NOTES ABOUT THE PARTICIPATIVE AND THE DIGITAL MEMORY: THE SECOND WORLD WAR CASE

NOTAS SOBRE A MEMÓRIA PARTICIPATIVA E DIGITAL: O CASO DA SEGUNDA GUERRA MUNDIAL

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ABSTRACT

Because of the massive amount of data in the Big Data context, human beings trust increasingly in the ICTs to the information archival. Considering this reality, a question that seems urgent is to understand the collective memory's transformations in the digital era. Therefore, two themes are relevant to this paper: the technologies of memory and the participative memory. To do so, this articles approaches the theoretical reflections and brings, as example, a cartography of the participative initiatives related to the Second World War's remembrance at *Twitter*.

Keywords: Technologies of memory; Participative Memory; Digital Memory; Twitter; Second World War.

RESUMO

Devido à enorme quantidade de dados no contexto do Big Data, os seres humanos confiam cada vez mais nas TICs para o arquivamento de informações. Considerando essa realidade, uma pergunta que parece urgente é entender as transformações da memória coletiva na era digital. Portanto, dois temas são relevantes para este artigo: as tecnologias da memória e a memória participativa. Para isso, este artigo aborda as reflexões teóricas e traz, por exemplo, uma cartografia das iniciativas participativas relacionadas à lembrança da Segunda Guerra Mundial no *Twitter*.

Palavras-chave: Tecnologias da memória; Memória participativa; Memória digital; Twitter; Segundo Guerra Mundial.

Introduction

As a result of various disruptions, which are accelerating even more through time, it is natural to think about the transformations of memory. This is important, since the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) emerge and transform our relationship with time and space, as past and present are now available immediately in a data collection (Canavilhas, 2004).

To understand the new configuration of memory, one important concept is the collective memory (Halbwachs, 2013). The author defended that individual memory is a result of the thinking of a group of people because each individual's mind-setting is influenced by a collective approach. Reflecting on this idea, it is possible to think that the relationship between individuals and groups is even more profound after Web 2.0 (Hoskins, 2009).

The second generation of services from the World Wide Web was responsible for allowing the user's participation, through the availability and production of online content (Jenkins, 2009). This new participative culture was also responsible for influencing the official memory, which was preserved, until the 1980s, by the elite, especially the male one (Gillis, 1994). Now, we are facing the growth of new remembrance forms, because the user's participation creates alternative memories, affecting the official one and fragmenting the institutional history.

Consequently, the academic debate about digital memory and the technologies of memory is not restricted just about the complexity regarding archiving and preservation. Those themes are already elaborated, but to think about memory, it is also important to involve the transformation of remembering and forgetting. Due to this new context, the memory is mediated and, consequently, there is a constant negotiation between personal thinking and the one influenced by the emerging technologies. Those ICTs are responsible for reformatting the past, which turns, during every new mediation, always new.

Accordingly to the theoretical reflections, this paper's objective is to approach those memory's transformations, facing the disruptive context. Besides, this article also aims to think about how the social networks, defined in this paper as technologies of

memories, are responsible for setting up a new way of remembering and forgetting. To do so, this work brings examples, related to the Second World War, of participative memories' initiatives, which are allowed by this new cognitive ecology.

Technologies of Memory

The ICTs can be understood as technologies of memory since they can also generate new forms of memory, either individual or collective. This concept, however, is not fresh, because it was used by other researchers (Van House and Churchill, 2008). The two authors, during the beginning of the 2000 years, already paid attention in the transformations of the remembrance and forgetting, through the technologies devices. According to them, "what is remembered individually and collectively depends in part on technologies of memory and the associated socio-technical practices, which are changing radically" (2008, p.295).

Some of those technologies were enumerated by Sturken (2008), who believes that they can be exemplified as objects like *souvenirs*, but the must significant nowadays are the mass technologies and media. The researcher believes that individual memory and the cultural one are always being produced. Besides, they are also mediated by those devices. In other others, everything that is remembered depends, in a certain way, of those technologies of memory and its associated socio-technical practices, both in constant change through time.

The first noticed technology was the invention of writing, a huge technological disruption, which has put in shock the relation between human beings and oral tradition. Sócrates had a negative perception about this tool because he believed that it could generate ignorance, through the production of forgetting (Rumsey, 2016). Likewise, the relation between man and memory changed. For instance, during Ancient Greece, only the human memory was trusted, which was influenced in virtue of the association among emotions, space, and objects. Thereafter the Sumerians, as a result of the writing word, could create the archiving method. Since then, the human being could trust in other tools for remembrance.

The total forgetting, as Sócrates thought, didn't happen, but there was a disruption of memory since the individual could trust in the file's organization and storage. Following the man lived the transposition of this writing to the papyrus and, later on, to the paper pages. Those innovations could bring more mobility to that invented archival, because the books could be easily transported, in contrast to the rocking surfaces from the Sumerians. After those reading technologies, other disruptions also happened, as the "image machines" (Dubois, 2004). They can be exemplified as photography cameras, television, and cinema. Those devices changed the relationship between man and image, remodeling discourse itself.

Besides, the new technologies also modified the perception of time, which created an acceleration and also increased mobility. With the television, for instance, the individual could access lively what happened on the other side of the Earth. One of the explanations for the 1968 riots was this new configuration induced by the television (Zappa and Sotto, 2018). This new flux and acceleration just increased through the years and today we are in the mobile era, with smartphones. In the German Language, for example, the word *Handy*, which means cellphone, evokes the idea of the hand's extension (Reading, 2009). The extension concept, however, was first approached by McLuhan (1974), who defended the thesis that the technologies act as human bodies' parts, changing the sensory experience. With the cellphones, however, this new configuration is even more evidenced, since the device can be transported to everywhere and is now an indispensable tool in everyday life, being the last object seen before the humans sleep and the first used when they are awake.

Additionally, smartphones can be described as digital memory, because of its mobile feature (Oksman and Rautianinen, 2003). As an example of this new reality, the concept 'memobile' brings the idea of a combination of the word 'me' and 'mobile', eliciting this new perception of the human experience through time and space, especially facing how easy it is to access and storage contents (Reading, 2009). In other words, the devices changed the relation of humans with memory. In the smartphone market, for example, the memory dimension is central to technological development and also selling, since the new models always try to bring more and more space for its users.

So, the technologies of memory allowed that the material world organization was replaced by an immaterial one, which has the flow as an important aspect. As a result, the electronic information is becoming a central part of society, modifying the collective memory and influencing projects of remembering and forgetting (Ibrahim, 2018). This liquid society, as Bauman (2003) claims, has a lack of stability and it is always uncertain. Because of that, we live, today, a "memory boom", since we search, in the past, an anchor for this culture of the present (Huyssen, 2000). Consequently, we live the constant sale of memory, as the past is always a theme of culture contents and political discussions.

The participative memory

The contemporary society trust in digital materials to the archiving, especially because of how easy it is to digitalize, replicates and share (Van House and Churchill, 2009). Hence, there are profound changes in how we conceptualize memory, our collective and personal archives and our world visions about permanence. We live,

today, a utopia of an infallible memory, in constrict with the idea that the human memory is not trustworthy. As a result, we are seduced by the promise that it is possible to accumulate and store everything.

Another promised brought by the 21st century is the participative culture (Jenkins, 2006) since, after the Web 2.0, the users could be prosumers, consuming and producing content at the same time. According to the researcher, in this new logic, the individuals could become active participants, interacting ones with others, according to new rules. Those are spectators that also write and readers who also write, reality responsible for generating a massive amount of information and data.

The context is optimistic, in the sense of enabling the emergence of new voices, the one that was often silenced before. In the past, for example, the editorial market had a filter, which left a lot of content behind. All of it is changed in this new digital ecology because in the digital era, there is much more access and the feeling of losing that filter (Rumsey, 2016).

However, this new reality has the difficulty of a curatorship, since it is hard to select what is worth to be consumed. As a result, we are dawned in a massive amount of content, creating a constant crisis of attention and problems related to the mental health, like anxiety and depression. This crisis of attention is created because the capitalism system increases the stimuli that provoke distraction (Crary, 2013).

Thus, this system recreated the sensory experience, changing the perception means, because capitalism demands that we take as natural the quick alternation of attention from one thing to another. Therefore, the capital, when it accelerates the trade and circulation, produced a new form of human adaptability. It provoked a regime of distractions, full of modifications, which perpetuated the transitory process, with no pause for the individual subjective adapting to this new reality.

It is true that the problems related to the Web 2.0 are unaccountable, but there are, as well, the positive facts, as the participative memory itself. Before, with the editorial and archival restriction, the institutions decided what should be remembered and forgotten. However, with the growth of information access, it was possible the creation of new archives, libraries, digital museums, alternative websites and other examples that defy the institutionalized discourses. Besides, the social networks, like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were very important for the birth of new narratives, which are primordials nowadays for an "underground memory" (Pollack, 1989). In other words, those social configurations made it possible to share the "history seen from the downside" (Thompson, 1966). As a result, the history has now roles for protagonists who were before forgotten by its institutions, which just told the Winners' Histories, groups, that historically have the power and dictate what should be forgotten and remembered.

Naturally, the logic of participative memory evokes a disruption on social memory itself, since it is now fragmentary. Now, there is no space for a single way of remembering, because of the uncountable other voices. Those new ways of remembrance challenge the hegemonic discourse. Besides, regarding the obsession for memory in the digital era, there is a constant redetermination of past events. As a result, when there is a new post about an old event, a new one is created, since it is rebuilt in meanings.

This is the case, for example, of the traumatic events of the 20th Century, because they are always revived by the media narratives and by the participative culture. An example can be seen on Twitter because there are various pages that try to remember the past episodes. Some of them will be cited to show how is the participative memory within the internet.

The Participative Memory about the Second World War on Twitter

Twitter has the attribute of being instantaneous and objective, which can be explained by the space limitation of 280 characters (at first 140 characters). Therefore, news circulate with agility and that social network is a useful tool for journalists researching its stories and being updated. Because of those characteristics, it is common that the information is first handed through *Twitter* and more details are published by other social network or news portals.

Even with this instantaneous attribute, there are other accounts aiming to recirculate past contents. Thus, those pages go against the present time logic, and there are published pictures highlighted at this time. Besides the photos, it is also informed the date, place and a brief subtitle emphasizing the context. There are various contents, with posts regarding the Germans, Japanese, North-Americans, Britishers, and Italians. Besides the pictures, there are also remembered articles and cartoons published during World War 2. Those are the examples of the pages @WW2Facts; @WW2Today; and @RealTimeWWII.

The account @WW2Facts has 91.000 followers and has published more than 5.000 tweets since its creation. Many followers like and retweet the posts and there are also the ones who interact with the page with their comments and impressions. One of the posts published on the 8th December of 2018, for instance, showed the German soldiers from the Panzer division before an attack against the Volga, in Stalingrad, during 1942. A user commented: "And they look shellschocked now. They don't know what they're in for". Another one replied: "Prior? Looks like they already been to hell and back I guess they already were hey".

Besides this page, another one that is related to the Second World War 2 is the account @WW2Today, which remembers the events of the war on the day they happened.

In 2019, for example, all the posts are focused on 1944, 76 years after. To do so, it is used the #On ThisDay. In March of 2019, the account had 36.000 followers and it is active since 2010, counting 2.961 tweets. Additionally to Twitter, the owner also dedicates his attention to a blog, where he publishes an expanded content of what is tweeted. Because of that, it is possible to state that this page has also a trans-media content. It was created by Martin Cherett from the United Kingdom, who introduces himself as a specialist of II World War. According to him, the blog is a process of exploration and learning and it is also opened to contributions. Finally, Mr. Cherett also created a fan page on Facebook, which, until March of 2019, counted more than 8.000 followers.

In Twitter, it is published information about the Second World War, using the hashtag already cited. In some cases, there are only short tweets, with a hyperlink for the complete content at the blog. In other ones, the posts are longer, and they are followed by pictures of the period. An example is a *tweet* from December 7th of 2018, which brings the information, followed by the blog link: "The 44th Royal Tank Regiment finds itself fighting against Panzer IVs in Italy. Newly equipped with Sherman Mk IIIs, they were mobilizing to support Canadian troops when they became under attack..." (@WW2Today). However, this page doesn't reunite so many interactions as the @ WW2Facts, even with its increased number of followers.

Finally, the @RealTimeWWII is the bigger between the cited pages and has currently 500.000 followers. It is active since 2011 and was created by Allowing Collinson, a history student from Oxford. The project idea is to publish the war events on the same day and time that it happened, reflecting the 6 conflict years. In 2019, the project is in 1941, but it is its second time since there were approached already the 6 years of war. So, the history is once more being retold, with new pieces of information and significations. The tweets are published various times a day and some of them are followed by photographies. They are liked, retweeted and in many cases, the users also comment on them.

Besides, the page is not only centered on the main events of the war, because it also brings other related themes, not so approached by other media products, since Collin, its owner, also publishes contents shared by users, who tell stories about relatives and also make available journals and letters that have never been published before. Because of this fact, it is clear that the page doesn't bring necessarily the institutionalized history since it also publishes contents of a participative culture.

As a result, the history told on those accounts are not the official version, privileged by the scientific approach, as a reflex of the positivist thought. Now, there is a movement that tries to give voice to the ordinary individuals, the ones that were once forgotten by the main discourses. This new context is also strengthened because

of the participative culture since those narratives can now emerge more easily through the Web 2.0. Those pages are examples of this reality, afterward, they are created by ordinary individuals, interested only on sharing content and collaborating. Nowadays, those accounts have more than 10.000 followers and they bring the possibility of dictating of what is deserved to be remembered. As a result, those are perfect illustrations of prosumers within this participative memory, which also acts on the construction of collective memory.

Conclusion

The social memory has suffered many major transformations through the 21st Century. The technologies of memory aren't new. The beginning of writing itself can be described as the first case of those technologies. On the past, the Sumerians, who printed code on a rock surface, allowed the content archiving in a way that was never seen before. From this moment, human beings started to trust on technologies of memory for remembering.

Following, the newest disruption suffered by memory was the digitalization process, which allowed the emergence of digital archives and online libraries. This new reality changed the way we handle content preservation. Besides, through social networks and the participative culture, memory stopped being centralized on institutions' hands, being also constructed by individuals, through the sharing of visions. As a result, the logic of the collective memory suffered a modification and could be more democratic.

A reflex of this new context was the creation of pages on social networks by individuals, with the goal of remembering and recirculating contents from the past. Those accounts contribute to bringing new meanings to the history, among other narratives. Examples are the pages @WW2Facts; @WW2Today; and @RealTimeWWII.

This paper aimed to build a cartography of those accounts, understanding how they contribute for the construction of new memories. Usually, people have access to history through official institutions or mass media vehicles. However, with the help of social media, history can be retold and therefore reconfigured. As a result, there is the emergence of new voices and new testimonies, which bring the "underground memory", as stated by Pollack (1989).

It is important to question, however, whether this new reality makes history more democratic or not. On the first studies about internet, there was an optimistic view related to the possibilities brought by the medium (Lévy, 2000 and 2003; Jenkins, 2009). After, nevertheless, scholars began to question this context and published a more pessimistic perspective. It is important, nonetheless, to have a critical view regarding

this phenomenon, understanding the possibilities brought by this democratization of speech and easiness of publication and, at the same time, the dangers of the monopolies faced with the multinational tech companies, as Google, Amazon and Facebook.

So, when researching about social memory and its changes in the 21st century, it is relevant to understand if history became more democratic or if the institutions still dominate discourse. The field of study is still new, as technologies suffers changes constantly, but it is necessary to understand memory through this new perspective. This paper aimed only to build a cartography about the pages in twitter that try to bring new voices related to the Second World War. However, it necessary to have a broader look on the phenomenon of digital memory, understanding how and if those new initiatives bring an "underground memory" and change the way population understands history.

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