

SUGGESTIONS & DEBATES

The Road to Democracy: The Political Legacy of “1968”

MARIANNE MAECKELBERGH

*Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology,
Universiteit Leiden*

E-mail: mmaeckelbergh@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

SUMMARY: Over the past forty years, the social struggles of the “long 1960s” have been continuously reinterpreted, each interpretation allocating a new mix of relevance and irrelevance to the brief global uprising. This article is a contribution to one such interpretation: the small but growing body of literature on the central importance of experiments with democracy within movements of the 1960s. Rather than examining the transformative effect of 1960s movements on institutional politics or popular culture, this article examines the lasting transformation 1960s movements had on social-movement praxis. Based on seven years of ethnography within contemporary global movement networks, I argue that when viewed from within social-movement networks, we see that the *political* legacy of the 1960s lies in the lasting significance of movement experiments with democracy as part of a prefigurative strategy for social change that is still relevant today because it is still in practice today.

INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING “1968”

Remembering 1968 is a difficult task. Those who were there have coloured their memories with the dreams of movements past, turning histories into myths. Those who were not there, unsurprisingly, have even more trouble remembering, as a recent pamphlet entitled “Remembering May ’68” made clear with the humorous opening, “I want to remember May ’68 but I don’t know how. Part of the problem is that I was born in 1975”.¹ For many social-movement actors today, the challenge is to remember something they have not experienced. The trouble in reconstructing the past is, however, not

1. A.K. Thompson “Remembering May ’68: Fifteen Fragments on Struggle and Redemption”, photocopied pamphlet (2008), p. 1.

nearly as interesting as the question, why do so many activists feel the need to continue retelling the story of this brief moment in history? Why are activists today still writing pamphlets about May '68 and 1960s movements more generally?

The answer I offer in this article is that activists today write, read, and talk about 1960s movements because the ideals and practices that were born out of 1960s movements continue to be central themes of movement praxis today. Specifically, I build on recent literature that treats the experiments with participatory democracy during the 1960s as a crucial break with communist theories of social change towards more “prefigurative” practices of social change.² Rather than a linear struggle towards a revolutionary moment, prefiguration entails the conflation of movement ends and means; it is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society. Prefiguration is a strategy best suited to movements that value participation not only in the struggle towards a predetermined goal, but also in the process of determining the goals. I argue that this shift from linear theories of social change to prefigurative ones lies primarily in the 1960s because this is when we see movement actors become increasingly willing to relinquish the singular revolutionary goal in favour of multiple visions of the future society.³

Much of the literature on 1960s movements in western Europe and the United States examines the question of lasting effects of the “long 1960s” (ranging from 1956 to the mid-1970s)⁴ from the point of view of 1960s movements’ impact on either institutional politics or popular culture and in some cases both. The general consensus thus far acknowledges that 1960s movements were successful in bringing about cultural transformations, even “revolutionary” change on the cultural level,⁵ that they made some inroads into institutional politics and temporarily improved

2. I draw particularly on Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America 1956–1976* (Oxford, 2007), and Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting* (Chicago, IL, 2002).

3. The concept of prefiguration predates the 1960s and is a long-standing practice in anarchist movements and certain strands of communist movements; the innovation of the 1960s movements lies in the application of prefiguration as a strategy in pursuit of multiple goals. See Marianne Maeckelbergh, “Doing is Believing: Prefiguration as Strategic Practice in the Alter-globalization Movement”, *Social Movement Studies*, 10 (2011), pp. 1–20.

4. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford, 1998) takes the year 1974 as the end of the “long 1960s”, but Horn, *Spirit of '68*, takes 1976, and Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (New York, 2008) take the year 1977.

5. See especially Marwick, *The Sixties*. For further interpretations of the 1960s and 1970s movements as a “politics of culture”, see Christopher Rootes, “Student Activism in France: 1968 and After”, in Philip G. Cerny (ed.), *Social Movements and Protest in France* (London, 1982), pp. 17–45, 35; Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*

working conditions for many,⁶ but that they never achieved the far-reaching political goals they set for themselves in terms of fundamental political transformation.⁷

This article examines the legacy of the long 1960s from the point of view of social-movement praxis. It therefore does not address the cultural legacy of the “long 1960s” but instead draws attention to the *political* legacy of 1960s movements from the point of view of a contemporary political reality – the crisis of democracy and the global movements that have arisen in response to challenge institutions of global governance such as the WTO, G8/G20, WB/IMF, and UNFCCC.⁸ I show how, when viewed from the perspective of contemporary social movements, attempts made by scholars such as Francesca Polletta and Gerd-Rainer Horn to “rescue [1960s] experiments with ‘participatory democracy’ and the corresponding social struggles from the historical distortion and condescension to which much recent historiography appears to condemn that promising era of revolt” become doubly important.⁹ This article argues that the 1960s are a turning point in movement experiments with democracy; it was during the 1960s that the notions of multiple goals and participatory democracy merged together and became common practice. This merger of the pursuit of multiple goals with practices of participatory democracy remains at the heart of the alterglobalization movement today.

Movement actors today actively pursue more inclusive forms of democratic decision-making as an alternative model for governing. This alternative is both a continuation of ideals that became central movement tenets during the 1960s *and* the legacy of lessons learned from mistakes made during 1960s attempts to put these ideals into practice. The idea that goals of movement organizing should be multiple and open and that the process of movement organizing should be participatory represents a continuation of ideals that came to dominate movement organizing during the long 1960s. The practice of these principles, however, has been greatly improved over the past forty years resulting in more effective

1962–1968: *The Great Refusal* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1989), pp. 46–66; and Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 1991).

6. Philipp Gassert, “Narratives of Democratization”, in Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, pp. 307–324; Werner Hülsberg, *The German Greens: A Social and Political Profile* (London, 1988), p. 73; and Horn, *Spirit of '68*, p. 192.

7. For an example, see Gassert, “Narratives of Democratization”; for an analysis see Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, pp. 2–25.

8. On the crisis of democracy see: Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York, 1975); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York, 2000); and Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam (eds), *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

9. Horn, *Spirit of '68*, pp. 1–2.

structures for the expression of these principles. Movements today have an elaborate set of rules and procedures that guide and structure the process of democratic decision-making.

The argument presented here therefore builds on the conclusions reached by Horn that the 1960s, “turns out to have been above all else a ceaseless effort to construct a different and more egalitarian social order”, and can be seen as a contribution to Polletta’s project to show that “participatory democracy’s potential benefits [...] cannot be reduced to ‘personal’ or ‘cultural’ changes. They go to the heart of political impact.”¹⁰ Reclaiming the history of 1960s movement experiments with participatory democracy is important not only because 1960s movements were “above all else” about the construction of a more egalitarian society, but also because the democratic processes set in motion through 1960s struggles are still with us today, stronger than ever.

In order to demonstrate this lasting political legacy of 1960s movements, I first examine the scholarly literature on the importance of participatory democracy to social movements during the long 1960s, focusing specifically on the link made by these movements between anti-authoritarianism and the pursuit of open and multiple goals. In the second section I draw on seven years of ethnographic research into contemporary global movement networks to show that these 1960s movement experiments with democracy have had a lasting impact and have only grown in importance to social-movement organizing. In the final section, I attempt to answer the question of how it is that an emphasis on multiple goals and participatory democracy have outlasted the movements from whence they came and have since developed into clearly defined democratic structures that form the basis for a prefigurative strategy for social change.

THE RISE OF THE NEW LEFT: FROM COMMUNIST REVOLUTION TO DEMOCRATIC PREFIGURATION

Social-movement practices continually evolve and it is generally an illusion to identify the “starting” point of such practices, but we can nevertheless identify periods of time that were key turning points, in which certain practices transform and gain in relative importance. The ideals that became widespread during the 1960s had predecessors in other struggles, most notably anarchism, various forms of revolutionary syndicalism, and council communism, as well as the mythologized versions of the 1848 revolts, the 1871 Paris Commune, and the 1936 Spanish revolution. Gerd-Rainer Horn points out that “1968 was only the latest instalment in a long series of unpredicted and unpredictable popular insurrections which have, time and time again and in a great variety of historical contexts, attacked privilege, autocracy, and

10. *Ibid.*, p. 2; Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, p. 3.

hierarchy in the name of justice, equality and self-determination",¹¹ and Francesca Polletta contextualizes the 1960s by pointing out that "activists in every major movement of the last hundred years have found strategic value in participatory democratic decision-making".¹²

The scepticism we find in the 1960s towards political parties and the centralized state apparatus, especially in Europe, built literally upon the contemporaneous imaginings of the Paris Commune as a moment when, as Debord, Kotányi, and Vaneigem write, insurgents "had become the masters of their own history", and in which leadership had been thwarted against all odds.¹³ This vision of the Paris Commune was partially drawn from Marx's view of the Commune as "a revolution against the state itself".¹⁴ The abundance of worker's councils that sprang up across Europe also echoed much earlier protests against the Russian model of communism. Both revolutionary syndicalists¹⁵ and council communists emphasized the need for direct control of the economy by workers through councils in the workplace and incorporated a rejection of state socialism and (usually) scepticism about parliamentary politics in favour of workers' self-management (*autogestion*).¹⁶ Certain strands even brought the need for a revolutionary party into question, arguing instead for "unity organizations".¹⁷

Furthermore, the type of non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian prefiguration that was present in the 1960s was also clearly inspired by anarchist traditions.¹⁸ Very few of the specific beliefs found in the 1960s, therefore,

11. Horn, *Spirit of '68*, p. 238.

12. Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, p. 2.

13. Guy Debord, Atilla Kotanyi, and Raoul Vaneigem, "Theses on the Paris Commune", reproduced in Ken Knabb (ed.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA, 1981), pp. 314–316.

14. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (London, 1968), pp. 288–293. (According to the editors, the quotation cited here was originally an unpublished note written by Marx that can be found in Moscow in the Marx-Engels Archives, 3 (1934), p. 324.)

15. Here I use the broad definition to include anarcho-syndicalists, industrial unionists, or other syndicalists that *ideologically* advocated workplace democracy based on self-management of the economy through workers' councils. Actual practice is less important here because I am tracing ideas rather than experiences.

16. See Marcel van der Linden "On Council Communism", available online at: http://reocities.com/cordobakaf/linden_cc.pdf. On revolutionary syndicalism, see Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (eds), *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot, 1990), and Dan Jakopovich, "Revolutionary Unionism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow", *New Politics*, 4 (2007), available online at: <http://ww3.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue43/Jakopovic43.htm>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

17. Van der Linden, "On Council Communism," p. 6.

18. See especially Benjamin Franks, "The Direct Action Ethic from 59 Upwards", *Anarchist Studies*, 11, (2003), pp. 13–41; Mikhail Bakunin, *Marxism, Freedom and the State* (London, 1984); and James Bowen and Jonathan Purkis, "Introduction: Why Anarchism Still Matters", in Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen (eds), *Changing Anarchism* (Manchester, 2004), pp. 1–20.

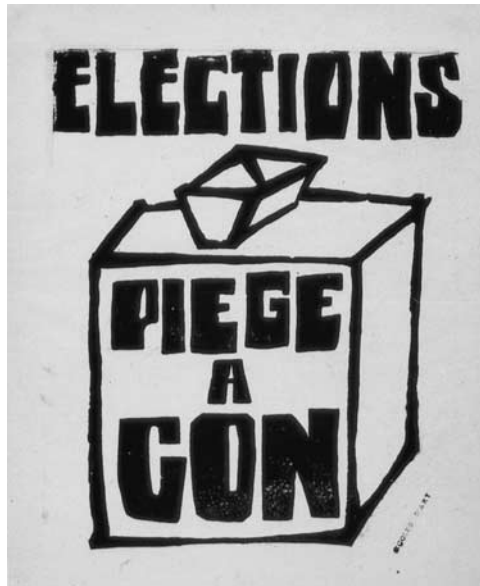


Figure 1. 1960s poster, referring to the distrust of electoral democracy. Collection IISH, 1968.

were entirely “new”, but the 1960s were nevertheless a turning point. What makes the 1960s the precursor to contemporary social-movement praxis is not simply that these movements challenged authority in favour of non-hierarchy and egalitarian democracy, but *how* they did so.

The details of daily struggle differ from one context to the next, but it nevertheless remains possible to make certain generalizations about 1960s movements in western Europe and the US. After the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, communism in western Europe and the US began to be discredited as *the* alternative vision for organizing society. This growing scepticism about Stalinist communism was reinforced by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, after which “Soviet contempt for the world movement was shocking, and world Communist unanimity had dissolved”.¹⁹ The internal strife that began with disagreements about supporting or rejecting these invasions led to many splits within communist parties across Europe and the US and to many activists leaving their respective communist parties.²⁰ With communism deeply discredited,

19. Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford, 2002), p. 361, and Horn, *Spirit of '68*, pp. 131–152.

20. For a discussion of splits within communist parties in Europe see Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, and Horn, *Spirit of '68*; on the US, France, and the Netherlands, see Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*

movements in the 1960s had to find new theories of social change and new movement repertoires for bringing about that change.

The discrediting of communism as the hegemonic ideology for revolution created an opening for other ideologies and practices. Katsiaficas has argued that movement actors in the 1960s, although struggling nationally, were united across Europe and the Atlantic through an “eros effect” that brought movements into a common ideological field of struggle.²¹ Part of this ideological field of struggle included a departure from orthodox Marxism,²² and an emphasis on the decentralization of decision-making and the empowerment of grass-roots activists.²³ Political parties that had previously dominated the Left started to lose their claim to represent the course of revolutionary change.²⁴ So deep was this break with past political practice that Stuart Hall described it as a “break-up of the political Ice-Age”, which “defined the boundaries and limits of tolerable politics”.²⁵ The result was that the boundaries of politics were open and had to be redefined. They were redefined, however, in many different ways. The proletariat was dislodged from its privileged place as the revolutionary class and other forms of oppression (patriarchy, racism, hetero-normativity, etc.) became part of the terrain upon which revolutionary struggles would be waged.

The argument I engage with here is that it was during the 1960s that internal movement practices of participatory democracy were transformed in terms of both content and scale. Participatory democracy began to refer primarily to various forms of “consensus” and the incorporation of everyone into decision-making processes. The content of participatory democracy was transformed to refer to anti-authoritarianism in the form of an active rejection of centralized power and the pursuit of multiple and open goals. The idea that movement goals should not be predetermined from above led to the realization that a democratic process would be necessary for determining the goals from below. This meant that the enactment of democratic ideals within movement organizing also became essential to bringing about goals beyond the movement, resulting in a conflation between the means and ends of movement organizing – a process

(New York, 1996), pp. 25–38; on the UK see Madeleine Davis, “The Origins of the British New Left”, in Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, pp. 45–56.

21. George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left* (Boston, MA, 1987).

22. Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*.

23. Horn, *Spirit of '68*, p. 153.

24. Immanuel Wallerstein, “1968, Revolution in the World-System: Theses and Queries”, *Theory and Society*, 18 (1989), pp. 431–449; Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*; and Horn, *Spirit of '68*, pp. 131–177.

25. Stuart Hall “The First New Left: Life and Times”, in Robin Archer *et al.* (eds), *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London, 1989), pp. 11–38, 13. See also Davis, “The Origins of the British New Left”.

that scholars refer to as “prefiguration”.²⁶ Finally, the scale on which participatory democracy was insisted on by movement actors as an essential part of struggle grew during the 1960s and started to overtake the centralized and hierarchical structures of the “Old Left” as the organizational status quo.

The New Left

The road to democracy is a long one, but the contribution of the 1960s is nevertheless of unique significance for explaining how the road brought us to where we are today. The break with “traditional” or “Old Left” politics in the 1960s is most often articulated in terms of the rise of a “New Left”.²⁷ Although definitions of what precisely constituted the New Left diverge, many scholars agree that unlike the Old Left, the New Left was not a unitary organization, but encapsulated a diversity of political tendencies committed to egalitarian principles: “the new left was diverse and experimental, with a broadly revisionist, creative, and non-sectarian attitude toward Marxism [...] adhering to a vision of socialism as fundamentally a project to extend human control and capacities on the basis of democratic and egalitarian values”.²⁸

Part of the project to extend human control was to allow people to determine for themselves what the “goal” of movement struggle should be and which form of hierarchy they wanted to challenge first. This meant that the New Left was partially characterized by a rejection of organizations and parties in favour of “movements”, a distinction which many movement actors understood as linked to questions of decentralization, autonomy, and the rejection of a unitary party line and representative structures.²⁹ As the *Situationist International* wrote, “it was a rejection of all authority, all

26. On prefiguration in 1960s movements, see Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, pp. 46–66; Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*; Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*. On prefiguration versus communist theories of social change, see Franks, “The Direct Action Ethic from 59 Upwards”, pp. 13–41.

27. Much literature on the long 1960s posits a “generation gap” between older and younger activists, in which the older activists belonged to the “organized left” (communist parties, trade unions, etc.) and the younger activists were students and hippies expelled from the organized left, who in most of the accounts of the 1960s are described as more spontaneous, rebellious, and “unorganized”. The generation gap is generally described as a pre-World-War-II and post-World-War-II divide, in which the post-World War II generation had a much deeper distrust for authority. See Mark Kurlansky, *1968* (London, 2004), pp. xvii–xviii, and 100–102; Lewis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations* (New York, 1969); and Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias*, pp. 25–38. Given the perspective taken in this article – a view of the 1960s from within contemporary social-movement struggles – the generation gap itself is less important to the analysis than the ideas that emerged out of this generation gap. The younger generation of the 1960s is now the older generation, with the result that all generations within contemporary movements have a similar distrust for authority.

28. Davis, “The Origins of the British New Left”, p. 49.

29. Gassert, “Narratives of Democratization”, p. 312.

specialization, all hierarchical dispossession; a rejection of the state and thus of the parties and unions, a rejection of sociologists and professors, of medicine and repressive morality".³⁰ Although not all actors within the New Left rejected every form of authority, anti-authoritarianism and corresponding forms of democratic decision-making were certainly defining characteristics.³¹

This rejection of the top-down organizing structures of the "Old Left" reinforced the importance of egalitarian forms of democracy and made them a defining feature of the New Left across Europe and the US. Klimke and Scharloth argue that it was the:

[...] new forms and tactics of protest that clearly distinguished the protest movements of "1968" from their historical predecessors. Students held teach-ins to generate a critical public in egalitarian discussions, go-in activists put forward their claims to ensure their participation in the debates and decision-making processes of the authorities, and anti-ritualism aimed at disturbing the order of everyday life.³²

Although there were many sites of simultaneous innovation for egalitarian democracy, the term "participatory democracy" was first popularized by the US-based Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in their Port Huron Statement which sought, "the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation".³³ SDS members immediately took the term "participatory" to heart and insisted that the process of decision-making within SDS itself be more democratic, inclusive, and collective. In so doing, they transformed the Port Huron Statement from a statement *about* participatory democracy into a statement *of* participatory democracy by insisting on being a part of the process to determine what "participation" meant in terms of decision-making structures.³⁴

The participatory democracy of the 1960s was messy and confusing, slow and unstructured. One of the main problems with participatory democracy across contexts can be clearly captured through the example of SDS. SDS, much like the rest of the New Left, was rapidly developing new values and ideas, but new structures were slow to follow. Norman Fruchter describes

30. Situationist International, "The Beginning of an Era", in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, pp. 225–256.

31. Wallerstein, "1968, Revolution in the World-System".

32. Klimke and Scharloth, "1968 in Europe: An Introduction", in Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, p. 5.

33. SDS, "Port Huron Statement" (1962), online at: <http://www.sdsrebels.com/port-huron.htm>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

34. James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 141–153.

SDS as a “hybrid [...] an organization proclaiming a set of new values as its goals, yet attempting to achieve those new values through a traditional set of structures and forms”.³⁵ Many attributed the apparent decline of participatory democracy precisely to these problems of structure and structurelessness, and perhaps the practice would have disappeared entirely if movement actors hadn’t spent the next fifty years improving these structures.³⁶ That these practices remained central to movement praxis today, despite the initial lack of appropriate structures, is testament to their political importance for movement actors. Rather than discard these values, over the next decades movement actors set about developing structures to fulfil them better.

One of the most important structural innovations carried out towards the latter half of the long 1960s was the combination of participatory democracy and consensus decision-making, which made the rejection of representation possible. This occurred first in the US and was spearheaded by the Movement for a New Society (MNS) which introduced Quaker-inspired structures for reaching consensus into movement praxis.³⁷ But this innovation came nearly ten years after the drafting of the Port Huron statement. Participatory democracy was at first neither intended to be consensus-based decision-making nor to involve “abandoning organizational structures of the usual sort like elected officers and parliamentary procedure”, but this is nevertheless what happened.³⁸ Partly due to the fact that existing movement structures were felt to be “hopelessly ‘inflexible’ and ‘unresponsive’”,³⁹ and partly due to the influx of new non-aligned students, before long consensus “was taken for granted”,⁴⁰ and “by 1965, it was being widely discussed as an *alternative* to representative structures. By then, the term had become a weapon of combat in a struggle against all forms of hierarchy and authority.”⁴¹

The desire for participatory democracy as an alternative to representation and hierarchy was by no means limited to the US. Philipp Gassert shows how all across western Europe and the Atlantic protest movements demanded democracy in what he refers to as an “all-encompassing cultural

35. Quoted in Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, p. 129.

36. On problems of structurelessness, see Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” (1971), online at: <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

37. David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA, 2009), pp. 228–237, and Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, pp. 48–52.

38. Flacks quoted in Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, p. 143.

39. Robert J. Ross, “Generational Change and Primary Groups in a Social Movement”, in Jo Freeman (ed.), *Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies* (New York, 1983), pp. 177–187, 182.

40. Booth quoted in Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, p. 243.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 152–153.



Figure 2. ‘Autogestion’ becomes a key part of movement ideology. Collection IISH, 1975.

sense”, by which he means that democracy was more than a way to govern, but a “social system in which human beings enjoyed more personal autonomy and better chances of participating in decision-making processes. Terms such as ‘participatory democracy,’ ‘*autogestion*,’ ‘*autoestione*,’ and ‘*Mitbestimmung*’ expressed these demands.”⁴² This shift from traditional Left political party structures to non-hierarchical forms of organizing is clearly articulated in an anonymous “tract” issued on 1 June 1968: “the absence today of a leader at the head of our movement corresponds to its very nature. It is not a question of knowing who will be at the head of everyone, but rather how everyone will form one head.”⁴³

This distinction between *who* and *how* was very important to movement actors for whom experiments with democracy were aimed at developing effective structures of governing (the “how” of decision-making) in order to make representation (the “who”) obsolete.⁴⁴ Although Gassert is

42. Gassert, “Narratives of Democratization”, p. 313.

43. Quoted in Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, IL, 2002), p. 76.

44. See also Eley, *Forging Democracy*, p. 343.

highly critical of democratic innovation within 1960s movements, emphasizing that they did not transform western European political systems, he concedes that in “terms of how politics are being carried out, 1968 had a more lasting impact. New ways to communicate were opened up, and politics moved out of the old organizational framework of parties and unions.”⁴⁵ This move made it possible for the New Left to open up not only new ways to communicate, but also new ways to envision the goals and means of social-movement organizing in a less predetermined and more participatory way.

Some of the structures fostered across Europe (and to a lesser degree in the US) during the 1960s were workers’ councils and neighbourhood/local committees, both of which were motivated by the desire to foster more inclusive structures of decision-making.⁴⁶ In the Censier building of the occupied Sorbonne, for example, students placed “defense of direct democracy [...] and absolute power of worker’s councils as ultimate goal”,⁴⁷ to ensure that “the fundamental decisions remained in the hands of the rank and file”, in order to restore “to the working class its own tradition of direct democracy and its own aspiration to self-management (*autogestion*)”.⁴⁸ Students and workers in Europe were in search of, “organizational forms and practices [...] that sought to disengage themselves from a conventional politics of central apparatuses”.⁴⁹ Democratic initiatives based on grassroots committees and councils (*à partir de la base*) factored centrally in social struggle across Europe and helped to forged what Narot describes as “the workings of a different social order”, that “allowed for very diverse people to begin to work together to take charge of their conditions of activity and existence, all the work of producing a different social organization altogether”.⁵⁰ As we shall see below, the creation of democratic structures through which a diversity of people could work together in order to determine their own destiny meant that this “different social organization” had to be open to being created in a variety of incarnations so as to reflect rather than oppress the diversity of people involved.

From future revolution to perpetual prefiguration

The “recalibration of democracy” as a project of total social transformation meant that democracy became at once a means and an end for

45. Gassert, “Narratives of Democratization”, p. 316.

46. See Berman, *Tale of Two Utopias*, pp. 48–49; Eley, *Forging Democracy*, pp. 361–365.

47. Council for Maintaining the Occupations, Paris, 19 May 1968, online at: <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/May68docs.htm>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

48. “Paris: May 1968”, online at: <http://www.af-north.org/solidarity/may68.html>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

49. Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p. 92.

50. Jean-Franklin Narot (1988), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 103.

movement actors.⁵¹ The goal of movement organizing became to allow people to determine their own goals rather than pursue the party goal. Consequently, the strategy shifted from a linear march towards the seizure of state power (after which the predetermined collectively shared goal could be instilled) to a prefigurative process aimed at the creation of democratic structures that made it possible to decide collectively what the goals would be. This was prefigurative because the process and the goals were intricately entwined; the goals emerged out of the process and the creation of an effective set of structures for redefining collective goals was a goal unto itself. It was strategic because the best way, perhaps the only way, to pursue multiple and open goals is through *practice* – by literally trying out new political structures to see if and how they work.

The full implications of this shift may only be visible from the point of view of contemporary movements that have developed this strategy considerably since the 1960s, but the seeds of a prefigurative strategy were certainly present in the ideals of the 1960s. Horn makes precisely this point when he argues that the increased importance of democracy within 1960s movement networks came hand in hand with a shift in the strategy of social change: “a socialist strategy remained the ultimate and desirable goal, but the road map leading in this direction no longer contained instructions for sudden, radical breaks and associated cataclysmic events but, instead, a series of intercalated structural reforms which, in due time, would bring about the same result”.⁵²

This shift from sudden-break models of social change in which there is a revolutionary moment after which social relations will be more “equal” to a processual model of social change that acknowledges the impossibility of suddenly eradicating social inequality was slowly taking form in the 1960s. It took a long time, however, for these ideas to develop corresponding practices. Despite these new ideals emerging, the practices were often missing and, as we shall see below, these practices needed decades to develop and are still today a work in progress.

Nevertheless, this gradualist, but not reformist, approach to social change is key to understanding why the 1960s “new generation” was critical of non-democratic practices within the movement itself and particularly the idea of “intermediate” state structures as a necessary stage in the transition from a capitalist world to a post-capitalist world. The desire for plurality within the movement reflected a rejection of any one “vision of sweeping social change”, and an awareness that “each transformation of some ‘minority’ into a ‘majority’ created new ‘minorities’”.⁵³ As David Graeber

51. See Gassert, “Narratives of Democratization”, p. 313.

52. Horn, *Spirit of '68*, p. 143.

53. Wallerstein, “1968, Revolution in the World-System”, p. 439.

writes of the Movement for a New Society, “rather than a cataclysmic seizure of state power, they proposed the continual creation and elaboration of new institutions, based on new, non-alienating modes of interaction – institutions that could be considered ‘prefigurative’ as they provided a foretaste of what truly democratic society might be like”.⁵⁴ Klimke and Scharloth also stress the importance of a “prefigurative” approach to social change, arguing that actions in Europe were

[...] not just appellative and symbolic [...] their goal was to change the activists themselves [...] these protest techniques served as anticipations of the new society: Activists acted as if the norms of the actual society had been temporarily suspended, and by autonomously following their own rules, they were prefiguring the alternative society they envisioned.⁵⁵

Rather than have the state decide what the “goal” is and pursue this goal through centralized planning, the New Left wanted to participate in determining and pursuing their own goals. Many 1960s movement actors, therefore, assumed that the creation of a “real” democratic society depended on their ability to create participatory democracy in the process of struggle. One way in which this idea was enacted was in the idea of “exemplary action” (*l’action exemplaire*). Exemplary actions are actions “that transform the balance of power within a concrete context, a specific topic, and which are consequently experienced by us as a fundamental and irreversible change”.⁵⁶ It is the transformation of society, not by first taking power and then changing it from above, but a social transformation that is enacted through experience and practice from the bottom up. Daniel Cohn-Bendit described exemplary action as, “apprenticeship in action”, and considered it “of primary importance for the analysis and continuation of the Movement”.⁵⁷

In these quotations we begin to see the seeds of a prefigurative approach to convincing people of the potential and need for social change. The idea that a new way of organizing society had to be learned through experience, however, had its limitations in the 1960s. 1960s movements maintained a Marxian notion that social change followed an inevitable trajectory. Attempts to create a “new democratic type of social organization that would lead to the end of exploitation” through worker’s councils and open assemblies rested upon the assumption that creating these democratic processes would somehow naturally lead to the end of

54. Graeber, *Direct Action*, p. 235.

55. Klimke and Scharloth, “1968 in Europe”, p. 5.

56. Mouvement de 22 Mars, *Ce n’est qu’un début, continuons le combat* (Paris, 2001[1968]), p. 61, my translation.

57. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, quoted in Alfred Willener, *Action Image of Society on Cultural Politicization* (London, 1970), p. 166.

hierarchy and a more egalitarian society.⁵⁸ The question of exactly how this transformation would happen, however, remained unclear.

The idea of prefiguration, in its incarnation as the desire to make anti-authoritarianism and the pursuit of multiple goals strategic, stems from but remained underdeveloped in the 1960s. During the 1960s it was overwhelmingly assumed that power could disappear and that hierarchy was something that would naturally disappear through social and cultural transformations. The goal of creating a more democratic society through exemplary action remains with us today, as do the specific principles of non-hierarchy and multiple goals. These semi-failed experiments with democracy during the 1960s, however, led social movements to realize that power would never disappear naturally and that they needed to understand democracy as a perpetual process built upon structures of decision-making that continuously challenge the centralization of power.

DEMOCRACY AS A PERPETUAL PROCESS: CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL MOVEMENTS

The notion of creating broader social change through the enactment of participatory democracy within movement networks has only become more important since the 1960s. Nearly every scholar writing on the alterglobalization movement, also known as the global justice movement, has identified "democracy" as a key aim of the movement. Donatella Della Porta has argued that, "if social movements of the 1980s and the 1990s were described as more pragmatic and single-issue oriented, our research on the Global Justice Movement testifies to its continuous interest in addressing the meta-issue of democracy".⁵⁹

Contemporary movements have built on the ideals that emerged during the 1960s, but they have turned what were previously just ideas into complex structures of democratic decision-making. In this section I describe how these democratic structures, although more advanced than those of the 1960s, are based on the anti-authoritarian ideals that took centre stage during the 1960s. I first describe the complexity of these new structures in general and then zoom in on one of these structures: a procedure for non-hierarchical, consensus decision-making, referred to today as "horizontality". Finally, I show how this continued emphasis on participatory democracy and multiple goals has further increased the importance of prefiguration as a strategy for social change.

58. Raoul Vaneigem, "Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalized Self-Management", in Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, pp. 283–289. See also Thomas Hecken and Agata Grzenia, "Situationism", in Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, pp. 23–32, 25.

59. Donatella della Porta, "Democracy in Movement: Some Conclusions", in *idem* (ed.), *Democracy in Social Movements* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 262–274, 262.

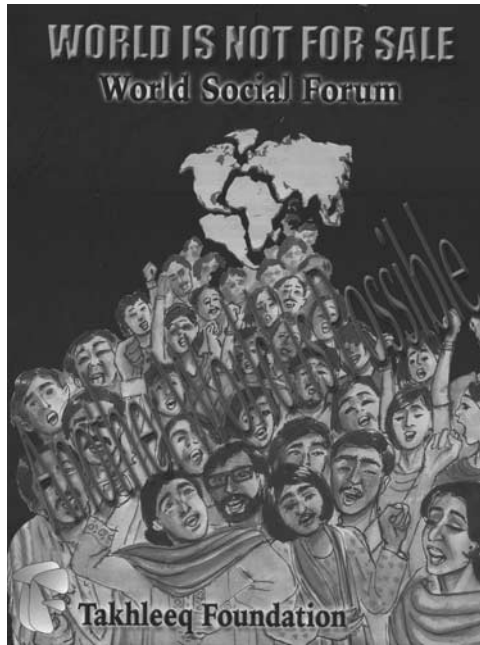


Figure 3. The World Social Forum in India, 2004.
Collection IISH, Takhleeq Foundation, 2004.

A more structured form of participatory democracy

The ideals of participatory democracy that emerged during the 1960s have since developed into complex structures of decision-making. The 1960s attempts to create inclusive forms of democracy (of which the result was often inequality of access with certain people dominating discussions) left social movement's actors with both a lasting desire for inclusive democracy and an awareness of the inevitable dynamics of hierarchy and the need perpetually to challenge these hierarchies.⁶⁰ Polletta draws a direct line from the movement practices of the 1960s to those of the Direct Action Network (DAN) – the network behind the blockades at the Seattle WTO in 1999 – and concludes that, although clearly inspired by 1960s ideals, “DAN activists for their part, put a great deal of emphasis on a deliberative process that is not just formally equal but that begins to overturn hierarchies built into conventional definitions of equality”.⁶¹

60. On problems with decision-making process in the 1960s, see Gassert “Narratives of Democracy”; Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*; and Council for Maintaining the Occupations, Paris, 19 May 1968.

61. Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, p. 178.

Movement actors today overturn hierarchies by rejecting the assumption of formal equality in favour of acknowledging the perpetual persistence of inequalities and creating structured methods for challenging inequalities every time they arise. To this end, movement actors spend a great deal of time talking about “process” and developing meeting procedures. The assumption is that consensus decision-making makes equal participation more possible than other systems, but only if the participants self-regulate their behaviour and take an active role in constructing that equality. The idea that everyone should be able to help determine the programme of the movement is still a core principle of movement activity, but today movement actors no longer assume that this equality will emerge naturally. Instead, structures for this type of equality are set up from the start of a process or meeting.

Preparatory processes for the European Social Forum (ESF) and World Social Forum (WSF), for example, involve months, sometimes years, of large-scale and small-scale planning meetings that share information through complex structures of consensus decision-making that are aimed at actively challenging inequalities. In social forum processes discussions often involve long queues of people waiting to speak, but there are rules about who can speak and how often (for example, alternating speakers male/female to improve gender balance) and agreements about deliberative style (such as embracing diversity and conflict, rejecting adversarial dynamics, resisting uniformity) that were lacking in the 1960s.⁶²

During anti-summit mobilizations, large-scale “camps” are built as self-managed villages (*villages autogérés*) to house the thousands of activists that attend protests. The decision-making structures are designed by open “working groups” that anyone can join, but which have the specific task of ensuring that decision-making within the village is open and effective. During the anti-G8 in 2005, the “facilitation/process working group” set up three different meetings for different types of decisions to avoid a situation in which too many different topics would be discussed at once and to keep practical matters for running the camp from interfering with action planning. The village was divided into neighbourhoods, called *barrios*, that were autonomous vis-à-vis the village as a whole. Each *barrio* held a morning meeting and sent one or two people to the campwide “site-coordination” meeting to discuss the practicalities of village life. In the evenings there were separate meetings for planning actions which were attended by spokespeople from the various *barrios* as well as spokespeople from action groups and affinity groups.⁶³

62. See Marianne Maeckelbergh, *The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement is Changing the Face of Democracy* (London, 2009), pp. 66–98.

63. See Facilitation/Process Group of the Stirling Hori-Zone Convergence Space, “Decision-Making at Horizonte”, e-mail sent to “resistg82005” e-list; posted 24 July 2005.

One of the mechanisms often used to improve participation in meetings is a consensus facilitation tool called the “group agreement”. The group agreement functions to ensure that everyone is involved from the start in determining how the meeting will be run. This practice is most common in Anglo-Saxon contexts, and was recently criticized during the UNFCCC mobilization in Copenhagen by the more autonomous strands of the movement for being *too* structured. This criticism, however, only makes it all the more appropriate as an example of the kinds of elaborate structures movement actors today have developed to help realize the ideals of the 1960s movements.

The group agreement itself is usually a basic set of principles which are largely unobjectionable within the context of anti-summit mobilizations. The one used most often during the 2005 anti-G8 mobilization started with the following five points: (1) make sure everyone is heard; (2) respect each others’ opinions; (3) practise active agreement; (4) use hand signals; and (5) help keep to time. The group agreement is proposed at the beginning of a meeting by the facilitator and everyone gets the chance to make additions or changes to the agreement. Common additions usually include logistics for the meeting such as helping to clean up, a point about practising anti-oppressive behaviour (anti-racist, anti-sexist, etc.) and non-communication with the police or media.

The experience of collectively constructing a group agreement is like an initiation, giving those present the basic information and skills required to participate in a consensus meeting productively. Because the people in the group can add or remove any items to or from the agreement, it also helps to build up a certain level of individual commitment to the group. The group agreement functions as a set of parameters through which behaviour is controlled, but importantly, self-controlled. All the points in the group agreement require active commitment from the actors, not just to refrain from doing something but to make an effort to participate in particular practices, everything from actively listening to helping with the logistics of running the meeting. These are rather strict rules limiting behaviour, but they are also fluid – they can be brought into question, discussed, and confirmed or rejected by the actors whenever necessary.

The first five points are used to make sure that if someone dominates the discussion they can be held accountable. Point (4) refers to the use of hand signals which movement actors developed in the latter half of the long 1960s as a way to allow for non-verbal participation in decision-making. There are signals for active agreement (two hands up waving at the wrist), for questions or new points (one finger in the air), for making a direct response to the person currently speaking (index finger of both hands in the air), and for blocking decisions (fist in the air). The distinction between one index finger and two helps to keep conversations on

topic. Facilitators keep a list of everyone who wants to speak in the order they raise their hands, but they move someone up if they have not spoken yet or if they have a direct response.⁶⁴

The practice of blocking, considered essential for protecting minority opinions, has also transformed in the context of the alterglobalization movement. When consensus was being used by small groups of people in the feminist and anti-nuclear movements of the 1970s and 1980s, a block would often be accepted unquestioningly, leaving the process open to manipulation. In the alterglobalization movement, blocks tend to be used as a way to voice serious concerns that need to be addressed before taking a decision. The result is usually that these concerns actually get addressed. For example, the decision to allow for media on the camp grounds often gets blocked because many people do not want to be on camera. When there is a specific reason why media should be let on to the camp and a group of people ready to take responsibility for the media while they are in the camp, however, the block can temporarily be rescinded, either in certain parts of the camp or at certain times of day.

This model of organization is standard practice in the autonomous sections of the anti-summit mobilizations. During anti-summit mobilizations, and to a lesser degree during preparations for the ESF or WSF, there are local-level groups and working groups that concentrate on their campaigns or a particular logistical task all year round, and some people from these groups come once a month to the national meeting to report, discuss, and “feed back” to their local groups or working groups. The working groups also “feed back” to the larger group about the work they have done, so that everyone knows what is being done and by whom without having to do it themselves. The structure of small meetings to large meetings back to small meetings (with temporary representatives communicating between meetings) comes from the spokescouncil model for consensus in large groups developed (in part) by anti-nuclear movements as a way to resolve some of the problems of structurelessness experienced during the 1960s and 1970s.

The pursuit of multiple goals: horizontality and diversity

The aim of these complex decision-making structures is to create mechanisms through which people can be easily included in decision-making, hierarchy can be continuously resisted, and goals can be left multiple and open without resulting in structures that are too rigid to be transformed. While movements today carry on the 1960s rejection

64. For a detailed description of this process in the words of movement actors themselves, see UK Climate Camp website, “How We Work”, available online at: <http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/get-involved/how-our-meetings-work>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

of centralized structures of power, unlike 1960s movements that assumed equality could be created by the removal of centralized power structures, contemporary movement actors believe equality needs to be constantly created through carefully developed and perpetually evolving structures of horizontal decision-making. Movement actors have realized that in order to limit hierarchy they have to practice what they call “horizontality”.

Horizontalidad is both a practice and a value. Marina Sitrin describes *Horizontalidad* as “democratic communication on a level plane” that “involves – or at least intentionally strives towards – non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction [...]. *Horizontalidad* is a living world that reflects an ever-changing experience.”⁶⁵ Rodrigo Nunes points out that “horizontality is not a model (or a property that can be predicated of things) but a practice. And as a practice, it remains permanently open to the future and to difference.”⁶⁶ Because movement actors today, in contrast to the 1960s, assume that power perpetually centralizes and cannot be eradicated, the centralization of power must be continuously challenged through active decentralization.⁶⁷

Contemporary movements have developed many mechanisms for this decentralization, including those described above, but horizontality requires that this process always be improved upon. After mobilizations, therefore, there are evaluation meetings that focus on the question of improving “process”. After the G8 protests in 2005, the Dissent! network planned a large-scale gathering that they dubbed the “reconvergence”. This reconvergence was structured in such a way to be preceded by local-level consultations of all groups involved in the Dissent! network. The rationale behind this organizational structure was described as follows in an e-mail: “The aim of this consultation is to achieve a more horizontally based network that is representative of the politics and activity of the autonomous groups and individuals who are involved.”⁶⁸

65. Marina Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Oakland, CA, 2006), p. 3.

66. Rodrigo Nunes, “Nothing is What Democracy Looks Like: Openness, Horizontality, and the Movement of Movements”, in David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott, and David Watts (eds), *Shut Them Down!* (Leeds, 2005), pp. 299–319, 310.

67. Decentralizing power is often cited as an anarchist strategy for dealing with power. See Sam Dolgoff, “The Relevance of Anarchism to Modern Society”, online at: <http://flag.blackened.net/liberty/spunk/Spunk191.txt>; last accessed 28 December 2010. Movement actors today, however, are aware that decentralized hierarchy exists, and that decentralization alone would not be horizontality. Horizontality requires that the decentralization of power be combined with the continuous challenging of power inequalities.

68. E-mail sent from the Dissent Reconvergence Working Group as part of a discussion on the future of the Dissent! network – the autonomous network that organized the protests against the G8 in 2005, sent to “resistg82005” e-mail listserv on 13 November 2005.

This reconvergence represents a conscious attempt to horizontalize the network. The section of the e-mail on "how" this would be done demonstrates one potential incarnation of horizontality:

The agenda of this gathering will be composed of the presentations made by the groups/individuals involved in the initiatives they propose. In order for this to happen it is important that a consultation period of discussion, self-organisation and preparation takes place. It is also important that the working group organising this gathering can collate and distribute all necessary information to aid others discussion and prepare the agenda for the gathering. For this reason there is a questionnaire below and a time line for the consultation leading up to this gathering.⁶⁹

This vision of horizontality, involving a well-organized process of decentralized decision-making from the local level up to the national or international level, mimics the structure of the spokescouncil format in the consensus model.

If the goal is to create more inclusive political structures, and power is assumed always to exist and to perpetually centralize and hierarchicalize, then any strategy for achieving the goal of more horizontality has to be aimed at creating structures that continuously limit this centralization through decentralization. One of the ways this centralization is challenged is by creating diversity not only in terms of inputs, but also *outcomes* of decision-making. One meeting can lead to several courses of action or several different decisions about camp life. Horizontality requires that the goals of movement organizing remain open and multiple – the aim, as one activist from the anti-summit mobilizations put it, is not to "arrive at 'a' or 'the' 'strategy' for anticapitalism",⁷⁰ but rather to create a process that fosters many such strategies. This practice of maintaining open and multiple goals can also be found in the World Social Forum, whose charter of principles reads, "The WSF will always be a forum open to pluralism and to diversity of activities and ways of engaging", which "is a source of wealth and strength in the movement for another world".⁷¹

Horizontality is the means through which movements today pursue diversity. As Rodrigo Nunes argues "there are many horizontalities":

As soon as one says "this is what it looks like," one is closing the door to all future and different things that might come under that name. The point here is not that horizontality is problematic, but that democracy as such is problematic. And problematic means just that: permanently open.⁷²

69. *Ibid.*

70. E-mail, Dissent Reconvergence Working Group, "resistg82005" e-mail listserv, 13 November 2005.

71. WSF Brazilian Organizing Committee and International Council, "Note from the Organizing Committee on the Principles that Guide the WSF", online at: <http://www.lfsc.org/wsf/wsf2006info.htm>; 2002; last accessed 28 December 2010.

72. Nunes, "Nothing is What Democracy Looks Like", p. 310.

If the goal is to create a permanently open process, in which participants have the ability to influence not only the means but also the ends of movement organizing, then there can be no singular predetermined goal.⁷³ If equality partly lies in the outcomes of decisions, and if it requires that people should feel that they can play an active role in reaching these decisions, then often those decisions cannot be singular. Equal outcomes are often diverse outcomes. This is the insight that movements in the 1960s brought to the surface through the rejection of the unitary linear programme for social change represented by Communism with a capital C.

Prefigurative strategy for social change

The intentional pursuit of political structures that allow for diverse outcomes through the construction of horizontal decision-making processes redefines the very meaning of struggle. This pursuit began in the 1960s, but is far from complete. Still, many lessons have been learned. The goal of the alterglobalization movement actors is not to eliminate power (as it was for some movements since the 1960s), or to relocate power with themselves (as it was for communist revolutionary and colonial struggles). Instead, the goal is to redesign the way power operates. This goal is not achieved by developing a new theory of power and writing up a treatise on how power would or should work but by designing new structures of decision-making that are learned through practice. This latter process is prefigurative: the movement develops the political structures needed to transform the way power operates in the very process of struggle. Actions and events are organized through vast networks that span nations, languages, political ideals, priorities, interests, and identities. With each event the movement actors experiment with the most inclusive ways to communicate and coordinate interests, priorities, decisions, goals, and actions within such a diverse polity.

The prefiguration of multiple and open goals has grown so much in importance since the 1960s that today it constitutes a defining feature of global movement networks.⁷⁴ Della Porta argues that, “the prefigurative role of internal democratic practices acquires, as we saw, a particularly important role for GJMOs [Global Justice Movement Organizations], which stress a necessary coherence between what is advocated in the

73. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

74. See Graeber, *Direct Action*; Jeff Juris, *Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization* (Durham, NC, 2008); *idem*, “The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements”, in Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (eds), *The Anthropology of Globalization*, 2nd edition (Malden, MA, 2008), pp. 352–370; Maeckelbergh, *The Will of the Many*; and Nunes, “Nothing is What Democracy Looks Like”.

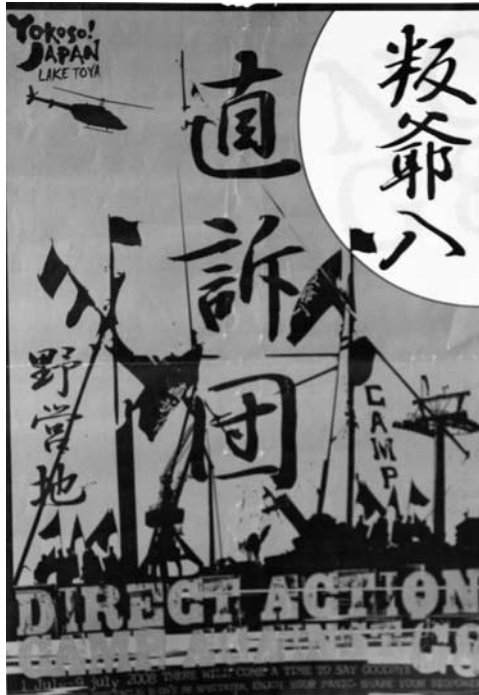


Figure 4. Poster from the anti-G8 protests in Japan, 2008.
 Photograph by Brandon Jourdan. Design by “No G8! Action”.

external environment and what is practiced inside”.⁷⁵ David Graeber captures the spirit of contemporary movements when he writes:

[...] this is a movement about reinventing democracy. It is not opposed to organization. It is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology. Those new forms of organization *are* its ideology. It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties, or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy.⁷⁶

Polletta argues that Direct Action Network members “see democracy within the group as vital to building democracy outside it”.⁷⁷ Jeff Juris reaches a similar conclusion about the alterglobalization movement as a whole, arguing that, “radical anti-corporate globalization activists are not only seeking to intervene within dominant public spheres; they are also

75. Della Porta, *Democracy in Social Movements*, p. 262.

76. David Graeber, “The New Anarchists”, *New Left Review*, 13 (2002), pp. 61–73, 70.

77. Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, p. 177.

challenging representative democracy, in part by developing their own directly democratic forms of organizing and decision making".⁷⁸

Rather than pursue democracy by lobbying the existing structures of power, movement actors opt for developing alternatives to replace these structures of power. Given the history of post-colonial states and the fall of the Soviet empire, movement actors since 1960s have many examples readily available to argue that seizing state power and putting new people in power is not the most strategic way to achieve positive "structural changes in the political, economic and social orders".⁷⁹ In the aftermath of Soviet decline and post-colonial disillusionment, many movement actors started to identify the centralization of power itself as the problem.

The solution to this problem, however, took a long time to evolve and is still evolving. The solution proposed by the alterglobalization movement is treating politics as a process rather than a state of affairs. The charter of principles of the WSF states, "from now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that 'another world is possible,' [the WSF] becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it".⁸⁰ This section of the charter is one of the most widely quoted passages at preparatory meetings for the ESF and WSF because it places the active construction of alternatives as a permanent process at the heart of the social forum. Although not all actors involved in the social forum process are advocates of prefiguration, the emphasis placed on process encapsulated in the charter has meant that even actors from traditional left political parties, who would have rather have ignored the existence of prefigurative politics, have had to take it into account: one cannot stake a legitimate claim to involvement in the social forum movement without demonstrating, even if only verbally, one's commitment to *process*.

As one activist wrote in an online forum:

If people can't be held accountable for their actions in lack of organisation, consultation, openness & transparency then we are doing a disservice[sic] to the very concept of the esf. I make no apologies for that. Ignoring the process needs to be criticised when ever & where ever it occurs.⁸¹

And as the "horizontals", a subgroup within the ESF organizing process, wrote:

The process is as important as the ESF itself and we cannot have a different world if we don't force ourselves to practice a different way of working together, based

78. Juris, *Networking Futures*, p. 295.

79. Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, p. 7.

80. WSF Brazilian Organizing Committee and International Council, "The WSF Charter of Principles", online at: http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4_2&cd_language=2; last accessed 28 December 2010.

81. Dean, "Response" to "Overview of Preparation for ESF in London", 26 January 2004, online at: <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/01/284413.html?c=on#c85707>; last accessed 28 December 2010.

not on self-appointed representation but on a wider inclusive process in which all the differences can express themselves and reclaim the right to participate.⁸²

In anti-summit mobilizations the emphasis on prefiguration is even greater and we see the conflation of movement organizing practices and the alternative world for which movement actors struggle even more clearly:

For me, it's not so important what happens at the summit, but more what we create, how we organise. The ecovillage will become a model of how we want to organise our world ourselves, a new way of working together. [...] This network was about anti-capitalism, anti-state and about taking control of our own lives and creating alternatives.⁸³

Here prefiguration takes on an instrumental dimension; it is strategic because it is the best means to achieve the end of taking back control and learning to organize the world differently. Having this alternative society embodied in the responses of a movement does not mean that the goals should be predetermined – quite the opposite. Prefiguration constitutes a strategy precisely because it allows for the pursuit of multiple and open goals – towards a world in which people get to decide for themselves what their goals are: “[r]ather than setting up an endpoint as to where we are going, we should set up a process through which we can get to whatever end”.⁸⁴

The setting-up of a process that allows for participation, not only in pursuing predetermined goals but in *determining* the goals, is key to understanding how prefiguration works, as well as being the link between contemporary movement experiments with horizontal prefiguration and 1960s movements that developed “a vision of socialism as fundamentally a project to extend human control and capacities on the basis of democratic and egalitarian values”.⁸⁵ For movements today, another world has to be one in which people extend their control over their everyday lives through clear and participatory structures of democratic decision-making.

When we consider the continued importance of prefiguration as a strategy for creating new and diverse democratic structures within movement-organizing practices, it becomes clear how the 1960s were anything but a momentary foray into idealistic notions of participatory democracy that dissipated as quickly as they emerged. Internal democracy continues to be a key concern within contemporary global movement networks. One of the successes of the movements of the 1960s and the 1970s was to begin to purge the strategic question in its consequentialist, linear, and predetermined form

82. UK Local Social Forum Network, “A Different ESF is Possible”, 7 December 2004, online at: <http://bellaciao.org/en/spip.php?article4702>; last accessed 28 December 2010, emphasis in original.

83. Comment made during the South East Assembly meeting, 28 May 2005.

84. Informal discussion on the future of Dissent!, Sheffield, 15 October 2005.

85. Davis, “The Origins of the British New Left,” p. 49.

so that alternatives (to traditional socialist/communist) movement practices could arise and create a space within which strategy could be reborn in a prefigurative form so as to make the pursuit of multiple goals and alternative democratic structures possible. The movements of the 1960s set a long-term *political* project in motion that is grounded in democratic ideals which have become so deeply embedded in the political left that they remain the basis for challenges and alternatives to neo-liberal representative democracy nearly half a century later.

FROM THE 1960S TO ALTERGLOBALIZATION

The question remains as to how exactly these practices continued and evolved from the 1960s to the contemporary alterglobalization movement. The processes that social movements underwent between the 1960s and the Seattle protests of 1999 are not linear or singular and there is no simplistic picture of this progression. Still, it is possible to highlight key processes of continuity. In this section I explore the role of three intermediary movements: feminism, anti-nuclear/peace movements, and autonomous/anarchist movements.⁸⁶ The continuum between the 1960s and subsequent movements is multi-faceted and I examine only the two key aspects highlighted above – structures of participatory democracy and prefiguration as strategy for social change.

On the one hand the answer is simple. The people, organizations, and practices that were involved in 1960s movements did not all disappear when the 1960s ended. Many of these movement actors merged into subsequent movements, especially feminist, anti-nuclear, and autonomous movements. What came to be known as the “radical left” partially transformed into autonomous, squatter, and commune movements, especially in Italy and Germany.⁸⁷ Movements tend to come and go in waves; they emerge and submerge, but rarely disappear entirely. If the underlying problems remain unresolved, another wave of activism emerges.⁸⁸

Still, several developments between the 1960s and today need to be traced more specifically. The realization during the 1960s that many people were still excluded from the movement’s so-called democratic process caused movement actors to lose faith in participatory democracy. Problems of structurelessness made participatory democracy seem like a relic of “a naïve early state of protest”.⁸⁹ This led to disillusionment, but it

86. Environmental movements were also carriers of these traditions, but largely follow the pattern of anti-nuclear and autonomous movements in terms of innovation. See Christopher Rootes, “The Environmental Movement”, in Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, pp. 295–306.

87. Horn, *Spirit of '68*, pp. 152–163, 195.

88. See Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America since 1960* (Chicago, IL, 1999), p. 11.

89. Staughton Lynd, quoted in Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, p. 121. On the problems of structurelessness, see Freeman “The Tyranny of Structurelessness”.

did not lead to the end of experiments with democracy. Instead these experiments shifted to less visible spaces and smaller struggles that did not capture public attention but which were nevertheless very important to the development of new structures of decision-making. Political divisions that arose from conflicts between movement actors during the “long 1960s” led to a more decentralized and small-scale mode of social-movement organizing. This smaller scale resulted in most of these experiments with democracy going unnoticed, but it also allowed for high levels of innovation due to the prevailing atmosphere of friendship and trust.⁹⁰

Feminism

Women’s movements are perhaps more than any other movement responsible for the continued impulse towards inclusive structures of decision-making. There are two main ways in which women’s movements contributed. First, women’s insistence on being included on equal terms within the struggles of the 1960s led to a politicization of the personal that was essential to the development of both prefigurative politics and inclusive democratic practices.⁹¹ Women’s movements (and identity-based movements in general) were essential for developing what is today referred to within the alterglobalization movement as “anti-oppressive” behaviour. Anti-oppressive behaviour refers to a guideline of decision-making that requires participants to refrain from any behaviour that is sexist, racist, or elitist. This guideline rests upon the acknowledgement that certain inequalities persist no matter how egalitarian the group is in principle and that these inequalities need to be actively acknowledged and challenged whenever encountered.

Second, identity-based movements were also crucial to further entrenching the movement scepticism about political representation. The idea that a single person in the form of a representative could accurately understand, much less represent, multiple experience-specific, subjective identities slowly grew more and more implausible throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.⁹² As Eschle describes of feminism in the UK, “a radical suspicion of representation as alienating and elitist was given a specifically feminist spin with the argument that it had functioned historically to delegate women’s voice to men acting on their behalf in the public sphere”.⁹³ Consequently, the idea of participatory democracy as a democracy without representation dug in and grew roots.

90. See Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, pp. 125, 130, 217–218, 221–225, 229, on the advantages and disadvantages of trust and friendship in consensus decision-making.

91. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York, 1979).

92. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford, 2000), p. 126.

93. Catherine Eschle, *Global Democracy, Social Movements and Feminism* (Oxford, 2001), p. 118.

*Anti-nuclear and peace movements*⁹⁴

The anti-nuclear and peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s, under the influence of anarcho-feminists, became an important learning process for consensus decision-making in the US and Europe.⁹⁵ It is largely due to the conflation made by these movements between participation and consensus decision-making that consensus and the notion of horizontality are central to the alterglobalization movement today. Peace and anti-nuclear movements are the movements most responsible for the development of the democratic decision-making structures used today on a large scale, such as spokescouncils and decentralized affinity groups.⁹⁶ In fact, the handouts and brochures used within the alterglobalization movement in the US, the UK, and Germany to explain how consensus in large groups works (brought to other contexts as well by the action trainers) are often drawn directly from anti-nuclear movements and have been adjusted only in a few key ways by contemporary action trainers.⁹⁷ Many of the trainers themselves are also veterans of the anti-nuclear movement, especially in the UK, where the anti-G8 mobilization included a day-long blockade of the Faslane Nuclear Submarine Base.

The peace movement plays the role of continuity in more ways than one. Many of the tactics used during 1968 were already in use within the peace movement even *before* 1968. Michael Frey argues that “the peace movement developed and anticipated many of the central ideas and protest methods later to be considered typical of the protesters of 1968”, including, “innovations such as decentralized organizations, transnationality, solidarity with Third World countries, and nonviolent resistance”, as well as the fact that they “acted as a loose network that spread their ideas

94. These two movements are merged here because their contribution to 1960s movements and after is comparable, not because they are strictly speaking *one* movement.

95. See Thomas Rochon, *Culture Moves: Ideas, Activism, and Changing Values* (Princeton, NJ, 1988); Joyce Mushaben, “The Struggle Within: Conflict, Consensus, and Decision-Making among National Coordinators and Grass-Roots Organizers in the West German Peace Movement”, in Bert Klandermans (ed.), *International Social Movement Research, II: Organizing for Change: Social Movement Organizations in Europe and the United States* (Greenwich, CT, 1989), pp. 267–298; Herbert Kitschelt, *The Logics of Party Formation: Ecological Politics in Belgium and West Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); and Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*.

96. See Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution* on anti-nuclear movements, and Zsuzsa Hegedus, “Social Movements and Social Change in Self-Creative Society: New Civil Initiatives in the International Arena”, *International Sociology*, 4 (1989), pp. 19–36 on peace movements.

97. As part of my research into the alterglobalization movement I gave many of these trainings myself and partook in the process of adjusting these anti-nuclear movement trainings to the sensibilities of the alterglobalization movement – most notably by taking out references to strategic non-violence, anything New-Age sounding, and ideas of the “common good” as a source of unity.

internationally”.⁹⁸ Furthermore, peace and anti-nuclear movements often pursued their aims through practices of civil disobedience and direct action, tactics that rely more on internal movement organizing and direct intervention to stop an event from happening than on the exercising of political pressure on representatives.⁹⁹ The role of direct action also played an important role in perpetuating the importance of prefiguration as a strategy for social change. Of all movement tactics, direct action is most often associated with a prefigurative approach to social change.¹⁰⁰ Fuller argues that for Peace Movement Organizations (PMOs), “organizational structures and processes are an ‘action form,’ a method of protest in itself rather than simply a means to mobilize resources”.¹⁰¹

Autonomous and anarchist movements

In addition to the rise of identity-based and single issue struggles, the 1980s and 1990s saw the development of movements that built on the ideas of autogestion and participatory democracy through the construction of processes outside, and independent of, the political systems within which they operated. Especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Anglo-Saxon world, autonomous, anarchist, and Do-it-Yourself (DiY) movements were inspired by the anti-authoritarian ideals of the 1960s movements and were disillusioned by state responses to these movements.¹⁰² Anarchism has a long-standing tradition of prefiguration, and when after 1968 the idea that it would be possible to create social change by making demands of the state seemed increasingly unrealistic, movement actors began to “concentrate on fighting schemes politically by building local opposition outside the formal decision-making process”.¹⁰³ As Cosmo, a DiY activist put it, “[i]n the eighties [...] DiY culture was born when

98. Michael Frey, “The International Peace Movement”, in Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, pp. 33–44, 42.

99. Direct Action, of course, long pre-dates the anti-nuclear movements. Voltarine de Cleyre is perhaps the anarcho-feminist most famous for making this point about direct action as a rejection of representation already at the beginning of the 20th century. See A.J. Brigati, *The Voltarine de Cleyre Reader* (Oakland, CA, 2004).

100. See Franks “The Direct Action Ethic from 59 Upwards”, and Noel Sturgeon, “Theorizing Movements: Direct Action and Direct Theory”, in Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein, and Richard Flacks (eds), *Cultural Politics and Social Movements* (Temple, NC, 1995).

101. Abigail Fuller, “The Structure and Process of Peace Movement Organizations: Effects on Participation”, Conflict Resolution Consortium (1989), online at: http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/full_text_search/AllCRCDOcs/89-8.htm; last accessed 28 December 2010.

102. George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics* (Oakland, CA, 2006); A.G. Grauwaacke, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den Ersten 23 Jahren* (Berlin, 2004); Horn, *Spirit of '68*; and George McKay (ed.), *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain* (London, 1998).

103. Brian Doherty, Matthew Paterson, and Benjamin Seel, “Direct Action in British Environmentalism”, in Benjamin Seel, Matthew Paterson, and Brian Doherty (eds), *Direct Action in British Environmentalism* (London, 2000), p. 7.

people got together and realized that the only way forward was to do things for themselves".¹⁰⁴ The people and practices of these DiY movements fed directly into Reclaim the Streets (RTS) which organized the anti-G8 protests in London in 1999 that were the immediate precursors to the alter-globalization movement and the inspirational talk-of-the-town on the streets of Seattle in the run up to the WTO protests that became the official coming-out party of the alterglobalization movement. A flyer announcing an RTS party declared, "Reclaim The Streets believes there is another way: take direct action in the streets, in the fields and in the workplace, to halt the destruction and create a direct democracy in a free and ecological society."¹⁰⁵

Autonomous, anarchist and DiY movements spread all across western Europe and the US throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Katsifias claims that autonomous movements were larger, more radical, more diverse, and more unpredictable than those of the 1960s and were characterized by antiauthoritarianism, independence from political parties, decentralized organizational forms, and an emphasis on direct action.¹⁰⁶ The democratic ideals of the 1960s became less visible in these movements, but they certainly never disappeared. Autonomous movements are today essential in western Europe to maintaining the alterglobalization movement. Especially the German *autonome* and the UK DiYers play an important organizational role in the alterglobalization movement. They bring years of experience in running democratically organized actions and communes with them to the various process/facilitation and action planning working groups that design the basic structure for the meetings, actions, and the self-managed villages set up as part of anti-summit mobilizations.

CONCLUSION: CREATING INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY

I have argued that the movements of the "long 1960s" permanently altered the way political activism is done, with lasting effects into social-movement praxis today. When viewed from the vantage point of contemporary social movements, we can see that 1960s movements were only the start of a lasting *political* legacy that lies in the construction of democratic processes that remain relevant today because they are still in practice today. I have shown that the importance of "participatory democracy" within social-movement networks has only grown over the past half a century. In particular, I have presented these democratic structures as important primarily because they reflect a shift in social-movement praxis from creating social change through a

104. Cosmo quoted in George McKay, "DiY Culture: Notes Towards an Introduction", in McKay, *DiY Culture*, p. 2.

105. Flyer reproduced in John Jordan, "The Art of Necessity: The Subversive Imagination of Anti-Road Protest and Reclaim the Streets", in McKay, *DiY Culture*, p. 148.

106. Katsifias, *The Subversion of Politics*, p. 3.

sudden-break theory of revolution in the future to creating social change through a gradual learning process that results from enacting one's ideals in the present moment – a process often referred to as prefiguration.

1960s movements did not simply disappear, nor were they incorporated entirely into mainstream political systems. The dreams of 1960s movement actors were daring but daunting, inspiring but unrealistic. Still, they captured the imagination of movements past and present and movement actors since have been working hard to turn those dreams into reality by taking the democratic ideals of the 1960s movements and putting them into practice. In the process, movement actors have fundamentally transformed social-movement politics. Prefiguration is today a viable strategy for social change due to two shifts in the way democracy is envisioned, both of which became a part of mainstream movement struggle during the 1960s: the pursuit of multiple goals and non-hierarchical, participatory decision-making structures. The contribution of the 1960s was primarily in the combination of these two values. After nearly fifty years of learning through practice, this political legacy is firmly embedded in social-movement decision-making structures and forms the heart of contemporary experiments with alternative forms of democracy. The failed dreams of the 1960s, far from being forgotten, have been carefully nurtured and the democratic principles expressed in the spontaneity of 1968 are now flexible but developed structures of decision-making.

The central importance of egalitarian and participatory forms of democracy within the 1960s movements has often been forgotten, but with the aid of hindsight we can see that these democratic ideals were a crucial part not only of the means but also the ends of movement organizing that have far outlasted the 1960s. Once we interpret the experiments with democracy during the 1960s as a crucial turning point in the long-term pursuit of democratic decision-making structures that do not rely on centralized forms of representative power but on a decentralized prefiguration of multiple goals, we see that rather than “demanding the impossible” as the 1968 slogan goes, the movement was *doing* the impossible. Participatory democracy was an attempt “to define a new process of politics”,¹⁰⁷ and when judged purely from a contemporaneous viewpoint, the 1960s movements failed in this aim. However, when viewed from the vantage point of the alterglobalization movement, we can see that it is too soon to declare game over.

The movements of the 1960s set this new political process in motion, but did not have the organizational or structural capacities to bring their own principles into practice. Their ambitious agenda, creative inspiration, and revolutionary impatience combined to make the prefiguration of their democratic ideals impossible in the context of the internal strife and state repression that most 1960s movements faced. Between the 1960s and today,

107. *Idem*, *The Imagination of the New Left*, p. 20.

movements' networks split into many different movements, each of which pursued different goals but many of which maintained the democratic ideals and continued to put these ideals into practice. The practices were experimented with and slowly improved upon on a small scale until they could once again be networked into a larger collaboration in the form of the alterglobalization movement. The alterglobalization movement has learned a great deal from the mistakes and successes of the 1960s, especially the need to be open to multiple goals and the need perpetually to decentralize power. And although it is not yet at the point of being able to transform society as a whole, it has come a long way in developing horizontal structures of democratic decision-making.

What the movements of 1968 learned painstakingly is that democracy is not about who rules, but about setting up clear structures for *how* to rule, and that it consequently must become a perpetual process of learning and construction. This idea, so new to movement actors in the 1960s, is today taken for granted because it has been incorporated into movement practice over the past forty years. The transition from revolutionary politics to strategic prefiguration held within it a profound acknowledgement that democracy is not declared, but continuously made. And that in order for it to be "democratic" it has to be made by all those who hold a stake in the process. Movement actors today understand the prefigurative aspect of their struggle much more strategically, which allows them to transform society patiently through a perpetual process of decision-making that continuously improves upon the alternative governing structures to ensure inclusion rather than struggling impatiently for the revolutionary moment after which "true" democracy will be theoretically possible.¹⁰⁸

When we evaluate 1960s movements on the basis of their lasting legacy within social-movement networks instead of their impact on society-at-large, therefore, we see that the movements of the 1960s were anything but a temporary moment of rebellion. Far from having failed in the political realm, part of their success was overcoming the limits of strict communist ideologies and launching an explicitly *political* experiment with radically inclusive forms of democratic decision-making. Even as the movements of the 1960s subsided, these practices never did; they carried on in subsequent movements to emerge once again into public view on the streets of Seattle during the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization. When we reapproach the history of 1960s movements from the perspective of contemporary global movements, we see that 1968 was far from a failure; it was only the beginning, a beginning for which the end has not yet been written.

108. The anti-climate-change movement, which is the successor of the alterglobalization movement in terms of democratic decision-making, exhibits more impatience than its predecessor due to climate change being considered an urgent issue that needs an immediate solution. It is too soon to tell what the consequences of this impatience may be.