

Rethinking Democratic Representation: Eight Theoretical Issues

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In countries we consider “established democracies,” the democratic concept evolved its familiar form based on elections of political representatives and a universal franchise.[?] This form had two notable qualities. First, the election of representatives enabled democracy to take root within large, integrated political units, producing mass democracy. Second, the electoral representative form established a viable if uneasy balance between the pressures of social and political democratization and the rule of professional political elites. Owing to these functions, we have come to understand democratic representation as having three key characteristics:

- ?? Representation invokes a principal-agent relationship (the representatives “stood for” and “acted on behalf of” the represented), mainly though not exclusively on a territorial and formal basis, so that governments could be said to be responsive to the interests and opinions of the people.
- ?? Representation identifies a place for political power to be exercised responsibly and with a degree of accountability, in large part by enabling citizens to have some influence upon and exercise some control over it.
- ?? The right to vote for representatives provides a simple means and measure of political equality.

It has long been recognized, of course, that these representative relationships are complex both in meaning and in practice (Pitkin 1967). They are enabled and mediated by many kinds of groups, including mass political parties, interest groups, and corporatist organizations. In addition, public spheres and civil society organizations develop and focus public opinion, so that mechanisms of representation have never simply aggregated citizens’ preferences, but also formed and transformed them. Finally, the equality of representative relationships, while conceptually simple, is highly vulnerable to distortion by everything from political institutions that exaggerate the powers of majorities to the corruption of representative relationships. What defines what we shall call the “standard account” of democratic representation is neither its containment within electoral processes as such, nor simplicity, but rather that democratic representation is, ultimately, understood as a matter of perfecting its territorially-based electoral forms.

The standard account of representative democracy describes and justifies a defining feature of large-scale, mass democratic institutions. At the same time, contemporary democracies have evolved in ways that increasingly undermine the adequacy of the standard model. Two of these involve the scale and complexity in processes of decision-making in modern society:

- ?? The emergence of transnational decision-making arenas, where new international and global players operate, tends to escape the reach of territorially-democratic representation, as do the increasing number of issues that are non-territorial in nature (Rehfeld 2005, Grant and Keohane 2005)

[?] This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association 2005 Annual Meeting, which in turn originated as a summary of a workshop organized by the Center for Democracy and the Third Sector, Georgetown University, June 2004.

- ?? An increasing number of collective decision-making areas and issues, at both the national and supranational level, are now under the control of specialized and expert bodies, with loose connections to the traditional institutions of political representation and where there is no direct place for the voice, influence and control of the citizens (Zolo 1992, Beck 1997, Brown 2006).

Two other changes have to do with the ways people relate to their political communities:

- ?? The simple political egalitarianism on which the institutions and mechanisms of modern representative democracy were established has given way to increasing demands for group recognition as well as for forms of equality related directly to people's needs, characteristics, identities and conditions (Taylor, 1994, Philips 1995, Williams 1998, Young 2000). These developments have produced a more complex discourse of representation, for which simple egalitarian and universalistic standards embedded in the standard model no longer seem adequate.
- ?? There has been a diffusion of more informal structures and opportunities for democratic representation and influence. This development partly reflects the diminished role of formal political structures in social decision-making, but also the increasing diversification of the forms of association in modern societies, postmaterial ideals and culture, as well as increasingly dense and complex forms of public discourse (Beck 1997, Offe 1996, Warren 2001).

In this paper, we take these developments as a point of departure. We offer a sketch of eight theoretical issues that are, in our view, fundamental to rethinking the problems and potentials of political representation under these emerging conditions. If we have an argument, it is that the theory of representation in democracies needs refurbishing: the standard view is no longer adequate to a world in which spaces of politics are de-centred, and, as a consequence, so too are the potentials, possibilities, and practices of democracy. Taken together, the eight theoretical issues amounts to an argument for returning to the concept of representation with the kind of generic and systematic focus that Hannah Pitkin brought to the concept almost forty years in *The Concept of Representation* (1967). If there is any originality to our argument, it is only that our theoretical sketch highlights the gap between current practices and possibilities of democratic representation and democratic theory.

We democratic theorists have embarrassing little to offer by way of guidance or critique for emerging issues of representation. More traditional democratic theorists focus primarily on state-centered politics. Their theoretical innovations are, therefore, mostly limited to important but familiar questions about the meaning and integrity of representative government (Manin 1997). Progressive democrats, while more likely to conceive democracy beyond the state, have too often followed Rousseau in viewing representative democracy as lesser form of direct or participatory democracy. We agree with David Plotke's claim that "the opposite of representation is not participation. The opposite of representation is exclusion. And the opposite of participation is abstention. . . . Representation is not an unfortunate compromise between an ideal of direct democracy and messy modern realities. Representation is crucial in constituting democratic practices" (1997, 19; Urbinati 2005).

The “democratic” part of democratic representation

Historically, the practice of political representation emerged through two different processes: the establishment of the representative nature of the state and of its institutions, and the emergence of “representative government”. These two processes are concerned with what Hanna Pitkin has characterised as “formal” views of representation (see below). The former, often associated to Hobbes, is concerned with the act of authorization; while the latter with the extent to which representatives can be made accountable to the represented. Extremely simplified, we can conceive these two processes as taking place sequentially: one coinciding with the emergence of ideas of sovereign and absolute power in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, and the other taking roots through the establishment of modern parliamentary institutions and constitutional government in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Institutionally, this meant a gradual passage of the claim of political representation from the more personalized institutions of the monarchy to the more diffuse institutions of modern parliaments. Socially, the transformation reconfigured political space, from the more fragmented and hierarchical structure typical of feudal societies, to the more unitary and undifferentiated relations underlying modern commercial, and eventually industrial, societies. “Democratic” representation built on this early modern, state-centric conception of representative government, which has in turn informed much of the research on modern political representation. Thus, the discussion of electoral systems and of the way in which the elected legislators relate to their own constituencies have taken priority.

This “standard view” has come under increasing pressure, and it has become increasingly evident that political representation in democracies is a rather more complex process. For these reasons, looking at political representation from a specifically democratic perspective now involves a more abstract and normative evaluation of the institutional forms this may take. “In order really to understand the state and moral quality of our democracies,” writes Thomas Pogge (2002, 50), “we must look at them from a somewhat greater distance so that we can see that they represent a small cluster of instantiations of the democratic idea within a much larger space of possibilities.” Imagining the maximum reach of the space of democracy, and thus the potential space of democratic representation, requires that the idea of democracy be conceived at a level of abstraction sufficient to generate the perspective to which Pogge refers. The norm should be divorced, at least in the first instance, from any particular institutional arrangement, so it is possible to identify representative relationship within an variety of possible institutions and practices, and then to judge them in terms of their contributions to democracy.

What, then, do we mean by “democratic”? As with all things we care about, democracy suffers from an excess of meaning, written into the concept by a long history of usage, and further complicated today by its identification with so many good things, which, like all political concepts, is stretched even further by opportunistic usages. Nonetheless, at a high level of abstraction, concepts of democracy tend to work with two sets of ideas, from which we can extract a general but nontrivial meaning.¹

The first involves the ontological proposition that a society consists of the individuals who compose it, together with the relations among them. Thus, if a *society* is good, this means that it is good for the *individuals* in society and the relationships they maintain. Public goods,

¹ The following three paragraphs are adapted from Warren (forthcoming).

collective goods, community, and culture are relational, and irreducible to individual goods. But these greater goods are judged as *good* owing to their consequences for individuals. From this follows the norm of *moral equality* in collective rule: because each individual life is an end in itself, collective decisions ought to recognize, respect, and benefit individuals' interests and values equally, insofar as possible. This moral intuition is central to democracy, and makes the concept morally compelling, apart from any institutional embodiments. Moreover because this intuition is shared by many moral theories in one form or another, democracy benefits from and expresses this moral purpose without requiring a single moral theory for its morally compelling qualities.

Second, the norm of moral equality applies to those who are part of “the people” composing the collectivity within which individuals are recognized as having a moral status with respect to some set of features, and sufficient to a moral claim for self-rule. In short, every democratic theory assumes, more or less explicitly, boundaries that demarcate inclusions and exclusions (Rehfeld 2005). The boundaries may be *territorial*, such that every individual within a territory is included. Historically, however, territorial boundaries have been supplemented with boundaries defined by ethnic, racial, and/or sexual *characteristics*, such that the relevant “people” includes only, say, the native-born or whites or males within a given territory. In cases where the principle of territorial democracy has been established, such boundaries typically become the objects of democratic struggles (Philips 1995). More recently, it has become clear that boundaries may be based on *issues*, as they increasingly are under doctrines of subsidiarity (the notion that political units should match the scale of problems with which they deal), and in emerging global institutions and forums. In such cases, “the people” may be constituted and reconstituted as a self-governing collectivity in a different way for each kind of problem and its effects—say, for purposes of occupation, defense, control of pollution, schooling children, or regulating public health (Pogge 2002, Rehfeld 2005). Implied in this kind of boundary is a complex form of citizenship in which individuals have multiple memberships, depending upon the nature and domain of collective decisions. Such a conception of boundaries generalizes and incorporates the older liberal notion that already prefigured its complexity: the notion that some matters are properly *public*—the legitimate business of the relevant people, while others are *private*—that is, there is no relevant “people,” because the issues (say, those involving intimacy) are not of a kind that should be collective matters.

A robust norm of democracy, then, would judge the effects of collective decisions on individuals rather than applying directly to institutions. The degree to which a representative relationship is “democratic” would depend upon the degree to which it enables the following norm: *every individual potentially affected by a decision should have an equal opportunity to influence the decision*. The corollary action norm is that *collective actions should reflect the purposes decided under inclusive processes*. In short, the basic norm of democracy is *empowered inclusion of those affected in collective decisions and actions* (see, e.g., Habermas 1996, 107; Dahl 1998, 37-38; Held 1996, 324; Young 2000, 23).

Eight Theoretical Issues

In all but directly democratic venues (and even sometimes then), the norm of democratic inclusion is achieved through representation. Thus, we are conceiving of representation as *the concept that identifies the normatively significant structure of*

democratic institutions. An account of representation that is sufficiently generic to respond to emerging political practices and institutions, as well as specific enough to identify their democratic elements, will have a number of theoretical features, which we summarize in the following eight points. The first four are concerned with the more conceptual aspects of political representation. One concerns the specific sense in which political representation is a “relationship”. The second relates to the way in which democratic representation, no less than older and more aristocratic forms of political representation, involves some form of trusteeship, which cannot be reduced to the processes of either authorization or accountability. The third is concerned with the criteria according to which “representation”, as a political relationship, can be judged: either for what it *is* or for what it *achieves*. The fourth regards the agency aspects involved in the relationship of political representation, looking at it as a complex form of political practice. The last three points discuss the more institutional aspects of the new ecology of political representation. Point Five functions as a bridge between the two set of issues involved in rethinking representation.

1. Representation is a relationship.

A great virtue of Hannah Pitkin’s approach to political representation was that she was clear about its ontology: representation is a social relationship, constituted in part by shared meanings. As a political theorist, Pitkin was interested in *political* representation (its normative background in democratic theory and its institutional articulation in various forms of representative government). But she recognized that an understanding of “political representation” (conceptually, normatively and institutionally) involved placing the concept within two interlocking narratives. One such narrative showed how the very concept of representation (and more generally the “represent- family of words”) had come to mean what it means in the standard account of political representation. This involved placing the *political* meaning of “representation” within a larger group of meanings, as those used in contexts such as artistic, theatrical, mental, religious, and legal forms of representation. The purpose of this comparison was not simply of historical and etymological character, but to make the point that meanings first developed in other contexts had left their imprints on our political usage. The second narrative was concerned with the process of institutionalization of the idea of political representation as the result of successive historical phases and experiences throughout which political agents used it as part of their power battles and ideological disputes. This eventually resulted in the standard account, which took political representation to mean the institutional and formalized relationship between a “representative” and his/her constituency, seen as the democratic feature of legislative power in a representative form of government.

The point Pitkin was making was that one cannot understand representation without recognizing the way in which it could be used from different perspectives, and that these perspectives were the results of linguistic, semantic and institutional processes.² Out of these

² Pitkin’s conceptual analysis was meant to show that representation theory needed to recognize the plurality of meanings of the idea of representation (what she metaphorically called the different snapshots of a three dimensional object), but she went on to suggest that by knowing the different ways in which the “word is used” one would know “what the thing is” (1967, 11). It should, however, be noted that she was probably aware of the excess of reification that the passage from “words” to “things” may imply. In a footnote to the passage where she suggests the photography metaphor, she writes: “I now believe, on the basis of reading Wittgenstein, that the

processes, however, Pitkin identified a number of discrete groups of meanings, which she clarified by a series of successive distinctions. She first distinguished between “formalistic” and “substantive” understandings of political representation. Formalistic understandings and theories focus on the presence of the formal features of *authorization* (by the “principal”) and/or *accountability* (of the “agent”). Substantive theories, instead, are concerned with the way in which the relationship works. She divided substantive approaches between those that understand representation as “standing for” someone or something else, and others that conceive it as “acting for” someone else (or a collectivity). The former she further distinguished between “descriptive” and “symbolic” ways of “standing for”. The latter she treated as a single group, though she recognized that there are different ways in which one can “act for” someone else.

However different, each of these formulations assumes that at the core of political representation there is a *relational* element between the entity that represents and the entity that is represented. Although this observation is obvious, its implications are not always fully appreciated. There are, for instance, important consequences for how we understand the agency of the representative (Plotke 1997, 29-30), to which we shall return in Point Four. For the moment, we wish briefly to signal two other aspects of the relational quality of political representation: its ambiguity and its social construction: there is an intrinsically dynamic quality to political (and democratic) representation, which the standard account fails to capture. This has important political consequences, as we shall see in Point Eight.

‘Formalistic’ theories, as Pitkin notes, may emphasize either authorization or accountability, almost to the complete exclusion of the other. From a formal perspective, we could therefore characterize the relationship established by political representation in at least two ways:

- A. Political representation involves a representative X being authorized by constituency Y to act with regard to good Z. Authorization means that there are procedures through which Y selects/directs X with respect to Z, and that responsibility over actions/decisions of X rest with Y.
- B. Political representation involves a representative X being held accountable to constituency Y with regard to good Z. Accountability means that X provides, or could provide, an *account* of his/her decisions or actions to Y with respect to Z, and that Y has a sanction over X with regard to Z.

Each of these accounts of what the relationship of political representation implies may give rise to different political conceptions. Democratic theories tend to combine the two accounts, but the way in which they combine them is not always obvious, nor, for that matter, need to be fixed once and for all. Indeed, our point is that democratic societies and institutions often propose different equilibria between these two accounts.

A similar ambiguity with respect to the relational quality of representation emerges when we look at it from a more substantive perspective. “Standing for” and “acting for” understandings point toward distinct ways in which “representation” constitutes political

metaphor is in some respects profoundly misleading about concepts and language” (255, note 20). In a previous note, she states: “this book is primarily Austinian and not Wittgensteinian in its orientation; if I were to write it over again now, it would be a different book.” (254, note 14).

relationships. We often conceive of our political or democratic institutions as doing both, thus using one or the other of these understandings as a way of justifying a particular conception of how the institution should either work or being organized or both. Some of the disputes about the merits of descriptive representation stem partly from this ambiguity. Moreover, both “standing for” and “acting for” can give rise to different ways of representing, to which we may give different political consideration. For instance, think of the way in which opinion polls (a form of descriptive “standing for” through statistical generalization) can be used to orient government’s action. Or consider the way in which activism and political mobilization can act as a form of symbolic “standing for”, and occasionally “acting for”.

“Acting for” can also give rise to different understandings of the relationship involved in representing: as a *trustee*, as a *deputed agent*; as a *fiduciary* (in the sense of a ‘free’ agent); as an *expert*. Each of these ways of understanding what “acting for” involves on the part of the agent refers to a different relationship between principal and agent. Recent suggestions (Mansbridge 2003) that the practice of political representatives cannot be captured by the simple “promissory” model of the standard account, but that such a practice is better understood by the use of looser ways of describing the relationship, such as “anticipatory”, “gyroscopic” or “surrogate”, are consistent with the point we are here making about the ambiguities, and the continuously contested nature, of the relational aspects involved in political representation. Different understandings of how the relationship involved in political representation can operate may also be of assistance in thinking new forms of representation in relation to what can be called the “politics of delegation”: the growing number of public-related decisions that are *delegated* to non-majoritarian institutions which are not directly accountable to the citizens.

The second relational aspect we wish to note regards the socially constructed and contextual nature of political representation. This is neither a “natural” nor a simple “formal” (or legalized) relationship. In some sense, of course, all relationships are socially constructed. But their natural or clearly formalized structure may make them easier to define, at least in the normal course of events. As Hans Wolf perceptively maintained in a passage rightly signaled out by Pitkin (1967, 9): “the making present of A by [B] is merely a formula; what is important is how that is to be understood, what it means, under what circumstances and assumptions it is possible, and how it is justified.” Representing is a “conceptual construct, particularly a construct of group opinion and ideology”. The socially constructed aspect of representation is evident in all discussions about *what* is represented in the political process: people, interests, values, characteristics, etc., as we discuss in Point Six below. But there is another aspect of the social construction of political representation as expressed in the standard account that is worth remarking, particularly because it has implications for how we understand political representation within the globalized conditions of modern democracy and politics.

This feature of the concept can again be illustrated by reference to Pitkin’s work. In the ‘Appendix on Etymology’ in *The Concept of Representation* she shows in a short compass how, at least in English 17th-century politics, the idea and function of political representation is first attributed to the whole legislature before being assumed by individual members of it as representatives of their own constituencies. But a very similar story, she suggests, can be said to apply to the development of the Latin equivalent in the late Middle-Ages. In other words, the claim to political representation does not emerge piecemeal as the aggregation of

particular representative claims, but is mediated by the more general claim that political authority binds insofar as it is representative of the whole of the people or realm. Of course this is a complex intellectual and political story, with later implications for the mandate-independence controversy. But from a more conceptual perspective it may suggest that, in modern political representation, there is no simple relationship between the principal and the agent, but the principal itself needs to be constructed and identified in relation to the larger political community to which the principal may belong. This construction of the principal remains unproblematic in the standard account because both the unity and the boundaries of the political (or democratic) community are assumed as being largely territorial and relatively easy to identify—a condition that holds less to the extent that the definition of the relevant “people” becomes increasingly problematic.

2. Trusteeship in Democratic Representation

Representation, argued Edmund Burke, should be “virtual”: representatives should not be delegates, but rather trustees who use their best judgment on behalf of those they represent. The “delegate” versus “trustee” dichotomy has been rightly rejected: As pure trustees, no democratic element remains, and representatives are little more than paternalistic aristocrats (Pitkin 1967, Mansbridge 2004, Manin 1997). Yet insofar as the “delegate” model implies that representatives simply mirror their constituents’ preferences, it fails to anticipate the key political functions of representatives as deliberators and bargainers within political institutions, and as agents in defining and refining constituencies and their interests. The current popularity of the concept of “accountability” as a feature of democratic representation seems to split the difference, enabling representatives to use their judgment, but in ways responsive to those they represent (Castiglione forthcoming).

But the “accountability” concept has limits, even within the terms of democratic representation (see also point Eight, below). Consider the following:

- ?? No citizen can participate in all decisions that affect them; but it is also almost unthinkable that citizens can actively hold accountable those who represent them. “Accountability” may assume that representative responsiveness requires a level of citizen participation in monitoring representatives that is impossible in large-scale complex democracies.
- ?? Accountability is often costly: it requires monitoring regimes. Trust is, from this perspective, simply more efficient: it lowers transaction costs. Ideally, because accountability is costly, it should be “allocated” to the relationships where it is most important.
- ?? Accountability regimes may cultivate a culture of suspicion which damages cultures of professional responsibility and undermining public trust.

In practice, relatively passive representative relations based on trusteeship are ubiquitous—and it is hard to see how they could not be in today’s society. We therefore need to ask whether it is possible, at least in principle, to understand “trusteeship” as a feature of *democratic* representation. Burke’s aristocratic formulation won’t do: the judgment to trust is, in large part, a judgment that the interests and/or values of the person or entity trusted are convergent with one’s own. Democracy emerged, in part, on the basis of distrust of aristocrats

who, for the most part, did not have the people's interests in view, and so provided little basis for trust.

Yet we do have another conception of trust that we generally see as consistent with democracy, if not democratic in itself: bureaucrats, judges, and many kinds of professionals hold a "public trust." They are not elected, but are chosen for their competence and expertise. Theoretically, they serve purposes which have already been settled and generalized by the political process. In government, trustee relations are, for the most part, limited to the domain of administration—that is, arenas in which purposes are agreed and administrators hold a public trust. In contrast, the domain of politics is defined in part by conflicting interests and values, and so relations of trust are not, on average, appropriate.

It is, of course, debateable as to whether trust relationships should hold in such cases, particularly as bureaucracies and judiciaries take on public functions. But once we understand the notion of trust in terms of its basis—the congruence of interests and/or values between the truster and trustee—we should also notice that many representative relationships exhibit this congruence. Under these circumstances, might political representative function as trustees?

Circumstances do exist that satisfy these conditions but on a case by case basis. We might say that trusteeship is *democratic* when a citizen makes a decision to trust, based on knowledge of convergent (or encapsulated) interests or values. Clearly, this kind of representative relationship is common in civil society through voluntary association membership: we trust Greenpeace to represent our interests in their political activities, even though we are not active in the organization. Likewise, we may trust certain of our elected representatives—they are, in Mansbridge's (2003) terms—"gyroscopic" representatives—their internal moral gyroscope holds her steady, and ensures (we think) that the choices she makes are the one's we would make under the same circumstances. We do not, therefore, delegate decisions we have made, but rather trust her to make decision in our name and on our behalf.

In complex democracies, then, even the most active citizens engage in something of a division of labour: they may reserve their participatory resources for monitoring representatives whose values and interests conflict with theirs, or who are subject to cross-cutting pressures in such a way that they are more inclined to represent those who actively voice their interests and values, and who monitor their conduct.

We might, then, develop a democratic conception of representation based trusteeship along these lines, on the assumption that it is one kind of representative relationship within a broader ecology of representative relationships. The *democratic* element resides not in citizens' active monitoring of the representative relationships, but rather in their initial judgment that trust is warranted, perhaps checked periodically—say, at the times of membership renewals and elections.

3. Input versus output representation.

Insofar as democratic representation is a relationship that benefits the represented, it must be possible to judge it from both internal and external perspectives—that is, from the perspective of the integrity of the representative relationship from the citizen's perspective, as well as from the perspective of how the relationship functions or what it accomplishes within the political system. There are two reasons for being attentive to both perspectives. First, as

already noted, the institutions of political representation have multiple meanings allowing them to perform more than one relational function at the time. Some institutions or persons may symbolically “stand for” a group of citizens or the collectivity, while and the same time they may be “acting for” them. The good that derives from the ‘standing for’ is more likely to be of an expressive nature and therefore not readily comparable with the more instrumental good that we presume should come from the “acting for”. The problem in each particular case is to judge how their different functions can be made mutually supportive or, failing that, how they can be balanced within the economy of a good system of government. Overall, we assume that in a democratic society, where the good of the individuals making up that society is what ultimately counts, there must be a presumption in favour of the instrumental over the expressive side, so that latter must in some way made be congruent to the attainment of the former.

Second, the concept of representation identifies the normatively significant structure of democratic institutions, or in other words as the institution through which individual citizens have equal moral standing in the collective decision-making process. From this perspective, it is possible to distinguish between the quality of representation within processes of collective decision-making—process representation or input legitimacy—from the outcome or product of the process, which we might refer to as output representation or output legitimacy. Neither process nor output representation has in itself its own criteria of validation, since each refers to the other as its ultimate test of legitimacy. So, the evidence of a good or fair system of representation is that overall it produces outcomes that satisfy the citizens. But in order to judge whether the citizens are really satisfied we need to have in place some fair or good system through which the interests, values and opinions of the citizens can be expressed.

4. Representation as a political practice.

Representation, we noted above, does not need to be seen as the opposite of participation. But historically, there is no denying that early modern period arguments in favour of representative government were often directed against a classical conception of direct democracy, and as a way of tempering the presumed excesses of growing social and political egalitarianism. Indeed, the practice of democratic government has relied on various forms of representation as a way of retaining aristocratic and elitist features of government (Manin, 1997). However, it is also true that the emergence of mass democracy has meant that representative institutions, such as large popular parties and class-based organizations, have broadened political and democratic participation. The practice of political representation should therefore be seen as a two-way relationship, which can be use as much to exclude (Rehfeld 2005, Ch. 1) as to include (Plotke, 1997) people from politics. Such a dualism has conceptual roots. Representation can indeed be seen as much as an “absence” as a “presence.” Since representation is “making *present* something that is literally *absent*,” much depends on where we place our emphasis. Indeed, the tension between presence and absence in representation is indicative of some of the general tensions of modern democracy, as this often stands in between the pitfalls of populism and elitism.

These points lead to the more general point that we ought to view representation as *political practice*. When we do so, we can see that there is no *necessary* (as opposed to *contingent*) antagonism between democratic representation and participation. Indeed, far from

excluding, many forms of representation encourage and channel forms of direct participation, making them both more meaningful and effective. In part, this has been the experience of mass democratic organization both in the political sphere and in civil society. The problem that we now face with the decline of such organizations is to find new and meaningful ways of reconciling political representation with democratic participation. This problem implies several tasks, such as re-thinking grounds (the idea of the “constituency”, of individual and group representation, etc.) on which the represented should have their identities and interests recognized (Rehfeld 2005; Philips 1995, Williams 1998, Young 2000); or the channels through which the represented can make their voice heard or make the representatives accountable.

There is another aspect that the presence/absence dichotomy underlying the idea of representation brings to democratic government. This consists in the kind of *reflexivity* that such a relationship may be able to foster by separating, as suggested by Madison and Kant, the judge from the cause, thus diminishing the distorting effects of self-interest over one’s judgment. Such reflexivity is achieved by a disjunction of the interests between the representative and the represented, and by a certain condition of objectivity that distancing may foster. There is another, more general, aspect to this separation of the interests from their representation. It may enable the representation to be argued and judged in ways that provide cognitive distancing between persons and arguments, between the “who” and the “what”, thus creating a more definite space for *public* discourse, deliberation, and various forms of accommodation and compromise. Within such a process, representatives can also function as conduits of other reasons and interests to the individuals they represent, thus making these individuals, potentially, more reflexive in the way they hold their interests, for reasons of now having to view and justify them from a public perspective (Ankersmit 2002). All this, however, implies a reconsideration of the various levels at which public discourse take place within a democratic society, and the various conversations that go on between the citizens, their representatives, and the citizens and their own representatives. In short, we need to understand representation as a relational political practice

5. Representation is constituted by/within political processes.

If we understand representation as a relational political practice, then, of course, we shall need to understand the features of representative relationships as being *constituted within and by political processes*. The relational quality of representation will mean that its “ontology” is contextual—in particular, the nature of the objects represented will depend upon how relationships are constituted by and within institutions, and, more generally, by and within political conflicts and collective actions. This point allows us to understand representation as something constituted by:

- ?? The rules and norms that define representative roles. In many cases, representative roles are formalized, with normative expectations that attach to the role. To be sure, even formal representative roles are often conflicted, with many possible ways to understand duties and responsibilities (Mansbridge 2003). Roles are also relational, constituted not simply by the self-understanding of the representative, but also by the expectations of participants.

- ?? The incentives and opportunities produced by institutions. We can think of institutions as structuring environments with incentive and opportunity structures. Adversarial processes, for example, provide opportunities for political entrepreneurs to articulate issues and claim representative status, not only within government, but within society and even markets. Differing electoral systems provide different kinds of incentives for parties, groups, and representatives to broker, express, or stand firm, as does the relationship of each—close or distant—to power and resources.
- ?? The nature of conflict and cleavage within society, defined by power relations, distributions of reasons, and culture. These provide the field of issues and arguments that, at any given point in time, provide opportunities for political representation, some of which come to bear upon public opinion and culture, others of which connect more directly with centers of decision-making.
- ?? The group and associational structure of society provides capacities, opportunities, and patterns of, representative relationships.
- ?? The self-understanding of participants and participation within representative relations. Citizens' education and representatives' qualifications both determine and are determined by the process of representation, so that citizens and representatives continuously contribute to each others' formation and transformation.

Owing in large part to these politically contextual elements, representative relationships are both intrinsic to political practices and institutions, and constitutive of them. For these reasons as well, it makes little sense to polarize direct democracy and representative democracy, or participation and representation. Representative relationships are themselves venues of participation and direct influences, as well as the sites of political struggles.

6. Objects of representation: What is represented?

Because our views of representation have tended to be contained by formal, electoral representative models, the question of what the *objects* of representation are has been constrained by the assumption that representatives represent constituents, either as individuals or aggregated into groups. As a normative proposition, the assumption is warranted: in a democracy, ultimately the goods of collective actions must be justified as goods for individuals within a collectivity. Within the standard model, however, the norm often functions as an *ontology*, such that the *objects* of representation are viewed as individuals, usually understood as their revealed interests, preferences, and values.

More recently, the standard model has expanded to include the descriptive characteristics of persons that bind them to ascriptive groups. The best recent literature holds that descriptive representation is justified because it introduces the social perspective and experiences of disadvantaged groups into representative institutions (Mansbridge 1999, Williams 1998, Phillips 1995, Young 2000, Dovi 2002). When representative bodies look like their constituencies, they do a better job of representing the full range of experiences, perspectives, and situations in society. But combined with the view that the objects of representation are constituted within representative relationships, these theoretical developments suggest that the question of *what* is represented should itself become a question.

At least four considerations should frame the question. First, from the perspective of those who are represented, what is represented are not persons as such, but some of the interests, identities, and values that persons have or hold. Representative relationships select for specific aspects of persons, by framing wants, desires, discontents, values, and judgments in ways that they become publicly visible, articulated in language and symbols, and thus politically salient. While individuals hold some interests, identities, and values quite consciously, many others are formed in response to representative entrepreneurship, which may function to evoke latent interests, raise consciousness, or overcome collective action problems. Thus, we should not say that “interests” or “identities” or even “values” pre-exist the representative relationship. They become the objects of representation through the relationship, even if they owe their existence to situated experiences and individual biographies. Likewise, “groups” are never objects of representation as such, because we should think of them as complexes of shared experiences, moulded into group form by a shared consciousness of belonging. It is very often the case that political representation outside of formal political venues—representation by social movement leaders or a counter-hegemonic symbols and argument—is instrumental in bringing the group in this sense into existence, and then stabilizing its existence over time.

Second, persons are never simply bundles of interests, identities, and values; they are also agents. As we have suggested, it is distinctive of *democratic* representation that persons are represented on the assumption that they actively participate in the asserting, authorizing, and approving that which is represented on their behalf—through arguing, reflecting, demonstrating, writing, and voting. So it is intrinsic to democratic representation that individuals are represented in their capacities as citizen-agents; these capacities are reflexively instantiated in every representative relationship. To put the point another way, democratic representation also represents the *political standing* of individuals *as citizens* who are empowered to authorize representatives and then to hold them accountable.

Third, the objects of representation are further “objectified” by their functions within democratic processes, where they are, as it were, detached from persons to *become* social movements, interest groups, public goods, social perspectives, narratives, empathies, and moral identities. Representatives often say that they “stand for” entities of these kinds—for the common good, for “the family,” for an argument against oil exploration, for human rights, for free enterprise, for the marginalized, or for the hard-working citizen who plays by the rules. Each type of “entity” is contingent, of course—real, but dependent upon the combinations of experiences, biographies, and social and political processes through which such entities are created and reproduced.

Finally, it is precisely this detachment of collective entities from persons that enable s representatives to represent positions in public discourse and argument, in this way serving as both conduit and structure of public spheres. Without this detachment from specific persons and interests, politics would fail to have a discursive locus, and would be reduced to the aggregation and bargaining of interests and identities. The issue here is related to but not quite captured by the old distinction between the delegate versus trustee roles of representatives. When representatives—groups, public individuals, the media—carry interest positions into public decision making, they engage in more than “individual” judgment. They function as key figures in representing and mediating public debates, in this way reflecting interest and identity positions back to their constituents. This reflexive representation of positions and

arguments should, ideally, enable constituents to follow debates and to reflect upon and defend their own positions, such that representatives can, ultimately claim to represent the “public will” as reflected in a developed “public opinion” (Manin 1997, Urbinati 2000). That is, a fully developed theory of democratic representation would capture the discursive functions of representatives in the public sphere—functions that are served in different ways, depending upon whether representatives are inside or outside of formal politics.

7. Who is a democratic representative?

As politics has become more complex, multilayered, and pervasive within society, so too has the question of *who* can legitimately claim to be a democratic representative. The standard answer, that representatives are elected, is increasingly inadequate, owing to the deterritorialization of political issues, the mismatch between representation based on territories and the scale of issues, the devolution and deconcentration of some kinds of powers and the globalization of others, and the increasing importance of discursive and symbolic influence. Each of these developments introduces new domains for political representation with the possibility of democratic legitimacy.

We might think of these domains as expanding in two dimensions. On the one hand, politics is increasingly spilling out of formal, electoral politics into non-electoral and informal domains, suggesting that we need to theorize the democratic possibilities of informal forms of representation. On the other hand, modes of influence are expanding—or are at least more visible—from those that are parasitic upon state powers of decision-making and administration to those that work through public influence and economic power. Combining these distinctions suggests the following domains of representation:

Table 1: Domains of representation

Mode of power	Sphere	
	Electoral politics	Non-electoral politics
State-based power	Elected representation	Corporatist, interest group, and CSO representation
Public Influence	Electoral-oriented political organizations and advocacy groups	Voice representation (media, social movements, advocacy groups, citizen panels)
Economic power	Public-private partnerships	Stakeholder representation, direct action representation, NGOs.

The significance of these distinctions is that the growth of representative activities is clearly in the domains outside of elected representation and familiar forms of corporatist and interest group representation. Many of the new forms of representation have ad hoc qualities which democratic theorists are poorly equipped to judge. Thus, in the domain of direct action, groups of college students claim, credibly no doubt, to represent the interests of sweat shop workers—but without having been elected, or even having any direct contact. In voice representation, individuals and groups claim to be the representatives of women, gays, ethnic groups, religious groups, the poor, the persecuted, the unborn, animals, and even “the Earth.” In cases of public-private partnerships, real estate developers assume public purposes and come to “represent” them in exchange for opportunities to profit. The European Union, the United Nations, and the World Trade Organization are all seeking to include “civil society organizations” in their decision-making processes, but are faced with the question of which organizations have legitimate claims to speak for women or peasant farmers.

In short, the emerging political landscape provides more and more opportunities for individuals and groups to *propose* themselves as representatives, and to *function* in representative capacities. But once representation no longer has an electoral basis, *who* counts as a democratic representative is difficult to assess (Alcoff 1995). Democratic theorists should not, we believe, rule out any such claims at the outset, but we do need ways of judging their democratic credentials of representative claims.

8. Authorization and accountability in informal representation

Granting Pitkin’s point about the excessive formality of the authorization/accountability distinction, it nonetheless suggests one approach to non-electoral or “informal” forms of representation. We might ask in each case about the *functional equivalents* to the relationship between authorization and accountability that is at work in election cycles. Through election, representatives are authorized to represent interests, identities, and values, and to bargain, deliberate, and decide. Once they have done so, they are held accountable for the results. “Accountability” requires representatives to give a retrospective account of their representations, actions, and decisions. While account-giving is discursive in form and can be on-going throughout a term of office, representatives often act prospectively, looking toward the next election in which voters have the opportunity to judge the adequacy of the account (Mansbridge 2003, Thompson 2004, Young, 2000, 128-33, Fung, forthcoming).

Non-electoral representation lacks the clear temporal sequencing of authorization and accountability that is produced by regular elections. Appointed positions in government (judges, administrators, etc.) have authorization procedures that are relatively clear-cut, at least from a conceptual perspective. In other non-electoral areas, however, the dimension of authorization is wide-open: where there are no regularized means such as an election, authorization can grow from the ability of groups to attract follows (memberships, petitions, etc.) mission statements of groups that converge (or claim to converge) with a constituency, descriptive characteristics such as gender or race (“as a women, I believe ...”), experiences, or simply public visibility as measured in book sales and media appearances.

Where elections are lacking, then, accountability may, perhaps, reflexively and retrospectively provide authorization. Does a mission statement converge with a group’s

subsequent activities? Do an association's members agree that the association represents their purposes? This is why, we think, representation is increasingly identified with "accountability" in non-electoral politics, suggests that we shall need to focus on what *democratic* accountability might involve in differing kinds of cases in relation to initial "self-appointment" to or "self-authorization" of representative status (Castiglione forthcoming).

What counts as authorization and accountability will, of course, depend upon the kind of representative. As a first rough cut, we might distinguish between membership groups that have potential representative claims simply by virtue of the fact that they have members. Within this group, we can further distinguish groups that are (a) *voluntary*—membership groups (b) groups that are *ascriptive* and thus involuntary. Finally, we should distinguish these membership groups from (c) those without a membership basis, but which have resources that enable them to propose themselves as representatives. These include NGOs, INGOs, media groups, and others with the non-membership-based capacities to propose themselves as representatives. Table 2 summarizes some of these possibilities:

Table 2: Authorization and accountability of informal representatives

		Group Characteristics	
		Membership groups	
		Voluntary associations	Involuntary-ascriptive group memberships
Authorization			Resourced groups: foundations, NGOs, media organizations
	Membership entrance	Descriptive characteristics of spokespersons Book sales, public appearances, etc.	Convergent missions
Accountability	Public justification	Public justification	Public justification
	Membership democracy	Membership democracy	Resource base (boards, contracts, market forces)
	Exit	"Horizontal policing" by groups, media	Transparency
	"Horizontal policing" by groups, media		Performance indicators "Horizontal policing" by groups, media

In the case of voluntary associations, the possibility of exit provides a strong indicator of representative links within the association (Goodin 2003). Likewise, the existence of internal democratic mechanisms, including elections and transparency, can provide some claim for legitimacy. Yet the temporal sequencing of authorization and accountability may not be very important in the case of voluntary associations. For individuals, the ability to enter and exit an association is likely to be based on a judgment of whether the informal representative has common interests. If individuals make this judgment, then the representative serves more like a *trustee*—and is simply trusted rather than being called to account (see Point Two above). In contrast, in formalized political venues, conflicts of interest are the rule rather than the exception; because of the nature of political interactions, which include bargains and brokering, interests, identities, and values will be compromised. Accountability is important in such cases since the bases for trust are uncertain at best.

Representation of involuntary or ascriptive groups, however, is less certain, since there are no organizational features through which group members may either authorize representatives or require accountability. This is why descriptive representation in formal bodies is inherently problematic, even if ultimately justifiable (Alcoff 1995, Mansbridge 1999). In such cases, democratic legitimacy may depend upon pro-active attempts by self-appointed representatives to develop accountability to the variety of experiences and perspectives within a group (Young 2000, Dovi 2002). Ironically, it may be that representation of ascriptive groups in informal domains is actually less problematic, owing to the need for representatives to attract a following, which might be evident in, say, book sales or media attention. Where advocacy groups form on the basis of ascriptive characteristics (such as the National Organization for Women), they bring with them the authorization and accountability mechanisms of voluntary associations (membership and exit).

Finally, a third category includes organizations with resources such as foundations, INGOs, and media organizations often simply propose themselves as representatives (of the poor, the community, drug users, etc.). The only initial authorization in such cases resides in missions that converge with the constituencies identified by the organization, while often the only accountability mechanisms are those inherent in the resource base of the organization (the board, government contracts, market forces etc.), combined with whatever public justifications the organizations offer. Clearly, the weakness of the authorization-accountability cycles in these cases has much to do with the current widespread focus on accountability of INGOs, NGOs, and the media (Ebrahim 2003, Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005). It is also clear that this is an area that requires imagination: Are there informal but effective “horizontal” forms of accountability—peers answering to peers—that might function in democratic ways? Can accountability be the result of networks of voluntary organizations that police one another (Grant and Keohane 2005, Goodin 2003)? Can accountability be strengthened by introducing mechanisms of organizational performance and organizational learning typical of the private sector and of the new managerialism in the public sector? It seems to us that we should not rule out accountability mechanisms that have may seem suspect from a democratic perspective, such as transparent performance indicators initially forced on public institutions by management styles that originated in the private sector. Or organizations, even corporations, that find profits in presenting themselves as accountable to a

constituency. Such mechanisms may provoke, for example, public debate about to whom organizations should be held accountable, and what this would mean.

Conclusion: Challenges of the New Ecology of Representation

If democracy means *empowered inclusion of those affected by collective decisions*, then simply conceptualizing new, non-electoral forms of representation won't be sufficient. We will also need to step back and assess their functioning within the broader ecology of governments, markets, and society.

This task presents a broader and tougher set of problems. In conclusion, we list three of them. First, the growth of informal representation, though inevitable, may erode the simple equality made possible by electoral representation. The norm of democracy does not require simple equality, but it does require inclusion of those affected by collective decisions—a norm that will result in a complex conception of equality attuned to multiple and overlapping forms of representation (Warren 2002). Yet it is far from clear that the new ecology of representation will realize a more complex equality. On the one hand, there are more opportunities for representation than ever before: individuals can increase their representative presence by joining advocacy groups, organizing expertise, or using the internet to enable direct action. On the other hand, the proliferation of representative opportunities outside of the electoral system may disproportionately advantage those who are educated and socially well-connected. As points of access and opportunities for participation multiply, so do the resource requirements for participation—education, money, time, and social capital. It is likely that those interests, identities, and values attached to populations with organizational capacities—particularly the educated or those with specific material interests at stake—will be better represented than those populations lacking sophistication. In some ways, of course, this problem is simply an expansion of an older and more familiar problem, namely, the undue influence of special interest groups and corporatist arrangements. Still, group representatives may often fill this void, especially when those with political sophistication (say, college students, the Ford Foundation) take on the job of representing the weak and unorganized (sweat shop laborers, inner city youth). And it may be that increasingly diverse kinds of informal representation will tend to counterbalance the traditional access, influence, and sometimes outright corruption of moneyed interests. For these reasons, citizen panels comprised through random selection may provide a promising way of gauging the nature and extent of systematic biases in informal representation (Brown 2006)

Second, *democratic* legitimacy has not only to do with the relative equalities of representation, but also with the universality of inclusions (Rehfeld 2005). Electoral representation can claim universality within territorial constituencies, and an elected representative is charged with representing those within the constituency, whether in fact he does so or not. Informal representatives cannot claim this *kind* of universality, but they may claim other kinds—for example, representing those who are affected by collective decisions of a territory, but not represented, as residents of Ontario are by air pollution from the Ohio Valley. But while we can find many instances in which informal representation supplements electoral representation, we do not have a functional equivalent of the equal right to vote to judge its legitimacy.

Finally, the growth of informal representation may also result in the diffusion of loci of accountability for broad public goods, even if accountability to specific constituencies increases (Mansbridge 2004). If institutions are opened to more representation without being designed to unify responsibility for decisions, accountability may become so diffuse that representation will fail to connect citizens and decision-makers. Multiple forms of accountability may demand so much of citizens that they become overloaded or disaffected. Or it may be that multiple forms of representation so grid-lock political processes that no single entity can take responsibility for public goods. These possibilities are, however, hypothetical at this point. And even if they could in principle be empirically investigated, we lack the theoretical frameworks for doing so. We democratic theorists will need to get busy.

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