Introduction: The terms of representation

'Representation' is a remarkably common term. It is used in many different fields, professions and domains; it pops up on the news; it even makes an appearance in everyday conversations. It should, therefore, be a very familiar term, easily understood by anyone. A quick examination of any dictionary, or of the super-dictionary that is the internet, will provide a number of definitions of representation. Some are philosophical in scope: for instance, explanations of what Kant wrote about representation. Some are more or less linguistic: discussions of how meanings are made through the production and organization of **signs**. Others are ethnographic, or anthropological: analyses of how people from other cultures make meanings and ascribe values. Because the term is used in psychology and philosophy, film and literary studies, media and communication, art and visual culture, politics and government, sociology and linguistics, it has many different nuances and uses.

In most of these disciplines, though, representation is examined as a way of teasing out the embedded, underlying meanings of texts. How women are represented in a film, for instance, can be seen to convey both the attitude of the film maker to women, and the general way women are viewed, understood, or 'known' in a particular context – the context in which the film was made and distributed. How someone represents their personal history or their feelings gives insights into their psychological wellbeing, or how they make sense of the world – how their brains function, and how they understand themselves and their environments. In political and legal contexts the word describes the process by which an agent stands in for – represents – a constituency or a client. It is used by linguists to explain how a sound can stand in for an object or concept. It is used by social scientists to determine how closely the characteristics of a group of people match the characteristics of the population as a whole, and thus how widely the findings of a research project can be applied.

Representation is also fundamental to everyday life. People practice representation all the time because we live immersed in representation: it is how we understand our environments and each other. It is also how we both *are*, and how we understand ourselves; representation is implicated in the process of *me* becoming *me*. None of us is like Popeye (*I yam what I yam*); rather, each of us is produced through a complex mix of background, tastes, concerns, training, tendencies, experiences – all made real to us through the principles and processes of representation that frame and govern our experiences of being in the world. The frames thus generated do not give us a stable or permanent sense of being in the world, but one that is frequently confusing, and always subject to change: as this image suggests. What we see is not what is there, but what our social and cultural traditions and their contexts give us.

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Central to all its uses, and domains of use, are three questions: who is performing the representation; what does it mean; and what effects does it have? This is also the approach taken in this book: in the chapters that follow I will trace how the term is used in meaning-making, language, politics and society, art and the media, to suggest useful approaches not only to research, but also to understanding how we personally experience the nature of the world and of being.

REPRESENTATION AND REALITY

A central issue in representation is that of substitution: it is widely understood as the process of standing in for someone or something, or acting as a

substitute for the 'real thing'. A female character in a movie is seen to *stand in for* women everywhere; the words someone uses to tell their story *stand in for* the neurological processes that structure communication; the thirty people who participate in a social research study *stand in for* the population more generally. This is a perfectly reasonable approach: after all, we know that there are concrete things in the world, and there are ways of describing or portraying those things. There is a difference between ideas about a thing, and the thing itself – as expressed in a famous line of poetry by Wallace Stevens. There are differences between actuality and imagination, or report and story. Aren't there? Let's test it out by a simple experiment:

> You are looking at this page. It is covered with black squiggles that you rec-ognize as alphabetical notations that, brought into combinations, form words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. As you look, you decode these squiggles and turn them into sounds in your head or maybe read out loud. What you 'hear' in your head, or actually hear if you read them out loud, are sounds that represent the squiggles. Those squiggles themselves both represent ideas in my head, and commonly accepted ways of communicat-ing in written form. There is nothing in these sets of squiggles that has any direct material connection to any material thing. I say 'head' but no head appears – only the idea of it. I say 'page', but it is only four individual squig-gles: P-A-G-E. Together these form what any English speaker trained to read alphabetical script will recognize as a word for something that might or might not be present. It is an abstraction; it is not the page itself.
>
> Now let's make it more concrete. First, read this paragraph so you have the instructions clear in your head, and then put down the book and go outside. As you go, look at and touch the things you pass: run your fingers along the wall, be aware of the sensation of flooring under your feet, grasp the door han-dle and be conscious of its shape and texture. Now you are outside. Smell the scents on the air, and identify them (exhaust fumes, the perfume of plants, garbage not yet collected by the authorities). Feel on your skin the movement of a breeze, perhaps, or the touch of rain, or the heat of the sun. Look around you: you might see sky, trees, road, buildings – real things in your immediate ambit. And you should be able to hear sounds too: a dog barking, traffic in a nearby street, perhaps the ringing of a telephone. These are real things: they are objects and sensations that have a material presence. They are real things that touch your skin, or are processed by your auditory, olfactory and optical nerves. You are physically outside your house, and also outside the abstract world of books and writing; you are immersed in a sea of sensory presence.
>
> Now go back inside, and pick up this book again.

Compare your experiences with the descriptions of those experiences, above. How real are the descriptions, compared with your experience of the

'real' world? Probably, the words were considerably less 'real', present and physical than your few minutes outside the house. Squiggles on a page cannot compare with the actuality, the physicality, of things that touch your body and are registered by your senses rather than by the technologies of speech and reading you have learned.

BEYOND REPRESENTATION?

Does this mean that your experience is outside the domain of representation – that it cannot be sufficiently described, but can only be felt in a way that is beyond language? This is a contentious point for many scholars in the field. Christopher Prendergast, for instance, insists that 'Everything is representable' (Prendergast 2000: 1), and many theorists, especially in the later part of the twentieth century, agree that humans have no real access to the world itself; our understanding and experience of the world can only be second hand, mediated through systems of representation. But others disagree, and point out that there are things that are beyond representation: or, at least, beyond satisfactory articulation. No one can actually understand or represent their own death, for instance, because the moment of the experience renders you incapable of understanding, communicating or representing what is going on, or how you feel (in fact, of course, you no longer feel!).

There are other examples sometimes called 'unrepresentable' – commentators speaking of the Holocaust, for instance, have insisted that its horror is so vast that it cannot be reduced and contained by representation. This is the position taken by the critic Theodor Adorno who insisted that 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno 1981: 34). This does not mean that it is in fact incapable of being represented, but that Adorno considers it inappropriate to attempt to capture its appalling scope in the limited space of representation. Others find the idea of God beyond representation, so much so that the divine name cannot be spoken or written. This seems to rest on a combination of the incapacity of human language to capture the divine, and the lack of respect that would be implied by simply chatting about God. There are other objects considered unrepresentable because to represent them would be to go against God's instructions – the iconoclastic aspects of Judaism or Islam, for instance, which forbid portraits and other 'lifelike' representations.

But of course these examples do not forcefully undermine the notion that representation governs our experience of the world. Although we cannot effectively represent death, as I pointed out above, we know it exists, through the limited (and often flawed) representations of the world that we make and perceive. As Prendergast writes, what these examples point out is either that the terms of representation are inadequate, or that representation is forbidden:

'It is not that representation as such is impossible; it is rather that it fails in its task' (2000: 2). In the art world, for instance, there are many things that are 'beyond representation' that are nonetheless captured in non-representational art. In some such cases, it may not be that the event or object is really incapable of being represented, but that the artist has refused the logic of representation, and is attempting instead to convey a 'something else' – a mood, a feeling. Samuel Beckett's novels and short stories are well-known examples of this. He typically eschews plot and structure for what is called 'affect' – a feeling, an attitude or emotions. His characters are in no identifiable place, wrestling with unknown problems or being assaulted for no obvious reason by unknown agents. They worry, and wonder, and fret, but do not achieve resolution. In his theatre piece *Play* (1964) the characters speak neither to each other nor to the audience; they simply direct their voices out into nothingness. Nor does the plot actually go anywhere: the characters simply run through the arcane script a couple of times, making no connection with each other – often speaking over each other so that the audience can't tell what is being said – and then their voices peter out, the lights go down, and the play is over.

This is not an example of something truly unrepresentable; it is an example of an artist making the choice to be non-representational because that choice allows him to suggest people's incapacity to connect with one another, and their inability to make sense of or stick to the 'script' of life. Of course it does so (ironically) in the material of representation: using words, gestures, utterances, clothing, and set and lighting design. In its very non-representationality, it shows that it is not possible to speak of representation without representing – we are caught in a logical and practical loop.

THE LIMITS OF EXPERIENCE

One strand of this loop is the fact that there is little actual difference between the experience of physical stimuli, and the mental abstraction of reading and thought. This might seem unlikely; but as I will discuss in the following chapters, the gap between the 'real world' and 'mere representation' is not always as evident as commonsense would suggest. New research into how the brain works is shifting our understanding of how individuals make sense of the world, and convey sense to others. Neuroscientists, social scientists and philosophers argue that rather than representation being a straightforward matter of signs standing in for, and communicating, real things, it is an **episte-mological** process. In other words, representation is considerably more than a simple matter of standing in for; it is also productive of what we know, and how we know it: that is to say, it is constitutive – it makes us. As well, those

scholars argue, representation is **ontological**: that is, it is about the nature of being; it is tied up with what something actually is, of what it is constituted, its status as a thing, property, object or experience. They also define representation as **cognitive**, an aspect of brain function, because much of the work of representation happens below the level of consciousness. When you stepped outside a few minutes ago to experience the 'real world' beyond the pages of a book, what you experienced might have felt real, but in fact was just bits of data that your brain processed and returned to you as sensations. Finally, they argue, representation is **axiological**. This which means that it involves questions of ethics, or the 'right' way of seeing, knowing and doing. Representation is, in short, how we experience and communicate ourselves and the world we inhabit, how we know ourselves and how we deal with others.

This is not to suggest that real, concrete objects do not exist in their own right, independent of representation. After all, the body and the world have physical properties that are not mediated by language or culture. If I stub my toe, the world has made itself present to me; and I both experience and interpret that moment, as that old limerick reminds us:

There was a faith healer from Deal
Who said, although pain isn't real
When I sit on a pin
And it punctures my skin
I dislike what I fancy I feel.

The faith healer can only retain belief in the absence of actuality by reframing experience. This is not a useful way to understand the relationship between representation and reality because it distorts commonly shared understandings, or codes, about the world and its meanings, and thus makes it difficult to communicate, or to be taken seriously by others.

Sometimes this is a good thing: common understandings and codes are not necessarily useful or 'true' in the sense of having a close connection with the observed world. Think of how throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was possible for Europeans to understand – to encode – African people as 'not really human'. It was a 'wrong' representation, but still a profoundly effective one (at least, from the European perspective – African people would have had very different understandings of their own identity) because it allowed slave traders, ships' captains, governments, slave owners and the whole social realm to treat black people as commodities, not as human beings. Those who rejected this representation fell out of communication: Africans were traded like goods, and Europeans who challenged that representation (and the practice of slavery) were ignored, repulsed or prosecuted. Eventually however the terms of representation and

hence the treatment of people shifted: slavery was outlawed, and though racism remains firmly entrenched, the official representation of Africans is as human beings. Contemporary acts of slavery are abhorred and where feasible are prosecuted, and the view of the world is radically different from its earlier iteration: the 'truth' of slavery, and of the relative identity of European and African peoples, has changed.

It is important always to bear in mind that the 'truth' of any representation is always only true insofar as it is perceived and coded as such by people. What seems to be true, or right, or accurate is, generally speaking, only true, right or accurate when it fits with a particular social, historical and personal perspective. To see 'things as they are' in fact means only to see 'things as *I/my culture* frame them', or 'things as *I/my culture* want them to be'. Any representation is limited, flawed and interested; and any representation changes 'things as they are' if it makes those things present in a different way.

THE LIMITS OF THE LEXICON

Some of the complexities of the concept of representation – what it can mean, where it can mean, the limits on its meaning – come about because representation is a slippery term, particularly in English. The German language allows more carefully delineated senses of the word: *Darstellung* (making present), *Vertretung* (speaking for and standing in for), *Wortvorstellung* (representations of words), and *Sach-* or *Dingvorstellung* (representations of things) allow fairly precise uses of the term. But in English we have just one word for all these forms and modes – and, indeed, even to talk about representation itself. This entire book, for instance, is a representation of representation. This raises a further problem because unless we have a very clear understanding of what the word means, or what I mean by it in the previous clause, it is very difficult to get any practical sense out of it. The limits of the English language mean that we are using just one word to do multiple duties, and to mean a variety of things. But because it is the same word in each instance of use, we tend to behave as though there is a commonality among all its meanings. Jacques Derrida takes up this point:

> If the noun 'representation', the adjectives 'representing,' 'representable,' 'representative', the verbs 'represent' or 'represent oneself' are not only the grammatical modulations of a single and identical meaning, if kernels of different meanings are present, at work in or produced by these grammatical modes of the idiom, then the lexicologist, the semanticist, indeed the philosopher who would try to classify different varieties of 'representation' or of 'representing' … is going to have a rough time of it. (Derrida 1982: 299)

As he goes on to argue, the words do not have a 'single and identical meaning', which is the main reason, perhaps, for the complexity of the concept, and the many squabbles among scholars about just what the term means, and what effects it has. We 'have a rough time of it' because it is not possible to settle on just what it means. Having said that, I will attempt to settle on some meanings, and to provide some definitions – always remembering that their 'truth' is limited and contingent.

DEFINITIONS OF REPRESENTATION

Christopher Prendergast suggests some definitions for the term 'representation'. The first, he writes, 'is the sense of represent as re-present, to make present again, in two interrelated ways, spatial and temporal' (Prendergast 2000: 4). It cites, or 'quotes', a presence, referring to something that is not there, but is assumed to be authentic and potentially present (the authentic voice, and so on). This is representation as *Darstellung*, the notion of making or *rendering* presence. In this mode, a particular representation can have the capacity to make visible, in the here and now, something that was (or might have been) present in a different here and now – it accommodates both space (it *is* present) and time (it *is in* the present).

The second sense Prendergast offers is that of *delegating* presence, or *Vertretung*: the substitution of a something for something or someone else. This is most commonly seen in language and politics. In language, a word makes a concrete thing, or an idea, present in conversation or writing. I say 'elephant', and though there is no elephant in the room, the concept of elephant is rendered, or brought into consciousness – allowed to stand in for the animal. In politics, a person is nominated to stand in for, speak for and *represent*, me. I delegate my political voice to a substitute in government, in a trade union, or in a court of law. In both language and politics, this sense of representation allows a term, image or agent to substitute for an absent object, idea or person.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

So far, so good, and this should be very familiar to anyone with the most basic commonsense understanding of representation. But of course there is a lot more going on in the process. There is, for instance, the issue of origins: the verb 'to make' (*making* meaning, *making* a constituent present in the person of their representative) is important here because representation does not necessarily just happen. Unlike physical events – the sun that rises and sets without anyone's intervention – representation is *made* to happen; and it is made to happen

by people. This is representation that performs an action, representation as a verb. It makes present what is absent, and so adds something to the context. And it does this through the actions of people: 'We see representation as a *process* in which the makers of signs, whether adult or child, seek to make a representation of some object or entity', write Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996: 6), and this seeking and making is often direct and conscious. A work of art, or a policy document; an address to the nation, or a seminar presentation; the blueprints for a new bridge, or a tax return – each is a representation which almost certainly is crafted very deliberately and consciously, with the audience very much in mind, to produce an intended result.

This is not the only way to understand it, however. A great many of the representations each of us generate in our everyday lives are not at the level of consciousness, but are simply our habitual ways of speaking, writing or otherwise acting. Think, for instance, of someone at a board meeting who is lounging in her chair, legs sprawled out in front of her, head thrown back, arms loosely crossed across her chest. Now compare her with another person at that imagined board meeting whose back is entirely vertical, whose head is precisely attuned to his spine, whose chair is tucked up under the board table so that it is impossible to see his legs, and so on. Each person is giving a very different impression of their sense of self in relation to that meeting. The first is confident, and probably bored. The second is very formal, more guarded, and is taking the whole process much more seriously. Each is making a representation of self and of the meeting, and conveying this representation to others; it is quite likely that neither has planned, intended or thought through what they are representing, or why. Still, they are making their thoughts manifest and present – representing them – to others around the table.

ESTABLISHING EQUIVALENCE

Much of the work of representation depends on first having established relationships of equivalence. Before we can start naming or substituting for, we must make it possible for 'a' to mean, or substitute for, 'b'. This involves establishing relationships of equivalence between a word or other sign, and the concept and thing that is observed – the **referent**. What is the process by which 'elephant' becomes connected with a large mammal? I won't attempt to answer that – it is a question better directed to lexicographers or linguists – but we need to understand that there is no natural equivalence between signs and referents, only equivalences that come out of particular cultural practices and cultural codes. This is an aspect of the process of delegation.

Once that equivalence is established – so that, say, people equate the word 'elephant' with the mammal – then the work of making it present can be

accomplished: 'elephant' (the sign) now renders Elephant (the creature). The word makes the creature present, because the word has come to stand in for the creature through the process of crafting chains of equivalence.

But it doesn't stop there: representation is a complex and slippery process because it is cultural and not natural, therefore not necessary or fixed. The sign itself is always empty of real content. Let's look again at 'elephant'; I can only say that word meaningfully because as a culture we have earlier established those chains of equivalence between the huge mammal and the word. 'Elephant' (the sign) doesn't inevitably mean Elephant (the creature); it is only a series of letters pushed together to make a sound we identify as the thing itself. Because it doesn't necessarily mean the animal, it also doesn't only mean the animal: the word might be used as a substitute for, or to make present, a toy, a rhyming sound, a character in a book, something else that is very large … it is empty except when it is put to work in a specific context, and for people who can decode it.

REPRESENTATION AND CONSTITUTION

In short, the processes of representation do not simply make connections, relationships and identities *visible*: they actually *make* those connections, relationships and identities. Representation is not just about substitution and reiteration, but is about *constitution*: it constitutes – makes real – both the world and our ways of being in the world and in communities.

Let's go back to the basic commonsense way in which representation is put to work: someone does or says something; that something is read by others as being an act of representation that is conveying something; and a further something is likely to occur as a result. This is a very conventional description of representation, especially in discussions about the media: Kate Bowles points out that representation is often considered 'simply the question of how the media portray events, people and ideas, and how that portrayal then influences the real world of events, people and ideas' (2002: 72). What is missing in this depiction is the *systemic* nature of representation: it should be understood not just as a noun – representation as a portrayal, or an object; but also as a verb – representation as the action involved, and the processes that must be gone through, in the work of making words or gestures. Stuart Hall explains that 'the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language' is a system of representation because it refers to clusters of ways of conceptualizing, organizing and arranging signs and concepts, and their relationships (1997a: 17). So representation is not just about rendering and delegating, but is also about organizing and arranging knowledge and ideas.

This is as much a cognitive as a linguistic or political idea. The processes we use to organize and arrange knowledge are cognitive processes because they

require that we perceive ideas, or sense data, and connect them to objects 'out there' – concrete objects. And we all do this, all the time: we constantly if subconsciously produce meanings out of the material world. Pure silence, or pure unmediated experience, is not a function of living human beings. Pure silence is available only to the dead, who no longer have the capacity to see, hear or feel anything, or to make sense of their environment. Unmediated experience is available perhaps only to non-sentient objects – rocks or motorcars – because anything with a brain is always subject to the chattering of neurons, the brain's constant effort to process and analyse what we are seeing, hearing or feeling.

We have to organize our knowledge and ideas because we do not have direct access to the things 'out there', the things we are seeing, hearing or feeling, and so cannot directly experience and process them. Writings on cognition suggest that there are always at least two degrees of separation between me and the object I am contemplating: first, I am separated from it because the process of perception translates it from an object to an image in my mind. Next, I am separated again because I translate that image into other signs so that I can represent it, if only to myself. Think again of my mythical elephant: many years ago in Africa I stood in the veld and watched a herd of elephant about two hundred metres from me; I experienced a spatial, but not a temporal, separation from them. But more separations were, necessarily, involved. 'Seeing' meant cutting them out from everything else in my range of vision, using the cones and rods in my eyes to capture the shape and colour of the animals, using my binocular vision to triangulate the scene and thus produce a sense of their size relative to their surroundings, and process all this data to come up with the picture of 'elephant'. Then I had to sift through all the concepts in my memory to find the word 'elephant' and with it all the associations of 'huge', 'dangerous', 'funny', 'like Babar', and so on. This is a long and terribly complicated process handled in the flickering of moments by any normal brain, but it does mean that the elephants themselves, out there in the veld, were doubly separated from me, first by being rendered as image, and then by being displaced by the word 'elephant', their delegate in my thoughts.

My point is that we can be conscious of things around us only insofar as we have ideas about them, the language to name them, and thereby to perceive them closely. We are not thinking them into being – they certainly have their own existence – but we do think ourselves into relationship with them. This notion of representation supports the idea of a mediated world, where our connection with everything outside ourselves is always mediated by perception and representation. Something always stands in for an external thing by means of **resemblance** or symbolism, so our knowledge of that external thing 'is thus indirect, in that it is mediated by the ideas, which are as it were clues to, or evidence for, the external things that act on our senses' (Dickerson 2004: 10).

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

This introduction has focused on some of the definitions of representation, and some of the complexities of the concept. It cannot cover them all because the concept is too vast and too messy to be neatly encapsulated in a list, or a book, or a shelf of books. Derrida posits the endless messiness and murkiness of representation in his vision of Socrates stumbling into a symposium, and saying:

> You tell me this is aesthetic, political, metaphysical, historic, religious and episte-mological representation, as if each were one among others, but in the end, aside from the fact that you are perhaps forgetting some types, that you are probably enumerating too many or too few, you have not answered the question: what is representation in itself and in general? What makes all these representations representations called by the same name? What is the eidos of representation, the being-representation of representation? (1982: 302)

This introduction has attempted to stumble towards at least some of the questions, if not the answers, of 'what is representation in itself and in general'. In the following chapters I trace how representation works in some of Socrates' modes. In Chapter 1 I turn to the historical and epistemological by discussing the relationship between resemblance, reality and representation and how, in the western tradition, these dominant modes of communication developed and are applied.

In Chapter 2 the issue of language is explored, and the uses of semiotic and discursive analyses of language, communication and meaning-making. There are several, often contesting, schools of thought on how representation works. I will outline the main issues of the reflective, intentional and constructivist 'schools', and describe some of the tools used by theorists to make sense of representative moments or texts. This brings in some of the history of representation: what is often called the 'linguistic turn', when scholars began to focus on using **semiotics** (the science of signs) to analyse texts; and the 'cultural turn', which tends to focus on the techniques of discourse analysis to make sense of social practices and structures. Each offers a very different notion of how meanings are made, and what it means to mean, and I will explore these differences in approach to set out the ways in which communication acts are performed by 'writers' and 'readers', and ways of decoding the world of texts.

Representation is not a purely human characteristic; it is found also in other sentient creatures; but my focus in this book is on people, so in Chapter 3 I look at the human beings who are involved in making and decoding these representations. What does it mean to be a 'speaking subject', a person with ideas, perspectives, and cultural and contextual specificities, who makes use of the tools of communication and understanding that can seem so prescriptive? How do our brains, memories and cultural frameworks shape how we both make and analyse meanings? How do we, individually and as communities or

nations, 'automatically' know the categories by which individuals and groups are classified and valued: issues such as class, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, age and other markers of difference? What does it mean for all of us, as the subjects of representation – representing subjects – to live in the contemporary arrangements of nations and communities, and contemporary communication networks?

This raises the issue of what are called the agents of communication. **Agency** is a catch-all term that incorporates human communication, knowledge and activity, and it is deployed as a name for any individual or collective that acts in society. Some agents are collectives: social institutions like government departments, education, the religious community and so on, which produce and manage meaning. Other agents are individual people making meaning in their everyday lives and in specific sites (professional and personal). Such individuals, consciously or not, draw on their own culture and its traditions, the shape of the language they speak, the properties of their brains, their sensory capacities and experiences, and the particularities of their own bodies (gender, age, ethnicity and so on) to represent themselves as well as any meanings they wish to make.

Chapter 4 extends this material by looking at how, as human beings, we organize ourselves politically. Politics is the site in which what something might mean is broadly determined. Most theorists agree that meanings are crafted, and are cultural artefacts rather than fragments of the real. But most human beings (including theorists) acknowledge that while 'sticks and stones may break my bones, words will *really* hurt me'. This chapter investigates the social and political dimensions of representation, because it is not (as will be clear from the foregoing paragraphs) just a matter of squiggles or lines. Rather, representation is at the heart of all systems of government, whether democratic, theocratic or aristocratic, because in every instance government is invested in an idea of some one or some group of individuals or institutions standing in for – representing – something: me, my community, god, the divine right of kings, and so on.

The next chapter discusses some of the effects of linguistic, social and political organization in what is called 'cultural representation'. This deals both with what most people understand as 'artistic' or 'cultural' activities – the work of artists and novelists and film makers, the function of museums and galleries – and with less obviously artistic, but still highly cultural, media of representation, such as newspapers and television. The central issue is the significance of context and framing in making cultural representations, and communicating them effectively to others. This incorporates the poetics of representation: how it actually works in terms of the way something is said or shown, and how specific forms of representation such as story, **analogy, metaphor,** syntax and spatiality contribute to how meanings are made in particular contexts, and for

particular purposes. I also address the relationship between visual and verbal modes, and between written and oral modes of representation to discuss the craft of meaning-making and how it can be used consciously. This incorporates an understanding of the relationship between showing and telling; and how specific kinds of sign (a word, sound or image that means something) and figure (metaphor, analogy, trope) likewise shape what meanings can be derived from something that is heard or seen.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the politics of representation in the sense of the ethical dimensions of how we delegate, render and organize objects, ideas and meanings. If things are changed when framed or represented differently, then there is an ethical obligation on every person to think through what representations they make, considering how others and how external things might be affected by what they say and do, by how they perform their lives and relationships.

Decades ago the US/UK poet TS Eliot wrote, in 'East Coker', lines that seem directed at the problem of representation:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years
… Trying to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. (1969: 182)

Understanding representation requires us to make *raids on the inarticulate*, in an attempt to render it articulate. This is always terribly difficult, because we can only perceive and articulate in a sort of a blur, and with limited perceptive. We perceive always in context; often in confusion; and sometimes in what Eliot elsewhere in 'East Coker' called 'the intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings'. Meaning is never clean and clear, and the making of meaning is never done; we mean or understanding meaning only for a moment, before the context, the perception, and the meanings shift. This is the context of meaning making, and of the perception without which meaning cannot take place. However, by learning how to use our 'shabby equipment' and how to use words variously in various contexts, it is possible to sharpen up the blur, to make 'new beginnings' in communicating with one another, and to tidy up, with thought and evidence, 'the general mess of imprecision of feeling'.