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3

Deliberative rituals

Emotional energy and enthusiasm in debating landscape renewal

Bas van Stokkom

This chapter argues that the argumentation process within interactive policymaking processes can be enriched by drawing upon affective and narrative types of communication. To illustrate this 'broadened deliberation', I focus on the emotional dynamics typical of some Dutch experiments in the fields of urban and landscape renewal. It is suggested that it is not rational argumentation which changes the views of the participants, but being confronted with particular stories, metaphors or design-presentations. These projects can be viewed as transition rituals, in which collective emotional energy may bring about a new identity formation. Creative experts may have some grip upon the conditions under which group enthusiasm can arise. The possibilities and risks of these projects are discussed, especially the pitfalls of group identification.

Introduction

Many theorists of deliberative democracy stress that a dialogue should be free of strategic views, rhetoric and emotions. Rhetorical statements and passionate debating are generally viewed as obstructive, hampering the formation of rational agreements. These theorists idealize communication settings free of power and domination, and divert the attention away from

'real settings', which often have rowdy and turbulent forms of political com-
munication (van Stokkom, 2005). The emotional dynamics in these 'messy'
interactive projects form – no matter how – a part of public communication.
In some cases, initial feelings of anger, indignation or fear can be overcome
and the process may take a turn that stimulates positive cooperation. In other
cases, the initial approval gives way for different emotions, for example, aver-
sion and disappointment. It seems fruitful to understand these 'non rational'
group dynamics in order to improve the organizational setting and develop
realistic expectations (Thompson and Hoggett, 2001).

In this chapter I will focus on emotional dynamics in a group of Dutch
interactive experiments in the fields of urban and landscape renewal. In these
interactive projects the role of designers is of great importance: they can
take the lead in transforming conflicting local commitments into a 'project
identity'. These projects often function as 'transition rituals' in which 'being
part of the process' and 'experiencing collective enthusiasm' seem decisive
for consensus formation. I will argue that participation in these symbolically
charged events may release an 'emotional energy' that reinforces designs or
plans that are deemed attractive or important. It is not rational argumentation
which changes the views of the participants, but being confronted with sto-
ries, metaphors or design-presentations.

Design professionals and other creative experts can bring in options to high-
light the intuitions and preferences of the participants (Forester, 1999). They
can shift the attention from antagonistic and polarizing arguments to relevant
historical, ecological or architectural issues with which the participating parties
are unacquainted. This may include narrative knowledge of the local environ-
ment and landscape designs that evoke an unexpected, attractive coherence
(Hajer, 2003). Creative experts and other heterodox experts like historians and
writers may provide unconventional views that function as eye openers.

In this chapter I will examine these processes of artistic and narrative
learning. The participants may identify with the special and unique character-
istics of a plan or proposal, like a renovated neighbourhood or a redeveloped
wetland. The attraction of particular and scenic places is an important factor:
identification with these places is defined by physical and spatial character-
istics and historical antecedents. During such projects the creative input of
architect teams, like visual material and reports of the field, are attuned to the
knowledge and experiences of the participants. Presenting photographs and
historic information about the location may start up a process of identification
(Hajer, 2003, 2005). Possibly the individuals, opponents and unknown persons
who meet each other during these projects may see the plans and designs
as a valuable collective undertaking. In this way deliberation may culminate in
temporary forms of consensus seeking: the willingness to shape and support

the project together. This means that the dynamic of identification moves to
the centre of the process of deliberation. The participants may grow towards
one another, approve the plans discussed, and become enthusiastic.

Of course this process does have its dark sides. It may bring along risks
and drawbacks: the group-identification process may be too greedy and raise
oppressive feelings, critical notes and discrepant views are not really heard,
opponents may find themselves in the margins of the event or give up.

In this chapter the possibilities and risks of these dynamics are dealt with.
By doing so, I will explore the boundaries of deliberative democracy. Is it
meaningful to bring about consensus by means of 'non-rational' strategies?
Is it acceptable in terms of deliberative democracy? Does 'deliberation' occur
at all during such group processes? I will first portray some planning projects
in the context of urban and landscape renewal in which architects and other
creative experts take the lead. How do they mobilize the public? Which meth-
ods are used to detach participants from their initial views and augment their
receptiveness to new designs? In the next section I will theorize the emo-
tional dimensions of narratives and the process of identity formation. In what
respects is this process manageable? What is the role of the group rituals and
the released emotional energy? I will sketch the contours of a theory of col-
lective transition rituals, which might indicate which conditions are relevant
for group enthusiasm. Finally I want to raise some critical comments, related
to group identification and 'ritualistic consensus formation'. My overall con-
clusion will be that identity formation and narrative competence deserve far
more attention within deliberative democracy. There is no reason to reduce
learning to a rational exchange of arguments.

Developing 'project identities'

One of the Dutch interactive projects in which I am interested took place on
the island Hoeksche Waard. In the 1990s there were many controversies
concerning the future of the region. Urbanization from Rotterdam and the
growth of industrial activities put considerable pressure on the island (Dijkink
en Hajer, 2001; Hajer, 2005). During the cultural manifestation Air Southward
in Rotterdam (1999), future plans for Hoeksche Waard were presented.
However, this event was not supported by the island inhabitants because the
plans were experienced as queer and alien. Many inhabitants denigrated the
Rotterdam initiative as plans prepared 'for' the citizens, not 'by' the citizens.
In their view the region was presented as weak-willed malleable material.

Subsequently, some moral entrepreneurs started a Hoeksche Waard
Initiative in which they unfolded their own plan and story, detached from

the 'arrogant' cultural scene in Rotterdam. During these Air Plus activities, the inhabitants were consulted and the involved landscape architects were eager to show the variety of ways in which the inhabitants make use of their natural environment. The architects approached the public in subtle ways. They did not suggest that something 'great' was going to happen; neither did they present plans that might overwhelm the public. Rather they presented a multitude of pictures, detailed fieldwork, photographs, designs and maps, all multi-interpretable and intended to evoke curiosity.

At the same time the landscape architects wanted to break through existing visions: upsetting and unbinding existing representations by offer-ing many opposing pictures that for instance refer to landscape functions in earlier times. They created a 'proximity' that evoked emotional reactions and tried to make the language of the local physical and cultural *Lebenswelt* productive. In this way the participants in the meetings – the potential local users of the area – were forced to reorient themselves; some designs that were organized around specific metaphors did attract the public, although for different reasons.

The Air Plus creative process culminated in a storyline that explicitly took into consideration the diversity of wishes of the region. But this storyline was also able to develop the shared meanings of the region, formulated against the usurping ambitions of the nearby metropolis Rotterdam. The Dutch political scientist Maarten Hajer points out that in Hoeksche Waard a new discourse coalition was created, in which different groups endorsed the same story for different reasons. First an 'identity of resistance' was shaped, a social and cultural opposition to the interference of Rotterdam, which subsequently gave way to a 'project identity', that anticipated the formulation of a future plan start-ing from clear and self-conscious feelings (see also Castells, 1997, p. 9).

In another Dutch interactive policy project, the Position of Amsterdam, landscape architects were involved in the formulation of a conservation plan (Gomart et al. 2003). The Position of Amsterdam is a fallen fortification system that lost its original function but still is observable in the landscape, although most parts are hidden. The architects intended to preserve and strengthen the Position as a recognizable cultural and green zone of connections in the Amsterdam region. By means of consulting citizens, the province of Noord-Holland tried to gain commitment and support of the public.

In the first stage of this project the architects and designers wanted to break through existing views, trying to dislocate and detach: to dislodge the Position from familiar representations by means of presenting conflict-ing images (referring to other historical periods or, on the contrary, por-traying details released from historical functions). The alternative designs presented were intended to make a lively contact with the environment by installing 'closeness' and evoking recognizable perceptions. These designs also intended to dissociate the public, and drag them out of passivity. Some suggestions by the participants were included in the plans.

During the Day of Participation in 2001 the organizing team tried to select ideas that could make 'the difference' and could withstand critique and resis-tance. Doing so the team was working up to a coherent and accessible design. The presentation of a well-known novelist proved to have a converging effect. He described the fallen fortification system in a nostalgic way, introducing a unity of suggestions and allusions. He coined the term 'Stiltestelling', which might be translated as 'stillness position' or 'stillness trenches'. A quote may illustrate the generaltone (cited in Gomart et al. 2003, p. 142):

> Hier hoort land bij stad.
> Hier hoort vooruitgang bij stilstand.
> Zo kalm, zo mooi, zo stil, in het zicht van een helse metropool: een wonder is het.
>
> Here land belongs to city
> Here progress belongs to stagnation
> So calm, so beautiful, so still, in sight of a hellish metropolis: it is a wonder

After his intervention this concept became the leading metaphor of the project and the Position of Amsterdam received a nostalgic emotional turn. How can the successful reception of this metaphor be explained? What is the 'magic' of storytelling? Which emotions are in play here? In the sections below I will first theorize the emotional dimensions of narratives and subsequently I will deal closely with the process of identity formation, the group rituals and the growth of collective enthusiasm.

The organization of identification

Designing tropes

These Dutch interactive projects show that it is not the exchange of arguments, facts or options that does the work of changing the opinions of the public, but the attractiveness of storylines. Specific stories can reduce complex ques-tions to some simple formulas or metaphors. The power of a story does not consist in logical consistency, but in being multi-interpretable. Participants get the opportunity to understand the question of landscape planning in their own ways, to give their own meanings to the ambiguous profile of the story (Hajer,

1995). Metaphors such as 'home' or 'yard' are burdened with emotions and are often experienced in a subconscious way. Metaphors, but also visual presentations, activate memories, fantasies and impressions; they renew experiences. Exactly because they act out a story, they sensitize and act upon our emotions. Successful designs seem to have a paradoxical combination of variety and simplicity: voicing different experiences of the public on the one hand and introducing guiding metaphors on the other.

Stories embody a narrative rationality that appeals to concrete experiences and the imagination; stories can be moving, suggestive and seductive. By stirring the emotions we are in a better position to recognize, identify and create self-consciousness. Stories bring about something because of their specification: it's 'us' who are involved. Events are often voiced in intimate concepts. Therein lies the potential for change: adding new experiences and referring to particular feelings of inhabitants, their expectations and fantasies that are embedded in local stories about their city or region (Abma, 2001, 1997; Fisher, 1984).

The openness and indefiniteness of narrative forms guarantee personal attachments and reconstructions of everyday realities. The reader or listener makes a plausible interpretation of a complex question that often is strongly polarized or raises divided opinions. But stories may represent reality in a more coherent and meaningful way. Providing coherence and order in a complex and often politicized environment can be called 'narrative organisation' (Wagenaar, 1997).

Metaphors and tropes allow us to attribute meaning to events or incidents (motives, causes, qualities, etc.); they change information into lived experience. The audience is able to situate the event, to compare meaningfully, to get hints for action. Of course, because metaphors are polysemic, one separate event can generate many different narrative interpretations. For instance, people can interpret a metaphor in a positive way and fantasize around it. In respect to interactive meetings related to environment planning, figures of speech that attribute 'oneness' and 'unique qualities' seem to be of special importance. Psychoanalyst Yiannis Gabriel (1998) emphasizes the emotional dimensions of stories. Some stories, in particular epic stories that refer to courage and perseverance, succeed in raising pride and admiration in listeners. Using the notions of Gabriel, one could place environmental or urban plans and designs in the genres of epic and romantic stories. Comical and tragic stories do not seem to be really suitable. The epic story has a typical progressive storyline in which fortune smiles upon the principal role player. The combining emotions are elevating and cheering. Epic aspects play a role when a city or landscape renewal project concurs with other rival projects. In that case often merit, performance and success are stressed, combined with

pride, or, on the contrary, jealousy when rival towns or regions do perform better. During citizen forums that aim to construct an attractive future town vision, the non-performance of rival municipalities is often stressed. Sigmund Freud (1921) would have called this the 'narcissism of minor differences'. In this way epic stories might contribute to a shared feeling, for instance by using 'we'-terms or grandiose names for building projects.

In romantic stories the central themes generally are love, care and devotion. These themes are connected with metaphors and tropes of attributing feelings (for instance: 'the plans are affecting'), merit ('this region deserves a nice future') and quality ('authentic architecture'). According to Gabriel the emotions these stories generate are caring, warmth, pride and especially nostalgic feelings, the affectionate orientation to and longing for characteristics of the past, or sharing in the quality of an untouched past (see van Stokkom, 1997).

The attribution of merit, achievement and quality to a local project could be interpreted as an attempt at 'self-elevation'. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984; see also Ashforth, 2001) especially well-educated people identify more with symbols that reveal distinction. Conforming to their 'habitus', they tend to judge designs and building projects rather upon their prestige. Distinction creates a sharp contrast between members and non-members, which strengthens the salience of one's own identity. Presenting attractive symbols is thus partly a status phenomenon: citizens tend to pride themselves on the uniqueness of their residential environment.

Introducing identity claims

Is it possible to structure the conditions under which collective enthusiasm for specific designs may arise? I think landscape architects, writers and artists have some grip upon these conditions and that the design process may be attuned to these conditions.

In respect with this question the classic stages that the psychologist Kurt Lewin developed are of special importance. He introduced the concepts of 'defreezing', 'moving' and 'refreezing' in a collective learning process (Ashforth, 1998, 2001; Lewin, 1976; Pratt and Barnett, 1997). These three stages can be reinterpreted as follows.

Defreezing/detaching identities

The process of 'unlearning' or 'detaching' suggests taking distance from familiar knowledge and initiating ruptures with the past. Unlearning responds to doubt, uncertainty and dissatisfaction, so that the participants are thrown off balance. Unlearning techniques force them to reorientate themselves and

check what really counts. Raising conflicting emotions seems to stimulate this process: emotional tension and excitement, on the one hand, and dissatisfaction, on the other, seem to be the key to becoming detached from familiar and routine views (Pratt and Barnett, 1997).

Moving/re-identification

As pointed out, the real creative process of design is tailored to the development of attractive new concepts, metaphors and stories. It deals with restructuring: displaying new connections in the middle of artistic stimuli. During this process there could arise a growing recognition of certain values. It concerns tentative and provisional claims on an identity, and anticipation of new applications of the local environment, testing the viability of options, without taking too much risk. Apparently small events can be reinterpreted as new storylines. A large variety of artistic stimuli allows us to test these figures of speech, to adapt them and reintegrate them into new coherent connections.

Refreezing/confirming new identities

Kurt Lewin's term 'refreezing' is somewhat unfortunate because identities always change and keep on being ambiguous. Nevertheless, claims of new identity formation need to be confirmed, disseminated and made known if they want to be attached. Identity claims have to be made urgent and salient in public.

Probably the first stage does not bring along many problems. Creative experts can easily employ methods and techniques that estrange and disengage participants. The second stage is more difficult: much depends on the group interaction rituals that I will discuss below. Making new identity claims permanent is without doubt the most difficult stage. Of course, organizers who have taken great pains in developing new identities do not really have grip upon what is happening beyond the interactive meetings.

Transition rituals: rousing emotional energy

Designing identity claims is one thing, to get them embedded in the group is another. Some storylines seem to be reinforced during group rituals. What is the role of the group process and the collective emotions in this?

Typical of rituals is that group processes as such – and especially the physical aspects – are of more importance than the content of what is being said. If we participate in rituals we are in a way forced to see others as partners; in a public setting we behave as if we already identify with the new plans or future projects. In rituals and ceremonies 'acting together' culminates in 'becoming'. As psychologist Blake Ashforth says: heart and head follow the hands (Ashforth, 2001).

In particular, transition rituals seem to be inviting and seductive because they evoke new identity claims. In these rituals there seems to be more scope to explore in collectively attractive ways. Excitement ('this is what we are going to do') seems to go hand in hand with anticipating the joy of collective future 'achievements'.

Sociologist Randall Collins (1990, 2004) points out that group rituals are contagious: the participants are assimilated into the speed of the collective play. He calls the long-term affective effect of group events 'emotional energy'. High emotional energy suggests enthusiasm and loyalty, being prepared to take the initiative. Low emotional energy indicates that participants do not feel attracted to group activities. They would prefer to avoid them. Individuals in the group generally show emotional passivity.

Because of their infectious quality, positive emotions may be felt more intense during meetings, for instance when a collective achievement or breakthrough is celebrated. Often enthusiasm is generated by a group leader or other vital and prominent participants. These persons function as an accumulator of emotional expression. According to Collins short-term positive emotions as enthusiasm, passion and in particular the expression of emotionally charged symbols, build up a supply of emotional energy. These emotions are often experienced as shared power, status and esteem. Intense group events and experiences and the related tropes and storylines may reinforce each other, and generate an emotional multiplier effect, a synergy that could bring forward a progressive movement of excitement. In that way the perception of so-called 'magical moments' has self-fulfilling characteristics: the ultimate plan that is endorsed by the participants is coloured by preceding group rituals. Sometimes these 'magical moments' will be called 'recognition', sometimes 'chemistry'. Collins also stresses that emotional energy tends to extinguish and dissolve when it is not renewed and revived through ritual, energizing events.

Enthusiasm is evidently contagious: seeing or hearing other people's enthusiasm makes us feel it too, often in an irresistible manner. What functions does enthusiasm have? The term 'enthusiasm' is derived from the Greek 'en theos', meaning 'having a God inside'. Enthusiast persons feel omnipotent, just like a god (Poggi, 2007). They are in a state of exultation, fervour and elation, a state that is close to other emotions in the area of joy. It is felt during or even before the pursuit of a goal. Collective plan-making is often exciting because the participants anticipate the joy of its achievement. Enthusiasm gives also a sense of power and self-efficacy: the achievement of the plans

is 'in our hands'. The participants believe with a high degree of certainty that they will achieve their goals. In this sense, enthusiasm includes the hope of success, although hope is less self-confident because hopeful people are mostly aware of external conditions and have a more accurate perception of reality (Miceli and Castelfranchi, 2010; Webb, 2007). Thus enthusiasm is an activating, energy-providing emotion which is felt during action. In that sense it has also dark and dangerous aspects: enthusiasm may be triggered in irrational ways, without reality checks, and it may lead to fanaticism.

In a group dynamic of enthusiasm there is typically an element of novelty. We feel enthusiastic when supporting something creative, when we are doing something deemed important or beautiful, in terms of adding value and establishing something. Enthusiasm is typically related to innovative images and aesthetic goals (Poggi, 2007). Thus I think it would be beside the point to suppose that people's enthusiastic responses are only governed by already learned and mastered habits (MacKuen et al. 2010; Marcus, 2002). Of course capitalizing on enthusiasm, as is the case in political advertisments, may cause people to rely more heavily on prior political beliefs (that are felt attractive), but still these people expect leaders to accomplish something. Enthusiasm fades away when there is no foreshadowing of something important.

Prolonged feelings of excitement?

How can positive commitments be preserved when the interactive meetings have terminated? How to go on when the excitement of collective experiences is ebbing away? This seems easier to realize in organizations in which members meet each other regularly than in *ad hoc* organizations. It is not clear whether the originally endorsed visions will survive during the implementation of the plans. Maybe former conflicts of interest will flare up again. Thus, the question is how to keep the attractive stories coupled to the plan alive. How is it possible to prevent only a subgroup siding with the new plan, while the interest of the majority of the stakeholders dwindles? How is it to keep the plan on course, in the midst of other concurring policy options?

If stories contain powerful 'we-images', then the core symbols of those images might become part of the project identity of a certain region or neighbourhood. The real art is to translate ritual process experiences into symbols that can be transmitted easily (Boyle, 1995; Downing, 1997). As set out before, stories contain a whole range of meanings and allow different interpretations. This abundance of meanings may be opened up by telling stories again and again, so they can be passed through multiple perspectives. Each renewed performance may introduce other story-layers and nuances (Abma, 1997).

Probably charismatic personalities can play a role here. In many interactive projects (informal) leaders come to the fore, functioning as opinion-makers and boosters. The participants generally like sympathetic and inspiring leaders who have a challenging style and with whom they can easily identify. Although the project might be dominated by such persons – the gurus, architects with name and fame – they might reinforce and regain the feelings of 'collective excitement' (Weierter, 2001). After finishing the interactive meetings, these entrepreneurs keep on playing a relevant role, especially to consolidate the often vulnerable project identity.

It should be noted, however, that many interactive projects easily find a 'gentle death' (van Stokkom, 2005). The majority of interactive projects in the Netherlands seem to end up in an uphill struggle, resulting in difficult compromises from which the original aspects of the proposals have been chipped away. Often the motives to develop new plans are barely recognizable. Sometimes administrators are obstructive or hold up the process, so the expectation of tangible results dwindles away. Many participants gradually believe that administrators fail to appreciate the value of their input. They have the impression that the end products of the project are not taken seriously. In other cases the lack of commitment and openness of local officials evokes sceptical attitudes. When it becomes clear that the chosen plan would only play a minor role, several participants point to the futility of the process. They start arguing for a more confrontational form of dialogue in which politicians are criticized for falling short of citizens' desires for reform.

Creative identity formation: some characteristics

Nevertheless, the creative group process during the planning meetings may be rewarding and promising. Enthusiasm thrives when the group is collectively experiencing an expectation of coming success. This process of 'artistic' identity formation does have its own logic and sequences. Let's describe three peculiar characteristics. First, identification is by no means a polished process and often is the outcome of struggle and conflict. To realize that you are forced to take distance from formerly valued views (the 'unlearning') or that idealized designs are not achievable, causes considerable dissatisfaction. Not all participants are willing to displace their interests.

Secondly, participants are encouraged to reconsider their aims and views, and explore attractive points of recognition. The creative experts are working towards a 'narrative organization': providing coherent designs or stories in the midst of conflicting opinions and interests. Stories that anticipate the needs of various publics have a greater chance of getting accepted. They seem to have

a paradoxical combination of variety and simplicity: on the one hand incorporating the diverse experiences of the public and on the other hand introducing guiding metaphors.

Thus, narrative knowledge seems to be more promising than rational argumentation. Suggestive and seductive language is indispensable to create shared intuitions and desires as 'being at home'. The participants think they share something precious; although all remain strangers, they have the feeling that they developed a shared identity.

Thirdly, profiling is partly a status phenomenon. This may explain why modern citizens are so concerned with the promotion and upgrading of their environment. A profiled story about the local future envisions a world that represents one's own views and beliefs, and makes one's geographical setting more meaningful and more authentic. Stories appeal to the desire of participants to substantiate their own striking images. Therefore creative experts tend to strengthen and amplify special local and historical meanings.

The dark side of group identification

In discussing interactive policy formation as group rituals, we have been moved far away from the principles of deliberative democracy. Habermas and other protagonists of deliberative democracy would probably reject these ritualistic ways of consensus formation. Enthusiasm and other collective affects are conceived as misleading and carry us away from argumentation.

Of course, pursuing consensus and unanimity has been criticized on good grounds. Consensus formation disregards the opinions of minorities or dissidents. In this context Cass Sunstein (2003) introduced the term 'enclave deliberation': deliberation among like-minded persons. The affective relationships in these groups do reduce the amount of divergent arguments and augment collective influence upon individual choices. In other words: the warmer the feelings, the fewer the protests. Psychologists call this phenomenon groupthink. Groupthink precludes putting alternative options on the agenda or discussing these options properly; decisions may be of lower quality (Steenbergen et al. 2004). Sunstein also points to a 'law of group polarisation': during the discussions the whole group is moving towards a more extreme position. An inflamed group dynamic may culminate in a radicalized collective viewpoint. Each organization, political party, social movement or NGO which mobilizes participants may pass through such a route of group polarization.

However, it is questionable whether this radicalization is typical for interactive meetings in the context of urban and landscape renewal. As stressed earlier, contradictory interests keep on playing a role behind the collective

approval of the plan. Moreover, identification is more changeable than the theory of groupthink suggests: cues of identification are not traditionally given, but are readjusted, developed or obtained individually. In a postmodern society personal identities are continuously changing and they are often reframed and reworked in cooperation with others (Brewer, 2004; Castells, 1997; Hajer, 2000).

Still, an ascending consensus may hinder a critical dialogue and may prevent particular perspectives from being put on the agenda. Iris Young (2000) stresses that pursuing consensus may put some participants at a disadvantage, because they would be forced to give up their specific views; their viewpoints are excluded from the discussion. But again one may reply, if participants embrace a collective design or story, each of them is stressing specific meanings that are connected to their own interests and views. When participants agree to go on with the group process and approve agreements, they may do so for very different reasons (see Dryzek, 2000; Pellizzoni, 2001).

However, unconditional identification with the group process conflicts with democratic principles (i.e. autonomous decision-making; equal respect). Group dynamics may rule out sound judgements; the participants may be carried away by the general enthusiasm. For these reasons we need some clear conditions to keep group processes within the contours of democratic communication. First, emotions should be stylized in terms of mutual respect. For instance, the group dynamics should not overwhelm in terms of following others slavishly, nor incite coercion. The organizers could regularly make a time-out to check everybody's experiences. Secondly, affective stories should refer to public interests. Communication that cannot relate the particular to the general does not have much political meaning. Thirdly, narrative communication should draw back in favour of argumentation when the political question 'what are we going to decide' comes in (Dryzek, 2000). In the phase of decision-making, critical argumentation should be of overriding importance. However, in the phase of plan formation the participants could focus freely on creative methods and techniques. This is important because meetings with (over)rationalized discussions often fail to generate innovative plans or culminate in flattened out plans with the lowest common denominator (van Stokkom, 2005).

Conclusion

I conclude that in the stage of plan formation we could broaden the argumentation process, and make use of various types of communication, including affective and narrative ones. There is no reason to reduce participation to

speaking, and learning to knowing (Forester, 1999). Nor is there any reason to see participants as carriers of abstract opinions and experiences, because that would obscure their particular interests and needs, and the specific narrative contexts from which they think, feel and act (see also Young, 2000). Learning cannot be restricted to rational argumentation. Learning processes are best addressed in terms of sensibility and attraction, through which the participants commit themselves to the aims of the project. In particular, texts and metaphors are bearers of important insights and may have a catalysing role. Narrative learning appeals to taste and articulates from sensitizing registers, through which the participants are affected and moved.

Passion and rhetoric raise commitment and give deliberation its liveliness and power. During the group process particular opinions and visions are dramatized and experienced in a collective way; these experiences often bring to the fore deeper meanings that may occupy individual memories. Thus, the group ritual may sharpen motives and choices, and reinforce specific attractive future visions. It may therefore also support decision-making processes.

I think that for those reasons narrative knowledge and competence deserve far more attention within deliberative democracy than they have hitherto received. Deliberation could be widened, absorbing more passionate and intuitive meanings, so that the learning process can be enriched. Delimiting deliberative democracy to a bleak 'rational exchange of arguments' seems to be a dead end. A cold debate is not in itself more valuable than an emotional group ritual.

Emotional democracy: some afterthoughts

In our postmodern times more and more aesthetic methods are being used to script and stage (unforeseen) shared identities. Appealing to attractive images is part of developments within popular culture, in which there is a cultivated prominence of feeling. Citizens are addressed via highly aestheticized imagery, which aims to generate emotional resonance in the public mind (Richards, 2004).

Identity formation seems to occur within an 'emotional democracy', the many everyday spaces of 'fear-free communication' (Giddens, 1994; van Stokkom, 1997). In a democratized world people can speak out freely; they do not have to hide behind status positions. Emotional life is emancipated: emotions that had been denied and repressed have gained access to individual consciousness and wider acceptance in informal social codes. This tendency is accompanied by a stronger and yet more flexible self-regulation in which emotions are expressed but kept under control (Wouters, 2007). But emotional democracy does also bring along with it a worrying development: dissatisfaction is easily expressed and citizens seem less willing to compromise; the scope of open and manifest conflicts and controversies seems to grow wider.

Both tendencies – controlled and impetuous expression – are part of contemporary mass politics. On the one hand there is a strong tendency to process emotional life and to address anxiety, anger and frustration. In the language of psychotherapy: there is an effort at containment and the working through difficulties, rather than expression through acting out (Richards, 2004). But at the same time we are witnessing a rising popular 'discourse' of raw opinion, mudslinging and the denouncing of political correctness.

This last tendency raises the problem of demagogy, which is often – mistakenly – equated with emotion in politics. As media-researcher Barry Richards says, it is important to emphasize the distinction between the exploitation and manipulation of feeling characteristic of the demagogue, and the articulation and management of feeling that is the role of politicians who reach for containment. So we have to distinguish between manipulative and containing forms of emotionalized rhetoric.

I think that Richards' analysis is on the right track. The majority of citizens does not like political tactics that sneer and pull down the 'enemy'. We resent grandiose idealizations of leaders and their idealized images: it incites disbelief or boredom. Many creative trends within popular culture – cabaret, music and docudramas – point to other directions: there is an increasingly demand for more authentic, ironic and playful political representations. The argument is not to rush into 'personality politics', as Richards says, but for the enrichment of political communication. Many political leaders and opinion-makers seem to respond to these needs and develop a style which is attuned to today's emotional democracy: presenting emotionally compelling narratives and appealing to citizens' best impulses and desires. They shape identities in positive ways and try to bridge the interests of diverse publics.

What role is left for 'rational' deliberative democracy in this emotionalized culture? At first sight, deliberative democracy, encompassing bodies in which citizens can deepen their thoughts, seems to have only a marginal place within the mass media. Still I think that bodies such as citizens' juries and deliberative polls will continue to be influential, especially as correction devices in which many distorted mass media opinions may be readjusted.

These forms of 'counter-populism' may be important, but citizens cannot be simply educated out of political passions. Moreover, and that's the concern of this contribution, we are in need of deliberative bodies in which persons do not have to leave their emotions behind (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002). In these interactive domains citizens can reveal their needs and engage in creative identity formation.

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