



Movements of Theory and Practice*

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abstract

In spite of Lenin's claim that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" it has become increasingly fashionable to argue against theory and celebrate practice. This can be clearly observed in an academic field such as organisation studies which is characterised by increasing pressures to be less theoretically abstract and more practically relevant for private and public management. In this paper I will defend theory against the attacks from 'common sense' practice by developing the concept of theoretical practice, which highlights the close interconnectedness between theory and practice but also leaves room for their relative autonomy from each other. This theoretical conception is practiced by closely engaging with the so-called 'movement' of anti-capitalist protesters and globalisation critics whose most recent event was the European Social Forum (ESF) that took place in Florence, Italy, in November 2002. I will argue that in relation to theory and practice the ESF points towards three notions: first, protest for radical social change is a theoretical practice; second, the theoretical practice of radical collective protest can be the source of joy; and third, theoretical practice is characterised by movements between multiplicity and unity. Overall then this paper is a call for the practice of theory in organisation studies (and in life in general), a theory that aims at interrogating and concretely effecting social organisation and contributes to a project of radical change.

The Rule of Total War

The year 2002 is coming to a close. Two years after the millennial turn all the hopes and utopias that were originally connected to this memorable date seem to have vanished; instead the world appears to be in a permanent state of undeclared (civil) war: Washington, New York, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Bali, Columbia, Kashmir, Congo, Nepal...it is impossible to name all places of recent or current war atrocities and human catastrophes. Despite the now famous claim that history has ended after the fall of the 'iron curtain' and state socialism (Fukuyama, 1992), wherever we look the world is in turmoil; or, as Walter Benjamin says, we live in a permanent state of emergency: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live

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is *not the exception but the rule*” (1999a: 244, my emphasis), as the only difference between the politics of peace and the conduct of war is the intensity of the means employed. It is no wonder really why the historical heroes we celebrate are usually military leaders – and today they have reincarnated as politicians who declare themselves to be leaders of global security forces¹ that fight for ‘human rights’, ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest, these security forces are not strictly national armies anymore, which fight in a war that is declared against a sovereign state. Instead they are ‘internal’ police forces that fight ‘global terrorism’ in every corner of Empire, which for Hardt and Negri is a theoretical concept that points to the global, boundary-less regime that rules over the entire ‘civilised’ world (2000: xiv). Empire is the global State that has appropriated the means of war and developed it into the defining organising principle for the social as such:

The State apparatus appropriates the war machine, subordinates it to its ‘political’ aims, and gives it war as its direct object. And it is one and the same historical tendency that causes State to evolve from a triple point of view: going from figures of encastment to forms of appropriation proper, going from limited war to so-called total war, and transforming the relation between aim and object. The factors that make State war total war are closely connected to capitalism: it has to do with the investment of constant capital in equipment, industry, and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population in its physical and mental aspects (both as warmaker and as victim of war). Total war is not only war of annihilation but arises when annihilation takes as its ‘center’ not only the enemy army, or the enemy State, but the entire population and its economy. The fact that this double investment can be made only under prior conditions of limited war illustrates the irresistible character of the capitalist tendency to develop total war. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 420-421)

The irony is that this ‘total war’,² this complete tyranny, which has as its ‘centre’ the social or even life as such, as Foucault points out,³ is ‘sold’ to us as a war for ‘freedom’. In other words, when the United States and its allies invade one country after the other,

1 As I write this, NATO is holding its annual meeting in Prague, Czech Republic, with 12,000 policemen guarding the governmental leaders of the Northern Atlantic military alliance. It is said that about 4,000 protesters will be demonstrating against NATO – see www.indymedia.org for reports on these protests. Besides Bush’s main concern to form an international alliance for his war against Iraq, on top of the agenda will be the creation of a rapid security force that can be mobilised to intervene in any conflict around the world within twenty-four hours. The European Union, too, has plans for a similar rapid deployment force.

2 My usage of the concept of ‘total war’ is quite different from a popular understanding that sees war, in the tradition of Carl von Clausewitz, as a “duel on a larger scale” with the “maximum use of physical force” (1984: 87). In this view then war is a duel between two parties; it is a decision about who is your friend and who your enemy. In contrast to this my understanding of ‘total war’ is based on the idea that today, in times of Empire and the War on Terrorism, the enemy is everywhere and everybody; hence ‘total war’ is in fact a civil war in the sense that it is a war from *within* the social, *against* the social.

3 Foucault writes: “Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed. And through a turn that closes the circle, as the technology of wars has caused them to tend increasingly toward all-out destruction, the decision that initiates them and the one that terminates them are in fact increasingly informed by the naked question of survival” (1998: 137).

when Israeli tanks flatten Palestinian cities and refugee camps, when Russian forces bombard Chechnian houses, we are told that these are pre-emptive strikes that aim to prevent terrorist 'evil-doers' to threaten global 'peace' and the 'freedom' of our people. That the former enemies of the Cold War sit, in this regard, in the same boat is not surprising, but proves the point of Hannah Arendt (1963) when she says that already the arms race of the Cold War was nothing else but 'total war' against the social, whether in the East or the West. In this light today's multiple 'War on Terrorism', which has become a term to justify pretty much all of Empire's military and political actions, is merely the continuation of the logic of total 'cold' war and its supplement with a 'hot' component and some new enemies. This is to say that today's global political and military constellation can hardly be described as 'new', in the sense that the 'total war' we are experiencing is a new phenomenon. No, as Deleuze and Guattari as well as Arendt suggest, 'total war' is intrinsic to the capitalist system, it is its main organisational principle. Therefore, the "catastrophe is not what threatens to occur at any given moment but what is given at any given moment" (Benjamin, 1989, I.2: 683). In other words, the main threat the world faces today is not the catastrophe of another '9/11', another 'Bali', or any other atrocity of global terrorism, but the catastrophe of the socio-economic relations of Empire itself. Put differently, "that things just go on is the catastrophe" (*ibid.*); the catastrophe is that barely a year after the war against Afghanistan and a decade after the first Gulf War the next war against Iraq is looming; the catastrophe is that societies allow people like Bush, Blair and Berlusconi to be their leaders; the catastrophe is that the US' 'defence' budget is bigger than the military budgets of the next 25 governments put together; the catastrophe is that neo-liberal programmes dominate socio-economic agendas around the world... and we could continue this list of catastrophes that we are facing today. But these catastrophes are rarely presented in the media or represented by the political caste system of what we call and celebrate as parliamentary democracy, a system that for many is now anything but democratic, but disengaged, self-serving, non-active and corrupt.

Responding

How do we respond to these catastrophes? Should we hope for a change of the attitude of the 'system', namely that it comes to its mind again and makes war disappear from the political agenda?

Is it too much to read into the current rather hopeless confusion of issues and arguments a hopeful indication that a profound change in international relations may be about to occur, namely, the disappearance of war from the scene of politics even without a radical transformation of international relations and without an inner change of men's hearts and minds? Could it not be that our present perplexity in this matter indicates our lack of preparedness for a disappearance of war, our inability to think in terms of foreign policy without having in mind this "continuation with other means" as its last resort? (Arendt, 1963: 4)

As Arendt in her days, I am pessimistic about the possibility of a 'reform' of international social relations and our preparedness, as Arendt calls it, for a disappearance of war. So again, how do we respond to these catastrophes? What does one do, as worker, academic or student, asks Luis Aragon, "in the face of certain very

simple, elemental facts: that workers are staring down the barrels of cannons aimed at them by police, that war is threatening, and that fascism is already enthroned” (cited in Benjamin, 1999b: 464)?

Do we respond to these catastrophes with silence, because “where violence rules absolutely...everything and everybody must fall silent” (Arendt, 1963: 9)? Or do we respond with ‘postmodern’ cynical denial, as, for example, Jean Baudrillard (1995) so famously is said to have done when he claimed that the Gulf War of 1991 did not take place? Or perhaps a certain left melancholic response is appropriate? Wark, for example, who reviewed Baudrillard’s *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, can report on a typical ‘moral’ response to Baudrillard: “One of my colleagues launches into a tirade about how immoral it is for Baudrillard to claim the war did not ‘take place’ when so many people got killed there. The other attacks Baudrillard for talking about ‘simulacra’, as if war had disappeared into a virtual realm when clearly war is proof positive that real things still happen in the real world” (Wark, 1995). Wark soon found out after the little exchange with his colleagues that they had never even read Baudrillard’s book in question.⁴ By not reading ‘the real thing’ and just responding to or rather mimicking popular (media) discourse they thus re-produced the ‘immoral’ simulacra they accused Baudrillard of producing in the first place.

As response to this little episode (at least) two questions seem appropriate: First, in our judgement of war catastrophes, or in thought in general, should we really rely on traditional categories of morality, the very same categories that are used by Western politicians and military leaders to justify these wars in the first place? Second, what happened to academia, or thought in general, when we are increasingly called to respond, and we are happy to follow this call, without having read anything, without having even started to think? Whatever happened to *reading*? Should we really continue to caricature the theories of so-called postmodern writers such as Baudrillard, for example, by making extravagant claims about their ‘relativistic’, ‘immoral’ and ‘apolitical’ writing without actually having read them in detail? In other words, should

4 It is partly these non-readers that Baudrillard targets when he entitles his book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, even though he obviously does *not* say that the Gulf War did not take place. What he does argue is that the war did not take place the way it was reported, on CNN and all the other hundreds of news channels and programmes. The Gulf War was one of the first globally staged media events. Literally overnight CNN was catapulted into a global media conglomerate that turned death and war into entertainment. Thus what Baudrillard meant was that the media had such a grip on the event of the Gulf War that it was first and foremost recognised by the Western ‘couch-potatoes’ as media event, as TV show, as image play, rather than as a distinct ‘place’ or ‘location’ where thousands of people actually died or lived through the horrors of their lives. In this sense the Gulf War was a non-place (Augé, 1995), because the war was won through ‘virtual’ images that were ‘sold’ to the American public and the international allies. But these overexposed CNN war images did not exist in a political vacuum; they were not value-free somehow. Instead these images were the products of particular socio-economic relations that were ‘chosen’ for particular political ends. These ‘virtual’ products were success stories of bombs hitting military targets, heroic US American soldiers and a quick military victory. But did we see images of the thousands of people who died on both sides; and since that war, have we seen equally overexposed images of the suffering Iraqi civilian population exploited by Saddam and disadvantaged by the UN embargo (see, for example, Pilger, 2002); have we seen detailed reports about the mysterious illnesses that are said to have killed many Gulf War veterans in the US and Britain? These are the questions Baudrillard asks, explicitly and implicitly.

we, in academia and elsewhere, continue to pay so little attention to reading and theory as such? It seems to me that these questions are absolutely central in our search for answers, answers to the ‘total war’ of Empire, answers to the catastrophes of our time. These answers are, undoubtedly, of immense complexity, yet what we can often observe is the dominance of ‘practical’, ‘down-to-earth’, ‘common sense’ or even ‘moral’ responses to this complexity: for example, ‘we need to find practical and unbureaucratic ways of helping the poor and starving’, or, ‘we should all support charities that are active in third-world development projects’. Are these ‘practical’ responses, which seem so obvious, adequate responses? Or even more generally, is the most obvious and practical response also the best one? What is the task of theory when we are called to respond? And what is the role of academia, which is supposed to be the place of thought and theory, in a world of obviousness and practicalities? The task of responding is then, for me, a question of the relationship between theory and practice. In this paper I will interrogate this question by critically engaging with the apparent celebration of practice and the mood against theory that I see to be dominating contemporary discourses. What seems urgent to me then is a conception of the relationship between theory and practice that does not privilege either, and, by keeping room for a relative autonomy of theory, as practice, is able to intervene in contemporary discourses and practices by showing their limitations and offering radical alternatives for the organisation of the social.

Fetishising Practice

With the general expansion of capitalist modes of organising the social, the production of knowledge, too, has been increasingly put under the command of the technics of capital. At least since Marx’s and also Foucault’s work on the interdependency of power and knowledge, it is not novel to claim that the technical apparatus of capital does not only produce material goods, i.e. commodities, which we can consume in supermarkets, but also immaterial knowledges, which produce and reproduce the social as such. In this sense academia and the university cannot be seen as independent realms of thought, theory and knowledge, but as practice that is fully embedded in the wider social relations of capitalist production. To appropriate a term from knowledge management, a field of academic and business practices that has been at the forefront of ‘bridging the gap between theory and practice’, one could say that the university is a ‘techknowledgy’⁵ of capital; that is, the knowledge produced on university compounds cannot stand outside the technics of the dominant social relations of production. In this sense the university may be seen, says Steve Fuller, as a corporate-sponsored training centre where the ‘cutting edge’ is increasingly defined not by theory-driven academic qualifications but by “those who possess non-academic, specifically entrepreneurial, forms of knowledge” (2000: 84).⁶ In other words, the ‘hero’ of the academic (student) is

5 In their international Knowledge Management bestseller *Working Knowledge* Davenport and Prusak, who both have a long track record of work in both academia and business consultancy, assert that, even though knowledge management is clearly much more than just technology management, technology and knowledge have merged to form ‘techknowledgy’ (1998: 123).

6 We should note here that in the same passage Fuller seems to suggest that contemporary neo-liberal programmes of universities have developed partly because attentions have been diverted from

often no longer the philosopher (in business schools one is lucky if a student can name at least one), but the highly successful business consultant⁷ or entrepreneur, like, for example, Richard Branson, the hero of English 'entrepreneurism'. It is also Branson who shows the way in terms of the 'new production of knowledge': recently his business empire Virgin entered the 'academic market' with a series of books⁸ aimed at small and medium-sized companies, co-produced and co-branded by Warwick Business School – a 'win-win-situation' for the two brands of Virgin and Warwick. But this is only the logical continuation of the business school model, which has stood at the forefront of turning academics into service providers for businesses, whether in the private or public sector.

It is the Virgin/Warwick private/public partnership that Gibbons *et al.* seem to have in mind when they, in their internationally influential research manifesto *The New Production of Knowledge* (1994), argue that, as traditional disciplinary university knowledge ('Mode 1') is not able to reflect the complexities of the new world anymore, knowledge should be increasingly produced by tearing down boundaries between disciplines as well as between theory and practice: "Mode 2 knowledge production is characterised by closer interaction between scientific, technological and industrial modes of knowledge production...The spread of Mode 2 knowledge production...and of market differentiation...is being driven by the intensification of international competition" (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994: 68). However, this apparently 'holistic' approach, this transdisciplinarity, is not value-free: "Another important precondition is to have access to such knowledge and expertise, being able to reconfigure it in novel ways and offer it for sale" (*ibid.*: 111). For Gibbons *et al.* then knowledge is produced for a *specific* purpose: for sale. Knowledge is here always already a 'techknowledgy', a knowledge that is embedded in particular socio-technical relations of capital and geared towards the production of surplus value. Thus for Gibbons *et al.* the value of transdisciplinary academic knowledge is its potential economic opportunity, its surplus value, which should be realised by making it available to practice. What we therefore get here is a relationship between theory and practice that is clearly dominated by the specific practice realm of the commodity. It is the knowledge commodity that should be produced at universities as efficiently and effectively as possible. Hence the vision for the university seems to be the fast-food-for-thought outlet, strategically located at motorway-junctions, airports, in city centres as well as out-of-town shopping centres.

However, the fetishisation of practice, which, as I have argued above, is closely connected to the fetishisation of the 'techknowledgy' commodity, is even a problem of writers who clearly follow a critical social research agenda – writers that I feel have

military to business agendas after the end of the Cold War. He writes: "[I]f total war no longer seems likely and 'the market' gets its way, the credentials monopoly currently enjoyed by universities may be punctured by corporate-sponsored training centres" (2000: 84). Fuller does not seem to understand, however, that 'total war' is not only very likely but in fact is the defining organisational principle of capitalism, of which the university is part and parcel of. (See also my earlier discussion on 'total war'.)

7 See Böhm (2002) on the consultant as fetish and the fetishes of consultants.

8 Part of the Virgin/WBS book series are: Barrow (2001), Barry (2002), Craven (2001), Cumming (2001), Dickinson (2001), Wolff (2001).

something important to say about the organisation of our society, but somehow fall into the same ‘practice trap’ as the ones who just have dollar-signs in their eyes. That writers who I feel intellectually close to end up in the same ‘practice boat’ as the Gibbons/Virgin/Warwick public/private partnership – this is what really concerns me. But let me be more specific by talking about Martin Parker’s new book *Against Management*.

Against Theory

To make this clear right at the beginning: I think Parker’s book (2002a) is a very important contribution and should be compulsory reading for every student of management, business and organisation. There is no question that I’m generally very sympathetic to Parker’s playful attack *against* contemporary modes of managerialism and his tentative argument *for* a different organisation of the social. However, what I do have an issue with is his lax treatment of theory and his indirect privileging of practice. In his review of Naomi Klein’s *No Logo*⁹, the international bestseller that aims to expose the role of branding and image in contemporary modes of globalisation as well as discuss strategies of resistance against these, Parker makes the distinction between theory, which he seems to equate with thought and reason, and Theory (i.e. with a capital ‘T’), which for him signifies academic high theory that is produced in the ivory tower and thus disconnected from the practical problems on the ‘ground’. He celebrates Klein’s book for its non-Theoretical argumentation line, as her newspaper-style of writing is supposedly able to reach a much wider audience and therefore have a much bigger impact on people in general and the anti-capitalism movement in particular. Therefore Parker asks:

[W]hat Theory do you need to throw a brick through the windows of a McDonalds’s? Who is most relevant in taking aim at corporate capitalism – Marx, Althusser or Deleuze? Who cares, outside the seminar room? Of course we all need theory (with a small ‘t’) to recognize a brick and a window, but do we need a Theory to connect them? (2002a: 162)

Just as Phil Hancock admitted in a recent discussion group contribution,¹⁰ I cannot believe that Parker actually means this. Is he serious when he says that we do not need Theories (to continue his algebraic language) to connect our thoughts? Is he serious when he suggests that it is enough for us to make distinctions between bricks and windows and that this would be enough for us to be well equipped in our struggle against capitalist hegemony? For me this is not only naïve and childish but dangerous, because in the end what Parker celebrates here are the everyday practices of *capitalist reality*, which he is elsewhere keen to critically question. And when he puts all his faith in the (non-Theoretical) brick-thrower he also builds all his hope on the ‘good’ and the ‘common sense’ in the, from him unquestioned, human it seems. This sounds dangerously close to Conservative political strategies of the eighties and early nineties when ‘back to basics’ and ‘common sense’ were high in fashion with Thatcher, Major,

9 Parker’s review of *No Logo* appeared first in *Organization* (Parker, 2002c).

10 See posts to the SCOS discussion group at www.jiscmail.ac.uk on October 10th, 2002 and thereafter.

Reagan and Bush. Is it not our task, as academic or non-academic, to question 'the common sense', the everyday practices, the subjectivities that are produced by social relations of capital rather than fetishistically celebrating them? Do we not have a serious problem if we put practice in charge of its own cure? (Because if practice aims to stop or go beyond itself, it must use itself, and thus it aims to stop itself in the same way that a disease is cured when it is allowed to choose its own treatment, it only thrives!)

And one feels even more perplexed about Parker's anti-Theory ramble when one looks into his other new, and in my view equally important, book, *Utopia and Organization*, in which he is keen to interest us again for utopian thought, for the not yet, for distant futures. Is Theory not something similar: an abstract idea about the not yet, the impossible, the virtual? As Parker as well as numerous other contributors to his book point out, the word 'utopia' comes from the Greek *outopia*, which means both 'good place' and 'non-place'. Hence utopia can be understood as the imagined good place that is not locatable in a specific time and place: it is nowhere, a pure speculation about a future time and place, a future human. Is this not exactly what Theory potentially does (in its radical form, that is in its radical practice): it abstractly speculates and imagines differences?

To be fair, I do not think that Parker would necessarily have a problem with what I have written so far. In my view the main target of his critique is actually not Theory, as in abstract theory as such, but the Theory that is done within the specific institutional realities and social relations that characterise academia today. He writes:

[T]he relationship between 'critical' practice and academic careers is one that does not go away. For academics to defensively respond by claiming something about the occupational specificity of their practice, or claim that they laid the groundworks for this kind of cultural critique in the first place, is to duck the issue....If academics continue to play their endless glass bead game in which 'theory' is incorporated within 'Theory' they are doomed to relative irrelevance in the bigger games that shape all our lives....Can any academic who is seriously concerned with grand words like 'emancipation' and 'justice' afford to ignore issues of readership and effect? What is the point in being a revolutionary, or even a reformist, if no one can hear you? (2002a: 163)

Seen in this way I can only support Parker's view that there *is* a serious question about the way academia and academic Theory work today. As he points out in his chapter on Critical Management Studies (CMS), Theory, for example in the clothes of the CMS project, is too often a self-serving, detached academic practice that can be consumed as fashion and brand and also sold on. But what difference have CMS Theories made on 'the ground', in the daily practices of people, Parker asks? His answer is not very encouraging: not a lot!¹¹ He therefore laments the fact that CMS, as Theory, has not

11 Parker's judgement on whether CMS has made an impact on the so-called ground obviously depends on a definition of 'the ground' that is, in my view, very problematic, because it is based on a crude binary conception of the relationship between theory and practice. If we understand theory and CMS as practice, we cannot deny that CMS has made a huge impact on the way management is thought about, studied and taught. So rather than calling for 'practical application' of the CMS agenda, is it not also our task to critically interrogate and change CMS practices as such? It seems to be often forgotten that the task of the researcher, academic, theoretician, is not to change practices 'out there', or even, change the world. Let us start in our own back yard; let us start with the practice of CMS, let us start with the way theory is done today.

been able to 'reach out' enough to other constituencies than academia, constituencies that, for example, are concerned with practices of anti-globalisation protests, labour movements and feminist, gay and lesbian activism (2002a: 131). In this sense it is maybe not Theory as such that is the problem here. Instead we must look *specifically* at how CMS Theory is practiced and institutionalised; we must realise the difficulty of being critical against something on which one is economically dependent in the first place, or, as Parker puts it, that CMS finds it difficult to "bite the hand that feeds it" (*ibid.*). In other words, maybe Theory should not be stamped as irrelevant as such; instead we need to critically interrogate the way Theory is produced within certain social relations of power and knowledge. To approach Theory in this way would, in my view, be a much more fruitful task than simply disregarding Theory altogether and indirectly celebrating non-theoretical, practice-oriented, populist approaches to writing and researching.

Theoretical Practice

What I have tried to show so far, admittedly in a rather tentative and even polemical way, is that in contemporary academic discourses we can either note a fetishisation of practice or a certain mood against theory. In the face of the concerns which I started this paper off with, namely that of the rule of total war against the social, I wonder whether these attacks against theory can be regarded as 'adequate' responses to the challenges of our times. I have serious doubts. In the following then I would like to develop an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice that attempts to argue for three things: first, neither theory nor practice should be privileged; second, both theory and practice are recognised to be relatively autonomous from each other; third, action brings theory and practice together in a way that, as theoretical practice, it potentially enables radical change. In other words, what I think is needed is a conception of practice that includes theory and equally a conception of theory that includes practice, because in the end what is important is not theory or practice but the mobilisation of action to bring about radical change. As Lenin says: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" (1970: 138). What we need to resist then, in my view, is the currently "fashionable preaching" for "the narrowest forms of practical activity" (*ibid.*) and against theory, which Lenin already warned us about hundred years ago. At a time at which Lenin seems to have long gone out of fashion, his monuments overthrown and state socialism has died, it seems odd to remind ourselves of a man's politics that must be regarded as absolutely alien to our times of New Labour and its populist¹² programme of 'total opportunism', i.e. pragmatism, and 'The Third Way'. But maybe it is Lenin's alien politics that can help us to imagine a difference to the

12 'Populist' and 'popular' must not be confused here. In fact it seems to become increasingly difficult to say whether a government is popular or not; elections, at least, do not seem to be representative anymore. John Pilger (2002) reports, for example, that the second New Labour 'landslide' (in last UK elections in 2001) represented the lowest vote for a UK government since records began (this means that only about 25 per cent of the UK electorate voted for the current New Labour government). Pilger calls this a gross misrepresentation of the people in the UK.

alienating politics of our times, help us to learn from the traditions of progressive theory and help us to see that we need *both* a concrete practical politics and abstract theory.¹³

For Louis Althusser the fetishisation of practice, or pragmatism, is about the acceptance or even celebration of the 'face-value' of 'real' objects: 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating!' In fact, for him this is what constitutes the question of ideology as such, as the 'truth' of the pudding is taken for granted and not questioned. Hence for pragmatism the practical experience of the real object, i.e. the pudding, is seen in harmony with our knowledge of that object.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating! So what! We are interested in the *mechanism* that ensures that it really is a pudding we are eating and not a poached baby elephant, though we *think* we are eating our daily pudding! Proof by repetition for hundreds of thousands of years of the social practice of humanity...! So what! For hundreds of thousands of years this 'repetition' has produced, for example, 'truths' such as the resurrection of Christ, the Virginity of Mary, all the 'truths' of religion, all the prejudices of human 'spontaneity', i.e., all the *established* 'obviousness' of ideology, from the most to the least respectable! Not to speak of the trap laid jointly by idealism and pragmatism in the complicity of their action (which obeys *the same rules*). (Althusser in Althusser and Balibar, 1979: 57, emphasis in original)

The 'common sense' practice of eating the pudding therefore does not prove anything. Hence when pragmatists celebrate practice, which supposedly is 'real' because it 'gets its hands dirty', they just produce a mirror image¹⁴ to theory, as Althusser points out (*ibid.*). In other words, as practice is established as the dualistic opposite to theory, the 'common sense' experience of practice is generalised and therefore fetishised: 'This is how we do things around here', or, 'This is how we have been doing it for ages'. But what does this 'repetition' of historical practices prove? Truth? This is, in my view, the basic problem of certain 'left melancholic' responses, which I have already made some gestures about in the above. By referring to historical 'truths' and basing their critiques on traditional conceptualisations of, for example, 'nature', 'morality' or 'humanity', they often celebrate historical practices that, in my view, need to be critically interrogated in the first place. In other words, we need to see practices as *distinct* practices:

There can be no scientific conception of practice without a precise distinction between the distinct practices and a new conception of the relations between theory and practice. We can assert the primacy of practice theoretically by showing that all the levels of social existence are the sites of distinct practices: economic practice, political practice, ideological practice, technical practice and scientific (or theoretical) practice. We think the content of these different practices by thinking their peculiar structure, which, in all these cases, is the structure of a production; by thinking what distinguishes between these different structures, i.e., the different natures of the objects to which

13 I am clearly influenced here by Žižek's (2002) recent attempt to reintroduce Lenin to the political agenda of the Left.

14 It is this mirror image, which I think defines the basic problem of the recently 'successful' *reflexive* methodology of Alvesson and other 'critical management' scholars (e.g. Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). Here too a dualism between theory and practice is maintained that, supposedly, can only be overcome by reflexive agency, some kind of 'critical common sense'. But as I have already pointed out above, the image produced by a mirror is endless. Therefore a mirror put in charge of its own cure can only lead to its own fetishisation: the classic problem of narcissism.

they apply, of their means of production and of the relations within which they produce... (*ibid.*: 58)

In other words, it is not our task to celebrate apparently natural practices of social existence, but to study their distinctiveness: study how these practices are *produced* within historical and therefore *distinct* socio-economic relations. But this studying is and cannot be done from a distant theory:

We have to let the concrete practical experiences intervene our theoretical practice. We have to let these experiences invade our bodies in the form of objects of experiences, or even speculative experiments, they are thought objects, ideas and concepts whose emergence contribute in their combination to the overthrow of our established, dare I say, ideological, theoretical base on which our lives is defined. (*ibid.*: 60)

In Althusser's view then, studying and researching, that is doing theory, is a very bodily experience: we have to let these practical experiences enter our bodies so that they transform our bodies, our thoughts, our theoretical base – things we have taken for granted. But does this not privilege practice in the sense that it is prior to theory? According to Althusser (*ibid.*: 58-59) the answer to this question is two-fold: first, 'knowledge' (even though it might be very rudimentary and steeped in ideology) must be regarded as always already present in even the most 'primitive' practices; second, what we commonly call 'theory', or even 'Theory', must itself be regarded as practice.¹⁵ "This practice is theoretical; it is distinguished from the other, non-theoretical practices, by the type of object (raw material) which it transforms; by the type of means of production it sets to work, by the type of object it produces (knowledge)" (*ibid.*: 59). Hence we can say: theoretical practice, or what we might call 'theory', is a distinct practice that is different from other non-theoretical practices, yet it not only transforms itself but also other practices by producing knowledges. Equally, practical theory, or what we might call 'practice', is a distinct theory that is different from other non-practical theories, yet it not only transforms itself but also other theories by producing experiences. In other words, practice is transformed through the practice of theory and theory is transformed through the practice of practice.¹⁶

What Althusser therefore poses to us is a conception that does not privilege either theory or practice and that leaves room for their relative autonomy from each other. This relative autonomy, however, does not mean that theory is supposed to hide in the ivory towers of academia and that practice is a fetishisation of the 'common sense'. On the contrary, both theory and practice should be understood as event, which is the coming together of desires, imaginations, powers, knowledges, theoretical practices and practical theories in an explosive 'moment of danger', as Benjamin calls it, a moment

15 This reminds us again of Parker's distinction between 'theory' and 'Theory', which I have discussed above. However, in contrary to Althusser, Parker is very reluctant to see 'Theory' as practice itself, as for him abstract Theory is too distant from the concrete practices/theory on the 'grounds' of reality.

16 This 'practice of practice' may sound a bit awkward, but what I attempt to highlight here is that, in my view, the practice of theory is itself transformed through other practices. For example, the ESF practice clearly has had an important influence on the way I practice theory. However, this does not mean that I am now doing theory *for* the ESF practice; instead the ESF practice has done something *to* my practice and I hope this experience will allow me to do something *to* the ESF practice as well as *to* the study of organisation and management, as theoretical practice.

where radical action becomes possible. Therefore, when we talk about the ‘autonomy’ of either practice or theory, then this does not allude to some sort of foundationalist ‘outside’, which separates theory and practice, but instead must be understood as call for distinct practices of theory and distinct theories of practice that both contribute to an agenda of ontological speculation and radical social change.

Resisting Subjectivities

One might be a little perplexed about the fact that, even though I clearly set out to write about ‘the movement’ and the European Social Forum (ESF), so far this text has not yet referred to these themes. Instead I have tried to carefully go over the problematic of the relationship between theory and practice. Yet, despite this ‘theoretical’ treatise I would claim that, right from the beginning of this text, I have always already been writing not just *about* but simply *writing* ‘the movement’ and the ‘practical’ event of the European Social Forum. In other words, the above discussion of the relationship between theory and practice did not aim to ‘prepare’ the specific engagement with ‘the movement’ and the ESF, but it was a theoretical practice itself, a *doing*, an action: it was an action of a self, as academic writer, who is exploring the possibilities of what *I can do*, what I can contribute, to the writing of the event of the European Social Forum. In this sense, it is my response: to the catastrophes of our time, to the total war that is waged against the social, to the possibilities of a different world. However, this *abstractum*, this theoretical reflection about the relationship between theory and practice, should not prevent us from the necessary and important task of engaging with the specificities of ‘the movement’ and the event of the ESF; this is what I will be concerned with for the remainder of this paper.

Between the 6th and 10th of November 2002 the first European Social Forum (ESF), which considers itself to be a regional meeting of the World Social Forum (WSF)¹⁷, took place in Florence, Italy. Its motto was ‘Another World is Possible’. Up to sixty thousand people¹⁸ gathered in numerous workshops, seminars and conferences to discuss strategies of opposition and civil disobedience against neo-liberal globalisation agendas and a European order based on corporate power, but also alternative ways of organising the social.¹⁹ The forum, which sees itself as a dialogical space for the great

17 The World Social Forum (WSF) has taken place twice in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to coincide with and form an opposition to the World Economic Forum, a yearly meeting of leaders from the world of politics, global business, science and culture that has taken place in Davos, Switzerland, and New York.

18 Khalfa (2002) reports of the following numbers: “There were around 32,000 paying participants, twice as many as at Porto Allegro 1 and more than at Porto Allegro 2 (30,000). There were almost 60,000 participants on the Friday. According to police estimates, around 500,000 people took part in the demonstration, twice as many as at the demonstration organised during the Council of Europe meeting in Barcelona. The presence of delegations from other European countries was not purely symbolic: more than 3,000 from France, 1,500 Spaniards, Greeks, Britons and Germans, 500 Belgians, 300 Hungarians 150 Poles and Swedes, 70 Russians.”

19 To immediately contextualise and introduce my discussion I have included here the full Call of the European Social Movements published at the ESF website after the forum had finished: “We have

variety of movements that have been protesting in Seattle, Prague, Nice, Genoa and other cities and regions around the world against neo-liberal capitalism in recent years, culminated in a peaceful mass demonstration against war and capitalist hegemony on November 9th, at which between five hundred thousand and one million people took part.²⁰ The ‘official’ purpose of the demonstration was to protest against a new Gulf War against Iraq, but the target for the protesters was clearly a much wider one: the ‘total war’ of global capitalism against the social, which is the sum of the multiple military wars fought around the world in the name of freedom, democracy, human rights and the new global world order, the multiple economic wars of global corporations (and the IMF and World Bank) against local economies in every corner of the world, the multiple political wars of neo-liberalism, pragmatism, and ‘The Third Way’ against the commons and public spheres, the multiple communicational and propaganda wars by global media conglomerates and the political caste system against the people – in short: the ESF and the massive demonstration were manifestations against the multiple wars staged by Empire in literally every sphere of social activity around the world, wars that produce particular subjectivities, a particular social, a particular world.

There has always been resistance to this ‘total war’ of capitalism against the social. It is one of the fundamental lessons we have learnt from Marx and also Foucault (among others), namely that struggles and antagonisms are part and parcel of social formation

come together from the social and citizens movements from all the regions of Europe, East and West, North and South. We have come together through a long process: the demonstrations of Amsterdam, Seattle, Prague, Nice, Genoa, Bruxelles, Barcelona, the big mobilisations against the neoliberalism as well as the general strikes for the defense of social rights and all the mobilisations against war, show the will to build an other Europe. At the global level we recognise the Charter of Principles of WSF and the call of social movements of Porto Alegre. We have gathered in Florence to express our opposition to a European order based on corporate power and neoliberalism. This market model leads to constant attacks on the conditions and rights of workers, social inequalities and oppression of women and ethnic minorities, and social exclusion of the unemployed and migrants. It leads to environmental degradation, privatisation and job insecurity. It drives powerful countries to try and dominate the economies of weaker countries, often to deny them real self-determination. Once more it is leading to war. We have come together to strengthen and enlarge our alliances because the construction of another Europe and another world is now urgent. We seek to create a world of equality, social rights and respect for diversity, a world in which education, fair jobs, healthcare and housing are rights for all, with the right to consume safe foods produced by farmers and peasants, a world without poverty, without sexism, without racism, and without homophobia. A world that puts people before profits. A world without war. We have come together to discuss alternatives but we must continue to enlarge our networks and to plan the campaigns and struggles that together can make this different future possible. Great movements and struggles have begun across Europe: the European social movements are representing a new and concrete possibility to build up another Europe for another world. We commit ourselves to enlarge our networks for the next year in the following mobilisations and campaigns: Against neoliberalism; Against war; Against racism; Against sexism and homophobia; For rights and ‘another Europe’” (Call of the European Social Movements, 12-11-2002 [<http://www.fse-esf.org>]).

20 The estimates of how many people actually took part in the demonstrations in Florence vary from 500,000 (an Italian Police figure) to 1,000,000 (a figure suggested by the organisers of the European Social Forum). Whatever the figure it certainly was the biggest demo I have been part of since 1989 – and demonstrations were big in those days.

processes, such as capitalism. In other words, where there is power, there is resistance.²¹ As many writers have argued, the specific formation processes of capitalist power have changed significantly over the past hundred years. For example, through the discussion of their concept of Empire Hardt and Negri show how capitalist modes of organising the social are increasingly dependent on decentralised communication networks that *control* rather than discipline subjectivities. In other words, “the network as the organizational model of production” (2000: 295) has, not necessarily replaced, but extended disciplinary modes of organising the social that were characterised by institutions like the prison, the school, the hospital, and, above all, the nation state and its parliamentary democracy and party representational system. Empire then is a concept that helps us to think about how institutions, like the prison or the school, have been transformed in a world that is increasingly characterised by global information and communication flows. For Hardt and Negri then Empire is not an ‘Orwellian’ state where everything and everybody is subsumed into one totality, but a dynamic ‘system’ of “radical contingency and precariousness”, a system that is characterised by “the unforeseeability of the sequences of events – sequences that are always more brief or more compact temporally and thus ever less controllable” (2000: 60-61).²²

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- 21 But let us not repeat the same liberal non-sense that seems to be in fashion in certain academic circles these days, namely that power is everywhere and therefore resistance is everywhere. What a non-productive statement! Of course, power and resistance are everywhere, but there are *distinctions* and *specific* formations of regimes of power and resistance that need to be analysed and critiqued...but here we are already again in the realm of a plea for theory as political action.
- 22 This dynamism, however, is not value-free. As Hardt and Negri (2000) show, the processes of accumulation of Empire are immanently connected to capital. This is to say that the value production within Empire cannot be disconnected from the value production mechanism of capital. Another way to put this is that the immaterial knowledge work (that produce the informational and communicational flows), which Empire so obviously is dependent on, produces knowledge that is always already a knowledge of Imperial capital. What we call knowledge today is thus restricted to particular meanings of political security and military measures, financial profit and loss accounts and the transfer of information that is always already coded by Empire. In other words, what we can know, see and say about Empire, this world, this life, is, according to Hardt and Negri, always already part of the power/knowledge regime that produces Empire. This leads them to claim that ‘there is no more outside’ of that very power/knowledge apparatus, which is to say that there is no more metaphysical, representational or transcendental position from where we can claim a knowledge of truth and on which basis we can critique this world. A different way to say ‘there is no more outside’ is to say that the Imperial power/knowledge regime acts as biopower in the sense that it informs the entirety of life. ‘Biopower’, a concept that Hardt and Negri take up from Michel Foucault, is a power that organises life from its insides, from the interior of Empire, as it were; it controls and organises our subjectivities and bodies; it wages ‘in-formational’ wars of all kinds against its own population – biopower thus concerns the (violent) production and re-production of life itself. As a point of critique one could argue that Hardt and Negri’s claim that ‘there is no more outside’ (and in fact their whole concept of Empire) is somewhat generalising too much. As I asked above: is it not our task to analyse and critique the specificities of the way Empire produces the social and is it not the case that different people have different positions within the Imperial apparatus? By en large Hardt and Negri offer a detailed analysis of the production processes of what they call Empire, but often they also make unnecessarily general and unspecific claims that they cannot substantiate. (But maybe this is the nature of their speculative philosophy; maybe by being general in their claims they always already invoke the universal that is at the same time the particular and the concrete; maybe their critique cannot be substantiated because it is beyond what we traditionally conceive as substance.)

In their view Empire should, in the first instance, be celebrated for this dynamism: it produces breaks with traditional organisational apparatuses, which opens up possibilities for the production of new subjectivities. This is the possibility of Empire, as global, open, liberal, quasi-democratic regime: however 'fascistic' and war-ridden it is, it potentially connects forces in a way that enables the production of new subjectivities, which exist *both within and against* Empire; in short, it makes new figures of resistance possible. The embracing of this new figuration of struggle, the embracing of the production of new subjectivities, is the task of the multitude, which, for Hardt and Negri, is a concept that points to both the multiplicity of productive subjectivities as well as their productive commonality and unity. In their view the multitude "is a productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction" (2000: 61). In other words, the multitude is the network of multiple subjectivities within Empire that 'produce value', i.e. the proletariat of the world. But this proletariat is not just the blue or white collar worker who labours, day in and day out in the factories of capital; instead it is a 'we' that comprises all spheres of contemporary capitalist production.²³ For Hardt and Negri then this 'we' has to embrace the possibilities of the 'openness' of Empire and develop itself into a globalised political subject. However, this 'we' is not an abstract 'thing': instead it points directly to each individual subjectivity. As Deleuze writes in response to his reading of Foucault:

What are the new types of struggle, which are transversal and immediate rather than centralized and mediated? What are the 'intellectual's' new functions, which are specific or 'particular' rather than universal? What are the new modes of subjectivation, which tend to have no identity? This is the triple root of the questions: *What can I do, What do I know, What am I?*... What is our light and what is our language, that is to say, our 'truth' today? What powers must we confront, and what is our capacity for resistance, today when we can no longer be content to say that the old struggles are no longer worth anything? And do we not perhaps above all bear witness to and even participate in the 'production of a new subjectivity'? Do not the changes in capitalism find an unexpected 'encounter' in the slow emergence of a new Self as a centre of resistance? Each time there is social change, is there not a movement of subjective reconversion, with its ambiguities but also its potential? (Deleuze, 1988: 115)

To repeat the questions that Foucault and Deleuze pose to us: *What can I do, What do I know, What am I?* These questions are not the result of some kind of narcissistic preoccupation with the Self. Instead they point to the radical questing of subjectivity as

23 'We' is the real but also imagined collectivity, or what Hardt and Negri call the 'multitude', which is not localisable in one specific nameable group. This relates to their claim that 'there is no more outside', which also means that it is impossible to reduce class struggle to a struggle between the capitalist, the one who owns the means of production, and 'blue collar' worker who has to sell his or her labour power in order to produce surplus value for the capitalist. Hardt and Negri's point is that the concept of production must be seen much wider than the traditional industrialist meaning suggests. For them production also encompasses information and communication flows and affects, for example; so their proletariat also comprises hospital and tourism workers, the unemployed, immigrants, students etc. There is no space here to go into the details of this discussion, but when Hardt and Negri talk about the multitude they have the proletariat in mind which comprises all multiple subjectivities that are subsumed under Empire. In fact this was the theme of a seminar at the ESF entitled 'Struggles, classes, multitudes and resistance', at which self-named Marxists scholars defended Marx categories of class struggle against Hardt and Negri's concepts of the multitude and Empire... but I will have to say more about this below.

such; it is a critical interrogation and transformation of the specific production processes that make up our Selves; it is a questing of the 'I' that is always already politically and economically related to the 'we' of the multitude. For me this questing of our Selves, our subjectivities, is the ultimate terrain for theory as practice and practice as theory. In other words, what both theory and practice, as relatively autonomous activities, need to radically put into question and resist is the organisation of the social as such – this is the task of organisation studies, as theoretical practice...and, in my view, it is a 'joyful task'.

The Joy of Collective Protest

Last year when the globalisation critics returned from Genoa, where, in response to the G8 summit, massive anti-capitalism protests and a counter-summit were staged, they were shocked, angry and frustrated. The reason was the absolute brutality with which the police operated against the protesters, which resulted in the death of Carlo Giuliani who was killed on Friday, 20th July; he was shot twice, and his body was then driven over by a police van.²⁴ This left a heavy mark especially on the Italian movement. The horrible events of 9/11, too, seemed to paralyse the protest movement for several months; it was as if 9/11 'disorganised' 'the movement', made it less united, hesitant – and all for obvious reasons. In this regard the European Social Forum can be seen as an important milestone for the re-forming of 'the movement' and the re-forming of its agenda in opposition to the ideology of the 'war against terrorism' currently staged and 'total war' in general.

When I returned from the ESF I felt a 'paralysis' of a different kind: of joy, astonishment and happiness; it was as if I could not quite believe what had happened to me; I suddenly felt "a sense of possibility, a blast of fresh air, oxygen rushing to the brain", as Naomi Klein describes the feeling of taking part in cooperative mass protests in her new book, *Fences and Windows*. And I was not alone in this feeling: one could see the joy and happiness in people's faces in Florence; upon their return many people reported in Internet discussion groups and alternative news websites about the success of the ESF and the sense of possibility and joy they feel.²⁵

24 The methods employed by the police in Genoa were beyond belief in many respects. Despite almost complete silence of the mainstream media regarding the atrocities of the Italian state against protesters, independent media organisations have gathered a lot of evidence against the police; for a collection of some of this evidence see <http://www.urban75.org/genoa>. One of the articles taken from this website quotes from a police confession article: "The main gate opened continuously – tells the police officer – out of the vans came youth while getting a beating. They made them stand against the wall. When they came in they smashed their heads against the wall. They peed on someone, others were beaten if they didn't sing fascist songs. A girl was vomiting blood and the chiefs of the prison police just watched. To the ladies they said that they were going to rape them with their sticks." See also Hislop (2002) who wrote a note for *ephemera*, in which he reports and reflects on the Genoa protests and its reception in the media.

25 See, for example, the reports by members of the ESF-UK-INFO mailing list, which have been overwhelmingly positive about the organisation, achievements and experience of the Florence ESF [<http://lists.southspace.net/listinfo/esf-uk-info>].

Seeing all the joy around in Florence reminded me of Michael Hardt's book *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, in which he talks (with Deleuze and Spinoza) about the joy that comes through participation in the *practice* of collective protest action. He uses the example of the Italian novel *Vogliamo tutto* [We want everything], which is about the story of a FIAT car plant worker in the late 1960s and his involvement in the formation of a radical political movement and the organisation of collective protest actions (see Hardt, 1993: 45-47). As I am writing this, there are hundreds of thousands of FIAT workers and sympathisers on Italian streets again to protest against the announced closure of several FIAT plants and the loss of thousands of jobs. But there is a crucial difference between the protests Hardt writes about and the current actions by FIAT workers: whereas the workers' protest action in *Vogliamo tutto* is a refusal *of* work and thereby a protest against the specific relations of production and against the essence of work as such, the current actions are a refusal *to* work, as protest against the reduction of work, against unemployment. The workers in *Vogliamo tutto* therefore put into question the notion of work as such: "What a joke to celebrate labor day. ...I never understood why work ought to be celebrated", says the 'hero' of the novel.²⁶ And by questioning work as such, the workers' critique is also "directed precisely at their own essence" (*ibid.*: 45). In other words, their radical protest action is a questing of the specific relations of power and knowledge that produce work and the social: it is the questing of subjectivity as such. As I have already noted above, this, in my view, was also very much the 'spirit' of the ESF: the social forum was a radical questing of one's own subjectivity.

Hardt then insists that the 'hero' of the novel only "gains real power to carry out his destructive project when he begins to recognize his commonality with the other workers." Hardt continues:

The voice of the narrative takes on a continually broader scope, shifting from first person singular to first person plural as the mass of workers begin to recognize what they can do and what they can become...The expansion of the collective expression is matched by an expansion of the will. It is precisely the wealth of the collectively that provides the basis for the violent radicality of critique...The recognition of collective desires goes hand and hand with the development and expansion of collective practice. The workers' strikes build to the point where they spill outside the factory as demonstrations in the streets and violent conflict involving large parts of the city. Finally, this collective destructive expression, this moment of intense violence, opens the possibility of the subsequent joy and creation. (*ibid.*: 46)

In other words, 'real power', as Hardt calls it, can never come through individual radicality alone; it can only come through collective action. Hardt therefore maintains that the "workers' power and their joy lie precisely in the fact that they act together" (*ibid.*: 47), that they form a powerful collectivity and not act alone. This is, in a way, common sense, but not the 'common sense' of neo-liberal agendas against the social and for the promotion of individuality; it is a sense of commonality, community and collectivity.

26 I wished I would have read this already for my paper-montage on Mayday 2001 entitled '010501'; most certainly I would have included it there.

Hence, when he reads *Vogliamo tutto* two elements are of importance for Hardt: First, the critical protest movement is tight to a broadening movement of the collectivity, which results in the construction and expression of a coherent body of common desire amongst the workers. “As the body of workers expand, their will and power”, as well as their joy, “grow” (*ibid.*: 47). Second, and this point brings us ‘back’ (or is it ‘forward’?) to our discussion of the relationship between theory and practice, for Hardt the workers’ joy and power comes through the *practice* of the workers: “Precisely when the workers ‘actualize’ their critique, when they pass into action in the factory and in the streets, they achieve the constructive moment of joy and creation. The ‘actualisation’ of the workers is a practice of joy” (*ibid.*: 47). Hence joy comes through common action, through the *practice* of a collectivity. But this does not have to be understood as the privileging of practice against theory; if we understand theory as theoretical practice, joy can also come through theory – as practice.

There is no doubt that Hardt’s study of radical collective workers action in *Vogliamo tutto* has influenced the conception of the ‘multitude’, which features strongly in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*. However, as I have already noted above, the multitude is, for Hardt and Negri, not only a common movement, a movement of united and collective action, it is also very heterogeneous, that is, the multitude consists of multiple and diverse elements that cannot be simply homogenised into ‘the movement’. Therefore the question arises of how we can think the multitude to be something that is both a multiplicity and a unity? This will be my concern for the last section of this paper.

Multiplicity and Unity

What is it that we refer to when we talk about ‘the movement’? Is there even such a thing as ‘the movement’, is there even an *is* of ‘the movement’? These are the questions that I had in mind when, so far in this paper, I have been reluctant to simply talk about the movement, or the people, or the multitude. Instead I have, perhaps a little awkwardly, used inverted commas to express my doubts about the term of ‘the movement’. I could have launched into a critical reflection on the term ‘the movement’ right at the start of this paper. But, as will become apparent in a moment, the discussion of theory and practice, collective action and the questing of subjectivities were all needed, in my view, to ‘prepare’ the ground for this discussion of what ‘the movement’ actually *is* (or perhaps what it is not).

Commentators on the protests in Seattle, Genoa, Prague and all the other places, as well as the organisers of these events themselves, are always keen to point to the diversity of action groups present at these protests: trades unions, community movements involved in popular education and local development, international solidarity organisations, organisations working against social exclusion, human rights organisations, organisations of environmentalists and ecologists, farmers organisations, economic networks offering social solidarity, youth organisations, migrant organisations, cultural

networks, feminist networks, networks of researchers and lecturers.²⁷ The Florence ESF, too, highlighted its “respect for diversity”²⁸ and indeed the different, often opposing, agendas of the groups present at the ESF were clearly felt. Is this diversity not counterproductive to the aim of forming a powerful collectivity? On the contrary; when Hardt and Negri (2000) talk about the multitude they always emphasise its network character, which is to say that it cannot be represented by a hierarchy, it cannot be placed in one centrality from where it speaks and leads: “groups which we thought in objective contradiction to one another...[are] suddenly able to work together” (Hardt, 2002: 117). This is the strength of ‘the movement’, in their view, namely that it continuously seeks to enlarge its networks, to increase its diversity, to include as many people, groups and organisations as possible, despite all their differences, to form a powerful network collectivity both within Empire and in opposition to it. In Klein’s language, the “key to this process is developing a political discourse that is not afraid of diversity, that does not try to cram every political movement into a single model” (2002: 245).

In my view the European Social Forum, and ‘the movement’ in general, still has to go a long way to be truly inclusive and expand its networks beyond the ‘traditional’ Western-European-white-middle-class type of activist and social critic. What about Eastern Europe? In Florence only a handful, in comparison to the masses of course, were present from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. What about Turkey? In the face of the growing conservative revolt against a possible inclusion of Turkey in the European Union, should it not be our task to reach out to progressive social movement in Turkey and include them in the ESF? What about immigrants? I hardly saw different colours in Florence. This is also what Khalfa (2002) notes: “Even though the subjects of exclusion and immigration were discussed in the conference and the seminars, there were still...too few immigrants present”. Hardt (2002) makes a similar point in his response to the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre in January 2002: in his view ‘the movement’ is not yet global enough. For example, there were very few faces from Asia and Africa in Porto Alegre. Furthermore Hardt maintains that the voices who were the ‘loudest’ at the WSF (e.g. The French leadership of ATTAC) were actually arguing for the strengthening of national institutions as response to globalisation and the erosion of national socio-economic politics. In Hardt’s eyes this is a dangerous position to hold, as national interests would always interfere with the need to continuously broadening the network of global resistance against Empire in terms of geography and diversity.

A point of critique that has been advanced at Hardt (and Negri) is that they do not sufficiently acknowledge the powerful effects of resistance that can be produced by ‘traditional’ representational politics at the level of the party and the nation. Mertens (2002), for example, maintains that the network is not and cannot be everything. In his view ‘old-style’ governmentalities, party and national representational politics, can be still important in the struggle against neo-liberal formations of power. He points out, for example, that the 2002 WSF could have never taken place without the regional

27 These are the type of organisations and groups that the call for participation at the second European Social Forum in Paris plans to address.

28 See the Call of the European Social Movements in footnote 14.

municipal government in Porto Alegre (which is led by the PT party, which has recently won the national elections in Brazil). Equally the Florence ESF would not have been as brilliant an event as it was without the generous financial and organisational support by the mayor of Florence and the regional government. Thus the fact that the ESF event was as well organised as it was, must be mainly attributed to the efforts of local party politics,²⁹ which Hardt and Negri often seem to dismiss when they talk about ‘the network’, or ‘the multitude’. This is largely a self-made problem of Hardt and Negri themselves, as their description of the concept of ‘the multitude’ and ‘the network’ often remains sketchy, highly abstract and non-specific. But then, perhaps as point of defence, as I have noted above, *Empire* is a theoretical practice that does not aim to ‘bridge the gap between theory and practice’ but develop concepts, which put that very gap into question and help to transform it.

The realisation that ‘the movement’ is so obviously diverse and multiple, should not prevent us though from the analysis of its organisational specificities and its specific voices and agendas. This is what Hardt has in mind when he, in his reflections of the 2002 WSF, questions the politics of the French leadership of ATTAC, for example. Similarly we should not let the joy and happiness that we felt at and after the Florence event make us blind towards the organisational specificities of the 2002 ESF. Therefore let me offer a few words of caution here, caution that is supposed to be entirely productive rather than dismissive. As I have already noted above, the exclusions of, for example, Eastern Europe and immigrants, were clearly felt at the Forum. Another exclusion that was clearly apparent in Florence was the absence of theory; that is, theoretical practice. As far as I could see there was just one relatively small seminar entitled ‘Struggle, Classes, Multitude and Resistance’, which was organised by a network of European Marxist journals that were eager to defend ‘traditional’ Marxist categories against ‘newcomers’ such as Hardt and Negri. The sophistication and diversity of this debate was appalling, so there is clearly the need, in my view, to include more theoretical practices at the 2003 ESF, which is able to develop concepts and critically interrogate ‘the movement’ and its organisation. This is the space I would like to see *ephemera* populating; so I hope we will continue to publish papers that question the processes of resistance against the dominant capitalist hegemony.³⁰

What also was very apparent was that the seminars and conferences were clearly dominated by relatively few organisations. First, there was ATTAC, of course, (even though one should note that ATTAC is not a homogeneous organisation, but rather a network of relatively independent regional groups, which often have much more radical views and agendas than the French leadership that seems to have much more traditional political ambitions). Second, there was the ‘hidden’ Italian organisational committee, which clearly dominated the agenda of the Forum. Treanor (2002) maintains that the

29 The city of Florence provided, for example, the forum’s conference locations for free, helped with translations as well as provided free temporary accommodation for literally thousands of people in schools, stadiums and other buildings.

30 Over the past two years *ephemera* has continuously sought to engage with radical protest groups and ‘the movement’ against neo-liberal globalisation agendas. See especially the following papers: Böhm (2001); Catley, Grice and Walton (2002); Hislop (2001); Lenton (2001); Monbiot (2002); and Munro (2002).

organisation of the Florence ESF was an exclusive, semi-democratic, hidden process that was dominated by local and national political power-plays rather than a truly enlarging pan-European movement. He claims that “the ‘organising meetings’ for the ESF in other countries were unreal, they had nothing to say about its structure. The organising committees in Italy made all the major decisions about the ESF – about who to exclude, about censorship, and about co-operation with the sponsors, acceptance of their conditions, about the structure of the ESF, and its agenda” (2002). This leads Treanor to call for the abolition of the ESF, as it has, and he shows this too, financial links to business and governments and is generally an undemocratic movement. This is strong language from someone who we cannot be sure about his own background. However, his claims about the ESF, in my view, have to be taken seriously.

Currently there are efforts under way to organise the second ESF, which will take place in Paris/Saint-Denis in November 2003. To prepare this event the first organisation meeting took place in Paris in December 2002. As far as I could see this was an open meeting, that is, everybody was invited to participate. What was discussed at this meeting was, for example, the ‘Proposal to create a European organisational structure’³¹. There is, unfortunately, no space here to engage with this proposal in any detail, and this is also beyond the scope of this paper. What I have sought to discuss and argue for was perhaps of more general nature, namely that even though, in my view, it is certainly the case that the ESF organisation currently lacks an open, democratic and transparent process that is fully inclusive and encourages participation from all spheres of society, we do not have to be as pessimistic as Treanor and call for its abolition; this is a purely destructive move that does not engage with the process productively. In contrast, and this is what I have tried to practice with this paper, it is our task to make ourselves heard and try to influence this process of mobilisation and organisation of the ESF and ‘the movement’ in general. We have to get involved, which for me means to think and write about ‘the movement’. Because getting involved (theoretically) means to change the multiplicity of ‘the movement’, change its practice, expand its networks and therefore make it more united.

31 The second European Social Forum will take place between the 12th and 16th of November 2003 in Paris/Saint-Denis. On December 7th-8th a meeting was held in Paris to kick-off the organisation of the ESF. The first major concern is the creation of a European-wide organisation and mobilisation structure. The French Mobilisation Committee decided on the 21st of October the following: “To guarantee its success, we propose to set up structures that are as *united* as possible to prepare the event. This will allow us to bring together all the social movements, networks, associations and organisations supportive of this proposal, of the project and of the Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum. We are addressing our call to the following social organisations and movements: trades unions, community movements involved in popular education and local development, international solidarity organisations, organisations working against social exclusion, human rights organisations, organisations of environmentalists and ecologists, farmers organisations economic networks offering social solidarity, youth organisations, migrant organisations, cultural networks, feminist networks, networks of researchers and lecturers. In order to create the most representative structures possible to carry out the preparations, both at a European and an individual country level, we need to bring together the continental networks of the diverse movements, as well as the National Mobilisation Committees.” (French Mobilisation Committee for the ESF 2003: their full ‘Proposal to create a European organisational structure’ was posted to the ESF-UK-INFO mailing list at <http://lists.southspace.net/listinfo/esf-uk-info>).

Conclusions

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* Marx engages theoretically and practically with the specific revolutionary situation of his time, namely the 1848-1851 period in which the hopeful French proletarian uprising was crushed, its agenda taken up and in the process corrupted by the bourgeoisie and a caricature of a man, Louis Bonaparte, is lifted into the top job of the republic. Marx analyses the events of this period in all of its concreteness. However, the purpose of his theoretical practices is not only to study the specificities of the 1848-1851 events, but to draw more wider conclusions for the organisation of struggle and proletarian revolutions. Today we would be well advised to follow his example and analyse the current constellation of social formations and the specific organisation of what I have called here ‘the movement’, which is nothing else but the global proletarian multitude of resistance against globally integrated capitalism, or Empire. It is not enough to just take part in ‘the movement’, it is our task, as critics, as readers of theory, to practically engage and critique ‘the movement’, its organisation, its agendas. These theoretical practices of critique cannot, however, rely on concepts, categories, and agendas of the past, because this would force us back into a defunct era, as Marx says:

A whole people, believing itself to have acquired a powerful revolutionary thrust, is suddenly forced back into a defunct era; and so that there is no mistake about the reversion, the old dates rise again, the old chronology, the old names, the old edicts, which had long declined to mere antiquarian interest, and the old functionaries, who had seemed long decayed. (Marx, 1852/2002: 21)

It is important that these words come directly from Marx, because he is the first who would advise us to question his ideas, concepts and theories. But this critique of Marx is not simply a getting rid of him, or a forgetting, but it is ‘usage’ of Marx and his theories to construct concepts that are valid today. It is our task to continuously question ourselves and develop concepts that can positively intervene in today’s constellation of struggle:

Proletarian revolutions...engage in perpetual self-criticism, always stopping in their own tracks; they return to what is apparently complete in order to begin it anew, and deride with savage brutality the inadequacies, weak points and pitiful aspects of their first attempts; they seem to strike down their adversary, only to have him draw new powers from the earth and rise against them once more with the strength of a giant; again and again they draw back from the prodigious scope of their own aims, until a situation is created which makes impossible any reversion, and circumstances themselves cry out: There’s no time like the present! (Marx, 1852/2002: 22-23)

It is this perpetual self-criticism of ‘the movement’, which theory, as practice, can contribute to. This was the starting point of this paper: How can we conceptualise theory as a practice that can directly and indirectly intervene, critique and engage with contemporary modes of organisation, in short, how can theory be relevant? In my view this is the question all scholars need to ask themselves, also in organisation studies, which too often is narrowly concerned to study organisational entities and institutions of capital without seeing the wider processes of social formation that are characterised by struggle and antagonisms. Organisation is about the organisation of the social. As scholars of organisation we therefore cannot ignore social relations of power and knowledge, we cannot ignore issues of imperial globalisation, we cannot ignore ‘the

movement', we cannot ignore the struggles to organise this world differently. But today "we lack creation. We lack resistance to the present" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 108). It is therefore the task of theory to help "to define the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live" (Foucault, 1992: 10); it is the task of theory to create concepts, because "the creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 108). Thought needs to be relevant again, but not in a way that fetishises practice; thought needs to be a radical practice itself. It needs to help, within a network of other practices, to imagine a different future for the social, different organisational principles. Only if theory, as practice, lives up to this challenge it can be part of the struggles of the social for a different world.

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