Feature Article: Theory and Practice

The Representative Claim

Michael Saward

Faculty of Social Sciences, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK.
E-mail: m.j.saward@open.ac.uk

Recent work on the idea of political representation has challenged effectively orthodox accounts of constituency and interests. However, discussions of representation need to focus more on its dynamics prior to further work on its forms. To that end, the idea of the representative claim is advanced and defended. Focusing on the representative claim helps us to: link aesthetic and cultural representation with political representation; grasp the importance of performance to representation; take non-electoral representation seriously; and to underline the contingency and contestability of all forms of representation. The article draws upon a range of sources and ideas to sketch a new, broader and more complex picture of the representative claim which — despite the complexity — helps us to reconnect representation theory to pressing real-world challenges.
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The Representative Claim

In all fields, real progress sometimes depends on a basic shift in frame of reference. This is the case with the theory of political representation today — or so I shall argue.[1]

It is not that progress is undetectable. There is, of course, a good deal of recent empirical work which seeks to illuminate varied dilemmas of indigenous and minority representation, the representation of women, group representation, descriptive representation in deliberative forums, and the ambiguities of representatives' roles (see for example the essays in Sawer and Zappala, 2001; Saward, 2000; Laycock, 2004). There have been effective challenges to prevailing theoretical views too. Eckersley (2004), Dobson (1996) and Goodin (1996), for example, have sought to extend (in different ways) the notion of representation to encompass the interests of future generations and non-human nature through notions of stewardship and virtual representation. Held (1995) and Thompson (1999) have sought ways to have the interests of non-nationals represented, shaking up the notion of constituency in representative theory.

Phillips (1995) and Young (2000) have stressed the claims of groups to be represented, challenging individualism and the dominance of 'ideas' over 'presence'. Mansbridge (2003) has highlighted the theoretical importance of deliberative representation and surrogacy. Together, such efforts challenge aspects of notions such as election, individualism, fixed constituencies and human constituencies at the heart of the theory of representation.

However, there are limits to how far even this body of work can take us. For one thing, it largely retains a narrow legislature–constituency focus; it seeks to alter electoral and parliamentary systems to allow for more group representation (Phillips, Young), or for proxy representatives of interests other than present-generation human interests (Dobson), or for legislative representation by affected interests beyond national or constituency boundaries (Thompson), or to encourage more sophisticated approaches to the role of deliberative accountability over time in legislative representation (Mansbridge, 2003). Legislatures, constituencies and the institutions they support matter, of course. However, they are not all that matters to political representation. We need to separate analytically (a) what political representation is, and (b) this given (albeit important) institutional instance of it. I hope that move, among others, will enable us to examine representation as a creative process that spills beyond legislatures.

From a slightly different angle, many of the authors mentioned remain focused on *forms* of representation, and thus on expanding or altering existing typologies. In this article I advocate a significant shifting of our frame of reference in order to explore what is going on *in* representation — its dynamics, if you like — rather than what its (old or new) forms might be. Trustees, delegates, politicos, stewards, perspectival representatives — the shifting taxonomies are often illuminating, but they can distract us unduly from grasping what are the wellsprings of such roles. Reframing our efforts to ask directly what is going on in representation should help us to weave together varied disparate threads in recent theoretical and empirical writing, and as part of the same endeavour to question fundamental aspects of the theory of representation. Specifically, I will argue the benefits of refocusing our work on representation around what I call 'the representative claim' — seeing representation in terms of *claims to be representative* by a variety of political actors, rather than (as is normally the case) seeing it as an achieved, or potentially achievable, state of affairs as a result of election. We need to move away from the idea that representation is first and foremost a given, factual product of elections, rather than a precarious and curious sort of claim about a dynamic relationship.

Although my approach initially brackets normative as well as taxonomic concerns, challenging our received ideas about political representation matters.

Consider for example widespread arguments concerning the alleged remoteness of elected politicians in western countries from 'real issues' and core citizen concerns. If we conceive of representation as a zero-sum game (you are either elected, and therefore a representative, or you are not) and as institutionally locked-in (elections alone confer representativeness), then this widely felt remoteness and alienation naturally leads to condemnation of 'representative' government and politics. However, this is both too rigid and politically too conservative a view of representation; careful revisiting of the theory, based around the representative claim, can open our eyes to new and extra modes and styles of representation, electoral and non-electoral, which might in turn help varied actors to address the sense of remoteness and inadequacy.

Consider too new spaces and claims within politics, for example arguments and institutions that enact representation in territorial ways that are alternative to the nation-state (e.g. Held, 1995) — or indeed non-territorial bases of representation, including ones which seek to have non-human interests represented within human polities (Eckersley, 2004). Mainstream thinking about representation limits unduly creative thinking about who, or what, may be represented politically, and how this might be done. However, a conception of representation which stresses its dynamic, claim-based character, its performative aspects as well as its narrowly institutional ones, and its potential for radical extension, can open up new ways for us to think about political inclusion and a more pluralistic representative politics — going an important step further, I would argue, than even provocative work such as Held's or Eckersley's has taken us so far.

The deeper assumptions contained in existing theoretical baggage are best traced through a focused critique of Hannah Pitkin's contemporary classic, *The Concept of Representation* (1967), drawing out influential stipulations which (in my view) have unnecessarily restricted prevailing theoretical approaches to representation. To anticipate some of what is coming, my approach is distinctive in that it: (a) sees claim-making as the core of representation, (b) stresses the performative rather than the institutional side of representation, (c) starts with the micro and works out to the macro, and (d) creates space for creative normative work on radicalizing our notions of who, and what, may count as representative politically, though without setting out a normative stall in the first instance. I start with the critique of Pitkin, before secondly offering a detailed account of the basic currency of political representation, the representative claim. Third, I show how diverse and complex the representative claim can be by mapping key possibilities, and then by showing how aesthetic, cultural and political representation are necessarily bound together in representative claims. Finally, I draw out topics that conventional approaches to political representation often miss, such as the importance of identity to representation, and the constitution of constituency.

Hannah Pitkin and Paths not Taken

The thrust of Hannah Pitkin's, *The Concept of Representation* is to suggest that the best way to think of representation is as a 'substantive acting for others', not merely a formal authorization or accountability to others. Representing means 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (1967, 209). Pitkin encourages us to ask: what is it about the representative that makes them representative? Is it something about their appearance, perhaps, or their actions, or more? Her focus is thus resolutely on the representative rather than on the represented; the latter is taken as unproblematically given. A key part of my argument will be that this unidirectional approach is unnecessarily but influentially limiting, in that it has encouraged theorists to underplay the subtle processes of constructing the represented, or that which needs to be represented.

Pitkin divides up the 'various views of the concept' of representation as follows:

(A) 'Authorization', 'accountability' and 'substantive acting for' are three modes of 'acting for' (a person)
(B) (1) descriptive, and (2) symbolic representation are modes of 'standing for' (a person or object)

Views of type A involve activity, 'acting for'. Views of type B are more passive — a person or a thing does not have to do anything in particular in order to 'stand for' something else. These categorizations look reasonable and innocent, but they are not, and it is important to see why. By this very process of categorization Pitkin denies the existence or legitimacy of a category of active symbolic or aesthetic representation. Politically, this involves screening out depictions of the represented by representatives and others. In other words, she screens out by definitional fiat the idea that representatives or their scriptwriters or sponsors are actively engaged in constituting certain ideas or images of their constituents, images which are inevitably partial and selective. And with this, she screens out the idea of 'representations' as depictions or portraits of the represented.[2] Any role in theories of political representation for the maker of representations is reduced by Pitkin to the mere giving of information, in the way a landscape painting might tell the viewer how many trees were in the field that day. For Pitkin, when it comes to symbolic and aesthetic representation, it is the inanimate object — the painting, the icon, the symbol, the map — that represents. The intentions of the maker of the symbol, etc. are either ignored or reduced to merely informational impulses.

Thus denuded of power and interest for politics, Pitkin can write that: 'When this view of representation is applied to the political realm, the implication is that in politics, too, the function of representative institutions is to supply

information, in this case about the people or the nation'. 'It is not an ''acting for'' but a giving of information about, a making of representations about …' (1967, 83–84). In one deft move, Pitkin sidelines the maker of representations and puts her preferred (highly limited) vision of the politician centre-stage, the politician who acts for others and only secondarily (and less interestingly) offers him or herself as standing for something in a distinctive and selective manner. The represented is transparent; to Pitkin's way of thinking; 'information' can be 'given' about it because it is a known or knowable quantity. The mere transfer of 'information' is enough — information whose ready availability and truthful status Pitkin does not question.[3] In this way, Pitkin defines away what I will argue is a central aspect of political representation — the active making (creating, offering) of symbols or images of what is to be represented.

Part of my goal is to place at centre-stage the necessary figure of the maker of representative claims about themselves and about their audiences. Just as representation is not a mere fact that 'just is', so representations (depictions, portrayals, encapsulations) of self and others in politics do not just happen. People construct them, put them forward, make claims for them — *make* them. More specifically, political figures (or political parties or other groups, for example) make representations of their constituencies, their countries, themselves. Crucially, these representations are an unavoidable part of a 'substantive acting for', and any theory of political representation must take them on board.

Seeing political figures as the makers of representative claims forces us to see in a new light more traditional views of the representative; for example, we need to move well beyond the mandate–independence, delegate–trustee frame for discussing political representation. Both of these perspectives *assume* a fixed, knowable set of interests for the represented: the capacity to be a 'delegate' or a 'trustee' is built precisely upon the more or less transparent knowability of the interests of the represented. However, constituencies can be 'read', inevitably, in various ways. At the heart of the act of representing is the depicting of a constituency *as* this or that, as requiring this or that, as having this or that set of interests. The character of the represented cannot be placed unproblematically to one side. I now set out the basic currency of analysis that can help us to do just that — the representative claim.

The Representative Claim

I have suggested, *contra* Pitkin, that representation in politics is at least a two-way street: the represented play a role in choosing representatives, and representatives 'choose' their constituents in the sense of portraying them or

framing them in particular, contestable ways. If I allege that you, a potential constituent of mine, possess key characteristic X, and if I can get you to accept this, I can then present myself as possessing capacity or attribute Y that enables me to represent you — by virtue of a certain resonance between X and Y. In other words, would-be political representatives, in this process of portrayal or representation of constituencies, *make claims* about themselves and their constituents and the links between the two; they argue or imply that they are the best representatives of the constituency *so understood*. Political figures (and their scriptwriters and spin doctors and party supporters, etc.) are in this sense creative actors. They may well be 'agents', as representatives are conventionally understood, but equally or more importantly they are 'actors', makers of claims. The world of political representation is a world of claim-making rather than fact-adducing. Note that, seen in this light, no would-be representative can fully achieve 'representation', or be fully representative. Facts may be facts, but claims are contestable and contested; there is no claim to be representative of a certain group that does not leave space for its contestation or rejection by the would-be audience or constituency, or by other political actors. To argue in this way is to stress the performative side of political representation. Representing is performing, is action by actors, and the performance contains or adds up to a claim that someone is or can be 'representative'. To an important extent, representation is not something external to its performance, but is something generated by the making, the performing, of claims to be representative. To stress the performative is not to downgrade material or institutional aspects of political representation (such as specific electoral systems). I will say more about that below. However, first, let's look at what exactly is going on when representative claims are made. We can map out the broader form of the representative claim, I suggest, in the following way:

A **maker** of representations (**M**) puts forward a **subject** (**S**) which stands for an **object** (**O**) which is related to a **referent** (**R**) and is offered to an **audience** (**A**).

Representation is often seen as triangular in conception — subject, object, referent.[4] However, representation does not just happen as the result of a process or by the functioning of familiar (e.g. electoral) institutions; it is claimed as the key part of someone making it happen[5] through the deployment or exploitation of a wide variety of formal and informal institutions. Subjects (or signifiers) and objects (or signifieds) are not just 'out there', in a certain number and of a certain type. There are 'makers' — spin doctors are a clear enough political example but there are many more — of claims about them, claims which generate and enervate specific senses of subject and object (and which generate and focus upon specific would-be 'audiences'). The makers of representative claims (and the depictions or portrayals of themselves and others that are bound up in those claims), it should be noted, are not necessarily good, or successful, at it. The Conservative Party leader in the UK

at the 2005 general election, Michael Howard, and his advisers, made representative claims depicting the British people as deeply concerned by the issue of 'immigration', but the claim was not substantially borne out in the actual vote (a large part of the audience didn't buy the claim at the heart of the performance). Makers of representative claims could be makers of bad, or unacceptable, or unaccepted claims; they could also be makers of compelling, resonant claims about themselves and would-be constituents.

Nor are the makers of representative claims magicians. They cannot simply conjure claims out of the air (or if they do they are highly unlikely to succeed). Representative claims that are compelling, or which resonate among relevant audiences, will be made from 'ready mades', existing terms and understandings which the would-be audience will recognize (see my comments on the cultural aspects of representation below). The style, timing and content of a representative claim must tap into familiar contextual frameworks. Claims must repeat the familiar as well as (indeed, in order to) create something new; must iterate features of political culture to cross a threshold of potential acceptability.[6]

In addition, representative claims only work, or even exist, if 'audiences' acknowledge them in some way, and are able to absorb or reject or accept them or otherwise engage with them. As I have indicated, a representative claim is a double claim: about an aptitude or capacity of a would-be representative, and also about relevant characteristics of a would-be audience (nee constituency). There is little political point in a claim that does not seek to address a specified (national, local, ethnic, religious, linguistic, class or other) audience, and more to the point, to bring a potential audience to a self-conscious notion of itself *as* an audience as the result of claim-making. Representation is produced by processes of claim-making and consequent acceptance or rejection by audiences or parts of audiences. Indeed, we can pinpoint three characteristics and potential effects that are crucial to the power dynamics of the representative claim: audience-creation, reading-back and silencing.

Makers of representative claims attempt to evoke an audience that will receive the claim, and (hopefully, from the maker's point of view) receive it in a certain, desired way. Makers of representative claims suggest to the potential audience: (1) you are/are part of this audience, (2) you should accept this view, this construction — this representation — of yourself, and (3) you should accept me as speaking and acting for you. The aim of the maker of the claim in such cases can be said to be to avoid disputatious 'reading back', or contestation of their claims, by would-be audience members.

However, avoiding 'reading back' by audience members is difficult for claim-makers. It is true that politicians are not like many contemporary artists who create works that are deliberately set up to provoke engagement and even contestation. Political makers of representations tend to foreclose or fix the

meanings of themselves and their actions. Nevertheless, there is no representative claim that cannot be 'read back' or contested or disputed by observers or audiences. The maker of a representative claim may intend that the audience invoked by the claim sees it as he wishes, but they are always to some extent free to reinterpret the claim, to turn it back against the maker: 'who are you to tell me what I want?' In the same way that postmodern literary theorists posited the 'death of the author' — readers become authors in that they actively recreate the story through reading — we might say that there is no representative claim without its being open to a counter-claim or a denial from part of the very audience that the claim invokes. This is a point which runs directly counter to what I called above the undue 'unidirectionality' of Pitkin's account of political representation. So for example a claim along the following lines …

> The MP (maker) offers himself or herself (subject) as the embodiment of constituency interests (object) to that constituency (audience).
> …. may provoke a constituent 'receiving' the representative claim to read it back, dispute it, seek to unmask it by revealing its coded character, etc.

Exploring the effects of representative claims might also include the need to examine the possibility that they include a series of interlinked silencing effects. Claims can by their nature silence the constituencies or people or groups which they constitute by evoking; reinforce, or bring about, or claim the necessity of the absence of the represented from the political arena; appropriate the voice of the represented by the very process of evoking into being a represented with a voice; and become privileged weapons in the hands of elite minorities with privileged access to technologies and institutions of claim-making.

These possibilities — all too often actualities — look at the potential dark side of the processes of representative claim-making. However, in principle the representative claim is neither good nor bad. Representative claims can activate and empower recipients or observers, even if that is not the intention of the makers. Recipients or audiences are 'on the map' by being invoked in representative claims, even if an initial effect of a claim is a silencing one. One needs an identity as *a prior condition* of being silenced by a claim to represent one. Once established, that very identity can be a basis of dissent. This can empower those on the receiving end of claims, for example, to 'read back' the nature of the claim.

For these reasons, then, I have added *makers* and *audiences* to conventional triangular conceptions of representation, which focus in a less political and dynamic, and in a rather bloodless, manner on the subject–object–referent relation only. It is vital to take on board these extra aspects of representation as claim-making. As Louis Marin wrote: '… to represent signifies to present

oneself as representing something, and every representation, every sign or representation process, includes a dual dimension — a reflexive dimension, presenting oneself; a transitive dimension, representing something — and a dual effect — the subject effect, and the object effect' (2001, 256). Elsewhere, Marin notes that representations at once signify and show that they signify (2001, 204). Here, Marin makes two crucial points. First, there is no representation without a *claim* that I or you or it represents — maps, paintings, politicians and terrorists are *presented* as representing something or someone, implicitly or explicitly; subject and object are the effects of an act of claim-making. Marin prompts us to take on board the importance of what I am calling the maker of the representative claim. He also usefully separates the maker from the subject (though the two may be the same person). And second, Marin suggests that subject and object are refined and clarified in the process of representation. By making representative claims, the maker-subject constructs a new view of itself. And by presenting the object in a certain way, he or she also constructs a new view of the object. Translated into more directly political terms, an elected politician, for example, makes a claim to be adequately representative of a constituency or their nation each time she speaks for or about it. And each time she does so, she offers a construction or portrayal of herself and of her object (constituency or nation).

So, a representative claim is a claim to represent or to know what represents the interests of someone or something. To use those words is to give it a certain spin, so it is important to note that the claim could be expressed in a variety of ways. For example, I as a maker of representative claims could …

Claim to represent	the interests	of a person
Claim to embody	the needs	of a group of people
Claim to stand for	the desires	of a country or region
Claim to know	the wants	of animals
Claim to symbolise	the preferences	of sentient nature
Claim to project	the true character	of non-sentient nature

… to an observer or intended audience. The terms in the three columns can be mixed and matched, within limits (non-sentient nature could not be said to have preferences for example).

My overall argument is that exploring the representative claim can provide us with a rich range of insights and hypotheses about the dynamics of political representation that conventional, and even more recent innovative, views miss, by and large. Not least among these insights are ones about how power relationships are created and exploited through representation. Again, the potential of this broader perspective derives largely from the way in which

focusing on representative claims leads us to look at representation as a claim, not as a fact or as the given outcome of a process (electoral or other). The consequent need to examine the evaluation, contestation and legitimacy of representative claims leads us in turn to break through many barriers set up by orthodox thinking on representation. For example (I am only being indicative here), first, the representative claim can come from electoral candidates, party leaders, interest group or NGO figures, local figures, rock stars, celebrities and so on (see Street, 2004). Even innovative studies tend to confine authentic representation to elected figures, whether under existing or new and imaginative electoral and legislative arrangements. Second, the representative claim can never be fully redeemed, always contains ambiguities and instabilities. As such, 'representation' can be said from this perspective not to exist; what exists are *claims* and their receptions. This, I suggest, is a new and liberating perspective which does not privilege particular actors by virtue of their institutional positioning. Third, more than existing literatures this theoretical focus on the claim and its performance forces us to look at representation in its cultural contexts, in a way that chimes, for example with the work of Jean-Pascal Daloz (2003), which shows the great differences in the ways would-be representatives need to disport themselves in different contexts (Nigeria, France and Sweden in his study). Fourth, the claim-based focus opens up what is often taken for granted — the character of constituency and the stability and ready knowability of its interests. Claims play a key role in *constituting* constituencies (or audiences).

I turn now to explicating the representative claim further, focusing on key lines of variation.

Key Lines of Variation of Representative Claims

Highlighting representation as an economy of claims is a way to show how much representation is going on, politically. It happens — claims are made, offered, disputed, and accepted — often and in greatly varied ways, well beyond narrow confines of electoral politics (important though that domain is). I shall now discuss key lines of variation of the representative claim as a way of mapping some of its main features. Under this heading I discuss briefly four axes along which representative claims vary: singular–multiple, particular–general, implicit–explicit and internal–external. The enormous range and scope of the representative claim through these variations is vital to explore; it radically enriches our grasp of the diversity and texture of political representation, bringing together micro-psychological concerns and macro-structural ones within a dynamic framework of representation as claim-making.

Singular–multiple

There is near-endless scope for variation of a seemingly single claim. Consider how one claim can admit multiple variations.

The MP (maker) offers himself or herself (subject) as the embodiment of constituency interests (object) to that constituency (audience).

The maker could become the party, or the constituency organization, or a wing of the party. The subject could encompass the politician by enveloping him in a wing or faction of the party, for example. Constituency interests could be recast as majority or significant minority interests, or functional group interests or even national interests, or a combination. The audience could be the politician himself, or the party itself, or the government.

These claims come 'all at once'; or one suggests the others; or one is intended but another 'comes across' to audiences … or observers/potential audiences interpret claims differently from makers or other observers. Mixing and matching, appealing to multiple audiences in economical ways, 'buy one get one free' claims, strategic fomenting of a confusion of claims: all are possible and all happen. Who is represented to whom? Is it more effective to attempt to fabricate multiple audiences within one claim? Why do political figures wish to signal their representativeness to different audiences in different ways, even through the same verbal claim? These are some of the empirical questions that are prompted by attention to the singular–multiple dimension of the representative claim.

Particular–general

The degrees of generality of political representations could crudely enough be divided into two. First, at the most general level, we have claims which concern the basic constitutive character of a political system. One might, for example set out a claim like this:

The founding fathers (makers) deployed the elected offices and assembly (subject) to stand for the nation (object) in the eyes of its people and other watchers (audience).

One could call this a 'framing' claim, one that delimits and defines the contours of the basic system and constitutionalizes or 'encodes' it. I shall say more about coding in the context of the cultural aspect of representation in a moment. Clearly, in modern democracies the coding of representative claims into varied electoral systems is deep and powerful.

Within this frame, we might locate 'strategic' representative claims. For example, these might take the shape of claims which take advantage of the constitutional frame or code of the system. Thus for example a claim might look like this:

The Conservative Party (maker) offers itself (subject) as standing for the interests of 'family' (object) to the electorate (audience).

However, of course representative claims of different levels of generality need not be (and very often are not) about or within electoral politics. Consider for example:

Marx (maker) offered the working class (subject) as the symbol of a revolutionary political future (object) to the would-be members of that class (audience).

If that is a claim at a high level of generality, then it enables more specific claims which (in this case) would-be socialist politicians can call upon for more strategic purposes: for example, 'Marx's theory created the lens through which the politician could see the constituency as standing for united class interests'.

Why does attending to this dimension matter? For example, electoral representative claims do not happen in isolation. They can rely on a background of larger, often deeply institutionalized, claims, and themselves provide a further context for specific claim-making. Representative claims form a complex weave at different levels of generality, a point that conventional views often overlook.

Implicit–explicit

Some representative claims are made openly and outright. Others are perhaps barely recognizable as representative claims, so implicit are they in familiar institutions, actions and rhetoric. A particularly explicit claim might be:

Genoa anti-globalization demonstrators (makers) set up themselves and their movements (subjects) as representatives of the oppressed and down-trodden (object) to western governments (audience)

A much more implicit claim might be:

The MP (maker) offers himself or herself (subject) as the embodiment of constituency interests (object) to that constituency (audience).

I suggest as a hypothesis that explicit claims will most often be made where the claim is new or controversial or unfamiliar, or cuts across conventional codes and categories of representations. Implicit claims will most often be made where the style or the focus of the claim is familiar, and invokes or rests upon accepted representational, often framing or constitutional, codes or institutions. It is worth noting that we are dealing with shades of grey here: a representative claim is never wholly unprecedented, never *entirely* drawing on established or highly familiar codes. However, it matters hugely for us to acknowledge and understand which claims we accept unthinkingly, and which ones strike us as new or troubling. Our cultural and temporal situatedness is a key part of what we need to analyse, since it is that which conditions what sorts

of representative claims will be familiar and comfortable, unfamiliar and unsettling.

Internal–external

Two variants of the representative claim are: (1) where the maker and the subject are one and the same person, and (2) where the maker and subject are not the same person. Examples of the first variant include 'I represent … ' claims. Examples of the second variant include 'She represents', 'They represent', and also 'It represents'. With regard to the first variant, in a nutshell: one cannot present oneself as representing without making representations in the sense of claiming to symbolize something (being a subject); and, one cannot make representations without presenting oneself as someone who can make them.

Note in this context that some representative claims can be almost entirely mental or infra-individual. For example:

I (maker) can think of myself (subject) as representing the interests of my students (object) to myself (audience).

This claim can all happen in my head — behaviour consequent on the representative claim may be evident socially, but the claim itself is wholly internal. This is an example of a highly self-referential representative claim. Rodney Barker (2001), in the related context of legitimation, writes of the importance of this sort of 'legitimation of rulers, by rulers, for rulers' (2001, 45): 'The public, though they may be an audience, have never been the principal audience in the theatre of endogenous legitimation' (2001, 54). A more-or-less endogenous representative claim would consist of largely different components, for example:

I (maker) claim that Bono (subject) symbolizes the needs of debt-ridden societies (object) to western politicians (audience).

Politics displays all shades of representative claims. Private, infra-individual representative claims are ones we have little access to but which may prove to be politically significant. Public, open ones may be more available to contestation on the one hand, and more effective and transforming on the other.

Political Representation: Electoral, Aesthetic *and* Cultural

Conventional views of political representation are concerned with how electoral mechanisms do or do not induce responsive behaviour in elected representatives; whether accountability works prospectively or retrospectively; and what is the appropriate role for the representative to play (see for example

Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999). I have argued that such approaches are one-sided and limited — they tend to ignore other political senses of an extraordinarily rich word and set of practices.

The approach recommended here differs, for a start, in that it is more interpretive than normative — it is a conception intended to aid analysis and understanding rather than to support prescription. In this light, a key goal is to graft together insights with respect to aesthetic representation and cultural representation along with electoral representation. There are aesthetic, cultural and (sometimes) electoral moments in political representation. Much of what I have said so far supports this view, but let me say a word about each of these moments explicitly and briefly here.

Representative claims, as we have seen, take place all the time, in local and larger contexts, against a huge variety of backgrounds. The ones that *are* electoral in some sense include the claims that competing candidates make in the course of election campaigns, the claims that others make on their behalf, and the claims of the victor to be representing his or her constituency after the election. However, business and labour organizations, new social movements, individual public figures like Arundhati Roy or Bob Geldof, claim (or are claimed) also to represent politically. Political life in its larger sense consists of myriad, competing, multi-layered and diverse representative claims, pressed and contested in electoral contexts, to be sure, but in many others too.

There is an indispensable *aesthetic* moment in political representation because the represented is never just given, unambiguous, transparent. A representative — or someone making a representative claim — has necessarily to be creative. He or she has to mould, shape, and in one sense create that which is to be represented. She has to be an artist — though, as I have commented above, not necessarily a good one — to operate aesthetically, to evoke the represented. Consider in the above schema the separation between signifier (S), signified or object (O), and referent (R). If an electoral district or constituency's interests were transparent, patently evident, singular and obvious, to most people, then a representative could simply 'read off' those interests and act on them. However, the signified, or the object, is not the same as the thing or district itself (the referent). It is a picture, a portrait, an image of that electorate, not the thing itself. It is no closer to *being* the thing itself than a Rembrandt self-portrait was to Rembrandt himself. Competing significations are precisely what political debate and dispute is all about. The 'interests' of a constituency have to be 'read in' more than 'read off'; it is an active, creative process, not the passive process of receiving clear signals from below. Political figures, parties, lobby groups, social movements — as makers of representative claims, their business is aesthetic *because* it is political.

And political representation is necessarily *cultural* in the sense that there are cultural limits to the types of subject–object links that can plausibly be made in a given context. I have mentioned that representative claims need to be built out of 'ready-mades', even if they are re-interpreted and re-presented in new ways; ready-made tropes like 'I am one of you', 'you can trust me with your futures because I'm straight and honest', 'he's an expert and he understands what's going to work for you and what isn't', tap into existing understandings of what might make for a successful (i.e. accepted) representative claim in a given context. In Stuart Hall's terms, cultural representation is about shared meanings by sharing 'codes': 'Codes fix the relationship between concepts and signs [subject and object in my terms]. They stabilize meaning within different languages and cultures' (Hall, 1997, 21). If the aesthetic moment in political representation is unavoidable — representation cannot function without claims, portrayals of self and other, and the performance of the same — then it is the cultural moment which sets the limits or parameters for the aesthetic possibilities. It centres upon cultural codes which carry meanings in characteristic, more-or-less local ways. These are codes which would-be political representatives can exploit. One way of looking at this is to see 'audiences' as sharing meanings which make them variously receptive or resistant to certain styles of representing, or to certain types of representative claim.

It may seem odd to include formal institutions, including electoral institutions, in this 'cultural' frame but that is a further key dimension. Electoral laws dictating the frequency of elections, vote-counting procedures, the number of representatives to be elected from constituencies, and so on, are settled codes within countries (and states, regions and localities, and within a variety of public and semi-public organizations). These codes, congealed into laws and associated procedures, become familiar and accepted parts of national and other political landscapes. They are critical in helping to constrain and even determine how 'representation' is produced in particular places. However, I would resist confronting the 'institutional' with the 'performative'. Electoral and other institutions, of course, condition the styles of representative claims. However, those institutions are themselves 'performed' or enacted. They are pieces of crucial institutional and constitutional culture.

Every making of a representative claim involves challenging, reinforcing or modifying a certain code, including electoral ones. Cultural codes do not render representative-claim-making a static or predictable affair. Constraint and enablement of the politically feasible in representative politics means that cultural codes are inevitably present, but *no one code* is inevitably present (including sole understandings of electoral laws and the incentive effects they establish for different claims). Let me give an example. We might say that in a

political system in which clientelism and patronage — 'providing for your own' — is the key 'code' of electoral politics, then the style of representative claims that electoral candidates and parties offer to voters will be cast accordingly. Within this patronage-driven code there will still be room for varied claims, and for pushing the boundaries of the claim. Coding may be narrow, parochial and highly constraining politically; or it might be open, cosmopolitan and pluralistic. Clearly the range of independent media outlets in a polity, among other factors, will have an impact on cultural codes and their evolution. Cultural codes provide for a delimited but shifting set of exploitable meanings.

Why are codes so important, and culture so important to political representation? Bear in mind the fact that a representation, a political claim, is nothing if it is not heard, seen, or read by its intended audience, those whom it is meant to attract and convince. A voter in an election, for example, may or may not recognize the depiction of himself as 'really me' or 'really my interests'; to accept it and be influenced by it, he needs to decode meanings and accept them, and to recognize the legal or institutional context in which claims are advanced. As Hall puts it, in terms immediately analogous of our political context, 'The reader [audience] is as important as the writer [claim-maker, or politician] in the production of meaning. Every signifier given as encoded with meaning has to be meaningfully interpreted or decoded by the receiver' (1997, 31).

Making Representations: Identity, Constituency, and Partiality

These observations lead directly on to the ways in which representation, understood primarily through processes of claim-making, leads us to focus further on the constitution of subjects, the making of identities, and the partiality of each of these processes. I have commented in passing on each of these aspects above, and now extend those observations further. Characterizing identity and constituency are largely what the aesthetic and cultural aspects of political representation boil down to.

Identity

In politics, portrayals of constituencies or the nation or voters' interests are just that: portrayals (Spivak, 1988, 276). There is no self-presenting subject whose essential character and desires and interests are transparent, beyond representation, evident enough to be 'read off' their appearance or their behaviour. Politicians often *claim* to be able to read off constituency and national interests, to have a unique hotline to voters' real wants and needs.

However, the fact is that they can only do so after first deploying an interpretative frame containing selective representations of their constituents. In the terms of Spivak in her dense and challenging essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), how one is represented aesthetically will condition how one can be, or wishes to be, represented politically. The subaltern can be produced, positioned and silenced through a process of representation. To speak for others — as elected representatives do, of course — is to make representations which render those others visible and readable. Linda Alcoff puts the point well: 'In both the practice of speaking for as well as the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, *who they are*. I am representing them *as* such and such … I am participating in the construction of their subject-positions. This act of representation cannot be understood as founded on an act of discovery wherein I discover their true selves and then simply relate my discovery' (Alcoff, 1991, 9).

The identity issue leads us to question any suggestions that groups, individuals or constituencies have a single, undisputed, *authentic* identity that can merely be received by a political representative as if the flow of meaning was all in one direction. In this sense the theory of political representation I am putting forward is resolutely opposed to the approach associated with Carl Schmitt, who thought that true representation 'is only ever an expressive realization of the unity of an authentic community' (Barnett, 2004: 517). Claims to authentic or 'true' representation remain just that — claims. A claim may be compelling, largely accepted, motivating or prompting self-conscious awareness among members of an invoked community, and so forth, but even so to accept it as 'authentic' is to try to foreclose the unforecloseable play of politics.

Constituting constituency

The painter Paul Klee took the view that painting did not mimic or copy, or even in the first instance interpret, its referent. What it did, first and foremost, was 'make visible' the referent.[7] By analogy, elected politicians construct verbal and visual images of their constituencies and their countries (among other things). Constituencies are 'hard-working', 'good honest folk', 'family-oriented', 'patriots', 'concerned' or 'worried' or 'angry'. Constituencies, like communities, have to be 'imagined', in Benedict Anderson's sense (Anderson, 1991). The equivalent of Klee's painting is required in order to make it imaginable, to make it visible.

Politics is, in the words of Latour, 'a work of composition' (2003, 158). In one sense, of course people and groups exist prior to evocation or constitution in politics. There is always a *referent*. However, the real political work lies in

the active constitution of constituencies — the making of representations. Pierre Bourdieu argues a strong version of this line: 'in *appearance* the group creates the man who speaks in its place — to put it that way is to think in terms of delegation — whereas in *reality* it is more or less just as true to say that it is the spokesperson who creates the group. It is because the representative exists, because he represents (symbolic action), that the group that is represented and symbolized exists and that in return it gives existence to its representative as the representative of a group' (Bourdieu, 1991, 204). Recognizing a dark side to political representation in these respects, he writes also of 'a sort of embezzlement' tied to delegation, and even of a 'usurpatory ventriloquism' involved in being authorized to speak for (or represent) others. Whether the represented, the imagined and constructed see *themselves* as they are seen or portrayed is of course another matter.

Incidentally, this view might lead us to turn on its head the orthodox modelling of the constituent–representative relationship as one of principal-agent. Perhaps the constituency is the agent, and the representative the principal? Looked at from this angle, the constituency must enact or reveal what the representative wants of it, must conform to the representative's images or depictions or representations of it. At least, one might want to insist on the 'mutual constitution' of representative and constituents (cf Young, 2000). Both are, in Seitz's words, 'the effect of a practice', the practice of representation itself: 'Representation fills in the blank spaces of possibility reserved for representatives, but it also fills in what gets represented' (Seitz, 1995, 144;134).[8] From a slightly different angle, note Ankersmit's comment that: ' … without political representation we are without a conception of what political reality — the represented — is like; without it, political reality has neither face nor contours. Without representation there is no represented …' (2002, 115).

We need to pay attention to the political strategies that actors employ in the depiction/construction of constituencies. Special attention may need to be paid in instances where there is an effort to hide the constructedness of the construction, to hide the aesthetic moment in representation in order to mask the constituted nature of constituency.

Partiality

Representative claims which make constituencies politically visible are partial (Becker, 1986, 125). They are always one version among plausible others of what could render the object 'visible', of dealing with 'the problem of identity' (Cohen, 1968). In this respect they are necessarily selective, proposing that 'we see the world from a certain perspective and that we arrange what can be seen in a specific way. As a landscape cannot determine

from what perspective it is seen, so the representation always contains an element that is essential to its representationality and that can never be reduced to aspects of the world *itself* and to what is true or false' (Ankersmit, 1996, 39).

This partiality raises significant questions about the status of 'true' representations — and, indeed, the place of 'truth' in political argument. Representations, selective depictions, draw on a referent, a materially existing group or entity, and they partake of cultural codes that carry meaning and truth within specific social contexts. In these respects truth is a core part of political representation. Alongside this, however, alternative representative claims (e.g. about voters' interests) can be no less efficacious, recognized and accepted than the currently prevailing ones. Creating and using alternative representative claims is, again, perhaps the core ingredient of political activity in general terms. To ask too much of these claims using a strong criterion of truth is, in an important sense, to misunderstand politics, to demand of it something it precisely cannot deliver. (Whether non-political contexts like scientific processes can get closer to satisfying strong truth criteria is a whole other story). As Latour writes, if 'faithful representation' is the political holy grail, then politics will always be disappointing, based on unrealistic assumptions about immediacy and authenticity, as if a sort of 'double-click communication' can bypass representatives' necessarily interpretative work. Latour writes that we expect too much of political representation if we 'expect it to provide a form of fidelity, exactitude or truth that is totally impossible' (2003, 143).

Conclusion

Political representation is a significantly broader topic than even relatively radical and innovative recent approaches would suggest. One upshot of placing the representative claim at the centre of our concerns is that a good deal of traditional scepticism about representation is helpfully displaced. For one thing, it is difficult to conceive of a regime of direct democracy — the radical hope of many trenchant critics of representative politics — which is not shot through with representative roles and practices (Budge, 1996; Saward, 1998). For another, loosening up categories of what can count as a representative claim, and what can count as a constituency, renders representation a newly radicalized notion which can be adapted and extended across geographical and even species boundaries, as Eckersley (2004) goes some way towards demonstrating. In other words, 'radical' critiques of representation in favour of different ways of organizing politics or democracy often miss the point: representation is more ubiquitous than the critique may suggest, and is an idea

containing far more radical potential than is commonly acknowledged. Nothing I have said suggests that 'representative democracy' is legitimate where other conceptions of democracy are not. Rather, I suggest that we should not too easily fetishize 'models' of democracy, as if they really do describe separable political visions. The question of the legitimacy of representation requires radical and prior recasting in line with the fundamental currency of representation as a practice — the representative claim — which operates in regimes of 'direct democracy' no less than in regimes of 'representative democracy'.

We need, I am suggesting, to adopt an approach that takes the aesthetic and cultural moments in political representation to be as important as electoral ones. We need to bring these and other perspectives to bear on our analyses by shifting our frame of reference, focusing on representation as a dynamic and differentiated process of claim-making, extraordinary in its variations and potentialities. In this way we can cast a new light on familiar issues, and (I trust) gain a greater understanding of what is happening when political representation is evoked as fact and as a concept.

Notes

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2 Pitkin discussed relevant aspects of symbolic and artistic representations, but only to diminish their political relevance in the end. See Pitkin (1967, 12;54;69;72–73).
3 Others have dismissed the activity of making symbolic or aesthetic representations from the topic of political representation even more forthrightly. See for example Pennock (1968, 6, fn9) and Diggs (1968, 35).
4 In Mitchell's formulation: 'representation is always of something, or someone, by something or someone, to someone' (1990, 12). On triangular conceptions see also Slezak (2002), Prendergast (2000) and Barthes (1985).
5 The idea of a 'performative', in the concept's journey from Searle's discussion of speech acts to Butler's notion of gender as a product of performance, centres upon the way in which performatives 'organize the world rather than simply representing what is', a formulation that Culler (2000, 511) associates particularly with Paul de Man.
6 The notions of iterability and repetition, for example, form key parts of Derrida's and Butler's renditions of the performative (see Culler, 2000).
7 Klee wrote that 'Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible'. As Riley comments on this, 'In painting the thing seen is, at best, a factor that gives rise to both the actual perception and to the sensation that places it within our experience' (Riley, 2002, 18).

8 Young writes that: ' ... in most situations the specific constituency exists at best potentially; the representative institutions and the process of authorisation themselves call its members into action' (2000, 130).

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