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# *At the Edges of the Map:*

# *The Chronotope of Informatics and Maps of Human Terrain*

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General McMaster of the U.S. Armed Forces once remarked that "some problems in the world are not bullet-izable." He was speaking in reference to the complexity and often impenetrable nature of the information increasingly presented to military officers via PowerPoint briefings.[1] This remark indexes an increasing challenge that has confronted the U.S. Armed Forces in "new wars"[2] operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan: the effective presentation of a situational analysis which also synthesizes large tracts of intelligence data.[3] This problem of presentation manifests in the bureaucratic management of interdependent intelligence services, leading to "junior officers and enlisted men…[being] unprepared 'to take on tactical intelligence roles' at battalion and brigade levels."[4] This problem does not stem from a quantitative lack of intelligence, but an inability to manage or perceive intelligence at an operational level in an effective and clear way. This paper addresses two cases where this problem of perception becomes very apparent: one at the command level and one at the operational or training level. In this paper, we will examine the difficulty of managing intelligence

[1] Elisabeth Bumiller , "We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Powerpoint," *New York Times*, April 26, 2010.
[2] Duffield, Mark, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (New York: Zed Books, 2001), p. 10.
[3] John Ferris,"NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA: Toward a Revolution in Military Intelligence?," In *Intelligence and Strategy: Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 325-326.
[4] Ibid., p. 324.


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both within the context of the Human Terrain program and the U.S. Armed Forces' use of cultural intelligence, as well as the usage of PowerPoint in senior-level briefings in Afghanistan.

Commanders in the U.S. military are increasingly finding themselves lost in stove-piped bureaucracies. These bureaucracies often spring up to fill perceived gaps in intelligence; at times these bureaucracies serve few functions, and some have been described as "founded to provide some general a three-star command."[5] In these bureaucracies, PowerPoint is a prevalent tool used to present large amounts of information in a simple way. Information presented at PowerPoint briefings is, however, increasingly narrow in scope or unyieldingly complex due to the style it is presented in. This narrow scope is imposed upon command-level officers due to an overreliance on managing uncertainty in conflict, and can be said to reflect a focus on "process not strategy."[6]

This adherence to PowerPoint leaves no room for friction, no room for different conclusions, ideas or new intelligence to shape the message of the presentation. Here, information is sterilized, through intelligence analysis and processing to be as succinct as possible, and conditioned to only reflect the information required for a commander or staff's operational knowledge.[7] Information that is presented is therefore deemed that which is "operationally-relevant." This leaves little room for change in cases and flexibility, such as that required in situations of counterinsurgency.[8]

These U.S. military PowerPoints display a *typical* form; they have forceful and defining characteristics not unlike those of Mikhail Bakhtin's *chronotopes*: "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."[9] For example, the spatial and temporal conventions of epic differed greatly from, for example, comedy. While Bakhtin was writing about how meaning was created

[5] Col. Lawrence Sellin, "The PowerPoint Rant That Got a Colonel Fired," *Army Times*, September 2, 2010.
[6] Ferris, "NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA," p. 306.
[7] Nathan Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook*, (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army, 2008), p. 94.
[8] Ibid., p. 327.
[9] Mikhail M. Bakthin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Carolyn Emerson and Michael Holquist, edited by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-85.

through language in literature, his notion of the chronotope is nonetheless very useful when characterizing the generic conventions of military communications. This paper argues that these generic conventions matter not only in the context of communicating intelligence but in operations.

The characteristics of specific chronotopes inform a reader of the reality inside the text, of what the outside world means for the text (and therefore, the author), conveyed by the author, and signified to the audience.[10] The methods and content of this signification, in addition to the reader's contextual consumption of them, inform and condition the reader's relationship to an environment; "[c]hronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves."[11] In what follows, this paper will demonstrate how the U.S. Armed Forces create and condition an understanding of culture and information through a chronotope of *informatics* (literally, the science of information) in one particular text: the *Human Terrain Team Handbook*. Further, this paper demonstrates how this chronotope comes to bear upon a community of military personnel, to inform an understanding and an approach to "culture" in the context of U.S. military operations. This approach is one that conditions U.S. Armed Forces personnel to interact with, describe the lives of, and relay knowledge about populations in operational areas in ways that suffuse an analysis of civilian populations with perspectives meant to enable military operations.

The *Human Terrain Team Handbook* is a training manual developed for the U.S. Armed Forces' Human Terrain Systems. Human Terrain Systems is a support division of the U.S. Armed Forces employing personnel from the social sciences in order to give military officers deeper regional understandings of the operational theatre.[12] Its mission is described as an "intelligence enabling capability."[13] Human Terrain Teams (HTT) are a part of this division; these teams are sent out into villages and among locals to "support field commanders by filling their cultural knowledge gap in the current operating

[10] Ibid., p. 252.
[11] Ibid., pp. 84-85.
[12] US Army HQ, "Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin: Human Terrain System," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* (US Army Military Intelligence Center of Excellence) **37** (4). PB 34-11-4.
[13] Department of the Army, "Human Terrain System," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* (October-December, 2011): p. 1.

environment."[14] These teams are one part of the U.S. Military's push to develop a "cognitive transformation and culture centric warfare."[15] HTTs attempt to exploit *culture* to increasingly create a battlefield where the U.S. has a "Superior Information Position" and an ability to "convert information into knowledge and situational understanding, which is key to decision superiority."[16] Many scholars have written critiques of the HTTs, focusing especially on the ethical dangers of 'weaponizing' social sciences. In particular, anthropologists Hugh Gusterson, Roberto Gonzalez, David Price and Maximillian Forte have written on the violation of disciplinary ethics in HTTs[17], the neo-colonial implications of using cultural research to military ends,[18] and the consequent militarization of academic departments in North America.[19] Few researchers, however, have focused on how HTTs (and their narrow understanding of culture) have irrevocably shaped how military communications (and operations) occur.

Gathering human intelligence has largely meant that HTTs and commanders conceive of, and gather information on "culture" in a new way. Within anthropology, for example, there is no one definition of culture. Even within the U.S. military bodies which study culture, there is still no one definition.[20] To explore how HTTs investigate and map culture, one must understand what "human terrain" looks like – literally, to members of HTTs and furthermore, how human terrain is mapped out in a briefing. This paper will first explore the *Human Terrain Team Handbook* to present a clear picture of a U.S. Armed Forces understanding and appropriate response to what this explication of "culture" is, and how this shapes how an HTT can map and use "culture." Simultaneously, through the framework of the chronotope, this paper shows how the process by which the U.S.

[14] Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook*, p. 1.
[15] Robert Scales, "Statement of Major General Robert Scales, USA (ret.): Testifying Before the House Armed Services Committee," http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/04-07-15scales.pdf, accessed on December 19, 2013.
[16] Ferris, "NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA," p. 290.
[17] Hugh Gusterson, "Do Professional Ethics Matter in War?" *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, March 2010.
[18] David Price, "Human Terrain Systems, Anthropologists and the War in Afghanistan," *Counterpunch*, December 1, 2009.
[19] Maximilian C. Forte, "The Human Terrain System and Anthropology: A Review of Ongoing Public Debates," *American Anthropologist* 113 (2011): pp. 149–153.
[20] Alrich, Amy, *Framing the Cultural Training Landscape: Phase 1 Findings* (Alexandria: Institute for Defense Analysis, 2008), p. 37.

Armed Forces understand a battlefield environment, and war more broadly, shapes the production of meaning for soldiers and commanders in relation to ideas of *culture* and the operational environment. This exploration of perception and conditioning of meaning is especially important as the U.S. military prepares a force which is "best prepared to operate across the full spectrum of conflict; from full-scale combat to stability and reconstruction operations, including the irregular war that we face today."[21]

As the idea that "armed forces can act almost without friction on near perfect knowledge"[22] takes hold, it is increasingly difficult to see victory outside of information management, outside of idiosyncratic standards in military PowerPoint presentations. Distance from the battlefield can lead to a view of war as a game or as management, where commanders can push a button or read a bullet point to achieve victory. The game-ification of war was seen throughout preparations and training for the Iraq-Afghanistan conflict, in such enterprises as Operation Desert Hammer VI;[23] operations in "The Box" at the Joint Readiness Training Center. Further, the game-ification of war was situated amongst academic writings on defence, made real through policy in accordance with journals focused on "transdisciplinary, predictive theory for application to security issues."[24]All these examples and exercises were organized to show how "digital technology" and the predictive capability of simulation "…can enhance lethality, operations tempo and survivability across the combined arms arena."[25] These exercises and simulations all rely on technologies that either partially or fully mediate vision and perception in conflict. The relationship between these technologies and the virtual exercises they enable is one that can be understood as the realization and visualization of analytical categories, narratives, and data collected from HTTs. Therefore, it is essential to understand how these categories and narratives are constructed to better understand

[21] Peter Shoomaker, "Statement by General Peter Schoomaker, Chief of Staff United States Army, Before the Commission on National Guard and Reserves," http://www.army.mil/article/989/Statement_by_General_Peter_Schoomaker__Chief_of_Staff_United_States_Army__before_the_Commission_on_N/, Accessed on December 21, 2013.

[22] Ferris, "NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA," pp. 290-291.

[23] Der Derian, James, "Virtuous War/Virtual Theory," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 76 (2000): p. 771.

[24] R. Brian Ferguson, "Full Spectrum: The Military Invasion of Anthropology," In *Virtual War and Magical Death: Technologies and Imaginaries for Terror and Killing* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 97.

[25] James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military Industrial Media Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 3.

how conditioning perception and meaning in conflict can change the way that militaries organize to produce violence.

Reliance on digital technologies that mediate vision, protection and positioning (such as airborne attack drones, satellite surveillance from space, and night-vision equipment) has been described as contributing to a 'virtualization' of war.[26] However, virtuality is not only associated with how technology creates new avenues for perception on the battlefield. "Virtual war" then suggests the way that "the imaginary becomes significant in creating meaning in the chaotic context of war zones."[27] As the U.S. military turns to teams of social scientists to map the "terrain" of culture, there is a "virtualization" of culture as well: the creation of an imaginary map of culture to mediate decisions and craft strategies. Here, culture is not necessarily equivalent to the culture HTTs aim to "map." Instead, culture becomes cartographic. Culture is the map produced by the operational definition of "culture" in the *Human Terrain Teams Handbook*. The handbook is a "programming" manual, directing Human Terrain Teams on how to extract and produce the salient definitions of culture from local populations in conflict zones, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. From this programmatic definition of culture, the U.S. Armed Forces are meant to capture not only the salient cultural narratives of populations in operational areas, but also those that are meant to inherently enable military practice. It is an attempt to standardize a perspective on "culture" in order to create a mode of analysis inherently predisposed to enabling the use of force.

The HTT Handbook never actually gives a comprehensive definition of "culture." However, the elements of "culture" necessary to HTT missions emerge throughout the text. In what follows below, we will discuss the sections of text where differing understandings of operationally-relevant "culture" appear.

[26] Neil L. Whitehead and Sverker Finnstrom, "Introduction: Virtual War and Magical Death," In *Virtual War and Magical Death: Technologies and Imaginaries for Terror and Killing* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 1.
[27] Ibid., p. 1.

The *Human Terrain Teams Handbook* provides frameworks which tell HTTs how "cultural missions" look and why "culture"[28] is important. First, there is an emphasis on "social science research," letting teams know that to address "gaps in the unit's cultural knowledge," teams must design missions with "classic anthropological and sociological methods."[29] Second, any information gathered with these methods must be "operationally-relevant;" cultural data gathered by teams is "worthless" unless "distributed and briefed in the right manner."[30] At once, this preclusion defines "culture" as a bound entity, only relevant in the context of specific military operations, defining cultural knowledge as something which can be "distributed and briefed."[31] Strict definitions and presentations of "culture" create "tacit ontological binaries" between "war and peace, soldier and civilian and battlefront and home front," making "culture," for commanders, *easy to work with*.[32]

There is no definition of "culture" in the Human Terrain Handbook, regardless of a repeated invocation of the term to indicate an implicit idea of what is required to satisfy the U.S. military's want for it. The U.S. military's conception of "culture" is hampered without a strict definition, and this fails to address the contemporary critical lens that anthropology has used to re-examine "culture" as a basis for social scientific inquiry. One definition that addresses the complexity of this debate contrasts with the view that "culture" is limited to a series of agreed-upon classifications for social phenomena. Instead, "culture *appears* as an aggregation of universalized human subjects ready to interact with other such individuals through the medium of a particular and individualized, rather than a collective and intertwined, cultural heritage (emphasis added)."[33] This definition problematizes a military definition of "culture," labelling it as an ambiguous definition that is reliant on a static agreement with a collective set of rules and conditions that can then be manipulated and used in conjunction with the strategic

[28] I use quotation marks here and throughout this paper to indicate my use of the word "culture" as found in the Human Terrain Handbook, as opposed to a commonly accepted, academic usage of the word "culture."
[29] Finney, *Human Terrain Teams Handbook*, 4.
[30] Ibid., p. 4.
[31] Ibid., pp. 3-4.
[32] Robertson Allen, "Virtual Soldiers, Cognitive Laborers," In *Virtual War and Magical Death: Technologies and Imaginaries for Terror and Killing* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 154.
[33] Neil L. Whitehead,"Ethnography, Knowledge, Torture, and Silence," in *Virtual War and Magical Death: Technologies and Imaginaries for Terror and Killing* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 30.

planning of military operations. "Culture" for the HTTs is, again, something very narrowly defined and specific to the military context. And it is also reductive, in the sense that it must strategically be so in order to be operationally relevant.

A more specific, individualized conception of "culture" does not preclude any investigation of "culture" entirely. Instead, it advocates for a more nuanced approach that may involve examining "culture" as an aggregation of different factors at any one moment. It is possible that this definition may provide a unique "cultural" framework specific to one "operationally relevant" environment, instead of a definition that attempts to impose specific "cultural" conditions on an entire theatre of war. Such a definition might also provide a means to understand different populations in operational environments not as separate, bound "cultures," but as historically contingent groupings, lifeways, and relative practices. Understanding populations in this way may allow for an exploration of "culture" that addresses ongoing relationships with the state, and the impact of past and present strategic, economic, and violent conditions on a civilian population's perceptions and actions towards military personnel.

The concept of the chronotope is useful here, revealing how these frameworks in the HTT Handbook not only condition the image and presentation of "culture" for members of HTTs, but also how these meanings are integrated and applied upon battlefield environments through military operations.

Mikhail Bakhtin originally developed the concept of chronotope to describe the rise of the modern novel form,[34] though, as we will see below, it becomes an incredibly useful concept through which we can understand the HTT Handbook. A chronotope defines the connectedness of spatial and temporal relationships in an artistic work and can be used to define characteristics of narrative and genre in a work.[35] By examining a narrative through the lens of chronotopes; "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" and space "becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."[36] The chronotope allows for an examination of

[34] Bahktin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 84.
[35] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 44-92.
[36] Ibid., p. 44.

narrative which can define how the author and the audience are meant to perceive time, space and the relationships between. These narratives can help us understand how actions situated within reflection upon and reproduction of these narratives and how action taken in response to these narratives is never divorced from these narratives, but instead part and parcel in creating and sustaining them.

Bakhtin originally defined chronotopes through an analysis of the impact of genre in various literary movements. He argued that these literary movements, by deploying different genres could define and shape the environments, personalities, values and reality as a whole inside a text, but also outside of a text.[37] These genres could then, Bakhtin argued, affect readers through a reader's *dialogic* relationship to the text.[38] The text is not a "dead," static entity, but always in conversation. The text is in conversation, first, with itself, and second, with the audience and the outside world, where realms of meaning are conditioned and shaped in the course of contact and textual consumption. This environment of continually iterated upon and unstable notions of meaning is essential understanding how genre and narrative condition perception and action. As a text is read, circulated, reproduced, and commented on through time, its place in conditioning and giving meaning to actions changes as other texts, meanings, technologies and other means come to bear upon its interpretation.

This means as well that the HTT handbook, as a text, is also perpetually in conversation with itself and the outside world, where these realms of meaning are powerfully defined by the handbook's conventions. The handbook does not stand alone as an explication of U.S. military thinking on how to conduct war, but it does – as a part of this wider conversation -- impact the way that the U.S. military and others condition soldiers, policymakers and the public to think about enemies and others in war. When a

[37] Keith Basso describes this process among the Western Apache, outside of an analysis of just texts, with his statement: "The Apache landscape is full of named locations where time and space have fused and where, through the agency of historical tales, their intersection is 'made visible for human contemplation.' It is also apparent that such locations, charged as they are with personal and social significance, work in important ways to shape images that Apaches have or should have of themselves." Basso argues, much as Bakhtin does, that interaction with and authorship in literary genres (or in the environment for Basso) are essential to the constitution of meaning in society. Basso, Keith, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 62.

[38] Bakhtin relates that works of literature "have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself." *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 421.

definition and conversation precludes certain approaches to a problem, it also positions that definition as the only appropriate position from which to speak as part of a wider conversation. Therefore, the HTT's perspective not only defines "culture," but also the only way to speak competently about the concept in any environment that is related to its use. A perspective that isolates any definition of "culture" from the wider academic community is inherently only beholden to itself, and neglects any further development of the concept or approaches in coordination with the academic community.

The limitation of this definition is especially powerful when paired with Foucault's discussion of the act and responses of individuals to discipline, an act described and readily contextualized through the training of a soldier.[39] The soldier in the process of training, according to Foucault, is a body "that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."[40] The chronotope is that which fuses together the political, the goal, the use and purpose inherent in the Human Terrain Handbook, mobilizing these realities in text, and upon the bodies of HTT members. This text is the force which drives conditioning upon the body, conditioning upon "culture," and the production of a "culture" which can be mobilized by actors who are operating as members of a specific community of chronotopes. It is the tension between the docility of discipline and the utility created by discipline that the chronotope addresses. The chronotope is a conceptual tool that can reveal the matrix of calculations which inform the definitions and inherent suppositions that form the basis of and possible uses of "culture" for HTTs. Therefore, the definition of culture and the means by which this definition is mobilized in military practice disciplines not only a perception of what "culture" is, but it also disciplines the actions taken in response to this perception.

The Human Terrain handbook imagines "culture" as a list of variables which are "influences on current operational environments."[41] For the informatics chronotope and any presentations produced in accordance with it, the focus is on a "knowledge-centric"

[39] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 135-137.
[40] Ibid., 135.
[41] Department of the Army, *FMI 3-24.2 Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2009), pp. 1-7.

outlook, to generate "situational understanding…[the] key to decision superiority."[42] Operational-relevance is more than a frame for presentation, it is the narrative's grounding "pole" of perception. "Culture" is realized to its fullest potential under the command of an officer.

Time, existence and any possible implications of "culture" in the handbook's narrative are tied to "operational-relevance." Operational-relevance ties each element of cultural study to a specific and oriented position, a demarcation of a place where each element of "culture" slots into the wider picture of an operation. The concept of "culture" is conceived of as a finite and definable entity in the handbook, which must be engaged with in "real time" by a commander "keeping his finger on the pulse of the populace."[43] "Culture," in this environment, is conceived of as merely another calculable variable, alongside the logistics, tactical, intelligence, and training regimes already in-place for an operational theatre.

An HTT is initially tasked with a "cultural assessment" when newly assigned to a region. This assessment requires a "more robust socio-cultural, political and economic awareness of a research area."[44] This focus on "robustness" brings considerations of a team outside of the current operational environment to "add depth."[45] However, this extension of historical awareness of possible relationships to an environment and intrapersonal understanding still only acts to serve the construction of a *current* map of human terrain in an operational environment. According to the handbook, knowledge of history should be used to collect indices of "historical landmarks, religious shrines" and indications of "critical entities (people, places and things)."[46] This demarcation of history denies any situated understanding of the daily life of individuals, or any contextual understandings of local history. Instead, history is defined as a list of "critical" objects or places, which coalesce into an iconic explanation for tensions, power struggles and the needs of a populace in current operational environments. In attempting to understand what is "critical" in a particular community, this perspective denies a capacity to understand the historical contingencies which have attributed salience and prominence

[42] Ferris, "NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA," p. 290.
[43] Finney, *Human Terrain Teams Handbook*, p. 100.
[44] Ibid., pp. 85-86.
[45] Ibid., pp. 85-86.
[46] Ibid., p. 37.

to some entities and not to others. It can be described as understanding that something *is* important, but not understanding *why*. Furthermore, all history (through an initial Mission Analysis) must be able to coalesce on request and "must be available at the start of mission planning."[47]

In this context, history must be made to resemble the present; through "link charts" and presentations, history must take into account how any one element may affect or be altered by an operation. These historical elements are drawn from already-recorded histories or inspections of the terrain among local "cultures," and help to compose the "cultural awareness" of a commander, to give further detail to what is known as the "Center of Gravity."[48] This term is defined as the source of strength for a military force, a combination of physical and psychological factors which can be definitively outlined as a directive principle for a force.[49] The centre of gravity is now additionally defined through an appropriation of a local population's "culture" and history, in terms which give meaning to "culture" in a military-intelligence context. In the handbook, time and the specificities of "culture" therein, are injected only when they specifically create a picture for U.S. operational interests. The history of a "culture" only exists in the initial Mission Analysis, when a commander is required to get a feel for the initial human terrain. All "culture," from this point on, must limit itself and its definition to other operationally-relevant definitions and activities. Life and time are contingent on the human terrain (according to the pages of the handbook), contingent on the invocation of specific, operationally-relevant processes. The reports of an HTT and therefore, the HTT's definition of "culture," must be available on request. "Culture" must be able to be inserted into a system of programming and then recalled at the push of a button. Past this point, definitions are not iterated upon or altered to reflect more nuanced understanding that develops over the course of the operation.

This element of recall is where the chronotope of the handbook can be most clearly defined. The handbook outlines the myriad of "products" which HTTs are expected to

[47] Ibid., p. 37.
[48] Echevarria, Antulio, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine – Again!" (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), p. 2.
[49] Ibid., p. 2.

produce, all of which feed into wider systems of processing and recall for other bodies of intelligence. These products include "Cultural Assessments, Information Operations Themes, Internally-generated Reports, Reachback Research Center Reports, Media Summaries, Biography, Cultural Knowledge Reports, Trip Reports, Significant Dates and Events, Executive Summaries, Spheres of Influence Engagement Reports and Engagement Debrief Reports."[50] All of these various reports function at the specific request of the agency or individual who require "different" and "useful" cultural data. For example, an Executive Summary requires the HTT to prepare a brief, *bulletized* report on "important trends/themes."[51] There, bullet points freeze "culture," meaning and life into a snapshot under the immediacy of operational-relevance. Distance is created through the required brevity. History, institutions and relationships of power, and even the life-histories of individuals are condensed into specific, succinct spaces for easy consumption.

"Culture" is removed from the human terrain which HTTs experience. It is then processed, not only in the minds of team members who prepare "cultural" data, but within an information system organized to handle and distribute newly-subsumed "cultural" knowledge. Providing "culture" for an Executive Summary, for example, simultaneously generates the space which "culture" will occupy and the definitions which are appropriate therein. In this context, the handbook's narrative of the Executive Summary defines when, where and how "culture" exists. In summary, it always exists in a brief. New, relevant "culture" can only be generated at the whim of the commander. This approach constrains cultural analysis to textual formats which favor reductionist approaches and expediency in military operations over understanding how a community exists in relation to both current military operations and the historical, political, and practical circumstances that have allowed such communities to exist outside of the context of military operations.

There is a problem in the space between stringent networks for cultural data and the interaction of HTTs with local populations. Cultural interaction is expected to conform to a format which aids "drafting the post-mission reports" and therefore, should look a certain way when encountered by HTT teams. Yet, the U.S. military insists on

[50] Finney, *Human Terrain Handbook*, pp. 85-89.
[51] Ibid., p. 88.

hiring trained social scientists and those with experience in social science research fields to make up HTTs.

Bronislaw Malinowski, a pioneer of classical anthropological methodology, wrote that preconceptions and assumptions can bias the ability of the ethnographer to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world."[52] The description of "culture" as operationally relevant, and the HTTs social scientific methods preclude an HTT member to relate a "native" perspective of "culture" to the U.S. Military, in any form. Malinowski described precluding impositions such as these as "preconceived ideas."[53] These "preconceived ideas," as Malinowski writes, are "determined to prove certain hypotheses," and leave a researcher "incapable of changing his views constantly," unable to "[cast] them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence."[54] Malinowski's solution to this was a reminder that the best researchers are "in the habit of moulding theories according to facts," and capable of "seeing the facts in their bearing upon theory."[55] An HTT is only able to relate a vision of "culture" which conforms to the information-systems which HTTs prepare reports for. Locally-defined "culture" (as Malinowski might call, "the native's point of view") simply does not exist. In this case, "culture" exists only when the screen flickers to life or when a commander requests a report. Time and space in "culture" exist only in relation to operationally-relative terms such as "Security, Population, Infrastructure, Issues/Friction Points, Economy, Opportunities for Engagement and Perceptions/Interactions (SPIIE OP)."[56]

A reductive notion of "culture" is, however, not a new phenomenon, and not limited to contemporary U.S. military concerns. Edward Evans-Pritchard, an early 20th century British social anthropologist was engaged in similar project. Evans-Pritchard originally did fieldwork amongst the Nuer, Azande, Anuak, Shilluk, and Nilotic Nuo over a period of thirteen years, from 1926-1939. From 1940-1945, Evans-Pritchard was a Tribal Affairs Officer in the British Administration in Cyrenaica (present-day Libya) and

[52] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: Dutton, 1922), p. 19.
[53] Ibid., p. 7.
[54] Ibid., p. 7.
[55] Ibid., p. 7.
[56] Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook*, p. 70.

also charged with different colonial management positions in Sudan and North Africa.[57] Evans-Pritchard's privileged position in the British colonial regime allowed him to conduct some of the first surveys of local peoples in North Africa, and these projects were wholly or at least in-part funded by the British colonial government.[58] He advocated specifically for an anthropologist's position as colonial adviser, in response to concerns about a future for the "applied" side of the discipline. However, Evans-Pritchard still saw this responsibility as inherently divorced from the scientific duty of an anthropologist, a project that could be used to allow colonial governments to defer to experts on local problems.[59] Evans-Pritchard made this point clearer with a cautionary statement about the utility of anthropological knowledge: "if, therefore, we allow [the man of affairs'] interests to decide the direction of our research we shall not only do our science a disservice, but do him injury as well."[60] His conception of the pursuit of science and knowledge cautioned him against any wholesale acceptance of a subsumed position within a colonial regime. First and foremost, the anthropologist's duty – according to Evans-Pritchard -- was to her pursuit of uncovering any knowledge of interest to the discipline, the use of this knowledge is of interest only after this fact.

Evans-Pritchard's own research was essential to the British colonial government's project of understanding African peoples. Evans-Pritchard's work on the Nuer of Southern Sudan made significant headway in defining the scope of anthropological inquiry. Specifically, Evans-Pritchard's concept of segmentation is especially cogent for comparison to the U.S. Armed Forces project. Segmentation, for Evans-Pritchard, described the shifting and complex relational structure inherent in differing Nuer tribal segments. Evans-Pritchard describes segmentation as a phenomenon where the Nuer "habitually express social obligations in a kinship idiom."[61] This leads to moments where smaller segments unite (after previously warring) to ally against a tribe that is distant in familial relationships. These segmentary alliances are impermanent and situational. This information was used by the British colonial government to strategically engage both

[57] Mary Douglas, *Edward Evans-Pritchard* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1980), p. 41.
[58] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "Applied Anthropology," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 16 (1946): p. 96.
[59] Ibid., p. 97.
[60] Ibid., p. 94.
[61] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes and Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxrford: The Clarendon Press, 1940).

against and with Nilotic African peoples in differing contexts (although all invariably with the goal of increasing British presence). While segmentation may have been a 'hot' anthropological concept at the time, Evans-Pritchard's text also allowed British colonial managers to gain insight into local alliances, and develop a larger military project in South Sudan designed to diminish the political power and capacity of local tribes. Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic work described the movements of different Nuer groups in relation to one another; it allowed the penetration of confusing political facets that confounded previous British attempts at creating order.

Today, HTTs still must engage with local populations to create their vision and order of "culture." In order to conform to the categories above, HTTs must see a population's "general state of health," or the "state of their clothes," if there are "existing issues with coalition forces," and even how "they perceive things compared to last year."[62] The handbook assumes that all encounters with native populations will generate effective operational data based on these principles. Within the SPIIE OP categories, there are also sub-categories, which can be compared to previously-collected historical data on a region (which is "by no means mandatory"[63]) to give a clearer picture of how "culture" looks in the U.S. military's eyes.

When these categories and the observations generated from them are no longer enough to create an operationally-relevant picture, HTTs may use a technique known as "drilling down." This technique is designed for "delving deeper" and is likened to "someone looking for treasure."[64] Through a taxonomy of questions which have been conveniently and thoroughly prepared in the handbook, HTTs can get access to "nugget-discovery" opportunities, opportunities which apparently contain information essential to operations.[65]

The invocation of "drilling down" touches on the immediacy and closeness of the U.S. military's need for "culture" *now*, where and when they want it, under the chronotope of informatics. This immediacy is present at all times and vigilance is

[62] Ibid., p. 70.
[63] Ibid., p. 70.
[64] Ibid., p. 72.
[65] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

required as operationally-relevant time may be invoked at any moment, in spaces which require new formulations and definitions of "culture." Even in the field, when conducting "classic anthropological and sociological research methods," HTTs are to take into account the nature of cultural analysis in relation to an operation's "battle rhythm."[66] Descriptions of time spent "in the field" remind HTTs that it is important to remain "succinct" and "be mindful" of opportunities to structure new questions or opportunities to gather operationally-relevant cultural knowledge. HTTs constantly need to "adapt to the changes and the environment," crucial as HTTs must continue to slot themselves into appropriate battle rhythm activities, such as "working groups, logistics synchronization" and "operation update and assessment briefings."[67] When out in the field, HTTs are only aware of time and space in relation to the operationally-relevant, invoked reality, denoted by requests for cultural data. Once an HTT leaves the field, "culture" in the minds of natives is frozen in time, as "culture" can no longer enter into the network of information for which HTTs prepare their data. Encounters in the field bring HTTs into contact with the ways that a population organizes everyday life, and subverting these encounters with pre-determined categories deemed "relevant" to operations only serves to isolate military operations from the populations who live in areas affected by these operations.

One problem which may arise, is how to deal with "cultural" information in conflict with the chronotypic vision of "culture" presented in the handbook. If the categories that a "culture" uses to define an ontological perspective differ from those that exist in the context of operational-relevance, how can an HTT be sure that the information fed into the wider system of intelligence is not "poisoning the well?" An accurate analogy is that of a "mad lib;" the U.S. Armed Forces engage with "cultures" to gather the "characteristics" of a "culture," which then fall into the various blank slots of a narrative structure, a structure which is composed beforehand. When confronting conflicting information, the process is akin to putting an adjective where a noun should go. The narrative continues to make sense as a structure, but the pieces which substantiate it - the characteristic elements - do not. The adjective is still a piece of data, yet it has been placed out of context and results in an understanding of the narrative which does not take into account the contextual situation of the narrative. This problem has similarities to that which Ferris outlines: "it always is convenient when one's enemy chooses to be foolish

[66] Ibid., pp. 74-77.
[67] Ibid., pp. 74-77.

or weak, or foolish and weak, but sometimes it does not choose to be."[68] It would be convenient if an "enemy" "culture" presented the proper adjectives and nouns in specifically the right order, characteristics which fit perfectly into the pre-ordained structure of HTT-defined "culture." However, in this case, it is not simply a matter of an enemy "culture" choosing not to play the same game on the same terms. Instead, to continue the analogy of the game, it is as if the U.S. Armed Forces has created the rules for the game of Risk, with the details of characters, names, and places from Monopoly.

The handbook conforms to confrontation with conflicting elements of culture by only invoking the operation's needs when there is a gap in the already-established database of "cultural" information. When culture only exists in reports created for specific operational purposes at a specific, operationally-relevant time, there is no need to confront a "culture" which the military does not want to see. When an HTT leaves for the field, to map the human terrain, it leaves with a vision of "culture" that conforms to the operation. Their relationship to this space occupied by a community is invoked by requests, missions or the operation's "problem-sets."[69]

Thus, it is not a coincidence that the two largest sections of the handbook are titled "organization and structure" and "methodology." In these chapters, HTTs learn - through an already-familiar military narrative – how to integrate perceived functions of culture, "to leverage cultural knowledge to enhance military operation."[70] These chapters focus on outlining the roles of each team member in relation to the HTT's objective. Each member of the team is made aware of their position in time and space through a "mission essential task list."[71] The word mission, in this context, denotes immediate relation to the narrativized necessity of operational-relevance, and evokes the sense with which each member relates to a specific environment, in a specific time and place. "Culture" is out there, and it is the HTT's mission to go out and find it. Each team member comes to know their association with "culture" as essentially mission-specific. Thus all tasks (see

[68] Ferris, "NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA," p. 327.
[69] Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook*, p. 3.
[70] Remi Hajjar, "The Army's New TRADOC Culture Center," *Military Review* (November-December 2006): p. 89.
[71] Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook*, p. 12.

Standard Operating Procedures) on the list become the means by which the leverage of cultural knowledge can be achieved.

The handbook perpetuates its view of time and space through members of the HTT, subsuming a team member's vision of "culture" under the categories which are presented in the handbook. A team member is only operationally-relevant as long as she contributes cultural information which fits into the categories laid out in the handbook. Otherwise the information is "worthless," as it does not fit into the vision of a reality made relevant by the objectives of an operation.[72]

For example, the "Social Scientist" role within the team contains certain essential tasks that contribute to understanding "culture" only in relation to operationally-relevant goals. These tasks include "[identifying] areas of contention within society," "[identifying] cultural data and knowledge gaps" and "[assessing] other characteristics of the battlefield (leaders, population, demographics, social, ethnic and religion)." The U.S. military recognizes that there is no "single definition of culture," and yet they are concerned with knowing "what it is it about culture that the soldier needs to know to improve performance at the tactical, operational and/or strategic level."[73] The handbook does not include a section on why the "cultural" categories of "spheres of influence," "current institutions" and "demographics" fall under the purview of operationally-relevant "cultural" information. Yet, the social scientist's task is to present a chronotypically informatic report on "culture" which adheres to these definitions, a task fraught with contradiction from the outset for an organization which claims that there is no single definition of culture.

Ideally, "knowledge of the value system of an actual or potential competitor helps in deterring undesirable behaviors and compelling desirable behaviors."[74] However, any knowledge of a value system generated from imposed logic—by the U.S. military's own chronotypical narrative—becomes worthless when presented with behaviours which do not conform to the military's "cultural" narrative.

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[72] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[73] Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Understanding Human Dynamics* (Washington: Washington Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, 2009), p. 70.

[74] Ibid., p. 5.

A review from the Secretary of Defense makes clear how contrary "cultural" information will be viewed: "…we must expect that for the indefinite future, violent extremist groups, with or without state sponsorship, will continue to foment instability and challenge U.S. and allied interests."[75] To put it simply, "cultural" information gathered through U.S. military activities is only relevant as long as it serves to validate and smooth further military operation or the political goals which are inherently accomplished by military operation. If U.S. interests are seen to require a military operation in the area, the only relevant "cultural" information is that which contributes to "deterring undesirable behaviors and compelling desirable behaviors."[76] Ferguson notes that this vision of culture is essential to "bring them over to 'our side,' thus isolating the really 'bad guys' and setting them up for targeting and defeat."[77] While Ferguson describes this vision as a fantasy and a manifestation of the "U.S. military-corporate-political complex,"[78] the use of "culture" is more than that. The interplay of logics between perceived organizational needs of the U.S. Armed Forces and those expressed in the everyday life of communities that are deemed to require cultural analysis shape not only the way that soldiers and commanders conceive of communities in areas of active operations. These efforts to generate and integrate "cultural" information also serve to condition the way that these communities conceive of and reproduce perceptions of cooperation with organizations or individuals deemed to be external to the communities. Ongoing operations and the methods utilized to provide intelligence on them through "cultural" analysis may manifest renewed conflict in the perception that "cultural" observers are there to spy on populations for the purpose of committing acts of violence towards members of the community, to utilize one possible example.

The chronotope discussed within this paper is only one way of demonstrating how the U.S. military approach to cultural study is shaped by interaction with uncertain battlefield environments. In order to generate informational superiority and certainty on the battlefield, all information and intelligence must conform to the ability of the

[75] Quadrennial Defense Review, *Report* (Washington D.C.: Secretary of Defense, 2010), p. 20.
[76] Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Understanding Human Dynamics*, p. 5.
[77] R. Brian Ferguson, "Full Spectrum," p. 93.
[78] Ibid., p. 109.

intelligence system to recall and use the information. "Cultural" information can only be valid under definitions which "leverage shared situational awareness and knowledge to achieve situational dominance and dramatically increase survivability, lethality, speed, timeliness, and responsiveness."[79] Effectively, "culture" must become a node in the intelligence system designed to "streamline procedures and handle ever more data."[80]

An attempt to deliver a full picture of culture through HTTs only magnifies the problems of "information overload, micromanagement and the fruitless search for certainty"[81] by poisoning the well. "Cultural" data integrated into the wider intelligence network only serves to reinforce the views of all "cultures" as already understood by the U.S. military. This information does not conform to manifestations of any actual "cultural" context; it conforms only to the context created in relation to operational-relevance. Local visions of "culture" are not recognizable or recognized in this system. The ways by which "cultures" are recorded and presented in the U.S. Armed Forces speak only to an integration of information - with a "cultural" source— into the institution of Network Centric Warfare (NCW). The institutional concept of NCW perpetuates a "feedback loop" of sorts, only accepting of information designed to integrate into the network in the first place, information which is collected through engaging materials like the HTT handbook.

[79] Department of Defense, *Network Centric Warfare, Report to Congress* http://www.dodccrp.org/files/ncw_report/report/ncw_cover.html Accessed on December 20, 2013.
[80] Ferris, "NCW, C4ISR, IO and RMA," p. 306.
[81] Ibid., p. 307.

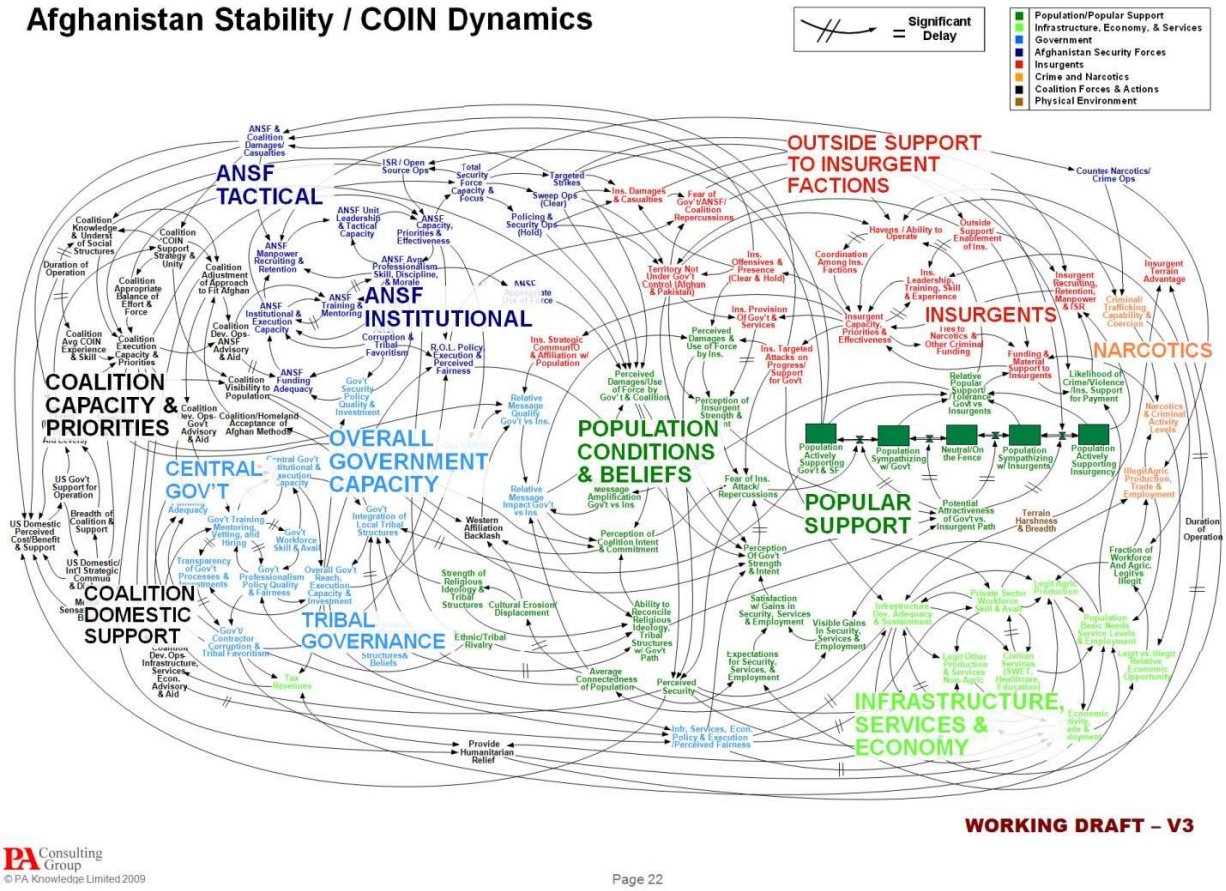


*Figure 1: A PowerPoint slide detailing the complexity of American military strategy in Afghanistan.*[82]

In order to understand how this concept manifests at the command level, this paper now turns to an examination of one particular presentation to command staff. The presentation was given to General Stanley A. McChrystal and staff in 2009, a presentation meant to convey the complexity of American military strategy in Afghanistan.[83] The above PowerPoint slide, upon its publication in a New York Times article, went viral, and became the object of intense scrutiny by a global public. The above image supposedly encapsulates the totality of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan; it shows the

[82] Bumiller, "We Have Met the Enemy and He is PowerPoint," http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/27/world/27powerpoint.html?_r=0

[83] Ibid.

interconnection and relationship of coalition, local population, economic, and U.S. military beliefs and motivations. "Cultural" information saturates the bottom-right corner and middle of the map and includes such bounded categories as "perception of coalition intent and commitment," "perceived damages/use of force by government and coalition," and shows how "clearly" demarcated sections of the population (actively supporting, sympathizing, neutral, insurgent sympathizing or insurgent supporting) fit into the overall scheme of the operation.

For the highest tier of command, "culture" has been further distanced from the operationally-relevant information gathered by HTTs on the ground, sanitized to a state where "culture" can relate and mesh with other pre-conceived relationships. Here, "culture" exists yet again only in relation to the operationally-relevant context of one, specific command-level briefing. In order to situate "culture" in this diagram, "culture" fits into a new story. The cast of characters has been expanded and new actions are indicated and realized on each and every character. At this point, the culture of populations on the ground struggles to be recognized even by the command-level staff, best-put by General McChrystal when he remarked "when we understand this slide, we'll have won the war."[84] At the level of command, it is not even possible to see an HTT vision of "culture" – this is even further reduced to a 'dynamic of counterinsurgency.' Thus, when tasked with providing a map showing the complexities of the Afghanistan conflict, the only operationally-relevant indicator was the briefing space and need for "complexity" as an indicator of the process which need be undertaken in the pursuit of this presentation of "culture".

Despite overwhelming attempts to generate "cultural" data through narratives with which the U.S. military can achieve operational goals, the knowledge only serves to distance the military from an understanding of "culture" and how "culture" affects the operational environment. The vision created by overlaying the "map" with "culture" only further obscures the complex relationships the U.S. military sought to elucidate through cultural work. Instead of creating a clear picture of the human landscape, the U.S. is "leaving the landscape and moving on to the map without paying much attention to the process or the destination."[85] To create an understanding of "culture," a "culture"

[84] Ibid.

[85] Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, p. 79.

generating new dimensions of uncertainty, the military consultants retreat to the familiar confines of a map which "provides a more appealing, more plausible landscape when a familiar world spins out of control."[86] The vision created by a chronotope of informatics subsumes all information and projects only to information which is requested. Yet, information available under the informatics chronotope has already been distorted to fit neatly into the narrative genre that the chronotope demands through materials like the HTT's handbook. A command-level officer can see only what the chronotope of informatics tells him he can see, a process which funnels certain information into certain forms, for certain people.

"Culture" for the military becomes virtual as it leaves the confines of the landscape and steps onto a map, via the mediation of the informatics chronotope. "Culture" is an identifiable, schematic entity like any other once it leaves the context and landscape of its origin. Through the HTT handbook, the U.S. has composed the questions the military wishes to pose to the monolithic entity of "Culture," questions which are only posed under the terms and conditions the military sets. The answers - as a result, are only answers which speak and relate to existence as understood by a military, a North American military. "Culture" is only what a military needs it to be, strictly enclosed within the confines of operational-relevance. But at the edge of the map - encroaching upon the fog of uncertainty- lay such chaotic and irrelevant datasets including "banal evils, absurd circumstances" and the "contingencies of life."[87]

The virtual aspect of war is not only created by distance imposed by modern technology. When war moves off the battlefield and onto a screen, the real question to ask is: which screen? Whether it is the projector screen for a military PowerPoint presentation or that of the drone pilot, war is no longer fought, but composed with an imaginary reality, imposed by the "news and cinematic and gaming media as well as the mediating and mapping technologies of contemporary military violence."[88]

[86] Ibid., p. 81.
[87] Ibid., pp. 88, 96.
[88] Whitehead and Finnstrom, "Introduction," p. 1.

The U.S. Armed Forces' Human Terrain Systems situate culture on a screen, projecting a reality which only exists within one kind of narrative, a narrative defined by a chronotope of informatics. "Culture" does its part as one element of the virtual picture of war, informing the narrative of operational-relevance through lists of "power-brokers", "demographics of literacy" and "cultural capabilities" which save, enhance or sustain life.[89] Through these categories and the methods used to obtain data to fill them, HTTs sustain and give life to a chronotope resident in military narrative genres; this chronotope seeks to elucidate the world by treating all space and time as operationally-relevant data which feeds into an ever-expanding military network.

The chronotope of informatics creates a metagame for war, a way to transcend the operational conditions which now exist only in a time prior to the information age. Any uncertainty presented in the virtual world of war can be extracted, removed from the context of initial presentation and analyzed to produce new rules for the game which confront uncertainty with pre-determined certainty.

The methods utilized by HTTs and the wider organizational framework within the U.S. Armed Forces designed to address "culture" leave little room for the contingencies, uncertainties, and anxieties of everyday life to manifest in analyses that favor pre-determined objectives in military operations. Despite claims that HTTs rigorously utilize methodologies from social science practice, these methodologies and their ethical and analytical limitations are disregarded in favor of redefining social science in terms deemed "useful" to military operations. Little to nothing is left of anthropology's widely-accepted arguments in favor of understanding a community through ethnographic research in the terms and narratives relevant to that community. Instead, what we are left with are texts, standards, and logics that may invoke and claim allegiance to the scientific endeavor of understanding communities holistically through close interaction, but instead utilize these terms only as a means to situate pre-determined methods for gathering intelligence to enable military operations. Within such a narrative, everything is certain and uncertainty is just another way of saying operationally-irrelevant.

[89] Finney, *Human Terrain Team Handbook*, pp. 50-55.

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