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THE DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL OF AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION: REASSESSING THE AESTHETIC ANALOGY IN THE CONSTRUCTIVIST TURN

ABSTRACT
The claim that political representation is analogous to artistic representation, insofar as it creatively shapes political identities, is a frequent yet underexplored claim within the constructivist turn in the studies of political representation. Assessing both the heuristic potential of this approach and its democratic credentials requires a closer examination of this aesthetic analogy. Drawing on Pitkin´s conceptual analysis, this article treats analogy as a helpful yet selective heuristic device. While it can illuminate salient aspects of representation, it may also conceal others. In the constructivist approach, the aesthetic analogy foregrounds the creativity of representation. However, this emphasis risks sidelining the activity of the represented, thereby undermining democratic representation. Reflecting on the use of the analogy in the theories of Frank Ankersmit and Michael Saward, the article argues that the aesthetic analogy can reveal a democratic potential of the aesthetic dimension of representation when it is formulated within a broader and more inclusive framework. While Ankersmit's one-sided formulation of the analogy highlights creativity of the representatives to the detriment of the represented, Saward's claim-making approach delimits aesthetic creativity with cultural constraints, audience's judgment and systemic plurality. The last section suggests that the aesthetic dimension of representation can be compatible with democratic politics when it is understood as operating through a tension between its creative elements and its cultural limitations, thereby avoiding both an unrestrained imposition and a mere repetition of already formed identities.

KEYWORDS
political representation, aesthetics, analogy, constructivism, Ankersmit, Saward, reflexivity

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the constructivist turn has been credited with revitalizing interest in political representation. In the era when traditional representative politics is criticized for failing to meet citizens' preferences, constructivists have shown how representation exceeds its usual institutional delimitations. It is rather a dynamic process that spans the entire domain of political relations.

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Furthermore, constructivists emphasize the constitutive effects of representation. Representation does not merely mirror or describe pre-existing preferences or identities, since it also partakes in their constitution.

This characterization of representation has been supported by a related claim, often made via an analogy: that political representation has an important aesthetic dimension, as it includes creativity in shaping political reality, making it similar to representation in the arts. The aesthetic dimension therefore refers not to ideals of beauty or harmony but rather to the selective or perspectival aspects of representative acts that creatively interpret political reality. While foregrounding the often-neglected aspects of representation, it simultaneously provokes normative hesitations regarding its implications for democratic politics. Does not this creativity result in an overt emphasis on the political initiative of the representatives who shape the identities of the represented, who are, in turn, passive or excluded from the process of representation? This article states that while the aesthetic dimension of representation is not without risk, potentially implying a rather elitist conception of representation, it is also normatively promising and conducive to democratic politics. The constitutive effects of representation may also induce reflexivity, making the contestation of representative claims more feasible, thereby potentially strengthening the position of the represented.

The aesthetic dimension of representation was most explored by constructivist authors Frank Ankersmit and Michael Saward. However, subsequent constructivist literature usually only assumes this dimension without properly investigating it. This article posits that for the constructivist turn to be more normatively secure, this claim should be thoroughly explored not only in its implications but also in its original presentation in the works of these two authors. The article therefore emphasizes the role of analogy in theory building, as it is employed by both Ankersmit and Saward to emphasize the constitutive effects of representation. The paper claims that the use of analogies requires special attention as they do not merely illuminate the area they are supposed to explain. Instead, they are performative because they reshape the way we see political reality. Analogy may be a beneficial heuristic device, disclosing the so-far underexplored aspects of representation. On the other hand, its one-sided use may also result in a selective view of the explored domain, providing only a limited view of representation. More importantly, the performative effects of analogies reveal their importance for normative theorizing as they always imply a certain normative picture of the researched domain - in this case, the proper relations between representatives and the represented, if representation is understood as creative and constitutive.

The aesthetic dimension emphasized by both Ankersmit and Saward is a salient trait of representation. However, its explanatory potential and normative implications depend on the rigorousness of the analogy that supports it. The paper takes issue with the selectivity of Ankersmit́s approach, which foregrounds the creativity of representation while sidelining its cultural or social mediations and the role of the represented. Sawarď s broader use of the

analogy, which complements the creativity of representatives with the referentiality and cultural embeddedness of representative claims, is seen as much more promising both heuristically and normatively. The article argues that when the aesthetic dimension of representation is understood as comprising a productive tension between creative and cultural (or social) elements, it may be conducive to a more reflexive rather than manipulative politics.

The article proceeds in three steps. First, it departs from the pivotal work of Hanna Pitkin and foregrounds the frequent selectivity of theories of representation that merely illuminate one aspect of representation while ignoring others and emphasizes the relevance of this selectivity for normative theorizing. Second, it shows the importance of analogies in political theory and examines their use in the works of Ankersmit and Saward. While Ankersmit's substitution model, borrowed from aesthetics, has limits both for exploring political representation and conceiving it democratically, Saward's multidimensional approach is more compatible with both goals. The last section, while departing from Saward's framework, tries to clarify the democratic potential of the aesthetic dimension of representation, arising from the tension between creativity and its contextual embeddedness.

Pitkin and the Problem of Selectivity

Despite being a longstanding subject of political theory, representation remains a contested term. Representation is not confined to the political domain, as it can also be found in arts and interpersonal relations. For this reason, it has often been approached through various comparisons and analogies drawing on its presence in other domains. In her seminal book *The Concept of Representation* (1967), Hanna Pitkin draws attention to the analogical reasoning operating in the main approaches to representation. As Pitkin repeatedly affirms, such analogies are both productive and selective – they point out important aspects of political representation but simultaneously conceal others.

While descriptive representation puts forward correspondence as a criterion by which a representative is judged, and symbolic representation discloses the affective dimension of politics and the importance of constituents' emotions, they uncover only partial aspects of political representation. The problem arises when these partial analogies are treated as exhaustive accounts of representation in general, thereby distorting both the representative relationship and its normative implications (Pitkin 1967: 7, 111). Descriptive representation, for instance, relies on analogies of resemblance, such as maps or mirrors, which foreground the correspondence between representatives and the represented while leaving little room for political initiative in action or judgment.

The explanatory power of analogies is closely tied to their normative implications, particularly in how they portray the relationship between representatives and the represented. The mandate approach, while suggesting that the representative should be bound by consultations with the represented constituency, relies on analogies of mirroring or transmission. Similarly, proponents

of the opposite approach emphasize the independent judgment and actions of the representative, seeing the representative "as a free agent, a trustee, an expert who is best left alone to do his work" (Pitkin 1967: 146–147). The choice of analogies therefore influences which side of the relationship is granted political initiative.

Seeking to overcome the selectivity of these competing models, Pitkin tried to preserve the tension between the representative's initiative and the responsiveness to the represented. Her definition of political representation as "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin 1967: 209) therefore aimed at a more encompassing conception of representation. The representatives are seen as relatively autonomous, using their judgment in interpreting the preferences of the constituency they represent. Still, this autonomy is bound by responsiveness to the represented, who are also not merely passive as they 'act through' the decisions of their representatives, albeit indirectly (Pitkin 1967: 154, 233). In other words, the possibility of political action must remain present on both sides of the representative relationship if we are to conceive representation as involving both representatives as political actors and citizens as represented.

However, Pitkin's emphasis on responsiveness came under critical scrutiny with the so-called constructivist turn. Since constructivists consider identities and preferences to be constituted in the process of representation, conceptions based on narrowly conceived responsiveness became untenable. Lisa Disch has shown that Pitkin's theory shares some affinities with the systemic and performative traits of the constructivist turn (Disch 2011, 2012). Pitkin considered representation as belonging to a broader institutional environment rather than a simple principal-agent relationship. Also, in her view, representatives did not represent individual preferences but constituencies whose collective interest was not pre-given. It had to be formed from the complexity of individual preferences by the representative (Disch 2011: 106). Criticizing the modelling of representation on the mimetic relation of correspondence, Pitkin (1967: 87) also insisted on the presence of creative depiction in representation. Moving beyond the purely mimetic models of representation, Pitkin thus approached a more dynamic and performative understanding of representation.

Yet, Pitkin ultimately undervalued the performative dimension of representation in her definition of political representation as a responsive action toward the represented. Moreover, this seemed to bring back the dyadic principal-agent model that she attacked before. This retreat from the performative dimension of her account was even more present in Pitkin's rejection of symbolic and fascist representation when she affirms that "the represented must be somehow logically prior; the representative must be responsive to him rather than the other way around" (Pitkin 1967: 140). In the effort to retain a normative conception that allows for democratic leadership rather than the manipulation of passive citizens (Disch 2011: 108-109), Pitkin ended up offering a normatively overburdened account of representation, leaving little space for the performative aspects she otherwise acknowledged.

A similar dilemma, however, haunts the constructivists, albeit from the opposite direction. With Lisa Disch (2015: 487–488), we can frame this problem as a conflict between the epistemological principles of constructivism, where political representation actively shapes both political reality and citizens' preferences, and a normative allegiance to democratic politics in which the represented are not merely passive. If preferences and identities are shaped in representation, how can we account for the citizens' presence and activity in the representative process? Following Claude Lefort's understanding of democracy as an empty and contingent place of power, constructivists often propose democratic politics based not on the responsiveness of the representative acts but on the possibility of their contestation (Bíba 2015: 161). This is also present in Disch's demand for systemic reflexivity. In a reflexive representation, the represented can contest the claims made in their name. No claim offers a definitive representation, as it coexists within a plurality of representations and is always open to criticism (Disch 2011: 111). Similarly, in conceptualizing representation as a claim-making activity, Saward (2010) sees every representative claim as merely provisional and subject to the judgment of audiences, thereby including audiences within the representative process.

Still, are these normative propositions consistent with the constitutive effects of representation? These effects are often expressed in the claim that representation has an aesthetic aspect, since it produces images of citizens' identities with which the represented may identify. This may imply an unbalanced dominance of the representatives, who creatively mould the identities of the represented. However, it was precisely these aspects of aesthetic representation that were attacked by Pitkin in her rejection of symbolic representation. As the link between the symbol and the (social) referent in symbolic representation is merely arbitrary, Pitkin warned that this leads to the shift from rational argumentation to affective persuasion by which leaders can manipulate the emotions of their followers (Pitkin 1967: 101).

While the criticism of the affective dimension of representation may again imply an overly streamlined conception, there is something in the rejection of symbolic representation that constructivists must face, primarily the relationship between the leader and audience, or the representative and the represented. The audience is included as merely passive, since the representative relationship is inverted, proceeding from the image the leader imposes upon his followers (Pitkin 1967: 101). This moment introduces the problem of manipulation, although it remains a problematic concept within constructivism insofar as it implies an intentional strategy that manipulates preexisting interests and identities. However, manipulation within representative relations could also be understood more broadly, where it refers to the impeding of contestation of particular claims (Bíba 2024: 34-35).[1]

1 This position is gestured towards by Pitkin herself: "Manipulation by a ruler, on the other hand, is imposed on the ruled, and threatens their capacity to reject a policy or initiate a new one. A person can be led and yet go of his own free will; something that

Constructivists have rightly emphasized the creativity of representation as a resource for destabilizing fixed meanings and introducing contingency to political relations. Overly inert identities and constraining cultural environments may limit the audience's capacity to contest the claims to represent them. Yet there is a possibility of the opposite danger, when the aesthetic analogy is introduced one-sidedly, emphasizing initiative only on the side of the representatives. The aesthetic analogy foregrounds the creativity of representation, but artistic representations are also constrained by tradition, repertoires of styles, and previous representations that artists depart from. The issue is therefore how the aesthetic analogy conceptualizes the relations between creativity and the broader social and cultural conditions that delimit and enable representation. While the emphasis on creativity and representatives is not problematic in itself, the analogy becomes one-sided when it neglects the role of the represented or the cultural context that makes representations comprehensible, acceptable or contestable.

If a constructivist approach is to be compatible with democratic representation, which must preserve some space for the activity of the represented, then I argue that this aesthetic dimension of political representation must be further explored. Again, this dimension is arrived at through an analogy – in this case between representation in politics and the arts. Once again, we may ask how this analogy portrays political representation and whether it conveys an overly selective understanding that privileges one pole of the representative relationship. The following sections will focus on the two theorists most closely associated with the constructivist perspective in political representation: Frank Ankersmit and Michael Saward.

Despite sharing a similar premise grounded in the aesthetic analogy, Ankersmit's and Saward's approaches to both the aesthetic dimension and political representation differ. While the political identities in both approaches are constructed through representation, Saward conceives representation as a more contestable activity. With Samuel Hayat (2019: 126–127), we can frame their differences as corresponding to two different views of representation. In Ankersmit's approach, representation corresponds to the imposition of identities constitutive of political subjects, or, as we shall see, as a substitution of the represented in the political process from which they are then excluded. Saward approaches representation as a proposition that allows for contestation by the represented. Moreover, the activity of representing is conceived as mediated by social and cultural contexts. In representation understood as a proposition, the political identities of the constituencies or groups are still constituted by the representatives, but their "members can judge, criticize, or even reject what is done and said in their name and the representations that are given of their identity" (Hayat 2019: 127).

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is manipulated does not move itself." (Pitkin 1967: 233). However, as the following sections will show, this impediment of contestation may also arise from other sources, such as an overly sedimented and constraining environment in which the representative claims are embedded.

The use of the analogy influences not only the conceptualization of representation, but also the normative considerations regarding the space for democratic politics in constructivist-conceived representation. This problem will be explored with the works of both Ankersmit and Saward before examining the (un)democratic potential of the aesthetic dimension of political representation articulated through this analogy.

Depicting Representation

Within the constructivist turn, both Frank Ankersmit and Michael Saward aim to illuminate the constitutive effects of representation by putting forward an analogy between political and aesthetic representation. The use of analogy is not unique to the constructivist approach, as it is widely employed in political theory. However, when employed in the context of a constructivist perspective, it bears specific normative implications and thus deserves closer scrutiny. For this reason, this short section will briefly outline the aesthetic analogy as formulated by Ankersmit and will focus on the benefits and pitfalls of analogies and metaphors in building political theories.

While these two figures do not necessarily overlap, cognitive linguistics has highlighted their functional similarities. Lakoff and Johnson define *metaphor* as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5), where the source domain serves to explain or approximate the target domain. Similarly, Gentner views this type of relational metaphor as an example of analogy, understanding analogy as an activity of mapping relations and establishing a structural alignment between two domains (Gentner et al. 2001: 200). This article will be more focused on the analogical inferences produced through relating the two domains. However, the figurative effects of metaphors are also relevant.

In his aesthetic theory of representation, Ankersmit conceives political representation as a process of depiction rather than mimetic correspondence. Drawing on aesthetics, Ankersmit (1996: 45) formulates the following analogy:

The depiction or representation of reality is the activity of the visual artist. For that reason, what aesthetics has to say about artistic representation will permit us to deepen our insight into political representation. In particular, aesthetics will be able to make our insight into aesthetic political representation more precise, seeing that (modern) aesthetics abandoned mimetic representation too.

This passage points to an analogous relationship between aesthetic and political representation through their rejection of the mimetic ideal of representation as an imitation of or resemblance to the thing represented. Furthermore, the metaphor comparing the activity of the politician to 'the activity of the visual artist' implies that the political will of the constituency is not given but must be depicted by the creativity of the representative.

But why should this use of metaphors and analogies in the theory of representation matter? Metaphors have long been a staple in the history of political

theory. Since political reality cannot be directly observed through our senses, metaphors help us grasp it (Miller 1979: 163). Similarly, metaphors and analogies are often the basis of scientific models for the description of lesser-known empirical phenomena (Bailer-Jones 2002). This is also pertinent in political theory, where the analogies between politics and aesthetics have become central to the so-called aesthetic turn (see, for example, Kompridis 2014).

Still, the potential effects of analogies in political theory warrant caution. In her book *Spectators in the Field of Politics* (2015), Sandey Fitzgerald points to the inadequacies in the 'theatre metaphor,' which compares political actors to theatrical performers and citizens to spectators. Most importantly, she emphasizes the performative effects of this metaphor (Fitzgerald 2015: 7), as it changes our perception of political reality and potentially our political actions. Therefore, we should not ask if metaphors or analogies can be used, but rather what picture of political reality they evoke. Does the analogical framing successfully deepen our understanding of the explored domain, or does its partial perspective provide only a misleadingly limited account? Consequently, how does their performative dimension manifest in the normative picture of representation they imply?

While metaphors or analogies in political theory are not exceptional, this specific use is nonetheless somewhat unusual. Typically, they help illuminate a lesser-known domain through our knowledge of another, more familiar domain by drawing on more common or proximate human experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 117–118). For instance, Schumpeter (1994: 282–283) likens political competition to competition in economics, presupposing that our knowledge of the latter may clarify the more ambiguous concept of democracy. While political representation remains a complex and unclear terrain, the same may apply to representation in the arts. Our knowledge of the base domain (art) is as uncertain as our knowledge of the target domain (political representation) that it was supposed to explain. This creates a potential obstacle to the explanatory potential of the aesthetic analogy.

If analogy is performative in changing our knowledge of the explored domain, then it should not be judged on the basis of some immutable "essence" of the two domains. Nonetheless, this does not mean that analogies are arbitrary, as they always rely on the culturally embedded commonsensical knowledge, or, as Black (1962: 40–41) claims, on a "system of associated commonplaces" that makes them effective. For the purposes of this article, the problem of selectivity arises here as well. As the workings of representation in art are hardly evident, it can be depicted in an overly selective manner, emphasizing some common aspects while ignoring others, which then leads to a similarly biased conception of political representation. This limitation should not lead to the rejection of analogies in political theory since they can be very helpful in areas such as political representation. The performative effects of analogies rather call for a closer scrutiny of their use. Their selectivity may not only produce a limited account of the explored domain, but also naturalize certain normative assumptions as seemingly commonsensical implications of political

representation itself. The following sections will therefore examine how different uses of the aesthetic analogy foreground certain aspects of political representation and imply normative consequences.

Representation as substitution

Ankersmit employs the analogy to offer a general theory of representation. First, he uses insights from the aesthetic theories of representation in the arts to reject the mimetic theory of representation, which grounds the representative relationship on either resemblance or imitation. Second, these inferences are instrumental in formulating the conception of political representation based on the substitution theory of representation in aesthetics.

Due to the aforementioned ambiguity of representation in aesthetics, Ankersmit first seeks to render artistic representation more unequivocal. For this purpose, he draws on Nelson Goodman's emphasis on the unsymmetrical nature of representation, distinguishing it from relations of resemblance (Goodman 1976: 4). Underscoring the selectivity and partiality of representation, Goodman sees it rather as an activity of characterization than "a matter of passive reporting" (Goodman 1976: 31). Furthermore, representations are mediated by a notational system that sets the distinct manner of representing (Ankersmit 2008: 19). As these notational systems are conventional, resemblance is not an inherent standard of representation but merely an effect of a given system that dictates what we register as resemblance (Ankersmit 2008: 28).

In politics, the mimetic relation can be understood as corresponding to the delegate view of representation, emphasizing the proximity between the representatives and the represented.[2] Drawing on Goodman, Ankersmit rejects these views for ignoring the necessarily selective and mediated aspect of each representation (Ankersmit 1996: 25). This, however, also poses some limits on the authority of representation. No representation can thus be seen as definitive, as it only offers a view from a specific perspective, which can be replaced by another.

In a second step, Ankersmit provides an alternative conception of representation, departing from Ernst Gombrich's and Arthur Danto's understanding of representation as substitution. In his essay on the hobby horse, Gombrich claims that representation is not based on an imitation of an outward form of a particular object but on its substitution, here made possible by its shared function of riding (Gombrich 1985: 2-4). Drawing on this conception of representation, Danto differentiates two senses of making present something absent. While in the first sense, the representation was seen as completely overlapping with reality, in the second, a gap arose between them (Danto 1974: 146; Danto 1982: 5-6). For Danto, this aesthetic gap allows us to enjoy art in its distance from reality and to observe appearances as potentially deceptive.

2 This view is exemplified in John Adams' dictum that the representative assembly "should be in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them" (Adams, qt. from Pitkin 1967: 60).

This notion of aesthetic gap is then transposed by Ankersmit to both political representation and political reality in general. As the difference between the landscape and its painting is a source of aesthetic pleasure, the gap between the represented and their representatives becomes a source of legitimate power (Ankersmit 1996: 50). An identity between the two would preclude any sense of critical detachment of society from the workings of the state. This transposition is based on the use of aesthetic analogy in Machiavellĭs dedicatory letter, emphasizing both the divided nature of political reality and the perspectival character of political knowledge.[3] Similarly, the represented are never fully present in their representation, but this only enables a distanced and more reflexive standpoint, where no representation is seen as definitive.

That representation should be seen as a matter of perspective is also present in Ankersmit's rejection of its referentiality. In his discussion of historical representation,[4] representation is contrasted with description, where only the latter has a referential relation to objective reality, whereas representations capture selective aspects of the thing represented (Ankersmit 2010: 376–377). This underscores Ankersmit's related argument that we cannot evaluate representations by outer reality but only by other representations, which thereby become their only limits (Ankersmit 2010: 392). While plausible within a constructivist perspective, this seems to recall Pitkin's criticism of symbolic representation, where the loose (or non-existent) connection between representation and its social referent leads to the danger of manipulation by representatives. This use of the aesthetic analogy thus implies a creative role for the representatives without locating any boundaries for their actions.

The transposition of 'representation as substitution' from aesthetics to politics clearly aligns with the independence side of the mandate–independence debate, which Ankersmit reinforces through aesthetic analogy: "Just as the work of art has an (aesthetic) autonomy concerning what it represents, so has the representative a certain independence of autonomy regarding the voters who sent him to Parliament or Congress" (Ankersmit 2002: 112), while the mimetic or delegate view "would reduce the representative to a mailbox" (Ankersmit 1996: 44). Certain autonomy and creativity of the representatives is a logical implication of the aesthetic or constructivist framework. However, these premises do not necessarily imply Ankersmit's final elitist position, where the activity of the representatives lacks any counterbalance.

3 "People who draw landscapes proceed to a low point on a plain in order to study the nature of mountains and higher elevations; they proceed to mountaintops in order to study the nature of the lowlands. Just so, to understand the nature of the people fully, one must be a prince; to understand the nature of princes fully, one must be of the people" (Machiavelli 2008: 95).

4 Generally, Ankersmit treats historical, aesthetic, and political representation as only particular instantiations of general representational logic. The aforementioned authors from aesthetics are inspirations for the conception of representation in both history and politics.

This conception results from a one-sided use of the analogy and selective inferences from the aesthetic domain to politics. Departing from the necessity of the gap between the represented and their representation, Ankersmit (2002: 116–117) holds that this gap should be much wider in politics. The argument for this gap is persuasive: the politician must be at a certain distance from society to adequately represent it, and the citizen safeguards equal distance, enabling a more critical standpoint. However, this does not imply the normative claim that the gap should be as wide as possible. Here, as Sofia Näsström (2006: 330–331) observes, the use of aesthetic analogy leads to a limited conception of representation, where creativity and initiative lie exclusively with the representatives. While the aesthetic gap may be a source of legitimate power in that it renders it criticizable, it cannot have this function without accounting for the consenting or critical role of the represented. In Ankersmit's framework, it seems as if no interaction is expected from the represented since they only function as passive objects of representation.[5]

Moreover, the description of artistic practice as boundlessly creative is selective, as it ignores even the authors Ankersmit cites as inspiration. Gombrich later attacked Goodman's conventionalism by proposing that while art does not imitate outer reality, its stylistic codes are never wholly arbitrary. For instance, naturalist art does not build on resemblance per se but on how we acquire meaning and orient ourselves within ordinary experience (Gombrich 1982: 280–281, 297). Similarly, an artist's creativity is never without constraints, as his art is always embedded in a broader context of artistic tradition, styles, and the expectations of his audience, even though an artist can sometimes transcend these external restraints. This acknowledgment of either limitations or background support for representing should also be present with both aesthetic and political representation.

Referential ties to external reality may seem implausible within constructivism, but how can we account for the intelligibility or limits of representations without them? Ankersmit hints at this problem in his discussion of the self-referentiality of representations that are always embedded in a (cultural) context of other representations, but omits it in his political theory. There, the image of the creative and autonomous representative is more determining. As the following sections will show, the aesthetic analogy works only insofar as the creativity of representation is complemented by the social or cultural context that both makes it comprehensible and delineates its limits.

5 This idea of an "aesthetic gap" between citizens and their representatives can also be read in a non-elitist way. While departing from Ankersmit, Lawrence Hamilton (2014: 73–84) views this gap and aesthetic creativity less as a source of the representatives' autonomy than of the critical judgment and engagement of the represented. While the closing of this gap would weaken possibilities for contestation by eliminating a critical detachment from power, Hamilton sees an overt widening of this gap as equally problematic since it would impede accountability of political leaders and the participation of the represented.

The denial of referentiality can further exclude the represented reality from the process of representation. In the case of historical representation, Ankersmit claims that the represented past never protests, only historians as authors of historical representations do (Ankersmit 2010: 385–386). However, this conclusion is far from intuitive. While the past does not protest its representation, protests often come from people whose past is represented and who represent it differently. This idea would seem absurd in political representation, where people could not protest how they are represented. Ankersmit generally omits the activity of the represented in his framework, advancing a normative picture of democracy where the danger of identification between the politicians and the electorate is avoided through an attitude of indifference (Ankersmit 1996: 103). While the fact that people do not care about every political issue is a stimulus for the creativity of representation, his conception omits the cases when people do care and want to have a say in how they are represented.

In general, Ankersmit offers a selective depiction of the aesthetic domain that ultimately leads to a limited account of the political representation that it was supposed to explain. Emphasizing only the creativity of the representing artists or politicians, this use of analogy elevates a particular aspect of political representation, i.e., aesthetic creativity, to its essence. This use of the analogy has normative implications, as it leads to a more elitist conception of representation instead of a democratic one that would also make space for the activity of the represented, as expressed by Hayat's term 'representation as imposition'. Representation conceived as substitution, foregrounding the inspirations from aesthetics and the creativity of the representatives, recalls the mandate–independence controversy, where Ankersmit occupies the latter position, as substitution would imply an exclusion of the represented during the process of representation.

If the representative relationship is supposed to include certain activity on both sides, at least in democratic politics, then approaches implying an absence of the represented are as incomplete as theories ignoring the constitutive effects of representation. In the next section, I will focus on Michael Saward's theory of the representative claim. There, the aesthetic analogy operates within a more inclusive framework that better captures the tensions inherent in the aesthetic domain.

Representation as proposition

If Ankersmit supplied a needed corrective in emphasizing the aesthetic dimension of political representation, his theory may have replaced the blind spots of previous approaches with omissions of its own, as its heuristic limitations sidelined the role of the represented or the tenuous and contestable character of the representative process. Michael Saward's conception of representation as claim-making makes it possible to transcend the shortcomings of Ankersmit's approach by retaining some of Pitkin's normative concerns but without abandoning a constructivist orientation. Saward questions any strict

distinction between depicting interests or identities and acting on behalf of others, since representation always includes both aesthetic creativity and relations to audiences and constituencies involved in the representative process (Saward 2010: 12–13).

Nonetheless, Saward never opposes his approach to Ankersmit, who is, on the contrary, an occasional point of reference in the claim that political representation has an aesthetic dimension. Yet, under closer scrutiny, the articulation of the aesthetic dimension diverges significantly. The question then is how to develop a constructivist and aesthetic conception of representation that successfully captures the complexity of representative relations and preserves its democratic potential, avoiding the elitist implications of Ankersmit́s account. This will be explored by focusing on Saward's use of the aesthetic analogy and on how the category of the aesthetic operates within the context of his conception.

Generally, Saward's use of aesthetic analogy and metaphor remains similar. He views representing a constituency as consisting of depicting, akin to artistic portraying. This act of portraying never mirrors a preexisting reality but offers a selective interpretation that is never exhaustive but only partial (Saward 2010: 77–78). Yet, Saward departs in a slightly different direction when he presents his aesthetic analogy:

The painter Paul Klee took the view that painting did not mimic or copy, or even in the first instance interpret, its referent. What it did, first and foremost, was 'make visible' the referent. By analogy, representative claimants, elected or otherwise, construct verbal and visual images for and about constituencies and their countries (Saward 2010: 51).

Representing is thus a creative activity that distinctively reframes reality, making some of its parts more visible. Saward offers a more comprehensive use of analogy, where the aesthetic element is complemented not only by the cultural context of representative claims, but also by theatrical and systemic dimensions of representation. Contrary to Ankersmit, there is an intention to maintain a referential relation to reality, however implausible it may sound within a constructivist approach. Before elaborating on this intricacy further, it is necessary to explore the distinctiveness of Saward's approach in his definition of representation.

In compliance with his methodological suggestions to withdraw from either static, essentialist, or normatively burdened definitions, Saward (2010: 36) understands representation as a general process of claim-making: "A maker of representations ('M') puts forward a subject ('S') which stands for an object ('O') that is related to a referent ('R') and is offered to an audience ('A')". The distinction between an object and a referent reiterates the idea that representation refers to social reality, even though this reality is never transparent, as it must be creatively interpreted or depicted. The inclusion of the audience signifies a more significant shift from Ankersmit's conception, as it suggests that Saward puts forward his concept of representation without being confined to the limits of aesthetic analogy. That is so because Saward (2010: 73) regards

representation as a multidimensional concept irreducible to a single facet. Rather than capturing a definitive essence, he reconstructs representation as an activity that comprises multiple elements. The general discursive framework of a claim-making activity is supplemented with an aesthetic metaphor (representative as a painter) and a theatrical one (constituency serving as an audience, representatives as performers), as only this combination allows for capturing the distinct layers of the representative process.

Theatrical performativity implies that representatives serve as performers who advance their claims to an audience. In his later work on performative representation, Saward emphasizes that representation does not consist only in acts of representing, but also in their public performance – not merely in "doing", but also in "showing doing" before an audience of spectators (Saward 2017: 75–76). With this inclusion of citizens as an audience, representation changes from a singular act into a complex process consisting of interaction between the representative and the represented. This view replaces the presence approach of both Pitkin and Ankersmit with an event approach, where the focus is not on 'making [the] absent present again' but on representing as a prolonged yet contingent activity constituted through ongoing performances, where presence is merely evoked and can be rejected. In this approach, contrary to representation as substitution, the represented are included, at least in the subcategory of democratic representation, where the constituencies affected and represented by a particular claim constitute the judging audience (Saward 2020: 106).

The broader context of this theatrical metaphor excludes it from the plebiscitary logic, where citizens are passive audiences of performing political leaders. The represented can also advance their counterclaims. Furthermore, while the democratic legitimacy of representation arises from the acceptance by an appropriate constituency, Saward also specifies the systemic conditions of access to information and plurality (Saward 2010: 154–156) that facilitate the contestation of representative claims and which were systematized later in Disch's notion of reflexivity. Yet, as Nadia Urbinati points out, Saward pays considerably less attention to the institutional conditions supporting such contestation, such as electoral procedures.[6] Still, Sawards use of the aesthetic analogy and the emphasis on the role of the audience and systemic plurality disclose both the constitutive and inconclusive character of representation.

Does the aesthetic dimension nonetheless risk inducing forms of representation that hinder the contestation of claims? The following section will demonstrate how the constitutive effects of representation, uncovered by the aesthetic

6 In her criticism of Saward's approach, Nadia Urbinati (2019) views claim-making as largely confined to the informal and extra-institutional domain of opinion. The legitimacy of representation in the electoral domain, Urbinati claims, cannot be accounted for only in terms of the relation between the claim-maker and the acceptance of the audience (or appropriate constituency). While this criticism may be beneficial in supplementing the constructivist approach with the relevance of institutional procedures, Urbinati ultimately presents too narrow a conception of electoral representation, disentangled from the effects of performance or rhetorics (Saward 2020: 119).

analogy, may likewise elicit a certain reflexivity regarding representation that buttresses the systemic reflexivity advanced by Disch through facilitating the contestation of representative claims. The aesthetic dimension of representation thus does not have to be incompatible with democratic forms of representation, especially if the analogy is not formulated too one-sidedly. Its democratic or reflexive potential, enabled by the tension between aesthetic creativity and its cultural embeddedness, will be explored through the category of the referent.

The Democratic Potential of Aesthetic Representation

While the starting point of aesthetic analogy, i.e., the emphasis on the creativity of representation, is shared by both Ankersmit and Saward, the latter supplements it with elements that may serve as a possible limit to this creativity – the concepts of referent and culture. With this simultaneous broadening and specification of the analogy, the aesthetic dimension that is captured by it not only provides a better insight into the workings of representation but also indicates a possibility of its compatibility with democratic representation.

The referentiality of representation is consistent with the event approach, which does not regard representation as a substituted presence (as Ankersmit) but as a contingent process where the represented reality is still included. While maintaining the view of representation as productive and creative, the distinction between an object and a referent also implicitly poses some constraints on this creative element. Nevertheless, the notion of the referent seems at odds with constructivist premises, as it implies something outside of representation, as if reality were transparent and did not require mediation. Possibly for this reason, Saward's exposition of this notion is changing and ambiguous, ranging from an entity preceding representation, the totality of potential meanings of the represented object, to the 'thing-in-itself' that may assume many meanings (Thomassen 2019: 166).

The first sense of the referent, signifying "the actual, flesh-and-blood people of the constituency" (Saward 2010: 37) is the most vulnerable within a constructivist perspective. In his criticism of this category, Thomas Decreus uses the example of Lenin performing representative claims in front of a group of sailors who should serve as a referent that the claim transforms into an object of representation. However, as Decreus shows, they are already referred to as 'sailors,' which means they are mediated by a representation categorizing them as members of a specific group. Even as individuals, they have "certain ideas about their own identifications: they are Russian citizens, supporters of the Revolution, fathers and mothers, and much more, but they are never just flesh-and-blood people" (Decreus 2013: 38). A reality preceding representation is not accessible to us without further mediation, rendering it meaningless as an anchoring point for representations. Nevertheless, the category of 'flesh-and-blood people' is not useless, as it highlights Saward's emphasis on the evaluation of representative claims. However, it is expressed rather by the audience judging representative claims. In this sense, while representation constitutes

political groups or identities, it should not be understood as their imposition, as each claim remains a tentative proposition that may be rejected.

An epistemologically permissible concept of the referent within constructivism corresponds to a grammatical function where a claim always refers to something preceding it (Fossen 2019: 833). The referent anchors the claim-making activity only in the preceding net of representation. As Lasse Thomassen (2019) asserts, understanding the referent as a pre-representational entity is undesirable as it may conceal the performative effects of representation. This argument is inspired by Derrida's (1988) objection to Austin's distinction between constative and performative acts. In contrast to Austin, Derrida claimed that the merely descriptive appearance of constative acts hides their performative effects caused by the (constative) repetition of something in new contexts, generating (performative) new meaning. Thomassen claims that similar concealing moments can be present with representative claims that try to pass off as descriptions of reality while performatively shaping it. When, for example, a representative speaks on behalf of the unsatisfied people of a particular constituency, this claim co-constitutes the identity of the people in whose name it is speaking. The referent is thus not a pre-representational entity but a "'sedimented iterability' that results from the repetition of representative claims, what we might call re-representations" (Thomassen 2019: 169).

A claim that conceals its performative character is misleading, as it tries to pass itself off as being merely an invocation of something already present. This brings back the issue of manipulation – not in the sense of intentional deception, but in impeding contestation by drawing on seemingly neutral constative acts and mobilizing shared meanings that appear natural and self-evident. For instance, speaking in vague terms on behalf of an undefined group of 'honest, hard-working people' may conceal the performative dimension of such a claim. By contrast, when the group is rendered more concretely — as in "I speak for those hard-working people whose needs are not being met today" — not only are the represented more thoroughly defined, but the claimant's creativity (and selectivity) in speaking for them is also brought to the fore. For this reason, this denial of presence as the bedrock of representation finds expression in Saward's move from the presence approach to the event approach, emphasizing the contingent and unfinished nature of representation, which, in the last instance, remains only a provisional claim (Thomassen 2019: 170–171) that can be disputed (as in "who really is hard working?").[7]

In this context, the aesthetic and performative moments of representation do not result in manipulation, as they, on the contrary, may reflexively disclose the workings of representation, which stops being seen as a neutral description and instead becomes a selective depiction of social reality. This is part of the

7 A similar phenomenon occurs in the performative dimension of representation, where performers convey selective depictions of their identities. In doing so, they may mobilize claims of authenticity (Severs and Meier 2024) or projected sincerity (Litvin 2023), thereby presenting their political personas as natural rather than as the result of a staged performance.

reflexive and democratic aspect of the aesthetic dimension of representation, uncovered by the aesthetic analogy by both Ankersmit and Saward. If representative acts are seen as selective interpretations rather than merely constative acts, then they are much more prone to contestation. While leading to the same effects, this reflexivity differs from the political demand for a plural and flexible systemic environment advanced by Disch, as it is much closer to reflexivity in aesthetics, where it concerns works of art whose artificiality is emphasized rather than concealed, thereby underlining their status of mere representations or fictions.

Still, it would be naïve to expect claim-makers to openly disclose and thereby put at risk the performative effects of their claims. This is well expressed in Saward's (dis)analogy between modern art and modern politics:

It is true that politicians are not like many contemporary artists who create works that are deliberately set up to provoke engagement and even contestation. Political makers of representations tend to foreclose or fix the meaning of themselves and their actions. Nevertheless, there is no representative claim that cannot be "read back" or contested or disputed by its targets, recipients, or observers (Saward 2010: 54).

In this context, shared cultural repertoires that serve as a background for constructing claims may contribute to the fixation of meaning. They might impede the contestation of representative claims when these claims present themselves as neutral descriptions of social reality instead of its interpretations. This fixation could be disrupted by foregrounding the performative effects of representation, but also by what Hayat (2019) calls inclusive representation, where the represented participate in the representative process and thereby facilitate the contestation of claims. While this reflexive moment of representations arising from their artificiality is present in Ankersmit as well, his theory lacks the inclusion of the evaluative activity of the represented, which prevents the meaning of representation from becoming fixed. Again, the aesthetic analogy reveals a salient aspect of political representation that may facilitate its contestation. Still, this reflexive potential needs to be complemented by the participation of the represented to be effective.

Thomassen (2019: 175) concedes that this critical stance towards the supposed referentiality of representative claims should not lead us to view representation as entirely unstable, with each claim initiating something novel. This relative stability is explained by Saward through cultural codes that delimit the possible subject-object links in a particular context, stabilize meaning, and establish boundaries for the inventive aspect of representation. As already mentioned, Saward establishes the concept of culture as an outer boundary "that sets the limits or parameters for the aesthetic possibilities" (Saward 2010: 75). Representative claims are embedded in a particular context, where representatives must account for the audience's expectations and use time-proven repertoires drawing from shared political experience to be successful (Hatherell 2014: 440–444). Saward advances an unnecessarily strict dichotomy between culture and the aesthetic dimension of representation. Every aesthetic practice

is socially and culturally situated, as it employs conventions, established styles, or expectations. Rather, this social or cultural dimension should be seen as an inherent trait of aesthetic representation, in productive tension with aesthetic creativity, which tries to introduce something new. The mobilization of shared codes may sometimes naturalize the performative effects of claims and contribute to the fixation of meaning, which is then taken for granted by audiences. However, the remainder of this section will show how this cultural or social dimension of discourse, in which each representative claim is situated within a broader context of other claims, may also facilitate the reflexive and democratic potential of representation. Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism proves helpful in this regard. Similarly, by advancing a non-mimetic conception of representation (Stam 1991: 252–253), Bakhtin does not argue for a free play of representations but emphasizes their social character.

Dialogism highlights the plurality and mutual interconnectedness of discourses. Therefore, when a discourse represents an object, it cannot do so in separation from other discourses, since "any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the light of alien words that have already been spoken about it" (Bakhtin 1981: 276). Developing this idea in Saward's terms, the referent of representative claims is never found in a pure state, unencumbered by previous representations. As Bakhtin illustrates, "the speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time" (Bakhtin 1986: 93). Claim-making thus relates to something that was already represented differently and is open to diverse ways of representation.

In a similar vein, Disch connects the referent with the metaphor of depicting a constituency in a distinctive manner, emphasizing the partial and evaluative relation towards the thing represented. Here, the referent captures the totality of the potential meaning of a given constituency and becomes "the impetus to ongoing 'political debate and dispute', not the ground for the adjudication and closure of such dispute" (Disch 2015: 493). The totality of meaning, arising from the social dimension of representation, may delimit aesthetic inventiveness without precluding creativity in general.

In this sense, we arrive from a different direction to Thomassen's warning against the reification of meaning. For him, this effect appeared because of the concealment of the performative effects of representation. Here, it stems from the concealment of the dialogical dimension that "deproblematizes representation by fixing one mode of signification as fully adequate to the comprehension of the object" (Gardiner 1992: 91). The social dimension of discourse, implied by the cultural anchoring of representation, may counter the monopolization of meaning arising from the unrestrained creativity that does not encounter any limitations from social reality and surrounding representations.

This dialogical interweaving of representations can help analyse representative claims, where, for instance, the claim-maker portrays themselves as

the sole legitimate representative of a 'working class'. The social dimension of discourse, conversely, points out that each representative claim is only one competing claim among others, and that the 'working class' has been (and will continue to be) represented differently by different actors. In this sense, it is in a complementary relationship with Disch's systemic concept of reflexivity, which calls for the proliferation of representations and thus their easier contestation. While the creative aspect of representation has reflexive potential as it emphasizes the performative dimension of representation, the same moment is present here in the emphasis on the cultural context of representative claims, which then cannot have the status of unrestricted imposition.[8]

Of these two aspects of aesthetic representation, which prevent the reification of meaning and facilitate the contestation of representations, Ankersmit includes only the performative while neglecting its support in the inclusion of the represented or broader systemic plurality. In this sense, Hayat's classification of his conception as 'representation as imposition' captures the absence of initiative of the represented. Departing from Ankersmit's inspirations in aesthetics, 'representation as substitution' also captures the authoritative force of aesthetic representation. If the creativity of the representatives lacks any counterbalance, then the representations are imposed without much resistance from the represented.

Both aspects – aesthetic creativity and its cultural backdrop – may have undemocratic implications, leading either to an imbalance in favour of the representatives or an inflexible environment where political identities become inert. In both cases, the possibility of contesting the claims is hindered. The claims either conceal their performative and selective character by presenting themselves through shared cultural codes as neutral descriptions of social reality, or they become detached from broader social and discursive context, allowing them to monopolize meaning without encountering counterclaims. Yet these same aspects may also reveal an inherent reflexivity in representation while making it easier to contest by disclosing its performative character or the plurality in ways of representing that prevent the monopolization of meaning. However, this potential concerns only the aesthetic dimension of political representation,

8 The constitutive dimension of representation has been particularly elaborated in the theory of populism by Ernesto Laclau (2005). For Laclau, populist representation does not merely evoke a preexisting "people", but instead contributes to its constitution. However, subsequent theorists of populism have advanced a more ambiguous reading, in which populist representation may lead to both problematic tendencies discussed in this article: the suppression of mediation through claims of immediacy, and the homogenizing imposition of collective identities. As Benjamin Arditi (2005: 82–83) argues, the immediacy projected through the style and performances of the leader may repress the iterative moment of re-presentation, in which 'the people' are always represented through some creative substitute. In such cases, the people are no longer put forward as a selective representation of a collective identity but are instead invoked as an unequivocal and fully present entity. However, populism can also operate in the opposite direction, by authoritatively imposing the name of 'the people' in a homogenizing way that suppresses the cultural plurality and contestability that this name can otherwise evoke.

and does not automatically translate into political participation, as the latter also depends on institutional and systemic conditions enabling the represented to contest the representative claims, such as the inclusion of the represented and the plurality of representative claims that enable their contestation.

Conclusion

The emphasis on the constitutive effects of representation within the constructivist turn is often accompanied by the claim that political representation has an aesthetic dimension, as it offers creative and selective depictions of political reality. While this dimension may cause understandable reservations regarding the increased initiative of the representatives, this article has shown that it is potentially compatible with democratic representative relations in which the represented are included or empowered. Although creativity is often exercised by representatives, the aesthetic dimension may also induce a reflexive relation vis-à-vis the representative claims, revealing their selectivity and making them easier to contest.

In examining this claim, this paper focused on its frequent way of presentation through an analogy between political and aesthetic representation. This attention to analogy helps clarify the explanatory potential of the constructivist approach. Overly narrow use of analogy, as exemplified by Ankersmit, highlights only the creative aspects of representation and neglects their social or cultural embeddedness. Such one-sided analogical framing offers an incomplete account of the aesthetic dimension it seeks to illuminate. A more nuanced version of the analogy found in Saward's approach – acknowledging the multidimensionality of political representation – provides a fuller understanding of political representation in general and its aesthetic dimension in particular, consisting of a dynamic tension between creativity and its cultural or contextual embeddedness.

The interest in analogy is not limited to its heuristic value. Because analogies are performative, they also serve as a bridge between descriptive and normative theorizing. In the case of Ankersmit, the selective use of analogy implies an elitist conception of representation that sidelines the represented, whereas Saward's broader analogical framework offers a more complex account that is also compatible with democratically conceived representation. When the aesthetic dimension is understood through the interplay between creative and cultural elements, representative claims are neither arbitrarily imposing nor do they mechanically mirror prior contexts. Instead, this tension fosters a specific aesthetic reflexivity that facilitates contestation, whether arising from the apparent selectivity of claims or their cultural embeddedness. In the multidimensional approach, this dimension does not stand on its own, as its democratic potential is buttressed by other dimensions, mainly the systemic reflexivity, which emphasizes a plurality of representative claims. In this sense, the aesthetic dimension is compatible with democratic representation as it offers an incentive for more reflexive representative relations.

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Jan Šima

Demokratski potencijal estetske reprezentacije: preispitivanje estetske analogije u konstruktivističkom zaokretu

Apstrakt

Tvrdnja da je politička reprezentacija analogna umetničkoj reprezentaciji, utoliko što stvaralački oblikuje političke identitete, česta je, a ipak nedovoljno istražena tvrdnja unutar konstruktivističkog zaokreta u proučavanju političke reprezentacije. Procena heurističkog potencijala ovog pristupa, kao i njegovih demokratskih kredencijala, zahteva pažljivije preispitivanje te estetske analogije. Oslanjajući se na Pitkinovu pojmovnu analizu, ovaj članak tretira analogiju kao koristan, ali selektivan heuristički instrument. Iako može osvetliti istaknute aspekte reprezentacije, ona može i prikriti druge. U konstruktivističkom pristupu estetska analogija ističe kreativnost reprezentacije. Međutim, takav naglasak riskira da zapostavi aktivnost predstavljenih, čime podriva demokratsku reprezentaciju. Razmatrajući upotrebu analogije u teorijama Franka Ankersmita i Majkla Sauarda, članak tvrdi da estetska analogija može otkriti demokratski potencijal estetske dimenzije reprezentacije kada je formulisana u okviru šireg i inkluzivnijeg okvira. Dok Ankersmitova jednostrana formulacija analogije naglašava kreativnost predstavnika nauštrb predstavljenih, Sauardov pristup zasnovan na iznošenju zahteva (*claim-making*) ograničava estetsku kreativnost kulturnim ograničenjima, sudom publike i sistemskim pluralizmom. Poslednji odeljak sugeriše da estetska dimenzija reprezentacije može biti spojiva sa demokratskom politikom kada se razume kao delovanje kroz napetost između njenih kreativnih elemenata i njenih kulturnih ograničenja, čime se izbegava kako nesputano nametanje, tako i puko ponavljanje već oblikovanih identiteta.

Ključne reči: politička reprezentacija, estetika, analogija, konstruktivizam, Ankersmit, Savard, refleksivnost