

Dissertation Proposal Summary
Paradigms of Representation
On the Crisis and Permanence of a Semantic Figure

Dissertation presented
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Summary

The democratic citizen appoints a representative who is meant to give him orders. This thesis examines paradigms of representation. It will initially present arguments that are provided independently of specific situations and which make plausible this relationship of rulers to the people they rule based on the premise of the self-legislation of a group. It requires a considerable degree of imagination and inventiveness to amalgamate the essential democratic concept of self-legislation with that of the delegation of authority. The present thesis investigates these fantastical narratives.

The first part of the thesis briefly attempts to explore the term “representation”. It focuses on the use of this term in German constitutional history, integrates a range of existing interpretations taken from Hannah Pittkin’s *Concept of Representation*, and finally comes to the question of how representation should be envisaged in the age of language. The emphasis here is placed on the constitutive aspect of every representational relationship.

These initial attempts to define the term are followed by a second section that looks at the theory of democracy. The aim of this section is to identify the differences and tensions within which relationships of representation are inscribed. It explores the birth of representative democracy as a model in the context of American independence and of the French revolution. Viewed from this perspective, the parliamentary system of government appears as a link in a

chain. As a phenomenon it is on a level with a rational, modern, scientific understanding of the world, a dangerous human nature and an emerging labour society. Carl Schmitt opposes the fixedness of representation to the modern openness of structures of meaning. Its concreteness precludes that openness of each identity that is the essence of democracy. The liberal world and a form of its denial nevertheless both process paradigms of representation, which establish an uneasy tension between the part and the whole, between the present and the absent, and between representative and creative moments.

The aim of this thesis is to reveal the permanence, and therefore the irreducibility of these tensions.

And yet, it would seem that our age of communication and language has left them behind. Niklas Luhmann's systems theory provides a consistent criticism of scientific and political relationships of representation. A functionally differentiated society does not have the capacity to provide a picture of the whole. The differences between the part and the whole become differences between the system and its environment. Personality becomes a form of self-simplification of the communication system. History evolves and form breaks down. However, systems theory finds its guarantee of reality in the differentiation between the structure of society and semantics, and passes on the representational tensions between the part and the whole, the present and the absent, between that which is representative and that which is productive.

Paradigms of representation do not open up in a representative system of government. The representations of history, representations of the people and the scientific representation of society have similar tendencies to become caught up within a single complex of problems. They fill out an empty identity by bringing it into being. The space of politics opens up in the places where the contingency of such attributions and shifts becomes visible.