WAR AND MEDIA

The Emergence of Diffused War

Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin

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polity

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For Philip Seib

Contents

Acknowledgements
List of Tables and Figures

1 **Introduction**
1. Diffused War
2. The Two Phases of Mediatization
3. Conclusion

2 **Images**
1. Introduction: Do Images of War Show or Hide?
2. Photograph and Flux
3. Mediality
4. Emergence
5. Saddam Hussein’s Execution
6. Conclusion

3 **Compassion**
1. Introduction: What is Compassion Fatigue?
2. Why News Values Keep Some Stories Off the Radar
3. Exploring Spectator–Sufferer Relations
4. How Do Media Enable or Restrict Compassion?

5. Conclusion

4 **Witness**
1. Introduction
2. Representation and the Truth of War
3. Witnessing
4. Conclusion

5 **Genocide**
1. Introduction
2. Premediation and the Holocaust
3. Media Templates
4. The Trnopolje Camp Images
5. Towards an Ethics of Images
6. Emergence

6 **Memory**
1. The Diffusion of Media and Memory
2. The Second Memory Boom
3. Media and Holocaust Memory
4. From Witness to Embodied Memories
5. The Third Memory Boom

7 **Vectors**
1. Vectors and Globalization
2. Controlling Vectors
3. Emergent Vectors
4. Conclusion

8 **Radicalization**
1. The Mediatization of Radicalization

2. Diffuse Relations Between Cause and Effect
3. Uncertainty for Policymakers and Journalists Enables ‘Hypersecurity’ to Emerge
4. Conclusion

9 **Legitimacy**

1. Introduction: Legitimacy, Representation, Discourse
2. The Power of Representations
3. Diffuse War Axes of Representation
4. Translation and Legitimacy 179
5. Conclusion

10 **Methods**

1. Identifying Effects amid Ubiquitous Media
2. How Do We Analyse Media Practices?
3. How Do We Analyse Discursive Linking? Nexus Analysis
4. Conclusion

Notes
References
Further Reading
Name Index
Subject Index

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Tables and Figures

Figure 3.1 Adam Smith’s Model of Sympathy
Figure 3.2 Relations in the Mode of Denunciation
Figure 3.3 Relations in the Mode of Sentiment
Figure 3.4 Relations in the Aesthetic Mode
Figure 8.1 Factors Contributing to Radicalization
Figure 9.1 British Government Handbook

Table 1.1 The Two Phases of Mediatization
Table 3.1 Boltanski’s Three Modes of Spectatorship
Table 3.2 Boltanski’s Forms of Response to Suffering
Table 3.3 Chouliaraki’s Three Types of News of Suffering
Table 4.1 Modes of Audience in Relation to News
Table 4.2 Mainstream/Professional Journalism vs. Citizen Journalism
Table 7.1 Media Coverage of the Fallujah Killing

1

INTRODUCTION

Roger Silverstone writes:

> I have a memory of an interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on *The World at One* during the height of the war in Afghanistan which followed hard on the heels of the attack on the World Trade Center. It was with an Afghani blacksmith who, having apparently failed to hear or understand the US airplane based, supposedly blanket, propaganda coverage of his country, offered his own account of why so many bombs were falling around his village. It was because, his translated voice explained, Al-Qaeda had killed many Americans and their donkeys and had destroyed some of their castles. He was not, of course, entirely wrong. (2007: 1)

The world imploded in the twentieth century. Once news could be transferred electronically, rather than via printed paper or newsreels on trains and boats, information about war, conflict and catastrophe could traverse distances almost instantaneously. The potential for global awareness, for a global village, meant danger and suffering could be brought closer to us. And as our fields of perceptions continue to change, conflict and the people involved in it become visible in new ways, affecting our relations to war. Whether through live broadcast or interactive media, we can now connect to war in a manner that was not possible before; we can read and respond to the blog of the soldier in

the field of operations, download the PDF terror-training manual, click and donate to the humanitarian worker, or listen to the live translated voice of the Afghani blacksmith as we have our lunch.

Just what these transformations mean for our world is hardly understood. The difficulty that governments, militaries, media organizations and other big institutions have had adapting to this world in the first years of the twenty-first century is hard to overstate. Images and stories have emerged, been debated and reacted to by populations around the world even before these big institutions have decided on their understanding of them, let alone their strategy. All that can be done, some argue, is to have narratives in place for any and every eventuality, just in case.

Human society no longer works according to mechanical principles, if it ever did. Thanks to media technologies, we live in a new media ecology marked by – terrorized by – 'effects without causes', to borrow a term from Faisal Devji' (2005). Things just seem to happen 'out of nowhere', such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Of course, this is not strictly the case. Actions are planned and executed, whether by occupying powers, terrorist cells or humanitarian rescue groups. But instant recording, archiving and distribution of images and stories add a chaotic element to any action. Nobody knows *who* will see an event, *where* and *when* they will see it or *how* they will interpret it. Nobody knows how the reactions of people locally or around the world will feed back into the event, setting off a chain of other events, anywhere, in which anybody may get caught up. The Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, images of abuse from Abu Ghraib prison, and 9/11 itself all demonstrate that the effects of events cannot be foreseen by those who originally record them.

Nothing can be gained from reproducing the conventional academic approaches to war and media, be these

constructed historically, specifically to a particular conflict, or comparatively, focusing on basic themes. Such an account would be significantly blinkered to the genuinely paradigmatic shift occurring in modern media and in modern warfare – the emergence of diffused war. Providing an intervention adequate to the dynamics of the flux of the post-broadcast era is difficult. Unfortunately, in the study of warfare, the disciplinary boundaries that regulate what is relevant and what is not – in terms of traditions, theories and methods – are not so malleable. This book attempts to overcome these limitations. If we recognize that it is the media surround itself – the new media ecology – that constitutes the very condition of terror for all of us, how can we analyse and understand its dynamics? Media enable a perpetual connectivity that appears to be the key modulator of insecurity and security today, amplifying our awareness of distant conflicts or close-to-home threats, yet containing these insecurities in comforting news packages. This connectivity is the principal mechanism through which media is weaponized, made a tool of warfare. It is not simply that media perpetuate a residual awareness of ongoing distant conflicts and the possibility of terror near or far, but that this connectivity is what enables a world of 'effects without causes' in which risk and danger seem impossible to calculate. Such a context makes order and security less easy to achieve. It is this connectivity by all participants and witnesses, in this emergent environment, which anchors and begins our account. It is in the new media ecology that established theories and assumptions about audiences, propaganda and warfare are, at the very least, significantly challenged (Der Derian, 2009: 252).

This book seeks to find intelligibility, not order. Our intention is to provide the concepts and tools for the reader to acquire greater literacy of war and media. For some, this will not be easy. For those used to thinking of military strategy, propaganda and political communications in

conventional terms, our presentation of the relation of war and media may jar. But, as Philip Bobbitt writes, ‘almost every widely held idea we currently entertain about twenty-first century terrorism and its relationship to the wars against terror is wrong and must be thoroughly rethought’ (2008: 5). So it is for war and media in general. It is to that challenge that we respond.

1. Diffused War

Our account of diffused war refers to 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. In this section we shall unpack this definition and show how its three axes – mediatization, causality and decision-making – can shape and reinforce one another in ways that make diffused war a coherent and intelligible paradigm. It is significant that we have chosen the term ‘axes’, since each is a matter of degree rather than being simply present or absent. Not all war is mediatized; not all actions have unforeseen effects; and uncertainty rarely paralyses policymakers absolutely. Rather, there is a modulation of each; policymakers’ certainty oscillates over time, for instance. It is our contention that these three axes capture the dynamics of an emerging paradigm of war.

We have not developed the concept of diffused war to explain *why* war occurs in the first place, but to describe and explain the changing character of war – the what, how, when and where. The causes of war may be relatively stable, a matter of political and economic interests for state and non-state actors. The opening decade of the twenty-first century was marked by wars for control of resources and territory, and the development of private markets for security forces and surveillance technologies, amongst

other things. There is little novelty there. However, the way war proceeds – its justification, conduct, reconstruction, remembrance – is changing markedly, and it is these changes that the concept ‘diffused war’ seeks to capture.

It is easier to discern the distinctiveness of diffused war by setting it in a historical context. The ‘first media war in history’ was the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856, according to Ulrich Keller (2001: 251).[1] This appears to be a remarkable claim, given the volume of the news, literary and photographic record of the Great Wars, the TV ‘living-room’ war of Vietnam, and the opening of the global satellite era with the spectacle of the 1991 Gulf War. However, for Keller, the Crimean War marked a significant shift from war as a show at which some civilian ‘spectators’ were there, co-present to the event, to something more organized for commercial mass consumption. It was ‘the first historical instance when modern institutions such as picture journalism, lithographic presses and metropolitan show business combined to create a war in their own image’ (ibid.: ix). Aspects of the war were deliberately organized as a mass spectacle. For instance, some phases of the war were highly visible to crowds, who had to be contained by the British cavalry in their fascination to view the colourful uniforms of the advancing regiments prior to a major attack on Sebastopol (ibid.: 251).

Yet, Keller argues, the eyewitnessing of certain historical events has traditionally been the privilege of elite audiences, and it was not until the Victorian era that war became more significantly ‘mediated’, including through ‘theatrically structured performances’:

> Even if performed almost simultaneously with the actual events, often by invalids just returned from the theatre of *war*, these were *mediated* stage presentations, made possible by the availability of a group of professional eyewitnesses who formed, with their cameras and communication lines, a fully-fledged apparatus of frontline observation. The verbal and pictorial reports of these lieutenants of the urban crowds, together with the art works

and show attractions, made the Crimean War the first *media* war in history. (Ibid.: 251; original emphasis)

Keller's visual history of the Crimean War illuminates a significant phase in the history of shifting *representations* of warfare, along with the shifting *perceptions* of warfare by those whose collective name wars are often fought or claimed to be fought in. Keller's work usefully questions the notion of 'media war' as principally a product of the mass media of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

This is an interesting observation for a number of reasons. For instance, in chapter 6, we suggest that the presence (or absence) of an event in collective or social memory is often related to the mechanism through which a person originally experienced it (usually through media), and the 'fit' of its original representations with the media of the day that reproduce or perpetuate a certain history of warfare. The neglect (or amnesia) concerning the Crimean War in modern media accounts has not occurred for any particularly conspiratorial reasons, but, rather, because it did not provide any moving images that would later make good television. And it is the medium of television that has utterly defined the vicarious experience of modern warfare, as well as shaping the way in which war is an object of study, which even historians may take note of.

Keller's work in detailing the significance of the role of the visual media in mid-nineteenth century warfare raises the important question: how would war proceed in isolation, if our media did not exist? Keller is explicit: 'Mediagenerated images precede that which they represent; more crudely put, reality nowadays conforms to the pictures, not the other way around (ibid.: ix). Thus, the legitimizing, the contesting and the waging of warfare have become shaped much more by the media 'production' of warfare than any discernible 'original' or 'authentic' experience. But as we move forward through this book, it becomes clear that there

are also unmediated aspects of war, either deliberately hidden or taking place in areas where media technology does not reach. The emergence of diffused war is not instant and completed.

We shall now unpack the three axes of diffused war, defined as an emerging 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.

The mediatization of war

As a result of changes in the communications technologies available to news media, citizen media and to militaries themselves, media are becoming part of the practices of warfare to the point that the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one carefully accounts for the role of media in it. This is what it means to speak of war as media*tized*. Stig Hjarvard makes a clear distinction between the terms 'mediation' and 'mediatization': 'Mediation describes the concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context. By contrast, mediatization refers to a more long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence' (2008b: 114). Sonia Livingstone, in her article 'On the Mediation of Everything', describes this mediatization of institutions and relations:

> [W]e have moved from a social analysis in which the mass media comprise one among many influential but independent institutions whose relations with the media can be usefully analyzed, to a social analysis in which everything is mediated, the consequence being that all influential institutions in society have themselves been transformed, reconstituted, by contemporary processes of mediation (2009: 2).

In other words, they have been mediatized.[2] War is 'transformed' and 'reconstituted' in precisely this way; the

planning, waging and consequences of warfare do not reside outside of the media. If we probe the connections between humans, technology and media to interrogate the emergent character of war and terrorism, we find that they all inhabit the same and unavoidable knowledge environment, what we have called our new media ecology. To write of the mediatization of the conduct of war is to refer to the manner in which media are integral to those practices in which actual coercive or kinetic force is exercised, such as the guiding of troops and vehicles, the use of drones, the symbolic acts of violence central to terrorism, insurgency and, indeed, major military operations. And rather than mediation and mediatization being processes exclusive to different eras, the two modulate together, although we have seen greater mediatization occurring as time has passed and digital media has become more ubiquitous.

The mediatization of war matters because perceptions are vital to war – the perceptions of a public who can offer support to a war, of government trying to justify a war, and of those in the military themselves, who are trying to perceive and understand exactly what is happening as war is waged. It is through media that perceptions are created, sustained or challenged. For example, Paul Virilio, writing on the emergence of a new 'logistics of military perception', argues: '*[T] he history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception.* In other words, war consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other material victories as in appropriating the "immateriality" of perceptual fields' (1989: 7; original emphasis). In other words, the battle is for how things are seen and perceived. This means both a battle of symbols and representations, and also a battle to construct how perception operates in the first place.

Let us start with battles of symbols and representations. In war and conflict today, making visible and public the capture of large armies or cities may often be of limited

symbolic value. For instance, in Afghanistan in January 2008 a Taliban assassin managed to enter and began firing a weapon in the Serena Hotel, perhaps the only hotel in Kabul with a gym in which international women can exercise. The hotel was a purely symbolic target. The act was a message with three audiences. To international people, the message was that you are not safe in Kabul. To local Afghans, the message was that we are still operating and you may want to side with us. And to the Taliban itself, the assassin's action said: we are still effective, whatever NATO says about its success against us. The Taliban did not need to regain control of Kabul itself or entirely defeat the NATO forces in order to make its point. A few months later, in April, Taliban members infiltrated a military parade and nearly assassinated the Afghani President, Hamid Karzai (Gul, 2008). The Taliban again showed they could access the most secure space that Afghani or NATO troops could provide. Whether or not the President was killed, a symbolic act was achieved. Indeed, the asymmetry of much of the contemporary so-called 'war on terror' is related to the high visibility of terrorist targets – presidents, skyscrapers, tourist hotels or nightclubs – versus the diffused form of the propagators of terror. These diffused, 'small-time' terrorists are able to shape how we perceive security locally and globally. In traditional war too, such as the 2003 Iraq War, it is snapshot images such as the fall of Saddam's statue or the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib that came to stand for, or represent, the entire war. To fight a war is to fight to construct and fill in fields of perception.

The interaction of media and war also entails a battle for how perception operates at all. How we perceive war is not just a matter of the content of news, of the images and stories presented to us, but also a matter of how we relate to media. The operations of a terrorist organization such as Al-Qaeda shape how the Internet is constructed and regulated, for instance. Attempts by governments and

security services to prevent the diffusion of jihadist materials online may alter use of the Internet more broadly. War and conflict are drivers of the form media take, of how media are controlled and of what information reaches whom. Robots and drones – unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – have been developed for warfare, enabling a new scope to the perception of war zones and the ability to control affairs remotely (cf Chow, 2006). At the time of writing, more than 40 countries produce, market or use battlefield robots or drones, from major powers to Belarus, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Georgia (BBC World Service, 2009; *The Economist*, 2009). Commanders based in the US can see what their soldiers see in Afghanistan thanks to real-time streaming devices. Indeed, this creates problems: instead of network-enabled, decentralized 'swarming' units, tensions emerge about whether it is the distant commander or the local, mediatized soldier who controls the crosshairs and decides who is shot at (Singer, 2009). As these tensions are worked out by militaries, and new perceptual technologies developed, so these tools will spread into domestic, civilian life, shaping how we can engage with each other, with states and with companies. Looking to the future, just as the identity of soldiers as warriors is complicated if they themselves become mere robots controlled remotely by distant commanders thanks to mediatization, so our identity as voters, protestors or even as political leaders may be rewritten by new perceptual technologies.

It is crucial to recognize that the absolute interpenetration of media and warfare has produced an emergent set of far more immediate and unpredictable relationships between the trinity of government, military and publics. These are significantly engaged in an emergent kind of conflict – which we are calling 'diffused war' – that is *immersed in* and *produced through* a new 'media ecology' (Cottle, 2006). War is diffused through a complex mesh of our everyday media:

news, movies, podcasts, blogs, video games, documentaries and so on. Paradoxically, this both facilitates and contains the presence and power of enemies near and far. Media bring war closer in some ways, but keep it distant in others. Media bring the voice of the Afghani blacksmith or Osama bin Laden to our eyes and ears, but do not necessarily help us understand them. The conventions of so-called 'traditional' warfare have been splintered by the availability and connectivity of the principal site of war today: the electronic and digital media.

For those engaged in combat and those wishing to observe, communications technologies have diminished the proximity and the unmediated visibility of warfare. Whether one is fighting in the war or watching it as an audience member, these technologies create a distance from what has conventionally been considered the stuff of warfare: human bodies being injured, land being secured. This might seem counterintuitive: surely nothing is more immediate than war? 'Like hanging, war concentrates the mind', writes Mirzoeff (2005: 2). That pain and injury are inflicted on bodies is the fact. As Clausewitz argued, a soldier's goal is to inflict damage and suffering (1976: 91, 93). For those involved, nothing could be more immediate, and nothing could be more absolute. Elaine Scarry writes:

> It is commonplace that at the moment when a dentist's drill hits and holds an exposed nerve, a person sees stars. What is meant by 'seeing stars' is that the contents of consciousness are, during those moments, obliterated, that the name of one's child, the memory of a friend's face, are all absent. (Scarry, 1985: 30)

The perceptions of a person suffering pain in war are obliterated. In the most extreme situation – being killed – the defeated party in a war loses its world. But there are many layers to perception in war. Not all are killed. Most of the time, in contemporary warfare, the experience of war is mediated. Here is a reporter's snapshot of British military

operations in Afghanistan in May 2008 under NATO auspices:

> Britain’s war in Helmand is being fought in real time on six big plasma screens, which dominate a dark room at a base in the desert town of Lashkar Gah in southern Afghanistan. It is a digital response to a primitive insurgency, as if a city trading floor had landed to govern a medieval land. Soldiers, sent out among adobe-walled compounds and poppy fields, report by text to a military chatroom about the explosive devices that destroy limbs. Commanders watch the combat from the skies, filmed by unmanned drones and shown in black-and-white. The reality of war is disguised by the watch keeper’s jargon; his talk of what happens ‘if it ends up going kinetic’. That means bullets are being fired and bombs are exploding and it is not what the army wants. (Glover, 2008)

The very culture of warfare (and the relationship between war and media) pivots around changing fields of perception. We shall explore later in this introduction and throughout the book how these changing fields of perception, enabled by the mediatization of war, alter war in significant ways. Mediatization alters the form of military organization possible. It challenges the notion of an enemy with a clear ‘centre of gravity’ to be targeted, and notions of war as a linear process leading to a clear outcome, allowing for clear aims and objectives. Those directing war, reporting on war and trying to keep informed about war as a citizen are faced with the possibility that their conceptions of time and space, progress and proximity, need reconsideration. And this takes us to the next axis of diffused war, the complication of cause-and-effect relations and the challenge that mediatized war poses to the exercise of power in war.

Diffuse causal relations between action and effect

The mediatization of war makes possible more diffuse causal relations between action and effect. The pervasive delivery of connectivity and visibility disrupts notions of intentionality and control. Modernity is conventionally understood as a period in which individual actors used their

reason and productive abilities to transform nature and the world around them in order to create industry, technology and social order. People, companies, governments and, indeed, military forces could act and be reasonably sure of what would be the consequence. Actor A could have power over actor B or the environment they inhabit in order to control what ends would be reached. It was clear who each actor was, and that their behaviour was the cause of whatever happened. But such an account of the world seems inadequate today.[3] For example, as Devji (2005) argues, Al-Qaeda is an organization virtually without causal power or capacity yet it has global effects. Al-Qaeda ultimately has no control over the many individuals and networks that act in its name (Rid and Hecker, 2009: 217). Anybody could commit a terrorist act and claim it was on behalf of Al-Qaeda. Nor could Al-Qaeda predict or control the effects of the 9/11 attacks. Not only is it impossible to draw the boundaries of Al-Qaeda and say who is in or outside the organization, but it is also not clear that those acting in its name even have specific effects they wish to achieve. The act in itself is enough. Devji writes: '[T]he actions of this jihad, while they are indeed meant to accomplish certain ends, have become more ethical than political, since they have resigned control over their own effects, thus becoming gestures of duty or risk' (2005: 3). The Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 are an example of this. Durodie (2009) writes:

> At the height of the Mumbai siege . . . one of the perpetrators, Fahad Ullah, used the mobile phone of one of the victims to call India TV and conducted a live interview with two journalists there.
>
> About a minute into their four minute conversation, the two journalists, one male, one female, asked him in turn 'What are your demands?'. At this point Fahed Ullah answered 'Wait one minute' and he was heard consulting someone else as to their demands.
>
> . . . to this day, over six months since the attack, no-one has come forward to claim responsibility for it, or to identify their demands and purposes.

Politics and political violence conventionally imply an act for a cause such as defending territory, interests or a people's pride; one acts to have an effect, and takes responsibility for that act and effect. However, this is not so simply the case with Al-Qaeda and those inspired by it. It is not an actor with a locus of decision-making (Burke, 2004; cf. Bobbitt, 2008). The units and lines of political action are further complicated by the blurring of domestic and global aspects of the jihad, and the invocation by Al-Qaeda of 'universal complicity' of all those who have witnessed, we can infer, acts of US 'imperialism' or aggression against Muslims. Potentially, anyone is drawn into relations with the jihadists. Finally, it seems nothing determines the 'cause' and effect of any particular Al-Qaeda attack: it seems purely contingent. It depends on the presence of local agents, who could be anyone, anywhere, and the victims equally could be random. And it is this model of action, 'effects without causes', that is enabled only through the new media ecology.

Causal relations are thus increasingly difficult to predict, given the under-determined character of social and political relations. Military headquarters and major media organizations cannot guarantee the success of their framing or narrative because of a key phenomena, 'emergence': namely the massively increased potential for media data literally to 'emerge'; to be 'discovered' and/ or disseminated – instantaneously – at an unprescribed and unpredictable time after the moment of recording, and so to transcend and transform that which is known, or thought to be known, about an event. The global spread of online video clips or images such as Abu Ghraib or the execution of Saddam Hussein exemplify this (see chapter 2).

As we explore in chapter 6, the rapid development of digital media, its availability and portability, and the supreme accessibility, transferability and circulation of digital content, has thus potentially profound effects in

shaping current and future events and also in transforming those considered ‘settled’ in collective memory. Both the unintentional and the intentional recording of events by the ubiquitous electronic/digital media (CCTV, mobile phone cameras, etc.) contribute to an archive of unpredictability that unsettles past, present and future.

For instance, the proliferation of remote and mobile audiovisual recording devices includes the mass availability of amateur or ‘bystander’ photographs and video, which adds to a growing ‘surveillance culture’ and which shapes news narratives in sometimes unpredictable and random ways. To take two examples: the amateur footage of the police capture of the suspects of the attempted 21 July 2005 London bombings on a West London balcony, and the mobile video of the police raid in Forest Gate, East London, in the summer of 2006 (both scooped by ITV News) were used to shape the news narratives of ‘reasonable’ and ‘excessive’ force deployed by the police, respectively. The police could not control how such images would be interpreted, however, particularly following the shooting of the Brazilian plumber Jean Charles de Menezes by police on 22 July 2005. Mobile phone photographs and video recorded by members of the public are now routinely requested by news organizations at times of the breaking of catastrophic news stories and other events, but could emerge much later to unsettle news narratives.

The mediatization of war does not necessarily result in the immediate end of Big Media institutions such as the BBC, CNN, *New York Times* or *Le Monde*, but it has lead to their transformation. They are not old or new media, but *renewed* media (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2007). It heralds a struggle between the established and relatively ordered regime of mainstream news – particularly television news – and an ‘ordered disorder’ of information that is potentially much more diffused. For example, as William Merrin (2008) observes: ‘In place of a top-down, one-to-many vertical

cascade from centralised industry sources we discover today bottom-up, many-to-many, horizontal, peer-to-peer communication' (see also Bennett, 2003). So, the broadcast model of Big Media is being unravelled through a set of more diffused and less predictable relations with the 'producers' of that which becomes its (and 'their') content. If the notion of a linear flow of news content (or propaganda) from elites to ordinary citizens ever did have validity, it is certainly challenged now.

One significant aspect of this shift (from what we call below the first to the second phase of mediatization) is the very extent and potential of the media archive, that is, the store of images, clips and stories available for retrieval and use. If, once, Big Media organizations had relatively large archives of stock images and reports to call upon, the emergence of digital media has not only resulted in a 'long tail' (Anderson, 2007) of the past (images, video, audio) whose 'emergence' into future presents is contingent in terms of the when, but also unsettled the terms of who has control over and access to such archives. David Weinberger (2007) calls this the 'third order' of information, involving the removal of the limitations previously assumed inevitable in the ways information is organized. (The 'first order' is the actual physical placing or storage of an item and the 'second order' is that which separates information about the first order objects from the objects themselves – such as the card catalogue). In *Everything is Miscellaneous*, Weinberger argues that 'the 'miscellanizing' of information not only breaks it out of its traditional organizational categories, but also removes the implicit authority granted by being published in the paper world (ibid.: 22).[4] Now, with potentially infinite archives and unpredictable emergence of images, challenges loom for both Big Media and audiences about which information and news are authoritative and

credible, and even about what authority and credibility actually mean.

We must be careful not to discard notions of linear communication and causality altogether, however. In the first axis we noted that some of the conduct of war is unmediated, accidentally or deliberately. The dynamics of emergence, the proliferation of digital archives and the possibility for disrupted memories and narratives are not absolute and universal. As we have described, major news organizations have not been wiped out in the increasing shift to a post-broadcast, participatory media ecology. As we turn next to the third axis of diffused war, the exercise of power, we must keep in mind that these shifts are uneven and require continued, careful study.

Greater uncertainty in decision-making in war

The third axis of diffused war concerns the ability of military and media organizations to make decisions with any degree of certainty about the outcome. The mediatization of warfare creates the condition for violence and conflict characterized at times as ‘effects without causes’, but at other times as well controlled and legitimized. Policymakers and editors cannot know in advance which it will be. Here we set out some of the key concepts for understanding the difficulties of decision-making, including chaos, complexity, risk and effects or impact. Discussion of these concepts illustrates the contingency of attempts to wage or justify war today.

Brian McNair (2006: 3) characterizes the nature and the scale of the transformations in journalism and news as a move from a ‘control’ to a ‘chaos’ paradigm. The former (control) for McNair emphasizes the role of the relations and power that we have here attributed to ‘Big Media’. These are based upon the determination of media content according to the political and economic interests of an elite

holding ‘control of the cultural apparatuses of media’, enabling them to create ‘planned and predictable outcomes’ (ibid.), such as the theory that media can ‘manufacture consent’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). The latter (chaos), while still accounting for the ‘desire’ for power and control by the same elites, suggests that ‘the performance, or exercise of control, is increasingly interrupted and disrupted by unpredictable eruptions and bifurcations arising from the impact of economic, political, ideological and technological factors on communication processes’ (McNair, 2006: 3).

As we have described above, because of emergence, it is no longer possible to explain social phenomena as the outcome of, or accumulation of, individual acts (Lash, 2005; Urry, 2007). From a policy perspective this is problematic: individual acts could be isolated and made the object of intervention. The problem for government and military policymakers is conceiving of policy and strategy in a time of ‘complexity’. The latter term is preferred over ‘chaos’ in the work of Urry (2007), for example, who points to the rapid and unexpected movement of people, things and images which make order contingent, not given. For Urry, the result is neither chaos nor order, but ‘metastability’.

Alongside complexity, a key term in military policymaking since the 1990s has been ‘risk’. Transnational security threats such as terrorism, pandemics and environmental catastrophe, alongside patterns of global migration, have triggered new paradigms of governance based on the regulation of flows – flows of money, people, microbes and nuclear materials (Bauman, 2000, 2006; Cooper, 2006; Sassen, 2006). However, Bauman argues that the increasing focus in Western political cultures on personal safety from assorted threats (terrorists, paedophiles, local gangs) is a manifestation of ‘a sense of impotence: we seem no longer to be in control, whether singly, severally or collectively’ (2007: 26). This condition is stabilized by a separation of politics from power, of tools to order and direct the

economic, social and political forces that bear upon our lives: David Held describes the resulting condition as one of ‘global structural vulnerability’ (Held, 2006). Governance has increasingly been based on preemption and precaution as means to manage threats which might not even materialize, but whose consequences would be catastrophic and unknowable. Conceptions of risk have been reconceived.

This sense of connection, complexity and emergent change is captured in a quote from Sir David Omand in 2005, at that time Security and Intelligence Officer at the Home Office with responsibility for national ‘resilience’ in case of emergency:

> There are certain obvious characteristics we need to take into account in our planning. The speed and penetration of global communications. The tightly coupled markets that can transmit shocks instantly around the globe. The known vulnerabilities of complex information infrastructure, for instance controlling logistic systems or power grids. More fundamentally the commercially competitive pressures on the Boardrooms that now control most of our critical national infrastructure that in years gone by would have been in public sector control or at the least subject to influence in the public interest. Just in Time value chains, leanness and speed to market all can introduce greater fragility in the face of unexpected disruption. Our knowledge of these inter-relationships is far from complete. I know of no full mapping of an advanced economy anywhere in the world, or even of a manageable methodology for obtaining one. (Cited in Dillon, 2007: 14)

National political, social and economic infrastructures are too complex to know, Omand suggests. He infers, it seems, that this makes such infrastructures more fragile, ‘in the face of unexpected disruption’.

Since the 1990s in particular, Martin Shaw (2005) argues, Western powers have engaged in ‘risk-transfer war’ in which each war generates its own ‘economy of risk’, where particular risks to particular people have particular value. There is an inequality between those who define risks, who set the terms of the war, and those exposed to the risks – the soldiers and civilians in the war zone whose lives are at risk, and politicians and military leaders whose political