From Utopian Worlds to Utopian Spaces: Reflections on the Contemporary Radical Imaginary and the Social Forum Process[*]

Simon Tormey

> Expectation, hope, intention towards possibilities that have not yet materialised – all this is not only a mark of human consciousness but, when rightly understood and regulated, is a fundamental determinant within objective reality as a whole. (Ernst Bloch quoted in Kolakowski, 1978: 432)

Even from afar, the degree to which many activists have invested emotionally in the social forum process (SFP) is startling.[1] At one level this far from surprising. The social forums are the primary and perhaps sole 'moment' when what is termed 'the movement' (or, more realistically, 'movement of movements') comes together as a totality – or where the 'totality' is made present to itself. It occupies a place in the contemporary political imaginary in a way in which many other kinds of events no longer do. In addition, whilst activists have their particular passions and interests when it comes to the social forums, they are – or can be – put to one side in search of something larger, in search of something *shared*. However, the much-documented tensions over the organisation of social forums bear witness to some deep underlying fault line that separates the whole, reminding us that for all the talk of 'processes' and 'movements' we are discussing an assemblage that is deeply ambivalent. This is not just a question of ideology. We know there are many different currents and positions within the movement, some radical and others much less so (Tormey, 2004a: 235-8). Nor is it just a question of cultures of organisation, some 'horizontal' and others 'vertical'. The terms horizontal and vertical are at one level mere descriptors for ways in which collective action is organised – the manner by which decisions, tactics, strategies are to be arrived at (Robinson and Tormey, forthcoming).

What these labels only hint at is a radical disjuncture in what Castoriadis terms 'the radical imaginary', the sense of what it is to be radical, what it means to confront the

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1 I am unclear whether it is meaningful to talk about a 'social forum process'. However this seems to be accepted way of talking about the emergence and development of social forums.

world as it is (Castoriadis, 1987). Since early modernity this imaginary has turned on the necessity for the transformation of the world into some much better world. One world, capitalist modernity, is contrasted with another world: 'anarchy', 'socialism', 'communism', 'the wild', 'ecotopia', 'the mutual order', 'radical democracy' etc. A utopian world is one that operates on the basis of a definite axiom or logic of organisation. It might be a maxim or principle of justice ('to each according to their needs') or according to some other normative imperative ('equality of outcome'; workers' self-management; the right of all species to subsist etc). Or it might concern the desirability of certain institutional forms or procedures (deliberative democracy; Rawlsian principles of justice; an Arendtian agora or Rousseauian public sphere) that are held to be so intrinsic to social functioning that they can be taken as necessary on *a priori* terms.

This imaginary has – relatively recently – been conjoined, supplemented and finally challenged by another imaginary, that of *utopian spaces*. Glancing around, reminders of the importance of autonomous space – utopian space – are evident. Subcomandante Marcos characterises the Zapatista project in terms of the development of "an anti-chamber looking into a new world". He declared that the point is not to create a new world, but a *space* in which "all worlds are possible, where all may live the dream" (Marcos, 2001: 80). Autonomous spaces in Italy, Holland, Germany and France (*les 400 Couverts*) form the mainstay of activist initiatives in those countries. In the UK much DIY or unofficial politics is focused on 'social centres', often squatted, housing a plethora of activities, initiatives on a non-hierarchical, non-partisan basis. In the world of radical theory space is a key motif in attempts to delineate the radical 'outside' of the present, from Hakim Bey's 'Temporary Autonomous Zones', Foucault's Heterotopias and David Harvey's 'Spaces of Hope' to Deleuze and Guattari's description of 'nomadic' or 'smooth' space in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Foucault, 1967; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Harvey, 2000; Bey, 2002). The social forums were themselves constituted by the charter of the World Social Forum (WSF) as 'spaces', not as conventions, rallies or assemblies. It was, it seems, for this reason that the first WSF was constituted as a non-party and non-militarised zone, thereby excluding those would annex the forum for their own ends and purposes.[2] As I think is clear, the common ground between these otherwise disparate projects, initiatives and figures is the rejection of the logic of modernist projects conceived as the building of a new world in the singular.[3] As the quote from Marcos makes clear, this is an approach that rejects the transcendental or *a priori* imperative. It is not seeking a new code or axiom by which to order social life. Nor does it conceive the task of resistance in terms of the affirmation of a definite monological alternative. Other worlds are, it seems, possible – but it is other *worlds* in the plural.[4]

It is here, I think, that we find a key to the antagonisms of the SFP. We seem to be witnessing the clash of two incommensurable imaginaries. Commitment to a utopian world relegates the space of the social forum to a vehicle or means for the realisation of

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2 The non-party nature of forums is made very explicitly in the charter of principles of the WSF. See http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/ for the complete text.

3 See S. Sullivan, this issue.

4 See Juris, this issue.

something else: the better world to come. An imaginary orientated to the proliferation of utopian spaces translates for our purposes as a commitment to social forums on the terms set by the social forum charter itself: to contingency, uncertainty and creativity. In doing so it anticipates – or could anticipate – the creation and multiplication of spaces that resist over coding, homogenisation, and uniformity. Before getting to the detail of the latter, I need, however, to outline two issues in relation to the hypothesis. The first concerns the nature of utopias and the second concerns the nature of the project to which the motif of space is contrasted: utopian world. Once we have clarified these terms we can proceed to look at the notion of utopian space more closely.

The Utopian Imaginary

Why do we need to think about the nature of utopias? Surely, activists don't need utopias; they need feasible projects, realistic visions, plans of action for the here-and-now? Of course, anti-utopianism is almost as strong a current in radical politics as is the utopian. Marx was notoriously dismissive of utopias and characterised "the theoretical conclusions of the Communists" as expressing "in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes" (Marx, 1988: 67). Utopias are for dreamers, or what Marx contemptuously dismisses as 'universal reformers', not for those who actually concerned about the existing 'struggle' of an existing 'movement'. The point for Marx was that the outcome of such a struggle is always-already determined by the historical conditions in which the class found itself. It was, in the famous words of Rosa Luxemburg, 'either socialism or barbarism'. No other possibility is open to us as agents, and none may be sought. With this gesture historical contingency, human action and responsibility is, as Agnes Heller asserts, 'annihilated' (Heller, 1982: 263). We are not talking about a political struggle in which we as individuals have a stake, but only a stake insofar as we impute our own class position and class interests. Hope, imagination, creativity, the 'madness' of human invention does not come into it.

Close inspection of Marxism as a tradition of thought presents, however, a different image. Here we find all sorts of utopian ruminations from Trotsky waxing lyrically about the future subject reaching the heights of an 'Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx', to Lenin's surprisingly exact, and almost expressly utopian, specification for a post-revolutionary order in *The State and Revolution* (Trotsky, 1923; Lenin, 1977 [1917]). These 'moments' in turn reflect the other suppressed dimension of Marx's own work, which is its deep, thrilling utopianism. What else are we to make of *The German Ideology* (written a mere three years before the *Manifesto*) and its evocation of a world in which we luxuriate in the possibility of being able to "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner" (Marx, 1970: 54)? Even the 'later' Marx was given to flights of fanciful speculative dreaming on the basis of the gains wrought be industrial revolution, one that ushered in the prospect of a greatly expanded 'realm of freedom' as automation took increasing care of the 'realm of necessity' to which we are otherwise subjected (Marx, Ch. 48). Ernst Bloch, a self-declared Marxist, was right about two things: Marx was himself a utopian and,

secondly, without utopias radical thought and action cannot, *contra* Marx, escape the condition of the present. This is to say that they cannot be radical.

Whereas Marx regarded utopias as a potentially demoralising distraction for the working classes, Bloch argued that without some image of a better world, something upon which hope could hang, there could be no challenge to the present (Bloch, 2000). If the present and the future-of-present are all that there is then 'common sense' and intuitive reasoning lead us to the conclusion that progress towards some radically better world is impossible. Up to the present the world has been beset by conflict, antagonism and war – why should we expect any better? What gives us grounds not merely for thinking that matters could be otherwise than they are, but also that it is incumbent upon us to *make sure* that they are? Why not just accept the prison house of the present? A genuinely radical or transformative politics is from this point of view a necessarily 'impossible' politics. It poses the image of something much better than the present in place of the present. Bloch was also right in asserting the inevitability of myriad different utopias, different 'impossible' visions. This was for him a function of human imagination, as it would be for Castoriadis who posed in similar fashion a non-deterministic politics of the 'magma' against the deterministic schemes of Marxist structuralism (Castoriadis, 1987). Yet Bloch was also insistent that Marx offered a different kind of utopia, one rooted in the flow of the historical process. This would be a 'concrete utopia', a utopia that was swept along by the tide of the historical itself, as opposed to the 'abstract utopias' of rival groups, theorists and movements. Marx's utopia had to be privileged therefore, because it was in some fundamental or ontological sense 'true'. Bloch should have remained true to his initial hypothesis. Instead of seeing a coalescence around a utopian project, instead of seeing history sanctify, in Blochian fashion, a triumphant collective project of emancipation, we have witnessed the fragmentation of utopian energies. This is not the same as saying, with Habermas, that utopian energies have become 'exhausted' (Habermas, 1986). Far from becoming giving way to a new 'realism', we are witnessing the constant and unremitting *proliferation* of utopias, utopian projects, dreams, ideas, ways of living. What confronts us is not the exhaustion of utopian energies so much as the *incommensurability* of utopias: your utopia is not my utopia, and mine is not yours.

The basic problematic of the age of minorities is thus as spelled out, paradoxically, in Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Nozick, 1974). Paradoxically because, as is obvious, Nozick's work is a long apologia for the capitalist *laissez-faire* world of precisely the kind that the movement for global justice challenges and seeks to displace. But Nozick is on interesting ground in insisting that the problematic animating contemporary politics is the search for ways in which different visions and different projects can be reconciled, can co-exist without annihilating each other. What he describes in the final section of the book ('Utopia') is a spatial project in which the exact details of how matters are to be organised are left to individuals and the groups and collectives that the individual chooses to interact with. His 'spatial' project is, however, the space of 'free trade areas' and Economic Processing Zones; but if we are

looking for a reason why in hegemonic terms his account had appeal then we might want to consider further the relevance of the argument for our purposes.[5]

As we have noted, it is not coalescence of outlook that marks the politics of the alter-globalisation movement, but the *multiplication* of differences, positions and standpoints. It has also been marked by a recognition that such differences are intrinsic to understanding the strength and vibrancy of the movement and hence that any attempt to undermine it would change its character. One of the features of the movement so far has thus been the double-edged nature of the discourse that has been developed to support and nurture it – hence a 'movement of movements'. The alter-globalisation movement not only resists neo-liberal capitalism, but also incorporation into an ideology and movement dedicated to *overcoming* neo-liberal capitalism. The issuing by Marcos in 2003 of a declaration entitled "I Shit on all the Revolutionary Vanguards of this Planet" (Marcos, 2003) was symbolic of this double-negation. His struggle is not only against Power as capitalism, but Power as *anti-capitalism*. He struggles not only against the forces of global capitalism but the forces lining up to *transform* global capitalism in the name of one 'true' ideology. This is an edict not to over-code or reduce complexity to a monological process or vision. But before showing how this plays out, we need to be clear about why it is that the traditional leftist utopian project is redundant, and how it is that the new utopian politics of space is able to develop.

What's the Matter with Utopian Worlds?

For the sake of 'space' I am only going to enumerate certain key features in the delineation of utopian worlds. These seem to me to be the following:

a) *The creation of a fixed and determinate social rationality*. This is through the projection of a 'master-signifier' in the sense that there is some nodal point that determines the manner by which institutions, processes and procedures are to be created and organised.[6] This could be in accordance with loose descriptors or concepts such as 'democracy' or 'justice', or with some definition of our humanity or 'species essence'.

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5   There are exceptions of course. The example of analytic or 'no-bullshit' Marxism would be one. For an example of this approach see G. A. Cohen would be one. See for example (Cohen, 1995) Certain post-Marxist figures such as Agnes Heller and Chantal Mouffe also come to mind as examples of thinkers who have tried to grapple head on with the challenge posed by libertarianism (Heller, 1987; Mouffe, 1993).

6   Readers can note that the 'Lacanian' terminology does not commit the author to a Lacanian position on the relation between language and the world, i.e. to Lacanian ontology. I am using 'Master-signifier', 'nodal point' etc as descriptors for how signifiers operate within determinate or 'fixed' normative accounts. I think, however, we should insist with Stirner, Sartre, Deleuze and Guattari, Freire, Castoriadis, Bey etc. that language doesn't have to be 'quilted' in this fashion – that is subject to the law of the Master. This is a conception that is itself tendentially conservative in that it posits the need for a Master Signifier to avoid the prospect of psychological and existential collapse. Language can also be a means of expressing the 'active' desire to reimagine and reconstruct individual and social existence. Indeed, one of the characteristics of the politics of utopian spaces is its seeking to interrogate and overcome Master-signifiers and thus to facilitate an active, imaginative 'insurrection' against codes and axioms of all kinds.

The work of the early Marx provides a useful example of how a Master-signifier anchors a given political rationality. It rotates around a clear binary: work/alienation. Wage labour subordinates our 'species essentiality' to something outside of the species, namely to profit creation. This sunders the link between work and self-creating activity, which the early Marx posits as the essence of our 'species existence'. Wage labour is labour-for-the-other and is thus the 'alienation' of what we are. Communism is posited as the recuperation of this species essentiality. All other considerations are from this point of view secondary – or 'inessential'. They are subordinate to the Master-signifier. From it we can begin to construct the ideal model to be contrasted with the alienated. In turn the sense of their being an alienated place is reinforced and underpinned by the delineation of the ideal. The pair works as a binary – a totality.

To be clear the act of positing a Master-signifier is not a specifically 'Marxist' move, but reflects the aims and ambitions of 'political philosophy'.[7] Some-*thing*, quality, need, characteristic is identified as key to our essence/well-being/needs. This functions as a nodal point for conceptual understanding. From this point of view political philosophy, as the search for the Good Life, is intrinsically utopian: it delineates a world on the basis of an idealisation of some essential attribute or facet of human life. This is just as much the case with liberalism (the utopia of 'smooth capitalism'), conservatism ('a matron cycling across the well-manicured village green'), as it with essentialist variants of Marxism or anarchism (William Morris's gift economy in *News from Nowhere*). Political philosophy represents the quest for certainty of the kind that is otherwise embodied in religion. Indeed, political philosophy might itself be regarded as a form of secularised religious practice, offering certainty, foundation, legislation.

b) *The reduction of political action to the teleological unfolding, recuperation or construction of an endpoint that is rational and true.* If we know what it is that we need or want to build, then politics is not a 'creative' act, but a utilitarian one. It is a matter of developing strategies and appropriate tactics enabling the project to be realised. Political action must in this sense be for something. Ideally it is for 'building' something concrete, 'constructing' the new world to come, planning the best way forward. Politics conforms to the logic of a military operation: we are to be coordinated, organised, galvanised. It is not a practice with room for doubt or ambivalence, of uncertainty or unknowability. These are marks of 'weakness' and 'vacillation'. We need to 'get down to business'. Politics in this sense is paradoxically the end of the political, or the end of the political as a creative act. The creation has already taken place: we already have the image of the world where we want to be, whether we call it 'communism', 'anarchy', or 'capitalism'. Creativity exists only for the means not for the end. The possibility of doubt, rethinking, and thus of what Bhabha terms in similar context 'newness' is eliminated (Bhabha, 1994: Ch. 11). 'Not now comrade'. This is to transform political action as the free play of ideas and visions into 'the administration of things'.

Lest this be regarded as an insight of a Berlinian liberal kind, it needs to be asserted that newness and creativity with regard to the terms and conditions upon which we are to live is *inconsistent* with liberalism. Liberalism makes a fetish of diversity and plurality

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7   Indeed, this is why we can doubt whether the later Marx had a political philosophy, as opposed to a
     view on how the struggle against capital could best be developed, nurtured, and brought to fruition.

of ends, asserting in turn the necessity for institutions to ensure that 'approved' subject positions and identities can be 'heard'. It also makes a fetish of incommensurability, antagonism (or 'agonism') and conflict in turn 'necessitating' a police and judicial apparatus, the state etc. As Marx was to note, this is precisely how the bourgeois liberal state can come to seem rational and reasonable whilst effectively denying ordinary people any meaningful power over their own lives (Marx, 1844). The contest of ideas and ideals is not at the heart of liberalism. It is as the heart of the *rhetoric* of liberalism. Values and ideals may be contested; but this does not mean that we can meaningfully contest the 'freedom' of the free market, the rationality of representation, the monopolising nature of anti-monopoly legislation, the tyranny of 'choice'. The point is that utopian worlds, even self-consciously 'libertarian' worlds such as *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, have a concreteness and completeness that makes politics teleological, that is, conceived in terms of the construction or realisation of that world. We do not contest that world. We do not contest; we 'build'.

c) *Tomorrow belongs to us.* Related to this point is the sense of *deferral* that such a stance engenders, and which is well documented by thinkers such as Heller, Castoriadis and John Holloway who are hostile to the utilitarianism of classical revolutionary positions. Utopian worlds encourage us to think of politics as the construction of a new Tomorrow, a model of social and political rationality necessitating a complete or fundamental break from Today. Even conservatism embraces such a stance, in the sense that the project of recuperating the past often sets in motion a dynamic predicated on the identification of the Past as the new Tomorrow (think of the rhetoric of Thatcher and Bush Jnr). The Good Times are just around the corner. Politics in this sense is a preparatory practice, preparatory for the break that will in time lead to the Tomorrow. Utopian worlds thus implicitly and sometimes explicitly invoke a 'transition', a state in-between the Today and the Tomorrow.

The classic instance on the left is delineated by Marx in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), which in turn provides the template for the transitional strategies and mindset of 'revolutionary' anti-capitalism. The revolution does not itself usher in the better-world-to-come, but merely clears the ground for the *construction* of the better-world-to-come. Transitional politics is a utilitarian politics, both in the sense of offering a deferral of moral and ethical justification in the name of the outcome ('you have to break eggs to make an omelette'; 'we must sacrifice a generation to build communism') and in reducing politics in the present to 'administration' pending the development of the new world where a 'new politics' become possible. The irony is thus that Engels was wrong to invoke Saint-Simon's description of 'the administration of things' as the achievement of *communism*. It is the goal (communism) that reduces politics in the *present* to 'the administration of things'. Politics, discussion, debate, creativity is 'deferred'. Tomorrow we will be 'artists and critics'; not today. Tomorrow we will rise up to the 'heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx', but not today. Today we are busy building *for* Tomorrow.

d) *A teleological politics is a vertical politics*. The always-already decided nature of teleological politics makes representative structures and procedures logical, if not inevitable. The point of politics is to *re-present* or make-present the ideal world to be created. That ideal world is firstly presented in the programme or manifesto, which in

turn informs the actions of the adherents of the programme, i.e. the members of the party or movement dedicated to its realisation. If the goal or object is already in some sense known, then the tendency of organisation is to diminish input from the ordinary members and to reinforce hierarchies and the division of labour within them. The leaders represent the 'wishes' of the membership, though this representative function is itself 'fictive', since the rationale of the leadership is to *realise* the programme. It is this problematic that sets in terrain the well-known tension of democratic party politics: should the leadership lead (i.e. seek to realise the programme on its own terms), or follow, that is obey the wishes of the membership of the party? If the end is some sense 'known' or 'know-able' then what is to be gained from elongating this process of discussion with the rank-and-file? Why not just get on with the business of realising what everyone already has decided in some sense, which to some degree is the aim of the party ('building socialism', 'saving the environment' etc)? The final act is of course taking over the state ('winning power') so as to transform what would otherwise remain a mere vision into a reality representing the universal interest.

From this point of view Hegel was merely stating the empirically obvious when he categorised the state as 'the universal' (Hegel, 1967: 155-6). The state *is* the universal, and as such it is inherently exclusionary. It excludes the particular, the idiosyncratic, the minor, the 'different'. The state stands for 'everyone' but in this very gesture stands for no one. Interestingly, this function of exclusion is expressly acknowledged in political thought by those who defend liberal democracy. J. S. Mill, perhaps the classic theorist of liberal democracy, makes perfectly clear the exclusionary 'supplement' of representation. As he notes in the *Essay on Representative Government*, "Men, as well as women, do not need political rights in order that they may govern, but in order that they not be misgoverned" (Mill, 1972: 291). Mill was clear: the point of representation is not to empower, but to give the *appearance* of empowerment whilst securing rational governance, which is to say governance by what he terms in *On Liberty* 'the wise' (Mill, 1980: Ch.3). Wise people *know* how the world should look. Ordinary people do not need to develop their own solutions; they need to follow the edict of those who know. Of course, what goes for Mill goes for Lenin and friends. Ordinary people are only capable of thinking to certain parameters – contemptuously dismissed in *What is to be Done?* as 'trade union consciousness' (Lenin, 1947 [1902]). Political philosophies often enact this kind of elitism, albeit with the 'best' of intentions. 'I know that the world would be a better place if we rearranged it like this …'. Those who know lead; the rest listen.

Utopian Worlds and the Social Forum

From this point of view it is clear that the function of the social forum for those in possession of this kind of final map or picture is to help 'build the party-movement'. The social forums are in this sense a means to an end, principally for recruitment of the uncommitted; for the retention of doubters and waverers; for defeating opposing viewpoints in the less-than-mortal combat of plenary session, workshop or seminar. They are for highlighting the positive achievements of the party-movement to date; for excluding or belittling rivals through side-lining, under-representation, obstacle creation

so that they become invisible and irrelevant. All this is achieved through well-documented mechanisms of majoritarian politics: claiming to represent what 'most people think', 'offering the best way forward', putting forward the clearest 'analysis' of the global situation etc. In short, the social forums are over-coded as an instrument or tool of the 'movement'. They are the vehicles of a utilitarian strategy to 'conquer power' considered as a macro-social resource that is 'captured' and then used as one would use a tool or machine – as against an inert 'hyplomorphic' entity (Protevi, 2001). To invoke Žižek, they are mechanisms for 'carving the field', ensuring that no one is left in any doubt as to the 'best way forward for the movement' (Žižek, 2000: 57, 126). In this conception the social forum resembles a battle at whose 'end' emerges a victorious 'analysis' standing over heaps of redundant delusions cast aside like the Germanic tribes in the opening shots of *Gladiator*. As Maximus shouts to his legions: 'stand close: hold the line'.

Again, it has to be emphasised that the above is not intended, expressly at least, as a critique of Marxism, nor even the Leninist variants of it. What we are documenting is rather the common features of the world transforming ideologies of modernity, ideologies that include liberalism, certain variants of conservatism (particularly those associated with neo-liberalism or populism) and anarchism, socialism and environmentalism. It is not just Marxist groupings that have 'designs' on the social forums, but every micro-revolutionary-groupuscle. Such ideologies are communities of a fixed and determinate world. The problem is 'they' want to transform a shared space of encounter into 'their' world. But isn't utopian space a void awaiting transformation into a new world? How can space *avoid* becoming fixed and determinate.

As we noted above, accounts of the kinds of spaces that contemporary theorists and activists want to create, i.e. 'smooth space', 'autonomous space', anti-authoritarian spaces – spaces of imagination and creativity (a 'Laboratory of the Insurrectionary Imagination' to invoke one of the autonomous spaces at the ESF) are contingent, open, negotiated, unpredictable, beyond capture.[8] This is what we are calling 'utopian space'. It is a space that is produced by, and becomes the object of, 'horizontal' politics. Indeed if it is not actually nonsensical to talk about horizontalism, then we might say that such a position represents the dissolution of ideological politics. Or to be more precise, it renders such a politics, local, particularistic, individual ('*I* would like to live in this kind of world; but I know this is just my preference'). It thereby undermines, cuts off, neutralises and opposes vertical politics through engaging in a double fold that accepts the limited and contingent horizon of one viewpoint when set against another. It thus accepts, indeed celebrates, the desirability of developing spaces in which we can encounter others on terms that are not mediated by 'necessity' or by some over-arching instrumental consideration, where we can learn from others, engage with others, join with others. It is, to shift genre, a 'dialogical' politics (Bakhtin, 1984; Freire, 1996); or in the more prosaic terms offered by Marcos, a politics that is prepared to 'listen' as well as speak. In this sense the idea of utopian space is one built from the *critique* of ideology and the deferral of the present. What does such a critique consist of?

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8   On these spaces, see the numereous contributions in this issue.

Life after the Master

We mentioned above that Marx's early work provides a useful example of the manner by which the essentialising of concepts serves as the basis for the delineation of a total critique of the given and the development in turn of an alternative world where this essence can be recovered or restored. It was Stirner who famously tweaked Marx's beard to the extent that the latter was drawn into a lengthy if ultimately futile *ad hominem* assassination of 'Saint Max'/'Sancho' (Marx, 1845). Why was Marx so riled by Stirner? Stirner's suggestion was that if we allow language to develop into what we might term 'fixity', then we risk surrendering the contingency and creativity of human existence, including language, to some shibboleth which will in turn enslave us (Stirner, 1993: Pt II, s. iii). As he argued, concepts such as 'freedom', 'Man', 'property' have no ulterior reality, no 'essence'. Allowing ourselves to become subordinate to words is to surrender the ability to construct and reconstruct 'the world' in accordance with shifting, contingent needs, wishes and hopes. Thus, whereas the early Marx elevates 'Work' and thence 'Communism' into 'holy' essences that inform the kind of world to be created, Stirner comments that these concepts are themselves mere 'spooks' that are deployed by 'communists' to make us accept the particular vision they offer as 'universal' and binding. Stirner, by contrast, urges us to reject these 'bats in the belfry', to 'drive out the spooks' and 'take possession' of ourselves. We should not allow concepts to determine the content and nature of the relations we develop with others. On the contrary, these relations should be mediated by our own needs, wants and aspirations. What Stirner offered was a critique of ideology *as such*. He urges us to review continually the terms and conditions of our interactions with others. We should enter into pacts and alliances, forms of cooperation and collective effort that are reviewable, contingent, held open. In this sense the 'union of egoists' creates a space of ambivalence and undecidability. Stirner doesn't offer us a *vision* of a new world, so much as a basis for thinking about the nature of relations between individuals, groups and collectives (Stirner, 1993: 235-8). How those relations develop, to which ends and with what effect, Stirner remains indifferent. What he offers is a space without constraints, obligations, contracts, permanently binding rational or 'universal' features. No wonder Marx was 'spooked'.

Stirner's approach anticipates the rejection of ideology and the politics of the Master-signifier that is associated with the politics of 1968 and the rejection of the spectacle of ideological politics in favour of a praxis of micro-power and a micro-politics of and in everyday life (Vaneigem, 1994; Gardiner, 2000; Certeau, 2002). Such a praxis is explicitly directed against ideological thought, the Master-Signifier and by extension the coalescence of revolutionary struggle around some agreed place that it was the task of the 'movement' to build or construct. A notable pamphlet of the early 1970s is entitled *The Revolutionary Pleasure of Thinking for Yourself* (Anon, 1975). It exhorts the reader not to submit themselves to the delusions of ideology, to a New Order, but rather to maintain critical distance, to safeguard one's autonomy, to retain a responsibility for plans and projects for which we feel an affinity. Similarly, the thrust of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is directed against 'majoritarianism', the notion that there must be some scheme, project, goal or telos around which 'we' can be united (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 469-73). A minoritarian stance, is by contrast a stance that insists on 'univocity', a notion that echoes Stirner's radical egoism in rejecting the superstructure of radical thought as the search for a universal schema or social blueprint.

This is a stance of permanent opposition to incorporation, representation, homogenisation. Autonomy is remaining other, rejecting the power of the Master-Signifier or nodal point.

The gesture of resisting incorporation in turn points to the desirability for generating spaces in which such a micro-politics can develop and multiply. These are utopian spaces as opposed to the Party Congress mechanism of democratic centralism whose rationale is to develop the line that will require the obedience and subordination of the faithful. It is clear that one of the reasons why many activists have invested heavily on the SFP is that they see the forums as providing such spaces – spaces of discussion, comparison, of affinity and affiliation, spaces of experimentation. They generate (or have the potential to generate) an activist rhizomatics, a way in which networks can coalesce, develop, multiply and re-multiply. A network does not have a Master-signifier, an ideology or a 'strategy'. What it requires are zones of encounter, shared learning, solidarity, proliferation. Phil McLeish is therefore right to stress that the task of social forums should not be to generate consensus or coalescence around some distinct political project, but to facilitate the proliferation of activisms in the plural (McLeish, 2004; Tormey, 2004b). It should be to foster and nourish the 'swarm', so that lines of affinity and association can crystallise into multiple resistances and actions.[9]

From this point of view the contingency, impermanency and transience of social forums should not be regarded as weaknesses, but rather as strengths. They prevent the congealing of the movement into some stodgy imitation of the very institution many of its participants are keen to get away from: the Party. The 'task' of a minoritarian social forum is not the accumulation of members, but the proliferation of spaces, the enlargement of the network, the accelerated growth of the rhizome. But it can only do this where the social forum is regarded as a space of creativity and uncertainty; where differences of affect and standpoint are regarded as the basis upon which meaningful dialogue, discourse and discussion can take place. Difference, plurality, creativity, alterity is not from this point of view the *enemy* of a politics of resistance to neo-liberalism; it is what such a politics is about: the transformation of everyday life from an over-coded 'object' (of law, capital, 'decency', democracy etc) to being the site of what Castoriadis terms 'auto-poeisis', self-invention and re-imagining (Castoriadis, 1987).

Today not Tomorrow

As we have noted above, political philosophy has long concerned itself with the creation of distinct and complete worlds, or the preservation of a distinct world against the flow, flux and contingency of life itself. Political philosophy projects an image of the world to come and politics rotates around the creation of that world. Such a politics is thus inevitably and of necessity *teleological*. Discontent with the here and now translates into a project for the creation of an alternative world: a better, happier, cleaner, more just world. How can politics but be about the creation of an alternative world? 'Another world is possible!' '*Yes, as long as it is my world …*'. From this point of view the party is the necessary form of teleological politics and of a politics of place. A world is to be created and that act of creation requires an organisation dedicated to the task, with

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9   See de Angelis, this issue.

tactics and a strategy to match. From this point of view it should hardly be surprising that the party remains the vehicle for 'modernist' radical politics. The party is a mechanism for the pursuit of power in general and *state* power in particular. The party is thus a product of statist politics and the state is in turn the product of party politics. Parties and states are, to invoke Foucault, engines of war: parties compete with other parties, states compete with other states (Foucault, 2003: 50-1). One vision of the world competes with all other visions. There are winners; there are losers.

A politics of utopian spaces is not a politics of parties, contestation, representation and war. Here again we find a tradition of theorising beyond or outside the party which links directly to what we have been saying about the rejection of the Master-Signifier. We have already mentioned Stirner and the union of egoists, an account that rotates around the idea of a transformation *in everyday life*, a revolution considered not in terms of large-scale or bureaucratic politics of the party political kind, but of everyday resistances and rebellions. When joined together such resistances can produce a dramatic transformative effect; but this is not Stirner's point. His point is rather that resistance or 'rebellion', as he puts it, is not subject to deferral, to having to wait. Resistance is implicit in the self-constitution of the present. It is what we do in the here-and-now. Similarly, James Scott's work on peasant resistances shows how the shared perception of injustice(s) can generate micro-revolutionary practices of a horizontal kind with devastating consequences (Scott, 1992). So too does the work of Rick Fantasia, Piven and Cloward, among the many others who document the possibility of effective resistance without the generation of bureaucratic movement and party structures (Fantasia, 1988; Piven and Cloward, 1988). As is evident, such resistances are rarely linked by a shared vision of the 'after', but by the shared perception of an *injustice*. They are resistances *in negation* as opposed to resistances as affirmation in the name of some determinate 'fixed' alternative world. They are efforts to clear obstacles to self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-rule. As such they of course are affirmative of something, without that something having to be 'named' ('communism', 'anarchy' etc). Clearing spaces is not the same as building a world.

Here surely, we find a key to understanding the centrality of social forums to contemporary struggles. To the great frustration of all those who would like to see the social forums aid in the construction of a party or movement 'proper', the tone and orientation of such meetings remains resolutely one of *negation*, of resistance, as opposed to affirmation of an alternative. Resistance opens the way to alternatives; it does not affirm or celebrate one alternative over all others. This in turn helps us to understand social forums as utopian spaces. They are spaces of ambivalence, plurality and diversity – in the sense of being based on the rejection of something. As spaces of negation, social forums have hitherto been constructed quite explicitly as minoritarian spaces. Many of the sessions are predicated on discontent with some aspect of the present. Which aspect of the present does not require specifying or stating. The object of that discontent is sometimes shared ('neo-liberal capitalism'; imperialism; global poverty; the G8 etc); but being against neo-liberal capitalism is not a condition of entry to the space. Thus the social forum cannot or rather should not 'speak for' or 'represent' the participants. The participants are not 'members' who have signed up for a

party/movement/project that could be spoken for or represented.[10] Participation is not conditional on the possession of some shared conception of the world, some notion of how things should be reconstructed. It is unknowable and deferred.

The social forum is a non-denumerable space, which is to say that it is composed of minorities. As long as it remains minoritarian, it remains a utopian space, which is to say a space that *resists* overcoding by some 'project' or plan to build 'another world'. It resists becoming subordinate to an axiom that would convert what is presently a space of encounter into one devoted to the development of an agreed 'analysis'. Should it become majoritarian, should it come to speak for or represent what 'everyone wants', then it would cease to be such a space. It would become a vehicle for the expression of a distinct political project that some identify with and others do not. It becomes a party-in-the-making, with a membership, division of labour, leaders and led, manifestos and programmes, exclusions and micro-fascisms ('and at this plenary another of our leaders will be speaking on the subject of ...'). Chris Nineham of the SWP/Globalise Resistance puts the matter in his usual succinct fashion: "The openness of the movement to innovation and creativity has been one of its great strengths. But simply celebrating spontaneity will not provide answers about how to move forward. Consensus is obviously desirable where possible but we can't pretend we can have a non-ideological movement" (Nineham, 2004). 'Moving forward', 'answers', 'ideology' and 'pretence', on one side. 'Innovation', 'creativity', 'celebrating spontaneity', on the other. Utopian worlds versus utopian spaces.

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10 Although we can note that a perennial feature of the dynamics of the AGM generally is the attempt of different individuals and groups to try to speak on behalf of it – from Susan George to the WOMBLES. Hence the frequent appeals by one of the founders of the WSF, Chico Whitaker, to respect the idea of the WSF as a space or 'village square' allowing multiple viewpoints and positions to be regarded as valid. See for example http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/wsf/whitaker.htm.

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the author   Simon Tormey is Professor of Politics and Critical Theory at the University of Nottingham, UK. His research interests concern the interconnections between continental thought, normative political theory and radical political practice. Current projects include work on the crisis of representation in democratic theory; the trajectory of post-Marxist thought since 1968; and the nature of resistance to neo-liberal governance, locally and globally. He is the author of numerous books and articles including *Making Sense of Tyranny: Interpretations of Totalitarianism* (MUP, 1995), *Agnes Heller: Socialism, Autonomy and the Postmodern* (MUP, 2001), *Anti-Capitalism* (Oneworld, 2004), and *Understanding Post-Marxisms* (Sage, forthcoming). He has published articles in journals such as *Radical Philosophy*, *Thesis Eleven*, *The Journal of Political Ideologies* and *Historical Materialism*. He is the editor of 'Reappraising the Political' a monograph series with Manchester University Press (with Jon Simons) and an editor of the journal *Contemporary Political Theory*.

Address: School of Politics, Law and Social Sciences Building, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK.

E-mail: Simon.Tormey@nottingham.ac.uk