



‘Thinking Where I Am Not’: Aversive Judgment in Political Representation

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ABSTRACT

In the constructivist approach, political representation is conceived as a creative activity that implies the role of a judging audience. However, the role of judgment within representation remains under-theorized. This paper foregrounds the role of the imagination in judgment as a necessary supporter of the constructivist effects of representation that not only contribute to the constitution of political identities but also induce a particular relation toward political reality. First, this paper examines the place of judgment in the constructivist conception of representation. Next, it focuses on Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment and on efforts to apply it to political representation. While these previous attempts rightly point out the affinities between the constructivist understanding of representation and Arendt's understanding of political reality as a contingent domain of appearances, they have not sufficiently considered the place of judgment within the power relations of representative politics. The final part claims that judgment must be considered both on the side of the representatives and the represented and advances an aversive reading of judgment that emphasizes an open approach to the perception of political reality.

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This paper examines the role of judgment within the constructivist turn in political representation. Recently, constructivists emphasized the creativity of representation, as it does not merely mirror preexisting reality but also offers new depictions of the identities of the represented. Michael Saward integrates these elements into his theory, defining representation as a dynamic claim-making process before an audience. While this approach implies the importance of the judgment of the represented, the role of judgment remains undertheorized, especially regarding the creative effects of representation.

This article claims that supplementing the theory of representation with the concept of political judgment enriches our understanding of the constructivist dimension of representation. Representative claims reframe political reality. Still, claimants must use their judgment when deciding which claims will be acceptable in a particular context. The role of judgment requires even greater refinement on the side of the represented. While constructivists have stressed the mobilizing effects of representation in forming political interests and identities, they have not considered its impact on how represented citizens perceive political reality or themselves.

Political judgment serves as a point of departure because it captures the aesthetic dimension of representation. It also shares with constructivist approaches an understanding of political reality as plural and contingent. At the same time, we must consider the specificity of judgment in representative politics. There, judgment is both partly situated and relational, as it involves an interaction between the representatives and the represented. By engaging with the transformative potential of representation and the open-ended nature of judgment, this article focuses on its impact on democratic subjectivity. The paper advances an aversive understanding of judgment that gives pride of place to the imagination as the faculty enabling us to see beyond our immediate identities and redefine our perception of political reality.

The argument will proceed in three steps. First, it will show how the judgment is insufficiently considered in the theory of political representation. The demand for reflexivity offers a possible starting point. However, its systemic perspective requires a complement in the form of a situated dimension of judgment. The following section turns to Hannah Arendt's concept of judgment and critically engages with its previous applications in the field of political representation—attempts that emphasize the impartiality of judgment at the expense of its political determinations, such as its situatedness and the corresponding plurality of perspectives. Focusing on this neglected political and imaginative dimension of judgment, the last section will situate judgment more firmly in representative practices. There, it becomes decisive both for the representative, who judges the resonance of their claims, and for the represented, who become receptive to new meanings of political reality and their political identity.

THE CONSTRUCTIVIST TURN AND THE MISSING PLACE OF JUDGMENT

In the constructivist turn in political representation, the process of representation is no longer viewed as a mechanical, one-sided transmission of predefined interests into the political system. Representation is instead conceived as a dynamic and creative process. Because of this, authors such as Frank [Ankersmit \(1996\)](#) and Michael [Saward \(2010\)](#) have emphasized the aesthetic dimension of political representation.

While representing a constituency, a representative contributes to the constitution of its interests and political identities. This complicates the normative account of representation presented by Hanna Pitkin, which affirms that ‘representing here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them’ (Pitkin 1967, 209).¹ Since this conception presupposes that, in democratic representation, the represented is logically prior to the act of representation (Pitkin 1967, 140), it collides with the constructivist approach, where the identity of the represented is co-constituted in its representation. The responsiveness to something that is not yet given is therefore impossible.

Saward tries to illuminate the making of representative claims by comparison to a painter offering a specific interpretation of a social referent (Saward 2010, 51–52). However, this aesthetic metaphor can imply the representative is the sole bearer of initiative and representation as, again, a one-sided process, only this time emanating from the creativity of the representative. To balance this reading, Saward highlights the complementary role of the audience. The success of a particular representative claim depends on the reaction of the audience (Saward 2010, 66).² However, audience acceptance alone does not guarantee the democratic status of a representative claim. Because of this, Saward further distinguishes between an audience and a constituency. While they often overlap, especially in democratic representation, the constituency is not defined by being addressed as an audience but by being spoken for and about by a particular claim. The democratic status of such a claim is dependent on its acceptance by an appropriate constituency (consisting of those who are spoken for and those who view themselves as being affected by a given representative claim) (Saward 2020, 106). According to Saward, ‘provisionally acceptable claims to democratic legitimacy across society are those for which there is evidence of sufficient acceptance of claims by appropriate constituencies under reasonable conditions of judgment’ (Saward 2010, 145).

Saward thus accentuates the role of audiences and specifically of constituencies who judge representative claims. This emphasis is crucial, as Saward’s conception diminishes the role of a theorist who would externally judge whether a given representation is democratic or not. Combining this step with the idea that the judging constituencies are also partly constituted by the representation, Saward avoids what Lisa Disch calls the pedagogical model, ‘where critics assess whether or not constituencies make good judgments about their interests and about the people best suited to represent those interests’ (Disch 2021, 45). Here, the final judges are the represented constituents, not the theorists.

In addition to the provisionality of all attempts at representation, Saward stresses the importance of the audience’s judgment for understanding the reception of representative claims.³ However, the citizens’ judgment is approximated only indirectly, through the examination of its ‘reasonable conditions.’ These conditions include accessibility of information, pluralism, and openness to both criticism and counterclaims from the citizens (Saward 2010, 154–156). Saward also specifies the role of theorists in this regard. While the democratic legitimation of representation is decided by citizens, theorists can expound the assessment of representative claims by adopting the ‘citizen standpoint.’ A theorist thus focuses on the circumstances under which citizens judge, on the ‘accumulation of lived experience of representative practice within a given context’ (Saward 2020, 110). This focus on the situatedness of the citizens’ judgment is beneficial because it accounts for the external factors that can affect judgment. Representative claims do not exist in a political vacuum. As Linda Alcoff (1991, 15) has shown, speaking for others, which attributes an identity to

the spoken-for group, is always implicated in the relations of dominance and power struggles. However, this illuminates only the external conditions while leaving the internal mechanism of judgment unexplored. Saward's reluctance is understandable, as he intentionally avoids assessing cases when citizens' judgment is or is not democratic. However, this paper claims that it is possible to elaborate on the role of judgment in representative practices while avoiding the pitfalls of the pedagogical model, where a theorist decides how citizens should judge.

If the efforts to represent a group consist of an act of portrayal that interprets its identity, then the judgment of the represented must have a specific nature. When the audience judges its portrayal, the judgment must differ from the standard evaluation of ordinary policies. Representation not only implicates the audience but also introduces an aesthetic aspect that must be registered by the citizens' judgment. While Saward upholds the centrality of judgment in representation and rightly emphasizes the non-linear nature of representation, where audiences are not merely passive recipients of claims but may also contest them or formulate counterclaims (Saward 2010, 36–37), the role of judgment within these dynamics remains undertheorized. Judgment appears primarily as a response to representative claims rather than as a continuous relation to the political reality that representative claims engage. Because of the aesthetic element of representation, judgment must be conceived more broadly. It is a continuous activity that pertains to the citizens' understanding of themselves and of political reality in general rather than something merely activated by the representatives. Nevertheless, the aesthetic aspect of representation is, at least in Saward's approach, restricted by the cultural codes that determine which claims are acceptable in a particular context (Saward 2010, 75). This calls for the use of judgment also on the part of the representatives who, while speaking for others, must consider the peculiarities of a particular context if they want their claims to be successful.

A possible starting point for this elaboration might be an approach that concerns judgment only implicitly. Lisa Disch (2011, 111–112) tried to replace Pitkin's criterion of responsiveness with a systemic demand for reflexivity. When a representative system is reflexive, it guarantees that there are no privileged actors of representation and that each representation is only a partial one and, therefore, open to contestation. In such an environment, judgment is not constrained by the force of a singular representative claim. The claim becomes disputable because of the presence of other representations. However, these implications cannot be deduced only from systemic reflexivity, as they must also be approached from the perspective of the judging citizens. The restrictedness of a political environment or, on the other hand, a plurality of competing claims may provoke differing attitudes toward the surrounding political reality. Yet, they remain unexplored because of the undertheorization of judgment.

This perspective, where the proliferation of representations leads to contestation and dissent in the public sphere, is linked to the view that representation has a mobilizing potential. Representation can thus contribute to the formation of political groups and the articulation of their needs and interests (Hamilton 2014, 144), and it may even influence how members of these groups view their preferences by confronting competing claims (Celis and Childs 2020, 168). While this approach displays how representation can enhance democratic politics and the formation of citizens' views and preferences, the picture remains incomplete. The systemic orientation misses the situated level of citizens' judgment where we can account for other mobilizing effects of representation—namely, those concerning democratic subjectivity. While

these insights were partly developed by George Kateb (1981, 357–358), touching on the transformed attitudes vis-à-vis political authority, they remain marginal within constructivist accounts of representation. If this approach discloses that political reality is not given but is open to different articulations, we may ask how this impacts the identities of those who judge representative claims. For this reason, the next section will focus on Hannah Arendt's theory of political judgment before moving on to its application to the field of political representation. Arendt's theory provides a helpful point of departure in offering a proximate picture of political reality to the constructivist turn in associating politics with plurality and openness to change rather than fixed necessity.

FROM ENLARGED MENTALITY TO POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Among the various formulations of political judgment, Hannah Arendt's conception is possibly the most influential. Understanding political reality aesthetically as a space of appearances open to new events and actions, Arendt sought a conception of judgment that could accommodate this vision of politics. For this, she turned to the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant. Arendt found in Kant's formulation of the judgment of the beautiful an affinity with political judgment, mainly in its paradoxical determination as a judgment of 'subjectively universal validity' (Kant 2000, 100). Kant understood the judgment of the beautiful as a case of reflective judgment. Contrary to determining judgment, the more contingent reflective judgment concerns the judging of the particular without the presence of a general concept that would determine it. The general classification (e.g., 'this painting is beautiful') is not given but sought in the process of judging.

Kant also distinguished judgments of the beautiful from purely subjective judgments. While not departing from general concepts, aesthetic judgments posit a claim with an intersubjective validity. This is reached by adopting a detached viewpoint where I judge the object without any subjective interest, as if I were judging it from the perspectives of others. The aesthetic judgment consists of the 'free play of the imagination and the understanding' (Kant 2000, 103), a cognitive state through which I may assert a general agreement with others by presupposing a shared common sense (*sensus communis*). Because of this common sense, the judgment becomes communicable. However, this general assent is never wholly realizable but represents only an ideal state. Similarly, the necessity of judgments of the beautiful is never absolute. Without a rule or concept, it remains merely exemplary (Kant 2000, 121).

This aligned with Arendt's vision of politics as an area of plurality and novelty, dissimilar to the necessity of logical reasoning. In reflective judgment, rather than following given principles, we are open to new features of the political world. For Linda Zerilli, this discloses the political potential of judgment that employs imagination that is free and not bound by concepts, 'not merely reproductive of what is already known, but generative of new forms and figures' (Zerilli 2005b, 163). With the faculty of imagination, we can view things in novel ways. The activity of judging with the centrality of imagination may thus provide a similarly open attitude toward political reality as the one implied by the constructivist understanding of representation. In both cases, the political domain is not seen as fixed or necessary but is instead indeterminate and open to changes.

This political potential of aesthetic judgment comes to the fore in its claim of intersubjective validity, where we consider the perspectives of others. Judgment, 'by the force of imagination, makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides' (Arendt 1989, 43). Arendt refers to this consideration of others' perspectives as either 'enlarged mentality' or 'representative thinking,' as it involves representing to ourselves the standpoints of others (Arendt 2006, 237). It is necessary to detach ourselves from our private conditions and interests to secure an intersubjective validity of our judgment. In judging politically, 'imagination and reflection enable us to liberate ourselves from them and to attain that relative impartiality that is the specific virtue of judgment' (Arendt 1989, 73).

This demand for a disinterested judgment sparked controversy regarding whether Arendt's conception of judgment signified a shift from the perspective of the actor to that of a more distanced spectator (Arendt 1989, 91). While the judgment of the actor had all the described traits of somewhat detached judgment, Arendt still upheld its intersubjective basis, saying that it 'cannot function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others "in whose place" it must think' (Arendt 2006, 217). In her later works, the detachment grew stronger, as the judgment was present mainly in the distanced observer or the historian, who is not involved in an action and therefore more eligible to judge it (Arendt 1989, 52). Other interpreters viewed this turn to the spectator only as a shift in emphasis, where judgment still requires a political condition in the form of a shared world. The spectator is still partly situated, and her disinterestedness is more akin to opening herself to the perspectives of others. Because of this, actor and spectator are interrelated, rather than being mutually exclusive opposites (Biskowski 1993, 874). From this dilemma, two possible readings of Arendt emerge. The first emphasizes the detached viewpoint of judgment, which can serve as a basis for deliberative reasoning. The second reading, closer to radical democratic theory, accepts the partially situated judgment as it highlights the plurality and contingency of political reality and identities.

While the correct interpretation of Arendt's turn to judgment is beyond both the scope and aim of this paper, this distinction between the situated actor and the more distanced spectator remains pertinent. If Arendt demands impartiality in political judgments, how should we imagine it with representative claims that often concern the situation of those very citizens who will judge them? There is a clear affinity between the constructivist theory representation and Arendt's view of judgment, as both understand political reality not as given but as open to changes and novel ways of seeing. As Nadia Urbinati (2006, 5) mentions, the constitutive effects of representation, similarly to the activity of judging, imply a partial transcendence or transformation of one's immediate identity.⁴ Both domains call for the productive role of imagination that embraces the openness of politics where meaning and identities are not understood as fixed (Urbinati 2006, 122). The constructivist approach to representation and the theory of political judgment are not identical but rather complementary. While the former emphasizes the constitutive role of representative practices in shaping political identities, the latter concerns the imaginative capacity to engage with these articulations of political reality. The disclosure occasioned by judgment does not concern the revelation of pre-existing features of political reality but rather responsiveness to its novelty.

Their transformative potential notwithstanding, representative claims remain embedded in a particular context, thus anticipating the partial situatedness of the judging audiences. For this reason, this article will be closer to the second approach,

following Linda Zerilli's reading of Arendt, which emphasizes the power of imagination to disclose the plurality of perspectives in the political domain (Zerilli 2019, 32–33). In judging politically, we do not remain enclosed in our subjective perspective. However, an overtly distanced judgment, implying the removal of subjective ties to the world, would ultimately lead to the loss of the plurality of perspectives and the shared world itself, as Arendt herself has affirmed: 'In cutting ties to our own interests, we run the danger of losing our ties to the world and our attachment to its objects and the affairs that take place in it' (Arendt 2005, 168).

Examining the interrelation of political judgment and the constructivist approach to representation beyond the mere affinity of these domains, Mark Warren (2018) ponders the normative implications of this intertwinement, primarily its contribution to democratic subjectivity. Expressing discontent with the under-theorization of the role of the represented, Warren objects to their understanding as merely passive or absent, welcoming Saward's shift 'from spatial metaphors of presence and absence to speech acts that establish representative relationships' (Warren 2018, 45). Focusing on the represented and their implication in relations triggered by representative claims, Warren advances that representation may potentially contribute to democratic subjectivity in four regards, as follows.

First, representation can foster autonomy by contributing to the formation of preferences and interests. Warren views autonomy through a Kantian perspective, where it signifies a formation of views 'that reflect not simply impulses or desires but rather considered positions that can be justified with reasons to others' (Warren 2018, 48). Second, thanks to the aesthetic effects of representation, individuals can see themselves as being members of politically constructed collectivities. Third, political representation can induce an ethical stance where we consider the perspectives of others when making judgments. Here, Warren draws on Kant's and Arendt's conception of reflective judgment and emphasizes the necessity of considering the perspectives of others. The final effect involves discursive accountability, as representation, being an act of speaking for others, engenders relations of responsibility.

This reflection is valuable in drawing attention to the effects of political representation on the represented citizens and their perception of political reality. The second contribution of representation is especially insightful in focusing on its aesthetic effects that contribute to our orientation in political reality and capacity to make corresponding claims and counterclaims. As Thomas Fossen points out, judgment plays a pivotal role here as well since the 'acts of identity attribution (or "interpellation") on the part of the regime call for a response—for a judgment' (Fossen 2024, 142), when we put our identity into question and either accept the particular claim or refuse it by claiming a different identity. While Warren considers the aesthetic aspect of representation, his account of judgment shifts the emphasis from imagination and aesthetic judgment toward a more rationalistic and ethical reading of Kant and Arendt. This shift risks diminishing the political potential of judgment by placing less emphasis on the contingency and plurality of the political domain.

Understanding politics through the lenses of discursive ethics and deliberative democracy, Warren transforms Disch's arguments for systemic reflexivity, advancing the plurality of competing representations into a precondition of autonomous judgment and mutual justification of positions (Warren 2018, 48). This position, while departing from a legitimate reading of Arendt that stresses the distanced and disinterested attitude, simultaneously shifts the emphasis from imaginative

engagement with a plurality of perspectives toward their mutual justification. Deliberative reasoning may transcend the contingency of political reality, as the demand for the mutual justification of positions privileges perspectives capable of being articulated within a shared framework of reasons, potentially narrowing the plurality of perspectives within the public sphere.

Warren develops this further in his proposal of the Kantian categorical imperative as a ‘concrete guideline for judgment’ (Warren 2018, 53). This effort to subsume representative thinking under the categorical imperative risks downplaying the implications of claims within existing power relations and the contingency of the political domain. Contrary to reflective judgment, which is unbound by principles or rules, the categorical imperative provides a guiding principle and recasts judgment in predominantly ethical terms. As Zerilli (2019, 277) claims, the categorical imperative arises from the mutual respect of actors, whereas representative thinking emphasizes the intersubjectively shared world. By using imagination as an instrument of deliberative rationality, Warren underestimates its political potential in disclosing new aspects of the world. Furthermore, by advancing the categorical imperative as a concrete guideline for judgment, Warren approximates what Disch refers to as a pedagogical model in which theorists decide when citizens judge well and when they do not.

The plurality of representative claims may induce citizens to reconsider their position in a broader context. However, positing this as a case of deliberative rationality omits that judging claims must be at least partly situated. While representative claims introduce novel elements, they must remain grounded in the context of the audience to which they are addressed to be comprehensible. Furthermore, there is always an element of power, as claimants speak for someone when representing them, and their claims can shape political reality. While Warren acknowledges this when affirming that judgment is present both with represented and representatives and that claims ‘provide the substantive structure of political deliberation’ (Warren 2018, 35), his emphasis on autonomy sits uneasily with the fact that it is often the representatives who provide the claims that citizens judge.

This disregard for the specificity of judgment in representative relations becomes even more pronounced in Aylon Cohen’s article on interest in representation that criticizes theories of representation for their conception of interest ‘as an object that is initially absent for the represented and must be constructed (i.e., actualized or fabricated by the representative)’ (Cohen 2023, 62). Cohen, by contrast, draws on Arendt’s etymological reading of *inter-esse*, where interest corresponds to an intersubjectively shared space between actors, which is disclosed when they open themselves to the perspectives of others. Cohen cites Arendt’s vision of council democracy as an example of this autonomous formation of interest while specifying that representation here appears only in representative thinking (Cohen 2023, 64). Whereas the criticism of the neglect of the represented is pertinent, Cohen’s alternative, which replaces the vertical relations of ‘speaking for’ by horizontal relations, is at odds with the asymmetrical character of representative relationships in contemporary politics.

Finding an alternative conception of judgment in representation does not imply affirming overly hierarchical and unequal instances of representative relations, as citizens can also represent themselves. Instead, we should seek a conception of judgment that underscores both the relation between the representatives and the represented and the aesthetic facet of representation that introduces novel elements without losing ties with what is familiar.

Aesthetic or political judgment embraces the indeterminacy of the political sphere without being enclosed in a particular perspective. The political nature of judgment comes mainly from the role of the imagination, which allows us to open ourselves to a plurality of perspectives and perceive political reality in a new way. However, if the judgment in political representation is relational, involving both the represented and the representatives, how can we account for it without losing its specificity in either case? To capture the creativity of representation and preserve the role of the judgment of the represented, I will turn to the works of Linda Zerilli and Aletta Norval. While they do not examine representation directly, their theories of political claims and identification reveal its important aspects. Zerilli offers an open approach to judgment that prioritizes the disclosing role of the imagination. Drawing on Wittgenstein and Cavell, Zerilli transforms the theory of judgment into a specific version of claim-making not dissimilar to claim-making in representation. Norval also builds on these authors and offers a post-structuralist approach to democratic identification and subjectivity. In the following sections, I will take inspiration from their works while examining the engagement between representation and judgment and its implications for democratic subjectivity. However, this first requires examining the judgment of the representatives and the represented who engage with representative claims.

JUDGING WHILE SPEAKING FOR OTHERS

While reflecting on the possibilities of feminist politics in making claims about a collective identity of women, Zerilli offers a general theory of claim-making. For Zerilli, this claim-making is characterized by Arendt's understanding of the political as a sphere of contingent appearances and by Lefort's emphasis on the indetermination of social identities. Each claim of communal identity is only a result of a temporary closure and remains thus open-ended (Zerilli 2005a, 166). While the context is slightly different, this constitutive yet open-ended assertion of communal identity echoes the constitutive effects of representation. This comes to the fore in Zerilli's turn to Cavell, who emphasizes the proximity of aesthetic judgments to the claims of ordinary language philosophy about what we commonly say. Cavell proceeds to a general account of speaking for others with whom we share membership in a group or community. While making these claims, we must accord with criteria that render them comprehensible to others. Such criteria are not independent of us; they are the product of the commonality and agreement of our judgments and expressions of a particular life form. Because of this proximity between what is said and the conditions in which it can be said, Cavell claims: 'The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria based on which we say what we say, are claims to community' (Cavell 1999, 20).

Cavell mentions how we can project a single word into new contexts, albeit always in a way defined by a particular form of life (Cavell 1999, 180, 185–186). If we view political representation this way, its creativity remains present, although the claim-making is limited by a form of life—or culture, in Saward's words—that provides a grammar rendering the claims comprehensible. However, this shared grammar must be discovered first by the representative's judgment. Claim-making therefore, at least in democratic contexts, presupposes the use of judgment on the side of the representative who considers the perspectives and judgments of the represented. Each claim is thus anticipatory since 'speaking politically is about testing the limits

to every claim to community, about testing the limits and nature of agreement' (Zerilli 2005a, 172). This underscores that, while representative claims are creative as they reconstitute political reality, they must nevertheless echo a certain amount of familiarity to be recognized by the judging audiences.

The open nature of political reality is also evident in the difference between political claims and claims of knowledge. With the use of imagination, these claims do not state facts about society but rather disrupt our settled way of conduct by 'the ability to see things anew' (Norval 2008, 64). Here, it is not a matter of proceeding 'through verbal argumentation alone but also through the production of images and symbols that play a crucial role in the construction of a democratic imaginary' (Norval 2008, 70). Norval describes this aesthetic aspect of claim-making in borderline cases where the identity of a certain community is resymbolized. Of course, this does not correspond to the normal functioning of politics, as it occurs only when a group cannot articulate its demands within the available grammar. There, a sense of dislocation may occur, which can be supplemented by 'the availability of an alternative imaginary horizon, something transcending the here and now, disclosing at least the possibility of new worlds' (Norval 2008, 71) and arriving at a new symbolization.

This transformative moment of claim-making is not limited only to extraordinary cases as a reconfiguration of a collective identity. The productive power of imagination also arises in reframing our considerations of political problems. There, it is not about learning new facts about society but rather about the ability to view political objects anew. Similarly, the creativity of representation comes to the fore when a particular political grammar seems exhausted and inadequate for citizens' self-understanding. In these cases, claims may shape the citizens' understanding of their collective identity. However, these aesthetic moments also occur more regularly because each claim in which a claim-maker puts forward an image of themselves or the represented can contribute to shifts in the perception of political reality. Even though the represented are embedded in a cultural context, their identities remain open to rearticulation.

This performative effect of representative claims evokes a capacity for persuasion. However, how can we conceive of it if we remain on this aesthetic level? If persuasion consists of inducing a change in belief, then, here, it occurs because of a shift in perception. Zerilli supplements the theory of aesthetic judgment with Wittgenstein's account of persuasion, finding the distinction between cognitive judgments and non-cognitive aesthetic judgments unsustainable (Zerilli 2016, 143–145). While she affirms that aesthetic or political judgments are less conclusive than logical ones, she nonetheless finds it necessary to underscore that aesthetic judgments contain a cognitive dimension and vice versa. This intersection stems from the aesthetic nature of persuasion shared by more types of judgments than specifically aesthetic ones.

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Wittgenstein argues that aesthetic judgments do not usually consist of proclamations such as 'This is beautiful,' but of noticing the correct following of rules, as in 'Look at that transition' or 'His use of images is precise' (Wittgenstein 1966, 3). We judge under the influence of rules grounded in our ordinary practices, and our argumentation therefore operates within a shared life form. However, Wittgenstein mentions these judgments in areas that transcend aesthetics, such as clothing or acceptance of scientific explanations. Even there, persuasion has an aesthetic character consisting of coherence or plausibility, which contributes to the appeal of an explanation (Zerilli 2016, 142–143). Richard Shusterman elaborates on this approach with the example of a critic who persuades not only with the

rigorousness of his arguments and reasons but also with the activity of giving these reasons, which ‘may help the reader to focus on the work so that he sees it as the critic does’ (Shusterman 1983, 61). Representative claims share this hybrid status, where they are cognitive (they concern our understanding of the social world), yet they offer not statements of fact but rather interpretations of political reality. This idea of aesthetic persuasion may help us understand how political representation partially constitutes our political reality. By partaking in aesthetic persuasion and creating, as Zerilli says, ‘a shared orientation towards an object’ (Zerilli 2016, 144), the maker of the claim draws our attention to certain aspects of political reality to accept the picture they propose.

ASPECT-SEEING AND IDENTIFICATION

How does this aesthetic dimension of representation manifest with the represented, and how does it contribute to their ability to judge? How can we conceive of them perceiving some part of political reality or themselves anew? To address these questions, I will draw on Aletta Norval’s theory of democratic identification, which builds on Wittgenstein’s notion of seeing aspects. In the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1968) describes something akin to the aesthetic dimension of understanding, where we experience a sudden shift in the perception of a picture by viewing it from a different aspect than before. This is exemplified by Jastrow’s rabbit–duck illustration, which can be viewed under two mutually exclusive aspects—either as a rabbit or a duck (Wittgenstein 1968, 194–195). Norval transposes this moment of aspect dawning to political practices, where it corresponds to a shift in identification (Norval 2007, 106, 113). While we usually express political reality in established grammars, they can be transformed in these occasions of aspect change, where we perceive something differently than before.

When Wittgenstein claims that ‘what I perceive in the dawning of an aspect is not a property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects’ (Wittgenstein 1968, 212), this description evokes Saward’s distinction between a referent and a constructed object in representation. In this respect, we can understand how a representative claim on behalf of ‘honest workers’ produces different aesthetic effects in the imagination of the represented when it is articulated in the context of racially charged grammar (constructing ‘honest workers’ as distinct from ‘lazy immigrants’) and when it is expressed solely in economic terms. The referent of representative claims remains the same, while its perception shifts radically. When Norval mentions that these aesthetic and rhetoric moments of aspect change are ‘not a matter of discussion but of persuasion’ (Norval 2007, 111), the same applies to claim-making that may employ arguments as well as evocative imagery in persuading audiences.

As with the transformative effects of claim-making, the moment of aspect change does not occur continuously. Even if we regard representation as having constitutive effects, our relation to political reality is usually characterized by what Wittgenstein calls ‘continuous aspect perception,’ where the meaning of political objects is mostly settled (Norval 2007, 112). In these cases, citizens understand political problems or themselves under a singular framing without being conscious of the framing itself. However, this normal working of representation, where the performative dimension goes unnoticed, is not necessarily desirable. Within continuous aspect perception, when we are captivated by a particular representation of political reality, there is a

danger of closure and monopolization of meaning. This can lead to naturalization, where the performative effects of a particular representation are perceived as natural. This setting then inhibits further contestation and openness to new ways of seeing. At a systemic level, this sterile environment of representational practices was challenged by Disch's concept of reflexivity, which requires the proliferation of representations and thus their easier contestation (Disch 2011, 111). To approach this problem at the more individual level of judgment, Wittgenstein's notion of 'aspect dawning' might be instructive.

Norval points out that, 'where aspect change occurs, what becomes visible is not just the presence of a different understanding of things, but an awareness of the multiplicity of aspects under which something can be seen' (Norval 2007, 126). She rightly infers that this awareness of multiplicity transforms our perception of political life. Not only do we acknowledge that we were captivated by a particular picture and that there is an alternative to it; we realize that it was only a picture, and no interpretation of political reality is conclusive, since, in Arendt's terms, it is a contingent sphere of appearances rather than a domain of necessity. Understanding this phenomenon in the context of political representation, we arrive at a more situated correlate to Disch's reflexivity. If the proliferation of representative claims and their competition facilitate their easier contestation, then it is solely through our imagination and judgment that we can see reality anew. Again, the perception of political reality in the interaction between political judgment and representative claims contains an interplay between familiar and novel. How does this aspect influence normative considerations concerning constructivist representation?

AVERSIVE JUDGMENT AND DEMOCRATIC SUBJECTIVITY

Such an understanding of identification and political perception further deepens the emphasis on imagination in political judgment. Even in the context of political representation, judging does not consist only of gestures of approval or rejection. While judgment in representation necessarily has a reactive dimension, its activity is much broader. First, the representative considers the perspectives and judgments of those targeted by their claim. Then, the represented constituencies use their judgment in evaluating a particular claim and later accept it, reject it, or come up with counterclaims. However, judging politically is a more continuous activity embedded in a broader context of political grammar that is simultaneously capable of transcending it through imagination. It relates to how people perceive themselves and their surrounding political reality. It can be activated by representative claims, but it also works outside of them.

If we recognize the centrality of judgment in political representation, then this leads us to consider certain normative propositions. While Saward's view that democratic representation is guaranteed by the acceptance of claims by relevant constituencies still stands as a decisive criterion, it is nevertheless desirable to supplement it with other elements that contribute to the democratic functioning of political representation. On the side of the representatives, I agree with Warren that the constitutive effects of representative claims can foster what he calls 'discursive accountability' (Warren 2018, 56). This accountability, which is distinct from Pitkin's demand for responsivity, is only made possible by the convergence between representative claims and political judgment. Norval locates a similar demand for accountability in Cavell, who draws on the proximity between making aesthetic judgments and speaking on behalf of a particular community. In their claims, claimants invoke with their judgment the

community in whose name they are speaking and thereby enter relationships of responsibility for their claims and judgments (Norval 2007, 171). The judgment implicates the claim-maker in the network of social relations where the claim intervenes. In representative politics, such instances of claim-making, as Alcott has shown, always involve power imbalances. For this reason, the demand for accountability is especially pertinent here (Alcott 1991, 25–26). The awareness of the constitutive and communal aspects of claim-making even more strongly encourages the need to receive criticism and feedback from those who are being spoken for.

Norval's conception of democratic subjectivity, based on aversive identity, can serve as a support for this critical attitude. This type of identity serves as protection against conformism, which 'entails a forgetting of the need to define oneself' (Norval 2007, 175) and letting oneself be passively spoken for by others. While an insistence on the immutability of one's identity might be understood as another sign of conformism, since it resists any changes, a passive attitude toward outside influences precludes any contestation of claims. This criticism of conformism is supplemented by the need for democratic perfectionism. With an aversive identity, we are always dissatisfied with ourselves and democratic society, yet we do not succumb to apathy. On the contrary, we always strive for improvements (Norval 2007, 175). Such an attitude thus presupposes both an allegiance to a democratic society and our determination to challenge it since we can never achieve a perfect ideal of both ourselves and democracy.

In representative politics, this attitude toward one's identity and political community is present in a similarly aversive nature of judgment. It discloses new aspects of political reality and transforms our self-understanding, as judgment for Arendt enables 'thinking in my own identity where actually I am not' (Arendt 2006, 237). While representative claims can be instrumental in shifting this perception of political reality and our identity, the aversive judgment also prevents us from being passively formed by them. Our identity is neither static nor in a state of perpetual flux, as aversive judgment parallels the effects of representation, which are simultaneously creative yet culturally delimited. In a reflexive environment, where we are confronted with a plurality of representative claims and thus engage our imaginative relation with politics, we acknowledge the precariousness of every identity, which makes it possible both to change ourselves and contest claims that ascribe a certain identity to us.

This reflexive and aversive judgment then leads to similar conclusions for representative democracy as those that Norval draws for democracy in general. We can never be satisfied with the state of representative politics or expect to be 'fully represented' as if our identities were completely mirrored in representation. This failure should not be seen as a deficiency of representation as such but rather as a consequence of the plurality and contestability characteristic of democratic politics. Each instance of claim-making becomes only a particular assertion and articulation of someone's identity or interest. Its inconclusiveness signifies that it has no monopoly on the portrayal of the represented and that it can be replaced by a different claim positing another articulation. An aversive understanding of judgment does not lead us back to the pedagogical model where theorists decide how citizens should judge. The content and result of judgment are of no concern here. Instead, it points to possible effects arising from the interaction of political judgment and political representation, which can contribute to the formation of democratic subjectivity. While the aesthetic dimension of representation may shape our perception of political reality, judgment is a faculty that enables us to view reality anew. At the same time, this imaginative

potential of judgment allows us not to be trapped by a single representation and to think beyond its boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This article argues for supplementing the constructivist theory of representation with a political conception of judgment. Its centrality has been acknowledged but never adequately theorized. In examining the previous attempts to apply Arendt's theory of judgment to political representation, I came across an overly ethical and impartial understanding of judgment, where its political and imaginative potential is weakened. The relational nature of representational practices and the associated role of power have also been undervalued. For this reason, it was necessary to emphasize the more political side of Arendt's reading of judgment. Drawing on Norval and Zerilli, I tried to arrive at a concept of judgment that would reflect interaction in representational practices. There, judgment is present both in the representative's formation of claims and in the represented citizen's perception of political reality.

Political judgment plays a role not only in accepting or rejecting representative claims. Rather than viewing judgment as a matter of receiving claims or assessing reasons, I conceived it as a relational political activity that engages and employs the faculty of imagination. The democratic and political potential of imagination is only fully realized in an aversive conception of judgment characterized by an open attitude to political reality, where the meaning of political objects is perceived as fluid rather than fixed. Only through imagination can we transcend static identities and social relations and become receptive to new articulations of political reality. Concurrently, aversive judgment helps citizens see representations as only partial and thus enables their contestation.

NOTES

- 1 Recently, Lisa Disch argued that Pitkin's famous book on representation can be used to advance constructivist arguments. However, as Disch concedes, these constructivist aspects of Pitkin's work are ultimately weakened by the criterion of responsivity. For the purposes of my text, I am using the standard interpretation of Pitkin, although I do not dispute that other parts of her work may lead in a different direction. For this reading of Pitkin, see [Disch \(2021\)](#).
- 2 For a similar argument, albeit in a less-constructivist version, see [Rehfeld \(2006\)](#).
- 3 While the represented and the judging audience do not always overlap in Saward's theory, I will be focusing on the more ordinary cases of representative politics, where citizens judge the claims that offer them a representation of themselves.
- 4 For further discussion of the proximity between the constructivist view of representation and political judgment, only with more emphasis on the personalist dimension of representation, see [Ballacci \(2019\)](#).

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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