fear, never knowing if they would die soon. Re-enactment still lets them feel as if they were there, as exemplified by the firefights against the Germans. While not instilling the full fear of getting shot at, it still makes for a space where emotional responses can occur. They also still feel on their body how it is to only have a great coat for comfort while on the fire step. Through learning this knowledge my interlocutors get first-hand knowledge as to how it was, knowledge which lets them discuss it with others.

My interlocutors almost constantly negotiate historical accuracy whilst doing re-enactment. They attain knowledge of the past through doing research and further through the action of doing re-enactment. Living, and doing the things soldiers would have gone through. By attaining such knowledge, they partake in bridging discourse with each other. Through this bridging discourse they together come to a common understanding on what can be considered as an authentic portrayal. However, these authentic portrayals are arguably socially contingent, depending on the groups themselves. Albeit the arguments they pose as to why their portrayal is correct, is very often based on actual historical material. They often back up their claims by

the research they have done themselves on the subject. This illuminates the democratization of history, which lets more people get hands on with history. Furthermore, at events the public are often caught in discussions with the re-enactors. Letting them share stories with each other, adding to the re-enactor's repertoire of knowledge. Also letting the public come hands on with the stories they have heard from their family.

Through learning and doing re-enactment as a group I have argued that my interlocutors reach a form of *communitas* with each other. This *communitas* lets them experience the past together as a group. Letting them play out their different roles, creating a community of the past for the weekend. Creating a space which allows them to connect with each other. Becoming something more than just friends, they also become a family. Through doing re-enactment they are not only connecting with each other, they are also connected to previous soldiers who have been through the same hardships. They create as I argue a sort of temporal *communitas*, connecting themselves directly to their heritage. Forming a connection with the soldiers who went through what they are re-enacting. My interlocutors argue that it is through digging trenches, trusting the others, and generally fighting together that they become more than friends. They have overcome something together. Whilst it is an imaginative battle, they have still fought the battle together, overcoming the adversities.

Re-enactment has made possible is to make places of remembrance within the UK. Letting people experience first hand how it would have been like fighting in WWI/II in a place where it never truly happened. Recreating battles, or sets, such as the trench at the Great Dorset Steam Fair, at places there never were any battles or trenches. What re-enactment makes possible is not only more people connecting with their heritage, but it also lets more people get hands on with said heritage. Creating pockets of an alterity that allows people to get hands on, touching the history experiencing it through their body. Placing themselves within the timeline of that heritage. Literally letting people imagine themselves as if they were living the life of a soldier.

Through connecting with the past my interlocutors further connect with what it means to be British for them. By using the objects and doing the activities they place themselves within the timeline of Britain. They connect with their national heritage. Re-enactment becomes a way for them to praise the soldiers, at the same time as connecting to them. Re-enactment for my interlocutors is therefore somewhat connected to British nationalism. British nationalism is as Ana Carolina Balthazar notes, not a homogenous wave, but rather a nationalism with multiple entanglements through various actors (Balthazar, 2017, p. 223). The past in a re-enactment is

not a disingenuous past, it is a national past. A past that is inhabited by heroic soldiers, family members and countrymen. A past that through the actions my interlocutors do, celebrates, and commemorates. However, it is worth noting that this is in relation to the group I took part in. A group which only re-enacted as British troops. Groups who re-enact as Germans or Americans does not necessarily take part in this celebration of Britain. Nonetheless, they still take part in the commemoration of soldiers.

### **7.1 Limitations of the study and further research**

Limitations to my study is that I studied a group which was more interested in a historically correct portrayal than others. My group also had a younger membership compared to many other groups, which may have influenced the data I was able to attain. Given that, this meant they were more hands on events, such in the cases of the private events, but also more into the living aspect of re-enactment. The group also at the time only had male participants. While there are female participants in re-enactment there are less of them. Therefore, a limitation of this study is that the aspect of gender is not that well revealed. While my interlocutors are adamant that they are open for female participants and have at multiple occasions previously had female members in their ranks, they are still missing. Another limitation is that the group was comprised of no other ethnicities other than white British. The group I re-enacted in also only took part in the re-enactment of WWI/II British forces. A limitation is therefore that I don't know what is happening in other periods. Or much about re-enacting other forces, such as the Americans or Germans.

What I have not touched too much upon in this thesis is the political aspect of re-enactment. Nazi groups are heavily criticized for being insensitive, and grossly offensive (Lockhart, 2022). Therefore, a deep dive into one of these groups could have been beneficial as to why people would want to portray controversial subjects. Furthermore, the aspect of gender and ethnicity are two concepts I never truly got to the heart of. While I have given some reasons as to why it may be so, it requires more meticulous research to uncover. Further deep dives could also be in the re-enactment of different time periods. Given that WWI/II is relatively connected towards war remembrance, it would be fruitful to see what is of concern in earlier time periods.

## References

- Agnew, V. (2007). History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present. *Rethinking History*. 11(3) 299-312.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520701353108>
- Anderson, B. (2009). Affective Atmospheres. *Emotion, Space and Society*. 2(2), 77-81.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005>
- Anderson, J. (1982). Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums. *American Quarterly*. 34(3) 290-306 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2712780>
- Appadurai, A. (1986). Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (p. 64-91). Cambridge University Press.
- Apel, D (2012). *War Culture and the Contest of Images*. Rutgers University Press
- Armstrong, P. & Coles, J. (2008) Repackaging the Past: Commodification, Consumerism, and the Study of History. *Convergence*, 41(1), 63-76.  
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/repackaging-past-commodification-consumerism/docview/204596658/se-2>
- Balthazar, A.C (2017). Made in Britain: Brexit, Teacups, and the Materiality of the Nation. *American Ethnologist*. 44(2). 220-224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12471>
- Berge, T. (2015). Døden, en Opplevelse for Livet: Åsted og Minnested på Vestfronten. *Nytt Blikk: Fra Åsted til Minnested*. 96-115. ARKIVET Peace and Human Rights Center

- Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books.
- Bernard, H.R. (2006). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Altamira Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourgois, P. (2003). *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Cambridge University Press
- Bowan, K. (2020). Historically Informed Performance. In V. Agnew, J. Lamb & J. Tomann (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*. (p. 106-110). Routledge
- Brædder, A., Esmark, K., Kruse, T., Nielsen C.T. & Warring, A. (2017). Doing Pasts: Authenticity From the Reenactors' Perspective. *Rethinking History*. 21(2) 171-192  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2017.1315969>
- Brauer, J. & Lücke, M. (2020) Emotion. In V. Agnew, J. Lamb & J. Tomann (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*. (p. 53-56). Routledge
- Bruner, E. (1994). Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism. *American Anthropologist*. 96(2) 397-415.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1994.96.2.02a00070>

Carnegie, E. & McCabe, S. (2008). Re-enactment Events and Tourism: Meaning, Authenticity and Identity. *Current Issues in Tourism*. 11(4). 349-368. DOI: 10.1080/13683500802140380

Dean, D. (2020) Living History. In V. Agnew, J. Lamb & J. Tomann (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*. (p. 120-124). Routledge

Decker, S. (2010). Being Period: An Examination of Bridging Discourse in a Historical Reenactment Group. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 39(3). 273-296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241609341541>

Gluckman, M. (1963). *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*. Cohen & West.

Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh.

Grasseni, C. (2004) Skilled Vision. An Apprenticeship in Breeding Aesthetics. *Social Anthropology*. 12(1). 41-55 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2004.tb00089.x>

Grasseni, C. (2009). Introduction. In C. Grasseni (Ed.), *Skilled Visions: Between Apprenticeship and Standards*. Berghahn Books

Handler, R. & Saxton, W. (1988). Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative and the Quest for Authenticity in “Living History”. *Cultural Anthropology*. 3(3) 242-260. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1988.3.3.02a00020>

- Imber, M. & Fraser, T. (2011). From Flanders to Fallujah: Rethinking Remembrance. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*. 4(3). 383-397. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jwcs.4.3.383\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jwcs.4.3.383_1)
- Ingold, T. (2014). That's Enough About Ethnography! *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4(1). 383-395. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.021>
- Jackson, M. (1989). *Paths Toward a Clearing: Racial Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*. Indiana University Press
- Johnson, K. (2020) Performance and Performativity. In V. Agnew, J. Lamb & J. Tomann (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*. (p. 169-172). Routledge
- Kopytoff, I. (1986) The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (p. 64-91). Cambridge University Press.
- Korsmeyer, C. (2019) *Things: In Touch With the Past*. Oxford University Press.
- Landsberg, A. (2004) *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. Columbia University Press.
- Lockhart, A. (2022, 20<sup>th</sup> June). WWII re-enactment group who dress up as Nazis are condemned by campaigners as 'insensitive and grossly offensive'. *Daily Mail*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10933901/WWII-Nazi-enactment-group-condemned-campaigners-insensitive-grossly-offensive.html>



- Lowenthal, D. (2015) *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press
- McCarthy, P. (2014). “Living History” as the “Real Thing”: A Comparative Analysis of the Modern Mountain Man Rendezvous, Renaissance Fairs, and Civil War Reenactments. *71(2)*, 106-123. <http://jstor.org/stable/24761920>
- Mochocki, M. (2021). *Role-Play as a Heritage Practice: Historical Larp, Tabletop RPG and Reenactment*. Routledge
- Moeller, H.G & D’Ambrosio P.J. (2012) *You and Your Profile: Identity After Authenticity*. Columbia University Press.
- Pennell, C (2018). ‘To Leave a Wooden Poppy Cross of Our Own’ First World War Battlefield Spaces in the Era of Post-Living Memory. In J. Wallis & D.C. Harvey (Ed.) *Commemorative Spaces of the First World War*. Routledge
- Pennell, C. & Sheehan, M. (2020). But What do They Really Think? Methodological Challenges of Investigating Young People’s Perspectives of War Remembrance. *History Education Research Journal* 17(1). 21-35. <https://doi.org/10.18546/HERJ.17.1.03>
- Rapport, N. & Overlin, J. (2000). *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. Routledge
- Rodriguez, A.R. (2016. November 19). *Reenactment Vs. Living History...and the Renaissance Fair?* <https://www.hhhhistory.com/2016/11/reenactment-vs-living-historyand.html>

- Sanjek, R. (1990). A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes. In R. Sanjek (ed.). *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. (p. 92-121). Cornell University Press
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. Routledge
- Spradley, J. (1980) *Participant Observation*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston
- Tacchi, J. (1998) Radio texture: Between self and other. In D. Miller (Ed.), *Material Culture: Why some things matter*. (p. 25-45). UCL Press
- Trouillot, M (2015). *Silencing the past: Power and the Production of History*.
- Tunbridge, J.E. & Ashworth, G.J. (1996) *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd,
- Turner, V. (1977). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Cornell University Press
- Turner, V. (1979) Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*.6 (4), 465-499.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30233219>
- Weil, S. (1952). *The Need for Roots*. Routledge Classics
- Winter, C. (2009). Tourism, Social Memory and the Great War. *Annals of Tourism Research* 36(4). 607-626. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.05.002>

Winter, J (2006) Notes on the Memory Boom: War, Remembrance and the Uses of the Past. In D. Bell (Ed.). *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Winter, J. (1995) *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge University Press



 **NTNU**

Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology