Radical Democracy: Semantics and History

A Very Short Introduction

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Democracy in Movements. Conceptions and Practices of Democracy in Contemporary Social Movements

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The Problem...in brevis

Both as formal institutional arrangement at the regime level and as constellation of internal decision-making procedures, democracy is once again at the forefront of scholarly and political debate. This once, however, not for heralding a new democratisation wave, or yet another ‘end of history’, but for reasons uninspiringly prosaic: though still enjoying quasi-universal normative appeal and approval, democracy is not doing well. As Peter Mair (2006) put it in a recent article, what we are presently witnessing is the massive ‘hollowing of western democracy’, a process involving, among other things, the retreat and internal disarticulation of parties, voter apathy and disengagement from conventional politics, and rampant political cynicism. This is an ensemble of developments, concludes Mair, which may well be described as the massive downgrading of democracy’s ‘popular component’.

Detecting democratic pathology/-ies, of course, highlights the need for solutions and remedies. ‘Radical democracy’ as a practical political quest and sought-after ideal (: the end state of a process of auspicious democratic reform capable of successfully addressing extant pathologies) acquires its relevance in this particular juncture. But who is seeking?

Considering that several, if not most, of erstwhile democratic champions (social democratic parties, major trade unions, welfare-state agencies and associated institutions) have –by deed or omission– turned into ‘democratic-hollowing’ accomplices, social movement organisations (SMOs) de facto become important, possibly the major, radical democratic agents. At the dawn of the 21st century, this is one of their greatest challenges and promises. But where exactly is the radical-democratic Promised Land located? In which direction are we to navigate in order to find it?

Conceptual and Theoretical Dilemmas

Nomina si nescis perit et cognitio rerum, observed Carl von Linné (also known as Carolus Linnaeus, 1707-1778), this Swede father of modern taxonomy: If you don't know (or fail to specify) the name … knowledge of the thing also perishes. In the case of ‘radical democracy’, of course, things are quite different: the problem is not lack on
‘names’ but the exact opposite: terminological hyperinflation, name spinning. And yet the two states –nominal shortage and nominal excess– are strikingly homologous in the perverse theoretical and practical consequences they obtain: cognitive diffusion and inchoate semantic fields, indeterminacy and ambiguity in meaning, vagueness in the empirical referents. This, of course, is a problematic state of affairs: In order to bring something about (as SMOs are ostensibly seeking to bring about ‘radical democracy’) one needs to know what it is we are looking for. In short, ‘radical democracy’ requires adequate conceptual maps, in the absence of which we cannot assess and evaluate steps considered or taken towards its realisation. Indeed, the danger looms large that we may end up navigating away from –instead of towards –meaningful democratic deepening.

The goal of this paper is to make a modest contribution towards this important end: critique and problematise contemporary ways of thinking about ‘radical democracy’ en route to suggesting corrective (re-) conceptualisations.

**A theoretical prefiguration**

To provocatively claim, as I do, that ‘radical democracy’ is marred by theoretical and empirical indeterminacy is not also to argue that it is a void concept. Quite to the contrary, it seems to me that the notion carries with it a fairly stabilised, albeit theoretically underspecified and denotationally opaque, syndrome of associations. In what follows, I want to tentatively argue that, burdened by terminological hyperinflation and amorphous –typically ultra-representational– semantics, ‘radical democracy’ has tended to be cast in the background of a cognitive template hypostatising certain largely ineffectual properties of direct democracy at the cost of robbing the concept of much of its applicability and practical import. My goal will be to problematise precisely this template, which –somewhat provocatively– I tentatively label ‘contemplative-transcendental’.

This project is still at its incipient stages. As a result, it is entirely possible that some of my aphorisms and apodictic adages may be doing injustice to ongoing theoretical work, whilst also failing to appreciate the significance of recent empirical findings. Critiquing neo-romantic transcendentalism as a forma mentis, however, retains its validity irrespective of particular –ad hoc- adjustments. I submit that ‘radical democracy’, both as a theoretical entity and as a practical political project,
cannot advance for as long as transcendentalism retains its grip on concepts, analytical categories and theoretical generalisations. But there is an additional theoretical and practical reason for wanting to pursue the critique: transcendentalism’s enormous opportunity costs, the fact that its keeps us from exploring alternative templates. In due time, I hope to be able to suggest the outlines of such an alternative (what I will eventually call ‘embedded-activist ’).

(In its full final version) The paper is divided into two parts. The first part (Section I) is dedicated to the conceptual and theoretical issues I have just sketched, while Section II (in this version of the paper merely introduced in title form for purely indicative purposes) turns to history; first to tease out ‘radical democratic’ moments in the experience of the historic labour movement, and, second, in order to reflect on the crucial question of social-movement outcomes. Succinctly examining aspects of mid-19th century Parisian clubs, the ideology and practice of early 20th century Revolutionary Syndicalism, and tenets of Iberian Libertarian Communism, I draw two tentative conclusions: first, that the utopian forma mentis has a history that long antedates its contemporary incarnations (: although current ‘radical democracy’ s’ scale and ideological circumstances are rather unique, as a general cognitive template it has been around for quite a while); and, second, that the ideological frames, organisational practices and action repertoires it has inspired have been generally abortive, both in the short and the medium-long run –costing its adherents dearly in terms both of material and symbolic resources.

I. Navigating through a sea of meanings
It has already been suggested that as a theoretical construct and general concept, ‘radical democracy’ is characterised by an enormous terminological inflation. Consider the following –far from exhaustive- list of epithets evoked to describe what is deemed distinctive, if not always sine qua non or defining, about it: direct/pure, demarchic, non-electoral, e-democracy, open-source, participatory, associative, deliberative/discursive, consensus, sociocratic, grassroots etc. Needless to mention, the literature endorsing, debating or disputing radical democratic aspects is equally
vast (and growing), albeit unequal. How is one to navigate through this sea of terms and meanings?

Aspiring to make a contribution towards formulating democracy’s contemporary semantic field (: co-varying ensembles of associated and neighbouring terms), I am adopting a two-prone approach. The first level (still in progress) is lexicographic and –I’m afraid- extra-textual, located at the Appendix at the end of the paper. There, I offer preliminary declarative definitions of a number of pertinent terms (arranged in alphabetical order), focusing on properties that appear to be central and/or necessary. Compiling a terminological inventory is obviously important (if always extremely arduous, convoluted and risky), but in the present context our journey becomes more manageable, if properties and terms are organised on the basis of my second analytical device: grouping the various designations along the following three (non-exhaustive) major polarities/dimensions:

- **Representation – Participation**, the most sweeping of all, it refers to the overall character of decision-making arrangements;
- **Majority Decision – Consensus** concerning the particular method employed for reaching political decisions; whilst
- **Hierarchy - Functional Isonomy** is essentially about the leadership is structured and relates with the membership.

The idea is provisionally visualised in Figure 1.

It will be readily recognised that radical democracy is typically conceived as connoting the cluster of meanings found toward the right-hand end of the three spectra depicted. The area these meanings jointly occupy can be envisioned as comprising a distinctive cognitive template, a semantic and theoretical grid conditioning how we conceive and try to perceive ‘radical democracy’, as well as the theoretical and practical expectations we place upon it as a general notion. For reasons that I hope will become clear in the course of my exposition, I call this particular cognitive template ‘contemplative-transcendental’.
Positing these particular polarities/dimensions is not arbitrary. They have been upheld (both explicitly and implicitly) in much of the literature (e.g., Fotopoulos 2005; Mansbridge 2003; Carter/Stokes 2002; Dryzek 2000; Gerber 1999; Bohman/Rehg 1997; Kobach 1993; Fishkin 1991: Magleby 1984; Pitkin 1967), including the well-known DEMOS typology of internal decision-making (see, e.g., della Porta/Andretta/Reiter 2006), and are also readily apparent in the political discourse of most SMOs, both critique of the ‘external’ political system (democracy as formal institutional structure at the regime level) and as appraisal of their own ‘internal’ decision-making arrangements. It merits attention that the link between the
two is direct and consequential: poorly articulated (vague or irrelevant) critiques of contemporary liberal democracy set the stage for inchoate ‘internal’ decision-making debates and vice versa: ineffective internal decision-making arrangements result in political ineffectiveness undermining SMO credibility in the short but, more crucially, in the medium-long run.

I propose to discuss each dimension in turn, reflect on and critique the resultant template, and then proceed to offer some open-ended thoughts about the desirability of an alternative template and its own practical requirements and prerequisites. [In this early version of the paper the argument is not fully fleshed out –yet an effort will be made to demonstrate its overall orientation.]

I.1 Participation – Representation

Participation is, of course, a massive concept. Its basic lexical meaning –‘taking part’– opens up a vast array of characteristics and empirical referents, ranging from the mere act of casting a vote all the way to politically intensive self-government. The clue as to which meaning is intended in typical radical democratic usage is given by the term’s position along the specific continuum: that participation is conceived as the polar opposite of ‘representation’ essentially means that the two are held to be mutually incompatible. Or, what amounts to the same thing, the more participation there is, the less representation (and vice versa). Cast along those lines, participation (and ‘participatory democracy’) becomes directly associated to ‘pure’ or direct democracy (self-government). (If words mean what they say, ‘direct’ refers –precisely- to the absence of representation.) What are the consequences?

We all know, but usually fail to sufficiently take cognizance of the fact that in contemporary settings (past the limit of a medium-sized city-state) direct democracy is largely untenable; not only externally, for the political system at large, but also ‘internally’ for organisations, including SMOs. This is rarely mentioned or acknowledged, but even in its ideal classical –and far less populous– incarnation, the paradise of the deliberative assembly was associated with the hell of systematic exclusion. It is important to recall that only 2% of the population of classical Athens attended popular Assembly (ἐκκλησία) meetings –5,000 out of approximately 250,000 (Finley 1973)– whilst things were not qualitatively different during the four centuries of Republican Rome. To wit: thinking of participatory (and radical) democracy as a
variety of direct democracy unduly confines it to an untenable cloud-cuckoo land. Why should that be?

One possible answer is the understandable aversion scholars and activists feel towards ‘delegation’: the unconditional surrender of responsibility to the representative. Though, if properly conducted, delegation is different form abdication, it is clear that delegation (and ‘delegative democracy’) entails the more or less unconditional empowerment of the delegate (O’ Donnell 1994). What is often missed in this line of reasoning, however, is that delegation is not a necessary property –let alone a synonym, of representation: representation is not unconditional delegation. Differently put, it is possible to limit the representative’s authority/jurisdiction without rejecting representation tout court.

A similar argument holds for the more modern incarnations of the ‘direct’ variety –in the form of e-democracy, EDD (Electronic Direct Democracy), and open-source governance. Conceiving the use of modern technology as a substitute rather than a corrective to representation, however, falls in the trap of technological determinism recently criticised, among others, by Tilly (2004). Open source software and other electronic devises such cellular phones obviously facilitate communication among those who have access to them, but, by the same token, they also accentuate inequalities between insiders and outsiders in all political circuits and networks. This obviously undermines the universalism required of all democratic procedures (Schmitter/Streek 1985). Besides, who sets the agenda? Does not the ‘virtual’ state promised by open source governance involve a gigantic –leap of faith-like– act of delegation?

Vexing agenda-setting and issue-formulating also pester the celebrated referendum variety –the form which has been hailed as capable of realising the direct democratic ideal. Even with the new electronic means available to policy makers and SMO members, the *Whats* and *Hows* (political terms) of referendum voting are premised on already established and functioning polities (with institutional infrastructures and basic policy orientations), which do not –and cannot- emerge, or be changed, in a purely inductive manner, from the bottom up. But that is not all. Though this is rarely mentioned in the literature, referenda are zero-sum mechanisms: literal majority rule systems that rule out minority rights (Sartori 1987). As such, they not only run contrary to a general logic of discursive deliberation (of which more below), but, because they do not admit compromise, cross issue adjustments, and *ad*
hoc corrections, raise a ‘winner-takes-all’ spectre of the tyranny of the majority. But none of this is necessary. Conceived as decision-making devices in the context of generally representative arrangements, referenda lose their spurious transcendental/messianic potential but retain their considerable practical usefulness.

To sum up (and bear in mind for what follows): contrary to what is often implied in many a treatment, thinking of participatory democracy as a direct democratic variety tends to burden it with excessive requirements that are either unrealistic or outright counterproductive. I argue, instead, that if we want it to serve as a credible radicalising device (contributing to the coming about of a robust radical democratic imagination), participatory democracy must be radically recast as a distinctively non-delegative representative variety with all --the several-- additional requirements. But to this issue I will return shortly.

1.2 Majority – Consensus

Belabouring the desirability of discursive deliberation and the benefits arising from consensual arrangements is rather superfluous. In most –if not all– varieties of democratic politics and shades of ideological opinion, that discursive deliberation is, in one way or another, conducive to rationality, impartiality, better knowledge of the facts, social and political learning, and carries with it profound epistemic value allowing dialogue participants glimpses of what is ‘morally good’, are all readily recognised and accepted (to the point of ‘politically correct’ banality). The problem lies elsewhere: in conceiving deliberation as an opposite of majority; in thinking that the two are mutually incompatible.

Suggesting that deliberation is antipodal to majority essentially implies that what is really distinctive about it as a procedure is its unlimited capacity to patch up differences en route to bringing about consensus (as unanimity). But this is an obviously exaggerated expectation. No matter how extensive, non-repressive or rational a deliberation, the possibility can never be ruled out –indeed it always looms large-- that disagreement (and I mean principled, intense disagreement beyond what ‘rough consensus’ formulae can process) may persist. What then? The answer is unbeatably simply. Either the polity (or SMO) will be forced to freeze all decision-making (: the strikingly unforeseen predicament of extreme deliberative versions such
as ‘sociocracy’), or it will have to fall back onto some kind of majoritarian (electoral) arrangement (such as Fishkin’s deliberative opinion polls).

This argument is related to intricacies surrounding the semantics of ‘consensus’. According to Sartori (1987) the concept involves three semantic layers. The first two – (a) common political culture/agreement on basic values and (b) the unanimous approval of leadership conduct (at the polity but, one surmises, also at the SMO level) –, though obviously facilitating, are not necessary democratic conditions: democratic procedure is conceivable and may well proceed unabated even in their absence (in pluralist settings rather, than being a drawback, disagreement is indeed an asset). This not so, however, with the third layer, (c) conflict-solving or disagreement-processing rules, in short, ‘the rules of the game’. Citizens (and SMO members) can remain dissonant after lengthy deliberation, provided they have reached agreement on how to process their disagreement. But how can this be done if the majority principle has been ditched?

Additional problems and incompatibilities exist. Joshua Cohen and Archon Fung (2004: 27), for instance, have recently pointed out that there is an innate tension between participation and deliberation. The latter depends on participants with expert or, at least, sufficient knowledge about the issues under consideration. ‘But on any issue, the number of individuals with such knowledge…is bound to be small…so the quality of deliberation declines with the scope of participation’. If this so (and though Cohen and Fung don’t pursue that line of argument), extensive deliberation is likely to lead to stalemate with no obvious way out.

The upshot of the preceding can fruitfully be summarised in terms of condition analysis. Majority is definitely not a sufficient condition of democratic procedure, but it certainly is a necessary one: its existence does not guarantee democracy (much less radical democracy), but democracy (hence also radical democracy) cannot exist in its absence. If this so, radical democracy is not furthered by counterposing deliberation to majority. The challenge is, instead, to find ways of blending them. Naturally, what will also be required in this juncture is constitutional (or, in the case of SMOs, internal-procedural) guarantees for protecting minority rights.

To aphorise: an exceedingly valuable democratic tool in the context of majoritarian arrangements, discursive deliberation can become a creed largely void of practical significance if approached as a contrariety to the majority principle. Far from being antinomically antipodal, deliberation and majority may actually be mutually
enhancing—the majority arrangement serving as last-resort exit from possible
discursive stalemate liberates deliberative energies thereby making the emergence of
consensus more likely.

I.3 Hierarchy – Isocracy
Discussing this dimension let me start from the end and work myself backwards.
Isocracy, a decision-making arrangement where all citizens/SMO members have
equal political power, is rhetorically intriguing, but like much else in the
transcendental template, typically indeterminate and high flown. This, of course, does
not mean that the problem tapped is not crucial; quite to the contrary. Unbridled
hierarchy sure breeds oligarchy, which—*eo ipso*—is the very negation of radical
democracy. But does this mean that radical democracy *resides* in an isocratic rejection
of hierarchy? Is it to be sought in the direction of ‘inclusiveness’ and demarchic
levelling procedures?

In an indirect and roundabout way, the hierarchy–isocracy polarity pertains
to the larger issues of the nature of political activities and SMO functions. Performing
a variety of expressive and socialising functions, as well prefiguring the world they
strive to bring about with their action, SMOs are clearly not just means. (And that
political activity, in addition to promoting interests and preferences, is also a
mechanism for personal growth and development is an old and cherished theme in
most shades of classical and modern political theory). But if SMOs are not just means,
they are not pure—transcendental—ends either. No matter how extensive and
consequential, their ‘non-instrumental’ teleology acquires its meaning in the
background of the political objectives for which the SMOs were founded. Remove the
latter and the former also founders. But can there be meaningful political action
without at least some form of hierarchy?

The point here is not, of course, to deny the importance of non-hierarchical
relations *tout court* (or underrate the semantic pool in which the non-/anti-hierarchical
debate is situated); my objective is, rather, to question the spectrum’s validity as a
radical democratic dimension. Once again, the reason is unbeatably prosaical. Even if
shown to be desirable (which is a very big if), isonomic or near-isonomic
arrangements are very difficult to come by (except perhaps at the grassroots level and
for SMOs that are—or seek to remain—exceedingly small). One does not have to be
an expert in organisational theory to realise that bureaucracies cannot just be wished out of existence. But whilst this is undeniable, posing the problem as if (quasi-) isonomic arrangements were possible, bears the enormous opportunity cost of not seeking ways to enhance hierarchic leadership accountability.

This discussion has a more than incidental bearing on the equally broad issue of decision-making and general organisational ‘inclusiveness’. Seen as a ‘soft guideline’ within a generally ‘hierarchical’ framework, inclusiveness is extremely important, provided of course one backs it up with specific accountability enhancing proposals. But as a strict organising principle (suggesting, e.g., that there should be no membership requirements whatsoever) may well backfire. In the case of western political parties, for instance, blurring the distinction between members and non-members has not so brought about the empowerment of the latter but undermining of the position of the former. According to Katz and Mair (1995) this has been one of the key processes reflecting and further contributing to the emergence of the ‘cartel party’, hardly an input to radical democracy. But this should not come as a surprise. Undermining of party and SMO ‘chain of command’ encumbers accountability, making the emergence of unseen (and eminently unaccountable) string-pooling minorities a distinct and rather likely possibility. If that is so, spurious isonomy may well turn onto to be breeding grounds for concealed autocracy.

**The Contemplative Template: key issues...**

The preceding discussion has hopefully shown why it is that at this stage I consider approaching radical democracy form within the confines of the contemplative transcendental template –pitting it against representative democracy, the majority principle and hierarchical organisational structures– inopportune, taxing and poorly attuned to the ‘reality principle’ (hence the label contemplative-transcendental). The consequences of course can be rather unpleasant: seeking the extravagant in metaphysical rather than political terms (Rawls 1985) entails the risk of neglecting what may be basic but necessary for a robust radical democracy.

I argue that the particular perceptions prioritised within this cognitive framework (participation as the opposite of representation, deliberation as the opposite of majoritarianism, etc) are not conducive to a robust radical democratic imagination, and this hampers practical efforts to cope with conventional democracy’s
shortcomings. The vast majority of the concepts that I have discussed in the course of my critique are necessary for such a robust radical democratic project. But for that potential to materialise they will first have to be ‘extracted’ from the transcendental cognitive terrain and then re-articulated within a different one. For instance, instead of thinking of participation as an activity asymptotic to representation, we may prioritise properties that have to do with ensuring the increasing accountability of representatives. To these issues I will return below. Before that, however, I want to suggest a number of additional, though not necessarily secondary, problems associated with the transcendental template.

...and some disparate concerns: a coda

One sparsely discussed—but I think quite likely—consequence of the quasi-chaotic multiplicity characterising the flow of political input as envisioned in the transcendental template (e.g., grassroots structuring, perpetually open-ended discursive processes etc.) is a certain diffusion in the framing, presentation, and handling of the various issues arising. This is obviously very exciting, but also quite risky, in that problems appear ‘levelled’ to the point of citizens/SMO members losing sight of what is primary and what secondary. With issues haphazardly and inchoately articulated, citizens may have well gained access to direct democratic components such as the right to initiate constitutional amendments (as, e.g., in no less than 34 U. S. states/Zimmerman 1999a, 1999b), but unless these are embedded in cohesive and operative political platforms, the newly won rights amount to little if anything at all. It merits attention that such segmentation of issues runs counter to the traditions of the radical labour movement—proclaiming instead generalisation (politicisation) of individual problems and grievances as a prerequisite of effective framings.

In an indirect way this concern also incorporates the so-called problem of ‘issue complexity’ highlighted by elitist democratic theory (in the Schumpeterian tradition). Transcendental depictions are fond of thinking of all citizens (and SMO members) as possessing ‘technical competence’ at all times and in all issues, capable of performing equally well as organisers as well agitators, as tacticians as well as campaign managers, etc. When it turns out that this is not so (and this is a condition that applies both to SMO members as well as to citizens in general), the so-called principle of inverted results sets in: a state of affairs where ideas, pushed to their
extreme, begin to operate in the reverse: the conclusion is likely to be drawn at that juncture that since transcendental participation is untenable, conventional participation is equally pointless and insignificant. But this is not so. If citizens and SMO members are not always willing or capable of formulating policies themselves (self-government), they know only too well how to judge and evaluate policy packages (both internal and external) presented to them externally, by their leadership. The question is whether citizens/SMO members are given the opportunity to do that while participating in SMO life or not, how often, under what conditions, and on how extensive a range of issues.

Towards an alternative –activist– template

Situated within the transcendental cognitive plateau, one is inclined to focus his/her critique of contemporary democracy on extant decision-making procedures. As a result, the quest for a radical democratic alternative is bound to be similarly procedural: self government, deliberation, isocracy. To an extent this, of course, is quite normal. After all, democracy is but a set of governing and decision-making governing procedures: appraising it, critiquing it, reforming it necessarily requires ‘procedural analysis’. This, however, is only half the story and, I’d venture suggesting, the least interesting half. Questioning how is democracy to operate where it exists is of course important. But where does it exist? What does it encompass and what it encompasses not? For instance, it does involve electing the executive, but not questions concerning allocation of the socially produced surplus.

David Held (1996: 107) formulated this question in passing in his fine discussion of John Stuart Mill’s analysis of representative government:

…[H]ow much democracy should there be? How much of social and economic life should be democratically organized?

I argue that an absolute prerequisite and sine qua non defining property of a robust conception of a ‘radical democracy’ is demanding the expansion of democratic scope primarily, though not exclusively, to the sphere of production. This has also been the suggestion of both classical participatory theorists such as Carole Pateman (1970) and C. B. Macpherson (1973) and neo-pluralist critics such as Bob Dahl (1985) and Charles Lindblom (1977). Once again according to Held’s (1996: 268) rendering:
…[D]emocratic rights need to be expanded from the state to the economic enterprise and the other central organizations of society. The structure of the modern corporate world makes it essential that the political rights of citizens be complemented by a similar set of rights in the sphere of work and community relations.

Excursus on the Open Method of Co-ordination

The argument that for purposes of a robust radical democracy what is crucial is not only (or principally) how ‘directly’ people participate, but, rather, the expanse of the public sphere that is open to deliberation, can be approached (and researched) from a variety of complementary angles. One example among many that springs to mind concerns the celebrated ‘Open Method of Co-ordination’ (OMC) adopted by the EU in the late 1990s to deal with the problem of unemployment (in the context of the European Employment Strategy). At the time of its adoption the policy was hailed as the harbinger of radical ‘democratic governance’, whilst there has also been the customary torrent of epithets: voluntarist, iterative, comprehensive, positive-sum, innovative, etc. (see Ardy/Begg 2001; Rhodes et al. 2001; Sabel 2000; Teague 2001, Goetschy 2001). A decade later, however, very few people would dare think of the OMC as a radical democratic instance. And the reason is not procedure but substantive democratic expanse. As I have argued on a different occasion, because key aspects of the problem at hand are blocked off the democratic agenda, consultation and deliberation ‘retain a perpetually asymptotic relation to what may be the gist of the policy debate’ (Seferiades 2003:194).

In order for it to be effective, expansion of democratic deliberation into the sphere of production along the lines suggested above obviously requires considerable institutional and procedural innovation. If radical democracy is to be regarded as a compelling idea, its practical grounds and features ought to be specified thoroughly. Of course, it is not possible to even begin doing this here, yet it is worth repeating that most of the governing and decision-making devices discussed in the course of the paper (referenda, deliberation, etc.) can be valuable radical democratic inputs
provided they are re-articulated in the context of a new radical democratic cognitive template. Such a template, and the conception of radical democracy it fosters, would not shun, but seek to build upon representation, majority, and hierarchical organisation. This requires three distinct operations, depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Democratic Dimensions of Variation and Cognitive Templates II
The first involves the explicit coupling of the new cognitive template with what I am referring to as ‘substantive democracy’: democracy that includes deliberation about the allocation of socially produced surplus. The second step involves liquidation of the transcendental template’s variation continua. It needs to be stressed that participation is not the polar opposite of representation, deliberation of majority, etc. The third step, finally, freely re-appropriates disparate democratic deepening elements and relocates them in the interior of the new cognitive template. Particular mention is made of the revocation principle, combining representation and increased membership control, at the intersection of ‘trustee’ and ‘agent’ representation. In order to highlight this template’s practical character, I’ve provisionally labelled it ‘embedded-activist’.

Pending fuller analysis in a future version of the paper, let me just conclude this section by mentioning the obvious political implications of the preceding analysis: scholarly debates not only reflect but also shape SMO perceptions.

[...]

II. Labour History as Control: A Few Preliminary Materials...

Can history be a guide to semantics? Does the historical record teach us something about radical democracy? Seeking to tease out ‘radical democratic’ moments in the experience of the historic labour movement in order to reflect about outcomes, my goal in this section will also be to look for correspondences between my two democratic ‘templates’ and specific labour practices.

In what follows I am just citing a small but suggestive selection of materials and documents, indicating selective affinities between the transcendental template and the discourse of mid-19th century Parisian clubs, early 20th century Revolutionary Syndicalism, and tenets of Iberian Libertarian Communism.
The Paris Club Movement

Where popular spontaneity was credited with the revolutionary successes of 1789, 1792, 1830 and February 1848, revolutionary regimentation was blamed for such dismal failures as the insurrection of the Seasons of 1839, that had been long on organisation but short on support. The popular societies offered what seemed a painless compromise between spontaneity and regimentation, by promising to bring revolutionaries together without unduly impinging upon their individual autonomy. [key]

A [key] theme presented popular societies as instruments of ideological education for the newly enfranchised, as a market place of ideas where an informed public opinion would be moulded.

What the popular societies sought to establish were patterns of social solidarity and social effectiveness in the midst of rapidly changing political and social structures...

(Amann 1975)

Revolutionary Syndicalism

DECLARATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM

►Accepted by the founding congress of the IWMA (1922)

…Revolutionary syndicalism…strives for the elimination [of all economic and social monopolies] by means of economic communes and administrative organs, run by the workers in the fields and factories, forming a system of free council system, which is subordinate to no political power or party… Consequently, its goal is not the conquest of political power, but the abolition of all state functions in the life of society...

Revolutionary syndicalism is opposed to all centralist endeavours and organizations, borrowed from the state and the church, which systematically stifle the spirit of initiative and independent thought. Centralism is an artificial organization, from the top down that leaves in the hands of the few the affairs of the whole community. Through this process, the individual becomes a puppet guided and controlled from above. The good of society is subordinated to the interests of the few, variety is replaced by uniformity, personal responsibility is replaced by rigid discipline, and education is replaced by training. Consequently, revolutionary syndicalism is founded upon a federalist union, that is, upon an organization structured from the bottom up, a voluntary federation of all forces based on mutual interests and shared convictions.

Revolutionary syndicalism rejects all parliamentary activity and all collaboration with legislative bodies. Not even the freest voting system can bring about the disappearance of the clear contradictions at the core of present-day society; the whole parliamentary system has as its only goal to lend an air of legality to the reign of falsehood and social injustice, and to induce the slaves to put the imprimatur of the law upon their own slavery. Revolutionary syndicalism rejects all arbitrarily created political and national frontiers, and regards nationalism as merely the religion of the modern state, behind which is concealed the material interests of the propertied classes. It recognizes only natural regional differences, and demands the right of every minority to regulate its own affairs by mutual agreement with all other economic, regional or national associations...

Thorpe (1989)
LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM
by Isaac Puente [http://flag.blackened.net/liberty/libcom.html]

First published by the CNT in Spanish as a widely distributed pamphlet in 1932, with many subsequent editions.

The National Confederation of Labour acts as interpreter to the workers’ freedom movement, warning of reformist flannel and giving the blind alley of politics a wide birth. It has found a straight road, that of direct action, which leads directly to the installation of libertarian communism, the only path to freedom. There is no point in building up a powerful movement that will win the admiration both of its members and of outsiders, unless it achieves its goal of liberation…

The union: in it combine spontaneously the workers from factories and all places of collective exploitation.

And the free municipality: an assembly with roots stretching back into the past where, again in spontaneity, inhabitants of village and hamlet combine together, and which points the way to the solution of problems in social life in the countryside.

Both kinds of organisation, run on federal and democratic principles, will be sovereign in their decision making, without being beholden to any higher body, their only obligation being to federate one with another as dictated by the economic requirement for liaison and communications bodies organised in industrial federations.

The union and the free municipality will assume the collective or common ownership of everything which is under private ownership at present and will regulate production and consumption (in a word, the economy) in each locality.

The very bringing together of the two terms (communism and libertarian) is indicative in itself of the fusion of two ideas: one of them is collectivist, tending to bring about harmony in the whole through the contributions and cooperation of individuals, without undermining their independence in any way; while the other is individualist, seeking to reassure the individual that his independence will be respected.
**APPENDIX**

**DEMOCRATIC VARIETIES: A PRELIMINARY GLOSSARY**

*(In progress/preparatory material)*

**Delegative democracy:** System in which election entitles the winner to behave in office as s/he sees fit, without any institutionalised constraints. It follows that elections in delegative democracies are a very-emotional and high-stake process. But during normal times voters typically display a passive attitude. According to O’ Donnell (1994) ‘delegative’ democracies are, generally speaking, poorly institutionalised.

**Deliberative/Discursive democracy:** Democratic variety envisioned as government by discussion and the powers of reason and the best argument. Deliberative democracy focuses on *both* hearing out every policy alternative from every direction *and* providing time to research them all. Relatedly, the source of legitimacy in all decisions reached is the amount of discussion that has gone into them (quality of the deliberative procedure observed).

**Demarchy/Sortition:** A decision-making arrangement without a standing bureaucracy, based instead on randomly selected groups of decision makers (sortition), who deliberate and make decisions much the same way that juries reach verdicts. Demarchy’s proponents claim that random selection of policymakers makes it easier for everyday citizens to participate, and harder for ‘special interests’ to corrupt the democratic process.

**Direct democracy:** Form of democracy (and theory of civics) wherein sovereignty is lodged in the assembly of all citizens who participate. A democracy is direct precisely in that it is not its opposite (‘representative’). Depending on the particular system, the assembly might pass executive motions, legislate, conduct trials, elect and dismiss officials. In the archetypical case of classical Athens most officials were picked by sortition. One modern form of direct democracy is the referendum democracy (see: below).

**E-Democracy (Electronic Direct Democracy –EDD):** The use of electronic communications technologies (especially the Internet) for purposes of enhancing democratic processes. EDD is a form of direct democracy in which the Internet and other electronic communications technologies are used to help carry out regular referenda.
**Grassroots Democracy:** More of an institutional device and organisational principle than a democratic form, ‘grassroots democracy’ refers to a design whereby as much decision-making authority as is practical is shifted to an organisation’s (or political regime’s) lowest geographic level or unit. (In the case of supra-national organisations, such as the EU, a grassroots example might be the principle of subsidiarity.)

**Open source governance:** Relying on freeware and other user-friendly technologies, open source governance promotes the idea that –much like a wiki document– interested citizens ought to be able to develop new policies, legislate &c. It has been argued that open source governance may be able to bring about a post-national ‘virtual state’, where policy-setting will be decoupled from territorial management and constraints.

**Referendum democracy:** A form of direct democracy (in that it abolishes representation and representatives). It ought to be distinguished from the referendum as a decision-making instrument within a representative setting. In referendum democracy referenda are not just devices used by leaders, but *the* basic democratic mechanism.

**Representative democracy:** Democratic variety founded on the basis of the exercise of popular sovereignty by elected representatives. The representatives –neither proxies/agents nor irresponsible trustees– retain a measure of autonomy and independence, but this ultimately depends on the accountability mechanisms on which the system is premised.

**Sociocracy:** Also called Dynamic Governance. The term is derived from the Latin *socius* (companion) and the Greek *kratein* (to govern). A form of government that presumes equality of individuals and is based on consent. In sociocracy a decision cannot be taken if someone presents a strong objection against it. The individual is thus enormously empowered, and this has made sociocracy enthusiasts suggest that it represents the next step after democracy (Endeburg 1998a, 1998b).
References


