Crisis and Political Vision:  
Radical Democracy as a Challenge

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GLOBAL DISCONTENT?  
Dilemmas of Change

by

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Abstract

Both as formal institutional arrangement 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, but for reasons uninspiringly prosaic: though still enjoying quasi-universal normative approval, democracy is not doing well. As Peter Mair put it in a recent article, what we are presently witnessing is the massive ‘hollowing of western democracy’, a process involving the retreat of parties, voter disengagement from conventional politics and rampant political cynicism. Considering that several erstwhile democratic champions have –by deed or omission– turned into ‘democratic-hollowing’ accomplices, social movement organisations become important radical democratic agents. But where exactly is the radical-democratic Promised Land located? Consider the following –far from exhaustive- list of ‘radical democratic’ epithets: direct, representative, deliberative, participatory, consensus, demarchic. What are the precise meanings intended, and how are they to be organised? What is the relevant semantic field, and how is it to be related to antonymic –more conventional- notions, such as representative/liberal democracy? The goal of this paper is to make a contribution towards this important end: critique and problematise contemporary ways of thinking about ‘radical democracy’ en route to suggesting corrective re-conceptualisations.
The Problem...in brevis

Both as formal institutional arrangement at the regime level and as a constellation of internal decision-making practices and 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, NGOs) have –by deed or omission- turned into of ‘democratic-hollowing’ accomplices, social movement organisations (SMOs) become –de facto- 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 Promise 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, claimed 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 invariably negative 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 that we are looking for. In short, ‘radical democracy’, requires adequate conceptual maps, in the absence of which we cannot assess and evaluate steps presumably taken for its realisation. Indeed, the danger looms large that we may end up navigating away, instead, of toward the goal of democratic deepening.

The goal of this paper is to make a modest —preliminary— contribution towards this important end: critique and problematise 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, for the most part ineffectual, properties of direct democracy, albeit 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’, or, more informally, neo-romantic-utopian.

This project is still at its incipient stages. As a result, some of my aphoristic adages may well 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 one such alternative (what I will eventually call ‘embedded-activist’).

(In its final form) The paper is divided into two parts. The first part is dedicated to the conceptual and theoretical issues I just sketched, while Section II (in this version merely introduced for indicative purposes as Appendix I) 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 late 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 invariably abortive, both in the short and the medium-long run –costing its adherents dearly in terms both of material and symbolic resources.

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 (and the literature presenting, debating or disputing aspects thereof is equally vast, albeit unequal, and growing). 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 II. There, I offer preliminary declarative definitions of a number of pertinent terms (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, risky and convoluted), but in the present context our journey becomes more manageable, if organised on the basis of my second device: grouping the various designations along the following three (non-exhaustive) major polarities/dimensions:

- **Representation – Participation**, the most sweeping of all, refers to the overall character of the decision-making arrangement;
- **Majority Decision – Consensus** concerns the particular method employed for reaching political decisions; whilst
- **Hierarchy - Functional Isonomy** is essentially about leadership: exploring the ways in which it is structured, and the kinds of relations it retains with the membership.

The idea is visualised in Figure 1. It will be readily recognised that radical democracy is usually conceived as a cluster of meanings toward the right-hand end of the three spectra depicted. The area they jointly occupy can fruitfully be envisioned as comprising what I have earlier termed a cognitive template (provisionally labelled ‘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. Incidentally, it is also worth noticing that, for the most part, they refer both to SMO critique of the ‘external’ political system (democracy as formal institutional structure at the regime level) and their own ‘internal’ decision-making arrangements.

Needless to mention, the link between the two is direct and consequential: poorly articulated (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 that undermines SMO credibility, if not immediately, then 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.

Figure 1: Democratic Dimensions of Variation and Cognitive Templates I

I.1 Participation – Representation
Participation is, of course, a massive concept. Its basic lexical meaning – ‘taking part’ – opens up a vast array of meanings and empirical referents, ranging from the mere act of casting a vote all the way to intensive self-government. The clue as to which meaning is intended in the analyses I have in mind is given by the term’s position along the specific continuum: that participation is conceived as the polar opposite of ‘representation’ 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’) is directly
associated to ‘pure’ or direct democracy (self-government). (‘Direct’ refers – precisely- to the absence of representation.) What are the consequences?

We all know, but often fail to elaborate or appreciate 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 dealt with, 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 (εκκλησία) 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 –much less 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 falls into the trap of technological determinism recently criticised, among others, by Tilly (2004). Open source software and other electronic devises such as cellular phones obviously facilitate communications among those who have access to them, but, by the same token, also accentuate inequalities between insiders and outsiders in all political circuits and networks. This obviously undermines the universalism required of all democratic procedures (cf. 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?

Not altogether different objections exist for the celebrated referendum variety –the form which has been hailed as one capable of realising the direct democratic ideal. Even with the new electronic means available to policy makers and SMO members, however, the question of who sets the agenda (and formulates the issues) remains. Moreover, for referenda to be able to perform as effective decision-making and policy-shaping devices, requires a functioning polity with an institutional infrastructure and basic policy orientation, which does not –and cannot- emerge (or be changed) in a purely inductive manner, exclusively 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 the spectre of a tyranny of the majority. Like much else in this discussion, however, referenda can be conceived differently, as devices of representative democracy.

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 want to 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.

I.2 Majority – Consensus

Belabouring the desirability of discursive deliberation and the benefits arising from consensual arrangements is rather superfluous. In most varieties of democratic politics (and shades of ideological opinion), the view that discursive deliberation is conducive to rationality, impartiality, better knowledge of the facts (hence also social and political learning), and carries with it a profound epistemic value (allowing dialogue participants glimpses of what is ‘morally good’), is readily recognised and accepted (to the point of a politically correct banality) (but do see Sanders 1997; Young 2001; and Hauptmann 2001). The problem lies elsewhere: in conceiving deliberation as an opposite of majority, thinking that the two are mutually incompatible.

This further implies that what is really distinctive about deliberation as a procedure is its unlimited capacity to patch up differences (through transforming opposite views) and bring 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 looms large— that disagreement (: principled, intense disagreement

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1 All the same, one cannot but be struck by the excessive —kindergarten-like— moralising involved in several treatments. For instance, what stands out from Steiner et al’s (2004) recent review of the literature is a fairly long list of pollyannish advice: be truthful; justify your arguments; be willing to ‘truly listen’ [sic] (p. 22); think of the common good; yield to the force of the better argument! Bearing the list in mind one can better understand Young’s (2003: 106) admonition that the ‘deliberative democrat who thinks that power can be bracketed by the soft tones of the seminar room is naïve’. Instead, ‘those who care about promoting greater justice should engage primarily in critical oppositional activity, rather than attempt to come to agreement with those who support or benefit from existing power structures’ (p. 103). Hauptmann (2001: 420-21) justifies the critique by pointing out that ‘deliberative theorists of democracy are not able to tell us much about what is wrong with the political world and, consequently, can tell us little about how we might make it better’. On the inherently dominating character of deliberative settings, see also Mouffe (1999).
beyond what ‘rough consensus’ formulae can process) may persist.\(^2\) 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 on some kind of majoritarian (electoral) arrangement.

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) unanimous approval of leadership conduct (at the polity but, one surmises, also at the SMO level)—, though obviously facilitating, are not necessary democratic conditions. In other words, democratic procedure is conceivable and may well proceed unabated even in their absence (in point of fact, in pluralist settings disagreement is an asset not a drawback). That, however, is not so 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?

The upshot of the preceding can fruitfully be summarised –once again- 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 is so, I submit that depicting deliberation and majority as polar opposites is counterproductive. For purposes of promoting a radical democratic agenda, the challenge lies in blending them. What is also required in this juncture is, of course, constitutional (or, in the case of SMOs, internal-procedural) guarantees protecting minority rights.

To aphorise: an exceedingly valuable democratic tool in the context of majoritarian arrangements, discursive deliberation becomes a creed largely void of practical significance if approached as a contrariety to the majority principle. The former poses crucial problems in democratic theory and practice with important implications for polities and SMOs; the latter is precisely the stuff contemplative transcendentalism is made of.

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, extremely high flown to say the least. This, of course, does not mean that the problem tapped is not crucial; quite the contrary. Unbridled hierarchy sure breeds oligarchy, which –\(\text{\textit{eo ipso}}\)- is the very negation of radical democracy (and one need not cite the rich literature to that effect from Michels all the way to Piven/Cloward and beyond). But does this mean that radical democracy resides in the isocratic rejection of

\(^2\) In point of fact, the argument has been vividly made that deliberation properly understood, instead of reducing, rather tends to exacerbate disagreements (Shapiro 1997; Sunstein 2002).
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, SMOs, clearly, are not just means (that political activity is also a mechanism for self-development is an old and cherished strand in liberal political theory); but 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 SMOs were founded. Remove the latter and the former also founders. The point here is not, of course, to deny the importance of non-hierarchical relations tout court; my objective is, rather, to question the spectrum’s validity as a radical democratic dimension. Once again, the reason is unbeatably prosaic. 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 –and 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 actually existing hierarchic leadership accountability; of controlling bureaucratisation and overall professionalisation that many important authors consider inescapable (e.g. Tilly 2004).

This discussion has more than an incidental bearing on the equally broad issue of decision-making and general organisational ‘inclusiveness’. Approached as a general principle (from within a generally ‘hierarchical’ framework), seeking inclusiveness can be extremely important, provided of course one backs it up with specific accountability enhancing proposals. But approached as a strict organising principle in a manner that words mean exactly what they say (implying, e.g., that there should be no limit and no membership requirements) may well backfire. In the case of western political parties, for instance, blurring of the distinction between members and non-members has tended not so much to enhance or upgrade the latter as to undermine the position of the former. According to Katz and Mair (1995) this has been one of the key processes at once reflecting and further contributing to the emergence of the ‘cartel party’, hardly an input to radical democracy. But –let me repeat— none of that is necessary provided that inclusiveness is approached from within a different cognitive perspective, not as opposite to general hierarchy, but as an accountability-enhancing tool.

Last but not least, protracted failure to deal with accountability in a systematic manner in the context of undermining SMO ‘chain of command’ may be carrying the far more insidious risk of introducing 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-inopportun e, taxing and poorly attuned to the ‘reality principle’ (hence the label contemplative-transcendental). The consequences of course can be rather unpleasant: seeking the extravagant entails the risk of neglecting what is basic but necessary for a robust radical democracy.

I argue that the particular perceptions prioritised within this cognitive framework (epigrammatically, participation as the opposite of representation, deliberation as the opposite of majoritarianism, etc) are not conducive to a robust radical democratic imagination. On the contrary, the framework hampers practical efforts to cope with conventional democracy’s shortcomings. The vast majority of the concepts I have discussed in the course of my critique are extremely important, indeed necessary for such a robust radical democratic project. But for that potential to materialise it seems to me that they will have first to be—as it were—‘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 the increasing accountability of representatives. To this issue I will return below. Before that, however, I want to suggest a number of additional, though hardly 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 in the context of the transcendental template (: grassroots, perpetually open-ended discursive processes etc.) is a certain diffusion in the framing, presentation, and handling of the various issues that arise. This is obviously very exciting, but also 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 gained access to direct democratic components such as the right to initiate a constitutional amendment (as, e.g., in no less than 34 U. S. states/ Zimmerman 1999a, 1999b), but, unless these are embedded within cohesive and operative political platforms, they amount to little if anything at all. It merits attention that such diffusion of issues runs counter to the traditions of the radical labour movement—proclaiming generalisation (politicisation) of individual problems and grievances as a prerequisite of effective framings.

In a roundabout way this concern also incorporates the so-called problem of ‘issue complexity’ (highlighted by elitist democratic theory in the Schumpeterian tradition). Transcendental depictions like to think of all citizens (and SMO members) as possessing ‘technical competence’ at all times and in all issues, capable of performing equally well as organisers and agitators, tacticians and campaign managers. When it turns out that this is not so (and this is a condition that applies both to SMO members as well as general citizens), the so-called principle of inverted results sets in—a state of affairs when ideas, pushed to their extreme, begin to operate in the reverse: the conclusion is likely to be drawn at that point that since transcendental participation is untenable, conventional participation is pointless or
insignificant. But—once again—this is not so. If citizens and SMO members are not always willing or capable of formulating policies themselves, they know only too well how to judge and evaluate policy packages presented to them externally. The question is whether citizens/SMO members are given the opportunity to do that whilst participating in SMO life or not, 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 democracy is similarly procedural. As Habermas (1996) tellingly stressed, deliberative democracy is about an ‘ideal procedure’. This must not come as a surprise. After all, democracy is but a set of decision-making and governing procedures: appraising it, critiquing it, reforming it necessarily requires ‘procedural analysis’. This, however, is only half (and, I'd venture suggesting, the least interesting half) of the story: How democracy is to operate where it exists. But where does it exist? And what does it encompass? For instance, it involves electing the executive, but it does not involve allocation of the socially produced surplus.

David Held (1996: 107) formulated this question in passing in his 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 elected [or controlled]?

It seems to me 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, in 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-pluralists such as Bob Dahl (1985) and Charles Lindblom (). 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.

**Open Method of Co-ordination**

This basic 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 (even if by

3 Moreover, one must not fail to notice the elitism involved in the exaggerated expectations of deliberative theory. Since a prerequisite of true deliberation is a capacity to present arguments in a coherent way, all those who are unable to do that are automatically excluded (Steiner et al 2004: 21; see also Gabardi 2001).
representatives)— 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). 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 has gone by, however, and very few people would think of the OMC as a radical democratic experiment. The reason is not procedure but substantive democratic expanse. 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 above (referenda, deliberation, etc.) can serve that purpose provided they are re-articulated in the context of a new radical democratic cognitive template. As already suggested, this template (and the conception of radical democracy that it would foster) would not shun but seek to build upon representation, majority, and hierarchical organisation. This requires three distinct operations, depicted in Figure 2.

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 by mentioning the obvious political implications of the preceding analysis: scholarly debates not only reflect SMO perceptions, they also shape them.
**Figure 2: Democratic Dimensions of Variation and Cognitive Templates**

- **Majoritarian**
  - Delegative
  - Representation
    - Revocation
  - Electoral
  - Deliberative/Disursive
  - Inclusive
  - Grassroots
- **Hierarchy**
  - Substantive Democracy: includes deliberation on allocation of socially produced surplus
- **Participation**
  - Referendum
  - E-Democracy
    - Electronic Consultative Assemblies
      - Open source governance
  - Pure/Direct
    - Sociocratic
    - Demarchic/Sortition
  - Consensus
- **Isocracy**
  - Embedded-Activist Cognitive Template
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.

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.

…[W]hat 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…

Libertarian Communism

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.

[http://flag.blackened.net/liberty/libcom.html]
APPENDIX II

DEMONCRATIC VARIETIES: A PRELIMINARY GLOSSARY
(in progress/preparatory material)

Delegative democracy: System in which election entitles the winner to behave in office as 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 poorly institutionalised in general.

Deliberative/Discursive democracy: Democratic variety envisioned as ‘government by discussion’. 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 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 from, ‘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 with 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 actors—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


