War and the Connective Turn

Interview with Andrew Hoskins

Diana Gonçalves & Daniela Agostinho

Andrew Hoskins' research connects multiple aspects of the emergent digital society: media, memory, conflict, security, and privacy, to explore holistically the interplay of contemporary media and memory ecologies. He currently holds an AHRC Research Fellowship, exploring the intersecting and contesting roles of individual, organizational and institutional memory, through an original ethnography of the UK's Army Historical Branch (the 'keepers' of the official operational record of the British Army). His latest major book (with Professor John Tulloch) is *Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Media, Memory, Uncertainty* (Oxford University Press, 2015). Hoskins and Tulloch argue for an interdisciplinary dialogue between the three major intellectual paradigms that have dealt separately with risk events: risk theory, neoliberalization theory and connectivity theory.

Professor Hoskins is founding Editor-in-Chief of the Sage journal of *Memory Studies*, founding Co-Editor of the Palgrave Macmillan book series *Memory Studies*, and founding Co-Editor of the Routledge book series *Media, War & Security*.

Media have always had an important role in shaping one's perception of war, namely by putting emphasis on specific episodes or images that eventually come to represent the event as a whole. You recently proposed the concept of 'diffused war' to refer to a new paradigm of war in which the notion of mediatization becomes a decisive factor in the way war is

conducted and remembered. What is exactly the importance of the media and mediatization within this paradigm?

In *War and Media*, Ben O'Loughlin and I identify the emergence of "diffused war": a new paradigm of war in which (i) the mediatization of war (ii) makes possible more diffuse causal relations between action and effect, (iii) creating greater uncertainty for policymakers in the conduct of war.

However, the field of mediatization is growing fast and is complex, and it is important to be clear of how this is defined. I define mediatization as the process by which everyday life is increasingly embedded in and penetrated by connectivity: the process of shifting interconnected individual, social and cultural dependency on media, for maintenance, survival, and growth.

It is crucial to engage with this field and its history as does a recent volume on the Mediatization of Communication that I have contributed to. Whereas, unfortunately, there are some scholars who dismiss the term and its influence too cheaply, as was the case in a so-called 'commentary' piece published recently in a journal that should know better. A principal problem with a new paradigm is that resistance comes precisely from those who have too much invested in the status quo, and in modes of analysis that are no longer fit for purpose.

If, up until a few years ago, mainstream media monopolized warfare representation, the "connective turn" has significantly changed this scenario, opening room to diversified (and divergent) ways of seeing, representing and even waging war (e.g. bin Laden's and Al Qaeda's communications or, more recently, the videotaped execution of hostages by ISIS as retribution). How would you say the coexistence of Big Media and Small Media in the "new media ecology" is impacting this paradigm of war? Do Big Media and Small Media still behave differently in their mediatization of war?

The very idea of 'diversification' is overdone. This is not a question of coexistence but rather the continuing imposition of a mainstream whereby established and emergent media constantly remediate and renew each other. To understand war and conflict requires study of the connectivity between media and the ways in which the mainstream directs users/audiences towards the content of other media.

John Tulloch and I, in our book *Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Media, Memory, Uncertainty,* out next year, examine precisely these new relations. Through a series of

case studies we explore the shift in a range of discourses towards attributing a particular power and influence to emergent over established media. This is manifested in, for example, the volume and the ease of mining of so-called 'Big Data' that attracts a certain mode of superficial analysis, as contrasted with broader and more complex media ecology analyses which seek to uncover the dynamic connectivities between different media rather than being overdependent on a single medium as the core corpus for investigation.

The "mediatization" of war is increasingly pluralized, with ever more points of view often colliding with each other. The public is no longer restricted solely to a journalistic perspective; instead, they have access to a myriad of sources (public and private) that bring visibility to what takes place behind the curtain. The soldier's inside view of war has always existed, with war diaries and photographic albums, but this "inside view" has become noticeably less private, from the pictures of Abu Ghraib to atrocity footage. What changes has this public appearance of an inside view of war brought about?

More widely there has been a greater personalization of warfare, but this is not just a matter of the greater mobility and penetration of media. For example, General Dannatt, the former Chief of the General Staff of the British Army, encouraged a more personal connection between soldiers and the public in the UK. But this I think confused the role of the Afghanistan mission even more in the public mind, with a greater emphasis on soldiers as victims.

Images of war show as much as they hide. Despite the fact that recent conflicts are characterized by an overabundance of images that flood manifold media (e.g. 9/11), it is also true that many aspects of war and conflict remain unmediated and, therefore, unseen (the capture and killing of bin Laden, for example, replaced by the 'situation room' photo). Do you think that this hypervisibility of modern warfare may lead us to forget that a critical facet of the "mediatized warfare" is precisely to manage the (in)visibility of those events? Does hypervisibility make controlling what is seen and what is left hidden more difficult?

In new work with O'Loughlin, we argue that the 'weight' of the medium (following Sontag) is found just below rather than on its representational surface. It is the sense of

a permanent state of hiding – of a continuity or mediality of images of atrocity that are always there *to be found*, and which could at any time *be shown*, that changes the relationship of the connected new mass always vulnerable to the exposure of what they are increasingly reminded of as being always only a click away.
So, we are not confronted by an abundance of images, but we are confronted by the knowledge of the abundance and the nature of images out there. So, rather than the mainstream of news being weakened by the volume of images available to the new mass, they have instead deepened and become more conscious of their role as powerful modulators of terror in giving us reminders of their capacity to hide or to not show.

Even though the mediatization of war brings war closer in some ways, it also keeps it more distant in others. The changes in the "logistics of military perception", to use Virilio's terms, such as remote technologies of visualization and warfare, have brought a diversification of means of seeing war, but also a progressive distance from the battlefield, not only for the public but for the military forces themselves, who tend to step away from a physical warfare and engage in more remote operations (drones, long-distance missiles, cyberwarfare...) that are extremely difficult to register visually. How does this affect the way the public perceives and remembers war?

Some technologies of memory bring audiences closer to the frontline of military action (helmet cams and online archives), whereas some technologies of warfare move military action out of journalistic reach (drones and computer viruses). But the public is still nonetheless fed a vision of warfare that fits journalistic assumptions as to what a mainstream's presumed audiences will recognize and tolerate as war.

In spite of the proliferation of new audio-visual instruments and strategies to cover war, there is also a turn to past templates of war representation. New media may promote new ways of seeing war, but apparently there is a set of cultural expectations on what war should look and feel like that provide a certain continuity to mediated memory and still play a decisive role within the diffused immediacy of events. This process may, however, lead to a congruent effect and a redundant narrative. That is the case of war, terrorism and risk, whose differences have become increasingly blurred. Images from all sorts of different localized conflicts – from Iraq to

Syria and Gaza - resemble each other so much that they can barely be distinguished. Why is that? Is this a consequence of a standardized "mediatization" of conflict?

Under these conditions there appears to be two incompatible memorial trajectories. The first is the new flux of everything connected, remediated, networked in some kind of all-equivocating mesh of journalism liberated from its profession, or so the now-familiar story goes: an almighty diffusion of memory. The second is more of the old: the continuity of the past through its constant referencing and re-referencing in a journalistic *déjà vu*.

So, there is a continuous coupling of Big Media's iconic trajectories of 20th century warfare with how recent and emergent war and conflicts are framed and seen. Of course these two memorial trajectories are shaped by each other and it is this that produces a 'new memory' of warfare, but as I mentioned earlier, it is more of the old that seems to be winning out.

Given the increasing portability and storage capacities of new media, memories of war are much more accessible but also less imprinted in one's individual memory, and ultimately, in collective memory. Digital technology allows for mobility, immediacy and wider distribution, while defying a more stable or settled memory. What are the prospects for individual memories in the shift from collective to connective memory?

This is a very good question. I have long argued that what was once an 'active' memory, a human memory that had to work to sustain a continuity of past – of identity, of place, of relationships – is fundamentally weakened with the shift from reliance to dependency on the search devices and connectivities of our machines. Memory in our 'post-scarcity' culture has become less about remembering and more about knowing where to look.