

## ***From Tales of the Field to Tales of the Future***

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Keynote Address

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### *Abstract*

John Van Maanen's account of the evolution of ethnographic narratives provided far more than insight about classic anthropological and sociological texts. By encouraging qualitative researchers to focus on the rhetorical and political qualities of voice, style, authority, representations of selves and others, he exposed the often hidden assumptions built into fieldwork and scholarship. It is not too much to say that no other single text has so forcefully shaped and inspired our understanding of qualitative research and narrative writing across the social sciences.

Van Maanen's work inspired two cross-disciplinary projects. One charted the cultural, rhetorical, and narrative influences that constructed classic ethnographic texts; the other created a common cultural code for new explorations of organizations and cultures. One result of those projects is that those of us doing qualitative we have become more comfortable in our textual diversity if at times challenged to find the appropriate evaluative standards to determine its worth and contribution. We have also embraced, if not fully acted upon, a perceived need to make our scholarship more relevant to diverse publics inside and outside of the academy.

Since *Tales of the Field* was published in 1988, rampant globalization, violent extremism, failed states, new media, rising economic and political powers in Europe and Asia, the specter of global warming, and a host of other challenges have demonstrated that how we think about organizations and report research about them has extraordinary potential for new forms of expression and impact. These "tales of the future" will likely push the boundaries of narrative, qualitative methods, and visual communication as they make more and better uses of new media and Internet circulation. They will also encourage us to address wider public audiences, including those in government, the military, intelligence, non-profit, and for-profit organizations. The time is right to consider how best to prepare for public scholarship that takes on new forms and formats, which is to say, how to extend what we understand about *Tales of the Field* in order to prepare for tales of the future.

## **Blame John Van Maanen For Me Being Here**

Picture me in Ardmore, Alabama, during the long dry summer of 1987. I am, at that time, thirty-five years old with hopeful eyes and just this side of handsome, living largely on my dreams of an epic writing life while doing my daytime job teaching at a local university. The local university was UAH, say U-AHHH, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the university whose logo was an image of an “empty head,” and which itself was living largely on its own dream of achieving seriously higher status as a recognized center of space science, engineering, and materials technology.

It was an odd and yet interesting place for me to be me growing into my new professorial skin. So I wrote about it. I had learned that the genre-crossing style of writing I was doing was something called “ethnography,” although I inflected that style with a one part new journalism, one part detective story, and two parts rock n roll, the result was a series of nonfiction short stories about living and working in Werner von Braun’s “rocket city,” complete with its vision of a future made of the confluence of capital and technologies and conservative, Christian politics.

As I say, it was an odd and interesting place for someone like me, a critically and culturally oriented organizational rhetorician, a complete nontechnologist with a wide liberal stripe and no Baptist headlock on my heart. Odd and interesting for someone like me, trained in communication theories, with creative and biographical writing as my research tools. The literary critic Kenneth Burke told me, over dinner one night at Mark Twain’s house in Hartford, Connecticut, that this odd juxtaposition of method,

opportunity, community, and madness provided me with everything I needed to enact “perspective by incongruity.”<sup>1</sup>

I never forgot that comment. I turned my own particular “perspective by incongruity” into a reason to explore an art form by writing from that perspective about Huntsville. The manuscript that emerged was a critically informed cultural take on the community, its secret Star Wars command and its public shopping malls; its software start-ups and its bottomless military funding; its new venture capitalists and their old gothic Southern neighborhoods. It was about a time, and a specific cultural space, where there was still a reasonable likelihood that the nice retired gay person who read the Atlanta newspaper on his front porch under the magnolia tree down the street in the late afternoons was also keeping captive a crazy relative in the attic while investing that relative’s money in illegal arms deals in Nicaragua.

Okay, so I made up the magnolia tree. I plead poetic license. But Huntsville was a critical cultural nexus where the seemingly ordinary mixed it up in the everyday with the truly strange. How to convey that?

I chose this “new” style because there was no way the old style of traditional academic reporting could handle the “it” that was there and then. It was no longer possible for me to accurately *represent* the culture, for accuracy in this government town was both a political fiction and a strategic deflection away from what was really going on, the meanings that were *really* important, just beneath the surfaces of talk and folded into the actions.

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<sup>1</sup> See a discussion of this concept in Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History, Revised Edition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 166-175.

I needed to develop a style of writing that was capable of bringing readers into the symbolic dimensions of a constructed storyline, the meaningful seeds sown into everyday conversations by the seemingly innocent act of naming things that would only later blossom into patterns, the meanings in the patterns themselves only evident further on. I needed to connect those symbolic patterns to human mysteries by exploring the confluence of capital and desire, the contradictions of love and work and money amid the lived complexities they lived through and often for. It was necessary to move away from strict reporting to *evoke* the local nuances, the everyday ironies, the high subtleties of language that marked the side-by-side “plural present”<sup>2</sup> of the given place, of the particular people, and of the velocity of change and of the emotional work of the time.

Perspective by incongruity no longer seemed so strange to me.

What did seem strange was the fact that the book manuscript that came from those rich engagements with organizational life was roundly rejected. I thought—no, I *knew*, I was doing the right thing in my writing, but academic editors from sea to shining sea told me “no.” No.

*No?*

Oh, most of them *liked* it. Some praised the boldness of it. They all thought the quality of the writing was good, *original* even. But I was assured there was no apparent scholarly market for that sort of genre-crossing narrative writing, not about organizational cultures, not about communities, not about government work or academic summer conferences dedicated to finding new ways to express our scholarship.

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<sup>2</sup> This idea is explicated in H. L. Goodall, Jr., *Living in the Rock n Roll Mystery: Reading Context, Self, and Others as Clues*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.

By then, I had pretty much decided that if I couldn't bring this sort of writing *to* my scholarship, and in turn bring this sort of scholarship into the field, that I ought to seriously consider leaving the academy. I could always play rhythm guitar in a rock n roll band. Or open a diner. I figured I had the summer to think it over.

The long dry summer of 1988.

Then a miracle occurred, or maybe just an odd thing, but either way what happened saved me from myself and my self-reflexive musings. I received a phone call from Kenny Withers, the executive editor at Southern Illinois University Press. He said, "I have good news! I'm publishing your book."

I thought he had made a mistake. "But you rejected the manuscript a few months ago," I offered, not unkindly.

"I know that," he replied. "I am not *feeble*." He paused. "But John Van Maanen actually liked it (he seemed surprised by that, as if John hadn't liked much he had been asked to review) and I've had a recent change of fortune, so I've changed my mind."

He could probably feel my fat smile through the telephone line.

John Van Maanen was my organizational ethnographic hero. I had read, raved about, and practically memorized *Tales of the Field*.<sup>3</sup> That he had actually *read* my manuscript and *liked* it was more than I could have hoped for, and, in retrospect, probably a lot more than the book deserved. I decided to keep my day job and my dreams of the epic writing life.

The "change of fortune" Kenny referred to was even stranger than this sudden turn of events. The money needed to fund the publication of my book was made possible

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<sup>3</sup> John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

because Kenny sold the paperback rights to a book by William B. Ober entitled *Boswell's Clap and Other Essays: Medical Analyses of Literary Men's Afflictions*. Because a university press is a nonprofit organization, Kenny needed to write off his profits from the sale against projected losses by signing books he liked, but didn't think would earn back the investment he made in them. My book, despite Van Maanen's endorsement (or maybe because of it), was one of them. Actually, Kenny later told me my book was at the head of his list of books he felt wouldn't make a dime.

He sure of it.

Happily for me at least, he was proven wrong. *Casing a Promised Land: The Autobiography of an Organizational Detective as Cultural Ethnographer* (1989) sold well enough to justify two more editions and still remains in print. It was reviewed widely and well inside and outside of the academy, including a prize review in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* under the title "Philip Marlowe, Private Ethnographer." I love that title.

Perspective by incongruity. From the other side of the story, it's still a life and writing trope with exactly the right name.

But I've learned to take a larger, if somewhat less exalted view of it.

After all, where would I be now without Kenny Withers taking a chance? Indeed, where would I be now without the sale of paperback rights to an obscure scholarly treatise on an esoteric topic? Indeed, where would I be now without Mr. Ober's interest in the repeated bouts of gonorrhoea suffered by the journalist James Boswell?

Or, closer to the subject at hand: where would I be without John Van Maanen's singular positive review?

With facts like these, who needs to write fiction?

### **But Enough About Me, Let's Talk about John Van Maanen . . .**

John Van Maanen's account of the evolution of ethnographic narratives provided far more than mere insight about classic anthropological and sociological texts. By encouraging qualitative researchers to focus on the rhetorical and political qualities of voice, style, authority, representations of selves and others, he exposed the often hidden assumptions built into fieldwork and scholarship. It is not too much to say that no other single text had, in its time, so forcefully shaped and inspired our understanding of qualitative research and narrative writing across the social sciences.

And why was that?

What John Van Maanen did was reveal the evolution of our common *narrative code*. By carefully explicating the textual constructions of realist, confessional, and surrealist tales, he uncovered more than a language for describing ethnographic works and authorial practices; he uncovered what lies beneath the truths (and the myths) we live by.

As a foundational work in the field it was more than a book about writing ethnography. It was the organizational ethnographer's equivalent of Watson, Franklin, and Crick's discovery of the structure of DNA. *Tales of the Field* revolutionized the ways in which organizational cultures researchers thought about three things: (1) the code-reading and writing relationships; (2) the transcription process for reproducing an ethnographic lineage textually; and (3) the selective relationship between writing about a

culture and that which we were seeking to represent about it, including our own sensemaking (and anti-sensemaking) position and personal immersion in that ongoing protean construction.

With the publication and wide cross-disciplinary dissemination of *Tales of the Field* he inspired two loosely connected writing projects.<sup>4</sup> First, there emerged among teachers of organizational cultures and fieldwork a cultural ethnographic “Genome Project,”<sup>5</sup> a mapping of codes in extant texts and deep historicizing of them. This was and continues to be a project to uncover the hidden meanings within ethnographic narratives that also serves to introduce graduate students to versions of our research past in order to open up their research futures.<sup>6</sup>

Second, we began a cultural ethnographic “Socio-Nome Project.” This project transforms writing about fieldwork, about cultures, about organizations, and about management, as well as changes the heads of those of us who study them. It serves as an

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<sup>4</sup> Van Maanen is clear about the influences that led him to his interest in the rhetorical and narrative qualities of organizational ethnographic texts. From an early appreciation of the urban sociological ethnographies of the Chicago School and anthropological fieldwork of Malinowski, Mead, Bateson, and others; through the post colonial revisionist assessments of Clifford Geertz, George Marcus, and James Clifford, and others; to literary theorists including Hayden White and novelists too numerous to name, he has integrated a close reading of texts with an equally close assessment of how texts were and are constructed.

<sup>5</sup> The terms “Genome Project” and “Socio-Nome Project” to describe these influences is my own creation, drawn, as I’m sure readers recognize, from similar paths in genetic research.

<sup>6</sup> Some examples of work done in and about this tradition from anthropology include Marc Manganaro (ed.), *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990; Roger Sanjeck (ed.), *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990; George Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick & Thin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. One excellent example from organizational studies is Karen Goldern-Biddle and Karen Locke, “Appealing Work: An Investigation of How Ethnographic Texts Convince,” *Organization Science*, 4 (1994), pp. 595-616.

architectonic art and science informing all new ethnographic practices, a way of bringing into every text its own realization of itself *as a text*.<sup>7</sup>

Those goals thusly imagined, what did this Socio-Nome Project look like? What did it entail? I prefer to position myself as a textual detective, so for me to get at the answers to those pragmatic concerns requires reading the clues in texts that John left for us. We must ask, how did *he* represent culture? In a lecture he gave in 2003 (which is easily stolen on the Internet, which is where I got it) his Powerpoint slide posits this notion:

*“Culture involves meaning, it is attached to both organizational products and processes, and it both shapes and reflects social and material conditions. To take a cultural perspective is to consider the pattern of meanings that guide the thinking, feeling and behavior of the members of some identifiable group.”*<sup>8</sup>

Hmmmmmm.

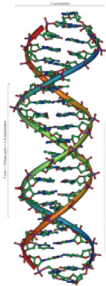
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<sup>7</sup> Some examples of work done in and about this tradition in Communication Studies and Sociology include Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (Eds.), *Composing Ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996; Carolyn Ellis, & Arthur P. Bochner, A. P., “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject,” in N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000, pp. 733–76); and Norman Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997. Four excellent examples applied to organizational settings are Michael Parker, “Becoming Manager: Or, the Werewolf Looks Anxiously in the Mirror, Checking for Unusual Facial Hair. *Management Learning*, 35, (2004), pp. 45–59; Gideon Kunda, *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High Tech Organization, Revised Edition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006; Julian Orr, *Talking about Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996; and Sarah J. Tracy, “The Construction of Correctional Officers: Layers of Emotionality Behind Bars,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10, (2004), 509–533.

<sup>8</sup> From [http://ocw.mit.edu/NR/rdonlyres/Sloan-School-of-Management/15-322Fall2003/C30EC796-8405-46DF-8575-8C297120C66B/0/ses8\\_cultural\\_rules.pdf](http://ocw.mit.edu/NR/rdonlyres/Sloan-School-of-Management/15-322Fall2003/C30EC796-8405-46DF-8575-8C297120C66B/0/ses8_cultural_rules.pdf)

And here is another clue, from *Tales of the Field*: “ethnography is a written representation of culture.”<sup>9</sup> When we combine these two foundational clues, these rhetorical and narrative framing devices for the Socio-Nome Project, we come to understand that ethnographic tales are, like DNA, always about a double helix of stored information, two strands of data streams intricately intertwined. One of those strands of information consists of the potential of recognized and acknowledged things, thoughts, actions, and words to create and constitute patterns of meaning in cultures; the other strand consists of the potential resources available to the teller of the tale because he or she is personally situated in the story, both as a writer and as an organizational product, both as a self-reflexive agent of her or his social and material conditions, and as a product of them.

If we could visualize these textual strands as DNA,<sup>10</sup> they would look like that classic double helix model:



The resemblance is canny.

One practical consequence of this duality of thought has been to challenge existing publication standards and evaluative criteria applied to ethnographic work,

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<sup>9</sup> John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA>

nowhere more apparent than among qualitative scholars publishing in qualitative journals. Omniscient narrators have largely gone the way of Oldsmobiles. Credibility of voice is determined by the author's ability to implicate herself or himself in the text, both in reasons for being interested in what is being written about as well as self-conscious about the problematic of representational writing from his or her point of view.

The good news from these changes is that narrators are held accountable for their position and authority in relation to those we study; the downside has been that evaluations of what constitutes a "good study" are often highly conflicted. Does voice trump findings? Does a sympathetic narrator and good story count for more than the argument offered about a workplace or practice? Whose meaning is it, anyway? And what are we supposed to do with these stories?<sup>11</sup>

Now the cynical among us might say that the self-conscious turn in management and organization studies is at best a case of an academic's revenge, wherein lower paid and lesser statused denizens of the global campus swamp prove, once and for all, that we *are* smarter and better prepared for leadership positions than those who opted out of school in order to make elephant money making bad decisions, oppressing others, and ruining lives. A well-told story wrapped around a high-minded theory is the best revenge, eh? That'll show 'em! Publishing a story is better than placing a fresh dog turd in an empiricist's mailbox, right? If, that is, our organizational betters or fiber-challenged empiricists actually *read* them, wept over their revealed truths, saw themselves in them and repented and so on, which of course they mostly don't.

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<sup>11</sup> For an extended discussion of the evaluation of narratives, please see H. L. Goodall, Jr., *Writing Qualitative Inquiry: Self, Stories, and Academic Life*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008.

Perhaps that is because we are writing for the *wrong audiences*. Or publishing them in the wrong outlets. Or trying to change the wrong world. But I will return to these notions later.

For now let me just say that the creative controversies John Van Maanen wrought as a result of *Tales of the Field* could no more have been envisioned by him than Watson, Franklin, and Crick could have envisioned their gift of genetic understanding and knowledge of life being implicated in insurance company attempts to deny coverage to those curious enough to know what they are eventually in for, or to dark-side defense contractors using that knowledge to experiment with designer weapons of mass destruction for targeted ethnic populations. Instead we can applaud efforts to use what we know about DNA coding to build new defenses against disease and better ways of understanding the intricate connections between who and what we are as human beings in the grander ecology of the blue planet and beyond.

We hold the capacity, and the power, for good and evil in both hands, always. Your hands, my hands. We work in the world where we live and we work and live however best we can. For those of us engaged in qualitative research of organizations, our hands are often poised over a keyboard as we create accounts, reports, fieldnotes, and stories. In our computer-aided cocoons the world outside may seem to stop as we open up discursive spaces, the inner worlds we live *in* and very often live *for*. We compose our tales of the field and of the fieldwork and of the writing.

The world turns. While it turns we adapt to our ever-changing environments, whether physical, political, relational, or textual. Our tales continue to be told. And life itself, as Anthony Giddens once put it, somehow manages to go on.

There are, of course, wars, famine, new films, diets, scandals, music, tragedies, Brittany Spears, Starbucks, and seemingly endless elections. But what can you do? We can't blame the code for the coding. We tell *stories*. We do what we must do, what we are trained to do to survive and prosper, which is to use the codes we know, and the stories we know how to tell, to do new things that matter in the world that perhaps may save it.

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Since *Tales of the Field* was published in 1988, rampant globalization, violent extremism, failed states, new media, rising economic and political powers in Europe and Asia, the specter of global warming, and a host of other challenges have demonstrated that how we think about organizations and report research about them has extraordinary potential for new forms of expression and impact. These “tales of the future” will likely push the boundaries of narrative, qualitative methods, and visual communication as we make more and better uses of new media and Internet circulation.

Our cultural coding for storytelling, our rhetorical and narrative DNA, is always in the process of adapting, making new connections, changing. But *to what purpose*, beyond tenure and promotion? Don't get me wrong, I'm all for tenure and promotion and believe me I understand fully the inner workings of the Higher Education Machine. I've also been personally guilty of every tale-telling failing I'm about to rail against. At fifty-five I have thoroughly enjoyed a career made out of them. But I also think I have lately learned something of value about the uses of what we write, and I'd like to complete this presentation by sharing it with you.

For me, there must be, in our seminars and methods courses and published research and passing on to the next generation a sense of scholarly purpose, a new urgency to engage the world and its many organizational and management challenges in new narratives. There must be a modest course adjustment from the “me-search” territory that characterizes even the best autoethnographic tales of an organizational life, as well as a move beyond the ever-cleverer tongue-twisting applications of post-structuralist theories to manager’s and workers’ lives. Instead, we must expand the intellectual scope and practical reach of qualitative forms of inquiry to engage a more public audience with narratives that embody our best ideas of how to make the world better.

We must cease believing that pages in scholarly journals have real “impact” or that citation indexes are the true measure of a scholarly life, and instead turn our collective attentions outward, into the larger marketplace of ideas, including in our metrics of impact and worth the considered opinions of those readers and listeners in government, the military, intelligence, non-profit, and for-profit organizations.

And why should we do this? The answer is simple. We can no longer trust that things will be better without us.

The world *needs* our stories.

Allow me a brief story to illustrate what I mean. It’s a story about DNA on both a biological and cultural coding level. My own two strands, although when it began, I didn’t know it. Where and how they have intertwined in my own narrative, and the narrative of my country, was unimaginable.

For those of you who have read my memoir, *A Need to Know: The Clandestine History of a CIA Family*,<sup>12</sup> you already know that I grew up in a cold war family that kept secrets. The largest secret was that my father was an American spy. And not just any ordinary spy, but a one-time clandestine officer whose exploits included working with Bill Colby to turn the Italian elections in 1956 and exposing the most infamous of all British traitors, Harold Adrian “Kim” Philby as the Russian mole that he was.

My father’s mistake was exposing that information to his boss, one James Jesus Angleton, the chief of counter-intelligence for the CIA and a friend and former student of Kim Philby’s. It was a mistake because Angleton was both genius and madman, what Angela Trethewey and I call a “dark side leader,”<sup>13</sup> and he could not find it within himself to *ever* admit he had been wrong about anybody. He ordered my father to stop his investigations and when my father refused—and this is where the story gets truly wicked—we found ourselves transported from the high life as it was lived in St. John’s Wood and the Court of St. James in London to a greatly lesser life among cattle ranchers and gas refinery workers in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

For my family, and especially for my father and mother, things went steadily downhill after that. By the time my father mysteriously died, at the grand old age of 53 in 1976, I had had enough of the family secrets about what my father did, the lies to cover up the secrets we told, and the strange thin man named Angleton who showed up at his

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<sup>12</sup> H. L. Goodall, Jr. *A Need to Know: The Clandestine History of a CIA Family*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Angela Trethewey and H. L. Goodall, Jr., “Leadership Reconsidered as Historical Subject: Sketches from the Cold War to Post-9/11,” *Leadership*, 3 (November 2007), 457-477.

funeral to smoke a thin Virginia Slim and gloat. I walked away from that organizational story of my life and made for myself a new life.

Or so I thought.

DNA and cultural coding are the deepest of deep structures. They move and mingle beneath in the blood beneath the skin of the stories we embody, always there, always working within us, moving us toward something I think we are not meant to name until naming suddenly and irrevocably is inevitable. Or at least that is how it happened to me, this strange mad poetry of the soul.

Fast-forward to 2001, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I don't know where you were or what you were doing when the first plane hit the World Trade Center, but I was getting my eyeglasses adjusted in a small shop run by two gentlemen of Middle Eastern descent. They invited me into the backroom of their shop to watch the coverage and when the second plane crashed into the remaining tower we all knew the world had turned.

In the scary days and nights that followed, I don't know why, but I began scribbling notes. "Fieldnotes from our War Zone," I called them. Writing them was oddly purposeful in the sense that it literally gave me something to do with my hands other than hold good and evil in them and wonder aloud what the hell was happening to our world, and, increasingly, to my country. For it became clearer and clearer to me that our national narrative was in a state of emergency, a state of extreme distress, and the people elected to deliver it were instead abusing the privilege and pushing us further and further into a kind of political, economic, and moral abyss.

But I was just a narrative ethnographer, right? What could I do beyond write up my fieldnotes and publish them in academic journals? Maybe start a blog. Maybe add

my voice to a growing chorus of people fed up with how the war and everything else was being handled.

So that is what I did.<sup>14</sup> And they were good first steps. Necessary, even.

In 2005 my disenchantment with politics and diplomacy became more focused on what I saw as a failure to apply contemporary theories of communication to these real world problems and issues. The Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy as well as the Secretary of State and others clearly relied on an antiquated advertising and pr model that just as clearly wasn't working.

Together with colleagues Steve Corman and Angela Trethewey at Arizona State University we formed a Consortium for Strategic Communication and volunteered our knowledge to the Department of State and the Department of Defense. We began with personal letters, phone calls, a lecture series devoted to the role of communication in combating the spread of violent extremism, and developed white papers on issues of counter-terrorism and public diplomacy that we published on our newly created website. We approached the issues of the construction of the U. S. image abroad from a qualitatively-assessed organizational vantage informed by narrative theories, intercultural communication principles, and a meaning-centered *foci* on how messages and images were interpreted in various geographic and cultural locations in the Middle East, Indonesia, and Europe. With a patented piece of social networking software developed

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, H. L. Goodall, Jr., "Fieldnotes from Our War Zone: Living in America During the Aftermath of September Eleventh," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8 (April 2002), 74-89 and H. L. Goodall, Jr., "Why We Must Win the War on Terror: Communication, Narrative, and the Future of National Security," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, (February, 2006), 30-59. The blogs are available at <http://comops.org/journal/>.

by Steve Corman and his business school colleague Kevin Dooley, we began tracking violent extremist websites and press coverage of terrorist events throughout the world.

Stories, cultures, the role of language and images, victims narratives, the social networks and organizations involved in the circulation of terrorist/counter-terrorism messages and public diplomacy, and the global mediated politics involved in every aspect of the struggle against violent extremism—these are the tales of the future we began telling to those who could best act on them. I say “tales of the future” because one sad fact of our work has been the conclusion that nothing much will change until January 20, 2009.

Nevertheless, our work applying communication theories, qualitative research, and alternative forms of organizing has found welcoming audiences in a wide variety of government agencies.<sup>15</sup> People in them are working to coordinate and to share information, develop better communication understandings and campaigns, and find creative solutions to very real problems. This is challenging work. And because terrorist cells are sophisticated in their acquisition of information and equally adept at distributing it, the challenges we face often mutate every day. For example, imagine our surprise seeing a video broadcast of Osama bin Laden talking about data drawn in part from *our* analysis of his organization in a document released by one of our partners, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a collection of our analyses and recommendations, please see Steven R. Corman, Angela Trethewey, and H. L. Goodall, Jr. (Eds.), *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Strategic Communication to Combat Violent Extremism*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> *Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qaeda's Organizational Vulnerabilities* (February 14, 2006) retrieved at <http://stinet.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA459919&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>

My point here is a simple one. On a personal level, it is pretty clear that the two strands of my biological and cultural coding have found a subject, a challenge, that I seem curiously made to engage. Truly, in some ways, I am doing my father's work, albeit on the sunnier side of the counter-intelligence streets. And I wouldn't know how to do this work had I not spent years honing my skills as an organizational ethnographer and narrative communication specialist.

Two strands. One me. What a journey!

Thank you again, John Van Maanen. Without your little blue book, none of this would likely have happened.

On a professional level what I have come to is a new appreciation for how important the work we do is to those who live lives beyond our academic walls and publications. And how pedestrian most of our publication outlets have become when compared to electronic forms of communication that make creative use of all available means of persuasion to capture the attention of diverse audiences and to work within news cycles and to engage the ideas that are circulating in the marketplace of ideas.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that we abandon traditional scholarship. What I am suggesting is that if that is all we do we will soon become largely irrelevant to the public. And I don't think any of us wants that. We do good work, hard work, careful and creative work, and we want it to have meaning for others and perhaps because of that, we can work together to change the world.

*I know we can.*

Martha Nussbaum's lecture "Liberal Education and Global Responsibility,"<sup>17</sup> suggests that our challenge as teachers and scholars is to use critical thinking, world citizenry, and empathy constituted out of the narrative imagination to jolt "the imagination out of its complacency, and getting it to take seriously the reality of lives at a distance."

I think she is right. The time has come for us to consider how best to commit public scholarship that not only takes on new electronic forms and formats, but which tackles the big issues confronting humanity from a decidedly qualitative ethnographic and narrative perspective. Chief among our challenges is the same one that has always been there for ethnographers: how to organize and manage our understandings and political actions toward the "reality of lives (and cultures) at a distance," whether the big issue that draws us there is one of combating terrorism or promoting sustainability or ending poverty, hunger, ignorance, and organizational injustices. One last example before I close. Do you know what the single largest failure has been in NSF funding for the past quarter century? It is that despite funding over one billion dollars of research to understand sustainable environments and reduce global warming, not a single policy has resulted. The failure to communicate, a failure to tell a convincing story, is the reason for that failure.

Our challenge, as scholars and as citizens, is to tell better stories capable of capturing the public imagination and moving their collective political will. One of the strengths of this association is that it provides a place for organizing a global social movement on behalf of narratives and storytelling to change our lives, our workplaces,

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<sup>17</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "Liberal Education and Global Responsibility," (October 25, 2002), retrieved at <http://www.ditext.com/nussbaum/carleton.html> .

our worlds. When I look at the program, I see a wealth of theoretical and methodological resources to bring to this important and potentially transformative task.

I repeat. The world needs our stories. Our expertise. Our cultural coding.

All of which is only to say, the world needs us to extend what we understand about *Tales of the Field* in order to prepare for tales of the future. I know we can do that.

Thank you.