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Spontaneity and the prefigurative *feel*

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abstract

When talking about prefiguration what is often talked about is the creation of formal anti-oppression protocols, sometimes critiqued as the self-bureaucratization of anarchist social movements. The result is what I refer to as *the protocolization of daily life*, a situation where the day-to-day is formalized into defined rules or norms. In doing so, activists often reproduce the control found at the heart of mainstream organizational forms. Such control often works to the detriment of the democratizing goals of social movements, excluding minorities and working-class people, generating the often-critiqued homogenization of social movements. This paper explores an antonym of such protocolization, what I refer to as the *prefigurative feel*. I will define prefigurative feel as a concern with the nature of the relationships between the people inhabiting such projects, the way they relate to each other, to time and to space. In the paper I relate this feel to an antonym of control – spontaneity. My own personal experience within social movements prompted a 12-year investigation into the issues of control and spontaneity within activism. Within it, arts-based participatory research provided rich ethnographic and biographical data of two case studies, two organizational ecologies where protocolization was tempered by a concern for the feel of the alternatives created. This data prompted the explorations presented here, not about what social movements mainly do, but about what they tend to do less of, and about the possibilities such actions less taken might afford.

Introduction

The term prefiguration, suggesting that the small-scale organizational experiments of activists are there to foreshadow a future utopian society, has been the subject of some polemic (e.g. Wilson, 2014; Gordon, 2018). On one hand, it's hard to conceive of the work of social movements without planning, or at least imagining on a large scale, forming part of it (Kinna, 2009; Desideri and Harney, 2013; Wilson, 2014: 197). On the other, within anarchist thought, which often underpins contemporary activism (Graeber, 2002), blueprints are critiqued as an expression of control and domination (Ward, 1988: 61; Wilson, 2014: 38). While the correlation between means and ends can suggest the instrumentalization of means towards specific ends (Parker, 2021a: 907), anarchism often sees organization as an open term (Parker et al., 2014: 624), a space for negotiating with the diverse specificities of heres and nows (Parker et al., 2007), leaving the future to unfold (Cornell, 2011: 7). In what seems like a compromise between the two positions, social movement theorists present prefiguration, where future-making is incremental and experimental, slowly charting the concrete configuration of the future ideal society through trial and error (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 3; Luchies, 2014: 99, 113; Pötz, 2019: 128). But despite this scaled down, hands-on approach, prefiguration still subsumes activist experiments to a grander coherent plan they might be working towards. This is sometimes deemed deterministic, instrumentalizing the present for the more important purpose of transforming the future, and instrumentalizing the small-scale for the more important purpose of transforming society as a whole (Breines, 1980: 420).

Gordon writes that prefiguration ‘may work to undermine a generative disposition towards the future’ (Gordon, 2018: 522). The indeterminate view his position exemplifies (Wilson, 2014: 198; Hillier, 2017: 668–669), presents an alternative to a mainstream culture where control is practically an axiom (Parker, 2002a: 3; Graeber, 2015) and planning, control’s temporal expression, is ubiquitous (Desideri and Harney, 2013). The emphasis of social movements on praxis rather than static plans is a reaction to this status quo and the war it wages against the human imagination (Breines, 1980: 420; Juris, 2008a: 65; Graeber, 2015: 82). This primacy of ethics, of the question 'what to do?' over metaphysical absolutes (Wilson, 2014: 12), draws tentative

connections to several contemporary theoretical conversations. Among them are the ideas of indeterminacy, anti-foundationalism and pluralism in pragmatism (Bernstein, 2010: 9, 34, 55), queer theory, where monisms and dualisms are rejected in favor of open-ended diversity (Parker, 2002b) and a conversation which talks about the world as precarious, vulnerable and in a state of becoming, coming from both feminist (Tsing, 2015) and indigenous thought (Ingold, 2006).

While an in-depth elaboration of these connections is beyond the scope of this article, one can see in these diverse conversations a growing patchwork of radical intellectual thought, often connected to the lived experience of those excluded from the mainstream. Such thinking both implicitly (Haraway, 1988: 584; Bernstein, 2010: 60) and explicitly (Scott, 2008: 94; Halberstam, 2011: 6) critiques control through its critique of academic rigour and utopian blueprints. It values indeterminacy as a central ingredient of how we perceive the world and how we act within it. This primacy of action from particular standpoints (Harding, 2009) over foundational theories, connects to anarchism's focus on incremental accumulation of examples, building towards an always evolving alternative common sense (Wilson, 2014: 12–13; Gordon, 2018: 531). Thus, the activist emphasis on praxis and their use of the term 'spontaneity', can be connected to a wider theoretical tendency expressed in diverse ways, one that puts indeterminacy at the center of the way we know the world and act within it.

But while traditional notions of rigour and blueprints are deemed suspect, there is still a need, within social movements, for collective learning processes that strive toward futures and take cues from the past. One must only observe the repeating cycles of mobilisation and burn out, the emotional ups and downs of exhilaration and disappointment described by activists and their chroniclers, making patent such a need (e.g. Juris, 2008b: 66; Naegler, 2018: 510; Kinna et al., 2022: 17). Despite some worthwhile efforts to address such gaps (e.g. Kinna et al., 2022), past experiences still suggest a certain cyclical stagnation, lacking a learning process that builds up from one generation of activists to another. The challenge is therefore to create learning processes that make such continuity explicit, while staying present with not knowing (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi).

In response, my aim here is to examine the role control and spontaneity play within the prefigurative practices of activists and the scholarship about them. In considering the centrality of spontaneity, it won't banish control out of sight. Rather, the aim here will be to create some leg room for spontaneity at the centre of alternative organizational practices, presenting alternative forms of resilience that challenge (albeit also include) control. Furthermore, rather than charting out what social movements essentially are or what utopian society they should be aiming to create, here my focus is small-scale, talking about the day-to-day of activists rather than about what an ideal society might look like. I will also focus on what activists tend to do less of and what scholars tend to focus less on, arguing for its value. While traces of the grand theoretical debates about control vs. indeterminacy (Ingold, 2006), organization vs. anti-organization (Breines, 1980) and utopia vs. anti-utopia (Kinna, 2009), are importantly there in this experience, I will stay close to the ground in my focus and terminology. For example, rather than atomizing and dismembering a term such as 'spontaneity', translating it into a meta-language and explaining it away (Latour, 2007: 49), I will take it on as an important building block, one that is at hand, given its recurring use by activists, useful for understanding the nuts and bolts of alternative organizing.

I first argue that spontaneity presents a contradiction within social movement studies. It is celebrated by activists but debunked by scholars who otherwise show affinity with their aims. I later add that despite their critique of control within mainstream culture, activists reproduce the ubiquity of control through their prefigurative use of protocols. I also argue that much of what is presented as prefiguration in the literature focuses on such formal protocols. To help widen our view, I then present instances of spontaneity permeating the practices of two organizations. I will call this an 'ecological spontaneity' and contrast it to the linear/directional and reactive definitions of the term, debunked by scholars. In both examples, an element of spontaneity co-exists in tension with organizational control. Both demonstrate a concern with the prefigurative feel of the spaces and organizations created, foreshadowing the transformed relationships of an ideal future and facilitated by ecological spontaneity.

Spontaneity

Activists emphasize spontaneity and open-endedness when talking about their actions (Polletta, 1998; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Snow and Moss, 2014: 1122). For example the 1960 sit ins were described using 'metaphors of wildfire, fever, and contagion' (Polletta, 1998: 137) and the 2011 Egyptian revolution in Tahrir square as one where 'there was no plan [...] all spontaneous and [...] evolved [over] time' (Hossam El Hamalawy, quoted in Al Jazeera English, 2012, cited in Snow and Moss, 2014: 1122). Anarchist theorists that often inspire activism also share this emphasis on spontaneity (Ward, 1966: 3; Bookchin, 1975). Ward celebrates adventure playgrounds as possessing 'diversity and spontaneity' (Ward, 1988: 91) and Bookchin writes that rediscovering spontaneity challenged 'the very concepts of hierarchy, power and manipulation' (Bookchin, 1977: 63).

At the same time, despite it being a recurring theme in both activist accounts and their theoretical background, scholars tend to take great efforts to debunk it (e.g. Flesher Fominaya, 2015). The debates are often informed by the different ways spontaneity is defined and described in the literature. Specifically, as I will now discuss, spontaneity oscillates between spatial and temporal definitions, while also defined as linear/directional (Polletta, 1998: 137–138; Snow and Moss, 2014: 1123; Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 143) and reactive (Breines, 1980: 422).

Temporal and spatial definitions

Some definitions of spontaneity use a spatial metaphor, in which spontaneity is the quality of not being controlled 'from the outside' (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). Others are temporal, focusing on the quality of not being 'planned in advance' (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). These two definitions co-existing and used interchangeably can sometimes be confusing. Some authors include their definitions, helping the reader discern which one they are addressing (e.g. Bookchin, 1977: 23; Snow and Moss, 2014: 1123). Others discuss it without definition or clarification (Pilati et al., 2019). Important for my case here is the fact that some use the spatial definition to

debunk the possibility of the temporal one (Polletta, 1998: 137; Fox Piven, 2017: m24).

Spontaneity as linear, directional and reactive

Scholars talk about spontaneity as a singular explosive event that happens unplanned (Polletta, 1998: 137–138; Snow and Moss, 2014: 1123; Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 143). It is important to note the directionality and linearity of a spontaneous event, as examined by such scholars. It is a linear trajectory going in a specific direction, suddenly erupting in spontaneous protest. Examples include the Beijing Spring student protests of 1989 (Snow and Moss, 2014: 1122), the 2011 Egyptian revolution (Snow and Moss, 2014: 1122), the protests against President Donald Trump (Fox Piven, 2017) and the 1960 Greenboro sit-ins (Polletta, 1998). On top of being linear and directional, the accounts examined by scholars show spontaneity to be reactive, associated with protest rather than with alternative organizing. All the examples above are protest events, grassroots reactions to larger events. One of the important questions I aim to address is whether spontaneity can also form part of alternative organizing and its notions of future-making.

Spontaneity debunked

Once defined as linear/directional and reactive, social movement scholars have a tendency to explain temporal spontaneity away (e.g. Polletta, 1998; Snow and Moss, 2014; kucinskas, 2015; Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Fox Piven, 2017). The fact of protest treated 'as isolated events, as spontaneous outbursts born out of immaculate conception' is seen as a bias to be avoided (Zamponi and Fernández González, 2017: 65). Sometimes scholars interpret activists' use of the term as only referring to spatial spontaneity, to movements' autonomy (Polletta, 1998: 137; Fox Piven, 2017: m24). In other instances they demonstrate the use of spontaneity to be an error in perception, based on incomplete or confusing data held by an observer (kucinskas, 2015; Flesher Fominaya, 2015). In one example that combines both, Flesher Fominaya implies that the internal autonomy (spatial spontaneity) of movements makes their organization invisible to outsiders, causing observers to use temporal spontaneity (the idea that things are unplanned) for understanding their actions (Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 143).

Another way scholars negate spontaneity is by showing its use to be a storytelling device, used by social movements to create a specific image of themselves (Polletta, 1998; Flesher Fominaya, 2015). Yet another is by showing it to be a phenomenon that can be broken down, clearly mapped. Snow and Moss interpret spontaneity to be a deliberative act 'compressed in time' with 'spontaneous decision-making being a case of fast thinking'. In that, by explaining its mechanics, it is brought back into the realm of causality, becoming part of what is scientifically understood and thus under control (Snow and Moss, 2014).

From a political perspective, describing social movements as spontaneous is perceived as expressing a lack of affinity with their transformative goals. Back in the 1980s, Killian already associated the use of the term with a view of social movements as irrational and lacking agency (Killian, 1984: 770). One can trace this tension to much earlier texts such as Lenin's 'What is to be done?' (Lenin, 1902), where he asks if spontaneous strikes are a form of mindless desperation, vengeance or whether they express consciousness 'in an embryonic form' (Lenin, 1902: 17). Zamponi and Fernández González warn that depicting activists as spontaneous is akin to depicting them as mindless and depoliticized and that such descriptions might be 'easy to exploit for those actors interested in doing so' (2017: 65). Spontaneity is thus perceived to be expressing activists' lack of agency, responsibility and intent. In addition, 'spontaneous order' is connected to capitalist thinkers that celebrate the freedom of 'market utopias' (Grey and Garsten, 2002: 16–17). The distance scholars place between themselves and the idea of spontaneity is thus an expression of an affinity to radical social movements and of a rejection of capitalist ideology.

Though often insightful about the internal dynamics of social movements, the literature rejecting spontaneity eschews the notion of something outside of the realm of human control, something astonishing and unpredictable emerging from below to affect social change, a sentiment expressed by activists themselves. In doing so, they also distance themselves from the generative indeterminacy towards the future, discussed above.

The value of spontaneity

There are several reasons why the idea of spontaneity might be beneficial to the work of social movements. For one, the centrality of control in mainstream organizing (Parker, 2002a: 2), the bureaucratic mindset, is in part what activists are fighting against (Graeber, 2015: 5). While the protocolization of social movements (discussed below), might attest to the ubiquity of such control, their recurring mention of spontaneity suggests a yearning for alternatives to it. Furthermore, the idea of an element outside of human control, something surprising and unplanned, could confront the current 'crisis of the imagination' (Haiven, 2010), where alternatives to the status quo are deemed illegitimate, illegible (Halberstam, 2011: 10) or unintelligible (Learmonth, 2005: 618).

In terms of negating temporal spontaneity through its spatial definitions, it is important to note that both express something fundamentally similar, suggesting freedom from external coercion. Planning the future is a specific case of negating the internal autonomy of the present moment. When Bookchin defines spontaneity as 'behaviour, feeling and *thought* that is *free of external* constraint, of *imposed* restriction' (1975: 12), while seemingly adhering to a spatial definition, he is in fact including the restrictions of a previously created plan ('elitist plan'), external to the possibilities afforded by the present moment and the potentialities that ripen as it unfolds (Bookchin, 1975: 8, 13, 26). Left to its own devices 'an ecosystem tends spontaneously toward organic differentiation' (Bookchin, 1977: 64). This means that each individual element of the ecology can tend towards a slightly different path following its internal impulses. Which doesn't mean that planning (or organization or discipline) is abolished, only that it is always in tension and dialogue with the present moment's spontaneously emerging possibilities (Bookchin, 1977: 56). In that, the spatial and temporal definitions of spontaneity merge. Bookchin's ecological take on spontaneity coincides with my observations of the two examples below.

Protocols for democratization

Despite the repeated mentions of spontaneity by activists, the ubiquity of control is often reproduced by social movements (e.g. Leach, 2013: 184), creating obstacles for their democratizing goals (Appel, 2011a). Democratization is a central concern for social movements (Gerbaudo, 2017: 9). Brown expresses with precision the perception that even in so-called democratic countries democracy has been 'hollowed out' by the extreme imbalances associated with neoliberalism, the state now having 'nothing to do with the people ruling themselves' (Brown, 2010: 47–48). In response, social movements work towards deepening the reach of democracy beyond its expression in national elections, promoting assemblies and other methodologies of direct democracy (e.g. Akuno and Nangwaya, 2017). Diversity of participation is key to these projects, aiming to be inclusive of the full range of cultures, genders and economic abilities, deepening access to power (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 11; Gerbaudo, 2017: 20). Integral to these experiments is the project of uprooting the discriminations and oppressions that perform in more or less subtle ways within existing systems (e.g. Butler, 1999: 25–26). Social movements hope to prevent such oppressions from seeping into their own internal organizational practices (Luchies, 2014). For that purpose, anti-oppression protocols are designed through much time-consuming debate (Asara, 2016: 5). Given the naturalization and performativity of oppression, such protocols are brought down to the smallest moments of daily life, in a process that I call *the protocolization of daily life*.

Definitions of protocol

When talking about protocols and their use in the prefigurative practices of activism one must consider two separate but connected definitions of the term. On the one hand it is a formal procedure, for behavior deemed correct in a specific situation (Galloway, 2004: 7). Examples of this would be diplomatic protocols, or protocols for formal arrangement in meetings of official dinners (e.g. Morgan, 2012; Faizullaev, 2014). Related but distinct is its definition within computer networks, where protocol is a convention that connects communications systems (Galloway, 2004: 7; Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In this section I will discuss the ways in

which the two types of protocol could be found in the work of social movements, how they enable innovative impactful work while at the same time perpetuating control.

In computer networks protocols are connectors, functioning 'largely without relying on hierarchical, pyramidal or centralized mechanisms [...] flat and smooth [...] universal, flexible and robust' (Galloway, 2006: 317). It is these characteristics of protocol that make it useful for activists in constructing autonomous, horizontal and decentralized organizational structures (Galloway, 2004: 11–12). Inspired by digital networks, social movements develop protocols that permit diversity through lowest common denominator connectivity (Juris, 2008a; Castells, 2015). Past examples include the simple decentralized structure of a network called People's Global Action, formed around five tenets that connected diverse groups globally (Juris, 2008a: 4–5; Cox and Wood, 2017) or the colour coding during mass protests that allowed groups from diverse position to coordinate mass-blockades of summits (Chesters and Welsh, 2004; Reitan, 2012: 327). In such examples, protocols are used by activists to materialize their inter-related aims of decentralization (Cornell, 2011: 47–48; Roux-Rosier et al., 2018: 10) horizontality (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 11; Eleftheriadis, 2015), diversity (e.g. Routledge, 2003: 335; Roux-Rosier et al., 2018: 3) and democratization (Giugni, 1998; Reitan, 2012: 327). Relatedly, within anarchism, decentralized control, with the protocols that structure it, are connected to autonomy (related to the spatial definition of spontaneity) (Swann, 2018: 432). Protocols are thus forms of control that produce alternatives to the hierarchy and the coercion of mainstream structures (Galloway, 2004: 29, 121).

But social movements also tend to include in their organizational practices protocols in its other sense, of formalized behaviour deemed correct in a specific situation. These include all the protocols developed for conducting meetings and for managing the daily functioning of large protests, squats, communes, social centres, protest camps and other activist organizations (Appel, 2011b; Juris, 2014, 12m44s; Leach, 2016). The protocols tend to serve the function of replacing tacit oppression and inequality with new methodologies ensuring horizontality and access (Luchies, 2014).

Accumulatively, such protocols can get quite complex. For example, the decision-making process of the Occupy Wall Street camps included…

> …at least three different kinds of meetings (GAs, SCs, and Working Groups) at which different kinds of business are conducted; several different kinds of participating groups, with different purposes and responsibilities (Working Groups, Operations Groups, Movement Groups, and Caucuses); four formal phases to the meeting (agenda items/proposals, working group report-backs, announcements, and soap box); eight hand signals; five facilitation roles (facilitator, stack-taker, stack-greeter, timekeeper, and minute-keeper); as well as rules about how to make proposals (through a Working Group), how the consensus process works, and how many people it takes to make/block a decision. (Leach, 2013: 184)

Reminiscent of Occupy, Extinction Rebellion's (X/R), 'Guide to Citizens' Assemblies' lists elements such as 'Coordinating Group', 'Advisory Board', 'Expert/Stakeholder Panel', 'Facilitation Team' etc. (The Extinction Rebellion Citizens' Assemblies Working Groups, 2019).

Other than managing meetings, protocols are often used for managing daily life. A good example could be found in Cornell's (2011) book *Oppose and propose*, which examines the legacy of Movement for a New Society (MNS), an influential activist network that popularised many of the protocols later to be adopted by other groups. The following quote exemplifies what I mean by the protocolization of daily life:

> We […] refined the idea of having support committees for members of the MNS community. Each person […] could turn to the members of their committee when they were facing major decisions in their lives like "Should I take this job?" or "Should I move to Seattle?" […] Support committees were also important […] in our personal lives, in things that were more intimate. […] One member had surgery on the top of her spine […] she asked her support committee to have at least one visitor stay with her all the time, even when she was sleeping, to hold her hand. (Cornell, 2011: 95)

With the intention of preventing oppression from seeping invisibly into alternative forms of organizing, the activists in the quote replaced traditional forms such as family and friends with formal protocols. The quote exemplifies how such protocols start permeating the smallest moments of activists' lives;

the work involved in creating them occupying much of their time (e.g. Cornell, 2011: 24; Maeckelbergh, 2011: 2).

So far, I've discussed how the two types of protocol are used by social movements within their prefigurative practice. But the two types have something important in common. In both cases, protocols are agreements that govern connections (Galloway, 2004: 7), there to help navigate the uncertainty of future encounters with others. They take the possibilities encounters afford, mitigating uncertainties and, I would add, spontaneity. Working towards the creation of alternatives to hierarchical systems such as bureaucracy (Swann, 2022: 6), they also have something in common with it, in the way they attempt to remove arbitrariness and its associated inequalities from hard to predict future situations (du Gay, 2000: 3, 58, 80; Allan, 2005: 172; Anderson, 2008: 154; Waters and Waters, 2015). Through accumulative experiments in the here and now this process strives to formalize the creation of a system for the ideal, decentralized, horizontal, diverse and democratic society. For example, published guides make informal dynamics explicit, incorporating them into the formality of protocols (e.g. Kinna et al., 2022; Seeds for Change, n.d.).

While the usefulness of prefigurative protocols in decentralizing and flattening hierarchies is demonstrable (Routledge, 2004; Chesters and Welsh, 2004; Luchies, 2014: 99, 112), there is also ample evidence of the adverse effects protocolization has on diversity, and by extension on the democratizing aims of social movements. Leach refers to the 'rituals and regulations' of prefiguration having 'unintended and ironically elitist consequences' (Leach, 2013: 184) and Appel writes they are 'rife with signals of oppression' (Appel, 2011a). For example, in an Occupy Wall Street meeting 'the ways in which this "horizontal" and "radically democratic" process can marginalize people was radically spotlighted', excluding people of colour and their concerns (Appel, 2011a). Scholars also note that consensus decision-making, characteristic of the social movements of recent decades (Cornell, 2011; Juris, 2012; Seeds for Change, n.d.), tends to exclude working-class people (Juris et al., 2012: 437–438; Luchies, 2014: 105, 118; Ostrander, 1999: 633). MNS (Cornell, 2011: 82), the global justice movement (Conway, 2003: 512; Juris, 2008b: 77) and X/R (Bell and Bevan, 2021), have all been critiqued

as being 'shaped by the concerns, priorities and ideas of middle-class white people' (as Garavito and Thanki, 2019 wrote about X/R). MNS even ended disbanding after 17 years (Cornell, 2011: 52) as a result of 'tasting and smelling too much like a white counterculture', having failed to 'extend [...their] cultural boundaries' (Cornell, 2011: 82). In all these cases, bringing such control to the smallest, most intimate moments of the day-to-day can create obstacles for participation, many related to tensions around use of time. These make activist spaces less diverse, less welcoming to people who are not white middle class and university educated. Thus, spaces that purport to be democratizing democracy can be exclusive.

When talking about prefigurative feel, I am not negating the usefulness of prefigurative protocols and the scholarship about them. I am simply shifting my focus towards attitudes in the daily lives of alternative organizations, expressing small moments of spontaneity and informality that push against protocolization, sometimes playfully. In the examples below, spontaneity and informality are underlying values, creating an atmosphere that is palpable in the social environment there cultivated. When arguing for paying attention to the prefigurative feel of alternative forms of organizing, I am looking towards a culture that allows learning processes to be experienced freely, through trial and error in the day-to-day (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 127; Eikeland, 2015: 382).

Methodology

The methodology combined participatory action research (PAR) and ethnography. As is often the case with such research, rather than pre-designed, it unfolded in dialogue with the action taking place (Fisher, 2006; Day, 2018; Kruglanski, 2024). This experimental process started with the creation and management of a small-scale neighbourhood organization (*macba*), which lasted six years. It then continued for six more years within the context of another organization I was collaborating with (IPC). The two represent two different moments in the research project. *macba* was my preliminary attempt to investigate the nuts and bolts of social change. Initiated as a form of practitioner research (Eikeland, 2015: 382) prior to any

formal relationship with academic institutions, it helped me scope the issues and identify control and spontaneity as central to my question. IPC was an established social enterprise through which I explored the relations between control, spontaneity and resilience.

macba was a rented storefront, which opened its doors for collaborations of activists, artists and neighbours. For six years, with a group of collaborators, I organized workshops, dinners, exhibitions, art projects, film screenings and public meetings. The premise was that opening the storefront's door to collaboration and spontaneous encounter would generate an economy rooted in the specificities of the neighbourhood. IPC was a 40-year-old housing organization. During my six years collaborating with it, my partner Anna Coromina and myself used the facilities and resources of IPC to organize a series of community events. Like *macba*, these events used open space as a point of departure for the creation of local economies and organizational forms. In parallel I started researching IPC itself, its long history and the social dynamics within it. Given its longevity, I was curious about how such an alternative organization becomes resilient. I also went back to gather and analyse data from *macba*. Altogether I conducted ten unstructured interviews with central people involved in IPC and its social environment, and seven interviews with participants and collaborators of *macba*. Beside recorded interviews, I also used ethnographic note taking and the collection and analysis of IPC documents (notes from meetings, timelines created by interviewees, minutes books from the 1980s and 1990s) and social media posts and documents from the six years of *macba* activities (monthly programs, a business plan document and other written descriptions of projects). In order to protect participants, the data, including names of participants, organizations and locations, was all anonymised and informed consent was confirmed in writing.

In order to make sense of the diversity of formats (interviews, ethnographic notes, social media posts, documents), I used non-cross sectional thematic analysis (Spencer et al., 2003: 203) through an iterative process (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009), placing the themes emerging through the data into a series of documents, starting with a rough selection of anything that seemed relevant to organizational dynamics, control or spontaneity. What I found

were instances of spontaneity expressed diversely in small ways throughout the data. The next section describes these findings.

Findings

Background on the two case studies

As I analysed the data, I started seeing the two case studies as organizational ecologies rather than simple organizations. Though short-lived and small in scale, *macba* already foreshadowed for me the way IPC challenged organizational boundaries. *macba* was an open space where other projects, proposed by individuals, collaborations and organizations, took place. It didn't have members but rather collaborators that usually had a foot inside and another outside of the organization. These projects populated the monthly program, hand-drawn and photocopied by me, with proposals that were open to the public, seeking to engage it with cultural and political activities (*macba* programs; *macba* Facebook page). The economy of *macba,* unstable at best, was based on such public engagement (personal communication, Daniel, 06.02.2017; Mar, 15.10.2016; Sascha, 19.02.2017; ethnographic notes, 12.10.2013; macba Facebook page).

IPC, later a housing charity, started in 1983 as a workers' cooperative. From its inception, IPC was surrounded with other smaller businesses, organizations and temporary projects that had symbiotic relationships with it. Members and friends of IPC initiated small businesses such as the corner store Folks and the clothing shop Punkarama (personal communication, Jowt, date; Alice, 18.07.2017; Tina, 18.07.2017; Griffith, 04.08.2017; Caswell, 27.04.2017). Several of these started in people's IPC owned and managed homes, later moving to commercial premises (also IPC owned and managed). Members and friends also embarked on political projects such as organizing an anti-poll-tax demo or running for office with the Green Party. When looking at all these projects, one can see many overlaps in personnel, giving the impression of a close-knit social milieu where people moved from one project to the next or simultaneously got involved in several of them. My conversations showed personal relationships – both friendship ties and romantic relations – as key factors in this social environment. Members and

friends of IPC got romantically involved with each other, sometimes had children, then separated, later getting involved with others from the same group of friends/collaborators (sometimes having more children with them). Alice, one of IPC's friends from the early days called it 'a meshwork' adding 'none of us can quite put our finger on where it ends'. She added that 'when things break there's other networks connecting things', suggesting that it was this multigenerational meshwork that is responsible for IPC's resilience (Personal communication, Alice, 18.07.2017). All of this took place within a few city blocks.

The data suggested a spontaneity that permeated this physical and social space. This spontaneity expressed itself through the many mentions of chance encounters, through the attitudes towards formality and informality and through the streets, the buildings and the rooms in which IPC's and *macba*'s activities took place. This physical/social environment, where the boundaries between one organization and another, between the insides and outsides of each one of them and the between formal structures and personal ties, were continually challenged to the point of being porous, is what made me start considering these 'meshworks' as organizational ecologies rather than clearly defined organizations.

Chance encounters

One of the things that most stood out during the recorded conversations were the many mentions of chance encounters. Chance encounter was a central theme in the data and appeared in various guises throughout my conversations and observations of the two organizational ecologies. Some of the *macba* collaborators described how chance encounters propelled their learning process forward. One example was Daniel, who used the space to produce and sell tempeh. He told me how encountering a *macba* neighbour got him interested in producing tempeh. Later, befriending the Indonesian partner of a friend created the unexpected opportunity of acquiring materials necessary for the project (personal communication, Daniel, 06.02.2017). Another example was Sascha, who used *macba* for organizing dinners and workshops that made culinary use of wild plants. He started his project as a result of meeting a knowledgeable friend with whom he took long walks in the

countryside. In our interview, Sascha emphasized how each dinner and workshop was a result of encounters with a particular edible plant or a recipe (personal communication, Sascha, 19.02.2017). In that, he presented an attitude in which chance encounter was not an exceptional event, but the material of daily life, the very basis of economic and organizational projects.

The methodological story of the research itself, the way I got to know IPC, also involved an element of chance. While exploring IPC's neighbourhood, I bumped into a space called the Avenue Village Hall, where I met Kid. Kid, who described himself alternately as 'the mis-manager of the hall' and its 'dictator', became one of the main participants within my research. It was through him that I was introduced to IPC and to its main coordinator, Jowt (personal communication, Kid, 26.06.2017; ethnographic notes, 13.04.2016). Jowt and other central figures in the IPC story stressed the element of chance encounter when telling their stories. Jowt, Max, Caswell, Griffith, Cecil, Vex and Tina were all involved in the project when it first started in the early 1980s. Jowt, Max and Caswell are still directly involved daily, while Cecil and Alice are still tied to it by friendship. Jowt, Alice and Tina still live in houses owned and managed by IPC. All seven were explicit in putting chance encounter as central to how they got involved (personal communication, Max, 26.01.2018; Caswell, 27.04.2017; Griffith, 04.08.2017; Cecil, 14.01.2018; Tina, 23.06.2017). For example, Jowt told me

> I went to university [...] in October 1982 and I was living in a student house [...] and I by chance turned up a day early, by mistake, and could've just spent the night on the streets [...] but luckily this guy [...], Joshua Jarred, was at the student house, so me and him spent that Thursday evening talking. He was a third-year student and was a kind of a rebel looking for a cause. He was quite a straight guy in a way. He dressed kind of straight and was just kind of quite wholesome, but I think he was definitely looking for, looking for trouble really. (personal communication, Jowt, 02.04.2017)

And Max...

> I got to know Jowt and Cecil by chance really. Because a friend of mine who I knew was coming to town as well happened to live in the same student house they lived in [...] bizarrely I'd taken my stuff back to Manchester. I was going to go back to Manchester. And I had to come back for a couple of days for some reason. (personal communication, Max, 26.01.2018)

He went on to tell me how a series of encounters got him involved in IPC, making him stay in town. Relatedly, Cecil also implied chance as a factor, referring to the same student house Jowt talked about:

> It was a student house and Jard [Joshua Jarred] was in that house and Jowt was in that house and I was in that house. As students, we just ended up piled in together just completely randomly. (personal communication, Cecil, 14.01.2018)

Kid heard of IPC at the Pythia Club, a local rock venue, and Griffith heard about it through Kid, whom he met in the park where both were walking their dogs. Vex heard about it from Cecil, whom she met at Cobwebs, a nightclub (personal communication, Kid, 26.06.2017; Griffith, 04.08.2017; Vex, 09.01.2021). Max and Cecil both also left the organization, years later, in an unplanned way. Max left when another member, Sealy, decided to come back. Cecil left 'half accidentally', while on a trip to Southeast Asia, suddenly realizing that he 'no longer lived [in the town where IPC operated] and [that he had] left IPC' (personal communications, Max, 26.01.2018; Cecil, 14.01.2018). Such repeated mention of chance encounter made me realize its importance for the central figures in the IPC story. Besides such central figures, people more peripheral to the organization also seemed to get involved through chance. IPC's minutes books from the 1980s mentioned their main form of recruiting as 'friends just drifting in' (IPC minutes book 4th Meeting 02.04.1986). Kid told me about how he recruited tenants and cooperative members for IPC at his job at a homeless hostel and at Pythia Club. He talked about Samuel, another IPC friend as similarly recruiting through chance encounter in different contexts (personal communication, Kid, 26.06.2017).

Other than chance encounters between people, I also heard mentions of encounters with objects, material processes, physical environments, ideas and larger social and political contexts, that changed the course of IPC's organizational story. This was also true for *macba*, which counted on the unexpected happening daily. The proposals, that gave *macba* its shape and flavour, came through its big open green doors. Encounters with ideas about art, activism, cooking, craft, wild plants, sewing and documentary video transformed the course of the organization during its six-year existence. I saw this by comparing a document that stated my original declaration of intents

for the space, with the actual activities listed in years of social media posts (*macba* Business Plan Document, date unknown; *macba* Facebook page).

Instances where an encounter with non-human elements changed IPC's trajectory are numerous and diverse. Two examples can give a sense of the openness to encounter that permeated the organization and its environment. Jowt and Carrol, IPC's architect, told me about IPC's encounters with buildings. Rather than having a clear plan, IPC tended to dialogue with the circumstance of a given building. Jowt told me that 'the buildings reveal themselves to us by being put up for sale [...] IPC then identifies a need'. He followed this statement with several examples of buildings and compounds, purchased and developed by IPC. Carrol concurred, adding several other examples, where IPC adopted such openness to an encounter with a building (personal communication, Jowt at the IPC collective conversation, 04.08.2017; ethnographic notes, 04.09.2018). Caswell told me about IPC's first house, which, had 'a complicated arrangement of ownership', and was being repossessed by 'two different lending organisations' (personal communication, Caswell, 27.04.2017). This lack of clarity regarding ownership put the early IPC members in a complicated situation:

> They [the estate agent] gave the keys so they [IPC] went and sensibly got a set cut. They had a spare set of keys for the house and when it became clear how complicated the buying process is going to be [...] they said 'right, let's just move in'. [...] And then Jowt went into the office [the estate agency] and the guy said, [...] 'we believe there are squatters in it'. And Jowt said 'I'll go talk to them see if we can get them out'. And then he went back and said 'I had a word with them. They said they'll leave.' But that took so long, that that became the fourth house that IPC owned.
>
> Aviv: And while they were buying these other houses they were living in this house?
>
> Caswell: Yeah. (personal communication, Caswell, 27.04.2017)

Through such examples I learned that openness to encounters and to the changes they bring was prevalent throughout the organization and its environment.

The many diverse instances of chance encounter accumulated to suggest a sensibility, a feel that permeated the organization. I started seeing this as openness towards chance encounters and their transformative potential. In the stories I heard chance encounters changed both individual and organizational trajectories. This was true both for IPC as it was to the many projects, organizations and small businesses that populated its periphery. Chance encounters being welcomed challenged planning and controlling, making me start seeing spontaneity as something that can be multi-directional, happening in the encounter with something or someone unexpected coming into one's field of vision. Such diversity of small instances also made me realize that spontaneity can be something small-scale that permeates the day-to-day of an organization or, in this case, an organizational ecology.

Informality

Both *macba* and IPC dialogued with the protocolization prevalent in social movements. Both organizations emerged from participation in such movements. I started *macba* after about a decade of involvement in protest movements including the early 2000s global justice movements and four years of squatting. IPC members and friends were also politically engaged, organizing protests and highly influenced by anarchism (personal communication, Jowt, 02.04.2017; Griffith, 04.08.2017; Kid, 26.06.2017; Caswell, 27.04.2017; IPC collective conversation, 04.08.2017). In creating *macba*, I was explicitly responding to the protocolization I observed within such movements and to my perception that their homogeneity was connected to it (similar to Appel, 2011b; Appel, 2011a; Juris et al., 2012: 437–438). For that purpose, no formal meetings were held. Instead, *macba* organized a monthly dinner where all collaborators were invited to share food. These were not multitudinous events, but small-scale ones with a maximum of 10 people attending, all of which knew each other. In these dinners, as in the general day-to-day of *macba*, I worked to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere. My assumption was that anything that needed to be discussed would emerge spontaneously, without the formalities of an agenda, during these events.

The IPC data presented tensions between the typical protocolization of movements and a mischievous informality. On the one hand, IPC held weekly meetings, used consensus-based decision-making, took extensive minutes, and debated endlessly about procedures. In other words, IPC valued the alternative protocols of social movements (personal communication, Max, 26.01.2018; IPC minutes, book 2, 36th Meeting, 05.03.1987). Members often mentioned meetings and the use of consensus, one even referring to the weekly meeting as the 'punk mass' (personal communication, Max, 26.01.2018). On the other hand, diverse anecdotes showed how improvisation and informality continually pushed against such protocolization. For example, Caswell told me:

> You'd have informal [meetings] where you would be just doing something like sorting out the yard at one of the houses and you'd just have a tea break and whoever was there would sit around, discuss whatever and a decision would be made. And the next time you'd have a formal meeting, well, that decision's already been made. (personal communications, Caswell, 27.04.2017)

Alice suggested that horizontality was more of a craft to be practiced than a set of formal rules that kept hierarchies at bay:

> You go to a meeting, and you really feel strongly about something, but you don't say anything, but you have the opportunity because everyone has the opportunity to say, but you have to step into your own power by saying the thing. It's not that anyone's stopping you [...] You've got to say what it is you think. (personal communications, Alice, 18.07.2017)

Leadership was similarly embedded in its specific social context. 'It's not a passive thing of being led', she told me, ''cause charismatic leaders go both ways. They're the hook... but you've got to get hooked' (personal communication, Alice, 18.07.2017).

Her words suggest a trial and error approach towards horizontality, in contrast with the strict adherence to the 'bureaucracies of anarchy' described in the literature (Leach, 2013 184). I observed such a dialogic approach towards protocolization repeatedly in the data. For example, the minutes from the meetings held about the IPC crèche stated:

> It was suggested that the number of kids per adult should be four. However this does allow for flexibility depending on such factors as how useless you are, whether you have a babe in arms and of course who the kids happen to be. (Crèche meeting minutes, 07.09.1993)

Both Kid and Jowt expressed a playful attitude towards protocol and hierarchy, with Kid referring to himself as 'the dictator' of the Avenue Village Hall, and Jowt humorously mentioning in conversation how he 'suspended democracy in IPC during 10 years'. Both were explained as pragmatic measures, taken for the purpose of maintaining the open, informal atmosphere, the very democracy of these two organizations. Kid, for example, felt that he had to occupy a position of power, specifically because he had no interest in it. Him occupying that seat prevented other, more authoritarian-minded people from doing it (personal communication, Kid, 26.06.2017; ethnographic notes, 01.05.2020). In other words, when formal democracy and the actual democratic dynamics of people interacting with each other were at odds, formality was rejected in favour of the craft of people working together. The accumulation of instances where protocols and formalities were treated as imperfect trial and error practices or as elements to be taken humorously, made a strong case for an organizational ecology that welcomed elements outside of human control, imbued with spontaneity.

Spatial expressions of spontaneity

The rooms, buildings and streets occupied by the two organizational ecologies also expressed this spontaneity. *macba*'s big green doors opened to convert the street and the storefront into one big space. The street right outside *macba* was a paved pedestrian cul-de-sac surrounded by a tall wall. The activities spilled out onto this area. Anyone walking in through the big green doors was offered a cup of tea and a conversation. This openness of the physical space and its use was there to welcome encounters. Kid expressed a similar openness when talking about the beginnings of the Avenue Village Hall:

> I opened the door and thought 'will anybody come in?' And then somebody wandered in because they were lost or needed the toilet and I started talking to them and had a few jokes and they stayed and then we started renting it out and advertising and people came and groups came [...] And then I started the Thursday morning coffee morning which built up and then rented out all the

> other spaces and that's how it started strangely enough. (personal communication, Kid, 26.06.2017)

His words illustrate the connection between cultivating openness in a physical space and the welcoming of chance encounters. It also shows how such openness nourishes an organization with proposals and ideas.

I also noticed openness and spontaneity when I heard about the different spaces that served as IPC's office throughout the years. The office in the early IPC was a decentralized affair with different functions taking place in different people's bedrooms (IPC minutes, Book 1 March 86-Feb 87, 2nd meeting 12/3/86). Their first dedicated office was in one of the first houses they bought and rehabilitated. The adjacent house belonged to Chris, an early IPC member and her partner Griffith. Chris told me about how they tore down the bottom floor wall connecting the two houses. In the space created they started a crèche for IPC children and a social space with a bar and a pool table. She said the following about this bottom floor crèche/social space:

> The crèche […] was bringing new people into the organisation […] more people, tenants then were allowed to come […] it wasn't just a closed club. Tenants were able to come socialising on an evening and also for the crèche. (personal communication, Chris, 29.06.2017)

Chris's story, which I also heard from other interviewees (personal communications, Caswell, 27.04.2017; Alice, 18.07.2017; Tina, 18.07.2017), expressed openness on several levels, given that both physical and organizational boundaries were broken. The breaking of a wall between two houses breaks open the boundary between a private home and an organization's headquarters. Inviting neighbours into the crèche and into the social space breaks the boundaries between both this private home and this organization and the people in their geographic surrounding. Cecil told me about how some of these neighbours became friends and often got involved in IPC (personal communication, Cecil, 14.01.2018). This openness to encounter with others (non-activist neighbours from a working-class neighbourhood) was a mechanism that worked against the homogeneity of social movements discussed above. These others included future members of IPC and future active participants in its organizational ecology. IPC's office later had two other incarnations. My observations show both as spaces open

for people to leisurely hang out, have a warm beverage and interact. It suggested to me that the different spaces occupied by the organization echoed the atmosphere of that old 1980s student house where people spent time listening to punk music, drinking, doing drugs and talking about anarchism. In other words, the spaces were open to diverse moments of the unexpected happening on a small-scale, and that these small-scale spontaneities were welcomed as points of inflection that can nourish organizations with new ideas, directions and motivations.

Meandering paths

Another way IPC pushed against control was the way it challenged planning. The organization, the different projects and individuals involved all seem to take meandering paths, changing trajectories in response to encounters with people, ideas or contexts. The examples of chance encounters, above, suggest this already. But apart from those, I repeatedly heard stories of people connected to the IPC ecology leaving the organization and coming back, sometimes after many years and taking on different roles. Also, projects and businesses within it changed name, location, purpose and personnel throughout the years. IPC itself, having started as a workers' cooperative later became a charity and a limited company, and included activities quite different from what original members predicted at first.

The ingredients of ecological spontaneity (e.g. porous boundaries, chance encounters, informality and meandering paths) and the relationships of containment and enabling between them, are subjects for a separate paper. Here it is sufficient to say that these interrelated expressions of spontaneity, permeating the smallest moments of an organizational ecology, exemplify a focus on loose forms of organizing that include challenges to control and allow the generative nature of encounter to unfold.

Ecological spontaneity and the prefigurative feel

Ecological spontaneity

As discussed above, scholars define spontaneity as linear/directional (Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 143; Zamponi and Fernández González, 2017) and reactive (Breines, 1980: 422; Cheng and Chan, 2017). Thus defined, it is then mostly debunked (Polletta, 1998: 137; kucinskas, 2015; Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Fox Piven, 2017: m24). At the same time, the fact of activists mentioning spontaneity as a value suggests that the lived experience of an ideal society should be one that feels free from coercion and control, one where the unexpected can freely emerge. Gordon refers to such approaches as 'generative' (Gordon, 2018: 522) and Gibson-Graham talk about 'proliferating possibilities' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxii).

Rather than linear, the data from *macba* and IPC presents an *ecological* spontaneity, one that permeates the smallest moments of the day-to-day. While the spontaneities usually examined in the literature are characteristic of a specific story, of a person or a mass of people suddenly erupting in protest, here spontaneity is characteristic of both social and physical space. It is found in the buildings and rooms occupied by IPC and *macba*, in the open doors and in the welcoming attitude towards the unexpected, found once one steps through them. This openness to the unexpected is found also in the way participants playfully pushed against protocolization by valuing informality, taking roles and procedures as imperfect elements to experiment with, and talking about them in a tongue and cheek way. Alongside planning and utopian dreaming of the future, the two organizational ecologies showed an openness to unpredictable encounter and to the meandering paths such encounters might lead to.

In IPC, projects' and people's trajectories wandered into each other, making connections and weaving the social sphere into a 'meshwork' (Personal communication, Alice, 18.07.2017). Alice talked about this as a living meshwork, connecting it to the resilience of the IPC organizational ecology. Rather than directional, here spontaneity is multi-directional, found in the encounter with an other. Rather than a sudden twist in the trajectory of a person, group or movement, it is a meeting of (at least) two trajectories which introduces new ideas and directions to each. The unexpected doesn't emerge from an autonomy found within, but with elements that enter a social space

through the porous boundaries consciously cultivated (conscious to what extent? Is a question discussed further down).

Rather than strictly reactive and associated with protest, the data from *macba* and IPC suggest that spontaneity can be propositional, forming part of alternative organization. The repeated mention of chance encounters and informality, the meandering paths projects and individuals took and the spatial expressions of spontaneity, show spontaneity to be valued by members and friends throughout IPC's history. Similarly, in *macba*, it formed part of my proposal and the ways collaborators responded to it through their uses of the space. The small-scale spontaneities of unpredictable daily encounters were valued as nourishing. They made the trajectories of the two organizational ecologies continually explore possibilities (March, 1991), contributing to them becoming generative of multiple proposals.

The prefigurative feel

When discussing prefiguration, scholars tend to describe protocols, formal mechanisms developed by activists to control the many oppressions that tacitly underpin both mainstream and alternative organizational dynamics (e.g. Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Cornell, 2011). While the prefigurative protocols created by social movements are often innovative, they also tend to create blockages for achieving the interrelated goals of decentralization, horizontality, diversity, and democratization. While scholarship about prefiguration is often insightful, its focus on formal protocols limits our possibilities to imagine future forms of organizing.

In this paper I took a wider prism to prefiguration by providing examples where, alongside protocols, activists experimented with elements that pushed against control, ones that enact the values of spontaneity and openness, letting the future unfold in unexpected ways. In the two organizations, the outside was repeatedly welcomed in (e.g. the creche, the social space of IPC, the programming of *macba*) and the inside repeatedly spilled out (e.g. side projects in both). The trajectories of projects that formed part of the two ecologies meandered, intersecting with each other in diverse manners. The openness towards the outside and towards futures unfolding was not

delineated by some accorded rule, it was a characteristic of the social and physical spaces the two organizations inhabited, it had to do with the feel of these social milieus. This was expressed by the small instances of spontaneity that permeated their day-to-day.

In *macba* and IPC, many members, collaborators and friend chose to prioritize *feeling their way through* organizational processes, over protocolizing. They sometimes emphasized the value of judgments made on the spot (e.g. the IPC crèche and Alice's comments about meetings, brought above), showing organizing to be more of a craft, developed through reflexive trial and error, than a system erected through a grid of rules. Other times they took this same line of thinking to the extreme, ironically engaging in the formal opposite of democracy (Kid's and Jowt's comments about dictatorship and cancelling democracy, brought above), as a way of preserving an atmosphere (a *feel*) they deemed democratic.

The question arises, to what extent was the cultivating of ecological spontaneity conscious, even political; to what extent does this treatment of the present address a vision of the future, and in that – prefigurative. The atmosphere created by the accumulation of such instances exemplifies the inherent tension in some of the writing about prefiguration. On one hand practices were valued in themselves, not as a means towards future ends (Gordon, 2018: 531; Parker, 2021: 907). They embodied the direct action ethic of materializing ideals in the here and now (Franks, 2003). At the same time, in seeming contradiction and through unpredictable, meandering paths, some sort of progress towards ideal futures was tentatively created, and a unique learning process was charted (Friedman et al., 2020). The many repeated instances of spontaneity, in both cases, show it to be a central value forming part of the cultures of the two ecologies (as in Fine and Hallett, 2014). The literature that emphasizes spontaneity, literature that informed the beginnings of IPC, and that filtered down to both projects through their embeddedness in activist culture, suggests that these values have a political, intentional dimension to them. In the two examples, the small moments of spontaneity, pushing against control, embody the ideal of a society free of coercion, one where unexpected possibilities are free to emerge out of

unpredictable encounters. In that respect they could be seen as aiming towards an ideal future.

But while considering futures, this paper also aims to make connections to pasts. In the introduction, I talked about the lack of intergenerational learning, where projects initiated in previous decades inform newer endeavours as examples that can challenge the cyclical dynamics of exaltation and burnout or the homogeneity of radical movements and spaces. The longevity and generative nature of IPC prompted me to believe that there is something to learn from it, that rather than just debunking activists' depiction of their own actions as spontaneous, it is interesting to explore spontaneity as an ingredient of generative alternative organizational recipes.

It responded to the need, discussed above, for the theoretical conversations regarding indeterminacy to be translated into the 'how to's' of social change. Within the common sense praxis of social movements activists tend to talk about the 'spontaneity' characteristic of their work rather than talking philosophically about 'indeterminism'. One can see this as a translation of the wider critique of control to the nuts and bolts of doing things in the world. The experiences of IPC, generative in a visible way in their neighbourhood, suggest directions to explore for both activists and scholars, practices that proliferate possibilities in the day-to-day.

Finally, while the debunking of spontaneity often informs us about how social movements *are*, the examples of ecological spontaneity I provided might suggest how movements and organizations *can be*. In that, it focused not on what activists tend to do when organizing, but on what they seem to do less of, on aspects of alternative organizing that enjoy less visibility. This lack of visibility could be either the result of fewer organizations engaging in such practices, or because of scholars not framing their searches in ways that bring them to light, issues that I leave to be addressed elsewhere. This paper is merely an introduction to the thing itself – the possibility of spontaneity to form part of organization and, by extension, prefiguration.

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