

READER

#12

I UNDERSTAND THERE IS GREAT PASSION AND DISCONTENT AMONGST THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE GATHERED HERE TODAY

AMY HOWDEN-CHAPMAN

This is a Raised by wolves performance, and Raised by Wolves is made up of my self and Bidy Livesey – Bidy would usually be here – but she can't make it tonight, as she's currently living in Rotterdam.

I wish Bidy was here, but since she can't be here I want to at least try and describe to you all exactly how great she is, you know, give you a good idea of how great she is, for example- well actually, if she was here that story would probably embarrass her a bit, but it is kind of worth telling. Let's not name any names, lets just say that Bidy is the kind of person that might get up in the morning and stand naked in front of her boyfriend, and lull him into the day by plying the 'muff guitar' ...strum strum... Just standing there, or dancing around a little, naked, strumming your own muff singing a song to start the day. She is the funniest person I know, but she's also super smart – at the moment she's living in Rotterdam doing her a Masters degree in urban management and development.

Her thesis question is – wait she's emailed it to me – “Is democracy related to size?” She is trying to consider all this material, existing and new – and to ask “How large should a political system be” in order to facilitate rational control by its citizens.

She's been trying to gather data together in order to consider the comparative advantages and disadvantages enjoyed by political systems of different sizes. But well, its not really data, data is the wrong word, it's more than just information; it's conversational data. She started doing all these focus-group-type things, but she said that the thing about focus groups is that it was really hard to get anyone to come along, and once they're there, it was really hard to get them to focus. So instead she's ended up talking more often to existing groups, at their own forums or at other occasions where a few of them gather together.

She always begins by asking representatives some variation on the question ‘Where do you live?’ and sees if people say the name of a street, neighborhood, city, region etc. to test at which level their allegiance lies.

But at a certain point she realised that she was dealing with an area that from above, in effect looked like a chocolate chip cookie – a big slab of dough, containing within it, a number of independent municipal areas each with varying degrees of power and their own agendas.

She concentrated on 6 main groups – 6 chips, which represented a reasonable range of interests. At first she was talking to them individually, but then she started realising that all these groups she had been talking to on their on turf were also attending these regional forums so she started going too.

Bidy was telling me about all the riff-raff that went on there... It would just be good if she was here to present her findings to you, but since she's not, I'm thinking what I might do is that, I'll pretend to be Bidy. I'll be Bidy over here, and Adam, this is Adam, he's a dancer, he can be me. I always wanted to be a dancer.

Ok so right now – I'm Bidy: The most striking thing, well maybe the funniest thing, I heard at any of the meetings was from a member of the *Farming, Food, Future Coalition*.

“When representatives have come to visit us they have suggested we farmers to diversify our livestock into more flood- adaptable species, which in practice means: stop farming chickens and start farming ducks! Chickens sink, ducks float...”

-Adam steps down Amy steps over

So there were those kinds of quite practical discussions that she was privy too but then also she was saying it just would get really emotional at some points.

-Amy step down at front, gestures with hand

A spokesperson for *Mothers for Sustainable Municipal Action* (MFSMA) stated:

“One thing that we have here is the ability to tell our own story, as beautiful as strange as ungrammatical as it may be. If we loose the belief that the telling of our own story is of such immense importance, because this is secretly, this is how people change class here, in this city. This is how people move from one realm to another. And it doesn't cost anything, you don't have to invest in it, and you can become your people's person. And they're busy taking it away; I think it's a very canny thing they are doing, it's very worrying.”

-step backwards

She would be asking them questions like, does your association believe it's wise to permit cities – and their outlying metropolitan areas– to grow indefinitely. If, as some demographers claim, there now exists here one giant continuous area of urban development, should we try to turn this into a single vast self-governing megalopolis? Why – or why not?

-step backwards

But they would end up giving me answers with their own agendas all kind of tied in. For example, when the *River Coalition*, actually I think their proper title is *The River Runs Through Us All, Awareness and Advocacy Association* presented, they would be so impassioned and they would just go on and on saying things like:

“We have already lost so much, once a network of meandering rivers, streams, and washes, the river is now a fully engineered flood controlled system. The river is no longer a natural phenomenon, it is a man-made web of vascular networks. Our river has ceased to exist as a single entity – it is a jurisdictional matrix of boundaries, rights-of-way, easements, and liabilities. No single agency controls our river. In the past, the river did not exist in the summers. Its flow was seasonal, dry in the summer and flooded during the winter storms, but now it must be acknowledged that it is the urban runoff that allows it to flow more consistently, year round. We believe it is a naïve desire to return the river to a “natural” state in fact, to do so would be a major, major threat to the urban ecologies that have emerged in response to the river's modifications. Recent guidelines call for the total removal of the exotic species and the planting of vegetation that was historically native to the watershed. But this narrow agenda does not take into account the many thriving species, native or otherwise, that are now dependent on the existing conditions.”

step back, tip chairs forward

And she replied: “Yes, I totally agree with you about the need to not romanticise the river's past state, but surely in your work to preserve the current eco-system surrounding the river you have

come face to face with the question of *How changes in jurisdictional boundaries affect urban activities with respect to Democratic participation and Urban functioning*. That is it must be vital for you to make sure you know who has control over every aspect of the river, before it reaches your communities' area of jurisdiction.

step Back and tip chair forward and tilt them.

And they would reply:

"I believe that you've misunderstood my remarks. What we're trying to make clear to you is that we are asking for something dramatic, we are asking for a dramatic change in the way they treat us, and thereby treat the governing of the river."

Step back and get up with a pause.

I don't know, maybe everyone is just speaking at cross purposes all the time, but apparently the way local groups and resources are governed and treated by city and state is really a hard-core concern, there's even this group that's been set up, to deal directly with that problem – the *South Western Center for Smart Participation*.

Step up through the middle

They, the *South Western Center for Smart Participation*, claim they are trying to fight the prejudice amongst officials that extensive participation may make policy resolution more difficult by raising expectations, or allowing a power of veto that allows some to block a project of benefit to others.

They stated :

"Our aim at the *South Western Center for Smart Participation* is to promote the importance of creating a forum where information can be tested and contested. We believe that to break down the specialist/citizen dichotomy is to lead to more robust solutions and wider public acceptance of policy."

get up backwards, get back up, Adam sits down.

Apparently at this point there was a general consensus that the greater the extent to which public conflict is dealt with through informal, face-to-face negotiations by key players, as opposed to being resolved through formal and impersonal organisations, then the greater the chance for some sort of consensus. And that everyone present, it was further agreed, was so present in order to show that they no longer tolerated the status quo, and further that they believed the vibrancy of such informal forums represented a collective understanding that informal sub-municipality, organisational structures, do and will continue to effect real change, and create hope from within.

Adam is sitting down, Amy walks over his legs

One of the mothers, speaking for *Mothers for Sustainable Municipal Action* (MFSMA) said:

"I agree: the thing about hope is if you don't have any the sum total decreases, and if you do have some the sum total increases. So simply by having hope we make it so there's more hope. And I think the things to be done could be put very simply, and probably too simply, which is to

spend less energy and invest in better technology, and it is our hope that this is going to help drive those forward."

"May I respond," (Biddy's transcript continues on) "my name is Yohan Mackenback, I am from the *Naming Society*. I would like to share with you all a reflection. When I was younger, people would say they were from where I was from and I would go crazy with excitement - 'city' meant something still unspoken, but rampant with held-in energy. We want this area to have a name that reflects its unique social and geological history but we don't want such stories reflected in our new title to simply preserve the past, we want accounts of our own community that will change the possibilities of what we may be able to achieve in the future."

Get down forwards, swap chairs, sit down for a second then stand up.

Biddy made a note next to his testimony that this Mr Mackenback had jiggled when he spoke and had a very large moustache and because of that it was kind of hard listen to what he was saying, even though he was saying it so intently. I kind of get the feeling from how Biddy described it that everyone gets quite impassioned. These two *Mothers for Sustainable Municipal Action* (MFSMA) were apparently, well, really yelling.

Step backwards- hand gesture on heart

One mother was saying:

"I absolutely know that we all have internal flaws, but they must be dealt with, and that we have to deal with these at the same time as we are dealing with external flaws. We need to be both inventing better technology and changing human nature. I know that we can't simply change human nature – but we can take the better parts of it, and balance it against our worse selves. We are human, we are very double, we're very mixed in our motivations, but we have to take on the challenge, we have to reach for the very best outcomes."

And then as soon as she was finished, before any other organisation had time to respond, another stated:

"Exactly, exactly, I've noticed an increasing writing in the scientific press about the human capacity for empathy. The model is switching away from social competition and Darwinism, and each against all, and those kinds of things, and its going over to – actually we're social beings, we need empathy, we need to help each other, it's built in. We should recognise the nature of that, just as we've seen the built-in nature of art and music, and the fact that they are evolved adaptations that we've developed, they're part of the human tool-kit – you can't get rid of them. So all of these things can be used- those parts of ourselves can be called out, and surely by now, looking at the great mess that's rolling towards us – surely we're realising that we have to work together."

Get down forward, walk into each other

And then apparently *The 6th Municipality Small Business Association* started chanting:

"We do not want to be part of an uprooting hypothesis because we do not want to be uprooted." "We do not want to be part of an uprooting hypothesis because we do not want to be uprooted."

Which I think Biddy would have liked because she, like I, just generally like singing and chanting and that kind of thing.

Get down and walk around the outside.

Then, Mariel from *The Naming Society* said:

"Well what you seem to be inferring is that increasing the numbers on the *Title Reforming Board* (TRB), may dilute the effectiveness of the average citizen, but it seems to us that you have not considered that there is one way in which increasing numbers may work to enhance the effectiveness of the process of finding a new regional name, and that is by increasing the chances of us all finding allies in our Naming causes."

Walk around the outside the opposite way.

This, Bidy notes, led to a lengthy discussion of minority viewpoints and thresholds for dissent, which also included many comments such as: 'No ... no you listen' and 'wait I haven't finished, I didn't speak over you, please give me the same respect.' On some occasions it seemed like they were fighting for some of the same things, but other times it would just seem like they were ripping each others throats out.

Change

The 6th Municipality Small Business Association representative then started up.

"I'm not going to disagree with you about the importance of sub-municipal sized informal lobbying groups, I am of course speaking here, not to voice my personal views but as a representative of such a group.

But I feel it is of the utmost importance that we remember the costs of participation and communication, and the costs of dissent. We as a group have much considered the vital role of communicating the current plight of state of small business in this area. We need more than pedestrian fixations on our local main streets. We need a – we absolutely need – a region wide, perhaps even beyond that – a state wide –solution to these current disasters and similar such disasters. They are ripe in our future, all of our futures."

A *The River Runs Through All Of Us* representative responded.

"Yes, this is a crucial matter for us all to balance the advantages of better local information and stronger incentives for those who live within our business areas (and especially our river flood planes and wetland areas) with the reality – the blinding reality that there is currently a vast spill-over effect between different jurisdictions that currently have control of the river, and that we need a uniform response from them. I invite anyone here at this moment to prove with any substance that the types of pollutants that we are dealing with are containable within existing jurisdictional lines."

Amy runs around, Adam steps over.

Bidy was telling me that she saw the president of the proceedings in the hallway at some point admit to her, without any prompting, that when she first became involved in this whole process that her first thought was that it did seem like it could be improved. She said:

"It might sound like a strange thing that these procedural things can be so important - and why not just do it in a more efficient manner, but this is a voluntary municipal forum, and for any binding decisions everyone has to agree, basically on everything, and if they don't? you get stuck. That is the reality here."

Amy runs around twice

A representative for *South Western Center for Smart Participation* then responded:

"I would like to respond, not to the entirety of what you just spoke

about, but more specifically I would like to challenge your characterisation of 'pedestrian fixations on our local main streets' as being in opposition to wide collaborative action/response to these, I agree, pressing issues. I agree that if we act on such issues primarily on a local level often the frequency of a problem – negative health effects from various pollutants being the issue in your case, but from our position, it is often the effects on sales by competition and monopolisation, that are threatening profit margins of many of our small businesses. Realising the frequency of such problems and the effect they're having in similar but distant communities is undoubtedly important. And yes, we need to know what is going on in the widest sense, but our response to it must be at a local level, and our power in opposition to it must be through bringing to the fore the support of our employees and customers ... faces, familiar faces, abstracted data will get us no-where."

So those are the kind of things that are said, and sometimes, other things are yelled like:

1 Single arms for emphasis

I'm going to tell you a story about what you're eating when you sit down at your the dinner table, you're not going to like it very much.

or 2 Swapping arms for emphasis

Ours is a remarkable place, though its terribly hot when it's hot and terribly cold when its cold. I'm not here to represent myself, I'm here to represent a community. We are asking you for something dramatic, for an unprecedented change in approach.

or 3 Jump at the beginning and jump at the time

If being uprooted is indeed as necessary as those presenting here have implied then my only role will be to be dragged graciously.

or 4 Up on toes one at a time

There is no optimum size for a political system! Different problems require political units of different sizes, but we need knowledge and a will to organise and act at the appropriate size for the impending challenges we collectively face.

or 5 Jumping one foot at a time –

'renaming for re-awareness.' Understanding place to preserve place. I see tears everywhere, here today. This is a sign of the passion we have for these issues.

or 6 Jumping with arms up

We need a strong body that can consciously control the entire river catchment area.