



Constructivism, Democracy and Symbolic Representation: A Formal/Stylistic Perspective

Giuseppe Ballacci

To cite this article: Giuseppe Ballacci (2022): Constructivism, Democracy and Symbolic Representation: A Formal/Stylistic Perspective, Representation, DOI: [10.1080/00344893.2022.2143414](https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2022.2143414)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2022.2143414>



Published online: 11 Nov 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Constructivism, Democracy and Symbolic Representation: A Formal/Stylistic Perspective

Giuseppe Ballacci 

Centre for Ethics, Politics and Society, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the normative dilemma raised by the constructivist turn in representation theory by focusing on a neglected aspect of such dilemma: under which conditions representation – taken in its existential and symbolic senses – can enhance democracy. By developing sustained readings of Laclau and Voegelin, it shows how stylistic/formal features such as a figurative and evocative language and a capacity to persuade both rationally and extra-rationally can be key elements for making representation democratic.

KEYWORDS

Constructivist turn; symbolic representation; democracy; Laclau; Voegelin

Introduction: The Normative Conundrum of Constructivist Representation

The aim of this paper is the following: to assess whether and how the stylistic or formal features of political representation, once we understand this in a constructivist sense, are relevant to its democratic status. This is a key question that the so-called ‘constructivist’ paradigm of representation (Disch, 2011, 2015; Disch et al., 2019; Kuyper, 2016; Näsström, 2015; Saward, 2010; etc.) has helped to bring to the fore, but that has so far not been the object of a detailed analysis.

In effect, the constructivist turn in political representation has amounted to a paradigm shift, not only at the level of conceptual innovation but also for having reframed the debate on the normative aspects of representation. This has occurred primarily as a consequence of one of its fundamental insights: the idea that representation doesn’t merely reflect a pre-given politically reality – namely, constituencies and groups sharing interests and beliefs – but essentially participates in the creation of such reality. This idea, in turn, has made it clear that to assess the democratic legitimacy of representation in terms of responsiveness (Pitkin, 1967) – that is, in terms of congruence between pre-given preferences of the represented and the acts of representatives – is more problematic than normally assumed.

Seen from this perspective, it seems that the constructivist turn has come, unexpectedly, to reiterate the basic tenet of the elitist school: that ‘the citizens cannot have meaningful preferences independently of the strategic conflict between elites’ (Brito Vieira, 2017a, p. 14) and that popular power remains dependent on the utterances and

representational paradigms of elites. Even if the constructivist turn has stressed that representation is a dynamic, two-way process, generating the identity not only of the represented but of the representatives as well (Saward, 2010), it has focused far more on the ‘entrepreneurial function’ of the latter than on the former (Castiglione & Pollak, 2019, p. 3). After all, representation’s depiction as a performative activity cannot but imply a stress on the creative role of representatives an emphasis that has to some extent sidelined the role of the represented thus making more difficult to assess the legitimacy of representation (Castiglione, 2012; Disch, 2015, p. 491; Näsström, 2015).

This problem can be clearly detected in the work of Frank Ankersmit, one of the theorists who has provided the most radically constructivist theory of political representation. It is Ankersmit, in effect, who has explicitly defended the analogy between the artist and the politician as representative, and the idea that political representation is an aesthetic rather than a mimetic activity that creates, rather than reproduces, a pre-existing and objective reality. For him, authentic political representation can only occur in and through an ‘aesthetic gap’ between that reality and the represented, and between the latter and their representatives; a gap that provides the representatives with the necessary autonomy to create (Ankersmit, 1996, pp. 43–45; 2002, p. 117, 198, etc.). Such a gap, however, also entails a problem; as noted by Näsström, Ankersmit’s ‘aesthetic model ... while it asserts that democracy dwells in the gap between representatives and represented, it indirectly associates democracy with the actions of representatives’ (2006, p. 322).

However, the problem posited by the creativity of political representation does not only concern the level of responsiveness between representatives and represented and the manner in which agency is distributed among them. It also regards the stylistic and formal features of the representations created by the representatives and whether these features contribute to making the public space more or less democratic. Political representations of a social reality indeed differ from each other not only in terms of content – of the idea of social reality they convey – but also in the forms or styles in which they do so. And this is relevant because, as I will argue, those styles and forms bear on the democratic quality of representation.

Nonetheless, this problem has been largely neglected by the literature, which instead has focused much more on questions of responsiveness between representatives and represented. In effect, it would be over-simplistic to reduce the constructivist turn to the recognition of representation as a constitutive and creative activity; an idea with a long history and clear precedents in the works of Hobbes, Burke, Schmitt, Lefort, and Bourdieu among others. The constructivist turn has also ushered in the development of fine-grained conceptual tools for understanding more deeply the multidimensional aspects of the representative process. In particular, by foregrounding representative claims it has clarified why we need to understand representation not only as a status conferred by institutionally-sanctioned processes, but as an event, produced performatively in a variety of contexts through the creation of political affinity at different levels: not only ideological, but also aesthetic and affective (Saward, 2010, pp. 42–43; 2020, Ch. 4; Urbinati, 2006, Ch. 1). So we can say that the constructivist turn has contributed, on the one hand, to make sense of representation’s ubiquity in contemporary politics and, on the other, to rediscover the key role of symbolic representation, which the standard model of representation has always tended to obscure.

The constructivist turn has, in short, drawn attention to two kinds of problems. First, it has raised questions about the representative process itself, on the way in which it

creates political identities. Second, it has highlighted problems of authorisation and accountability, especially with regards to non-electoral forms of representation. These two problems are of course interrelated. Nonetheless it may be useful to keep them conceptually separated, since they call for different kinds of analysis: a more interpretative attention to representation's multidimensional meaning in the former case; and a closer focus on its institutional and systemic dimensions in the latter.¹

This paper will focus on the former aspect by investigating some of the conditions under which symbolic representation can enhance democracy. For all the emphasis the constructivist turn has placed on the symbolic dimension of representation, its meaning and implications for democracy is a question that has eluded sustained analysis so far. Indeed, the normative debate the constructivist turn has spurred, even when dealing with symbolic representation, has remained largely constrained within the perspective of representation as mandate – or *Vertretung* (cf. Geenens, 2019, pp. 109–110; Sintomer, 2013). My interest in this paper will instead be focussed on the normative dimension of symbolic representation – that is, representation as 'standing for', or in German, *Darstellung* – from the point of view of the representations of the ideal or essence of the political community; what German state-theory and thinkers such as Carl Schmitt referred to as *Repräsentation*. Thus, in this sense, representation refers to the activity of making present an elusive, intangible idea, or model, by the mediation of its public representation, or figuration (cf. Hofmann, 2007, pp. 109–112; Mulieri, 2016, p. 135).²

I will not engage with the work of Schmitt, however. Instead of this, I propose a parallel reading of Ernesto Laclau and Eric Voegelin, two theorists who, despite their profound political and perhaps even more philosophical differences, share key elements in their understandings of representation: first of all, the idea of representation as a constitutive activity. Indeed, both Laclau and Voegelin explore the role the representations of the general principles of a society displayed in the public arena in shaping the way such a society and its members understand themselves. Moreover, both believe that these representations should maintain an open and unfinished character with regards to the reality they claim to represent, since such a reality is conceived as ultimately transcendent and impossible to fully grasp. Finally, both argue that this demands the recognition of the symbolic and revelatory character of the language of these representations, so as of its capacity to persuade both rationally and extra-rationally. What Laclau and Voegelin show therefore is that, *pace* Pitkin (1967, pp. 100–101), under certain conditions we could define stylistic or formal – as they refer to *how* representation represents reality –, existential and symbolic representation can be a resource for democracy because it participates in moulding society self-understanding in a way that respect pluralism as it keeps the democratic play of signification open. In the final part of the paper, however, I qualify my argument claiming that, despite this, these theories of representation also have some significant democratic shortcomings and need to be supplemented by additional normative resources, particularly those informed by systemic and institutional concerns and by an understanding of representation as *Vertretung*.

A Brief Overview of the Current Literature and What Is Missing

Responses to the normative conundrum raised by the constructivist turn bend more toward the institutional and systemic aspect of representation. A significant number of

works in effect have argued that the democratic legitimacy of representation should be assessed focusing on the capacity (or lack thereof) of the representative system as a whole to foster reflexivity (Disch, 2011, 2012, 2015), deliberation (Kuyper, 2016), and non-electoral mechanisms of authorisation and accountability beyond the elections (Montanaro, 2012; Näsström, 2015) in a context of structural inequality.

Others have sought responses instead through detailed analyses of the very process of representation. Fossen (2019), for instance, attempts to demonstrate that is not logically inconsistent positioning the represented as both normatively prior to and politically constituted by representation and to show, therefore, that responsiveness can still serve as a normative standard. Mulieri (2019) proposes to differentiate between a 'moderate' constructivism – that combines the ideas of representation as a constitutive activity and as mandate – and a 'radical' one – that makes representation as mandate almost meaningless by radicalising the constructivist dimension of representation. And the analysis of the same Saward, the leading theorist of the constructivist turn, could be included in this group. Beyond stressing the importance of the conditions under which the judgment of the constituencies is expressed, it can be argued that his sophisticated theorisation of the different aspects of representation – for instance, the idea of the 'shape-shifting' character of representatives, or the categories he has developed with regard to representative claims ('maker', 'subject', 'object', 'referent', and 'audience') – can be employed as a 'critical architecture' (Disch, 2015, p. 488) to develop context-specific assessments of its legitimacy (Saward, 2010, 2016, 2020, Ch. 7).

As this brief review shows the constructivist turn has generated a variety of normative responses. However, even if the symbolic dimension of representation is amply recognised by this literature, the meaning and implications for democracy are rarely explored in depth. Key theorists of this turn, such as Saward, Disch, and Brito-Vieira, criticise Pitkin for her idea that symbolic representation should be rejected as either politically irrelevant or undemocratic because it is essentially passive in character and prone to be misused. They contend that Pitkin did not grasp that 'the active making of symbols or images of what is to be represented' and its reception are central aspects of political representation and not inherently undemocratic (Saward, 2010, pp. 14–15; cf. Brito Vieira, 2017b, p. 44; Disch, 2011, pp. 107–108). However, they do not investigate in depth under which conditions symbolic representation can contribute to democracy and what precisely makes symbolic representation democratic.

These are the kinds of questions this paper will deal with. It will do so by engaging in a parallel reading of Laclau and Voegelin that shows how they propose theories that reveal the normative force of stylistic and formal dimensions of symbolic representation, understood through a constructivist framework. As mentioned above Laclau and Voegelin deals with representation in a broader sense of that employed by most contemporary scholars. They talk about those representations that refer to an idea of the good society, or of the universals that constitute it; representations that they understand as constitutive of the way in which society understands itself and whose meaning cannot be restrained to its institutional aspect. Miguel Vatter has argued that Voegelin and Laclau's theories of representation can be understood as a reaction to one of Schmitt's central concerns: the problem of 'political unity and its presence of representation', which he understood in the framework of a political theology (Schmitt cited in Vatter, 2020, p. 22). However, if Schmitt's response to such a problem consists in magnifying

the figure of the sovereign representative who stands for the unity of the community in detriment of the consent of the represented, Voegelin, first, and then, Laclau, would envision ‘forms of political representation that unify a people without or beyond sovereignty’ (Vatter, 2020, p. 2). For both Voegelin and Laclau, political representation is, as it was for Schmitt, more *Repräsentation* and *Darstellung* than *Vertretung*. But in Voegelin, sovereignty is tempered through a form of ‘representation that no longer places the human sovereign at its apex, but instead “opens” society to the idea of transcendent truth’; and in Laclau, through a theory of populism as an ongoing struggle for the representation of the people that aspires to hegemonic solutions, but which can only be temporary and partial (Vatter, 2020, p. 6). Thus, Vatter’s conclusion is that Voegelin and Laclau succeed in overcoming Schmitt in a democratic direction.

However, of greater interest to Vatter is the theological-political framework of such a question. This paper, instead, focuses on the theories of representation of both Voegelin and Laclau in order to show how the democratic potential of such theories is rooted in the specific ways they understand the symbolic dimension of representation. More specifically, I will show how Voegelin and Laclau share an idea of the representation of the idea of the ‘good society’; a representation that, thanks to its symbolic character, can respect the transcendent character of that idea, and is also able to persuade rationally and extra-rationally at the same time. Reading together Voegelin and Laclau thus allow us to focus on questions the constructivist turn has brought to the fore but still not investigated in depth: the meanings of representation as *Darstellung* and *Repräsentation* and the relevance of the formal/stylistic aspects of these kinds of representation.

Before moving to Voegelin and Laclau’s theories of representation, a brief reference to Claude Lefort could be useful to the extent that he is one of those who have formulated in the clearest way the necessary link between democracy, symbolic representation, and openness to transcendence. In his famous account of the origins of modern democracy, Lefort came to propose two key principles for this regime: first, that in democracy the locus of power should remain empty, in the sense of not being permanently filled by any embodiment of the sovereign; and second, that an irreducible gap should be maintained between the ‘symbolic’ (the abstract principles of democracy) and the ‘real’ (social reality in its concrete and ultimately ungraspable diversity). That is, according to Lefort (1986, 1988), the basic indeterminacy of the ultimate meaning of democracy must be preserved in order to preserve democracy itself.

Two aspects of this account are particularly relevant here. First, we should note Lefort’s insistence that democratic legitimacy is mainly determined at the symbolic level: this is the realm of what he calls ‘the political’, where society comes to terms with itself, by recognising itself after particular (self-)representations. Second, for Lefort democracy cannot subsist without a reference to something transcending itself, something from which its existence as a bounded whole can be justified.

Laclau’s Theory of Representation

I will consider first Laclau’s theory of representation, relying particularly on Maeve Cooke’s (2006) reading of his notion of the universal in *Re-presenting the Good Society*. Her reading in effect highlights an aspect of Laclau’s theory that is central to my argument. Cooke’s book is an attempt to answer to the question of how to develop

ideas of good society that can claim a context-transcending validity without repeating epistemological and political forms of authoritarianism. The response for her is that ‘we should conceive of the good society as re-presented in particular representations that are constitutively inadequate to it’. These representations should be taken as ‘regulative ideas’: benchmarks for assessing the justice of society and ideals capable of mobilising the people (Cooke, 2006, p. 6).

To such an end Cooke turns to Laclau’s conception of the universal, which she considers capable of striking a balance between the radical contextualism à la Rorty and the potentially authoritarian universalism of the likes of Habermas and Honneth. A number of key features in Laclau’s idea of the universal make it the best available model for Cooke’s theory of regulative ideas. For Laclau the universal denotes the transcendent object to which empty signifiers such as justice, democracy, freedom, and the fullness of the community refer. The universal manifests itself through specific representations, which are constitutively inadequate to the task of representing it. Far from constituting a limitation, however, this intrinsic inadequacy is precisely what prevents these representations from becoming authoritarian, insofar as it keeps the democratic play of signification open (Cooke, 2006, p. 86).

What Cooke underscores in Laclau’s notion of the universal is its being at same time necessary and impossible. It is necessary for two reasons: first, because without the attribution of self-sufficiency and self-transparency to the representation of those empty signifiers of universality it would be impossible to produce any social and political meaning at all; second, because it is this attribution of universality that provides the force necessary to mobilise and keep united a political subject. In Laclau’s view the universal is impossible because, even though it cannot subsist if not under the form of particular representations, it is ultimately conceptually ungraspable. The universal cannot ever be really universal, because its representations will always be ‘opaque’ and ‘impure’ (Laclau, 1996a, p. 98), representations in which a particularity is assumed to stand for a universality that is radically incommensurable with it and which can only provide a partial version of this universality (Laclau, 1996a, p. 43; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 11). The impossible and necessary characters of the universal are both, it follows, related to the constitutive function of representation. Without a particular representation, the universal and thus society couldn’t exist (Laclau, 2000, p. 56).

In this sense therefore Laclau’s account of representation is constructivist: because for him social and political reality couldn’t exist without a process of articulation that inscribes a set of undefined interests and beliefs in a more general political sphere by representing them in a more definite, even if temporary, form (e.g., Laclau, 1996a, pp. 97–100, 2005, pp. 157–64). It is in this process of transformation of the particular into the universal that political subjectivities are created and that social indeterminacy is (partially) recomposed. This is what makes the universal necessary. But, equally necessarily, this process of articulation remains incomplete because universality cannot be fully represented. We can explain this impossibility in the following way. Articulation is the practice of creating the identities of the different elements of a discourse, by establishing a number of symbolically mediated differences among them. Articulating the identity of one element in terms of a universal element, that is in terms of a discursive totality, cannot but produce a polysemy and an infinite expansion of signification, precisely because all discursive totalities are themselves overdetermined and symbolic in character,

lacking as they do what Derrida calls a fixed centre or origin (Laclau, 2005, p. 13; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 98, 108–111).

Cooke emphasises the fact that, according to Laclau, representations of the good society and its constitutive universals have an inescapably open character, remaining incomplete. Beyond that, Cooke highlights another element of Laclau's representations of the universal, which contribute to this openness, and which stems from a proximity with Sorel's conception of revolutionary myths: the imaginative, fictive nature of such representations. In order to successfully mobilise and keep together the elements of a chain of equivalences, these representations must convey a perception of universality; they must appear self-sufficient and self-transparent, disguising their structural inadequacy (Cooke, 2006, pp. 85–87, 116). This operation of concealment is for Laclau a form of ideological closure, since it grants to particular representations of the universal a transcendent status they cannot have. As a form of ideological closure, concealment is potentially dangerous, removing representations from criticism. For Cooke, however, this problem can be circumvented by realising that what really counts is less the ontological status of these representations (whether or not they are fictitious), and rather their persuasive power, their capacity to 'arouse feelings of attraction', on the one hand, and 'convince us rationally of their merits' and 'verisimilitude', on the other (Cooke, 2006, pp. 119–120).

This capacity for persuasion borne by representations of the good society rests upon another feature of such representations: a capacity to disclose what they claim to represent. These representations should have a distinct capacity to reveal the transcendent ethical object, to produce something like an aesthetic and religious epiphany (Cooke, 2006, p. 122). This persuasive and revelatory capacity in turn is strictly related to the tropological dimension of language, a topic which Cooke doesn't mention but that is key for Laclau (and on which I will come back shortly). If society is a system of symbolically mediated differences elusive of meta-discursive totality, then rhetoric belongs to society's very ontological structure, insofar as it is only through tropological processes of meaning's displacement that the different elements of society can acquire their (temporary) meaning and society, similarly, its objective reality (Laclau, 2005, p. 12, 19, 71–72, 2014, pp. 53–78).

Reading Laclau through Cooke allows us to frame representations of the good society as regulative ideas that can accomplish their normative, constitutive function in a non-authoritarian way, essentially thanks to their formal and stylistic features. These features can be understood as rhetorical in a double sense, whereby rhetoric is both a theory of persuasion and a theory of *tropoi*. The latter dimension accounts for the disclosive capacity of Laclau's representations of the universal, the 'affectively imbued, rationally motivating power' that allows them to question the prevailing *Sittlichkeit* (Cooke, 2006, p. 115). The former dimension, the capacity to persuade, is what keeps those representations open to intersubjective assessment.

Voegelin's Theory of Representation

In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin gives representation a fundamental role. Representation, as he writes, constitutes 'the central problem of a theory of politics' to the extent that it is what allows a society to understand itself, its place in history and

thereby to gain existence as a subject capable of action (Voegelin, 1952, p. 1). Representation so understood, what Voegelin labels ‘existential representation’, should be differentiated from its institutional meaning, which he terms ‘elemental representation’. The former kind of representation operates mainly at the symbolic level and is considered by Voegelin more important than the latter. Only when a society has clarified its founding idea, after all, can it become a political subject and so be taken as authentically representative of itself (Voegelin, 1952, pp. 48–51).³

Existential representation is linked to what Voegelin calls ‘articulation’: the process through which ‘human beings form themselves into a society for action’ (Voegelin, 1952, p. 3). Such process is twofold: it consists, first, in identifying a leader who is taken by the rest of society as its representative, capable of acting in society’s name and embodying its founding ideas; second, in the process through which society can become representative of itself, transparent to itself, by making each of its members a representable and representative unit. Articulation thus unfolds in two directions: vertical and horizontal. For Voegelin, however, the vertical dimension takes priority over the horizontal one because ‘in order to come into existence, a society must articulate itself by producing a representative that will act for it’ (Voegelin, 1952, p. 41). In this respect, thus, Voegelin provides a Hobbesian understanding of representation that takes the principle of representation upside down, since it makes the ruler the real constituent power and the sovereign people the constituted one (cf. Vatter, 2020, p. 175).

There is a further, crucial dimension of representation for Voegelin, which concerns the way society represents its understanding of universal truth and of itself as a representative of such truth. Truth is here understood as a reality that is experienced as ultimately transcendent and open-ended, a reality that is extra-mundane and thus extra-political but that exercises an orienting function: it is the world-transcendent *summum bonum*, the origin and ground of existence. This understanding of truth results from recognising oneself as part of a broader, encompassing reality, which the individual can only perceive from within and thus partially (Voegelin, 1990b, p. 119, 2000, p. 6, 2002, p. 34, 345, 361). The representation of this transcendent truth can for Voegelin only be symbolic: it is only through symbols that an evanescent reality can be evoked and kept accessible. If elemental representation cannot really exist without existential representation, the latter in turn depends on this representation of truth: that is, representation can only be complete if what political leaders do on behalf of society is directed toward the transcendent *summum bonum*. Representing truth in a way that deny the transcendent and open character of reality constitutes for Voegelin the most serious threat: the hidden cause of the spiritual decadence of humanity and the advent of totalitarianism. This is what he famously accuses modern ideologies of doing: as new forms of Gnosticism they immanentize the transcendent pole of reality thus transforming the finite pole into a closed realm to be fully mastered (e.g., Voegelin, 1952, Ch. 4, 1990b, pp. 117–118, 2000, p. 8).

The experience of participating in the original tension between a finite pole and a transcendent one is described by Voegelin as at the same time an effort to understand one’s own place in the cosmos and to find a language capable of clarifying and evoking the striving for transcendence. At stake is an ‘exegetic’ and ‘revelatory’ language that ‘does not merely refer to reality but is reality emerging as the luminous “word”’ (Voegelin, 1990a, pp. 184–185, 231). According to Voegelin this experience has been expressed in history in a variety of different symbolizations: myths, prophecies, artistic

works, philosophies, etc. Crucially, however, he argues that behind such variety lies a substantial communality: the structure of the search itself, that is, the tension toward the ground (Voegelin, 1990b, p. 115, 1957, p. 101, 2002, p. 346). What this insight confirms is the fundamental attribute of all these symbolizations: their open character regarding the reality they represent. Indeed, even if according to Voegelin the symbolizations of transcendent reality have evolved throughout history – becoming more and more ‘differentiated’ and rational –, he maintains that, in the end, ‘our knowledge of order remains primarily mythical’, because only under a mythological form can the mystery of reality be represented (Voegelin, 2002, p. 349, cf. 1990a, p. 175, 1957).

In hinting at important affinities between Laclau and Voegelin, let me touch finally upon the question of persuasion. In Voegelin’s view, the process of articulation can be considered truly fulfilled only when it has spread throughout the entire citizen-body. Although this suggests an extreme limit-case, it is particularly relevant for democracy. It is in democratic regimes that society can become fully representative of itself by making each of its members, through persuasion, representative of its founding principle (Voegelin, 1952, p. 75). As Voegelin (1952) writes: ‘this limit is reached with the masterful, dialectical concentration of Lincoln’s “government of the people, by the people, for the people”’ (p. 40). Persuasion is essential to this process of articulation: only if the leader is perceived as genuinely representative of society and only if all the members of society are persuaded of its founding principle can representation be said to be complete.

Voegelin and Laclau, as these remarks indicate, share key points in their respective understandings of the representations of society’s founding principles. Even if they provide different accounts of the transcendent foundation of society, based on different ontologies, they both underscore its inherently open and elusive character and the fact that it cannot be fully represented. Second, they share the idea that the representations of this transcendent reality are constitutive of society in the sense that, in providing it with its self-understanding, they transform society into a subject capable of acting. Third, they both posit an understanding of these representations as essentially symbolic, in that they evoke, rather than perfectly describe, the reality they represent. Fourth, and finally, both thinkers reach the conclusion that this feature, rather than a limitation, constitutes the greatest merit of these representations, insofar as this is what keeps the play of interpretations open.

We can conclude therefore that for both Laclau and Voegelin it is because of formal and stylistic features, above all, that representation can be said to fulfil Lefort’s criteria of democracy. The stories that members of a given society tell about it, about the foundational principles that form any society, can be very different but – to the extent that there are told in an evocative, figurative manner – they avoid closing the space of interpretation permanently.

Laclau and Voegelin’s Theories of Representation: What Is Missing

According to the argument developed so far, Laclau and Voegelin’s theories of representation provide an original answer to the problem raised by constructivist accounts of representation. Nevertheless they also suffer from problems that can severely limit this answer’s democratic potential. Some of these problems are specific to each thinker, while some are common to both.

Let's start with Laclau. Despite her general endorsement of Laclau's theory, Cooke offers an important criticism, one that has been raised more than once against Laclau. According to Cooke, to the extent that Laclau wants to keep the transcendent object completely empty his theory cannot avoid a certain degree of decisionism because it doesn't provide any criteria to choose between different representations of the good society (Cooke, 2006; cf. Arato, 2013; Kitus, 2020). The emptiness of the transcendent ethical object, as we have seen, operates as a warrant so that any of its representations could claim an absolute privileged status. Nonetheless, to postulate an absolute emptiness implies arbitrariness and thus raises the threat of decisionism. In this respect, it is safe to argue that Laclau's account of representation assumes at some points a clear top-down form, in which constructivism is taken in its 'radical' version so that the identities of the represented are made almost completely dependent on the work of the representatives (e.g., Laclau, 2005, p. 158).

To this manner of criticism, Laclau himself (alongside sympathetic readers) has responded by pointing out that the prevailing horizon of options available for establishing the contents and forms of representation is limited by the prevailing norms that a particular community find acceptable in a particular moment (Laclau, 2000, p. 82, 2004, 2005, pp. 92–93). As Thomassen (2019) puts it, representation is always a 're-articulation of already existing meanings', rather than an act of 'out of the blue' (p. 336). That is, the plasticity of representation is inevitably limited since it operates on a terrain of sedimented meanings; though representation always modifies and rearranges these meanings, it nevertheless depends on them. Moreover, the process of representation does not amount to a one-way relationship: representative claims, especially if they assume those stylistic/formal features identified earlier, can always be contested. They become effective only once they are accepted by their constituencies (Thomassen, 2019, pp. 337–338). This constitutes Laclau's main line of defence against the claim of decisionism; a defence that, once again, raises the question of persuasion, to which I will return shortly.

Voegelin's theory of representation suffers from even more significant drawbacks from a democratic point of view. The main problem, which was already the object of criticism by Hans Kelsen (one of Voegelin's doctoral supervisors),⁴ is that his is the attempt to formulate a general theory of political representation, not one specifically concerned with the question of democratic legitimacy.⁵ In effect, the constitutional constraints and procedures associated with liberal-democratic representation – what Voegelin dismissively refers to as 'elemental representation' – assume a secondary role with respect to the other two, more substantive forms of representation: existential representation and the representation of truth (Voegelin, 1952, p. 49). There is also a further problem, which is rooted in a general feat of Voegelin's philosophy: the centrality he attributes to individual consciousness in explaining the experience of transcendence (cf., McGurie, 2011). In Voegelin's account the process of moving from elemental to existential representation and then to the representation of truth depends, in the first place, on the skills of particularly gifted and knowledgeable individuals, first of all (Platonic) philosophers and (Hebrew and Christian) prophets. The experience of belonging to a transcendent reality is primarily an individual experience, lived at the level of the psyche, before being translated to society at large (Voegelin, 2002, p. 34, 352, 1990b, p. 125). And for society to accept the content of this experience, it is crucial for the person who has lived it to be recognised as particularly 'authoritative' (Voegelin, 1987, p. 40).

There is, therefore, a clear elitist and epistocratic overtone in Voegelin's vertical account of representation.

In this respect, Laclau and Voegelin's theories of representation display similarities: they both prioritise the integrative functions of representation (*Repräsentation*), over expressions of diversity, and they both consider that the constitutive role of representation goes beyond its framing in a democratic regime; finally, they both consider that such function depends more on the public representation (*Darstellung*) of a superior reality, than on the creation of institutions to make the plurality of interests and beliefs in society coexist (cf., Hofmann, 2007, p. 12). In Voegelin this can be seen in the way he subordinates elemental representation – that is, electoral representation, in the context of democracy – to existential representation and representation of truth (cf. Vatter, 2020, p. 158). In Laclau, this is borne out above all in his identification of populism as the archetypal form of representation and the only authentic political logic. This has exposed Laclau to the objection of reducing democratic politics to a 'consent-based strategy for gaining power' where the role of social, procedural, or institutional limitations become irrelevant (Urbinati, 2019, p. 34), or more drastically, of supporting a proto-totalitarian idea of the people-as-one (e.g., Arato, 2013; Vergara, 2020). So, despite the arguments for interpretive openness I have laid out here, this suggests that their theories need to be complemented in a liberal-democratic direction.

This is no easy task, however. Clearly, symbolic and existential theories of representation will struggle to explain how representation could actively consider the heterogeneous wills of the represented. In the case of Laclau and Voegelin, the problem is twofold. On the one hand, there is what troubled Pitkin: the idea that symbolic and existential of representation is especially suitable for totalitarian regimes because, relying on essentially extra-rational forms of identification, it cannot provide a deliberative and non-manipulatory engagement between represented and representatives (Pitkin, 1967, p. 111). As Brito Vieira underlines (in parsing Pitkin's view on this topic), 'symbols ... hold an arbitrary, purely conventional, connection to their referents' and can make 'us so affectively invested in the identity it produces that we can no longer exercise control' (2017b, p. 46). On the other hand, we have the difficulty that it is precisely the open and thus democratic character of these forms of representation that leaves open the door to decisionism. Representations formulated in a strongly symbolic, evocative language, indeed, can only provide general orientations that need to be specified according to situational circumstances (Göhler, 2014, p. 25). If this openness generates new possibilities of resignification, it also implies more discretionary power especially for those who take binding decisions for the community: the political elites. This can clearly be seen in Laclau's theory of populism, in which the emptiness of the signifiers is not only an essential condition for opening up the democratic game (Laclau, 2005, p. 167) but also the root cause of a troubling decisionism. If the emptiness of the signifiers is what allows a plurality of elements to identify with a populist subject, the only way to reduce such plurality, when decisions are to be made, is through a decisionist act of naming by the leader (cf., Arditi, 2010; Thomassen, 2019). To be sure, and as previously mentioned, emptiness for Laclau is never a complete emptiness and, as a consequence, decisionism is always limited. However, such emptiness should still be significant enough to guarantee the possibility that the highest number of instances could identify around a signifier and create a subject as extensive as 'the people'.⁶

Persuasion in Laclau, Voegelin and Contemporary Theories of Representation

These considerations bring us back to the question of persuasion. The power to decide on a particular interpretation of the representation of the good society and implement it in concrete decisions, belongs to the representatives. But to be effective their interpretations must be recognised and accepted by constituencies. This means that those who advance representative claims must take into consideration the rhetorical situation in which they propose them. As we have seen, Cooke amends Laclau's theory of the universal by adding the requirement that regulative ideas should be able to persuade not only at the extra-rational level, but also through rational arguments based on the verisimilar. That is, she understands these regulative ideas as rhetorical in nature, in the sense of rhetoric both as an argumentative art of persuasion, in the tradition of Aristotle and Chaim Perelman (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1988), and as a theory of *tropoi* and a form of identification through symbolic action, in the sense of Burke (1969). If in recent years a number of political theorists have recovered the former perspective, while being attentive to the latter,⁷ the poststructuralist position of Laclau clearly prioritises the latter. Notably, as Cooke (2006, p. 177) points out, Laclau and Mouffe once showed an interest toward what they called 'non-foundationalist forms of argumentation' in which persuasion is based on the verisimilar and on Aristotelian *phronesis* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, pp. 101–102). This is however a path they have not followed further. Laclau, in particular, has deepened his engagement with rhetoric, but mostly to analyse, from a poststructuralist perspective, the tropological nature of articulatory practices in society and the capacity through discourse to promote identification (rather than persuasion) (Laclau, 2005, 2014).

In the case of Voegelin, we have already seen how his theory of representation brings the role of persuasion to the fore. Persuasion is what moderates the vertical character of such theory, since for him persuasion is necessary to make a society fully articulated by spreading its mode of self-representation throughout the citizenship. Furthermore, it is clear, given Voegelin's comments elsewhere (e.g., Voegelin, 1957, pp. 29–30), that for him persuasion should be both rational and extra-rational.

The question of persuasion is one that shows up insistently also in the current literature on representation, as a consequence of its emphasis on what Pitkin called representation's substantive nature, that is, on its judgmental nature. The same Pitkin (1967), in effect, proposed to distinguish 'manipulation' from 'leadership' (p. 233). The distinction is tenuous and underdeveloped, but what she argues is that the latter is compatible with democratic representation, while the former assuredly not. Leadership is demonstrated by a representative who decides based on her judgment in new situations and on questions about which the represented may not have formed an opinion: this representative leads her represented, but does so under the condition of 'potential responsiveness', that is, always assuming their freedom to judge and act. Manipulation, on the contrary, occurs when the represented are treated as a passive subject, whose capacity to judge is undermined rather than encouraged (Pitkin, 1967, p. 233). Mansbridge (2003) likewise proposes a distinction between 'education' and 'manipulation' (a distinction especially relevant in the case of what she calls 'anticipatory' representation), which she understands in terms of standard deliberative theories of democracy, that is, according to

some benchmarks provided by a communicative ideal. If education requires an argumentative form of communication and aims at the interests of the represented, manipulation does not (Mansbridge, 2003, p. 519). In Saward, finally, the notion of persuasion is similarly significant (even if left unexplored), since for him the ultimate standard to assess the democratic legitimacy of a representative claim is the perception the relevant constituency has of it (2010, p. 147).

Disch, on the other hand, has expressed doubts on the relevance and theoretical feasibility of differentiating between a positive form of persuasion and manipulation, especially when they are rooted (as in the case of Mansbridge) on an idealistic model of communication such as that of many deliberative theories of democracy. Such attempts are problematic, she argues, first, because intertwinements of strategic and informative considerations are intrinsic to political discourse and, second, because they seem to overlook the most basic insight of the constructivist turn by implying that respecting the autonomy of the represented means respecting some pre-given, objective interests they have prior to representation (Disch, 2011, pp. 105–111; 2021, pp. 91–94).

Disch thus invites us to look at a different idea of deliberation: the one we get from the tradition of rhetoric, specifically of Aristotelian rhetoric. In this tradition the goal of influencing an audience is not taken as incompatible with that of respecting its capacity to judge. Furthermore, this idea of deliberation doesn't seem incompatible with a constructivist understanding of representation (2011, p. 110). Indeed, rhetorical persuasion and representation (understood in constructivist terms) share a similar structure (see Ballacci, 2019). As the former is a process that by 'drawing upon and reorganising [an audience's] existing patterns of thought and emotion' always moves between what an audience already believes and the beliefs it is capable of moulding anew through judgment (Garsten, 2006, p. 9); the latter is an activity that neither merely mirrors pre-existing beliefs nor creates them completely anew, since it can only re-articulate existing meanings. According to this Aristotelian understanding of rhetoric, respecting the autonomy of the audience implies a kind of communicative interaction that, taking in consideration the specific context, attempts to modify the beliefs of the audience by involving its judgment (which is precisely the same criteria invoked by Pitkin for her distinction between manipulation and leadership).

As Disch observes, however, this sort of constraints are only internal to the art of rhetoric. To find a more solid normative point, she proposes to move the focus from the dyadic interaction between represented and representatives to 'the systemic conditions for public-opinion and judgment formation' (2021, p. 105). For her, the democratic legitimacy of representation should be assessed at this level, by interrogating whether the system promotes, or not, what she calls 'reflexivity', that is the capacity to 'mobilise both express and implicit objections from the represented' (2011, p. 111).⁸

However, as I pointed out in the introduction, a systemic-institutional approach is insufficient to make sense of all those aspects of representation that the constructivist turn has contributed to recover, *in primis* its symbolic, affective dimensions and the way it involves judgment. This sort of approach should be complemented by a more interpretative and focused one, to explore in detail the process of representation.

Rhetoric cannot produce absolute, clear-cut standards (rhetoric, in effect, is an art that resists systematization). But this doesn't imply that it cannot bear on a normative analysis. Establishing how different representation persuades – for instance, whether more through emotional appeals, than arguments based on the verisimilar – is an operation

that cannot easily yield conclusive results. But it can orient judgment and provides important insights on how political cleavages and identities are shaped and different issues politicised. That is, a rhetorical analysis can help to navigate the entanglements between the rational and the extra-rational, strategic and communicative reasons, the asymmetries between speaker and audience, all features which are intrinsic to politics in general and, particularly, of representative politics.⁹

In other words, if a rhetorical perspective can bear on a normative analysis is more in the indirect, tentative way suggested by Saward. That is, by providing interpretative instruments to develop context-specific analyses that assess representation and its legitimacy from within, that is, from what he calls a ‘critical citizen standpoint’ (Saward, 2020, p. 175). The same analysis of Laclau and Voegelin’s theories of symbolic representation developed in this paper can be seen as contributing to a normative debate on representation in this way.

Now, this same analysis has also showed that a further relevant aspect of symbolic representation is the way in which persuasion occurs; a question however which, for reasons of space, I should leave open. My aim in this section has been rather to reiterate this point and offer some arguments to explain why the question of persuasion is, in general, relevant to a normative approach to representation.

Concluding Remarks

Normative-oriented analyses of representation should include an assessment of its stylistic and formal dimension because, if political representation is a constitutive activity, then, the way in which it represents reality will inevitably have political consequences. What I have proposed here is only one example of this kind of analysis. Many other stylistic and formal features should be taken in consideration. Furthermore, other aspects should be included in this rhetorical analysis of representation, especially, with regards to persuasion.

This paper has focused on Laclau and Voegelin’s analysis of the conditions under which existential and symbolic representations can contribute to make society’s self-representations coexist and interact – an essential feature of democratic legitimacy, as Lefort argued. These conditions concern the way in which the ultimate grounds of society are represented and how these representations are spread throughout the citizenship. At the same time, Laclau and Voegelin also corroborate some of the reasons liberals have to be sceptical about symbolic and existential representation; namely, the fact that these kinds of representation, precisely because of some of those features we have explored here, could be used in anti-pluralist, authoritarian or even totalitarian ways.

In effect, this kind of stylistic/formal approach cannot bring conclusive results and needs to be supplemented by other perspectives on representation, including systemic and institutional/systemic analyses such as those reviewed before. But each of these approaches can be considered insufficient in itself, because representation is not only a multidimensional and ‘liminal’ concept (Saward, 2019), but also one without which politics could hardly be imagined. In this respect what we need are both approaches that focus on the very process of representation and take into consideration representation’s substantive and quintessentially judgmental nature, and approaches that are institutional and systemic, such that we can discover the conditions under which judgment – on the part of the represented – can be expressed and transmitted to representatives. This

should be done however while bearing in mind that, owing to its complexity, the assessment of representation democratic legitimacy cannot but be, in the words of Pitkin (2004), ‘a matter of degree, an idea or ideal realised more or less well in various circumstances, conditions, and institutional arrangements’ (p. 337).

Notes

1. In this respect, Castiglione and Pollak (2019) notice that the constructivist turn has raised questions related to ‘whether representation can be democratic in character even when considered independently of the institutional role it plays within representative democracy’ (p. 4).
2. The canonical work on representation and its semantic variety is Hasso Hofmann’s *Repräsentation: Studien zur Wort – und Begriffsgeschichte von der Antike bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* published in 1974. The book has been translated in Italian, and partially in French, but not in English. In his reconstruction of the development of the meaning of representation as symbolic figuration – *Darstellung* – from the theological to the philosophical realms, Hofmann identifies the dialectical relationship this form of representation entails as a form of mediation between part and totality, presence and absence, unity and multiplicity, which as we will see is key in both Laclau and Voegelin’s views of political representation (Hofmann, 2007, p. 112). On the different meanings of representation as *Repräsentation*, *Darstellung*, and *Vertretung*, see also Sintomer (2013) and Mulieri (2016), who also provide detailed accounts of Hofmann’s work and its relevance for contemporary debates.
3. Representation, Voegelin (1952) writes, must represent what the 16th century politician and jurist John Fortescue called the ‘the immanent Logos of society’, its ‘mystical substance’, or what the late nineteenth–early twentieth century jurist and sociologist Maurice Hauriou refers to as its ‘*idée directrice*.’ Citing Hauriou, Voegelin adds: ‘the first task of the ruling power is the creation of a politically unified nation by transforming the pre-existent, unorganized manifold into a body organized for action’ (pp. 44, 48).
4. Some years after the publication of Voegelin’s *New Science of Politics* Kelsen wrote a very long and negative review of this book, which however he eventually decided not to publish. The book has been published posthumously (Kelsen, 2004).
5. As one of the reviewers rightly notes, the same argument could be made also about Ernesto Laclau, because, similarly to Voegelin, his is a general theory of representation, not one restricted to democracy.
6. The question of decisionism in Laclau, however, is more complex, since it is also connected to the Derridean notion of undecidability (one of the sources he uses to explain the impossibility in any discursive articulation to implement a final closure). Briefly, according to Laclau, once we accept the notion that the social is a realm characterised by an ultimate undecidability, it becomes clear that a certain degree of decisionism and a hegemonic kind of politics are unavoidable (e.g. Laclau, 1996b; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. xi, 111–112). For an interesting criticism of this argument see Norval (2004).
7. For an overview, see Garsten (2011).
8. To sustain her argument, Disch cites some empirical research that demonstrates, among other things, that the quality of judgment expressed by the constituencies increases with the level of competition among different political frames (Disch, 2021, pp. 101–102).
9. Indeed, these are the kind of questions on which the recent ‘rhetorical revival’ in political theory has produced the most interesting analyses (e.g., Abizadeh, 2007; Chambers, 2009; Garsten, 2006, 2011; Goodman, 2021; Yack, 2006).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Research funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (DL 57/2016/CRP).

Notes on Contributor

Giuseppe Ballacci is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Ethics, Politics and Society (CEPS) at the University of Minho in Portugal. He has written and researched on topics from both contemporary political theory and the history of political thought, in particular on questions related to democratic theory, representation, populism and rhetoric. In 2018 he published *Political Theory between Philosophy and Rhetoric: Politics as Transcendence and Contingency* (Palgrave MacMillan), a book in which he analyses the multifaceted significance of the ancient quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy for contemporary political theory. Currently he is working (together with Rob Goodman) on an edited book on the history of populism, titled *Populism, Demagoguery and Rhetoric in Historical Perspectives*, under contract with Oxford University Press. E-mail: gballacci@elach.uminho.pt

ORCID

Giuseppe Ballacci  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3214-2110>

References

- Abizadeh, A. (2007). On the philosophy/rhetoric binaries: Or, is Habermasian discourse motivationally impotent? *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 33(4), 445–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453707077017>
- Ankersmit, F. R. (1996). *Aesthetic politics: Political philosophy beyond fact and value*. Stanford University Press.
- Ankersmit, F. R. (2002). *Political representation*. Stanford University Press.
- Arato, A. (2013). Political theology and populism. *Social Research*, 80(1), 143–172. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2013.0020>
- Arditi, B. (2010). Review essay: Populism is hegemony is politics? On Ernesto Laclau's on populist reason. *Constellations (Oxford, England)*, 17(3), 488–497. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.2010.00587.x>
- Ballacci, G. (2019). Representing judgment—judging representation: Rhetoric, judgment and ethos in democratic representation. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 18(4), 519–540. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-018-0276-6>
- Brito Vieira, M. (2017a). Introduction. In M. Brito Vieira (Ed.), *Reclaiming representation: Contemporary advances in the theory of political representation* (pp. 1–21). Routledge.
- Brito Vieira, M. (2017b). Performative imaginaries. Pitkin versus Hobbes on political representation. In M. Brito Vieira (Ed.), *Reclaiming representation: Contemporary advances in the theory of political representation* (pp. 25–49). Routledge.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A rhetoric of motives*. University of California Press.
- Castiglione, D. (2012). Giving Pitkin her due: What the 'representative claim' gets right, and what it risks missing. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 11(1), 118–122.
- Castiglione, D., & Pollak, J. (2019). Introduction. In D. Castiglione & J. Pollak (Eds.), *Creating political presence: The new politics of democratic representation* (pp. 1–15). University of Chicago Press.
- Chambers, S. (2009). Rhetoric and the public sphere: Has deliberative democracy abandoned mass democracy? *Political Theory*, 37(3), 323–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591709332336>
- Cooke, M. (2006). *Re-presenting the good society*. MIT Press.
- Disch, L. (2011). Toward a mobilization conception of democratic representation. *American Political Science Review*, 105(01), 100–114. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055410000602>

- Disch, L. (2012). Democratic representation and the constituency paradox. *Perspectives on Politics*, 10(3), 599–616. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712001636>
- Disch, L. (2015). The “constructivist turn” in democratic representation: A normative dead-end? *Constellations (Oxford, England)*, 22(4), 487–498. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12201>
- Disch, L., van de Sande, L., & Urbinati, N. (2019). *The constructivist turn in political representation*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Disch, L. J. (2021). *Making constituencies: Representation as mobilization in mass democracy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Fossen, T. (2019). Constructivism and the logic of political representation. *American Political Science Review*, 113(3), 824–837. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000273>
- Garsten, B. (2006). *Saving persuasion: A defense of rhetoric and judgment*. Harvard University Press.
- Garsten, B. (2011). The rhetoric revival in political theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 14(1), 159–180. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.040108.104834>
- Geenens, R. (2019). Political representation: The view from France. In L. Disch, M. van de Sande, & N. Urbinati (Eds.), *The constructivist turn in political representation* (pp. 109–126). Edinburgh University Press.
- Göhler, G. (2014, February). Political representation – reconsidered. In P. Diehl & A. Escudier (Eds.), *La “Représentation” du politique: histoire, concepts, symboles* (Vol. 57, pp. 15–26). Cahier du CEVIPOF.
- Goodman, R. (2021). *Words on fire: Eloquence and its conditions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hofmann, H. (2007). *Rappresentanza – Rappresentazione. Parola e concetto dall’antichità all’Ottocento* (C. Tommasi, Trans.). Milan: Giuffrè.
- Kelsen, H. (2004). *Hans Kelsen’s reply to Eric Voegelin’s “new science of politics.” A contribution to the critique of ideology* (A. Eckhart, Ed.). Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag.
- Kitus, A. (2020). The theory of hegemony: Laclau’s path not taken. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46(10), 1225–1243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453719889987>
- Kuyper, J. W. (2016). Systemic representation: Democracy, deliberation, and nonelectoral representatives. *American Political Science Review*, 110(2), 308–324. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000095>
- Laclau, E. (1996a). *Emancipation(s)*. Verso.
- Laclau, E. (1996b). Deconstruction, pragmatism, hegemony. In C. Mouffe (Ed.), *Deconstruction and pragmatism* (pp. 49–70). Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2000). Identity and hegemony. In J. Butler, E. Laclau, & S. Žižek (Eds.), *Contingency, hegemony, universality: Contemporary dialogues on the left* (pp. 44–89). Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2004). Glimpsing the future. In S. Critchley & O. Marchart (Eds.), *Laclau: A critical reader* (pp. 279–328). Routledge.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2014). *The rhetorical foundations of society*. Verso.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1987). Post-Marxism without apologies. *New Left Review*, 166, 79–106.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (2nd ed.). Verso.
- Lefort, C. (1986). *The political forms of modern society: Bureaucracy, democracy, totalitarianism* (J. B. Thompson, Ed.). MIT Press.
- Lefort, C. (1988). *Democracy and political theory* (D. Macey, Trans.). Polity Press.
- Mansbridge, J. (2003). Rethinking representation. *American Political Science Review*, 97(4), 515–528. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000856>
- McGuire, S. (2011). Voegelin and Schelling on freedom and the beyond. In L. Trepanier & S. McGuire (Eds.), *Eric Voegelin and the continental tradition: Explorations in modern political thought* (pp. 64–84). University of Missouri Press.
- Montanaro, L. (2012). The democratic legitimacy of self-appointed representatives. *Journal of Politics*, 74(4), 1094–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381612000515>
- Mulieri, A. (2016). Hasso Hofmann and the polysemy of representation. *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, 19(2), 127–145. <https://doi.org/10.7227/R.19.2.2>

- Mulieri, A. (2019). Exploring the semantics of constructivist representation. In L. Disch, M. van de Sande, & N. Urbinati (Eds.), *The constructivist turn in political representation* (pp. 245–268). Edinburgh University Press.
- Näsström, S. (2006). Representative democracy as tautology: Ankersmit and Lefort on representation. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 5(3), 321–342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885106064664>
- Näsström, S. (2015). Democratic representation beyond election. *Constellations (Oxford, England)*, 22(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12123>
- Norval, A. J. (2004). Hegemony after deconstruction: The consequences of undecidability. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(2), 139–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310410001691187>
- Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1988). *Traité de l'argumentation. La nouvelle rhétorique*. Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.
- Pitkin, H. F. (2004). Representation and democracy: Uneasy alliance. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27(3), 335–342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2004.00109.x>
- Saward, M. (2010). *The representative claim*. Oxford University Press.
- Saward, M. (2016). Fragments of equality in representative politics. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 19(3), 245–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2016.1144853>
- Saward, M. (2019). Liminal representation. In D. Castiglione & J. Pollak (Eds.), *Creating political presence: The new politics of democratic representation* (pp. 276–297). University of Chicago Press.
- Saward, M. (2020). *Making representations: Claim, counterclaim and the politics of acting for others*. ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sintomer, Y. (2013). The meanings of political representation: Uses and misuses of a notion. *Raisons politiques*, 50(2), 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.050.0013>
- Thomassen, L. (2019). Representing the people: Laclau as a theorist of representation. *New Political Science*, 41(2), 329–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2019.1596687>
- Urbinati, N. (2006). *Representative democracy: Principles and genealogy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Urbinati, N. (2019). *Me the people: How populism transforms democracy*. Harvard University Press.
- Vatter, M. (2020). *Divine democracy: Political theology after Carl Schmitt*. Oxford University Press.
- Vergara, C. (2020). Populism as plebeian politics: Inequality, domination, and popular empowerment. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 28(2), 222–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12203>
- Voegelin, E. (1952). *The new science of politics: An introduction*. University of Chicago Press.
- Voegelin, E. (1957). *Plato and Aristotle*. Louisiana State University Press.
- Voegelin, E. (1987). *In search of order*. Louisiana State University Press.
- Voegelin, E. (1990a). The beginning and the beyond (1977). In T. A. Hollweck & P. Caringella (Eds.), *What is history? And other late unpublished writings* (pp. 173–232). Louisiana State University Press.
- Voegelin, E. (1990b). Equivalences of experience and symbolization in history. In E. Sandoz (Ed.), *Published essays, 1966–1985* (pp. 115–133). Louisiana State University Press.
- Voegelin, E. (2000). *The ecumenic age* (M. Franz, Ed.). University of Missouri Press.
- Voegelin, E. (2002). *Anamnesis: On the theory of history and politics* (D. Welsh, Ed.). University of Missouri Press.
- Yack, B. (2006). Rhetoric and public reasoning: An Aristotelian understanding of political deliberation. *Political Theory*, 34(4), 417–438. doi:10.1177/0090591706288232