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And Ye Shall Know Your Story, and Stick to It

Anthony Olcott | june 2011

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An odd document tiptoed onto the stage in early April 2011, surprisingly unnoticed, considering the radical shifts in U.S. policy for which it was arguing. Called *A National Strategic Narrative,* the fifteen-page booklet was put out by the Woodrow Wilson Center, and claimed to be authored by "Mr. Y"—although, unlike the mysterious "Mr. X" to whom the "Mr. Y" pseudonym refers (eventually revealed to be George Kennan, author of the famous "Long Telegram" of 1946, which argued for the policy that became known as "containment"), these authors are named in the pamphlet itself—Navy Captain Wayne Porter and Marine Colonel Mark Mykleby, both special strategic assistants to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Michael Mullen.

Reaction to the pamphlet was slow, and somewhat stumbling, because the program put forward by the two looks like a fundamental departure from current military doctrine and indeed from foreign policy. "Mr. Y" argues, for example, that the United States must move from "containment to sustainment," swaying the world not by our ability to "control," but rather because of our "credibility," which other nations will wish to emulate. We must, the authors argue, shift our investments to education, "sustainable security," and, only third, to the means necessary to ensure continued access to the resources of the world marketplace. We need this last because, "Mr. Y" says, we must move from "deterrence" to "fair competition," in order to help shape our "strategic ecology" in the "global system." Such commentary as there has been so far ranges from genuinely hostile, through puzzled, to cautiously positive, to quite positive . . . but maybe still a bit puzzled. *Puzzled* seems to predominate because of the mixed signals that the document sends out—not only was it authored by two high-ranking Pentagon staffers who are identified-but-not-identified, but also it

The contours of diplomatic engagement are changing rapidly, as are the environments in which diplomacy is crafted, honed, and practiced. New media have changed the pace and content of political awareness and provided new tools for diplomacy.

Every global issue now tests the assumptions and practices of traditional diplomacy. Non-state actors—whether benign or malign, constructive or disruptive—now play increasingly important roles in the conduct of international politics and lead us to think differently about global development, conflict, and reconciliation.

These issues, conditions, and actors are helping to refine, and perhaps redefine, what diplomacy means, how it is conducted, and how we examine the new terrain of diplomacy.

comes with a long, and very supportive, preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter, who until February 2011 was director of Policy Planning at the State Department, but has now returned to Princeton.

This ambiguous air of "officially unofficial" that surrounds the publication, as well as the radical nature of the two officers' proposals for changing our "national narrative," has combined to obscure what in some ways is the most remarkable part of the document—that all three take for granted the notion that the United States has "a narrative" in the first place. After all, "narrative," as Slaughter's foreword reminds, "is a story"— which, until some very recent moment in U.S. government discourse, was a word used *in contrast* to what State and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the other official organs deal in. The notion of "narrative" sat somewhat uncomfortably just to the more respectable side of "spin" and "propaganda," more innocent perhaps for being "just a story" but still bearing the onus of being "made up." What the various U.S. government agencies have claimed for some time to offer is "truth," not stories. As newly appointed Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes explained in 2006 when [interviewed by a German magazine](), "my job starts with the truth"—one reason, perhaps, why a signature action of her office was the creation of a "[Rapid Response Unit](https://www.example.com)," the task of which was to quickly rebut "disinformation" with "the truth." Certainly "truth" is what the CIA claims to offer—the Biblical passage [engraved in the building's main lobby]() reminds, "And Ye Shall Know the Truth, and The Truth Shall Make You Free." In 2008, U.S. Ambassador to Korea [Alexander Vershbow also used]() the "truth vs. story" motif in his defense of U.S. beef, calling accounts of possible mad cow contamination "disinformation"—a remark that set off several days of large-scale protests because of this "[insult to all Korean citizens]()."

THE STORY WITH STORIES

"Mr. Y"'s use of the term "narrative" seems to recognize one of the most important findings that behavioral psychologists have

been developing over recent years: Humans are fundamentally story-telling animals—we seem quite literally to be unable to comprehend "facts," or data, unless they are embedded in some sort of narrative matrix. Indeed, even something that we consider to be as fundamental as *seeing* turns out to be a process of physiological "story-telling" in which light-sensitive cells in the eye and pattern-recognition neurons in the brain combine to "tell" us what they think we are seeing, even if—as numerous experiments have proven—we fail to notice an actor in a gorilla suit walking through the middle of what we are staring at intently. Memory too seems to be more like narrative than it is like videotape, assembling what we take to be "the real event" from all kinds of mnemonic nooks and crannies (interesting examples here include plagiarism scandals, politician gaffes, conflicting court testimony, and other illustrations of the tricks that memory will play).

Even more important, stories appear to be the way that we encode instructions and heuristics, helping ourselves to remember them and teaching our young "the rules" by which our societies work. A great deal of scholarship points to various aspects of this process, suggesting, for example, that the metaphors we use (especially if we are unaware of them *being* metaphors) can have enormous impact on our actions, expectations, and interpretations of what we see around us (here a general argument; here one restricted to economics, here an intriguing one on language and perception). George Gerbner argued in the 1970s that TV had replaced other forms of storytelling, at least in the United States, and was now playing a powerful role in what he called "cultivation," teaching people moral values, rules of behavior, and what to expect from the world around them. (This tended, he wrote, to make people much more fearful of violent crime than the actual incidence of crime suggested they needed to be). More recently, scholar Ian Bogost has argued that computer games (played by 97 percent of U.S. youth, for an average of more than an hour a day, according to a 2008 Pew study) should be read as "deliberate expressions of particular perspectives [which] make claims about the world, which players can understand, evaluate, and deliberate." In a

different kind of affirmation, anthropologist Laura Bohannon illustrated the power of conflicting narratives in an [amusing but memorable way](#) in her description of how the Tiv people of West Africa "rewrote" the Hamlet story to make Shakespeare better fit their own cultural expectations and understandings.

One of the fullest explorations of humans as narrative-making creatures is that of scholar Christian Smith, in his book [*Moral Believing Animals*](#): *Human Personhood and Culture.* Arguing that "we not only continue to be animals who make stories but also animals who are made by our stories," Smith defines narratives as "a form of communication that arranges human actions and events into organized wholes in a way that bestows meaning on the actions and events by specifying their interactive or cause-and-effect relations to the whole . . . narratives seek to convey the significance and meaning of events by situating their interaction with or influence on other events and actions in a single, interrelated account." To illustrate his point, Smith sketches a few major narratives, including the following:

- The "Capitalist Prosperity" narrative, which celebrates the eighteenth-century invention of untrammeled commerce; limited government; technological innovation; and enlightened, rational self-interest. Though threatened by government regulation, utopian egalitarians, and antientrepreneurial freeloaders, capitalism can, if left alone, provide freedom and prosperity to the world,

- The "Progressive Socialism" narrative, which saw the early communalism of mankind eroded by the greed of rapacious exploiters who seized the means of production and grew fat on the labor of others, until the contradictions of raw capitalism opened the eyes of a progressive minority who understood their own duty to lead the rest of humankind to overthrow capitalism and build a society based on fraternity, justice, and equality.

All of these narratives have similar plot structures, with "good guys" and "bad guys"; threats that must be faced; virtues

that must be exercised if the threat is to be overcome; and great rewards in the end, provided that "the rules" are followed properly. Smith's sketches show how the world can look quite different in different narratives (paraphrased below, but retaining Smith's story-like wording):

- *American Experiment Narrative:* Once upon a time, our ancestors lived in an Old World, persecuted for religious beliefs and oppressed by aristocracies. Land was scarce and freedoms denied, but then brave explorers opened up a New World, and our freedom-loving forefathers crossed the ocean to carve out of a wilderness a new civilization, a way of life where men govern themselves, believers worship in freedom, and where anyone can grow rich and become president. This America stands as a city on a hill, shining a beacon of hope in a dark world.

- *Islamic Resurgence Narrative:* Once upon a time, while Europe was engulfed in medieval darkness, a glorious Muslim empire and civilization led the world in all manner of science, art, technology, and culture. Islam prospered for many centuries under faithful submission to Allah. But then, crusading infidels from the Northwest invaded the land of Islam, conquering, dividing, and subjugating us, forcing once-glorious Islam to suffer endless humiliations, infidelities, and corruptions through western colonialism, secularism, socialism, communism, mass consumerism, feminism, and eroticism. But today the tide is finally turning—Islam has awoken and is now returning to fidelity and glory, with a new vision of devotion to faith.

Smith's juxtaposition of the various narratives makes particularly clear that none of them is "right" or "wrong"—rather they are internally consistent systems for assigning value to action, determining the salience of information, and providing heuristics—shortcuts—that allow their adherents to know swiftly what requires their attention and what can be ignored.

ONE PROBLEM WITH STORIES

Despite all of the evidence for the power of narrative, there also is an inherent paradox—which is that, as "the rules," as something that "everyone knows," narratives tend to be naturalized, so that people are frequently unaware of the story in which they live. While it is easy to be aware of the narratives of others—because those seem so clearly "wrong"—it is much harder to acknowledge that the narrative within which one is living is also "just a story." Such acknowledgement is probably particularly hard for those who live in what might be called the "modernist" narrative, which places great faith in its devotion to "objectivity," "empiricism," "reason and logic," and the other legacies of what author David Gess calls "the grand narrative"—that the notion of freedom was born in ancient Greece, tempered and hardened by Roman law, and implemented in the Anglo-Saxon Enlightenment, so becoming the "natural" way of life that required self-defense against communism. In the 1970s, National-Security-Council-staffer-turned-dove Morton Halperin came to a very similar conclusion about what had pulled the United States so deeply into Vietnam, although he expressed his view in a slightly different way: "A majority of American officials (as well as the American public)," he wrote, had "a set of widely shared images," such that "the pre-eminent feature of international politics is the conflict between Communism and the Free World," making the "surest simple guide to U.S. interests" be "opposition to Communism."

As this Armed Forces Information Film from 1950 on how to "spot Communists" [at left, showing a clear candidate for suspicion, reading the Communist newspaper *Daily Worker*] may remind, there are times when it can be not only difficult intellectually to question a narrative, but even dangerous. Even in less parlous times, however, people tend to be reluctant to think of their belief systems as narratives, since that appears to drain them of legitimacy or importance. Attempts to introduce "narrative analysis" into the analytic community have found heavy going, because analysts tend to be wedded to "rational actor" political models, Freudian psychological constructs, or

Marxist models of economic determinism (as may be seen in the amusing anatomy of various schools of Sovietology limned by CIA analyst Richard Shryock in a 1964 piece in *Studies in Intelligence*). Indeed, student of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Barry Katz has argued that reliance on the presumed dispassion of social science (emphasis on "science") was hardwired into the intelligence community from the beginning, basically as a marketing ploy, to distinguish the fledging, and bureaucratically unprotected R&A (Research and Analysis) branch from the departments of War and the Navy (both of which had "doctrine") and the State Department (which did "policy").
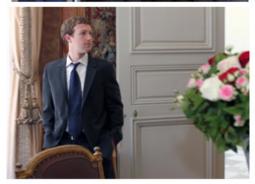
The consequences of *not* taking into account the power of narrative, however, are potentially much greater. In his *Why Intelligence Fails* (published in 2010), Robert Jervis offers a text he first wrote in 1979 at the request of some analytic managers in the CIA, who were trying to understand why they had not noticed how much domestic trouble the recently deposed Shah of Iran was actually in. Recapitulating his findings from three decades before, Jervis cited four "major errors," two of which were essentially failures to be aware of narratives: No one inside or outside of government, Jervis wrote, understood the power of the ayatollahs, because it "seemed inconceivable that anything as retrograde as religion, especially fundamentalist religion, could be crucial." Equally, no one credited "the role of nationalism and its twin, anti-Americanism," because no one in the United States considered the shah to be "a U.S. puppet" and so failed to see what he looked like to his own countrymen. As Jervis explains, because the shah did not always follow U.S. wishes, the Americans viewed him as independent; because he sometimes *did* follow them, he was despised by many of his subjects as a "tool of the Great Satan."

A BIGGER PROBLEM WITH STORIES

One of the objections usually voiced to cultural approaches such as narrative analysis is that people have a variety of identities, and so it is easy to be misled or, the more common error, to

see a mirror for one's own narratives in the narratives of others. This is quite true—people define themselves in multiple ways, and, moreover, have differing degrees of allegiance or adherence to those narratives, recognizing some almost as affectations or quirks but holding fast to others, even to the point (if challenged) of being willing to fight and die for them. Indeed, some scholars have argued that it is precisely narratives that enable states to ask their citizens to, for example, fight wars (or endure their deprivations), since "pure rationality would not be strong enough to produce the sacrifice"[1] required for success.

Until the recent past, people were able to navigate the contradictions and conflicts of their various narratives without much difficulty, because it was possible to control the information that resulted from inhabiting any one of the multiple narratives. Thus, a young person looking for employment might project a sober, ambitious mien to prospective employers while also managing to cultivate a peer-group reputation as a hard-partying slacker. As has been widely reported, however, the walls between one's various lives have basically eroded—as legal scholar Geoffrey Stone argued in a recent essay, "social and technological change [has] for all practical purposes gobbled [such privacy] up completely . . . once information is out of the bottle, once we share it with others, once others know it, we can no longer hope to put it back."

Perhaps more importantly, that genie is out of the bottle for governments as much as it is for individuals. Information control has been a fundamental lever of state power for as long as there have been modern states, but technology now makes such control essentially impossible. A particularly remarkable illustration of this came at French President Nicholas Sarkozy's "e-G8" conference on late May 2011, convened to substantiate Sarkozy's assertion that "legal and moral rules and more generally all the basic rules that govern society in democratic countries" also apply in the Internet—to which twenty-seven-year

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg meeting with French President Nicholas Sarkozy.

1. Helmut Lotz, quoted in Jeannie Johnson, Kerry Kartchner, and Jeffrey Larsen, *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 253.

old Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (who uncharacteristically was wearing a suit and tie, not a hoodie—perhaps because he was received at Elysée Palace by Sarkozy, who, as the photos from the official website suggest, looked distinctly uncomfortable) responded, "You can't isolate some things you like about the Internet, and control other things you don't."

"NON-STATE ACTOR" IS BEGINNING
TO SOUND LIKE "HORSELESS CARRIAGE"

The remark above, tossed off by Internet guru Clay Shirky at the end of a congenial TV debate with Anne-Marie Slaughter (again acting in what host Charlie Rose called "her almost semi-recent official category" of ex-White House staffer now returned to academia), captures one of the reasons why the new ubiquity and transparency of information make it almost inevitable that states will become tangled in the contradictions among their own operating narratives. Shirky is alluding to two processes: first, that people have a tendency to define new phenomena as a negated form of an old phenomenon that seems to be the closest analogy for the new one. Thus the automobile seemed, on first appearance, to be "just like" a horse-drawn carriage, save without the horse. That implies the second process, which is that, as the new phenomenon institutionalizes itself and proves to be transformative, it is the older thing that becomes outmoded.

Evidence of that process is becoming visible in continued assertions that the proper control agent for the Internet (and the broader information environment) is government. The strains and contradictions of that position are evident, for example, in the White House's recently released *International Strategy for Cyberspace*, (ISC), which lays out, at an abstract level, the principles that are intended to guide U.S. policy in regard to cyberspace. Repeating the support for "internet freedom" that was sketched out by President Barack Obama in remarks in China in 2009, the ISC posits that "[t]he more freely information flows, the stronger our societies become." What that means in policy terms had already been announced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2010, with an "Internet

freedom" goal of "[helping] individuals silenced by oppressive governments . . . [by] supporting the development of new tools that enable citizens to exercise their rights of free expression by circumventing politically motivated censorship." In practical terms, what the policy meant was funding the creation and dissemination of tools that allowed people to get around firewalls, and training activists in ways that the Internet might be used to encourage regime change.

At the same time, however, the ISC attempts to establish some firm boundaries around that freedom, sketching out some activities that are not to be permitted—"narrowly tailored exceptions" such as "child pornography, inciting imminent violence, or organizing an act of terrorism." Just as the word "pornography" has proven enormously slippery to define and, as Geoffrey Stone points out, technologically and socially impossible to constrain, so do the other two exceptions quickly prove problematic. Although it is easy for those unsympathetic to the Hosni Mubarak regime in Egypt to reject official charges that international support for the protestors in Tahrir Square (including that voiced by President Obama) was "inciting violence," or to dismiss Saif Qaddafi's claim that his father's regime in Libya has been "merely rooting out terrorists hiding in the city, just as the Russian army did in the Chechen capital, Grozny, just as Americans did in Fallujah in Iraq," it is extremely complex—and ultimately perhaps impossible—to articulate what distinguishes, for example, the two comparisons that Qaddafi's son offers. Similar ambiguities swirl around whatever distinguishes the President's call in the ISC for "norms of responsible behavior" in cyberspace from China's efforts to create and enforce a "civilized Internet."

More precisely, that kind of distinction is almost impossible to make on philosophical grounds but quite easy to make on the basis of state interest—as was immediately noted by the quasi-official *Russia Today,* which saw the ISC as "nothing more than another attempt to meet the interests of the White House while distracting the global community with abstract calls for freedom and information transparency." The problem, however, is that most nations are openly reluctant to justify their ac-

tions solely on the basis of naked self-interest and so prefer to couch their reasons in higher-order principles. During the Cold War, our staunch opposition to Communism made it easy to justify "government-to-people" foreign policy tools like Voice of America, which in effect were attempts to incite foreign citizens against their home governments by supplying them "the truth" while also using "government-to-government" tools to, for example, regulate international arms races or to establish international legal norms in defense of human rights. That opposition even helped clarify third-party relations, explaining U.S. support of odious regimes and rulers as still fitting within the larger narrative of U.S. support for fundamental freedoms, as long as those rulers were reliably anti-Soviet.

The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its satellite governments made it increasingly difficult to reconcile two conflicting narratives of support for freedom and the needs of *realpolitik,* just at the same time as the mushrooming availability of information everywhere made much more visible, and much easier to publicize, instances when the two narratives collided. In July 2010, Egyptian activist Rami Khouri characterized U.S. actions in the Middle East as "feeding both the jailer and the prisoner," charging in *The New York Times* that "[o]ne cannot take seriously the United States or any other Western government that funds political activism by young Arabs while it simultaneously provides funds and guns that help cement the power of the very same Arab governments the young social and political activists target for change."

Tunisian activist Sami ben Gharbia made a similar but even more fundamental critique, arguing that *any* policy toward the Internet—other than simply getting out of the way—would inevitably expose the United States, and indeed any government, to accusations of hypocrisy about the "Internet freedom" they claimed to be promoting. Part of the reason was structural—the Internet itself, as well as the greatest part of the tools and services it offers, is an American invention, thus opening anyone who used these (whether in ben Gharbia's native Tunisia or in Iran or China) to accusations of being "U.S. agents." To

have the United States *actively* pursuing a "freedom agenda" would, he argued, make such accusations even harder to refute. What *really* tainted any such "Internet freedom" agenda though, ben Gharbia argued, was that the United States was itself committing the same violations of "Internet freedom" for which it was criticizing others. As he noted, aggressive protection of copyright, monitoring of Internet use, and compulsory Internet protocol logging were all initiatives begun in the United States, which totalitarian governments were happy to copy.

"THE INTERNET IS LIKE WATER—IT GETS IN THE CRACKS AND TEARS STRUCTURES APART"

To be sure, the run-up to what proved later to be "the Arab Spring" was far from the first time that policy rhetoric and actual policy contradicted one another and may not even have been the most dramatic. For one example, Ukrainian nationalists responded to President George H.W. Bush's speech to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet on August 1, 1991 (soon dubbed by William Safire "the chicken Kiev speech") with much the same kind of anger and confusion as that shown by ben Gharbia, and for similar reasons—Bush's warning that "Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism" is the other side of the coin to which ben Gharbia was pointing when he observed that "the U.S and the West's support of Arab regimes is derived from the fear that any kind of democratic reform in the Arabic world will yield even worse regimes than the current ones."

However, there were some important differences between that event and now—pretty much summed up when Internet engineer Kevin Marks tweeted that "the Internet is like water—it gets in the cracks and tears structures apart" as the January 2011 events were unfolding in Egypt. The "Arab Spring" in Egypt was an ongoing demonstration of what some have called "the dictator's dilemma"—defined by Secretary of State Clinton as having "to choose between letting the [information] walls fall or paying the price to keep them standing." Unlike the past, though, when it seemed possible to argue that the Unit-

ed States could be in favor of freedom but against a Ukrainian vote to be free, the "fast, cheap, and out-of-control" information environment of 2011 is demonstrating that the dilemma extends as well to democracies and indeed to all hierarchical, top-down organizations. The English courts, for example, have recently lost battles to keep private the identities of a purported philandering sports star and an oil company accused of dumping toxic waste, in both instances because the information was widely available and circulating freely on Twitter and in the blogosphere. The State Department found itself in the same muddle in December 2010, when Wikileaks released a huge cache of classified diplomatic cables into the Internet. This prompted not only outrage but also extralegal pressure by some senior U.S. politicians to shut Wikileaks' server access and to cut off Wikileaks' financial support (outlined here by Shirky)—responses that looked disturbingly similar to the government censorship behaviors that the United States was criticizing in China. Although Secretary Clinton attempted to resolve the contradiction in a February 2011 speech by declaring the material made public the result of "an act of theft," the United States was nevertheless left arguing for an "Internet freedom" agenda at the same time that it was trying to forbid its own employees—and even possible future employees—from looking at material that was not only freely available on the Internet but was even on the front page of newspapers like *The New York Times.*

Claims have also been made for the "democratizing" or "civilizing" capacity of previous information technologies—the telegraph was celebrated as "annihilating time as well as space;"[2] the Linotype was hailed as "an enricher of the lives of millions" that "raises the intellectual standards of people so that they will become true thinkers and will not be led by flannel-mouthed politicians of low standards"[3]; and the short-wave radio was called "a new and strange weapon of war," able to "pass over

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2. As quoted in James Gleick, *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood* (NY: Pantheon, 2011), Kindle position 2643.

3. Thomas Dreier, *The Power of Print—and Men* (Brooklyn NY: Mergenthaler Linotype Company, 1936), pp. 11, 136.

frontiers and through censorship," using the human voice—"the most subtle, most used, and probably the most persuasive of all communications"—to woo audiences half a globe away.[4] As scholar Timothy Wu shows in his book of 2010, *The Master Switch*, each new information technology has begun as an unregulated, uncontrolled "game changer," and each was eventually brought under legislative and corporate control. These media were, in the words of Jonathan Zittrain, author of *The Future of the Internet—and How to Stop It*, transformed from being *tools*, or technologies that humans could apply in aid of a wide number of uses, to being *appliances*, or tethered instruments that the creators had so locked down that they could serve only a small set of prescribed and controlled functions.

Although the jury is still out on whether governments and corporations will be able to control the Internet as they have those other communication technologies, the cheapness of content creation and delivery, the ability to make unlimited copies—indeed, *perfect* copies, indistinguishable from the original—and the near ubiquity of cheap, easy-to-use digital devices make it clear that belling this particular cat will prove to be an epic battle, with no clear route to success. Certainly the "e-G8" was part of that battle, exemplified by Sarkozy's assertion that "governments are the only legitimate representatives of the will of the people in our democracies. To forget this is to take the risk of democratic chaos and hence anarchy." The ISC, too, is an effort in the same direction, citing five "principles that should support cyberspace norms." The contradictions in that effort are immediately manifest, however, in the distance between the first principle ("fundamental freedom of expression") and the second (respect for "intellectual property rights, including patents, trade secrets, trademarks, and copyright"). Within the narrative of the second principle, it is easy to defend, for example, the repeated seizure of domain names by the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement, on the grounds of copyright violation,

4. Harold N Graves Jr, *War on the Short Wave* (NY: Foreign Policy Association, 1941), pp. 61, 62.

or the Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) massive attack on peer-to-peer file sharing. However, within the narrative of the first principle, "fundamental freedom of expression," these seizures and RIAA's lawsuits and injunctions are coercive support for the corporatist side of what is an extremely wide-ranging debate about whether and to what degree ideas can be considered property (strong counterarguments to which have been made by Yochai Benkler, Lawrence Lessig, Pirate Bay founder Peter Sunde, and many others). Their argument was summed up by one-time Grateful Dead lyricist and head of the Electronic Frontier Foundation John Barlow, a last-minute addition to the e-G8's "intellectual property" panel (other speakers included the head of Gallimard publishing, the head of 20th Century Fox studios, and France's minister of Culture and Communication), who noted that "**I** don't regard my expression as a form of property. Property is something that can be taken from me. If I don't have it, somebody else does. Expression is not like that. The notion that expression is like that is entirely a consequence of taking a system of expression and transporting it around, which was necessary before there was the Internet, which has the capacity to do this infinitely at almost no cost."

Even if the Internet should follow the telephone, radio, and other information media into some locked-down realm of greater control, however, that control will at the very least be contested by corporations—as Mark Zuckerberg made amply clear with the announcement that Facebook is creating its own corps of international ambassadors to represent the company directly to foreign governments (nor is this the first instance of Facebook behaving as if it were a country—its interface also recognizes Kosovo as a country, even though two-thirds of the UN members do not, and it is not shy about pointing out that it has "more than five hundred million active users," a figure that makes it more populous than all nations on Earth save India and China).

It is no doubt the legacy of earlier "information instruments" like radio and telegraph that encourages governments to continue to conceive of the Internet in technologically deter-

ministic ways. If we may argue that funding Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty played some instrumental role in "bringing down" the USSR, then it makes sense to attempt to create an analogue "Internet freedom agenda" of firewall evaders and proxy servers. However, the ways in which the Internet "is like water" become immediately clear when an entity such as the State Department or the Department of Defense attempts, in Clay Shirky's term, to "weaponize social media." Not only does State stumble into the kinds of contradictions outlined above, but it even falls afoul of its own regulations. For example, an Office of the Inspector General internal study, released in February 2011, found that *all* of the forty-two overseas posts it examined were violating laws and regulations in their use of social media. The firewall evasion tools that State has been developing, some in partnership with the Broadcasting Board of Governors (the semiprivate, semipublic hybrid that now oversees U.S. propaganda efforts), have been discovered to violate the security regulations of at least one other U.S. government agency, causing that agency's website server to block access to State's official website—and prompting one Internet activist to joke:

> "The National Science Foundation is spending taxpayer money to (ineffectively) prevent scientists from learning about a debate about 'Internet freedom' tools the U.S. State Department and the Broadcasting Board of Governors are spending taxpayer money to support and promote, again using taxpayer money. Is there a federal irony department where I can lodge a complaint?"

Nor is that all—many U.S. and foreign internet service providers specifically block access to Tor, Haystack, and other proxy services that the State Department has funded. These companies have been known to threaten legal action against subscribers who attempt to use the State-sponsored programs in order to turn their own computers into Internet proxies for use by presumed dissidents in Iran and China, because those services also can be used to facilitate the untraceable transfer of "pirated" intellectual property.

MOVING FROM CONTROL TO CURATION

The travails of State illustrate the consequences of what Alastair Campbell, long-time press spokesman for British Prime Minister Tony Blair, dubbed "the gale of change" wrought by "the empowerment of new stakeholders, the digital network revolution, and the realities of globalization." Although using terms somewhat different than those employed by "Mr. Y," Campbell too argued that "communicators are not in control" and that "those who try to set agendas find agendas set by events." The reason, he suggested, was that the availability of information had brought at least two changes: one is that the distinction between what he termed "public sector values and private sector standards" has been erased, as people expect private sector-level performance from the public sector and a greater attention to values from the private sector; and, the second, the notion of "stakeholder" has now enlarged to include anyone who is touched by the actions or intentions of either public or private sector organizations.

Although Campbell used a metaphor of picture-painting rather than story-telling, the advice he gave in the speech cited above is essentially the same as that offered by "Mr. Y." Stressing repeatedly that large organizations—governments included—can no longer *command* attention or compliance, Campbell spoke of "putting your dots on your picture, over and over again, building your story up over time and sticking to it." A company can only survive this "gale of change," he asserted, if it repeatedly conveys the same messages, establishing the integrity and continuity of its "brand."

The image used by "Mr. Y" is more nautical, calling the country's "core values and principles enshrined in our Constitution and proven through war and peace . . . both our anchor and our compass." Much as a narrative defines rules, "Our values provide the bounds within which we pursue our enduring national interests." The pair of authors write that "[i]t is only by balancing our interests with our principles that we can truly hope to sustain our growth as a nation and to restore our credibility as a world leader . . . [and so] regain our credibility as a leader among peers, a beacon of hope."

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One need not agree with the substance of the story for which "Mr. Y" argues in the document *National Strategic Narrative*—indeed, the authors' proposal that the country should adopt a "National Prosperity and Security Act" (to replace the "National Security Act" of 1947, which in most ways set the present "command-control-contain" culture in place) is a kind of invitation to discuss the merits and drawbacks of that story. It should be encouraging, however, that such a high-level document (no matter how ambiguously "nonofficial") has raised the notion that "America" is a kind of brand that must be curated. The authors conclude:

> "As Americans we needn't seek the world's friendship or to proselytize the virtues of our society. Neither do we seek to bully, intimidate, cajole, or persuade others to accept our unique values or to share our national objectives. Rather, we will let others draw their own conclusions based upon our actions. Our domestic and foreign policies will reflect unity of effort, coherency and constancy of purpose. We will pursue our national interests and allow others to pursue theirs, never betraying our values."