War Memory and Commemoration

In a period characterised by an unprecedented cultural engagement with the past, individuals, groups and nations are debating and experimenting with commemoration in order to find culturally relevant ways of remembering warfare, genocide and terrorism.

This book examines such remembrances and the political consequences of these rites. In particular, the volume focuses on the ways in which recent social and technological forces, including digital archiving, transnational flows of historical knowledge, shifts in academic practice, changes in commemorative forms and consumerist engagements with history affect the shaping of new collective memories and our understanding of the social world.

Presenting studies of commemorative practices from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East, War Memory and Commemoration illustrates the power of new commemorative forms to shape the world, and highlights the ways in which social actors use them in promoting a range of understandings of the past. The volume will appeal to scholars of sociology, history, cultural studies and journalism with an interest in commemoration, heritage and/or collective memory.

Brad West is an Associate Professor in the School of Communication, International Studies and Languages at the University of South Australia. He is the author of Re-enchanting Nationalisms: Rituals and Remembrances in a Post-modern Age (2015).
The ‘past in the present’ has returned in the early twenty-first century with a vengeance, and with it the expansion of categories of experience. These experiences have largely been lost in the advance of rationalist and constructivist understandings of subjectivity and their collective representations. The cultural stakes around forgetting, ‘useful forgetting’ and remembering, locally, regionally, nationally and globally have risen exponentially. It is therefore not unusual that ‘migrant memories’; micro-histories; personal and individual memories in their interwoven relation to cultural, political and social narratives; the mnemonic past and present of emotions, embodiment and ritual; and finally, the mnemonic spatiality of geography and territories are receiving more pronounced hearings.

This transpires as the social sciences themselves are consciously globalizing their knowledge bases. In addition to the above, the reconstructive logic of memory in the juggernaut of galloping informationalization is rendering it more and more publicly accessible, and therefore part of a new global public constellation around the coding of meaning and experience. Memory studies as an academic field of social and cultural inquiry emerges at a time when global public debate - buttressed by the fragmentation of national narratives – has accelerated. Societies today, in late globalized conditions, are pregnant with newly unmediated and unfrozen memories once sequestered in wide collective representations. We welcome manuscripts that examine and analyze these profound cultural traces.

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War Memory and Commemoration

Edited by Brad West
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The origins of this volume lie in the symposium “Traces of War” hosted by the Narratives of War Research Group at the University of South Australia in late 2013. The theme of the Symposium was used to make sense of the variety of evidence and impressions left by history and how these can be picked up and used by social actors in promoting a variety of engagements and understandings of past conflicts in a cultural diverse and globally interconnected world. This volume builds on this theme by matching the notion of traces with how these cultural and material artefacts attain symbolic power through the act of commemoration. As such the contributors on the chapters point to the influence of a variety of new, reworked and rediscovered ritual forms that social actors use in giving meaning to the past.

Apart from the contributors to this volume who generously gave of their time and intellectual energy, I want to acknowledge Kerry Green, with whom I co-convened the Traces of War symposium, and other participants in the Symposium, including members, past and present, of the Narratives of War Group. The Symposium would also not have been possible without the administrative dedication of Julie White, Team Leader of Research in the School of Communication, International Studies and Languages. On a personal note, I would like to acknowledge an intellectual debt to Philip Smith and Barry Schwartz for instilling in me a sociological fascination with the ways in which war is narrated and remembered.

Brad West
Adelaide, November 2015
The era of digital commemoration has begun. The Internet has created a new space for our participation in commemorative activities, and new ways to tell commemorative narratives. The data they have generated promises to reveal more about the intimate, social and civil dynamics of contemporary commemorative cultures. This chapter surveys a unique moment of digital commemoration, examining how connectivity, participation and agency were essential to its character. April 25, 2015 marked the 100th anniversary of the dawn landing of Australian and New Zealand Army Corp (Anzac) troops at a beach on the Gallipoli peninsula – now part of modern-day Turkey. This landing was the first major engagement of Australian troops in the First World War, and quickly came to be seen as a key moment in the nation’s history. It is commemorated annually as ‘Anzac Day’, which many Australians view as the country’s most significant national day. This chapter considers how digital commemoration reflects both enduring tropes in the practices surrounding Anzac Day, and the beginnings of new, disruptive or creative elements within it. In particular, I will consider the interweaving of individual, social and civil identities in newly created online ecologies, notably News Corporation’s AnzacLive Facebook site and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s @ABCNews1915 Twitter feed.

Most Australians’ experiences of Anzac Day 2015 were shaped, mediated or communicated through the digital realm. As dawn arrived in Australia on Anzac Day 2015, the first light many Australians saw was from the screen of their digital device. On their mobile phones, they could see friends posting photos of themselves sleepily getting up for a local Anzac Day service on Instagram, or follow Gallipoli diarists waiting in the dark Dardanelles on AnzacLive. Perhaps they posted photos and stories about their own family histories of military service on Facebook, or took a selfie as they went to yoga or caught up with friends, and tagged it #lestweforget. Or maybe they watched others do this in their feed, shared a poppy picture, or liked a ‘thank you for your service’ meme. Then they might have looked on their tablet at the Sydney Morning Herald’s webpage to see how preparations were going in Gallipoli, or visited ABC news online to see photos of the parade in their hometown. They could have watched the Anzac Cove dawn service live on their digital TV, while simultaneously checking Twitter for photos from friends who were there – or searching for information...
about the history of the Battle of Lone Pine in the lead-up to the ceremony there later in the morning. Or maybe they purchased a digitally recorded minute of silence from the Returned & Services League of Australia’s www.minuteofsilence.com.au, and listened to it on their mobile phone (RSL, 2015).

Government, institutions, corporations, commercial entities, media organisations and community groups all invested vast resources in the development of Anzac-related online content – eager not only to deliver messages and access, but to occupy existing online spaces and generate connections with digital consumers through the Internet’s participatory potential. Individuals and online publics engaged actively through these same digital portals to create their own forms of commemoration, and assert both collective values and their own agency in the process.

A context for digital commemoration

Two key forces have influenced the rise of digital commemorative activity: the memory boom and the hyperconnectivity of the digital realm. We live in an era of perpetual referencing of the past. As Jay Winter has observed, the pervasive revisioning of war imagery fuelled the second memory boom (Winter, 2014). At the same time, new media technologies are influencing how contemporary war is perceived and practised (Potzsch, 2015). The connectivity of the ‘new digital ecology’ has diffused war through the media of our everyday lives. Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2010) argue that interactive Web 2.0 has created a new phase of mediatisation, where war and its memory is diffused through online media. Hoskins has set out how connectivity and digital propinquity is reshaping commemoration and memorialisation via a ‘connective turn’, in which the past is being pushed through the porous digital present and returning to shape our understanding of present and future war. This is one way to explain how, against the backdrop of the seemingly ‘perpetual and horizonless, diffused wars’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010, pp. 118–119) at the start of the twenty-first century, the memorialisation of the First World War, with its clear duration and outcome, has increased its grip in Australian culture.

However, as this chapter will argue, the digital experience of Anzac Day 2015 suggests a convergence of the second memory boom, as described by Winter, with the emergence of a third boom, as identified by Hoskins, whereby the digital media used to report current wars is utilised in existing memorial cultures. Hoskins and O’Loughlin suggest that we are seeing a quick succession of ‘booms’, each mediated by rapid shifts in technology. The second memory boom, based around analogue technologies, recognised the fear of forgetting and a commensurate need to actively ‘remember’. Contemporary networked wars are automatically plugged into new media and emphasise the automated remembering enabled by these technologies.

In a new media environment, the divisions between a ‘person’, their ‘devices’ and ‘content’ are increasingly fuzzy. Immersive, integrated, persuasive media that is inextricable from everyday life most accurately describes the current
condition (Hoskins, 2011). Digital networks no longer augment or supplement experience, they shape, record, revive and repurpose it. A photograph posted on Facebook, for example, shares a personal moment with friends and their infinite connections, and fixes it in place, time and memory. The site’s algorithm then reminds the user of its presence on key anniversaries, and enables them to reframe it in the present, almost infinitely.

This is known as ‘hyperconnectivity’. The preponderance of social media sites has meant that Web 2.0 moves social interactions away from community-based conversation into online connectivity. Platforms that support this mode of interaction include Facebook, Google, Apple, YouTube and Twitter. In these spaces, the tools of liking, trending, following and sharing create a perception of online sociality. However, behind the scenes, the technical structures and algorithms of proprietary systems, based on metrics of attention and accumulated user data, also drive the engines of connectivity, as do the structures of governance and ownership of these online platforms (Dijck, 2013). Hyperconnectivity via simultaneous immersion and externalisation in systems is transforming memory, as media integrates with the cognitive memory circuits of the self (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010, p. 663). Remembrance now forms a loop through media and back again. Consequently digital ‘code’ is a new actor on the commemorative stage, enabling and influencing how people participate in commemorative activities.

The Anzac code

The digital is, by definition, anything that can be reduced to a binary code of ones and zeros. However, the success of the digital depends on the capacity of that code to encode symbolic, cultural and social systems. Anzac Day is an event in which the interplay of the past and present enacts a set of complex self, social and civil meanings. The ‘digitization’ of Anzac Day inevitably involves the remediation of a century’s worth of analogue content.

Anzac Day achieved its significance in Australian culture as a simulacrum of an historical event. At dawn on 25 April 1915 Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (shortened to ‘Anzac’) troops ‘landed’ on the Gallipoli peninsula, part of the Dardanelles in the Ottoman Empire the Turkish called Ariburnu (Uyar, 2015). Their action was part of a larger Allied offensive aimed at securing the Dardanelles, and ensuring the free passage of ships along the straits that connected Britain and France with their ally Russia. Winston Churchill sold the British War Council the vision of a strategic push on to Constantinople, and opening of a new battlefront with the Ottoman Empire, following its alliance with Germany and engagements with Russian troops on its eastern borders, which were also considered at stake (Grey, 2015). A British naval attack upon the Ottoman Empire, designed to force the Dardanelles, in March 1915 failed (Broadbent, 2005; Gilbert, 2004). The result was a military plan to put boots on the ground. This led to the massed landing of 25 April, where multinational troops were each allocated sections of the peninsula to secure (Stanley, 2015).
The Gallipoli landing was the new nation of Australia’s first significant military engagement. In 1914, Britain’s declaration of war had mobilised Australian society (Beaumont, 2013). A force of volunteer soldiers and allied personnel were quickly assembled, and initially stationed in Egypt awaiting orders. It was here in January 1915 that the new term for the Australasian force was coined: ‘Anzac’, a piece of code that would serve the ‘world wide web’ of the telegraph well. Anticipation mounted both in the ranks and at home as to where and how they would first see action – and how they would acquit themselves. When the moment finally came, it was a dawn landing from boats rowed onto a narrow beachhead, and then a steep climb up jagged cliffs, under sustained fire from waiting Ottoman troops who were already established on the high ridges. Despite a brazen beginning, a trench warfare stalemate ensued. The invasion never made it further inland than the progress of the first day. Over the night of 19 December 1915, Anzac forces evacuated their position, leaving their dead and their name at ‘Anzac Cove’ (Prior, 2009). Despite this apparent ‘failure’, the Gallipoli campaign, and the landings on the 25 April in particular, have become the historical events around which most of Australia’s war commemoration revolves.

April 25, named ‘Anzac Day’, initially became the focus for commemorative activities surrounding Australia’s involvement in the Great War. From 1916 and throughout the 1920s an array of commemorative activities developed around the day across Australia and internationally. By 1921, legislation protected the word ‘Anzac’ from commercial exploitation. In 1927 Anzac Day was gazetted as a public holiday in all Australian states (Holbrook, 2014, pp. 58–59). By the early 1930s the dawn rituals and a sequence of Anzac Day activities were established, and uniformly enacted annually across the country.

As the twentieth century, with its growing list of conflicts, progressed, Anzac Day became synonymous with Australian commemoration in all wars and became, effectively, Australia’s national day. In public discourse, Gallipoli stood as the moment and the place where the Australian nation was truly ‘born’ – in bloody conflict on a distant shore, rather than the ballot box-driven transformation of six British colonies into a new federation that had occurred 14 years earlier. Many historians have expressed disquiet over the cultural centrality of war in Australia’s national identity, the scale and deeper purpose of state and commercial support for commemorative activities, the accuracy of popular understandings of the ‘Anzac legend’, the ways in which a focus on glorification of Australia’s war stories obscures the deeper colonial power relationships that produced them, and the fundamental violence and dispossession wrought on Aboriginal people upon which modern Australia rested (Scates et al., 2012).

From the late 1960s, with the numbers of participating servicemen declining, and anti-war protest movements coalescing around the Vietnam War, engagement rapidly waned, flat-lining from the mid-1970s. Interest began growing again through the 1980s, and then there was a well-documented and exponential interest following the seventy-fifth anniversary in 1990 (Clark, 2006; Holbrook, 2014; Lake, 2010; Macintyre, 2003; Scates, 2006; Stanley, 2005; Stockings, 2010). The fin-de-siècle resurgence of the Anzac Day phenomenon has coalesced around the
sequence of traditional codified rituals constructed almost a century ago. Historian of commemoration Jay Winter has described three codes that, through the language of mourning, encrypted the trauma of the First World War in European cultures: the visual, the verbal and the social. Visually and in poetics, the dead were seen to ‘return’ among the living. Images of the dead’s appearance in the present and the visualisation of their symbolic homecoming proliferated (Winter, 1995). Spectral depictions of dead soldiers risen around memorials or pondering the Anzac Day presence at home were important in the late 1920s. Longstaff’s Menin Gate at Midnight, with its ghostly march of soldiers approaching the memorial, was painted in 1927, just as Anzac Day was being nationally formalised. As the original toured the nation, a print version was reproduced and sold door-to-door to raise money for the Australian War Memorial. Salesmen were required to memorise a script that remarked to families ‘He is not missing. He is here’ (Gray, 2015). In the same year Will Dyson produced the cartoon ‘Voices from Anzac’, featuring two spectral soldiers at Gallipoli, which was distributed by the Victorian Branch of the Returned Soldiers’ League to ex-servicemen. Poetry and prose formalised in the dawn service evidenced ‘the same tendency to “see” the dead among the living’ (Gray, 2015; Inglis, 2008, pp. 260–265). The third form of ‘cultural encoding’ was expressed in equally sacred and spiritualised ceremonies at local sites or war memorials, conducted on behalf of the ‘“imagined community”’ of the nation itself (Winter, 1995, p. 225).

In Australia, this cultural coding combined solemn remembrance, parades to honour service men and women, and social gatherings. In cities and towns across Australia, communities gather for a ‘dawn service’ at the local war memorial. As the first rays of the sun break the horizon, the ‘Ode of Remembrance’ (taken from Laurence Binyon’s poem, ‘For the Fallen’) is read:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.

The crowd then repeats the phrase, ‘We will remember them’. The ‘Last Post’ is sounded by a lone bugler, then, following a minute’s silence, a reader recites words from Kipling’s ‘Recessional’, and the assembled group repeats them: ‘Lest we forget’ (AWM, 2015b). With the solemn service complete, the crowd disperses for refreshments, then reassembles in the daylight for the Anzac Day march through civic streets. Servicemen and women march, while spectators line the route. Then, once the shops and hotels reopen, attention turns to catching up with comrades over lunch and a drink, and gambling on a game of ‘two-up’, an activity that is illegal every other day of the year.

Anzac Day began as a civil commemoration of Gallipoli during the conflict, then codified the commemoration of the Great War into a social practice by the early 1930s, enabling annual recognition of all subsequent twentieth- and twenty-first-century wars. Over that time it has become a civic institution where
organised practices of commemoration stand in for Australian social relations between the self and civil society, and even in defence of Australian society and national ‘spirit’. Each of these commemorative elements offer a distinctive choreography of individual reflection, social connection and collective civil affirmation, generating a complex interplay between the past and the present performed in civic space (Inglis, 2008, pp. 228–238).

Steven D. Brown has shown how Western public commemorative practices in the wake of the Great War can be treated as ‘social technology’. These ‘assemblages’ of technologies are ‘mediational means for the reflexive self-modification of subjectivity’ (Brown, 2012). Stiegler (1998) suggests that technology, as organised inorganic matter, is a form of human memory. From these perspectives, objects like war memorials are a form of this ‘memory technology’ – focusing, holding and stimulating the memories of groups and individuals. Now, contemporary communication technologies are beginning to play a similar role, for both past and present conflicts.

A digital Anzac Day

Throughout the twentieth century, the cultural signal of Anzac Day flowed like an analogue wave. However, in 2015 the myth experienced a new digital disruption in the form of a literal set of ones and zeros – the 100th Anniversary of Anzac Day. This centenary is arguably the first fully digital Anzac commemoration. Even a decade before, many people would have experienced their digital connection at work or in the home through a slow wire connection, which tethered their towering CPUs to a phone line and power socket. By 2015, millions of Australians had a more powerful processing unit sitting in their pocket or handbag – and could access an Internet connection through a mobile or Wi-Fi connection almost anywhere. Smartphones combined digital recording and communication with data-processing power and application use. There were 12.7 million Internet subscribers in Australia at the end of December 2014, and 79 per cent of these were described as being household or individual subscribers (ABS, 2015). The volume of data downloaded from the Internet increased 35 per cent over the previous year and 1,146,743 terabytes were downloaded in the year to December 2014. There were 21 million mobile handset subscribers in Australia in December 2014. Download of data via mobile devices increased substantially in late 2014. In the period up to December 2014, Australians downloaded 52,000 terabytes in the preceding three months, an increase of 36 per cent over that time (ABS, 2015). By late 2014, more than 81 per cent of households used the Internet daily (ABS, 2014). Usage was spread right across the generational spectrum: 44 per cent of older persons actively used the Internet, while 96 per cent of children under the age of 15 did. When Anzac Day 2015 arrived, the opportunity for a digital engagement was substantive and seamless.

A simple way to measure that engagement is by looking at searching behaviour. Internet metrics confirm that counting searches reveals the pattern of knowledge seeking or ‘remembering’ of an event in the collective awareness
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(Breznitz, 2011; Yeung and Jatowt, 2011). The Internet is now a huge database of information, facilitated by the fact that storage is now very cheap both privately and commercially. Mass crowd, institutional and commercial upload has substantially increased the volume of the Internet itself as an Anzac database. Type the word ‘Anzac’ into a thin white box on a screen, click or hit return on a keyboard, and that word is sent to Google, the world’s dominant search engine. As at mid-2015, a Google search on the word ‘Gallipoli’ returns 14.7 million results and the word ‘Anzac’ 18.2 million results (Google, 2015). A search for the word Anzac in YouTube results in about 200,000 video hits.

Use of the Internet as a major source of information regarding Anzac Day exponentially increased in the lead-up to Anzac Day 2015. Typically, interest online experiences a dramatic rise in April of each year. In April 2015 that interest was far greater than ever before. In April 2015 there were 2,318,070 searches for the term ‘Anzac’ on Google, compared with 810,390 in April 2014. The phrase ‘Anzac Day’ within this sample was 1,434,310 for April 2015. Google data just provides information per month. Of the April 2015 figures, 904,066 ‘Anzac Day’ searches were carried out on mobile phones. Searches occurred either side of the median, but April was the focus of interest. In March 2015 there were 568,450 searches for the term ‘Anzac’, and 406,060 in May 2015. In total, between June 2014 and May 2015 there were 4,743,640 searches including the term ‘Anzac’. Of these, 67.5 per cent originated in Australia and 13 per cent in New Zealand. So 48 per cent of annual searches occurred in April 2015. In April 2015 there were 1,023,770 Google searches for the term ‘Gallipoli’, whereas in April 2014 there had been only 354,380 searches for the term. There was a marked increase in comparing average monthly searches between 2014 and 2015, but April showed a massive spike (Google, 2015).

On an international scale, the level of Australian interest in Anzac Day in April 2015 exceeded total world interest in the Great War itself in online searches during that month. Globally, searches for the phrase ‘World War 1’ averaged around one million hits a month, with the peak in November, but with a noticeable bump in March and April 2015, perhaps as a result of Anzac Day and Gallipoli online remembrance (Google, 2015). Other digital sources confirm this engagement. Crowd-sourced online encyclopaedia Wikipedia has become a first location to identify information on any topic. Wikipedia is an important source for Internet researchers because it is based upon genuine collaborative value structures (Yasseri et al., 2012). Analysis of the data behind the Wikipedia page for ‘Anzac’ reveals a spike in views, with 36,659 on 24 April and 45,093 on Anzac Day itself. The ‘Anzac Spirit’ page repeated the same trend but received only 1,348 requests on 24 April at the peak. ‘Gallipoli’ received 26,511 requests on Anzac Day (Wikipedia, 2015b). Edits data for the Anzac Day page reveals almost 100 edits between late 23 April and the early morning of 25 April. The bulk of these appear to be revisions to address reversions of vandalism (Wikipedia, 2015a).

This data suggests that the Internet was first port of call for millions of people looking to find out about Anzac Day and the events at Gallipoli. Where once
Australians might have turned to their bookshelves or library, now they are picking up their phones and typing keywords into a search engine. Where in the past their historical knowledge was shaped by linear narrative-driven forms like film, documentaries or books created by authorities in the field, now people are reading Wikipedia entries or webpages created by users rather like themselves. And their searches and link-following are mashing together first-person narrative, later commentary and historical and contemporary images, film and video into a unique, simultaneously personalised and networked stream of data, one that they in turn can create, comment on and share. This shift is critical to what makes the digital commemoration of Anzac Day 2015 different from what has gone before.

**Convergence and commemoration**

Just as the Australian public has moved its commemorative participation online, and, increasingly in recent years, taken it mobile, so too the commemorative activities of commercial entities, media, government and cultural institutions have converged onto the Web. As a consequence, many Australians experienced Anzac Day 2015 as an integration of online and physical experiences, and personally created as well as externally generated ones. In the lead-up to Anzac Day 2015 a vast amount of commemorative content was generated in the digital space. Each state and territory government, and coordinating government department, created a unique commemorative website and these were in turn consolidated into a single portal (DVA, 2015a). Most cultural or heritage-based institutions and libraries provided a physical and online response to the event: whether they be based around new exhibitions or increased accessibility to newly digitised or linked First World War-related records (AWM, 2015a; MV, 2015; NAC, 2015; NLA, 2015; NMA, 2015; SLNSW, 2015). Major news providers produced Anzac-themed digital offerings, including the ABC, News Corp Australia, Fox and Channels Nine and Seven (ABC, 2015; Foxtel, 2015; Nine, 2015; Seven, 2015). Conventional media platforms, such as book publishers, print media, radio and digital free-to-air TV, pushed out First World War content, whether it be documentaries or drama, and cross-promoted it on websites, augmented with additional interpretative, visual and narrative content. News outlets reported at key milestones on the path to Gallipoli, on the build-up to Anzac Day in Turkey, in Europe and in local communities, and showcased poignant family stories. Opinion and long form pieces in major online media sites such as Fairfax and the *Guardian* critiqued and examined the phenomena. Google alerts set up in early 2014 for Gallipoli and Anzac by 2015 counted over 3,000 individual pieces of media generated over that time (Sear, 2014–2015). Corporate organisations donated funding to large-scale appeals, and had their brands associated online with major commemorative activities (DVA, 2015b). Charity organisations, from the RSL to Legacy to Soldier On, all made online appeals to support their work. On Facebook hundreds of groups collated interest in historical and future events, from *Honouring Our Military Heroes Past and
Present to 5000 Poppies (Berry, 2015a, 2015b; King, 2015). Sepia and poppies were everywhere, as screens around Australia became saturated with First World War images, stories and branding.

Almost all of this content sought the participation of online publics. Much of this participation was activated around the connections between living Australians and the individual soldiers in their family tree or local community. Ancestry.com provided a special portal to investigate Anzac family histories (Ancestry, 2015). It was possible to use the War Memorial or National Archives of Australia’s pages to search for the official records or historical collections relating to a soldier in your family. News outlets created interfaces that allowed readers to submit their own stories. The comments sections of online news articles and opinion exploded.

Once, news organisations claimed market share readership, or in ‘hits’ on their own news sites. In the new digital world of convergence, they are looking to increase those connections by generating likes and shares for stories, debate in their comments box, and spread for their online ‘impressions’. They are seeking not only to extend their reach, but to occupy space on these busy social platforms, and precisely target content for differentiated components of their readerships. Two of the most innovative examples of online commemoration created by Australian media outlets illustrate this trend: @ABCNews1915 and AnzacLive.

News from the front

National broadcaster the Australian Broadcasting Commission teamed with social media platform Twitter and a range of cultural institutions to present a real-time digital recreation of historical experience. From 1 April 2015, @ABCNews1915 ‘live’ tweeted the events leading up to and through the Gallipoli landing in real time, 100 years on (Napper, 2015a). Producer Eric Napper partnered with the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Library of Australia and the Australian War Memorial, who supplied sources for the first-person narrative. Twitter provided technical and operational advice and promoted the venture. The project interlinked the accounts of more than 60 original sources ‘aggregating and retweeting status updates from secondary, or derivative accounts’ (Napper, 2015b). Examples of prominent Gallipoli figures featured included @AlbJacka_1915, @Bridges1915 and also @BillyHughes1915 and @MKAtaturk1915, @CaptFaik and @KingOMalley1915. On Friday 24 April, with ‘news’ of the landing imminent, @ABCNews1915 was ‘trending’ in Australian Twitter. The project ultimately received 1,177,899 impressions across Australia (Napper, 2015b).

Using social media to retell an event from the past in real time in the present is still a new way to depict historical narrative. @ABCNews1915’s antecedent was @titanic_live, which live tweeted the sinking of the Titanic a century after the actual events took place (@titanic_live, 2015). The ABC’s innovation was to undertake the first retelling from multiple handles. Twitter’s potential for
simultaneous posting, scope for storytelling from multiple perspectives, and sparse, concise text style creates a feeling of sharing immersion in a thread, but one that is also centred within one’s own feed. It is consequently more intimate than a platform like Facebook, with its visible social connections. The volume and diversity of ‘voices’, combined with the real-time impact in the Twitter feed, produced a different dramatic effect from AnzacLive, News Corp’s Facebook retelling of the same events. Twitter’s structure, which is less based upon friends’ interaction and more about being part of an online public, gave the experience a very particular ‘feel’.

Twitter history has the sparse, tense quality of haiku. On 23 April @TomDrane1915 tweeted ‘All ships have stopped. For a short church service. Some of us won’t see another one’ (@TomDrane1915, 2015). On the morning of 24 April, @SamNorris1915 tweeted ‘Breakfast. Wondering how many are eating their last meal.#Anzac100’ (@SamNorris1915, 2015). As they prepared to go ashore, @CDix1915 advised ‘Offshore at Anzac Cove. Brilliant Moon. Can see for miles’ (@CDix1915, 2015). The accumulation of these posts from many historical actors in a person’s timeline greatly accentuated sensations of dread and uncertainty for followers.

Journalist Annabel Crabb, tweeting a call to action for her followers to follow @ABCNews1915, confided: ‘It’s freakishly compelling’ (Crabb, 2015). Overall the feedback via @ABCNews1915 followed this positive line, with respondents such as @rickeyre and @dockane describing the experience as ‘innovative’, ‘powerful’ and ‘gripping’, and @PalmerHelen described it as ‘fascinating’. Most feedback reflected on the distance created by the medium. ‘Chilling’ was a common descriptive word, used by followers like @DavidCurnow, @kennethw and @justbel19 (@ABCNews1915, 2015). The affective impact was painful rather than comforting. @MarkMcCann61 tweeted: ‘@ABCNews1915 you have us right there with the diggers. Incredible sorrow and pain ripping through me. My grandfather joined the boys in July’ (McKann, 2015).

@ABCNews1915 created an uncanny presence for the past in the present. Napper’s crafted tweets, which sometimes added new words, imagined experiences or introduced historical anomalies, offered interpretations of diaries tailored to the platform. Their scheduling created a real-time news effect, stripping away the comfort of hindsight and reintroducing the uncertainty of the present moment. However, Napper’s choreography of Gallipoli as news was more than just narrative retelling. The experience of Twitter is a personalised aggregation of the social perspectives each individual user has chosen, but at the same time, that reflection occurs within the completely open public and civic space of Twitter itself. Fuelled by an audience’s awareness of ‘dramatic irony’, which Twitter does so well, it can be argued that Twitter is an ‘historical’ form itself (Waldman, 2012). Reverse chronology, created by scrolling backwards, is how a reader devises meaning (@atrubek, 2015). In the case of @ABCNews1915, reverse chronology and dramatic irony became devices for triggering reflection about the tragedy surrounding the landing, and powerfully reminding the audience of the limited nature of historical understanding the
present in the past contains. In so doing, Twitter ironically highlights the luxury of hindsight.

It could be argued that @ABCNews1915 placed the audience at the centre of a new digital Anzac civic space–time relationship. Followers gathered around the handle to follow the news, conscious of their distance from events and powerlessness to change them. Few spoke back. History was reported as contemporary news. Events were experienced at specific ‘real’ intervals and so occurred in ‘real time’. The sensation of following the tweets was a curious echo of what it might have been like to receive the war news, by telegraph or newspaper, in 1915, albeit through an intimacy with multiple players that would never have appeared over the wires. Its power lay in recreating the simplicity or stark horror of the first-person accounts, translating them into real-time reportage and feeding them to followers acutely aware of their own knowledge about what was to come – as well as their shared impotence to influence the events unfolding on their screens. The dramatic power of @ABCNews1915’s narrative was the stark austerity of the forces of history, invisible, inscribing; existential risk, ever-present and self-consciously self-evident. While this audience, like a reverent crowd, was largely silent, other social media forms encouraged people to speak. Personal participation and empathetic engagement of another kind was evident in another peak media organisation’s online representation of Gallipoli: News Corp’s AnzacLive.

Socialising with soldiers and nurses

The ethos of News Corp was born at Anzac Cove. Gallipoli radicalised Keith Murdoch and inspired him to create the first integrated media organisation. Possibly as tribute, News Corp Australia applied boldness to telling the Anzac story a century later. The corporation created a project called AnzacLive, which used social media to post diary entries from real historical figures in parallel ‘real time’. Led by Justin Lees, the News Ltd Network’s Network Online Editor, the project delivered integrated content on the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, an explanatory website, a live blog on 25 April and the news.com.au webpage to tell the story of the Anzac landing (News Corp Australia, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d).

Like @ABCNews1915, News Corp Australia adapted an international precedent. Throughout 2013, the French Musée de la Grande Guerre in Pays de Meaux, in association with DDB Paris, produced ‘Facebook 1914’, a Facebook campaign centred on Léon Vivien, a fictitious French soldier sent to the Front, away from his wife and baby in April 1915. Its tag line was ‘10 characters, one destiny, all with the same question in mind’. Ten months of posts were uploaded for the launch, and Léon received more than 60,000 followers (Musée de la Grande Guerre du Pays de Meaux and DDB World Wide, 2013).

AnzacLive deployed nine profiles of real Anzac diarists on Facebook. The project involved collaboration with the State Library of NSW and the Australian War Memorial. Based upon the language and timed events in their respective
diaries, each profile told the story, to quote Lees, ‘as if they are alive and posting right now’. Access to the State Library of New South Wales’s (SLNSW) First World War diary collection inspired News Corp to ask ‘what would it be like to talk to these people, and live through their experience with them’ (Lees, 2015). Lees suggested that ‘they were young people just like us, and if alive in 2015 would be communicating in the same way, as today’s 20somethings . . . on social media’ (Lees, 2015).

The capacity for audience interactivity on social media 24 hours a day required an operational model based around a media newsroom. Volunteer custodians from across News Corp ran the characters’ Facebook pages in addition to their regular jobs. Each character posted up to 14–18 times a week in the peak April/May period, from 6:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Their custodians were required to intimately know their character’s diaries, life stories and nuances of period English, diction and syntax to lend authenticity to both postings and responses to questions.

The multiplatform nature of the storytelling – across Twitter, Instagram, the web and news sites – enabled a nuanced presentation of events and experiences. In contemporary 24-hour social media rich journalism, video and image coexist to tell different stories, across different access points. Social media pressure in the form of comments and shares, for instance, pushes certain story angles in the retelling (Lieber & Reiley, 2016, p. 3). Most prominently, this multiplatform approach enabled News Corp to harness the power of combining text with visual elements, video, data visualisation and historical image colourisation.

Engagement for this new form of sociable historical connection-making was strong. Two months on from its 29 March 2015 launch, News Corp claimed the Facebook pages and Twitter/Instagram accounts had a combined 49,406 dedicated page likes/account followers. The hashtag #anzaclive was attached to every post and was seen 51.5 million times, with a top post reaching 1.7 million people with shares (Lees, 2015). Significantly, the AnzacLive audience actively engaged with each of the historical figures. Facebook users treated each avatar as they would a Facebook friend. They liked their posts and made positive encouraging responses or raised questions about their ‘status updates’, accepting them as they would a real live person in the present. This suspension of disbelief among the audience is remarkable. The audience and the media collaborated to create the fiction of historical figures recounting past experiences in a shared present.

Empathic concern and advice was a common reaction from followers. For example, Alice Ross-King posted twice a day during April/May as Gallipoli casualties began arriving in Egypt, to the distress of the nursing staff. On 6 May at 8:20 a.m., the Ross-King avatar describes the strain, remarking ‘I could not look or speak to anybody without crying.’ The post was identified with the ‘tag’ of a crying face emoji – the digital symbol used to convey emotion – ‘feeling exhausted in Heliopolis, Al Qahirah, Egypt’. The phrase was positioned over the large stock image of an imploring eye. This post achieved 161 likes. The nine comments made by followers themselves each received an average of five likes.
All comments arose from female identifying profiles. Margaret O’Brien wrote: ‘Oh Alice how we feel for you cannot understand trauma and upset you must feel every day’; Helen Fell commented: ‘Thank you so much for everything you are doing Alice and thank Douglas for noticing your exhaustion before it was too late. Rest up young lady for there is more tomorrow unfortunately’. Kathryn Hatcher responded: ‘description leaves a nightmare of imagination. People say “poor brave lady” but … as a nurse you would think those poor brave men’. Sharon Broad confided: ‘You are incredible, Alice. I can’t imagine what you went through’, while Christina Coombe wrote: ‘You need more people like Douglas in your life … you need rest too. you are amazingly strong. Nothing wrong with tears but you sound exhausted’ (Alice Ross-King and News Corp Australia, 2015, 6 May).

The data-rich nature of social media reveals much about who was consuming this kind of commemoration. A video on First World War nurses posted on Facebook did especially well, reaching over 225,000 people, and its reach revealed a trend. Around 65 per cent of the AnzacLive audience was female. The biggest demographic slice was women aged 35–44. Alice Ross-King was the most popular individual character with 4,794 individual likes at August 2015 (News Corp Australia, 2015e). Scrolling through multiple posts, the overall impression is that women were the most actively engaged participants. Winter has suggested that family history is the core of contemporary commemoration and that women maintain family history and its implications for cultural continuity. A project like AnzacLive enables an actual metric proof for arguments like these, and further analysis of the data will confirm its value as a means to reveal both the intimate thoughts and meanings of the commemoration for participants, who usually stand silent, and its scale and character.

But the upload of the diaries on historical Facebook profiles also reveals the dynamics that underlie the algorithm logic of social media socialisation: automation, augmentation, personalisation and prosthetic memory. On Facebook the material ‘you’ are prompted to view is based on what you tend to like, and the connections of those likes. So what you see of others’ likes and posts is driven by how many times you have liked their posts in a self-reinforcing system. Timelines are reflexively dynamic at a machine level and at the same time they are panoptic in that cognitive circuit. When you submit a response to a post, a user is conscious of how they will be perceived and that they are being watched – potentially by everyone with digital connections. This creates considerable self-consciousness, but also new ways for historians to observe commemorative activities. The Internet has created a new public space where it is possible to observe, and even intervene in, individual and community interactions around Anzac Day commemoration.

The resurgence of Anzac Day can be positioned broader trends of remembrance and generational continuity in Western society, not isolated to Australia. Whereas the first and second memory booms were defined by forgetting, in the era of mobile digital cultures, constant remembering, where everyone records events both trivial and important, has created a new ‘spectrum of diffused
memory’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010, p. 112). Affective engagement with the past has developed more broadly in concert with the second memory boom and generational change. Marianne Hirsch has explained how Holocaust experiences are transmitted to ensuing generations, who did not experience it themselves, so intensely as to constitute memories in their own right. Alison Landsberg has described the contemporary phenomenon of ‘prosthetic memory’, in which historical knowledge is felt rather than intellectualised (Hirsch, 2012; Landsberg, 1996). The connective phase of commemoration contains these elements but augments them. An avatar can logically mediate and therapeutically absorb society’s collective post memory. Equally, they can be prosthetic in an era of online celebrity. The ‘characters’ of AnzacLive operate and are understood by digital users both as avatars from the past and as historical ‘celebrities’. Consequently their personal narratives can be deployed and interacted with in line with these existing tropes.

In an environment of simultaneous diffusion and personalisation, the narrative structure of remembering inherent to social media has become a key tenet of connective commemoration. Professional historians’ attempts to reshape narratives of the First World War through the personalisation of experience began in 1970s. Bill Gammage’s work, published in 1974, introduced the personal into the mythology and informed the film Gallipoli (Gammage, 1974, 1981). The emergence of the soldier as ‘victim’ and the construction of the category PTSD in the aftermath of Vietnam has also fuelled the affective, emotional and empathetic response to Anzac (Twomey, 2013). However, these responses generally reflect the trauma discourses prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. In a post-9/11 world, post-memory subjectivity is more asymmetrically embedded in civil relations (Simpson, 2006). Recent historiography has experimented with disruptive forms, where diaries create episodic narratives that coincide with major events, but generally follow disparate personal logics. Adrian Gregory points to the ‘anti-history’ of Englund’s The Beauty and the Sorrow, which is, in his words, concerned not with why things happened ‘but how they felt to those who were there’ (Englund, 2011; Gregory, 2014, p. 199). In this sense Englund, AnzacLive and @ABCNew1915 provide almost a ‘helmet cam POV’ perspective on a past war (BBC3, 2014).

In many ways, participants in AnzacLive appear to be engaged in a process of communal rehabilitation, not only in relation to the intergenerational trauma stemming from the First World War, but in connection with the damage wrought by contemporary conflicts. A telling set of comments on AnzacLive directly or indirectly addresses the spectre of PTSD for the historical actors, either out of retrospective awareness and concern, or possibly even as a touchstone for personal experience. When on 16 May Ellis Silas posted in AnzacLive, clearly distressed, that he was ‘no more use as fighting unit’, he received 15 sympathetic responses. One of these, by Alison Moffat, simply stated: ‘PTSD’ (Moffat, 2015).

Leading exponent of the idea of ‘moral injury’ Jonathon Shay argues that PTSD is an adaptive behaviour to stress. Within this framework, PTSD is an
injury, not an illness – and one that can only be alleviated socially. Shay argues for the ‘circle of communalization of trauma’ where ‘trauma survivors hear that enough of the truth of their experience has been understood, remembered and retold with enough fidelity to carry some of this truth … then the circle of communalization is complete’ (Shay, 1994). In short, healing is now understood as a social process – not a clinical problem faced by an individual, as exemplified in the post-Vietnam model of PTSD or the clinical victimhood discourse of the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, its focus lies in attention being paid to an individual within a shared social context in an era of ‘just war’ (Walzer, 2004). In this instance, AnzacLive participants appear to have used Facebook – the pre-eminent form of ‘social’ media – as both a mechanism and an opportunity for acknowledging and addressing the wounds of conflicts old and new in a social, and perhaps also a civil, space (Arthur, 2014).

Gathering around the memorial

Anzac commemoration has always involved the complex interplay of the private and the public, the self, the social and the civil. Distinctive commemorative practices were formalised into a ‘social technology’ in the late 1920s. Now commemoration occurs simultaneously in the physical world and in an interactive and immersive online public ecology, co-created by humans, algorithms and machines. Where once the choice was whether to attend the ceremony or not, now it is possible to virtually participate in multiple ceremonies at once. The mobile phone and the hashtag have become ways to create digital assembly (Mottahedeh, 2015, pp. 16–17; Weller et al., 2014, p. 17). Where once Australians stood in silence around the cenotaph, now they can gather in a cloud of Anzac chatter, tweeting #lestweforget instead of (or as well as) speaking it aloud.

This early phase of digital commemoration has much in common with the 1920s. In many ways, the centenary looks back to the process of post-war codification of commemorative practices, as much as it does to the Great War itself. As they did 90 years ago, new communication technologies and technologies of commemoration are evolving together and shaping each other, and several of the new or experimental digital forms are taking up the codes of the earlier period and re-envisioning them for a hyperconnected age. This process takes familiar rituals or relationships, but extends them in new ways. The experience of waiting for the dawn on Anzac Day is converted into a moment-by-moment account of the Gallipoli landings on Twitter. The symbolism of the dawn is replaced by a more precise awareness of the real-time sequence of events, and a disquieting awareness of the luxury of hindsight. The profiles of AnzacLive give modern Australians the chance to befriend, question and encourage the ghosts of Anzac past who have reappeared in their Facebook feed. Silence is no longer required to summon them – conversation is what keeps their presences in your feed – and they talk back, instead of standing mute. The hashtag rather than the bugle brings people together, and thousands of people say #lestweforget at different times.
Together, the renewed cultural appetite for the past, and a digitally enhanced capacity for social engagement, have created a new field for commemorative activity: connective commemoration. In 2015, in an era of persistent, diffuse and networked conflict, the digital has created a proliferation of connective, transformative platforms for Anzac Day. Whereas once Australians stood together in public space to collectively represent their social connections, now social media defines and augments that sociality. Coding technologies built into corporate platforms like Facebook and Twitter have converted previously invisible social networks into connectivity. Connective media has become ‘synonymous with sociality’ (Dijck, 2013). Ubiquitous computing and connective media forms like sharing, friending, liking and posting have become normative. The word ‘social’ has come to stand in for social media. Opting out is no longer an option. Only the very old, the very young or the odd do not participate (Dijck, 2013, p. 175). Consequently, where the term ‘Anzac’ has always been connected with attempts to resist and activate commodification, now what is commodified – by global Internet corporations, commercial interests, government, news organisations, cultural institutions and communities of interest, among many online players – are the relationships that Anzac creates.

The analogue rituals of Anzac Day placed individuals into silence in civic space to create a community (Brown, 2012). Now it is the links made by clicks and conversation that are important. Where in the past a community may have been imagined, or constituted by ceremony and silence, now, whether it is in a window, an interface or an application, we see and are seen in a digital panopticon. Inglis’s earliest memory of the Shrine of Remembrance ‘connects it with the occult’ (Inglis, 2008, p. 2). Along with other technologies of commemoration, it was capable of summoning the dead and enabling a communion that made meaning from war and reinforced connection to local, national and international communities. Today we live in an era where seemingly ‘advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic’ (Clarke, 1977). Not only are the processes that shape what we see on our ‘black mirrors’ secret and mysterious, they seem capable of strange and uncanny disruptions of space and time. The Gallipoli landing can be experienced in a single feed from multiple historical perspectives in real time, via posts constructed by contemporary journalists and cued by a remote server. We can read the intimate thoughts of long-dead soldiers and nurses, materialising among the chatter of our friends, ask them questions and get an answer back. We can assemble around the column a hashtag makes in our Twitter feed, instead of a column of soldiers, or the column of a memorial. And all of our actions are visible to others, connect us to people we will never meet and are inscribed in ones and zeros, to be stored on a distant server, and remembered for ever.

As dawn arrived in Australia on Anzac Day 2015, the first light was digital. Emitted from screens connected by fibre optics, light has been transformed from a natural and metaphorical force into the very vehicle that carries communication, connectivity and meaning. Anzac Day could always have been called a photological liturgy, concerned as it is with the eternal flame of remembrance burning within the
darkness of death. In 2015, through the optic fibre of digital communications, light itself has transmitted the Anzac code, illuminating the new power of networks and relationships in the next century of connective commemoration.

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