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REPRESENTATION

Representation is the process by which one entity comes to stand for or SIGNIFY another. Accounts of how this is achieved have historically emphasised either that representations stand for their SUBJECTS by virtue of a likeness, or through an arbitrary symbolic connection. Plato held a MIMETIC view and in his ALLEGORY of the cave positioned representations as illusions that MEDiate individuals' access to the real. The referential view became dominant following Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) development of a SEMIOLOGICAL LINGUISTICS and its subsequent extension across the humanities by STRUCTURALIST thinkers. Theories of representation overlap significantly with theories of MEDIATION, focussing upon the relationships between the subject and the means of representation. As such, COMICS are identified by the unique ways in which they afford these relationships. Roland Barthes (1957) described a second level of representation, connotation, in which the objects denoted by first-order signs are placed in wider MYTHICAL SEMANTIC fields, and through which ideological concepts such as "Englishness" or "imperialism" are depoliticised. Although representation is now seen as consisting in relationships between signs or the construction of discursive structures (Foucault 1982), W. J. T. Mitchell's assertion that "representation (in memory, in verbal descriptions, in images) not only 'mediates' our knowledge (...) but obstructs, fragments and negates that knowledge" (1995: 188) suggests that concerns about its obfuscatory power remain salient for contemporary theorists.

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