The camera never lies: Social construction of self and group in video, film, and photography

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1. Introduction

> The imitator is a poor kind of creature. If the man who paints only the tree, the flower, or other surface he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer.
> James McNeill Whistler,
> *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies,* 1927

Whistler might have delivered the above insult almost a century ago, but photographers, video producers, and other "imitators" are today striking back with a vengeance. Technology that enables the digital retouching of photographs has afforded means for enhancing or dramatically altering photographic images. Forms of construction and manipulation of video imagery are "subtly changing the nature of reality as experienced through moving images" (Hochswender, 1992).

Construction of self and group often incorporates the use of objects associated with "expression," including videos, films, and photographs. In this article, I describe four different sites for construction of groups (group portraiture, courtrooms, video-assisted group therapy, and videoconferencing). I discuss potential impacts of shifts in the way we use and talk about media on what it is like to participate in a group. The characters of the groups we belong to may be altered as vehicles for group construction become more malleable, and records of group interaction become less reliable.

Video, film, and photography have undergone many technical changes, but they have also been transformed as the narratives we construct about them increase in number and complexity. We all could explain how these technologies once "worked". Perhaps we did not understand technical details, but we knew, when we saw a photograph, that someone had aimed a camera at a scene or an object to get the picture. The negative was construed as a sacred link from the original situation to the photographic image: if we

had questions about photographs, we could always examine their negatives.

This is not to say that photography was considered as completely lacking creative aspects. The notion that photography involves art and skill was in common circulation at least since Alfred Stieglitz's influence in the 1920s. Today's photographers and video experts are being viewed quite differently than even in the recent past. Their functions and related responsibilities are becoming seen as akin to those of the author, providing just one, personal account of a situation (perhaps a flawed and biased one). Their pursuits are increasingly considered as active and complex, involving selection, enhancement, and (with the aid of computer tools) creation of images.

Photographers have been manipulating photographs for more than a hundred years, employing such means as multiple exposures and cutting-and-pasting (Mitchell, 1994). But only recently have sophisticated techniques for photographic manipulations been widely available. Fred Ritchlin (1990) asserts that photographers will have to be trusted as a profession and as individuals, in much the same manner as news reporters are today: "Like the writer, the photographer, rather than the mechanical camera, will need to assume responsibility for the content and authenticity of all that he or she reports. Furthermore, the photographer's own miniscule 'credit line' will have to become more of an author's byline" (Ritchlin, 1990, p. 110). Jon Dartley (1993) recommends that photographers adopt conventions (such as the identification of retouched photographs that are published in newspapers and magazines) in order to preserve public trust in the profession.

Video, film, and photographic accounts play substantial roles in construction of groups (whether small families or large corporations). Group portraiture was once analogous to natural conception, in the sense that few direct choices could be made about the quality of the product. Portraiture is now more akin to genetic engineering, allowing a panoply of micro-level decisions to be made on components of style, form, and presentation. Group interaction that never took place can also be readily composed, as in the placement of separately-shot photographic images of actors Dustin Hoffman and Charlie Sheen together in a full-page publicity photo in *Newsweek* (Ritchlin, 1990). Group portraits, the once-reliable markers of group unity, and proofs of group interaction, have become quite malleable.

2. The mechanically-rendered portrait: Self- and group-construction via portraiture

Jotting down ideas, speaking, drawing, and producing mechanically-rendered images (such as photographs and videos) are forms of personal expression tightly coupled with the self. Expression through the written word, for exam-

ple, is often linked with images of self and notions of self-efficacy. Joan Didion (1976) proclaims, "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means." Groups are constructed by their members and by outsiders through comparable means. Since ancient times, the "group saga" provided insiders with a chronicle of the group's exploits and perceived places in the larger community or organization. Outsiders were given a sense of the group's boundaries (for example, who was included in the group, and what kinds of activities the group conducted).

Portraiture of some sort has always been available to the wealthy, with oils and tapestries rendering likenesses of the rich and powerful throughout the centuries. Invention of photography in the 1830s helped to democratize portraiture. Submission to portraiture has become involuntary, in some cases; it is often used by the state to identify us for bureaucratic purposes. In the advent of widely-available photography, family albums became construed as keys to our past and to our senses of self. Similarly, when affordable video cameras emerged in the marketplace in many developed nations, large numbers of individuals produced video records of their homelife and day-to-day circumstances.

Portraiture in the organizational context helped define and delimit such constructions as "corporations," linking these complex institutions with various audiences and serving to hasten the widespread public acceptance of these entities. For example, David Nye's study of the archives of General Electric from 1890 to 1930 displays a corporation that used photography to reach a number of different groups. Nye's voyage through the archives showed him pictures of work groups, of corporation leaders, of picnics and gatherings:

> during General Electric's growth to maturity, photography proved to be a fundamental means of communication. The corporation used images to project varying conceptions of the social world to separate groups. To engineers it presented an image of value-free scientific research and technological education; to workers it showed a vision of harmonious, nonunionized social relations. (Nye, 1985, pp. 15–16)

In the early part of this century, photographic technologies were limited, and afforded few options. Strong sets of standards and conventions were adhered to among some groups of photographers, and many of the photographs produced shared notably common perspectives (as in the collection Nye reviews). Video and photographic portraits of today's corporations have more variety, although many of the often-espoused values of corporate life (internal harmony, growth, security) also emerge as common themes in the portraits.

Video, film, and photography also can be employed in efforts to define boundaries among groups and exchange group perspectives. The role of videos in verification of the social conditions some groups face has been enormous, just as photographs had considerable impact in conveying images of urban blight and other woes to policymakers in the past. In 1991, a bystander's video of a police beating in Los Angeles triggered nationwide concern about justice. When police involved in that beating were later acquitted, outrage was expressed even in the highest offices in the nation, and the city suffered a series of devastating riots.

3. Performative images: Uses of video, film, and photography in the group context

Images and narrative associated with video, film, and photography play important roles in constructing and defining a situation. Individuals shown in a photograph or video are considered as part of an "ensemble" (whether or not their presences in the scene portrayed were matters of choice). Bystanders depicted are constructed in relation to the central "action" of the photograph. Furthermore, individuals watching those media become members of an "audience." Audience viewing of such media is a form of participation in the situation in question, one that is often considered deeper and more intense than reading an account of the group proceedings. Trevor Whittock (1990) declares that, despite their metaphorical status, film images "testify to the presence of objects in a way that words do not," providing an "existential link to a preexisting world" (p. 22) which is supposedly missing in writing. The motion of objects that is "captured" in video and film plays special roles in construction of situations, connecting past actions with the present:

> Because still photography is in a way the trace of a past spectacle... one would expect animated photography to be experienced similarly as the trace of a past motion. This, in fact, is not so; the spectator always sees movement as being present (even if it duplicates a past movement). (Metz, 1974)

The notion that movement depicted on the screen is somehow present and "real" has appeal in motion-oriented Western culture.

Historical accounts of Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) and others tell us that it took centuries for written words to be considered reflections of "reality" (or for the very issue to arise). M. T. Clanchy (1979), in his account of twelfth-century scholarship, presents the following description by a medieval author of how "letters" relate to "things": "Fundamentally letters are shapes indi-

cating voices. Hence they represent things which they bring to mind through the windows of the eyes. Frequently they speak voicelessly the utterances of the absent."

Photographs, film, and video took far less time to be accepted as reflections of reality. In the way these media are construed in some contexts, the assumption that "video (and film) are reality" is also apparent. Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1986) contends that the expression "documentary photograph" was seldom utilized until the late 1920s. Before that time, the "preponderance of photographic uses previous to the term's introduction were what we could now automatically designate as documentary" (p. 193). For about a hundred years, photography was largely a transcriptive medium that "innately and inescapably" performed the documentary function.

The nature of this "transcription" is indeed changing. For example, an increasing number of choices are being presented to those who wish to create group portraits, including enhancements, alterations, and color embellishments. Facial images can be "morphed" together into a video sequence, one smoothly blending into the next. Given the role that group portraits have in preserving history as well as congealing modern-day groups, archivists should be worried about prospects for the retouching of photographs in the effort to reconstruct the history of interaction of individuals. Control over which features to enhance, or even which individuals to remove from a portrait is available; individuals who make these choices have a great degree of control over how the group is constructed. With erosion of the sense of permanence in construction of group portraits may also come a diminishing of the sense of group solidarity and continuity.

John Austin (1963) developed the notion of "performative utterances," describing how words such as "I pronounce you husband and wife" perform actions and change the statuses of social actors. Much in the way that some spoken phrases are performative, certain images can be used explicitly to alter or reinforce already-sanctioned relationships or construct new categories of social interaction. For example, a marriage is reinforced by marriage photographers, who document the wedding party and record when and where the wedding occurred. Today, advances in image processing are affording options for those who want to change their domestic situations, yet retain traces of the past; the American company Divorcex alters photographs so that ex-spouses are eliminated (Bounds, 1994).

Ritual and rhetoric that support the veracity of the group portrait (the "video is reality" perspective) can serve to help a group obtain a consensus on a particular group portrait and portrait interpretation, and thus support the performative functions of certain images. Obtaining such a consensus early can be beneficial for groups, although choice of a portrait may restrict later choices: if various group members consistently concentrate their energies on

discussions of how to modify an image or about their own interpretations of what is in a photograph or on the video screen, attention can be directed away from other, equally vital, group activities. Just as in the case of the individual portrait, group members must be able to interpret and identify with the group portrait to a certain extent. Not to do so could affect the quality of their participation in the group.

With the ready availability of means to retouch photographs and reconstruct video and film, narratives that accompany these media will play stronger roles. Group portraits that are coupled with accounts of how the photographs, videos, or films involved were produced (or reconstructed), and how they were eventually displayed or otherwise utilized, will have levels of value different from those that do not have these narratives. Construction of these narratives may become a critical part of photography, film, and video production, although the language and style of such narratives have yet to be developed fully. The kinds of discourse about photography outlined in Terry Barrett (1990) and other approaches to media education could provide some direction to the shape these narratives may take. Such construction could also play a role in developing group unity, in a manner similar to "group testimony" (discussed in the next section).

Narrative construction may not be a panacea for the erasures of history precipitated by tampering with group imagery and for the losses of control group members may feel when the impressions linked with them are altered. However, the narratives may provide a kind of Rosetta Stone for those who want to understand a group and the portraits with which it chooses to be associated.

4. Silent witness: Designative authority and the use of photographic and video evidence

Designative authority and documentary values of video, film, and photography described by Whittock and Solomon-Godeau are apparently still high, even through abilities of video and photographic technicians to alter and retouch the images are increasing. However, capacities for manipulation of these media may soon have substantial impacts on the genres associated with them, for example, the "news":

> What happens if CBS has one of those machines that can generate real-time animation of photographic quality? You look at two TVs — one's got a picture of Ronald Reagan shaking hands with Gorbachev, and the other set has a picture of Ronald Reagan punching Gorbachev in the nose, and you can't tell them apart. (Brand, 1987, p. 223)

How might video and photography retain a role in the news and in the courtroom as "evidence" when video and photographic traces are becoming less trustworthy? Some commentators speculate that the authority now placed in the photograph, video, or film image itself, the authority to "verify," may be transferred to photographers themselves in their roles as professionals or dedicated amateurs:

> We've been spoiled by a hundred years of reliable photography as a place to put faith, but that certainty was an anomaly . . . we have to trust in other ways. What the magazines who routinely use these creative touching machines say is "Trust us." You can't trust the medium, you can only trust the source, the people. It's the same with text, after all. The only way my words are evidence is if I don't lie, even if it is so, so easy to do. (Kelly, 1985)

Sheila Reeves (1991) asserts that different sets of standards for acceptable levels of doctoring should be generated for entertainment as opposed to news vehicles. However, given the ways news and entertainment vehicles often switch roles, this prescription could be problematic: in American television, many news programs have taken on a significant number of entertainment features, and in entertainment shows, news items are often reflected.

Courtrooms are sites for construction of groups ("juries" and "defense" for instance) and of group-produced narratives (such as "decisions" and "judgments"). One alternative to the use of an authoritative silent witness in the reconstruction of events is the "group testimony." Such testimony plays a role in the legal systems of some cultures (Vansina, 1969). The focus of such testimony is on creation of consensus, mutual validation, and agreement. Nothing is included in the testimony to which one or more group members dissent. Photographs in the courtroom were once construed in a manner close to that of group testimony: they were generally considered more akin to consensually-approved "pieces of the puzzle" than as objects of contention. Photographers and others may indeed have had extensive information about the production of these artifacts. However, the photographs themselves were considered critical in the legal proceedings, and detailed descriptions of the context of their production were seldom required.

Photographs have played prominent roles in US courtrooms for decades, places where precedent is regarded highly. Christine Guilshan (1992) asserts that by "liberally admitting photographs into evidence, courts implicitly have accorded substantial faith to the reliability of the photographic process" (p. 370), although she estimates that this liberality will fade soon as awareness of potential doctoring of images grows. Video faces comparable problems involving image manipulation. As well as providing evidence, it has been

used for taking depositions (Harbaugh, 1989), and for linking judge, defendant, and plaintiff where distance is a consideration (Williams, 1987); image manipulation and distortion factors could influence the use of video in any of these applications.

Incorporation of statements into the court record by photographers (and bystanders, if available) as to the context of the production of pictures and video could help reinforce their value as evidence. Statements about the technical capabilities of photographic and video gear utilized might also be required, as the capabilities of pieces of equipment vary substantially. However, basic issues concerning "evidence" and how it is presented to the jury as a group are only beginning to emerge. As photographic enhancements, video montages, and computer simulations are increasingly used as ways to convey situations in courtrooms, questions are being raised of whether technology can assist or distract in presenting scenarios of a crime or other event in a group context.

The "jury" as a unit is constructed in the context of the courtroom proceedings it views and its subsequent deliberations. The context of the group viewing of technologically-rendered evidence may itself be a critical factor in how cases are resolved, as some kinds of information may be better digested in a group setting than others (picture presentations rather than lengthy, developed oral accounts, for example). Given the technological sophistication needed to understand modern image processing techniques, there may be vast differences in understandings among jury members of how technologically-rendered evidence is produced, and how it can be doctored and manipulated. Technological savvy may thus become a major consideration in the jury selection process, and certain aspects of court proceedings could become photography, video, and film criticism sessions as the defense, prosecution, and jury members struggle to make sense of the products of image processing technology.

5. The reflection of self and group: Video in therapeutic contexts

Video has been utilized in group settings for a variety of special purposes, including therapeutic ones. In group therapy contexts, video is often used to help groups congeal more quickly by enabling groups to see themselves as a unit. It is also employed as a focus of group attention, to stimulate discussion and analysis on group-related issues. Jerry Fryrear and Barry Stephens (1988) investigated the effectiveness of a psychotherapy program using video and masks to facilitate both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. Similarly, Elizabeth Cox and Leslie Lothstein (1989) describe the videotaping of group therapy sessions with young adults, and they note the "extraordinary

appeal" of such a method to a generation reared in front of the television screen. They claim that videotaped therapy sessions have a "seductive power," by drawing attention to the exhibitionistic and voyeuristic aspects of the self (p. 250).

Cox and Lothstein describe the "videoself" that is composed in a young person's confrontation with the medium as a "public self for all to see, enjoy, admire, and love." The videotaping arrangement may play a "symbolic mirroring role" for the self, providing means for the self to unfold its contents and be admired simply for its own sake. Cox and Lothstein assert that in group therapy, however (where a number of individual selves are revealed), the confrontative power of videotaping comes into play. They claim that the "flaws" of the self become more obvious when exposed in the videotaping, and a more vulnerable self may be experienced. The power of the assumption that videos reveal pathologies, and that they can serve as powerful diagnostic tools, is clearly demonstrated in Cox and Lothstein's work.

Some of Cox and Lothstein's patients composed video self portraits as part of their therapy:

> The actual taped product, the self-portrait, may also function for most patients as a kind of observing ego, providing them with the possibility of reinternalizing previously experienced negative emotional states in a new, positive light. The self is no longer experienced as diminished and isolated, but is enhanced and part of a larger totality. (Cox and Lothstein, 1989, p. 250)

Although Cox and Lothstein claim that such video-based treatment is not self-sufficient and advise that it should be conducted along with other, more traditional, forms of therapy, they express much optimism about its future.

How is it that the "self" can be reflected on a screen of electronic dots? Or, rather, what is a "self" so that it can be constructed in a video context (either in a consciously-produced and edited self-portrait, as in the Cox and Lothstein therapeutic efforts, or in more casual, less conscious efforts)? The video as reflection of self couples the self tightly with a specific timeframe, as well as a set of activities and interactions. The individual portrait (constructed in oil, drawing, photography, or video) has been widely construed by historians, psychologists, and artists as a critical factor in development of individual self-awareness, a self-awareness in which the individual cannot readily jettison linkage to and responsibility for previous actions and appearances. However, as understanding of how easily these portraits can be manipulated increases, the influence of the portraits in development of self-awareness is likely to be altered. Individuals may consider the portraits not as mirrors but as experimental tools as they modify and successively "try on" a variety of images tangentially associated with themselves.

The enormous interest in individual portraiture in the past centuries has been linked with a broad spectrum of human concerns, from mortality to narcissism. The "group" as a unit is also deeply affected by portraiture, as aspects of weddings and other key social events are staged in ways that satisfy societal and religious traditions, as well as accommodate the needs of those who hold cameras. Many of these portraits become performative images, either directly through their production by an official of some sort (such as the photographer who takes the official portrait of the U. S. Supreme Court), or indirectly through after-production rhetoric. The performative functions of portraits underscore the assumption that they reflect or somehow capture reality.

In taking a literal, "video reflects reality" approach, however, consideration of the rich metaphorical dimensions of self and group portraits are often excluded. Trevor Whittock (1990) outlines six attributes of metaphor applicable to considerations of its role in film cinematography: (1) decoration, (2) emotional effect, (3) concision, (4) naming the unnamed, (5) naming the unnamable, and (6) eliciting the watchers' own creativity. The fourth and fifth attributes play roles in group therapy and individual self-examination by affording individuals a vehicle through which they can associate some otherwise unlabeled characteristics or situations with particular video images. Individuals may not be able to characterize a particular behavior or feeling, but they may be able to associate it for purposes of group discussion with a video image or sequence. The sixth attribute can also be an aspect of self- and group-construction. Some uses of video can have similarities to Rorschach tests, drawing out otherwise unexamined associations with the self. Metaphorical aspects of video are more difficult to understand and manipulate than are the more mundane and documentary-style ones; hence, their utilization has been minimized except in artistic contexts.

Attempts to integrate video into group-level psychological therapy include the efforts described in Petitti (1989). Gerald Petitti discusses a drama therapy group in which videotape was used as an externalizing object rather than as a reflection of self. "Externalizing objects" are inanimate objects intentionally linked with the roles of significant others in order to establish a fictional relationship to real-life conflicts, a relationship that can be explored in dramatic terms (generally with the help of a psychotherapist). These and other uses of video in group therapy can be seen in terms of George Herbert Mead's (1934) social psychological framework. Construction of an "other," whether the "generalized other" of a community or the "other" that an authority figure provides, plays a prominent role in Mead's psychology of the individual. Mead's notion that "self arises only when one steps out of immediate subjective experiencing and becomes an object to oneself" is applicable to the study of video-based group therapy. Videotaping has been used as a tool in this

temporary objectification: "Suddenly, the self is not swimming amorphously somewhere beneath the skin but is being represented upon a screen several feet away from the body" (Skafte, 1987, p. 398).

The initial resistance to video feedback by individuals that is often observed in adults (see also Harrison *et al.*, 1990) may be related to the fear of entering the reflecting, observing mode. Diane Skafte claims that the fear soon dissipates, and is replaced by feelings of excitement:

> As individuals begin to realize the dazzling array of dimensions that each one of them embodies, a new freedom and excitement enters their relationships with each other. The group becomes more than a hall of mirrors. It becomes a hall of doorways that open into new vistas of the self. (Skafte, 1987, p. 400)

Skafte's enthusiastic description of the power of video technology in group proceedings is infectious. However, her description of video as being unproblematic in its "vivid and life-like" capturing of self-presentations omits consideration of participants' varying perspectives on video as a medium, as well as the inevitable distortions in video imagery. Constructing "video as reality" can have dramatic effects on the quality of video-focused group psychotherapy. Skafte describes how a number of therapists utilize video technology to create "instant replay" situations (my characterization), confronting individuals with video-captured images of "what really happened" in the group: "Direct viewing tends to blast through defenses, particularly rationalization and denial" (Skafte, 1987, p. 399). Skafte asserts that video helps group members achieve more accurate interpretations of social phenomena around them. These instant replays of group proceedings may distort various aspects of their interaction, however. Seldom does a video slice provide the context needed to understand a situation. Selection of what slice for the group to examine (and re-examine) can place a large amount of control in the hands of the therapist.

Just as in the case of the individual portrait, for video to be usable as a vehicle for group portraits and diagnostic efforts group members must be able to interpret and identify with the video format to some extent. Rhetoric that supports the veracity of the group portrait (the "video as reality" perspective) can play a role in its construction as a shared group resource, but can also inhibit some of the groups' reflections about the limitations as well as potentials of the technologies involved.

6. Videoconferencing, interactive plausibility, and the "capturing" of group work interaction

We are quite accustomed in Western society to watching work groups in television and film media. Many of the most popular American entertainment programs are placed in the context of the work group (from the field setting of *M*A*S*H* to the office setting of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*). Recognition of the social and economic importance of group work is increasing in many organizational settings, and technological means for group support are expanding in number and variety. The "group" or "team" has become more widely recognized as an epistemological unit in organizational contexts: it is the group that digests and processes images and information about the world that is "external" to the organization. Increasingly, those who evaluate the performance of groups or who participate in them gain information about group proceedings through video rather than direct observation.

Despite the availability of portable viewing environments (such as the Sony *Watchman*), a good amount of viewing of videos and films in organizations is conducted in settings where lights have been dimmed and group attention is focused on a screen or tube. This activity can be linked with many hours of home television viewing, hours often spent in a sedate atmosphere and a group setting. These viewing patterns are being altered as the merging of computer and video technologies intensifies and video images are exchanged on desktop computer screens. Video is also increasingly a component of "computer-supported cooperative work" (CSCW) systems, a variety of application that supports group work in organizations. Video is thus retaining a number of roles in the group work context, though those roles are changing in character.

Use of videoconferencing has increased dramatically in the past decade as its availability has expanded and several technical advances have improved transmission quality. Video and computerized support tools have been coupled in seminar-style "electronic meeting rooms" (Oravec, 1996). Thus, in many organizational contexts, group members are more than merely spectators to video; interactive possibilities are widening, as portraits of individuals and groups themselves are incorporated in the mix of organizational footage. Often, what is recorded in those video portraits is the response of subjects to what is being shown to them on video screens. People's responses to video have a number of important roles: the responses can provide important clues to organizational participants as to certain individuals' evaluations of the images captured on a screen. These reactions in themselves may be richer in relevant information than the activities recorded on the original video (especially if the reactor involved is of a high status); they may reflect

on the attitudes and well-being of those individuals. Video portraits of people watching videos (and of people watching videos of people watching videos) can blur the distinctions between the "subject" of images and the "audience" that views those images.

As in the cases of video-assisted group therapy sessions and courtrooms, tight couplings are often drawn between video images and "real" situations in work group video usage. Issues of "interactive plausibility" are today emerging as salient, as more portraits of work group interaction are being pieced together out of slices of video footage. Interactive plausibility is the extent to which various images capture interactions among group members and other contextual matters relating to groups and the logic of action and response in the social context. Timestamping of video segments can aid in establishing the interactive plausibility of an edited sequence, but it is no guarantee of plausibility since some needed contextual material may be removed in the editing process.

The Center for Machine Intelligence has developed an electronic meeting room called the "Capture Lab," a name that has interesting connotations: a captured account of a situation apparently connotes a stronger, more life-like image than a mere "description." Archives of group interaction in the Lab include video recordings of all group proceedings (some of which involve face-to-face interaction) as well as participants' computer activity. Video tapes and computer logs are both timestamped, which allows the computer activity to be used as an index into the video archive (Horton et al., 1989). Recording of group interaction thus takes place on two, integrated levels.

Capture Lab innovations involving the continuous creation and timestamping of group interaction are more than just curiosities: they are being taken seriously by many corporations, and applications are already in service. Viewing of the video portraits created by such applications is increasingly construed as a replacement for more direct forms of group participation (such as sitting around a conference table). Group members are often construed as being "present" at a gathering when they view immediate or recorded images of the gathering, which triggers questions as to what constitutes a group: the notion of a "group" is being stretched to comprise a broad range of plausible composite portraits, combinations of slices of videos and people watching those videos. Memberships and timeframes of groups can also be expanded, possibly indefinitely, as new viewers join the gatherings.

There are limitations of these expansions of the "group," and the developments just described may meet with some obstacles. Continuous portraiture of group interaction has aspects of overkill: use of these vehicles in everyday workgroup interaction raises concerns about the roles the portraits will play in current and future control of the group. Editing and compressing of these video portraits for subsequent review and analysis will also be highly prob-

lematic, introducing new potentials for bias and manipulation as scenes are selected to construct a certain story line. Group conferences are generally not video- or film-criticism sessions (although the latter can indeed be interesting). A delicate balance is sought: for the group to feel that the video portraits produced are co-extensive with the group and are non-controvertible evidence of its activities would invest in the video format far more than would be appropriate and useful. However, little or no identification would lend the video portraits meaningless; the camera might well be directed to an empty wall.

7. Some conclusions and reflections: From WYSIWIS to WYSIWIN

The eras of video, film, and photography as "silent witnesses" to human interaction are gradually passing. Designatory values of these media are being reassessed as various technologies for reconstruction and enhancement become available. Filling the voids they have left are new notions of the ways in which media play roles in individual and group expression and interpretation.

Construction of groups often involves an object of some sort. Individuals become an "audience" when placed in front of a film screen, a set of images placed in proximity becomes a "family portrait," and a montage of video images is construed as a "conference." The fact that these objects can be manipulated with increasing ease is affecting the way groups themselves are constructed. At the same time that photographic, film, and video images are becoming more easily manipulated, their roles in individual and group construction are expanding. For example, individuals are often considered "present" at gatherings when their images are electronically projected or when they view a video of group interaction.

The designatory values of video, film, and photography are being reassessed as technologies for image reconstruction and enhancement become more widely available. Those who employ these media as epistemological companions, supplementing their vision and memories of various events and interactions, are increasingly doing so from a critical (and somewhat cautious) perspective. The philosophical and educational communities have developed sets of critical thinking skills related to consumption of oral argumentation and forms of written material (Costa and Kallick, 1993). Few sets of skills have been developed for critical thinking in the realm of sound and images, however. Until such skills are available, group members are likely to be divided on many important matters concerning the interpretation of the photographs, videos, and films they are called upon to deal with.

Video, film, and photography have generally been considered WYSIWIS technologies ("what you see is what I see"). New ways of construing video, film, and photography, as media that are highly malleable and linked with a variety of possible narratives, are emerging. Groups as a unit may indeed not be the most suitable interpreters of these media, which may eventually change the way the media are utilized in courtroom settings and therapy sessions.

We are entering an era when "interpretations" by individuals and groups of video, film, and photography can have a variety of components. For example, my interpretation of a video portrait may include an editing, an enhancement of details, or a deletion of what I feel are distracting aspects. Thus, the narration of a particular video portrait may include not just a spoken or written account of the context of the production of the video, but also sets of narrative, interpretatory images.

The media themselves would be changed by this broad variety of accompanying narratives. Stories and fables travel with great works of art and notable artifacts; in the same way, photographs, films, and videos would be considered as "incomplete" without attempts to situate them in particular contexts. The General Electric archives that Nye (1985) surveys have little in terms of such narrative, leaving large gaps in our understanding. Work groups, social clubs, institutions, and families of the future may wish to prevent similar losses. Movement toward perspectives such as WYSIWIN ("what you see is what I narrate") or WYSIWWN ("what you see is what we narrate") could help us enrich our use of media and enhance our perspectives on ourselves as individuals and group members.

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