Social Violence and Political Representation

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PREFACE

There once was a law school. Of its sixty faculty members, twenty were white male heterosexuals, twenty were white women, and twenty were black. The white men had by some freak of history acquired a great deal of power in the law school. To them went all the privileges, from the best offices and courses, to exclusive use of the library and high salaries. A committee of three such white men governed the law school. One was a liberal, one a conservative, and the other a reactionary. The women and the blacks lived an academic version of poverty and disempowerment—no photocopying privileges, no library rights, ten times more courses to teach, low salaries, and no say in the governance of the school. Good students shunned them because their recommendations were worthless. Less stellar students needed their help because they themselves were shunned by the white men, but the blacks and women had no time to give them—they were so overworked.

At a certain point, the forty blacks and women decided to take their case to the school's governing committee. They submitted a list of grievances and demands; they asked for basic changes, even a little bit of equality in the distribution of power and resources. The reactionary member of the committee would not talk to them. The conservative said that he was encouraged by their ability to recognize the virtues of the system within which they worked, its capacity to be elastic and to accommodate the need for change. He praised their activism and urged them to continue on their course. But . . .

"But," he said, "we cannot really satisfy your demands. Things just will not change. The basic structures are what they are. I am sorry."

The liberal wondered at their inability to recognize the virtues of the system within which they worked. "We have a genuinely free law school here," he said, "one in which dissent is permitted. But I cannot help you, for I fear what might happen if too much fragmentation resulted from your demands. We have harmony now. Moreover, I have heard that our friend and colleague, the reactionary, is planning a coup if we give in to your wishes. Think of what that might mean; not only would you have no rights, but ours would be taken away as well."

Frustrated and angry, the women and blacks took over the committee meeting, ejected the three sitting members, and named three new members—one white male, one black, and one woman. This seemed to them more fair, since there were forty women and blacks, and only twenty white males. The new committee immediately voted to rescind the exclusive privileges of the white men, to equalize the distribution of work, and to reallocate the school's resources along strictly equitable lines.

At first, the white men were unhappy with this, but they soon got used to it.

I. INTRODUCTION

If I were to sum up the revolution that has occurred in the humanities (and increasingly in the social sciences) in the past two decades, it would be to say that what was before seen as substance is now seen as representation. One could expand on that statement in several ways: what was before seen as nature or reason is now seen as convention or artifact; what was before a logic of necessity is now a highly contingent, even random relation of terms whose connections obey no necessary order; what was before a ground or foundation from which reasonable derivatives could be deduced and applied to different situations is now itself the effect of contextual situations and systems of signification; what was before rationalist axiomatics is now rhetorical agonistics. At stake here, of course, is a very old battle; we have been hearing about it for at least 2500 years, ever since people first began to feel the need for written laws and interpreters, philosophers and judges. With those developments came a sense that the terms in which social order—and with it, as always, social power—would be defined somehow had a bearing on the terms in which that world would be represented in the dominant forms of social knowledge. From the start, how we represented the world to ourselves had something to do with how we came together in societies, how we forced other people to do our labor for us, how we dealt with those who disagreed with our particular conception of what

it meant to be part of our society. If a certain difference in representation would always have something to do with social change, the elevation to dominance of certain very powerful representations would also always have something to do with how societies immunized themselves against social change.

In this Article I will suggest some ways in which the philosophical revolution of recent decades, which is usually associated with post words like poststructuralism and postmodernism, might help us think about the way societies are held in place by regimes of representation. I am particularly interested in how this revolution allows us to imagine new ways of formulating and constructing the societies in which we live. I will discuss first the relationship between power, representation, and violence. I will then suggest some ways in which representation can be a lever for undoing the power that is so important for the maintenance of a violent and unequal distribution of resources and responsibilities under western capitalism.

II. REPRESENTATION AND VIOLENCE

That dominant forms of social knowledge have something to do with the maintenance of social power is not a new insight. I would like to suggest a strong relationship between the forms of representation that shape social knowledge and the forms of representation that give structure to our political institutions, especially inasmuch as those institutions are usually thought to embody ideals of fair and equal representation in a liberal democracy.

By representation I mean such things as image, word, sign, symbol, and story. A representation stands in for something else, allowing invisible ideas to become concrete things or permitting an encapsulation of something large or long in a brief and communicable form. Our thoughts are represented in words, our desires in actions, our ideals in institutions, and our fears in the images we project onto others. The principal mechanism of representation is substitution, but representation also encompasses displacement, negation, inversion, encapsulation, spatialization, and the like.

In the postmodern age, three things that have been noticed regarding representation are important to my concerns here: Its variability, its active power, and its capacity to invert cause and effect. Representations vary, even representations of the same thing. Black people seen (cognitively represented) from the perspective of a white racist will appear (be represented as) frightening, huge, evil, threatening. A white liberal will picture (represent) them as needing white patronage in order to succeed. A conservative will see (represent) them as being lazy welfare thieves. Blacks themselves might represent African-American

life in differing ways, depending on their social position, religious assumptions, and personal history. The variety of representations is itself representative of material differences of station and enculturation.

Representations signify and produce different kinds of attitudes and actions. They have an active power: they make things happen, usually by painting the world in such a way that certain policies—from domestic slavery to Cold War militarism—will appear justified. More importantly, perhaps, the very act of painting itself enacts the policy. The mapping out of a social terrain as an exploitable field of economic possibilities already in effect transforms that terrain, denying other possibilities and producing an object that can be acted on without certain constraints which might have come into play if the social world had been conceived (pictured, mapped, represented) differently.

This is particularly clear when representations, which are supposedly the effects of the things they represent, come to take the place of their cause, the things themselves. If the images are powerful and pervasive, they can act on the things they supposedly represent by transforming them to make them conform to the prevalent images of those things. Victims of violence are especially susceptible to this process. Rendered passive and subdued by violence, they are represented as somehow deserving of violence, as wanting or needing it. An effect of violence, a particular representation, thus comes to justify violence. The representations produced by acts of violence come to be justifications for further acts of violence. That violence then furthers the transformation of its victims into people whose behavior conforms with the dominant representations of them. They become the passive, undeserving things they were represented as being. Similarly, those rendered poor by an economic system find comfort in excesses of self-indulgence—drug use particularly—that allow them to be pictured in images that justify their being rendered poor. They are too irresponsible to deserve better. The result of immiseration—a certain fallen self-image that gives rise to a public representation as undeserving—comes to occupy the position of a justifying cause.

The postmodernist revolution has drawn attention to the role of representation in the construction of things we until now have assumed to be pre- or extra-representational. As the prerevolutionary story went, there was a world to be known, and we knew it using the representational and interpretive instruments at our disposal. Words stood for things; narratives recounted our lives and histories; pictures gave us accurate images of our various worlds. All we had to do was find the right representations and our thoughts and all tbe truths that were to be known through them would stand before us in their simplicity and objectivity, untainted by the instruments that seemed nonetheless so nec-

essary to their existence.

It is no longer as easy to believe this story. The variability of representation has drawn our attention to the way in which even supposedly normal forms of social knowledge depend on representations. The tendency of representation to substitute for its cause has made us suspicious of claims to pre- or extra-representational truth; the active power of representation has underscored the way we actively paint a world into being out of the images we hold of it, images that are as much projections of desire as depictions of real things.

Consider the example of the American nation state. American history books have attributed an almost natural coherence and linearity to that particular set of rather contingent historical conventions through narratives that posit an origin or cause from which a plausible development—geographic, political, or economic—can be said to derive. From Huck Finn to Gary Cooper, novels and films have constructed an image of the American character, the privileged subject of the national narrative, as one endowed with the traits of self-reliant virtue and wise innocence. Such themes as "the struggle for liberty" have given the psychological imperatives of this subject—white, male, heterosexual—semantic weight. One result is the exclusion of large segments of the population from participation in the privileged subject's unfolding history as anything other than minor characters and bit players. These cultural exclusions always seem to imply political exclusions. If certain experiences would be more valuable than others, certain points of view more privileged, then certain social subjects would be more valuable and privileged, too. The allocation of cultural meanings thus always seems to be secured by strict semantic rules that are also political rules.

The purpose of the representational attribution of a sense of coherence to a fragmented social world is always to justify the conversion of antagonistic parts into a unified whole. Representations justify the violence that is required if dissonant particularities are to become consonant totalities and if one part especially is to assume power over the whole. Within the logic created by positing a coherent national community where only fragmented and asymmetrical class, gender, and racial groups exist, the violence done to maintain the hierarchies of power within the so-called nation will, as a result of the attribution of identity through cultural representation, seem a reasonable action required to preserve the integrity of the whole itself. Yet it is the very action of subsumption of part to whole that constitutes the larger unity in the first place. If workers turned out of factories become homeless or if infant mortality among blacks rises, it will seem a consequence of a logic whose larger form is the very idea of a nation held together by rules everyone must obey if the nation is to exist at all. The great trick of

American liberalism is to call these rules the rules of freedom, which makes them seem like no rules at all.

One important purpose of the representational positing of a national community is to neutralize the potentially destructive possibilities of social and historical contingency. If the rules of the national community were not grounded in authoritative meanings given by the dominant interpretations and regimes of signification, then the violence done in the name of those rules and meanings would not seem justified and might result in counter violence. By creating a sense of coherence and unity, representations secure a sense of authority that is as much political as cultural. In this process certain representations and meanings come to occupy a foundational and grounding position in the logic of signification that defines the national community. Other meanings that represent both alternative interpretations of a particular social reality and alternative ways of structuring that reality come to be either marginalized or repressed.

Freedom is perhaps the most important of these grounding representations in the American context. As a representation, freedom gains authority for itself from the founding narrative of the struggle against monarchial absolutism. The representational construction of America would be based on certain images of male action and economic possibility, a merchant class's utopia of desire restrained only by the measure of harm done to other merchants. Having been endowed with a power of its own from these founding images, freedom became an agent of action in its own right, legitimating violence against those who fell outside the boundary of the merchant utopia as well as against practitioners of alternative ideals of a more communal society. The representation continues to saturate our political culture, empowering particular subjects and preventing those public institutions that represent interests not served by the ideology of economic freedom from playing too intrusive a role and acting as a restraint. The selective service done by this concept—that in an economic free-for-all only some win and many lose—stages a situation in which the representation sanctions the legitimate violence of dispossession. Particularly for those consigned to labor, the representation has little relevance other than as the name for the actions they are permitted during time off from the prison of exploitation. Freedom has thus become more evidently what it has always been from the outset—the right to violate.

The men who invented the concept of freedom and whose self-representations are embodied in the contours of possible actions licensed by freedom would not quite agree, of course. Their struggle with their fathers in an authoritarian patriarchal culture (John Stuart Mill being the exemplar) made liberty both a valuable and a useful concept, one

that secured needed latitude but retained a vertical ordering of social groups. In a world without the old paternalist forms of political authority, these firm semantic grounds were needed. Alternatives were always available, of course, if only because alternative social subjectivities existed, from women to workers to slaves. The alternative possibilities of life that emerged from the repressed majority's experiences of exclusion from the white male world of axiomatized autonomy registered as much in the realm of cultural representation as they did in the high rates of repressive violence that always seem to be the male way of greeting infringements on autonomy.

If freedom, for example, has a positive meaning of unrestrained action whose limit is harm done to others of one's own gender, race, and class, it also has the negative meaning of refusing to heighten the priority of social responsibility. That negative meaning is important because it is not simply another possible meaning. It suggests another world picture entirely and is always inscribed as its repressed converse in the actions licensed by the doctrine of freedom. The political ideal of freedom of choice presupposes an already disintegrated social world in which contending factions relate to each other as externalities that merely signify other more important material differences of power. Choice of parties bears within it the negative meaning of the refusal of an ideal of a social community that can negotiate its differences because those differences are truly political. In other words, they are not representative of any significant material differences of station or power, but rather are differences of opinion regarding the shape of a world to which all are bound equally because all participate and hold shares equally. The economic ideal of freedom harbors a similarly repressed alternative meaning that signifies an alternative world construction. The principle of free economic action means also a refusal of a possible world in which agents need not face each other as dissociated antagonists. The meaning of freedom as dissociation and opposition derives from an implied background meaning that is its converse: the ideal of a world of conjugated association without opposition.

The meanings I am describing are possible, but necessarily repressed. They must be repressed because their availability suggests the radical contingency of a social universe whose supposed ontological stability is confirmed by the stability and univocality of its representations. That contingency is contained by the positioning of terms like freedom as foundational meanings within a particular regime of signification. Differences of meaning, which are differences of possible world constructions, thus come to be differences over the interpretation of a set of terms whose status as founding terms cannot be challenged. Liberalism's great success was not that it substituted the rationality of law

for the violence of feudal authority, but rather the discovery that se-
mantic repression works just as well as physical force.

Only in recent decades have we come to think twice about the
power of this representational system. People who have been violated
by the cultural representations that subsumed their experience and by
the system of political representation that obliterated their voices have
begun to demand representation of their own—native Americans whose
land was stolen, women whose existence as subjects was denied, and
blacks whose lives were shattered—all for the sake of wise innocence.
What emerges after this questioning is a sense of an entirely different
world that demands new representations which do justice to the broken
lives that are the legacy of America's emergence as a nation. If power
spoke in a narrative without shadows, according to a line of develop-
ment at once straight and self-sufficient that moved toward goals of
freedom of action and antisocial self-empowerment, which were particu-
larly satisfactory ideals for the white, heterosexual male subject of the
narrative, then the questioning of power would necessarily challenge the
monovocality of that history. If the violated were to speak, then there
would be many voices, not one. If power was by definition the dis-
empowerment of others and their submission to the experience of self-
dissociation, then counter power would not speak in the mode of em-
powered subjectivity, confident of its project, secure in its unviolated
source, and destined toward its inevitable goal. Stories of counter power
would require a sense of the tentativeness of other perspectives, of his-
tory as a frequently violent field of contingencies, of narrative itself as a
fragile and constant exercise in self-construction.

III. FOR CONSTITUENCY DEMOCRACY

If counter power would require a different system of cultural repre-
sentation that would not subsume dissonant lives to a single term like
freedom, it would also, I will now argue, require a different system of
political representation that would not subsume the whole community
to one of its parts. There are strong links between the representational
structures that shape the ideological realities and imaginative possibili-
ties of American culture and the actual structures of political represen-
tation which hold that culture and that society in place. My attempt to
chart this course is fraught with danger; it is the kind of thing that can
earn you a bad reputation, especially in the political culture of the
American left, which is devoted to the idea that real things are real
things and that there is a clear line between real things and imaginary
ones. Even though it can easily be demonstrated that all the ideas, be-
liefs, and assumptions that people bring to social interaction come from
culture, from the representations, narratives, and images that form our

psychologies, still one must be careful. And for good reason: in society and in reality, violence is done; though it may be done in the name of certain representations, still, real hands do the harm. Or can we make so clear a distinction, even in this realm?

I recently saw a Soviet documentary about a young man who murdered two people. He was robbing them with a gun in his hand, and when the woman laughed at him and ran to the door, he shot her. In trying to explain his feelings at that moment, he said she made him feel small by not taking him seriously, even though he did not really want to be taken seriously as a killer because he had never harmed anyone before. He was overwhelmed by shame and anger, by a self-image that fell short of what he liked to think of himself as being. Later in the film, one learns that his mother, a rather tough-minded person, shunned him and left the family. A recurring image of this abandonment no doubt influenced his psychological disposition when confronted with his female victim's derision. The young man did indeed do the killing, but there is something else about this situation that requires attention. It underscores the difference between the criminalization of people and the description of those actual, empirical, and very real processes of representation and self-representation that go into the production of violence. The young man killed in part because of a particular representation of himself that emerged in the interaction with his female victim. That representation was deadly for his self-image and contributed to his willingness to commit violence. And violence must always be interpreted, I think, as the physical projection of psychological fantasies. At the origin of much male domestic violence is a problem of self-representation, of a certain dangerous vulnerability of self-imaging. The silencing of that violence, its acceptance through particular strategies of interpretation by victimized women, often has to do with the need to represent the world in a particular way, as a place where violence must somehow be justified, where it is necessary or logical rather than contingent and random.

This framework should tell us something about why authoritative representations in general, which posit a ground of necessity behind contingent institutions like the nation state or the capitalist market, are necessary precisely in societies constructed around these institutions. As they are formulated on the principles of aggression and defensiveness, those institutions promote the kind of violent instability that results in a need for a sense of justice, a sense that the threat of violence which is the basis of enforced community in a society founded on the free right to violate is somehow part of a necessary order, some system of meaning that makes the violence seem rational. The greater the levels of unjust violence in a society, one might say, the greater the like-

lihood of encountering representations of the just necessity of violence.

What we learn in studying the just world syndrome in domestic or intimate violence, therefore, can help us account for how a representational process allows large sectors of our population to accept violent subordination. The process is akin to euphemism, and it operates through a substitution that annuls one reality in favor of an image that bears a significant nonrelationship to that reality. I say nonrelationship because the reality itself is one that withstands semantic ordering. It seems to have no meaning; it offers no consolation. The Soviet man's confusion of representation at the moment of violence, the nonalignment between the woman's derisive representation of him and his own desired self-image (derived in part no doubt from the image his departing mother left with him) was solved by a representation of himself as capable of violence—indeed, by a representation of himself as a perpetrator of a violence that annulled a negative and threatening representation of himself. The desire on the part of violated women to make some sense of a violent social world executes a similar substitution. The contingency and apparent randomness of the violent event is effaced and subsumed to a meaning that substitutes a sense of order for what appears to be without logic or reason.

Representation is, therefore, very much a part of the world, and I will now argue that one can relate the operations of cultural and psychological representation to the system of political representation in a republican democracy such as that of the United States. Our political system imposes a structure of meaning on a potentially random and contingent social world. Meaning provides order, and order is achieved through substitution. As in cultural and psychological representation, the semantic order imposed bears a significant nonrelationship to the world represented. In political representation, as in much cultural representation, the structure of substitution is one in which a privileged representation does not relate to the social whole in crucial ways; it must not so relate in order to effectively subsume the contingency and diversity of that world to a manageable scheme of order (as well as an orderly scheme of management).

If social violence always involves the exclusion of others from power, or resources, or rights, the representations that enable such violence are themselves exclusionary. They lie or misrepresent by allowing one group's representations of the world to become the standard for constructing that world. What is striking about ideals like freedom is how little they actually represent of the reality they supposedly name. The managerial executive class of white male businessmen may be relatively free, but those whose exploitation lies at the origin of their wealth—the large throngs of people, many of whom are female or non-

white, who put in hours each day, year after year, producing and doing things for those men—certainly are not. It might be more accurate to name this reality with a mixture of representations: free domination, for example, or more elaborately, majority coerced labor-minority communally subsidized liberty. These do not sound as nice as freedom, however, and I wonder sometimes if we cherish certain cultural and political ideals precisely because they offer the image of a compensatory utopia of unrestrained action that has very little to do with the debased reality they supposedly depict. One thing at least is certain: These representations allow a part of reality to stand in for the whole. They permit one group's self-defining ideal to substitute for what might be the real interests of the majority, thereby displacing those interests and removing them from view as well as from the realm of legitimate public discussion.

If we can say that one problem with the representations that construct things such as the idea of a nation state is their inaccuracy, the same is true of the system of political representation. The current political system aids the violence of exclusion precisely because it is not representative enough. The system lies, if you will. Although the authority and legitimacy that systems of political representation claim for themselves rest on a notion of fair and equal representation, wealthy white males bear at best a metonymic relationship to the social whole. The basic process of political representation, like that of cultural representation, is one of substitution and displacement. Members of the upper sectors of society, mostly male and mostly white, acting as political representatives, stand in for and supposedly represent the interests of everyone else. It is a matter of substituting part for whole again, and again one would have to say that the result is a displacement and repression of the real interests of the larger group.

I say this with trepidation because one can easily claim, of course, that if people wanted something other than what they get, they could make those demands felt. It is here precisely that one begins to perceive the contact between cultural representation—understood as a system for reinforcing the conventions essential to the maintenance of the founding economic, political, and social structures of power in a society—and political representation. When the only permissible representations around are ones like freedom that make the whole game seem somehow legitimate and that make alternative formulations like wealth redistribution or economic democracy seem abridgements of everything the nation stands for, then it is unlikely that people will be able to express their needs in anything but the terms endorsed as legitimate by the existing system of power. What gets represented in political representation, if you will, is cultural representation. If the system of politi-

cal representation is meant to translate or communicate the needs, interests, and desires of the population into policies and programs, then the difficulty in thinking about those feelings in anything but licensed representations illustrates something crucial about the kinds of limits such political representation is likely to respect, even when it is operating most naturally and spontaneously, without any apparent manipulation. The process works in the other direction as well. When an inaccurate system of political representation holds sway, the rise to dominance of cultural representations that question the governing power is unlikely.

This is why, when societies change in radical ways as in Eastern Europe, everything changes, from the words and images that circulate in culture to the political and economic institutions. And this also is why, when societies like America do not change radically, nothing changes. The culture continues to circulate the same self-serving ideology, and the process of exploitation that fuels the enormous private accumulation of a community's wealth remains the same. Dominant representations of reality turn out to be dominant predictors of reality.

But what if things were to change? What would it look like? Let us assume that the process of displacement and substitution which allows one partial perspective to stand in for the whole is not such a good idea, either culturally or politically. Everyone should have a direct say in what happens. Politically, that will require a different kind of representational system. Culturally, it implies the full democratization of cultural production, a full inclusion or representation of voices in what is now a minority affair. The second depends, I would argue, on the first. A great deal of attention has been given to the issue of cultural democracy, but we have simply assumed the rationality of our current system of political representation. How might it be reformulated?

One possible answer might be called constituency democracy. It would be a system of more accurate representation based on the assumption that the different interests of constituencies are best represented when they are represented directly by those constituencies. This means that the ideology of totality in political representation, the assumption that a part can stand in for the whole, would be put aside. White, well-to-do men would no longer represent black, not-so-well-to-do women. In place of this system would be a more fragmented and multiple process that would favor no single part by allowing it to stand in for and displace all the others. More concretely, all social groups with a significant membership, a significant relationship of subordination to hitherto dominant groups, or a significant history of exclusion from representation and power—women, sexual and ethnic minorities, and the various unrepresented lower income groups—would be proportionately

represented in the political decision-making bodies of the nation. If half
of the country is female, then half of the representative decision-mak-
ing body either should be female or chosen exclusively by women. If
one-third of the population is black or gay, the same would be true of
them. If two-thirds of the nation makes less than 75,000 dollars a year,
then two-thirds of the representatives also would make less than 75,000
dollars a year.

Obvious problems would arise in this kind of system. Should one
category such as income prevail over another such as gender, for exam-
ple? Are Irish Americans a significantly oppressed and excluded group?
All these questions require thought, negotiation, and the development
of tests and standards. I would argue for proportional demographic rep-
resentation for at least those groups that recent history has taught us
have been victims of violence and exclusion—nonwhite racial minori-
ties, women, lower income people, and victims of ethnic violence and
prejudice based on sexual preference. But clearly, any such system
would have to be extremely flexible—open in an absolute way to change
and revision.

Nothing like this will ever take place, of course, as long as power
exists. Power in a pseudo-democratic situation depends on the substitu-
tion of one group's interests for another's and on the cultural represen-
tation of this process as the fulfillment of a political ideal like freedom.
What is interesting to imagine, nevertheless, is how large a difference a
small thing like a change in representation might make. What would
blacks, or working people, or women, or sexual minorities do if they
were represented in Congress according to their numbers? Perhaps fear
of the answer to that question keeps us where we are, with the forms of
political representation that we now possess.

IV. REPRESENTATION AS AN ANTIDOTE TO VIOLENCE

I want to conclude with one final justification for the kind of politi-
cal representation I have just described as constituency democracy. It
would help bring an end to violence by according a power of speech, of
self-representation, to those whose victimization depends in part on
their banishment from the realm of public representation, or on their
positioning within that realm as objects rather than expressive subjects.
Violence depends on a particular kind of representation of the victims
of violence, one that is not informed by the victims themselves. Like
the substitutional rhetoric of political representation under republican
liberalism, the representations that enable and encourage violent vic-
timization abolish others by substituting a partial projection for the
whole picture of another person or people. Violence spreads through a
process of representation, simulation, and copying. The violence of sub-

jugation and frustration in the economic realm, for example, becomes a repetition and reenactment of that same violence in a more controllable domestic arena. Past violence is reenacted when victims are turned into perpetrators whose beings as potentially independent subjects are foreclosed by the images of past harm they bear with them. The public ethic of violation in a nation state that prides itself on its ability to beat up on smaller, dark-skinned neighbors is copied in a circulation of more private forms of violence. The violence of a society founded on the free right to violate returns to society in the violence perpetrated by its victims against themselves and others.

If representation lies close to the heart of social violence, representation of another kind enables its solution, its exorcism, so to speak. The bringing of repressed material to conscious representation is the secret of psychotherapy's quelling of private violence. With the entry into social speech of the voices of those repressed others who are the objects of society's violence, public violence finally begins to find its limit. We cannot hurt those who speak to us and to whom we speak; to allow speech is to accord power and existence as a subject, to grant a right of representation both culturally and politically. In the power of this subjectivity is entailed an inevitable process of recognition, the representation of the other as like oneself. At a certain point, the end of violence is the inability to harm oneself. Crucial in this endeavor is the creation of pathways that permit more equal forms of representation, forms that do not displace or substitute and thereby annul perspectives. We will need a different kind of political democracy to accommodate this need—new, more accurate forms of political representation. Only then, I think, will American culture be capable of achieving the kind of community it now can only pretend to be.

AFTERWORD

I have cheated by including in my Preface a response to my respondent, Professor Robert Covington. I want to elaborate a bit more here on some other possible responses to Professor Covington and to others from the audience who offered challenging and helpful comments.

It would be inaccurate, as Professor Covington rightly points out, to characterize the American tradition as being without exception violent toward nondominant racial and sexual groups. The violated have had their sympathizers in the ruling group, and some of these proponents wrote novels and made movies. Even as zealous a perpetrator of representational violence against Native Americans as John Ford would make films like *Cheyenne Autumn* late in his career, which portray quite sympathetically the hazards of being nonwhite in nineteenth century America. I would suggest, however, that we should not confuse ex-

ceptions with rules. Indeed, the exceptions must be understood as arising out of and in response to the overwhelming preponderance of the rules.

I have treated Professor Covington's other point—that too much change risks provoking a right-wing reaction—with perhaps too much irony in my prefatory anecdote. This is a liberal version of the conservative slippery slope argument that a little equality can lead quickly to too much equality (whatever that is). In my oral response at the Symposium, I suggested that the fragmentation Professor Covington fears is already upon us, and it assumes the shape of the very harmony he thinks is so worthy of preservation. If one is a white male and thereby a member of the favored group, then the current unequal system of power and resource distribution, with all of its attendant acts of repressive violence on the part of the legal system against less favored groups, might indeed seem a praiseworthy harmony that should be preserved. But if one belongs to one of the fragments that is an object of legal violence and of subsumption to the white, male-dominated whole—if one is gay, or black, or female, or poor—then such harmony will seem less virtuous. As always, where we stand determines what we see.

Someone in the audience wondered if some of the subjectivities I described as needing representation may be created by society. I think the point here was that the categories I used may not have any ontological grounding outside social construction. Are gays or women or blacks separable categories, or are all these groupings merely conventions applied to much more complicated, differentially constituted, nonidentical subjective processes? I think that is true in reality, but again we must take into account the dominant representations that allow certain groups of people to be fit into those categories and treated in certain ways as a result. Those representational acts of categorization are also real, and because they are the categories of existing power, they are the ones we must contend with in seeking to defuse this power.

Cornel West wondered if substantive issues of wealth distribution and the like might not be more important than the alternative forms of political representation that I proposed. I suggested then, and suggest again now, that the alternative form of representation would be more likely to guarantee that those issues would actually be raised in a legislative assembly than would the current form of representation. Now, for example, the concerns of lower income people are not addressed as structural problems by political representatives. If those people were represented according to their numbers, such avoidance would be less likely.