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Representation as Social Relation In Praise of Georg Simmel on the Centenary of the Publication of his Essay *The Stranger*

Abstract: This article is inspired by Georg Simmel's formal sociology and written in his characteristic essay style. The article is about the representation relation viewed as a form of social interaction. Contrary to approaches which are dominant in the literature, the author argues that representation is a trilateral relation: the representative always represents the representee before an audience, even if this audience is not always easy to define. The same, paradoxically, can be said about the representee. In its pure forms, the object of representation may be the very *presence* of the representee, the representee's *will* or his/her *interest* and mutual expectations among the three parties will vary depending on what is being represented. Many representation relations only become such relations *ex post*; they are initiated not in the act of authorization but in the act of usurpation which is legalized and institutionalized not only by the representee but also by the audience. For this reason, the difference between representation and usurpation is often fluid and fuzzy. The representation relation, as it is understood in this article, is one of the main forms of social interaction because thanks to this relation people who cannot appear personally in the public sphere for various reasons can nevertheless make an appearance.

Keywords: representation; audience; usurpation; social expectations; public sphere.

What do Aneta Kręglicka, Włodzimierz Lubański and Krzysztof Kieślowski have in common? Not very much, really, except that they have all successfully represented Poland abroad although, of course, in different ways than Polish ambassadors indicated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and accepted by the President. Besides, ambassadors do more than just represent their country. Their main job is to implement the foreign policy of the government, designated by the parliamentary representation of the Nation, that is, the winning party or party coalition. At court, advocates represent their clients for better or for worse—clients whom they may never have met and never will. The director representing his company during negotiations with another director may secure favourable conditions for his company's future development or, on the contrary, may get his company into serious trouble. Serious trouble is also often the lot of parents representing their juvenile offspring before the law. If they fail to fulfil their legal parental obligations, they must suffer the consequences of their children's behaviour. Those who "haven't done anything wrong" but have simply signed the document representing consent in the wrong place also have to bear the consequences, which may even include imprisonment. Finally, football fans who demolish the stadium after the national eleven's away-from-home match also do a lot

of often unimaginable harm. As far as the local tabloids are concerned, they too are representing their country.

In other words, the relation of representation is present in many different social situations and we can easily find it in all spheres of everyday life. This of course suggests that this multiplicity and variety of usages of the term conceals its “real” meaning, one common principle or idea of “representation,” the “essence” of this type of relationship between individuals or institutions of their making. Social and political philosophers of logical positivist group felt that it was their calling to discover this meaning but other philosophers of language, inspired by the late works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, assumed that there may be many meanings although these meanings are similar enough under certain aspects to remain in relations of “family similarity.”¹ I neither pass the verdict on whether or not such correct meanings exist, nor on the superiority of one or other research method in terms of production of interesting outcomes.² I simply assume that even if a common thread runs through all the uses of the word “representation,” it is insignificant compared with the differences.

If we take our inspiration from Georg Simmel, however, we can identify certain a-historic forms of social interaction within these differences and ambiguities, forms of the same kind as the relations which Simmel himself identified: subordination and superiority, competition, emulation, division of labour, emergence of factions or internal consolidation.³ Like all interactions, representation may be more or less institutionalized and may take place between various social actors: individual men and women, formal institutions and formal groups, nations and states, or even organizations of states. The actors define the contents of these relations whereas their form is largely shaped by parties’ mutual *expectations*. In special cases, these expectations become formal *obligations*. Because this relation assumes the practical activity of only one party, it is easy to miss the fact that these expectations are two-sided; all the more so that the patron is the one who commissions his or her representative to perform certain tasks and who gives him more or less freedom of conduct. Meanwhile, even if the representation relation is not the result of a specific contract, it is more symmetrical than the name itself would suggest and it is governed by the norm of reciprocity, which means that the representative’s expectations regarding both his or her patrons and those before which he or she is representing the patrons are legitimate and respected.

¹ A. H. Birch’s book *Representation* (1971) refers to this methodological premise directly (pp. 13–14) but Hanna Pitkin in *The Concept of Representation* (1967), the book still acknowledged as the standard work on the topic, criticizes the various conceptualizations in the literature and offers her own definition of representation and therefore comes closer to the first strategy.

² For a full discussion of this problem see my *Interpretacja teorii politycznej* [Interpretation of Political Theory], (1998, pp. 54–59).

³ See *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. B. J. Diggs makes a distinction between “pictorial, dramatic, or descriptive representation” and representation, as it will be presented here, calls “practical,” see Diggs, “Practical Representation,” in: *Nomos*, vol. X: *Representation*. “The representative in the practical sense,” writes Diggs, is, generally speaking, in a sense the “agent” of persons recognized as “agents,” albeit operating in another sense than he. With respect to the one whom he represents, he is another self, someone who “takes his place” in the practical matters of everyday life” (Diggs, p. 30).

For this reason and other reasons mentioned later on, the representation relation should be considered three-sided: someone always represents someone else *before someone*, even if the third party does not always have a clear identity. The barrister represents the client in court before the judge, the ambassador represents his country before the government of the country in which he is accredited, trade unions represent employees before employers and the government etc. The third party does not even have an elegant name in the literature—for lack of a better term I shall call it the *audience*—and is easy to overlook⁴ because it has basically no effect on the representative/represented relation; the court cannot enforce barristers upon the litigating parties, the CEO has no influence on the composition and competence of the group of representatives of his employees who are demanding a rise. Sometimes the party is not even clearly defined: before whom are sportsmen and sportswomen representing their country? Sometimes it belongs to a different order of things, like God or History, before whom rulers ruling without the mandate of the ruled and beyond their control are representing their “people” or “nation.” Sometimes the opposite is true, however: the relation between the representative and the audience is more tangible than the relation between the representative and the patron. The monarch ruling by divine charter is a classical example but so is Miss Venezuela representing her country (so whom exactly?) at the *Miss Universe* beauty contest. Most important here is that in cases such as these it is the audience (see below) which can legitimize the representative’s position if he or she assumed it without the explicit permission of the represented.

Permission is the fundamental condition of *authorization*, granting the representative the right to act in the name of the represented. Authorization may be more or less formal. Politicians are elected according to strictly defined regulations but they do not sign any formal contract (agreements with lobbyists are even less official) whereas the client/lawyer relation is legally defined. Representatives are usually chosen but not always. Children do not choose their parents and this is no exception. Relations between children and their parents *qua* representatives coincide with the natural (unconventional) relations between them but this is rather exceptional. Bilateral consent, albeit in conditions of limited choice, is the rule rather than the exception. Citizens can only choose from among those politicians who have been selected by their party organizations; clients can only hire those lawyers who have licences issued by their professional corporation. Social norms limit the category of people who can choose their representatives but they limit the pool of people from whom they can choose even more. This greater restrictiveness can be explained as follows: expectations are higher regarding representatives than they are regarding the represented (more on this later). It is no coincidence that fewer citizens always have the right to be elected than to vote. For example, candidates for mandates in the Polish Senate must be over 35 years old.

⁴ Diggs sees this problem but does not discuss it (cf. p. 36). It also crops up only in passing in Pitkin’s book when she calls the third party the “audience” or (when reviewing the ideas of German writers), the “Addressat.”

Not all representatives are elected by those whom they represent (the representees). The national sports team is chosen (“appointed”) by the trainer (selector) but the selector himself, who also wears the national colours even if he is a foreigner, is hired by the national federation of the sport in question. The composition of the national representation and the identity of its trainer are usually highly disputed issues, the procedure itself is beyond dispute, however. But this is not always the case. Ever since 1990 there have been two national beauty contests in Poland, *Miss Polonia* and *Miss Polski*. Both choose two unmarried women who will represent Poland at the *Miss Universe* and *Miss World* contests. Of course one country cannot have two beauty queens and so one of these women is *usurping* the title and right to represent her country. Thankfully, as opposed to other much more urgent problems, this problem does not have to be resolved immediately but it does show that when unequivocal and widely accepted authorization procedures are missing, representation is really a more or less harmless *usurpation*: the vast majority of people speaking “on behalf” of someone are usurpers. And although the word itself has an ominous ring and one would think that representation was the opposite of usurpation, the boundaries between the two are in fact fuzzy.

Rather than being deceptions, usurpations are claims and are sometimes made in good faith. The usurper is someone who has been denied the right to representation but may obtain it if he or she fulfils the demands of the representee; this has been demonstrated by the history of many rulers who came to power *per nefas* rather than *per fas*. But were it not for its moral connotations, we could extend this term to all those who were unable to obtain permission to represent others for obvious reasons. Although single individuals should have no problem obtaining such permission under normal conditions, informal representation by a scattered group is quite a different matter. Who, according to the normal authorization procedure, can speak in the name of the whole nation? In the strict sense—nobody although the state, created by the nation and itself representing the nation before other nations, or to be more precise, states created by those nations, issues such certificates of sorts. This situation illustrates a certain pattern: authorization processes will always be more unequivocal when the represented subject is clearly defined. When his or her identity is unclear—as it is in the case of nations, societies but also so-called communities, every act of representation may be questioned and those who are not satisfied can say it is usurpation.

Nevertheless, even if the usurper has not obtained the representee’s permission, he can obtain it from those before whom he wants to represent them. Whether or not the monarch is convinced the he is God’s earthly representative, this is less important for social order than his subjects’ opinion on this matter. Therefore, *Miss Polonia* or *Miss Poland* may consider themselves to be the most beautiful Polish woman because those before whom they appear—the organizers of world beauty contests—honour their titles. Representation without the representee’s prior consent cannot remain unauthorized by the public. This is why governments which come to power after revolution or territorial secession but still have weak support in their own country immediately seek recognition abroad. What is more, audiences can have the decisive voice when judging whether a usurper’s claims to representation are

legitimate, taking (or more often not taking) the opinion of the interested parties themselves into consideration. This is the situation of the judge adjudicating child custody, i.e. deciding who is to represent the child, during divorce suits. Arbitrators arbitrating between superpowers dividing areas of influence between each other, or resolving territorial disputes between smaller countries, are in a similar situation. This has been illustrated, for example, by the new order which the Congress of Vienna introduced in 1815.

Since classical representation in everyday life can mainly be found in institutions, incidents of usurpation will be very common in all other, only partly institutionalized, wakes of life such as neighbour communities. The passenger who writes to the municipal transport board about changing the bus route; the inhabitant of a block of flats who demands that his cooperative stop leasing property to the open-air pub owner; the invalid who demands wheelchair access to a public office will all be treated more seriously by the respective institutions if these institutions acknowledge that they are representing particular interest groups. On the other hand, the same institutions sometimes even demand that their clients or applicants appoint someone who will speak on their behalf. For example, the cooperative administration would like every block to have its administrator. We may therefore expect that if a social group is insufficiently organized to elect a representative, a representative will probably appear on the scene without its permission and will obtain permission from the institution which requires such representation.

If we understand representation and usurpation this way, it will not be absurd to say that one can become a representative against one's will, solely of the audience's will, in which case representation will of course be informal. Complaints about the misbehaviour of one's countrymen abroad flow from the fact that they are representing our country involuntarily and against our will, and therefore doing us a *discredit*.⁵ Due to the nature of cognitive processes, which include the understandable tendency to stereotypy, these involuntary representatives will be recognized as *typical* members of their group.⁶ If the pleasure derived from shaping other people's ideas concerning the unknown world are insufficient compensation for the need to "behave themselves," they will treat the situation as a discomfort because they cannot count on getting any other satisfaction from the relation. But if they feel obliged to act as "ambassadors," they do so partly because that is what their countrymen at home expect, and they themselves will expect when they return from their holiday.

Such behaviour irritates us because it "spoils" *our* image abroad. In our own eyes this image is usually better, but even if it is even worse, we feel no inclination to "present oneself in the worst possible light"! Unlike in public opinion polls, the representation *relation* is not about representatives being *representative* of who we are;

⁵ When approaching representation this way I disagree with Hanna Pitkin who says that if representation is a relation between people then it only takes place when the representees themselves believe that they are being represented (Pitkin 1967 p. 9).

⁶ This understanding of representation resembles treatment of this relation as a form of reproduction but it is not reproduction because the goal of the representees is not to create a self-image, a sample of the whole or microcosm, to meet the needs of the audience; for a discussion of varieties of this type of representation, which Pitkin calls *Organschaft*, see: Pitkin op. cit. pp. 60–91.

we do not expect Miss Polonia to be a typical Polish woman, nor do we expect the national football team to play like the average 30-year-old guy. Hooliganism illustrates a more general problem: whether we like it or not, hooligans represent us passively, or at any rate unauthorized by us. Those whom the audience itself has selected also represent us, even if we protest. And this may undercut the efforts of all those who are to create such an image consciously and whom we have commissioned to do so.

The basic function of representation understood as a social relation is not to generate *information* about the represented society, it is to *act* on behalf of that society. There is a certain connection between the two, however, and advocates of parities, for example feminists and ethnic minority activists in multi-cultural societies, who justify their demands by explaining that these social categories are underrepresented in representative bodies, have some reason in what they say but are not quite right. In democracies, representative bodies are not the vehicles of information for the authorities, they are the authorities. Of course the extent to which the composition of these bodies determines the content of their decisions is too complex a question to deal with here so all we can do is to conceptualize the question as a larger problem: is representatives' representativeness really a condition sine qua non of their proper functioning? How can we make sure that representative bodies are actually representative is another problem.

The nature of the representee/representative relation depends on what the representative is to represent. Is she to behave according to the *will* of the representee or is she to act on behalf of the representee's *interest*? Of course the two are not mutually exclusive but neither are they exactly mutually equivalent. Sometimes all the representative is to do is to be meaningfully *present* in a given setting *in the place of* her patron.⁷ However, we must not view *will*, *interest* or *presence* as motives underlying the choice or hiring of one's representative because these motives are really quite complex, as demonstrated, for example, by studies of electorates' voting attitudes. They are simply *types of expectations* with respect to the representative which define the form of representation. Each form delineates the representative's range of freedom and invests her with a certain responsibility. Also, each requires mutual trust but, in complete harmony with Simmel's ideas concerning the nature of social life, not necessarily mutual attachments.⁸

In the simplest case, the representative is to make an appearance in a situation instead of the representee but his job is not to report on what he has seen and heard there but to be perceived as the representative of a given individual or group, to

⁷ Birch distinguishes three basic uses of the term "representative:" someone who (a) acts on behalf of his principal, (b) "shares some of the characteristics of a class of persons," (c) "symbolizes the identity or qualities of a class of persons," Birch, *op. cit.* p. 15. Someone who is simply replacing someone else, for example at work, is not a representative because he is neither manifesting the other person (see below), nor executing his will, nor acting in his interest; he is there himself, not as the "alter ego" of the person whom he is replacing; cf. also Diggs, p. 37.

⁸ Cf. Simmel, *op. cit.*, p. 9 "But in addition to these [definable consistent structures—A.W.] there exists an immeasurable number of less conspicuous forms of relationship and kinds of interaction. Taken singly, they may appear negligible. But since in actuality they are inserted into the comprehensive, and, as it were official formations, they alone produce society as we know it."

speak on their behalf, or at least wear their colours. The representative *symbolizes* someone's presence, just like delegates of the president to state ceremonies in a foreign country. This is presumably not too difficult a task and almost anyone could manage it. However, one must be "somebody" to be given the role. The function is usually honorary and the identity of the representative attests to the rank which the representee attributes to the event; this is why the rank of foreign guests delegated to appear at various ceremonies evokes such emotions. We may say that such representation is also an expression of respect for the audience. On the other hand, failure to invite any representation to the celebration is a blatant manifestation of hostility or at least dislike of the ignored party. Failure to accept the invitation is similarly a sign of hostility. Another function of this type of representation is to draw attention to the representees. Representatives of national minorities are not only acting on behalf of these minorities, they are also reminding others of their existence in society and so are people with disabilities sitting on various committees.⁹

What the person who merely symbolizes the presence of the representees is expected to do is to play her role with *dignity*. After all, she is bearing the representees' majesty. This can sometimes mean something quite different, however. Surely we can expect Miss Polonia to assert in perfect English in front of the cameras that she is deeply concerned with environmental protection but we cannot expect her to "fight" for her title. This, meanwhile, is exactly what we expect of sportsmen and sportswomen. If the opponent is too powerful to beat, they should at least "do their best." In their case, "dignity" means "fighting spirit." We do not expect anything in particular from the film director who represents his country at a festival. On the contrary, in this case the representees expect the jury to assess the production representing their cinematography fairly. If no particular element—the result of the match, the value of the contract etc.—attests to how well the representative has played his part, all the representee can do is trust the audience's judgement and that is what usually happens in representation of presence. But how are representatives and representees to force the audience to pass a fair verdict?

Following the representee's instructions is more than representation of presence. Representatives who follow instructions can be "special" or "personal" emissaries who go anywhere their patrons will not go for any reason. Such representatives are not only the representees' "eye and ear," they are also their "extension." The king's envoys, equipped with safe conduct documents, enjoy the same level of respect among the king's subjects as the king himself. The reason why they made the long journey from the capital is to convey the monarch's will to people who live far away. They owe their position completely to the one whose will they represent and that is why absolutist monarchs nominated people from the lower estates to act as their emissaries,

⁹ Analogously, various objects, such as flags, represent people *symbolically* albeit completely passively (for a detailed discussion see: Pitkin op. cit. pp. 92–111). In a way, objects substitute people in the role of representatives. We may say that those who cannot secure social representation must make do with displaying their symbols, for example, neo-fascists who paint swastikas on walls. Thanks to these swastikas society learns that such people exist and that, in accordance with the values of liberal democracy, they cannot be relegated from society, they can only be relegated symbolically by painting over their signs.

a practice which affronted those subjects who were higher up on the social ladder. The emissary selection procedure is a good illustration of the difference between representation of presence of the representee and the execution of his will. Politics provide the most vivid examples of this kind of representation but it will actually be found in every centralized power structure, be it the Catholic Church or the underground network. In the political sphere it need not be related to authoritarian rule; representatives of the regional diets to the general assembly of the Commonwealth of Two Nations (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) represented the political will of their patrons.

Freedom of decision of representatives, that is people who implement or even enforce the representees' will, depends on former instructions but in order to represent their representees successfully, representatives must keep in touch with them lest anything unforeseen in the instructions were to happen. Lack of communication was the factor which so often incapacitated the representatives of regional diets and led to decisional paralysis. Ideally, one who represents another's will should not have a will of his/her own when acting as representative. The question is: how unequivocal is the represented will and to what extent must it be *interpreted*. Interpretation always runs the risk of bias. So can we really say that, ideally, this type of representative is someone who "just does what he/she is told"? From the patron's point of view—yes. From the point of view of those before whom the representative represents the patron, rather than being the representee's eye, ear and arm, the representative is a "blind instrument." The reverse is also possible, however. Without questioning the structure of centralized authority or the authority's competence, they may accuse the authority's emissaries of "bad will" in their execution of the authority's will, as illustrated by the figure of speech of the good Tsar and the bad officials. Representation of volition, unequivocally authorized by the patron, can take place despite complete lack of authorization by the audience, however, although it is debatable whether authority which is so unfortunately represented can still be considered legitimate and effectively practiced. In many cases it certainly cannot, testifying that this type of representation may ultimately be inconsistent with the patron's interests.

If the proper candidate for the role of personifying representative is someone whom the audience respects, and if the representative who acts as transmitter of the representee's will should be loyal, then representees should choose competent specialists to represent their interests. Representatives should also be loyal, of course, but loyalty itself is not enough, it should normally also be legally sanctioned. As always when there is at least potential conflict of interests, representation can be facilitated by satisfying the representative's own interests, for example by means of an appropriate commission on the value of the contract. What needs to be trusted is not so much the representative's character as his/her competence, especially with regard to matters beyond the patron's own competence. To recall Weber, the representative is expected to be instrumentally rational—to behave in such a way as to maximise the representee's gain.¹⁰ At times this gain is obvious—for example, financial profit

¹⁰ This is what representation is all about according to Hanna Pitkin. Representing is *acting for*. Pitkin makes it clear, however, that she means activities *for* the patron, non *instead of* the patron. In this sense,

or winning a lawsuit—but at other times it is anything but. Once again, politics with their ambiguous and controversial concept of *common good* is a model example. And although the nature of this type of representation assumes representees' ability to define their own interest, this ability is—paradoxically—indispensable in the case of individuals, such as minors or individuals with mental handicaps, who do not have this ability. And it is in such cases that the degree to which the representee, who is not the incapable individuals' patron, must bear the consequences of his or her representative's behaviour, is a matter of particular importance.

As far as representation of interest is concerned, the representative's range of freedom must naturally be larger than in the case of representation of presence or representation of volition. Because the patron himself or herself will have to bear the consequences of the representative's actions, he or she will reserve the right to make key decisions. Negotiations are a typical example of such limited trust. During negotiations, participants ask their patrons for permission to consent to consecutive conditions voiced by the other party. Although they are negotiating someone else's interests, they also have a common interest—they both eventually stand to benefit if the transactions are successful and we can accuse them, just as we accuse politicians, their electorates' informal representatives, of "coming to terms" above the heads of those whom they represent. This is why their mutual relations must be regulated so as to safeguard the client's interest and they will only be granted *powers of attorney* in a given case when this is really indispensable. There is no other way out in many cases. Even if it is not explicitly legally regulated, in practice parents or their legal guardians are minors' plenipotentiaries and children bear the consequences of their ambitions, for example when choosing the child's first school, just as their parents or legal guardians bear the consequences of the children's education when they have to pay for their private tuition.

The example of parents as representatives shows that this role has both a personal and a social aspect. Many representatives may feel that the cases in which they represent are their own. This is more probable if they themselves belong to the group or category of electors on whose behalf they are acting.¹¹ But no contract will force them to become emotionally involved in this relation. What it can do is to give some protection from the risk of conflict of interests whilst doing their duties. Clients cannot expect their lawyer to break the law while representing them. Nor can lawyers violate the ethical norms of their profession if they have been hired as members of the corporation. But can football fans not expect a player for the national team to play despite significant family circumstances which could keep him at home? In such cases, typical conflicts between the social self and the individual self are salient and these conflicts remind us that the representation relation conforms to Goffman's logic of representation with all its technical problems and ethical dilemmas. Like Goffman's actor, every representative may be absolutely "sincere" in extreme cases—

specialists and experts only act for the client when they not only do certain things which the patron (representee) cannot do him/herself but also act in his/her name, cf. Pitkin pp. 138–9.

¹¹ This becomes far more complicated when the group itself, for example the constituency, has diverse interests, cf. Pitkin op. cit., pp. 40, 144.

when his social self and his public self coincide completely and his own interest and the representee's¹² interest are also identical—and absolutely “cynical” when he is merely playing his part more or less successfully, fully aware of the possible conflict of interests.¹³ More or less conspicuously, he is submitted to social control and this helps to explain why so many people are unwilling to play the part—not only because they are incompetent or afraid of the responsibility but also because they do not want to be interpersonally entangled.

Of course, the more personally involved the representative is in playing his role, the more he feels that he has the right to expect gratification. Like all social rewards, this gratification can take the form of power, affluence or prestige. If the relation is based on a formal contract, the representative's remuneration will also be fixed. And although one would have thought that prestige itself was sufficiently rewarding, sportsmen and sportswomen are also rewarded for good results. The CEO will also probably receive a bonus from the Board of Trustees if he manages to negotiate a good contract. Miss Polonia is sure to enjoy fame, especially if she gains recognition at the world beauty contest, and advertising commissions will be a source of big money. Of course “involuntary” representatives, such as foreign tourists, cannot count on any remuneration or prestige, even if they do great credit to their country. Power is politicians natural reward and perhaps that is why the electorate is unwilling to reward them any further by showing them respect. Or perhaps the electorate feels no respect for politicians because they often covet other, more tangible rewards? Be that as it may. Social life is based on the norm of reciprocity. Representees will think their representatives' claims are justified if they themselves play their part well. Nobody protests when gold medallists are abundantly rewarded and have enjoyed fame since antiquity—winners of the Olympic Games had their monuments in Ancient Delft alongside great playwrights.

These rewards can be so big that the representative's position can be said to be privileged. And I don't just mean the monarch representing God on earth. Even when he is only implementing his patron's will, he basks in the patron's glory, often feeling no responsibility, or refusing such, for what he does on his behalf.¹⁴ He may actually hope for social advancement, like the “toga-wearing gentry” in 17th and 18th century France. On the other hand, if he is a hired specialist, he will—paradoxically—have an advantage over his client, in that he will have a hold on issues of vital importance to him. And even if he has to compete with others over the right to represent, this will by no means lower his position because, equally often, clients themselves will strive for his services. These services can be expensive enough to compensate for his need to mix with people of ambiguous status, as in case of respected barristers hired by racketeers or plain rich gangsters. Even more significant is the social position of sports representatives because it is equivalent to the top of the discipline's hierarchy. When one becomes an MP one's status also changes characteristically. As a group, politicians

¹² As illustrated by every second American “court drama” film.

¹³ Cf. Erving Goffman, 1956, p. 10.

¹⁴ As demonstrated by the Nazi trials and the lenient sentences for those who “just followed orders.” Only those who gave the orders and those who implemented them extremely zealously were convicted.

do not have a good reputation but individual deputies or ministers fair much better. Despite the extreme cynicism which has dominated today's politics, people cannot have too bad an opinion about those whom they themselves have elected.

Another source of the exceptional nature of the institution of representation as social relation is the fact that all those who cannot appear in public themselves can be heard. This applies not only to marginalized or alienated groups but also to *institutions* which have no other way of making themselves heard in public: schools, football clubs, trade unions, charities—someone must speak up for them. We may say that, thanks to representatives, the institutions of social life can appear before other institutions. This applies to informal groups to an even greater extent than it does to formal organizations. It also applies to the largest informal group of all (if we can call it a group)—the nation, even if public opinion feels that most of its representatives are usurpers in the sense adopted in this article. The same applies to those who speak in the name of society using a different rhetoric. Thanks to them, debates on issues concerning society in general are possible. Viewed from this perspective, public debate is a dispute about who has a right to public debate. Finally, thanks to the institution of representation, believers can even hear God's voice because he also speaks to people (other than the mystics) through the specially anointed.

Paradoxically, the fact that the institution of representation creates the public sphere is most obvious when the representee is his or her own representative. This can sometimes be observed at meetings when a participant, usually provoked by the aggressive question "In whose name are you speaking?" answers resolutely "in my own." "To speak in one's own name" is much more than "to speak for oneself" because to speak for oneself is to speak in one's own private voice whereas to speak in someone's name is to elevate that voice to the public forum. This is why participants in all meetings feel obliged to speak up even if they know that by so doing they will not contribute substantively. Of course we can treat the phrase "I am representing myself" as a sign of individualism but nevertheless it is symptomatic that it can be manifested by means of a formula which expresses a social relation. To be a representative means to be able to appear in public. Children and persons with mental deficiencies cannot do this and that is why they only make their appearance through representatives." "To speak in one's own name" is to declare that one is personally capable of doing so. To quote Goffman once more, we may say that such a declaration also means willingness to don a mask and play in public performances according to the rules of the game.

Acts of representation are in fact accompanied by a certain degree of ceremony, typical for these situations, whose meaning rises above what can be perceived by our senses. After all, the representative, said Hobbes, is "an artificial person" and so he/she needs appropriate *decorum* in order to be recognized in his/her second, unnatural embodiment. Can we imagine the ambassador's car without his country's flag? The ambassador himself is an allegory of his country; the flag only tells us which one. Such decorum is essential in the founding act, be it accreditation of the said ambassador or the bishop's installation and whenever he has his representees' power at his disposal whilst playing his role. One particularly interesting case is the decorum of the political representation election. Democratic rhetoric and "naïve" political

theory accentuate this moment of the people's sovereignty, its epiphany, so to say, when the governed change places with the governors for a fleeting moment. However, Rousseau saw nothing more than mild tyranny in a state which permitted such a thing once every few years. Rousseau's enthusiasts would say that governing politicians represent the sovereign people just as kings represent God on earth, meaning that they usurp his place.

Thank goodness we do not have to decide whether social order is the result of consensus or coercion because, however it is created, it defines the rules which say who, in whose name, and under what circumstances may appear in public.¹⁵ Thanks to the institution of representation nobody is left in public space that would not be at least indirectly responsible for his/her actions. Like the institutions of power and hierarchy, the institution of representation is ultimately meant to prevent chaos in social life. But does this thesis not imply that representees cannot be present in social life themselves, without their representatives? And what would happen if they did? The answers to these questions have obvious ideological implications as illustrated so vividly by the famous monologue of the Great Inquisitor vis-à-vis the silent Christ: "Thou hast promised, Thou has established by Thy word, Thou hast given to us the right to bind and unbind, and now, of course, Thou canst not think of taking it away. Why, then, hast Thou come to hinder us."¹⁶ Leaving all doctrinal differences aside, the difference between social conservatives and social radicals is that the former will trust the institution of representation and the latter will tend to distrust it.

If we agree that the institution of representation demarcates the limits of the public sphere then these limits are quite far-reaching. Intimacy sets the limits. By their very nature, intimate relations cannot be mediated; even marriage of love can be formalized *per procura* but one cannot love through a representative. In this sense, the representation relation must be present in every society, whatever its culture. Kierkegaard was wrong, or imprecise, when he said that the ancient Greeks were unfamiliar with it because it was specifically Christian.¹⁷ Perhaps Greek culture was unfamiliar with representation-cum-allegory but Greek society would not have developed a public sphere were it not for representation as a *form* of socialization.

Of course this form, like any other form, is full with cultural content. Culture determines what can be represented in public and what must remain private, who can appear directly in public and who can only appear through a representative, how the

¹⁵ The literature on the representation relation in politics is not very large. One work merits our special attention. This is Jane Mansbridge's "Rethinking Political Representation" (2003). Basing on empirical studies the author identifies three types of relation between politicians and their electorates: anticipatory, gyroscopic and substitute. Nancy L. Schwartz (1988) offers a down-to-earth defence of the institution in her book *The Blue Guitar: Political Representation and Community*, although she still does not sufficiently appreciate the effects of the media on politics. On the other hand, Pitkin's comments on how the representation relation in politics really looks, written forty years after she published her classic book, are typically bitter, cf. Pitkin (2004).

¹⁶ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, English transl. Constance Garnett, Plain Label Books, p. 650.

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, 1981, pp. 68–9. I wish to thank Szymon Wróbel for drawing Kierkegaard to my attention. Wróbel deciphered Carl Schmitt's laconic comment (in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*) on this Protestant theologian who had written earlier about representation.

representative shall be accountable before the representee etc. Culture is what ultimately resolves whether God shall be represented in public or is just a “superfluous hypothesis,” whether women can open bank accounts themselves or their husbands must do so on their behalf. Of course theoretically we can imagine a society which has no institutionalized religion and a society where women never leave the house unaccompanied or even a society where all its members are fully empowered. Emancipation of every underprivileged group and granting them the status of public persons will not make any difference, however, because we will still have juvenile members of society and those who are incapable of living independently for other reasons as well as institutions which must ultimately speak in human voice in social reality.

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