Small Cities Imprint, Volume 3 (2011), No. 1, pp. 74 - 85

Quality and Authenticity in Representation

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I arrived at the meeting ten minutes late, having spent the brunt of these wiping mud spatters off of my face. I entered to a table of suits, bike helmet in hand, and felt immediately out of place. I slid into a chair next to the City Alderman, and tucked my tattered gear out of sight.

This was a 'visioning session' in which we, the Board of the Civic Arts Authority, were to come to some sort consensus on the meaning of the city's cultural attributes and climate - to arrive at a series of objectives upon which strategic actions could be built. I had been involved in many such processes before, but this one stood out – perhaps because of the stark contrast that I felt between myself, the 'new kid' chosen, I suppose, for my various affiliations with the arts & culture community, and my slickly-dressed comrades.

The meeting was tedious, an exercise in ego-vetting and verbose persuasion. Flashing back to an event I had attended the night before involving a somewhat uncontrolled music jam in a parking lot, I wondered how the vision of those sitting at this prestigious table differed from that of the green-haired projectionist who had decided, rather spontaneously, to prop up a 24mm film projector in the second story window and to paint the brick wall across the street in a barrage of moving images. What, I wondered, was his 'vision' for this city? Why was his voice not represented here?

A MATTER OF REPRESENTATION

The debate over representation – who has the power to represent whom and with what authority – has become central within contemporary development contexts. Post-structural development initiatives of the 1960s and 70s, including the feminist movement, the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement all grappled, to varying degrees, with the issues raised by this debate. These movements took, as their central point of departure, "the right of formerly un- or mis-represented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined politically and intellectually, as normally excluding them" (Neetens, 1991:24). The feminist movement, for

instance, "critiqued and parodied the sexist content of films, advertisements, TV series, and lobbied the institutions responsible for creating and distributing them". It drew attention to the "absence of women players in history textbooks... [and] lobbied for better and more inclusive representations of women in school curricula" (Bantjes, 2007:l44).

Yet within the movement's fight for alternative representations of women, and in the attempt to frame such representations within an essential paradigm of 'womanness', a variety of critiques emerged. Critiques of the 'womanness' proposed by first-world middle-class feminism were launched, for instance, by those defined outside of this categorical framework. Feminist scholar bell hooks, for instance, launches such a critique: "white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Nor are they aware of the extent to which their perspectives reflect race and class biases." (hooks, 1984:3). This critique questions the value of an essentialized 'woman' figure as representative of 'the whole'. Such a critique, furthermore, challenges the authority of a particular group to construct such an essence. Taken to its logical end, this critique asks how any voice might be privileged in the representation of another, how any authority can be said to exist.

These questions become pronounced in the postmodern movement of the late-1900s. Philosopher Nelson Goodman, considered by some to be the 'patriarch of post-modern American philosophy' (West, 1989:189), grapples with a theory of relativism in his renowned essay, "The Way the World Is". Here, Goodman presents the construct of 'map vs. territory', through which he considers the relationship of the representation to the 'thing' it represents. Goodman problematizes the preferencing of one 'map' or 'representation' over another, questioning the mechanisms through which the authority surrounding any particular world-view is established. He also problematizes the notion of 'territory' – negating the existence of a 'real' in relation to which a 'faithful' representation can be procured: "if we say that all true descriptions and good pictures are equally unfaithful than what standard of relative faithfulness are we speaking? We have no longer before us any clear notion of what faithfulness would be." (Goodman, 1960:55). Within such a view, all attempts to prioritize or bring authority to one representation over another are seen to be flawed. If, as Goodman concludes, "there is no way which is the way the world is," there is then "no description [that] can capture it" (55). There are, however, "many ways the world is, and every true description captures one of them" (55). Thus Goodman argues against an absolute truth that preferences one representation over another. Instead, he advocates for a theory of absolute relativism.

Such relativism, emerging to popularity in the 1990s, faced substantial epistemological criticism even at the height of its intellectual reign (Owen, 2007:154-155). In agreeing to the notion that all representation is fundamentally equal, that no representation should be prefered over another, one must then address the question of relativism as, itself, an absolute. This paradox leads to a perplexing outcome. As Andreja Jonoski indicates, "The 'universal statement that no universal statements can be made'... appears to leave no room for any meaningful action. If, after all, there is no ground on which this or that epistemic alternative can be justified, where do we find the motivation for action?" (Jonoski, 2002:42). Critics of postmodern thought (e.g: Christopher Norris, 1992), argue that "this kind of epistemological relativism is not emancipating at all and that it actually leads into a 'blind alley' where 'anything can be said about everything'.(Jonoski:42). In a response to Baudrillard's classically postmodernist 'denial' of the existence of the Gulf War, Norris responds with the following rebuke:

> It is Baudrillard's contention that we now inhabit a realm of purely fictive or illusory

> appearances; that truth has gone the way of enlightened reason and such-like obsolete ideas; that "reality" is nowadays defined through and through by the play of multiplied "simulacra" or reality-effects... That this is all sheer nonsense... should be obvious to anyone not wholly given over to the vagaries of current intellectual fashion. (Norris, 1992:14-15)

Norris' critique of Baudrillard's postmodern relativism demonstrates the epistemological hot water in which the movement found itself in the late '90s, and the pointedness of the barbs aimed at this school of thought.

Cognizant of these barbs, but also of the positioning of postmodernism as a reaction against the very real systems of domination perpetuated by 'absolute' epistemological world-views (Phillips; Okholm, 1995:12), I now return from what I shall refer to as a 'necessary tangent' to ask the following: can representation exist beyond the fray of this either/or dichotomy? Can it manifest both absolutist and relativist ideals? The answer to this question will inform the way in which we approach representation on a political level, and the way in we conceptualize and actualize change.

VOLOŠINOV'S ANTITHESIS

Russian linguist V.N. Vološinov, in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, poses a response to this question that includes elements of both relative and absolute world-views. For Vološinov, these two seemingly opposite phenomena form two parts of a dialectical whole. To make his point, he examines each 'part' in turn, unearthing the false presuppositions that arise when either concept is taken to an extreme; when either is seen to exist without its dialectical counterpart.

First, Vološinov examines 'abstract objectivism' – a philosophical approach that assumes the world's existence in relation to a series of pre-defined, absolute 'truths'. Taking, as a model for his research, the 'closed' system of language propagated by his intellectual rival Ferdinand de Saussure, (Vološinov, 1973:59), Vološinov critiques the 'irrational rationality' of a world-view that attempts to 'fix' particular occurrences and phenomena a-priori. Saussure's belief in language as a "self-contained whole" is seen by Vološinov as an 'avoidance of philosophy' (62), or, said another way, a failure to engage with the complexity of a larger philosophical paradigm. Such a world-view, in giving primacy to absolute forms of knowledge, to language as an absolute construct, falls short of the depth that a paradigmatic approach affords.

Similarly, Vološinov critiques the relativist model – one founded entirely upon individual subjectivism. Highlighting the Romantic era in its preoccupation with the primacy of 'inner' or 'internal' realities (83), Vološinov questions the underlying assumption of an internal/subjective reality as, in fact, internal:

> Even though we sometimes have pretensions to experiencing and saying things *urbi* et *orbi*, actually, of course, we envision this 'world at large' through the prism of the concrete social milieu surrounding us.... Each person's inner world and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned. (86).

Within Vološinov's critique, we find the roots of what is perhaps a more useful criticism of postmodern relativism than that offered by Norris. While an individual might negate particular norms and beliefs within a particular social network (e.g: Baudrillard's negation of the Gulf War), the *existence* of such norms persists as a constitutive force, molding 'subjective' forms of experience. In recognizing the particulars of a subjective position, one must also acknowledge this position as informed by a larger social reality, a larger social whole.

For Vološinov, the antitheses between subject and object, absolute and relative, is found in the concept of the 'social', and in the sum of 'sociality' or 'intersubjectivity' as expressed in the whole. Vološinov alludes to this 'whole' in assuming, as he does, a "unified sphere of organized social intercourse" (46). He refers to the social dynamic of the whole in terms of the "we-experience": (88) a shared consciousness including "different degrees and different types of ideological structuring" (88). The whole is thus considered to be a thoroughly intersubjective phenomenon – it is that which is collectively shared.

The presence of this whole can be experienced in a number of ways: in the whole of an 'utterance' (99), in that of a creative and/or literary work (183), in the phenomenon of shared consciousness (90), in the social dynamics present within a generation" (94). One of the broadest conveyances of this concept, however, Vološinov borrows from Dostoyevsky - in his conveyance of the whole as "today's whole image of the man, in the sum gesture of his words, gesture, behaviour, looks" (Vološinov, quoting Dostoyevsky, 1973:156). This 'whole' is considered to be something impossible to pin down, but something nevertheless that produces "a perfectly cogent and irresistible impression that unwittingly turns into the most absolute conviction." (156). There is, in the whole, an element of mystery– it is a concept that, in some ways, resists definition. Still it is seen to be a powerful and ever-present force – one informed by the past (142), yet reinventing, reconstituting itself continually.

Given the dialectic that we have just described, we return, now, to our central line of questioning to ask how Vološinov, with this antithesis, views the phenomenon of representation.

Vološinov advocates, in his work, on behalf of representative phenomena that convey and embody the 'social whole'. He characterizes an authentic representation of this whole as one embodying 'multiaccentuality' – a term referring to the 'intersecting of accents' (23) - to the place wherein differences connect with one another in unity. In the space between viewpoints lies an essential struggle. It is through difference, through the conflict between differences, that humanity charts its path of development, generating new visions, directions and realities on behalf of the 'whole'. A multiaccentual sign (in Vološinov's words) or representation (in ours) is one, then, that conveys the essence of this fundamental struggle, and of the generative and plural nature of the whole.

In Vološinov's view, such struggle is not to be found in the ideologies of the ruling class. These ideologies, on the contrary, reinforce fixed, uniaccentual realities that serve, ultimately, to secure and maintain control: "The ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual. (p. 23). Here then, we see a particular support (albeit in inverse form) on behalf of the popular. It is not the 'ruling' but the 'popular' who, through their embracement of the inherent struggle of life, are preferenced to represent the 'whole'.

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY AND THE SOCIAL WHOLE

Reflecting on the possibility of the popular representation, I now turn from Vološinov to ask how, within contemporary democratic politics, such representation is actualized, how a 'politics of the popular' might be constructed. In addressing this question, I draw upon practices of contemporary democratic governance as enacted in the West, and in particular, within the United States as the epicentre of such practice. Here I ask whether American democracy, in its principle state, serves as a political manifestation of Vološinov's 'popular', and by extension, of the 'whole'.
I centre this investigation around the concept of 'popular sovereignty'. This term, existent as one of the defining principles of American democracy, posits a government that is "of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln, Gettysburg, 1863). The U.S. Declaration of Independence speaks to such sovereignty as a fundamental right - a truth existent a-priori:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights... – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the *consent of the governed*, - That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government. (United States Declaration of Independence July 4 1776, italics added).

Here, within the Constitution, the agency of the popular is given primacy over any form of power in which such agency is not present. The right of the 'people' to participate in and direct political decision-making processes through representation (and to overthrow governments that do not allow for such representation) is seen to exist a-priori.

Yet this 'right' is counter-balanced with its objective – to enact protection for diverse and 'relative' views – to enable rights for 'all men'. The 'absolutist' roots of the constitution, then, are contrasted with their support on behalf of individual relativity, and the right of the individual to manifest difference. Here we see, within the notion of the 'popular sovereign', the dual manifestation of both relative and absolute. In its embodiment of this antithesis, and in its focus upon 'the popular' as the appropriate agent of representation, the Constitution can be seen to operationalize - to bring into political reality Vološinov's support for of the 'popular' as an authentic representative of 'the whole'.

THE PROBLEM OF THE ELITE

In taking this comparison further, we extend our examination of the 'whole' beyond the founding documents of the Constitution so as to investigate its relevance and applicability within contemporary U.S. politics. Here we examine the *ideal* of popular sovereignty versus the *reality* – the concept versus its manifestation.

Numerous critiques have arisen surrounding the manifestation of the 'popular sovereign' within the U.S., many of which view the concept to be a myth. Rather than a government 'of the people, by the people and for the people', critics of American democracy perceive a government 'of, for, and by the elite'.

Kevin O'Leary, in his book *Saving Democracy*, describes the United States political situation as one embodying a "yawning chasm between the public and the political elite" (O'Leary, 2006:4). O'Leary attributes this chasm to a qualitative shift in democratic

engagement that has been exacerbated in recent decades by an increasing U.S. population-size. While the population has increased dramatically over the past half-century, representation on the national level has remained constant (18) The widening gap in the ratio between representing and represented has caused a shift, he argues, in the quality of democratic engagement, and in the ability of the popular to authentically 'rule'. The popular, he argues, have experienced a drastic decline in their power and agency, and in their 'link' to and 'participation' in governance: "With one member of the House of Representatives for every 650,000 Americans, our connection with the federal government is stretched thin" (2).

O'Leary theorizes a number of ramifications surrounding this decline in popular agency. One of the key impacts, he claims, is a growing sense of distance between the 'average citizen' and his/her political representative: "As the U.S. population grows, it is as if politics takes place in an ever-expanding auditorium. Most of the audience is far from the stage, and only the loudest voices reach them" (4). This distance has led to an 'entertainmentization' of politics, as politicians strive to pander to an increasingly larger crowd: "players perfect sound bites and handlers stagecraft entrances, backdrops, and messages. What matters are the sweeping gestures that reach far into the hall and the balcony" (4). As quantitative shifts occur in per-capita representation, the stature of those in power shifts, he argues, qualitatively. Those that are indoctrinated into the roles of political representation on the national scale are indoctrinated, simultaneously, into a "special elite class – economically and socially" (19). This elite not only retains an increasingly high level of power, it favours certain types of people – namely the wealthy – those living, ironically, "at great remove from those who vote for them" (19).

Within this critique of the U.S. democratic state, we see emerge again Vološinov's concept of uniaccentuality. The system's manifestation of 'popular sovereignty' is seen to be comprised, in actuality, of a self-propagating, self-perpetuating elite. This 'elite' enacts 'closed' systems of meaning and representation that remove the popular from political agency, and that replace this agency with that of the ruling class.

THE QUALITY OF REPRESENTATION

In examining further this 'uniaccentual' representation in opposition to Vološinov's 'multiaccentual', we encounter a few key differences. While Vološinov advocates for a representative system that acknowledges the inherently plural and multi-accentual qualities of the 'whole', the elite system of the U.S. democratic state embodies a singular, uniaccentual, view. While Vološinov advocates for a system reflective of the 'popular' as the class most able to represent the 'whole', the elite system of the U.S. democratic state is comprised of representatives hailing from positions of wealth – its representatives members of the ruling class. While Vološinov advocates for a system embodying and representing the qualitative dimensions of the struggle inherent in human diversity, the elite system of the U.S. democratic state is seen to embody and propagate, in its affiliation with ruling-class ideals, the qualities of 'sameness'.

The differences noted here are caused or exacerbated, according to O'Leary, by the low level of representation per capita existent within the United States democratic system. Such a system, in its placement of representative control into the hands of the 'few', finds itself at odds with its proclamation of public sovereignty as a fundamental 'right'. Also lacking within this system is a certain qualitative connection between those representing and those represented. Here, the relationship is seen to be both fragile and superficial. The elite do not, O'Leary argues, embody the interests of those they are commissioned to serve.

What, then, might representational relationships look like that are qualitatively engaged with these realities – that connect with and convey the popular 'soul'? The final segment of this paper grapples with responses to this question. Here I draw, in a preliminary and exploratory fashion, on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire. I present a 'snap-shot' of each theorist's work as it responds to this question, noting the differing nuances embodied within their views.

GRAMSCI: A POLITICS OF EMPATHY

Marxist revolutionary Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, proposes a form of representation that includes, as its key agent, the 'Organic Intellectual'. This individual is one who, through identification with the lived experience of the 'people', represents their interests in an engaged and empathetic way. Recognizing that "the [traditional] intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel", (Gramsci, 1992:173), Gramsci advocates on behalf of an intellectualism rooted in passion, empathy and idealism: "One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people".

This passion, stemming from 'lived' and 'experiential' identification with those represented, enables the intellectual to move beyond superficial forms of representation to enact, rather, long-lasting, transformative change. As Gramsci explains, "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as a constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' "(Gramsci, 1971:10). Persuasion is induced, then, by the organic intellectual through lived experience. As such, it exudes a deep understanding of and commitment to, those whose interests are by it served.

Gramsci, himself considered by many to be an 'organic intellectual', demonstrates the nature of this commitment in his relationship with those whom he, as political leader and co-founder of the Communist Party of Italy, represented. Asked why he had not, in the months leading up to his arrest and imprisonment by Italy's fascist regime in 1926, left Italy in order to avoid imprisonment, he responded, "the captain does not abandon the sinking ship." (Germino, 1990, paraphrasing Gramsci, 244) In this statement, we gain a sense of the quality and strength of the empathetic link between the organic intellectual and his/her constituency, and of the depth of commitment inherent to this relationship.

BAKHTIN—A POLITICS OF AESTHETICS

Gramsci's insistence upon empathy as a necessary ingredient for effective representation is reflected in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, empathy is embodied and expressed in aesthetic, rather than in overtly political, form. Such empathy is captured in the quality of exchange enabled by certain mediums of art – particularly that of the novel. In Bakhtin's view, novelistic expression creates the conditions for the emergence of a particular kind of consciousness - one inclusive of both subject and object; 'self' and 'other'. The medium of the novel is seen, by Bakhtin, to enable a particular quality of interaction and of representation – a quality based on flexibility, heteroglossia, irony, humor, self-parody and indeterminacy – and a

"semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality". (Bakhtin, 2002:7). Within this description of the novel's dialogic potential, we see emerge the possibility of dynamic engagement – that which is inclusive, it seems, of the 'multiaccentuality' embodied within the 'whole'.

In his essay, *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, Bakhtin focuses on the dialogic connection between Dostoyevsky and his work. He centres his discussion around the qualitative elements of Dostoyevsky's relationship, as author, to the complex and dynamic heroes for which he is renowned. Bakhtin compares this relationship to that of a mother to a child. He notes that through a mother's love for her child, through the author's love for his hero, a certain form of consciousness can be said to arise:

> ...as soon as a human being begins to experience himself from within, he at once meets with acts of recognition and love that come to him from outside-from his mother, from others who are close to him. It is from their lips, in the emotional-volitional tones of their love, that the child hears and begins to acknowledge his own proper name and names of all the features pertaining to his body and to his inner states and experiences" (Bakhtin, 1990:49).

Here we understand the representative to play a nurturing and enabling role for those represented. Through empathy, a certain consciousness and identity is formed within those who are the recipients of such 'love'.

Although constitutive of the consciousness of the hero, the author, Bakhtin notes, is not inextricably entwined with this consciousness – he is, in many ways, removed from it. As with 'mother' and child, 'the author' is seen by Bakhtin to exist both within and outside of the lived reality of the character whose existence he represents. While on one hand he connects intimately with his character: "penetrat[ing] him and almost merg[ing] or becom[ing] one with him from within" (22), he is also capable of assuming an objective view. The author can do what the hero cannot: perceive the hero's life as a whole. In this ability to step outside - to 'interpret' the significance and meaning of experience as it is realized in relation to the whole lies - an aesthetic power. For Bakhtin, the aesthetic journey begins when "we return to our own place outside the suffering person and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself." (26). In this 'place between' subject and object, self and other, a 'shared' reality is born. The differences between self and other are here confronted – and through this confrontation, empathy becomes manifest.

Bakhtin, advocating on behalf of an 'aesthetic' form of representative engagement, expands, then, on the Gramscian notion of empathy. For Bakhtin, empathy entails more than an engagement with lived experience. It entails, also, an experience of distancing – of a perception of one's views and understandings in relation to a larger whole.

FREIRE: A POLITICS OF COLLECTIVITY

Thus far we have grappled with the qualitative nature of representation as explored by Gramsci and Bakhtin. We have examined the possibility of representation as both an 'empathetic', and 'aesthetic' phenomenon – one rooted in 'identification with' and 'interpretation of' the popular in its lived reality. We have also examined the possibility of representation as a constitutive force – one enabling of 'identity-formation' for those represented. In the final segment, we explore

representation as manifest in the work of Paulo Freire. Here, we understand the phenomenon as existent within a 'collective' context – quite literally, as enacted 'of, by and for' the people (in Freire's terminology, the 'oppressed'). Representation, as such, is owned not by an individual (the author, the organic intellectual), but by the 'popular' or the 'oppressed' as authentically connected to, and constitutive of, the larger whole.

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire draws focus to the agency of 'the oppressed', and in particular, to its right to self-representation. Says Freire:

> Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They [the oppressed] will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. (45)

This statement acknowledges the 'lived' experience of the oppressed as enabling a certain authenticity of representation – as providing just cause for 'a fight'. In the same way that Gramsci's 'organic intellectual' is empowered to represent by means of a deep-rooted connection with 'the people'; so too is the 'oppressed' empowered, according to Freire, to self-represent by way of its lived experience.

This ability to represent emerges, claims Freire, not only through lived experience but through the development of critical consciousness. Here, Freire echoes Bakhtin's notion of 'aesthetic' consciousness – a consciousness rooted in lived experience yet removed, simultaneously, from the immediacy of such experience. This removal entails, for Freire, the objectification of lived experience: "the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality" (51). In objectifying its lived reality, in perceiving it as would the 'other', the oppressed are empowered to self-represent, and through this representation, to enact change.

Such representation is seen to embody, as is the case with Bakhtin and Gramsci, a character of empathy – of love. Says Freire: "This fight [for liberation], because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence" (p.45). Such empathy can only arise from an understanding of the oppressive situation as existent within a conceptual framework larger than that of lived experience. Through objectification, the oppressed are empowered to see themselves as both 'self' and 'other' – and to represent their lived experiences as existent in relation to a larger 'whole'.

SUMMARY

Through the work of Gramsci, Bakhtin and Freire, we perceive representation as a phenomenon that is both at one with, and separate from, the realities of those represented. Each theorist advocates for a depth of engagement between represented and representative – an engagement founded upon emotional connection as derived from lived experience. Bakhtin and Freire, in turn, emphasize the need for a conscious distancing, simultaneously, from this lived experience. In removing oneself from the immediacy of lived experience, in perceiving this experience in relation to its larger 'objective' context, a critical aesthetic, or consciousness, is born. Through this consciousness, an individual and/or group is authenticated in its representation of 'the whole'.

CONCLUSION

In considering the possibilities of representation described by Gramsci, Bakhtin and Freire, and in applying these possibilities to the context of contemporary democratic politics, some interesting questions arise. In the United States democratic system, with its ratio of national representation of 650,000:1, we ask *how* such representation might exist – what quality and depth is embodied therein. Are such representatives empowered to identify with their constituencies? To participate in their 'lived experiences'? Are they enabled to feel empathy on behalf of their constituencies – to 'love' them in the way of the author to his hero? Would such representatives endure personal hardship, if necessary, on behalf of their constituencies? Would they place the interests of those represented ahead of their own? And are such representatives enabled to perceive, through simultaneous identification with and removal from the 'lived experience' of their constituencies, the connection of their experiences in relation to that of the larger whole?

Such questions might, in fact, be asked of any democratic system. I pose them, in particular, to my well-dressed comrades of the Civic Arts Authority, to those seated around that mahogany table and to those, on a larger scale, responsible for visioning processes on behalf of their communities. Does your representation, your vision of your community embody a lived connection to those affected by this vision? Is it situated critically – is it understood to be connected to the framework of a larger whole? In asking these questions, we open doors of possibility surrounding the phenomenon of representation. We question our assumptions and understandings surrounding this phenomenon, and make room for new avenues of representation – new embodiments of change.

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