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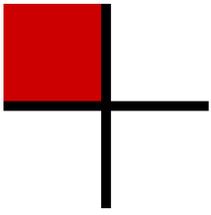
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The Organisation and Politics of Social Forums

Steffen Böhm, Sian Sullivan and Oscar Reyes

Social Forums have become key spaces for the articulation of discontent and radical politics today. The first World Social Forum (WSF) took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001, and since then numerous other Social Forums have been organised in many different locations at local, regional and global levels. As articulated in the guiding document for the WSF – the Charter of Principles¹ – a Social Forum is intended to provide a space that brings together multiple actors that are part of, or at least connected to and interested in, the so-called anti-capitalist or global justice movement(s). While there is a burgeoning literature on these movements, rather little has been written specifically on Social Forums (although see bibliography by Reyes, this issue).

This special issue of *ephemera* focuses particularly on the close relationship between the organisation and politics of Social Forum spaces. That is, since many people regard Social Forums as important political spaces, with the potential to radically transform politics – and therefore society itself – we feel it is important to consider the way these events are organised as a window into the politics, i.e. the power relations, they produce. The aim of this special issue is thus to engage with aspects of the organisation and politics – and more precisely the interface between organisation and politics – of Social Forums.

The starting point of this engagement is an understanding that politics is always already connected to questions of organisation. Here we do not merely mean the organisation of political institutions. If one understands the constitution of the social – of life as such – as in itself political, then this constitutional act is linked inherently to questions of social organisation. The political slogan of the Social Forum movement is: ‘Another World Is Possible’. Although there are multiple, sometimes contradictory, voices within this movement, clearly it aims at the transformation of the world – of life as such. It is for this ambition of a political transformation of life that it becomes of utmost importance to engage with – that is, describe, critique and translate – the organisation of the Social Forum movement. The rationale is that, if we understand the organisation of this

1 www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

movement, we are potentially better equipped to critique the type of life that this movement hopes to constitute.

It goes without saying that this engagement with the Social Forum movement cannot be done from ‘afar’; we are not artificially – in the name of science and objectivity – disconnected from its politics. The contributions included in this special issue are always already political; that is, the texts, images and sounds presented in this space are activist contributions that seek to engage with and influence the organisation and politics of the Social Forum movement. And since the politics of this movement is one that aims at the transformation of life as such, the contributions to this special issue are not merely representations: instead, they are ontological interventions in a political project of the radical transformation of being.

As the contributions to this special issue started to come in, it seemed to us that a number of themes recurred. In other words, individual contributors were nevertheless collectively iterating a range of critical and cross-cutting concerns. It is around these concerns that we have organised this special issue. Most of the contributions are linked to two or three of these themes:



(Self) Organisation: as noted above, organisational processes are key to the production of politics, i.e. to the dynamic distribution of power. And in the organisation of Social Forums some key organisational debates have been reproduced: namely those between the distributed power hoped for by participants of an organisational culture that emphasises autonomy, consensus decision-making and (self)organisation, in contrast to the hierarchical political style associated with conventional left party-politics, and seemingly reproduced in the organisation of the ‘formal’ Forum events.

Representation: critical to issues of organisation are questions of representation and democracy. Of who gains the power to represent – to speak for – others; and of whose voices are occluded – clouded over – in this process of representation. Here we include contributions that speak to the critical disjuncture between power-over-others, i.e. as reproduced in representational democracy, and the power-to-become, i.e. as sought by

those participating in and desiring greater autonomy and empowered spaces for organising social life.

Proliferation: an intention of Social Forums is to proliferate beyond Forum events and 'boundaries' its conversations and intentions regarding the production of 'another world'. A number of contributions here consider the possibility for Forum 'culture(s)' to grow and proliferate. Here we also include a review of an educational project outside the Forum that is inspired explicitly by the radical pedagogical or learning space that the Forum hopes to produce.

Alterity: in a (neoliberal) world that brings people in by processes of proletarianisation, homogenisation and control a crucial question is that of the sustenance and claiming of spaces that permit diversity and difference: that are enabling for the 'the other'. This issue also is key for Social Forums and in this theme contributors ask the question of to what extent the organisational culture of the 'formal' Forum can hear, include and be shaped by those who desire the participation in, and production of, radically different political cultures: the constitution of *other* possible worlds. Of interest here is that as these themes began to emerge we realised that those dealing most critically with the question of alterity – of 'the other' – in relation to Social Forums were written by women; in other words, by those othered by the organisational culture of patriarchal modernity (which underwrites the current neoliberal project that Social Forums seek to contest). Perhaps this in itself says something about what possibilities are embraced and what are excluded in the organisation and politics of Social Forums?

Open space: a significant debate regarding Forum organisation and intent revolves around the stated aim of the Forum to provide an 'open space' for the production of a different, and globally relevant, political culture. Here we include a range of pieces that consider the emergence of the concept of 'open space' in relation to Social Forums, civil society and the public sphere.

Record: a number of contributions to this special issue provide important first-hand records of Forum events and organisational processes. These are pieces by participants in Forum events and by organisers of various aspects of Social Forums. They become interventions in the production of our own contemporary history and memory. Here we have attempted to provide something more than written accounts and analyses. Personal records, images, transcripts and soundscapes are included in an effort to highlight the Forum as sensual and embodied experience.

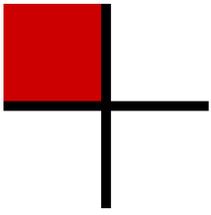
This special issue has been some time in the making. It is the largest issue of *ephemera* to date and its range and number of contributions say something of the compelling magnet of Social Forums in contemporary critical political culture. We offer this issue as both record and analysis of the Social Forum 'movement', and hope that it will provide relevant reading in the lead up to the next 'round' of Forum events early in 2006.

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The Other Worlds Educational Project and the Challenges and Possibilities of ‘Open Spaces’

Vanessa Andreotti

abstract

This paper explores an educator’s hands-on experience of working with the ‘Open Space’ methodology in the context of the ‘Other Worlds’ Project, a reflexive educational programme addressing development education and uncritical discourses of global citizenship.

The educational project Other Worlds was funded by Department for International Development (DFID – Development Awareness Fund – mini-grants scheme) from March to October 2004, is hosted by Mundi (a ‘development education centre’ in Nottingham with charity status) and was developed by a collective of activists, educators and academics from the UK, Brazil and India. It proposes an approach to transnational (global/political) literacy¹ based on ‘reflexive ethics’,² in which participants are encouraged to engage critically with issues related to global and local contexts and think about how their way of seeing the world and acting in it are connected to justice and injustice.

In this paper, I intend to reflect on the development process of the project and its ‘open space’ methodology as political interventions in the field of education. As the coordinator of the Other Worlds project, I feel the need to locate my perspective and myself in this reflection. The Other Worlds initiative stems from my attendance at the World Social Forum, where April Biccum and I documented perspectives from activists and participants in order to set up an educational website and contribute to a special issue of an academic journal called *Situation Analysis*. It also originates from the challenges and difficulties we faced in our attempt to create a WSF awareness network (mainly in Nottingham) after we got back from Mumbai, trying to work in partnership with regional and local student and activist groups.

1 Transnational Literacy is a concept described by Gayatri Spivak, summarised by Diana Brydon as an understanding of how globalisation works and how it can be negotiated.

2 This concept is constructed in opposition to the concept of prescriptive ethics that sets values, behaviours and understandings as prescribed outcomes for learning processes.

I was first introduced to the World Social Forum in November 2003, when I saw the documentary ‘Testimonies of the Twenty-First Century’ screened in Nottingham. After a career in teaching in the South of Brazil, I had been working with educational NGOs in England for five years, trying to advance the agenda of more critical approaches to the areas of development and citizenship education. I interpreted the idea of the open space of the Forum described in the documentary as a space where people would come to listen to and engage with one another regardless of age, background or gender to develop together a vision of a different world, a world that would be undivided, but that would welcome difference and include everyone in its continuous creation, something that was in line with what I thought ‘education for change’ should be about. So, I decided to go to Mumbai in early 2004 to see and feel the Forum for myself.

Like other participants in the Forum, I was really inspired and touched by the explosion of colour and ‘difference’ and the feeling of unity and hope in the streets of the Nesco grounds where the WSF took place. There were moments when I felt as if I had lost my identity and become part of something much greater and powerful – something that went beyond my ‘rational’ understanding of reality. However, the contradictions became evident very early as well: how power operated within the space and in the seminars and workshops, who had the answers and was allowed to speak, who should listen, who was considered an insider, who the outsiders were... I also noticed that the moment we stepped out of the Nesco grounds, into the streets of Mumbai, the ‘magic’ of the Forum disappeared and the reality and consequences of poverty and exploitation continued untouched – beggars kept being ignored by passer-byes, people kept dreaming of social mobility for themselves, the divisions of the space of the city based on class, gender or caste were stronger than ever: how could we, the self declared ‘activist’ participants of the WSF, think we could transform the world without engaging with the people outside and keep the contradictions within our own space unexamined? How could we reach out and realise the potential of ‘open spaces’ in a way that the wider society would also be affected by it?

Towards the end of the Forum, I incidentally met two people who were also asking similar questions. Jai Sen (one of the editors of *WSF: Challenging Empires*³) and Madhuresh Kumar had organised, together with Mukul Mangalik, a series of seminars on the World Social Forum (under the auspices of the History Society Ramjas College – University of New Delhi) proposing an attitude of ‘critical engagement’ with the Forum itself and the issues discussed within it. The series was implemented successfully at different colleges at Delhi University during August-December 2003 and one of the outcomes of this initiative was the publication of the book *Are Other worlds Possible? – The Open Space Reader* compiled by Jai Sen and Madhuresh Kumar with a collection of texts discussed in the seminars. The framework used in the series became the foundational stone of the original Other Worlds project proposal submitted to DFID

3 Sen, J., A. Anand, A. Escobar, and P. Waterman (eds.) (2003) *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*. New Delhi: The Viveka Foundation.

The Original Proposal

The aim of the original proposal of the project was ‘to enable young people in England to engage critically with the processes of the World and European Social Forums and the issues discussed within it’.

This proposal stated that:

The idea of the World Social Forum as a ‘Southern’ initiative and a pedagogical space for the collective construction of ‘Another Possible World’ poses important questions for young people in the UK: What is the significance and the implications of the WSF and its related forums in the world and for people in the UK? Whose world is being envisaged? What is the role of people from more developed countries in its construction? In what ways is the so called ‘North’ seen in the events? What are the implications of this image for people who originated and live in ‘Northern’ countries, as well as those who have migrated to such countries but in a sense have dual (or even multiple) identities? What are the implications of this image for people who happen to live in ‘Northern’ countries but belong to a larger interdependent / interconnected world made up of myriad migrations? Is there room for dialogue and critical engagement?⁴

The content framework of the series of seminars in Delhi was adopted in the project and the justification of the Indian organisers was also generalised for the UK context:

This series of seminars is proposed in a context where the Forum is yet hardly known in India, neither as an organization / initiative or as a movement it is widely seen to be elsewhere, nor in terms of the interesting culture of politics it appears to offer, the culture of ‘open space’. There has been very little critical public examination in India as yet of the Forum, either as an idea or as a significant world institution.⁵

The proposal of a position of critical engagement (as opposed to critical disengagement and uncritical engagement) was seen as one of the major strengths of the Delhi initiative and was adopted as one of the pillars of the Other Worlds project as well:

Given the volatile world context within which the Forum is taking shape, the important initiatives and also positions that it itself is taking, as well as the major challenges it is facing, there is reason to think that the WSF is at a critical juncture. Maybe the Forum as well as the thousands of organizations from across the world that are participating in and supporting it, would do well to take a step back and get a view of the larger picture of which it is one part, one frame.⁶

The proposal also described the way in which the initiative in Delhi and the Other Worlds project were different:

Different from the New Delhi initiative this application proposes a pilot project in Nottingham that will lead to a semi-distance structured educational programme that will be made available to self-organised groups of young adults through the web for their independent use. It will consist of a series of proposed ‘open space sessions’ supported by online input materials that should be

4 Original proposal for the Other Worlds Project submitted to DfID.

5 Sen, J. and M. Kumar (2003) *Are Other Worlds Possible? The Open Space Reader on the World Social Forum and Its Engagement with Empire*. New Delhi: National Foundation for India, 7.

6 Sen, J., and M. Kumar (2003) *Are Other Worlds Possible? The Open Space Reader on the World Social Forum and Its Engagement with Empire*. New Delhi: National Foundation for India, 8.

discussed by the groups themselves following the methodology of the 'Open space' (with or without an external moderator).⁷

A design and development research approach was proposed for the project development process. The objective was to work collaboratively in designing a framework for educational intervention that would support the development of an understanding of the Forum process and the issues dealt within it and develop critical and analytical skills in a 'non-indoctrinating' and participatory way. The second stage would be to pilot this framework in different contexts and modify it according to the outcomes and feedback from participants and external or internal 'critical friends', so that we could come close to an optimal learning trajectory for potential participants. Therefore, rather than a series of seminars, the Other Worlds project proposed an educational programme which would make a set of educational materials available online based on the methodology of 'open space' (which served as the framework for intervention). The initial idea was to create an entry point into the Forum, so that more people could take part in the Social Forum initiative, more particularly in the European Social Forum.

Different Conceptualisations of 'Open Spaces'

The proposed methodology of the Other Worlds project was based on the premises of the 'open space' methodology of the World Social Forum and slogan: 'Another world is possible'. However, as the development process progressed, the Social Forums became less central to the project and more emphasis was placed on the issues discussed within it. The idea of an open space was re-deployed using a different framework. This happened because of the perception that the kind of space that the Forum (more specifically the European Social Forum) was becoming due to internal power struggles was incompatible with the notion of open space we were working with in the pedagogical arena.

Within the current project framework, an open space is considered an educational 'safe space' where people are relatively protected from subjugation and can participate in a kind of dialogue that welcomes different ideas and 'critical engagement' with diverse worldviews. This concept is based on the principles that:

Everyone has knowledge (we all have got our own lenses to look through at the world);

Every knowledge deserves respect (these lenses are legitimate, but they are constantly reconstructed and bound to particular contexts);

Every knowledge is partial and incomplete (as the lenses are constructed within particular contexts, they are informed by particular assumptions and they lack information from other contexts and other assumptions);

All knowledge can and should be questioned (the assumptions that inform the construction of the lenses should be examined, as well as their implications and other possibilities of assumptions).⁸

7 Original proposal for the Other Worlds Project submitted to DfID.

Therefore asking questions and challenging assumptions in a responsible way becomes a sign of respect for others and can be a way of going beyond the boundaries of acquired/constructed perspectives, beliefs and cultures. Thus, the project promotes and supports the creation of open spaces where participants can talk about issues that affect their lives, reclaim the right to question received knowledge, explore the implications of assumptions and positions without being told what they should think or do, and participate in collective constructions of alternative visions of the future. This participation, though, is not based on consensus.⁹ The aim is not to create a collective vision of another world, but to explore possibilities together, relying on individual differences to avoid the reification of a collectively agreed 'ideal' future. These explorations do not depend on a commitment to a group identity or ideology, which is the mainstream strategy of community formation, but they do rely on a commitment to a process of de- and re- construction of 'self' and 'other' and of ontological and epistemological assumptions (of the nature of reality and knowledge respectively).

This understanding of open space is theoretically different from the perceived dominant understanding of the open space of the Social Forums and even to its conceptual description of

an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind and between it and the Earth.¹⁰

In order to maintain an open atmosphere, the purpose of the pedagogical space of the Other Worlds project does not emphasise 'effective action' or foster consensus in relation to what this new planetary society should look like. Neither does it portray neo-liberalism or the domination of the world by capital or imperialism as an 'enemy' to be defeated. The notion of Open Space in the project is best described as the idea of a 'pedagogical open space', that is open to all who are willing to look at things from different perspectives, to open up their minds to different (and also partial/incomplete) forms of knowing and being and to the complex nature of the 'system' we are all part of. This pedagogical strategy implies a recognition that the 'Empires' we would like to change do not exist only outside of us – their violence operates in a complex way and is reproduced on a daily basis even by the people who see themselves as the ones who are challenging them. These Empires have historically shaped the way we see the world, the way we think and the way we relate to others. In a pedagogical process, this recognition demands a productive acknowledgement of complicity with 'the system' and shifts the focus of the intervention from a politics of hostility (of 'us versus them') towards a politics of 'friendship to come' (or 'us all').¹¹ Within this framework, answers, solutions and alternatives, as well as collectivities, 'cultures' and associations will always be

8 These principles are prompted in the introductory unit of the project which is reproduced at the end of this paper.

9 See Colin Wright's article in this issue.

10 WSF Charter of Principles.

11 See Spivak, G. (2003) *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press.

contingent and temporary. The utopia promoted in the project is of an undivided world that is not monolithic, nor homogeneous, but that transcends current divisions and promotes a call for relationship – ‘ethical relation to the other’ as an embrace of difference – an act of love.¹² The project can be seen as an intervention towards this goal which attempts to create the possibility for the reinvention of ways of thinking, relating and imagining the world.

The conceptual framework of the project is based on concepts related to postcolonial pedagogies, to what is often called ‘continental philosophy’, as well as to a social-historical constructivist understanding of the learning process. Amongst the perspectives that inform this framework are those of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michel Foucault, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Jacques Derrida and the later work of Paulo Freire.¹³ Although this methodology has parallels with the area commonly referred to as ‘critical pedagogy’, it differs insofar as it attempts to avoid normalising agency or subjectivities. Therefore, what participants ‘should do or be’ is left for them to decide. This is defined in the project as a reflexive ethic, which, as suggested by Foucault in one of his last interviews, seeks not to “suggest what people ought to be, what they ought to do, what they ought to think and believe”,¹⁴ but to enable the construction of an awareness about how social mechanisms have, up to now, been able to work and how, therefore, these systems have conditioned the way we think, evaluate, act and relate to others. And then, starting from there, leave to the people themselves, knowing all the above, the possibility of self-determination and the choice of their own existence.¹⁵

The emphasis on critical engagement and the focus on self-reflexivity and on ‘sanctioned ignorances’¹⁶ in the project aims to prompt a process of unlearning privilege¹⁷ that may have the potential to enable the construction of more ‘ethical relations to the other’, as well as more ‘accountable reasoning’ – features that could be seen as essential for the ideal of participatory democracy, which also seems to be the essence of some of the conceptualisation of the Social Forums phenomena.

The Other Worlds Educational Rationale

In the first phase of the project a set of learning materials were developed by a group of educators, academics and activists from India, Brazil and England around thirteen themes or ‘open space units’:

12 Spivak, in D. Landry and G. MacLean (eds.) (1995) *The Spivak Reader*. London: Routledge.

13 See Freire, P. (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

14 Foucault quoted in Spivak’s essay ‘More on Power/Knowledge’, in D. Landry and G. MacLean (eds.) (1995) *The Spivak Reader*. London: Routledge, 156.

15 *Ibid.*

16 See Spivak, G. (1988) ‘Can the Subaltern speak?’ In: C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 271-313.

17 Unlearning is defined by Gayatri Spivak as the ability to question how truths are produced, descending to the level of the cultural and political formations that produce them. See D. Landry and G. MacLean (eds.) (1995) *The Spivak Reader*. London: Routledge.

- Knowledge and perspectives
- Globalisation and its effects
- The World Social Forum
- Agents of change
- War and terrorism
- Violence and non-violence
- Nationalism and fundamentalism
- Representation and exclusion
- Identity and multiculturalism
- Reform or revolution?
- Battle for resources
- Transnational solidarity
- Whose struggle?

The choice of themes was based on the structure of the Delhi initiative.

Each unit was designed to serve as an entry point into the issues and questions related to each theme. The project team has tried to cover a variety of language and political literacy levels, but the primary intended audience were 16 to 24 year olds, who might be curious or sceptical about political issues, but who do not describe themselves as ‘politicised’.

The starting point was the perception that learners need to be equipped to deal with difficult issues and questions related to themselves, their contexts – their identities, cultures, power, privilege, exclusion – and to other people and other contexts in order to take responsibility for their choices in relation to how they think, act and relate to others. However, in order to create the conditions for informed choice, learners (and teachers/educators) need to have the skills to deal with the complexity of global processes and with different kinds of knowledge in a ‘globalised’ world. Within the project, this set of skills and the knowledge about how global processes work and how they can be negotiated is called ‘transnational literacy’. These critical and analytical skills relate to the ability to perceive the origins and implications of assumptions that inform the choices that individuals and collectives make. Amongst these skills, the project privileges ‘self-reflexivity’, which relates to the ability to perceive and question how one’s own assumptions are/were constructed and the openness and willingness to listen (critically) to other possible ways of thinking about things which opens possibilities of different forms of agency (possibilities of intervention), of dialogue across difference and of transnational and transcultural solidarity.

The development of these skills require a move away from education seen as ‘knowledge transmission’ or ‘banking education’ as conceptualised by Paulo Freire, through which knowledge is deposited in students’ minds and withdrawn on tests, assignments and exams. The principle is that students need to construct the understanding of their places in the world through exposure to difference and critical engagement with it – so that they can learn to think independently and responsibly, becoming aware of their accountability for their reasoning and decisions. In order to achieve this teachers/educators cannot impose on learners what they believe learners

should think or do. This generally works the same way as tests and exams: learners will reproduce what has been taught them as long as there is surveillance and a system of reward and punishment in place. But outside the classroom, outside the school, the surveillance and imposition are exercised by other groups and if learners do not develop the skills to challenge these impositions and think independently, they will be less likely to choose to think in different ways. We suggest that a process that develops these skills can ‘empower’ students to negotiate their own subjectivities and identities and enable them to challenge and go beyond cultural practices that produce oppression, divisions, hate and inequalities in their contexts and in the world in a more effective and sustainable way than processes in which the choices are made for learners and in which learners are expected to conform to what has been decided without understanding the implications and responsibilities involved in all the options available.

The methodology of this project invites learners and educators to create open spaces – that are relatively safe from oppressive power relations – where students do not feel afraid to express their views freely and without fear in order to be able to challenge and go beyond them ‘in dialogue’ with other people. This does not mean that the authority of teachers/educators will be denied or nonexistent, but it does require this authority to be problematised and exercised in a more democratic and responsible way, so that students also share the responsibility of the creation of the space.

The methodology also invites learners and educators to engage critically and respectfully with their own views and the views of others. This implies a recognition that teachers and learners have and construct their own knowledge and that all knowledge is partial and incomplete. This strategic relativisation of the teachers’ views is necessary to make learners comfortable about expressing their perspectives without the fear of being looked down or silenced, about learning with one another and about developing an attitude of respect for different views. However, this respect does not mean an absolute relativisation of perspectives where ‘everything goes’. As knowledge and perspectives – or the lenses we look through at the world – are seen as always partial and incomplete, different perspectives are needed for transforming these lenses and therefore, critical engagement for the examination of assumptions and implications of perspectives is essential for this transformation to happen in a responsible and informed way.

The Development Process

The development process relied on a content group, an advisory group and a piloting group. All groups consisted of educators, academics, activists and students from different ‘persuasions’ – mostly working voluntarily or semi-voluntarily.¹⁸ The content group developed the basic materials for each of the ‘open space units’ on an online collaborative virtual environment (wiki). Some members (and also ‘outsiders’) took the formal role of ‘critical friends’ whose objective was to read the texts produced (and the

18 The rates paid per hour were ‘flattened’ in the project to £10 p/h. Some of us called this type of work ‘financially compensated activism’.

development process) in a critical way. The materials produced and the methodology, were then piloted with three pilot groups along the way (from May to September 2004) and the feedback collected through learning diaries, focus groups and interviews informed the re-constructions and re-directions of the project.¹⁹

Besides informing the re-directions, the evidence collected so far also suggests that this approach to transnational literacy has been successful in inspiring and engaging young people who did not define themselves as politicised or had an interest in ‘politics’ prior to the project. It also indicates that it has led participants to:

- Examine the origins and implications of their assumptions (develop self-reflexivity),
- Transform these assumptions through dialogue ‘in difference’, changing the ways they perceived themselves and other people
- Empower participants to negotiate their positions more effectively in social processes building on the notion of interconnectedness
- Feel they are able to intervene in the world in a more responsible way

There were seven steering meetings from March to October 2004 where the content, advisory and piloting groups met to reflect on the process and piloting results and re-define the framework for the project. Due to the diverse constitution of the three groups, the negotiations in the steering meetings were problematic at times,²⁰ but the balance of focus on the process and on contingent outcomes guaranteed a ‘final product’ of the first phase of the project that was carefully and responsibly produced, but is still unfinished and even contradictory. This product can be described as an online resource bank and a set of procedures for pedagogical interventions that are based on the conceptual framework already described.

Online Content²¹

The online content can be found on the website: www.mundi.org.uk/otherworlds. The materials selected or produced for this project portray ‘non-mainstream’ perspectives that challenge ‘common sense’ assumptions, in order to develop critical and analytical skills. By inviting participants to engage critically with the materials, we acknowledge that we do not necessarily endorse any of the perspectives presented – we use them strategically as aids for the kinds of learning processes that this project intends to initiate and support.

19 Language (in terms of accessibility) was by far (and in many senses still is) the greatest challenge that the project team had to face.

20 This learning process deserves further consideration, but this remains outside the remit of this paper.

21 This section was copied from the ‘Educational Rationale’ section on the Other Worlds website.

The introductions available on the site, written in the first phase of the project, were meant to provide readers with an 'activist perspective' on the themes. However, the outcomes of the first piloting schemes have provided evidence that they are not necessarily effective as 'entry points' due to the type of language used and previous knowledge assumed. Therefore, new introductions are being written following the model of the introductory unit. These should be available by the end of 2004.

The question section is divided into: self-reflexive questions, open space questions and further questions. We suggest that the self-reflexive questions should be dealt with by participants themselves as they address issues that might be too personal for an open space discussion. The 'open space' questions, though, were designed to stimulate dialogue and discussion and to encourage thought processes beyond what is perceived as 'common sense'. In many ways we perceive this as the most effective component of the project as it is through the questions that participants identify their own assumptions and recognise and consider other ways of knowing and being. Participants should not view the questions as a list to be answered – they are rather prompts for dialogue that may lead to directions defined by the participants themselves. The 'further questions' were designed with more politicised audiences in mind and therefore their language and the background knowledge required for discussions are of a different level.

The online interviews are an attempt to provide perspectives using a more attractive kind of media. We have tried to include the perspectives of activists, educators, academics and students from different backgrounds, but the process of collection of video-statements was limited to the availability of people, resources and language skills of the interviewees. We hope that in the future we will be able to develop a more comprehensive video-statement library that will go beyond the current limitations.

The texts section is divided into: selected texts, books, articles and films. The 'selected texts' were chosen for their degree of provocation. They (should) show a relatively wide range of 'non-mainstream' perspectives and different levels of language, but they are currently being revised together with the introductions. We welcome suggestions for articles, books and films for each of the themes – as well as for the introduction/selected text revisions.

We believe it is through the questions, introduction, interviews and texts that students are exposed to 'difference' (different perspectives about reality, power and knowledge) and are supported in their learning processes for the development of critical and analytical skills.

One feature that is currently being piloted to make the connection between questioning and action stronger is the introduction of problem solving tasks based on case studies related to challenges faced by NGOs, social movements or civil society groups, in which participants need to use the critical/analytical skills developed in the project to tackle real life-like problems. If effective, this new feature will be available on the website in February 2005.

Other features of the website include:

- A links section for each unit – where users will find a collection of websites of NGOs, special reports, global governance institutions, direct action groups and civil society networks and campaigns related to the specific themes;
- An ‘exchange ideas’ section with a discussion forum which can be used to foster dialogue in a virtual environment and a collaborative tool called ‘wiki’ which takes users to the virtual environment where the units are being revised and re-written. Anyone can use this development tool to participate in the construction of this project. We welcome and value contributions from teachers/educators and students;
- An ‘evaluation’ section – inviting educators from around the world to take part in a comparative research exercise to analyse and discuss the challenges and possibilities of the methodology proposed by the project;
- A newsletter with the latest information about the project;
- A general links section that connects this project to similar initiatives in other subject areas and parts of the world.

The project team encourages teachers/educators to evaluate each unit critically and choose or adapt whatever is useful for their contexts.

Conclusions

The project is one possible strategy for pedagogical interventions attempting to deal with complexity and uncertainty in a responsible way. This strategy tries to avoid normalising subjectivities and does not propose consensual outcomes for dialogue,²² which can be seen as an innovative aspect for pedagogical processes, but which by no means offers a universal or ‘ultimate’ solution for all educational challenges. The project should be read critically: the methodology might not work in certain contexts, the content was designed with a very specific target audience in mind and (despite all planning and evaluation) may be contradictory at times and the process prompted by what is proposed in the project *might* lead to individual confusion, internal conflict and frustration,²³ depending on the facilitation/moderation offered and/or participants’ learning processes.²⁴

Therefore, the Other Worlds is a limited and unfinished project, characteristics that can be seen, from the perspective promoted within the project itself, as consonant with what the project wants to do. By being unfinished, it can inspire individuals to ‘react’ to its limitations and attempt to go beyond them, sharing the ownership of this ‘adventure’ of

22 On the other hand, the project does not go against collective or individual action emerging from the group itself.

23 However, we do not necessarily see these things as inherently bad.

24 No educational process is actually immune to this.

reconstructing things that are perceived as important. At present, the project is an open collective initiative run by volunteers that always welcomes new contributors (educators /teachers /activists /students /academics /‘ordinary people’) who are interested in this methodology and think that they would like to work with people from this group or within their contexts and groups in a kind of partnership with the project

It is recognised, within the ‘loose collective’ that made this project possible, that what has been done needs to be taken further.²⁵ Therefore some members of this collective have put forward different proposals for its continuation, two of which for interventions in the formal education sector: one for a ‘transnational literacy’ programme for teacher training and 6th forms in the East Midlands and eight partner countries (hosted by MUNDI – the same NGO that hosted the Other Worlds project) and one for an international comparative research project which will try to collect evidence and map the learning processes of participants in the transnational literacy programme in different countries and contexts. The first proposal has been successful and the second is under way. More information about the two initiatives, the methodology and how to become involved can be found at www.mundi.org.uk/learningaboutothers.

Appendix



Open Space Introductory Unit: Knowledge and Perspectives

“Believe nothing because it is written in books.
Believe nothing because wise men say so.
Believe nothing because it is religious doctrine.
Believe it only because you yourself know it to be true.”
-Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (573-483 B.C.)

²⁵ A mid-term official report of the development and outcomes of the project was submitted to DFID in October and can also be found on the evaluation section of the website.

“On the one hand, the necessity of resisting the power of a closed knowledge creates in me an attitude of permanent openness towards others, towards the world. On the other hand it generates in me a continuing attitude of questioning myself that prevents me from becoming absolutely certain of being right. To protect myself from the dangers of closed knowledge, I cannot and must not close myself off to others or choose to think that only my truth is valid. On the contrary, the right way to keep awake and alert my capacity of right thinking, to improve my perception and to hear with respect is to be open to differences and to refuse the idea that I am absolutely right, which makes me incapable of learning anything new. In essence, the correct attitude of one who does not consider him or herself the ‘owner of truth’ is the attitude of permanent openness – openness to approaching and being approached, to questioning and being questioned, to agreeing and disagreeing.” – Adapted from Paulo Freire (1998)

**What do the two quotations tell you about knowledge and the person who knows?
Do you agree with what they say? Is it possible to agree with both?**

In academia (or the university environment), some people say that knowledge is objective and neutral. These people are usually called ‘modernists’ or ‘positivists’. They tend to believe that everything can be known and tested scientifically to produce a universal truth that is complete in itself (something that anyone could see in the same way). This is the most common approach in the natural sciences and is related to the idea that progress and development can be achieved through the use of science and technology to control the natural environment in order to build the perfect society.

Other people think that this idea of control cannot and should not be applied to people. They believe that human beings are different from one another and extremely complex, therefore they cannot be treated as objects. In addition, they believe that knowledge is not objective (there is no possibility of complete ‘neutrality’), as what is observed (even through scientific experiments) depends on the interpretation of the person who ‘sees’ it. Like a pair of glasses we wear, they think each of us has different lenses to look through at the world. These lenses determine what we see as real, ideal, true, good and bad. Rather than being constructed by each individual, these lenses are produced collectively in social interactions (in families, education, the media, religion, the government). These are the ‘constructivists’ and ‘critical theorists’ (amongst others) who are concerned about how our knowledges affect the way we see and relate to others, how others see and relate to us and (in some areas), how knowledge is related to power and how it affects the way wealth and labour are distributed in the world.

- a) **That each individual brings valid knowledge to the open space**(everyone is a pot of knowledge!)
- b) **That this knowledge deserves respect**(everyone should have the right to express themselves without fear of being ‘looked down’ by others and should be committed to listening to others with respect)
- c) **That all knowledge is related to who you are and where you come from**(we construct the lenses we look through at the world in our contexts and interactions with others)
- d) **That all knowledge is partial and incomplete**(we all see the world through different lenses that continuously change and there are no universally better or clearer lenses)
- e) **That all knowledge can and should be questioned through dialogue**(we should engage critically with actions, thoughts and beliefs of both ourselves and others as we need different lenses – other perspectives – to challenge and transform our own views).

In this project, **being critical is a positive thing**. Engaging critically with others (as opposed to engaging uncritically or disengaging critically) means opening up to dialogue with different perspectives in a process of sharing knowledge that has the potential to affect and transform everybody involved. It requires a willingness to think outside your normal thoughts, to ask questions you have never asked before, to expand and enrich your horizons and to experiment with new ways of thinking and doing things. **Do you agree with these ideas?**

Reflexive Questions (for personal reflections):

1. What makes you think the way you do?
2. How sure are you of what you think?
3. Are your ideas of what is good and what is true the same as other people's or do they differ? Why is this so?
4. Where do your perspectives come from?
5. What are the similarities and differences between what you think and what your parents think? Have you ever questioned why these similarities and differences exist?

Open Space Question (to be discussed in the group):

1. Do people in different parts of the world see things in the same way? Do you think there is something that is fundamentally true for everybody, regardless of where they come from or what their background is?
2. Where does our knowledge about the world come from? For example, think about how you conceive differences to rich and poor, powerful and powerless or respect and fear.
3. Who or what shapes our understanding of what is real? For instance, would you say that what the media presents is necessarily true and neutral?
4. Does anyone control the sources of your knowledge? What are the dangers of this situation?
5. Do you think any group (of 'experts' for example) should have the power to decide for other people (or for everyone) what a good society is? Who should decide what a good society is?
6. Some people believe that there is a better, 'more developed' way of seeing and relating to the world (a more developed culture) – as there are more backward and underdeveloped ways of seeing as well. Do you agree with that? What are the implications of accepting that as true?

Some people think that an expanding culture of competition, consumerism and individualism, that is sometimes said to be the most 'developed', has not brought a just and good society for everyone. Do you agree with that? Do you think this culture has the potential to do so? How can the common good be achieved?

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The World Social Forum: Exploiting the Ambivalence of ‘Open’ Spaces

April Biccum

abstract

In this paper I argue that it is a mistake to regard the new culture of politics and the ‘open space’ of the World Social Forum (WSF) as an immediate and euphoric redress coming out of this contemporary crisis moment. Using historical examples from colonial discourse analysis and recent ‘development’ processes, I argue that contemporary politics, as a direct trajectory of this history, is intrinsically paradoxical and ambivalent. Using the concept of ambivalence from the work of Homi Bhabha, and influenced by postcolonial theory in general, I suggest that, while this ambivalence is problematic for our times, it nevertheless is productive and exploitable for progressive social movements. Following this logic, I argue that the WSF, arising as it does out of a crisis moment, also is fraught with productive paradoxes and ambivalences and should not be presumed to exist as an a priori ‘openness’. I propose a strategy of resistance for this particular moment of crisis (in the meaning of neo-liberal globalization – of which the anti-globalization movement is part and parcel). I also affirm the value of a political praxis which openly, knowingly and purposefully exploits ambivalent moments in political, pedagogical, representational and ‘open’ spaces; so as to politicize people, engage in politicized activity and enable a broader range of people to become critically aware of the hegemonic narratives that naturalize the current world order and posit that ‘There Is No Alternative’. Clearly, a wide spectrum of people, both in the metropolis and in the ‘developing’ world, *are* critically aware and are engaged in the work of *engendering critical awareness*. This paper makes the case that the World Social Forum and its tangential activities also can provide a tool for exploiting ambivalent moments, so as to reach beyond the strata of the already ‘converted’.

Introduction

The logic of our contemporaneity can be characterised by the logic of a crisis in signification: a crisis in the narration of history and contemporaneity – or history as contemporaneity – as well as a political and economic crisis; a crisis grounded in the question – ‘how do we organise the world now that we are ‘at the end of history’’. Has the dream of liberal democracy materialised? Or is there still the space or possibility for living *otherwise*? The crisis in signification for the neo-liberal world order, as represented by the mantra of the World Economic Forum (WEF) that ‘There is No Alternative’ to the globalisation of neo-liberal capitalism, also is accompanied by a recent spate of literature in history and on the ‘New American Imperialism’¹ which is

1 There has been a flurry of revisionist literature on Empire and Imperialism recently, the most popular of which has been Niall Ferguson’s *Empire*, televised for Channel Four, whose premise is that the British Empire has provided more benefits than harm and, in being responsible for the creation of the

apologetic on the question of empire, and designed precisely to mask or postpone the possibility of raising of these sets of questions. These questions are being and have been raised in an organised response to the mantra of neo-liberal capital in the increasingly consolidated anti-globalisation movement: a series of protests amalgamated in recent years into a yearly counter-meet to the WEF. This is the World Social Forum (WSF), whose organisers and participants respond to the neo-liberal mandate by claiming that 'Another World is Possible'. It does so, its organisers claim, by promoting and practising a 'new' kind of politics: a politics of the 'open space'; a post-modern, non-hierarchical, decentralised politics that is a response to the political activism of modernity, to the politics of identity, to the hegemony of liberal humanism which informs and paradoxically underpins the neo-liberal project. The advocates of this 'new culture of politics' champion this 'open space' as a radical departure from the 'old' style of politics: as a space for both education *and* mobilisation which occurs *outside* of the corruption of a free market economy and in which the dream of liberal democracy is realised as a radical 'living democracy' of free association.

I argue here, however, that it is a mistake to regard the new culture of politics and the 'open space' of the WSF as an immediate and euphoric redress coming out of this contemporary crisis moment. Rather than existing outside the corrupting influence of the globalised economy, the WSF as an organised response to neo-liberal capitalism actually is deeply embedded and equally a part of the crisis of signification characterising the contemporary political moment. Drawing on the cultural criticism and theory of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak I argue that this contemporary crisis in the logic and discourse of neo-liberal capitalism, as for colonial culture and discourse in the past, is an *ambivalent* moment, and that the WSF also is fraught with and caught within this political ambivalence. But rather than dismiss this ambivalence on the grounds of its contamination by the hegemonic practices of globalised capital, as has been done in relation to the WSF04 by some critical commentators from the Marxist-Leninist camp in India, I argue that ambivalence is always/already *productive*, in that it unwittingly permits the possibility for its exploitation in the form of resistance. In this paper, following the influences of post-structuralism on the theorisation of contemporary politics, I thus argue against naïve postmodern assumptions of received decentralisation, and of pure and uncontaminated 'open spaces', and I make the case for the conscious exploitation of fleeting ambivalent moments in contemporary politics of which the WSF is one. Coalescing around this project of exploitable ambivalences towards a non-directive critical pedagogy this 'new culture of politics' might go some way towards raising what I will refer to as a 'critical (self)consciousness'.² An un-controlled and uncontrollable praxis of framing, exposing the staging of popular narratives: prizing open spaces in fleeting moments in which the raising of fundamental questions becomes the politics of the possible.

'modern' world, has achieved in part its civilising mission. This has been accompanied by, and paves the way for, apologetic gestures within the political studies literature which claim that American Imperialism is 'new' and largely benevolent. See Lal (2004), Ferguson (2004), Bacevich (ed.) (2003), Barber (2003), Johnson (2004), Mann (2003), Todd (2004) and Lefever (1999).

2 The framing of this concept is informed and inspired by Spivak's now notorious prescription to 'unlearn one's privilege as one's loss' in addition to her advocating of a transnational literacy.

I begin by describing what Homi Bhabha means by the term ambivalence in his description of colonial culture and discourse, and I indicate how I intend to use it throughout this paper. I then rehearse the debate which has occurred over the 'open space', briefly review critical responses to the Forum in the form particularly of the Mumbai Resistance, and narrate my own personal experience of the World Social Forum in Mumbai 2004 to demonstrate further this ambivalence.³ I conclude by making the case that ambivalences can be, and are being, exploited for the purposes of de-homogenising or de-colonising knowledge. This process is not new, is part and parcel of the effort to produce counter-narratives and raise 'critical self-consciousness', via engaging in critical pedagogies and praxes necessary for the realisation of 'other worlds'. The WSF is a significant, if (and because) ambivalent, moment and process in this endeavour.

Empire and Ambivalence

From the late nineteenth century, the consolidation of liberal democracies in Europe held problematic paradoxes for Europe's relations with the rest of the world. This relationship is what Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to as the ambivalence in the global organisation of politics which persistently haunted colonial rhetoric.⁴ For Bhabha, the structural ambivalence in the belligerent rule by emerging liberal democracies of foreign territories is revealed anxiously in colonial discourse in fleeting, uncanny moments in which the discourse of colonial authority lets slip the fear that its benevolence in the civilising mission might be manifesting itself in violence. That is, that a colonial relationship over foreign territories contravenes the emerging late nineteenth century liberal discourse of freedom, fraternity, equality and democracy.⁵ These anxious moments in colonial rhetoric occurred also in relation to the issue and exercise of free trade, implemented in British colonial policy from 1846,⁶ and, despite shifts in discourse and policy back toward direct imperialism after the conference of Berlin in 1885, remains the policy directive motivating corporate-led globalisation, to which the WSF is an organised response. In other words, what requires emphasising (and which seldom is in anti-neo-liberal or anti-globalisation rhetoric), is that neo-liberalism is the return or taking up of a classical late eighteenth and early nineteenth

3 I was a participant as a 'Media' delegate in the WSF in Mumbai 2004 with my colleague Brazilian educationalist Vanessa Andreotti. Together we documented the Forum, and conducted interviews with key figures such as Thomas Ponniah and Chico Whitaker. Those interviews appear in Situation Analysis 4 (www.situationanalysis.co.uk) and also were utilised as materials in an educational project headed by Vanessa upon our return. The educational materials and project can also be found online at www.otherworlds.co.uk (also see Andreotti, this issue).

4 The same uncanny anxiety which Bhabha notices in British colonial discourse on India recurs in contemporary development rhetoric, as I argue in Biccum (2005, forthcoming).

5 See 'Articulating the Archaic', in Bhabha (1994).

6 For discussions of the relevance of this shift in colonial policy and its resonance throughout the Nineteenth Century and into the Twentieth, see Semmel (1971), Furinival (1956), Arndt (1987), Havinden and Meredith (1993), and Douglas (1996).

Century emphasis on the freedom of the market with major continuities with previous colonial regimes.⁷

The following quote from J. S. Furnival, in his discussion of the rhetoric around Free Trade in British colonial policy in the early Twentieth Century, illustrates this ambivalence between global democracy, world economic leadership and a never changing relationship of Development and/or economic and military coercion between the 'first' and 'third' worlds:

Free Trade is good for Britain and good therefore for India; social legislation protects British labour and should, therefore, promote welfare in the tropics; democracy strengthens the political future of Europe and should therefore, help dependencies toward autonomy. (Furnival, 1956: 7)

This then is the ambivalence integral to demands for the imposition of freedom and democracy on supposedly autonomous nations, such that if 'democracy' is not 'naturally' forthcoming, it will be violently imposed by 'democratic' powers from without. Of course, this has become brutally evident in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For Homi Bhabha, colonial discourse therefore is an ambivalent discourse. It is a discourse that produces a continual undecideability inherent and integral to its articulation of difference – its deciding, distancing and differentiation of the two terms coloniser/colonised: "[i]t is in the enunciatory act of splitting that the colonial signifier creates its strategies of differentiation that produce an undecideability between contraries or oppositions" (Bhabha, 1994: 128). This ambivalence of which Bhabha speaks is especially noticeable in the dual mandate of British colonial policy *vis à vis* India. This dictated that the civilising mission of British colonial policy was a benevolent gesture encapsulating and signifying British cultural morality and hence superiority, *at the same time*, it just so happened, that the practice of colonisation was in the British economic interest.

There are two competing aspects of this ambivalence of the dual mandate. First, the idea of development, democratisation and/or welfare becomes a two-pronged moral project whereby Western beneficence has the conflated and convenient effect of being good for 'them' *and* for 'us'. That is, progress equals freedom for the 'developing/colonised/Third World' and again just happens to be in the economic interest of the (corporate) West. This marks a shift whereby 'our' welfare becomes connected to 'their' welfare in a synechdochal conflation which masks the actual relation between economic interests and exploitation: the interests of the corporate West become the interests of 'the World'. What happens, in Gayatri Spivak's terminology, is a '*worlding of the world*', or a '*worlding of West as World*' (Spivak, 1987). Second, the sublated mirror terms of progress, democracy, and development – that is, backwardness, authoritarianism and poverty respectively – are posited as both a 'handicap' or barrier to Third World freedom and, conveniently enough, a threat to 'global' security, economic welfare and the functioning of the system.⁸ In other words, what is inscribed in the Dual

7 For arguments to this effect, see Reno (2004), Gallagher & Robinson (1953), O'Rourke & Williamson (1999).

8 For evidence of this perpetual construction of poverty as a cause in and of itself see Government White Papers (1997, 2000) and DFID promotional literature generally. For echoes of this sentiment in

Mandate referred to above, and repeated in contemporary and globalising neo-liberalism, also is the logic of a 'threat': their poverty, their lack of development, their authoritarianism stands in their way, *and* in ours.

This threat also is double. There is the threat of profit loss, control of land, cheap labour and resources, that is, all that is needed to reproduce liberal democratic life in the metropole; *and* the threat of exposure of the fact that liberal democracy in the metropole is dependent upon this ambivalent, unequal and violently exploitative relationship with developing and/or un(under)developed nations. Colonial and/or development policy as the cause of poverty, inequality, etc. in the first place is masked, and a differentiation and distancing between two terms is produced which effects, as Bhabha explains, coeval statements of belief:

Splitting constitutes an intricate strategy of defence and differentiation in the colonial discourse. Two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the same place, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality. This results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself productive of differentiations. Splitting is then a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negation or elision; it is a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief. (Bhabha, 1994: 132)

Thus two terms become articulated together discursively so as to establish and produce their difference, e.g. coloniser/colonised, developed/un(under)developed; but simultaneously this difference must be rigorously maintained so as to avoid running the risk of their conceptual collision – of exposing their structural relationship, the causal relationship *between the two* (also see S. Sullivan, this issue).

My intention is to take this concept of ambivalence beyond Bhabha's use of it to describe colonial discourse and to show that it also can be applied to contemporary political contexts (Biccum, 2005). The possibility of this application, I have argued elsewhere, might then tell us something about the nature of this particular historical moment, especially as its current narration remains relatively open (*ibid.*, and Biccum and Moore, forthcoming).

For instance, the crisis in signification which I described in the introduction manifests itself here in the UK as a crisis of the national narrative. Thus there is a profound and ambivalent slippage in the question, 'what does it mean to be a British citizen?' This connotes not only the politico-socio-legal-economic context for the current moment. It also carries the haunting spectre (if perpetually suppressed reminder) of Britain's colonial past, simultaneously implying issues of migration, migrant communities, multiculturalism, community cohesion and race relations. Anxiety over migration in the press and in policy is rife, measures are draconian, borders are closing down, military expenditure and adventure is increasing, as is development aid. Assimilation policies have been introduced, race relations legislation has recently been updated, and migrant communities are being monitored and policed whilst money is spent to 'cohere'

mainstream discourse from the previous government see Government White Paper (1995). This sentiment has been expressed explicitly throughout mainstream development discourse.

fractured communities found to be leading 'parallel lives'.⁹ The death knell has sounded on 1980s multi-culturalism. Community 'leaders' complicit with government policies are being sought, while national security is paramount and persistently under threat from the 'other' organising within. British citizenship as an 'ideal' is supposedly up for public debate at the same time that it has been institutionalised *and 'fixed'* within the National Curriculum (in the discipline known as Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)) as part of the fabric informing and attempting to produce national subjectivities. The government is promoting as a part of PSHE the introduction of a 'Global Dimension' in the national curriculum as part of its push for 'Development Education', apparently aimed at promoting an understanding among young people of 'global interconnectedness' – a euphemism for the normalisation of neo-liberal globalisation. 'Global Citizenship' has been included in the national curriculum at the same time that the nation's borders are closing down for the rather more specific citizenships of people from countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. There is a deep ambivalence, in Homi Bhabha's sense of the word, for a liberal democratic nation state forced to legislate, for legitimacy's sake, against its own institutional racism. There is an even deeper ambivalence around the ways in which an institutionally racist society enforces its own legislation against the racism officially admitted to permeate the fabric of its institutions. The current paradoxical climate of border paranoia, global migration, globalisation, millennium development and foreign intervention has the potential to heighten awareness of ambivalences in the construction of contemporary social life. It is an ambivalence which I feel becomes most profound, and can best be exploited, in both pedagogical and political/public spaces. This is because these are spaces in which conscious/critical practitioners of (development) education can knowingly, and purposefully, reframe the relationship implicit in 'Global Citizenship' between 'our' lives and 'their' lives, in a way that forces a collision, and/or creates the possibility for critical engagement with the two differentially but simultaneously articulated terms, i.e. 'ourselves' as 'developed and those in the world 'out there' needing to *be developed*.¹⁰

The use of the notion of ambivalence is a way for Bhabha to describe, according to a post-structuralist logic, the desire within apparatuses of power to fix meaning in discourse that nevertheless is perpetually undermined by discourses' unceasing movement, flux and motion, which renders the fixity of meaning an impossibility and makes the repetition of utterances a necessity. The promise of a better world (for some and never for all) is predicated upon and really only made possible through colonial/imperial/capitalist exploitation. This is not a universal function of power's operation of but the *historically specific paradox of our time*: a paradox which post-colonial theory, and other political writings from the Third World, including

9 This rhetoric has entered race relations discourse via the inquiry into the summer violence of 2001 in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, conducted by the commission led by Ted Cante titled 'Community Cohesion: A Report by the Independent Review Team', [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs2/comm_cohesion/html]. It largely blames the insular separatism of migrant communities, encouraged during 1980s multiculturalism, for the violence, and has been the spur for new government spending on projects which promote 'community cohesion'.

10 See Barker (2004), for the struggles practitioners are having between government directives for Development Education and practitioner's more idealistic and political/pedagogical goals

Dependency Theory and other nationalist and anti-colonial literatures¹¹ have, throughout the twentieth century, been persistently at pains to point out. The impossibility of fixing meaning and power structures absolutely, produces this ambivalence within structures, apparatuses and discourses of power, and it is this that contributes to periodic crises in signification.

To sum up my understanding of ambivalence, then, it is a simultaneous 'either/or' which produces the possibility of a question, is productive of uncertainties and creates the space for movement one way or another. Discursive ambivalence produces a fissure convenient for the mobilisation of activism and resistance to discourses of hegemony and power. An ambivalent space leaves room for the 'hijacking' of that space, that narrative or that agenda; of forcing a collision between two differently articulated terms, and of exposing the staging implicit in the narration of neo-liberal capitalism. Because ambivalent space is productive space, what is of utmost importance is how we utilise and engage with this space; to use that ambivalence against itself, to push it back the other way.

The exploitation of ambivalences in this way holds forth the promise of raising a critical (self) consciousness; a strategy and a praxis for the ability and desire to ask questions about one's position in the world, about privilege (or lack thereof), about the political implications of this privilege (or lack thereof), about the connections between your life, your world, your understanding and those of others. This can heighten one's ability to analyse, question, critique and resist the hegemonic narratives, apparatuses of power and oppression that currently exist, partly through (re)thinking one's complicity in those apparatuses. Exploring one's consciousness of what is happening in the world, why it is happening, and what it has got to do with 'me'. Exploring, seeking out and encouraging others, in negotiation and solidarity, a consciousness of how the world can be otherwise and exploring strategies for the part you can play in effecting change (given that change is desired). In these terms, the Social Forum process, as both political and pedagogical space, can, I feel, do much to bring itself beyond the consciousness of the already converted.

Experiencing the Forum: Ambivalent Spaces at the WSF 2004

Euphoric defences of the Forum as a manifestation of a radical democracy contradict my own experience of the Forum, parts of which I found to be problematically hierarchical and yet highly politically productive in its spontaneity and uncontrollable multiplicity. It *was* a space, depending on how you engaged with it, which fostered a transnational literacy, a space in which the very recipients of World Bank dispossession policies could walk up to you at any moment and tell you, through an interpreter, of their experiences of dispossession. But it also was a space fraught with contradictions, where there was a clear (to my eyes at least) gendered and racialised division of labour

11 E.g. Amin (1972 & 1989), Cardoso (1982), Diop (1987), Fanon (1986 & 1967), Memmi (1965), Frank (1978), Hobsbawm (1968), James (1993), Césaire (1972), Mudimbe (1988), Nkrumah (1965), Rodney (1981), Wallerstein (1984), Walvin (1993), Mariategui (1926 & 1929), Williams (1994).

(especially with respect to garbage collection and toilet maintenance) and a distinct hierarchy of access whereby the possession of a 'Media' badge afforded the most privilege and freedom of movement.

While, on the one hand, there were a bewildering and wonderful array of cultural diversity and cross cultural communication, interaction and exchange despite language barriers (I received numerous hugs and kisses from girls and women) and the freedom of expression for just about every political issue under the sun, there was also a bewildering stratification in wealth and prestige, manifested particularly around accommodation (five star hotels for some participants, camping outside the grounds for many others – myself and my colleague were fortunate enough to be hosted by friends), and a hierarchy of access and participation whereby Mumbai's most abject it seemed – those urban slum dwellers not fortunate enough to have NGO sponsorship – remained outside the gates begging money and food from participants as they came to and left the proceedings. Within the Forum itself there seemed to be a division and virtually no dialogue between two factions: the politically reformist NGOs discussing in cosy tents over glossy promotional literature ways to democratise current development policies, and the hoards of angry groups marching and making up noise throughout the Forum with what seemed to me to be a very clear message: "Down IMF! Down WTO! *Down, Down, Down, Down!*" So much for productive contamination or pedagogical levelling out.

The 'open space', it seems to me, performs more like a market-place (also see Gilbert, this issue). Post-development critic Gerald Berthoud defines the market of neo-liberal capitalism as follows:

The market as place is a bounded, situated phenomenon, clearly differentiated from ordinary life. [...] Ideally, the individual is totally free to act in his own interests; no explicit limits are imposed. Such behaviour would be dangerously uncontrollable in everyday social practice. Hence, individuals in the marketplace are no longer seen as social beings with particular rights and duties. They are liberated from a deep feeling of belonging to a community. Furthermore, they may not bring their potential conflicts with them. To express this in a positive way, individuals must be able to initiate utilitarian exchange with anyone they choose. In this idealised scheme, the marketplace is composed of an aggregate of strangers willing to exchange with each other for their mutual advantage. (Berthoud, 1992: 75)

So like a conventional market place, autonomous NGOs at the Forum compete for space to host their seminars and events; the ones with most prestige and financial backing have the best time slots and venues and affording therefore the greatest attendance. From one perspective, the WSF facilitated a unique opportunity for a talk-shop for the reformist/welfare liberal faction of the global finance and trading infrastructure. The 'open space' of the WSF also is a regulated space in which, like the description of the market above, conflicts, violence and party affiliations are left at the door and individuals and NGOs are free to mobilise to their mutual advantage.

In my travels through the Forum there seemed to be little or no engagement between these two factions: the largest NGOs and the smaller critical grassroots movements and individuals, particularly of the anti-imperialist variety. In the few seminars I participated in, in which there was a challenge put by a member of the audience to the dominating reformist position of the hosting NGO, it went largely ignored. This happened more

than once and it recurred particularly around the issue of development. I was also struck as I moved through the Forum and spoke to and encountered various people and movements by the variety of ways in which a kind of pedagogy was employed as political praxis. We spoke to many people whose activities and activism were focused on education and the raising of awareness to combat hegemonic knowledge apparatuses. In between seminars we interviewed an anti-communitarian theatre group who were engaged in countering communitarian state sponsored violence through the use of theatre in villages to promote an awareness of the issues and stem the violence. We met and spoke to these gentlemen while sitting in a green clearing. We also met and interviewed Ahmed Shawki, an Egyptian American and the editor of the *International Socialist Review*, who is actively engaged in promoting critical awareness of U.S. foreign policy among Americans through alternative media. Many Americans, he argues, are aware of media propaganda and the fascist control of narratives in the media and are thirsty for information produced outside the U.S. because they don't trust the information produced inside the U.S. Ahmed is actively trying to provide this alternative narrative. We came across several educators who viewed their role as primarily political and during a session on 'post-development' a leading member of the Post-Development Network in France spoke of the need to 'decolonise the mind' and try to get beyond the restrictive epistemological constraints imposed by notions of modernity and development as hegemonically operative terms. Peter Reil, a former U.S. army officer and Vietnam Vet, spoke at the Mumbai Resistance about the necessity of raising the critical consciousness among working class soldiers who have no means of questioning their role in various imperial missions. He spoke himself of the effects of the Vietnam War on the psyche of soldiers in a way which was reminiscent of Frantz Fanon.

A 'New' Culture of Politics? Exploiting Forum Ambivalence; Promoting Transnational Literacy

I have suggested that at national and international levels we are experiencing a crisis in signification of which the WSF, with its appeal to alternatives, is a manifestation. But just as the WSF is a manifestation, or a result, of this crisis – that is, of the failure of dominant discourses to convince everyone that there is no alternative – it also is fraught with all the same ambivalences, ambiguities and contradictions of that crisis. This is first and foremost apparent in the debate over the Forum as 'open space'. The WSF desires to embody the new politics of networks based on transient association which mobilised mass protests such as those against the WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle 1999, and proclaims itself an open space for facilitating the mobilisation of civil society against corporate led neo-liberal globalisation. The 'open space' is meant to be a direct alternative to conventional politics, the myth of liberal democracy, the fallacy of representational politics predicated on the problematic modern ideal of autonomous, rational, individual and bourgeois subjects. Embracing a post-modern decentering of that subject, the 'open space' levels the hierarchy associated with conventional representational politics and avant-garde movement politics and decentralises the identity of those participating in the space, enabling a freedom of association and the

possibility of solidarity across the conventional identity politics of modernity, and across differing political interests.

In our interviews with Thomas Ponniah, co-editor of the book *Another World is Possible: popular alternatives to globalisation at the World Social Forum* (2003), for example, he claimed that the Forum is inherently contradictory, trying “to walk a tightrope between two visions”, the modern centralised and the postmodern decentralised. The Forum tries at one and the same time to identify a common enemy – neoliberal globalisation – while simultaneously “releasing a plethora of alternatives”, trying to “produce a universalism of difference” (Ponniah, in Ponniah and Andreotti, 2004). For Ponniah, the Forum is a glimpse of utopia trying to embrace a radical democracy: “[t]his movement’s durability is built on the depth of its democratic process, and at this point, it is the most sophisticated and inclusive democratic process the world has ever seen” (*ibid.*). Thus for Ponniah, the ‘space’ of the WSF can be seen as a space of becoming: for the production of a ‘living’, which I interpret as moving and fluctuating, democracy. The WSF stands as an example of the utopia which is desired by the anti-globalisation movement, not a Manichean telos but as something that is happening in the WSF grounds itself.

It is easy to get caught up in the fervour of this utopianism until it is remembered that neo-liberal or post-modern capitalism is itself constructed upon and operates according to the logic of non-hierarchical networks (see Hardt and Negri, 2000; Kiely, 2005; Hoogvelt, 1997; Cox, 1987 & 1996), thus illustrating the problematic that Spivak continually sites from a post-structuralist perspective, that critique and/or resistance is forced to occupy and utilise that which is being critiqued and/or resisted (Spivak, 1987). Thus according to Jai Sen, a prominent figure in the WSF process and co-editor of the WSF’s official text *Challenging Empires*: “[i]t is not always easy to see the differences between the ‘alternative’ globalisation proposals with the idea of many business leaders that some democratisation is necessary in order to make the global expansion of capitalism acceptable” (Interview with Jai Sen, 2004).¹²

What this illustrates is a *productivity* in the complexity of ambivalence and the possibility of its exploitation, and not a defeatism or an undermining of agency as some critics of post-structuralist thinking would have.¹³ Exploiting ambivalence is never a matter of imagining you can create a space ‘outside’, but of pushing the boundaries of what is to hand.¹⁴ This begs the question of what might happen if the ambivalences

12 www.otherworlds.co.uk

13 These criticisms come especially from a ‘classical’ Marxist camp. E.g. see Ahmad (1992), Jameson (1998) and Eagleton (1996).

14 Bhabha illustrates the exploitation of ambivalence in resistance to colonial domination in his ‘signs taken for wonders’ in which he gives three examples of ways in which key texts in the ‘civilising mission’ were used, unwittingly, against themselves. Texts used in England’s civilising mission, particularly the Bible, for example, were “written...in the name of the father and the author, these texts [...] immediately suggest the triumph of the colonist moment...” (Bhabha, 1994: 105). These books were presumed to be ‘universally adequate’ and had as the aim of their circulation, the production of adequate and appropriate subjectivities, ready to receive the civilisation that would be so benevolently bestowed upon them. The civilising mission for Bhabha represents a shift to a much more “interventionist and ‘interpellative’ ambition... for a culturally and linguistically homogeneous India” (*ibid.*). Bhabha describes the reception of the Bible into India in the early Nineteenth Century

inscribed in the practices of authority were knowingly, purposefully exploited? As Bhabha says, when “the words of the masters become the site of hybridity [...] then we may not only read between the lines, but ever seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain” (*ibid.*).

It could be argued that the WSF, in setting itself up in opposition to the World Economic Forum, actually becomes its sublated mirror term and functions according to similar insidious logic of duplicity (as described above). The place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial within such a system of ‘disposal’ as I have proposed, thus is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional (Bhabha, 1994). The clear and defined position being laid out in the Charter of Principles that attendees must endorse before attending is that the WSF is ‘open to groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society centred on the human person’. Thus the ‘open space’ of the WSF is from the outset closed to any one not opposed to neo-liberalism, any one engaged in the use of violence as political praxes, anyone affiliated with a political party. Similar to the paradox produced by the belligerent spread of ‘civilisation’ through military despotism, the ‘open space’ of the WSF is not and never intended to be what it claims to be. As Jai Sen, commenting on this debate¹⁵ over the ‘open space’ asks: “[i]f the Forum is indeed restricted to only those who already have a clear and defined position, how can it be considered to be ‘open’?” (Sen, 2004: 217).

In other words, the WSF has already attempted to fix meaning of the crisis of which it is seeking to take advantage. Similarly, the openness of the ‘open space’ clearly is not so open and neither, as we shall see, is the ‘space’ so horizontal. Chico Whitaker, one of the three founding progenitors of the WSF phenomenon argues strongly for the maintenance of the WSF as a space, rather than a movement (the structure of the traditional vanguardism of leftist politics), because only a space maintains its ‘horizontal’ orientation, with no leaders and operates as he says, ‘like a square without an owner’. This space, he says, will work as a ‘factory of ideas’ (the metaphor of production should not go unnoticed): an incubator from which new initiatives can emerge, with mobilisation beyond the space one of its primary aims. Responding to the criticism that the organisers and leaders of the WSF are still largely white, male and middle class, Whitaker says that because the WSF is a space for facilitation, representation on the organising committee and in the International Council does not matter, since all the space needs to function is people and institutions willing to perform the task of organising and facilitating the use of the square without interfering with what is discussed in it, or the freedom guaranteed to its participants.

as a situation in which the assumption of its authority is undermined by its inappropriate use (as anything other than a ‘holy’ book), and by questions raised by the “natives” about the English presence which accompanies it. “Revealing”, Bhabha says, “the hybridity of authority and inserting their insurgent interrogations in the interstices” (*ibid.*). The subversive character of the Indian response to English texts occurs much as a result of the inevitable instability of authoritative texts.

15 For this debate and other critical engagements with the forum see Sen et al (2004).

These ambivalences are manifested also in Teivo Teivanen's assertion that "it is possible [for the WSF] to be an arena and an actor simultaneously" (Sen *et al.*, 2004: 122-129). But Teivanen's defense of this duplicity also reveals an anxious ambivalence and produces coeval statements of belief:

While there are reasons to maintain coherence and some underlying rules in the process [*a desire to fix meaning*] so that the WSF brand [*an interesting appropriation of corporate marketing language*] does not simply evaporate [*anxiety over the impossibility of fixing meaning*], too much control by the IC and the secretariat is bound to limit the creativity of those in *charge* of the *decentralised* events [*contradiction and coeval statement of belief*]. (*ibid.*, emphasis and asides mine)

What this debate by the participants in and around the staging of the WSF highlights is the naïveté, perhaps somewhat insidious, of presuming that the open space is a space without struggle, devoid of politics and power (also see De Angelis, Dowling and L. Sullivan, this issue). In fact, it is a space, or rather an openness, which must be struggled for. The continual and repetitive desire for fixity amid the motion of politics, of people, of discourse and the world means that one cannot define the boundaries of a space (itself a function of power), declare it open and expect it to remain so. The open space is not a space without movement, it is a space within and amid movement, never static but part of the perpetual motion of social life. The WSF, as its critics and counter-spaces reveal, is part of the struggle to define exactly what the struggle is. Is it a struggle against corporate-led globalisation, all forms of globalisation, capitalism, the domination of one state by another or the entire imperialist system of states? Is it a struggle for the reform, overthrow or transformation of existing institutions and organisation and according to whose interests? These are precisely the questions which are up for grabs and why the WSF must be situated as endemic to the crisis in signification: not outside of it, or occurring as its redress. The alternatives offered depend entirely on how one is framing the question and what is being struggled for is what is at stake in the WSF. It is a difference in emphasis between postmodernism, that emphasizes plurality without foregrounding structural inequality, and a post-structuralist perspective which brings the question of foundations to the centre of its inquiry (Young, 1990). This means that what becomes important, and what we have to be vigilantly mindful of, is not simply that the space exists, *but how and to what ends the space for mobilisation and resistance is used*. This is a question I feel we should ask tirelessly of ourselves and others: it bears both the mark of politics, i.e. as the struggle for meaning and power, and the mark of personal responsibility. How are we, each of us going to engage, how we are obliged to engage, or where exactly is the space for our engagement? These questions do not end with the closure of the Forum, but carry over into all the networks and political activity engendered and participating 'there', and this is especially so given the diversity of positions and movements involved.

That there is no singularity of vision within the WSF or the anti-globalisation movement is evidenced by the many factions from reformist, transformist and revolutionary present at the Forum, and in its opposing spaces such as the Mumbai Resistance (MR) at WSF 2004. The Forum has also come under fire for privileging groups from civil society and organisations over individuals. NGOs and civil society, the critics argue, are themselves an ambivalent manifestation of the institutionalisation and government appropriation of

grass roots politics.¹⁶ For example, this ambivalence was emphasised repeatedly in the criticisms emerging from the Marxist-Leninist camp which organised the Mumbai Resistance, a counter-event that occurred simultaneously with the WSF's staging in India. Of particular relevance for these critics was the issue of funding and the affiliation of the WSF's organisers, a key argument being that global aid and development projects furnished by NGOs is paradoxically funded by the same governments (as affiliates to the international monetary and trading regime) whose violence makes the 'humanitarian' aid necessary. According to this critique, NGOs function ambivalently within the system in much the same role and performing many of the same functions as Nineteenth Century colonial missions. With such a strong NGO presence in its organisation and participation, the WSF offers for these critics no plausible alternatives, but is rather a more insidious part of the problem of imperialism.¹⁷

In our interviews with them,¹⁸ Whitaker and Ponniah responded to the criticisms of the MR by citing the plurality of the WSF itself and the fact that all of these competing factions on the left are participating and engaging in the Forum. And in doing so, they claim, there occurs a kind of levelling out or productive contamination across ideological lines. This leads both defenders of the WSF to emphasize *the pedagogical element* of the Forum. The challenge, for Ponniah in this respect, is to "decolonise the conditions of knowledge production itself", for which the Forum can play a large part. It is clear that the pedagogical aspect of the Forum similarly endorsed by Whitaker is inspired by Freirian critical pedagogies and not conventional power/subjectivity driven pedagogies, so that this potential for cross-ideological contamination comes from a questioning of the self when confronted by the other, a learning to unlearn from the other which has the potential to happen to every participant in the Forum. This kind of pedagogy, for Whitaker, emphasises and *invites* critical engagement.

In this response to the question of pedagogy, Ponniah draws attention to the problematics of conventional education. Ponniah describes the ambivalence inherent in the liberal democratic project of education, an ambivalence which also is connected to its use as a tool historically and contemporaneously in subjectivity production at home and abroad. Thus:

[t]he education system has always been a project for producing good citizens. However, producing good bourgeois citizens necessarily reproduces a consciousness of the contradictions within the overall system. [...] So mainstream knowledge is inherently potentially revolutionary. The challenge for an educator is: how do we teach the student to pursue the interrogation of democracy down to its most radical implications? (Ponniah, in Ponniah and Biccum, 2004: 18).

16 For evidence of this process at the 'international' level, see 'The Economics and Politics of the World Social Forum: lessons for the struggle against globalisation' (2004), produced by the Research Unit for Political Economy in India and distributed at the WSF's counter-meet the Mumbai Resistance and at the WSF itself. For evidence of this occurring in the black voluntary sector domestically, see Kundnani (2002) and other works by A. Sivananadan on the Institute for Race Relations website (<http://www.irr.org.uk>).

17 For a wealth of articles articulating this position visit www.peoplesmarch.com and www.mumbaioresistance.org.

18 www.otherworlds.co.uk

It is this ambivalence in traditional pedagogy that Paulo Freire and advocates of critical pedagogy at the Forum aim in part to redress. So that the direction or result of the educational process is left open-ended and both parties in critical pedagogies are presumed to be changed by the process. Brazilian educationalist Clarissa Menezes Jordao (2004) has indicated that there is a danger even in critical pedagogies of their slipping into a kind of pastoralism which has an intended subjectivity in mind, the rational/critical questioning subject, to which it won't confess. This eventuality of the supposed critical openness is what critics in the Mumbai Resistance have been so keen to point out: "[t]he forces behind the WSF were very clear about the path that this coalition should take, right from its inception [...] and in the process, offering negotiations, peaceful pressure, lobbying as the only legitimate form of struggle."¹⁹

Critical pedagogies might escape this pastoralism by recognizing that there is always/already an ambivalence at work in pedagogy as political praxis. Choosing to engage the space of the Forum in a pedagogical way therefore is also fraught with ambivalences and contradictions: no engagement is pure or neutral, and that, indeed, is the point. Education historically is ambivalent: produced by the hegemonic structure of the nation state as a strategy for social organisation and mobilisation, and key in the process of colonisation, as revealed in the following excerpt from the colonial review of 1943:

The spread of elementary education through the colonies is a necessity for everything we are trying to do. Every social improvement, every economic development in some measure demands an increase of knowledge among the people. Every health measure, every improvement of agricultural method, new co-operative machinery for production and distribution, the establishment of secondary institutions – all these are going to make increasing demands upon the people, and they will be able to respond only if they have had some educational opportunities. (Furnival, 1956)

Rather than regarding the WSF as a pedagogical space, it might be regarded as a space and/or an opportunity which has the potential to facilitate, following Spivak, a *transnational literacy*. This notion of Spivak's is a relative of critical pedagogies in that it emphasises a critical attention paid to the narratives that inform one's idea of self, an investigation of where they have been learned, and of how they have implicitly and explicitly constructed the 'other', and has the potential to raise important questions.

Pushing Back

Education, I have tried to emphasise, by itself is not neutral. It is a means to an end, it is a mode and method for signifying, it is a way for constructing how people understand themselves in the world, as pious and productive members of a nation state or as critically aware actors negotiating the ambivalence of meaning in a hegemonic sphere. The promotion or facilitation of transnational literacy, I have also tried to suggest, might have a slightly different emphasis than the project of education, even if done while employing critical pedagogies. Quoting Jai Sen:

19 Quoted from 'The WSF: What other World?' (www.mumbairresistance.org).

Can the struggle against neo-liberalism be won only by those – and we are in minority – who have already taken committed positions against it? In this struggle, as in any other, is it not necessary, at the minimum, to engage with those who are less sure of their positions on the issue (likely to be the vast majority), and try to win them over – as well as listen to their arguments to deepen our own analysis and strategy? (Interview with Sen, 2004: 217)

What Jai Sen is emphasizing here is the dominant structures of meaning which we, and the WSF, are engaged in contesting. And, what all of these examples illustrate, it seems to me, is people taking advantage of the crisis of signification and ambivalences in meaning as they occur at their own local level.

To amplify this ambivalence in my own local context, I have cited the contradiction of the debate over British citizenship, itself a signal of a crisis in the national narrative, and the contradictory and paradoxical promotion within schools of a rubric of global citizenship for UK youngsters, concurrent with the closing down of the nations borders to the very specific citizenships of people entering the UK from places like Iraq, the DR Congo and Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. What this paper has proposed therefore is to take advantage of this crisis in signification, this crisis of contemporaneity, to exploit its ambivalence, to push it back the other way. I have used the WSF as an example of the inescapability of this ambivalence, even in resistance. I nevertheless propose a political praxis which engages at all levels, which knowingly, purposefully exploits ambivalent moments materially and discursively, by holding, by way of example, the notion of British and/or global citizenship to ransom, to exploit this crisis in signification by raising the question, or creating or joining spaces to raise questions about what is wrong in the world, what has it got to do with me and what can I do about it? The potential productivity of the World Social Forum as just a space, an event during which people to ask themselves what is 'really' going on in the world and what are our roles, rights, responsibilities and what are our strategies of resistance, our visions of utopia, how and where do they converge with the strategies of resistance of others and their visions of utopia? Just as this space houses the contradictions of politics and power it also houses the possibility of a productive engagement, and for mobilisation beyond the boundaries of the WSF which it cannot contain.

This paper has moved from a description of ambivalences which denote the workings of power and politics historically and contemporaneously, to the proposal of critical (self)consciousness as *a strategy* (and allow me to emphasise the singular) for political praxis and resistance in this contemporary moment. A strategy which my experience at the recent WSF in Mumbai 2004 has taught me is being employed by so many as a method of combating hegemonic and contradictory national and intra-national narratives of liberal democracy, and neo-liberal globalisation, or the idea that *there is no alternative* (TINA) to the current geo-political structure. A strategy which needs to be amplified, multiplied and pushed beyond the safety zone of the already converted and into the mainstream public domain.

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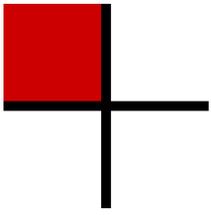
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Ground Zero of the Forum: Notes on a Personal Journey*

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When I first attended a social forum – the first European Social Forum in Florence (Italy) in November 2002 – I was just overwhelmed by joy. Although I cannot say that it was the experience of the social forum that (re)politicized me – this came, odd as it sounds, through the experience of theory when I started my PhD in 1998 – the trip to Florence was my first encounter with the street politics of social movements since the Velvet Revolution in the then Eastern Bloc, which had turned my world upside down when I was sixteen. Now, sixteen years after the *Wende* – as the collapse of real-existing socialism and the turn towards the capitalist West is called in Germany – we seem to be in the peculiar situation that, although the experience of the Velvet Revolution is relatively recent, the majority of people simply can't imagine the possibility of a repetition of such an event – the collapse of the dominant ideological system that structures our being. Today, people either seem to think that we live in a post-ideological open society, which is the culmination of all history, or they think that US imperialism produces a kind of totalitarian system that allows very few possibilities of escape. Does this not mirror the ideological situation in the former Eastern Bloc at the end of the 1980s?

Real-existing socialism – meaning not an illusionary or social democratic, that is opportunist, socialism but one that exists in reality and that has already come very close to the ideal of communism – was either hailed by *the* party as the culmination of history and the victory over capitalism, or it was denounced by the critics – mainly from the West – as a totalitarian monstrosity that didn't allow its citizens basic freedoms. The funny thing was that both sides were totally surprised when the Eastern Bloc suddenly collapsed. Almost overnight the all-mighty, totalitarian governments of the East looked shaky, its leaders confused and even frailer than usual. The ideological gloss-over – all the heroic talk, leader cult and shiny wrapping – was suddenly taken off and the unbearable truth of the East became exposed. It seemed to just happen: from one day to the next everything one took for granted was turned on its head.

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This radical change did, of course, not simply fall from the sky. In East Germany, for example, the few pockets of free speech the state allowed to exist – for example, in churches – were used by *Bürgerrechtler* – human and citizens’ rights campaigners – to discuss alternatives to real-existing socialism and ways of challenging the socialist state. One of the organisations that emerged out of these meetings was the *Neues Forum* – the New Forum – which played a crucial role in the transformation period in East Germany in 1989 and 1990. The New Forum understood itself as a political alliance bringing together people from all occupations, life circles, parties and other groupings to discuss the problems in East German society at that time. The New Forum consciously decided not to become a political party, as it was very concerned to be close to its grassroots and work according to a model of participatory democracy. By the end of 1989 the New Forum had about 10,000 members and about 200,000 people had signed its foundation appeal.¹

The appeal for the foundation of the *Neues Forum* was published on 10 September 1989. It starts by saying: “Communication between the state and society is obviously disturbed in our country.”² It then describes the conditions in the GDR and need for change – but no concrete political demands were placed. The main objective of the appeal was to call for a ‘democratic dialogue’ about the important questions the GDR was facing. The New Forum wanted to be a ‘political platform’ for this dialogue, and called all citizens of the GDR to become members of the New Forum in order to cooperate and work together for the ‘transformation of our society’. The New Forum had an amazing effect on people, and it played a crucial role for mobilizing large parts of the East German population. It helped to organise the legendary Monday demonstrations that took place mainly in Leipzig but also in many other parts of the country. It organised many meetings across the GDR at which people discussed the future of the country. It also began to develop organisational structures. Regional and supra-regional working groups were established each addressing different issues. These working groups began to place specific political demands that enacted the highly volatile political situation in East Germany in the autumn of 1989 until the first free elections in March 1990. It also took part in many so-called Roundtables, which placed various political demands on the existing GDR government as well as local councils and political decision makers. Most members and participants of the New Forum wanted to change the GDR – make it more humane, dynamic and democratic. Most were acutely aware of the downsides of the capitalist system, and therefore unification with West Germany was not really on the agenda of the New Forum.

History, of course, was not on the side of the New Forum. The then West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, bulldozed in soon after the Berlin Wall came down on 9 November 1989. At the end of November 1989 he presented a ten-point-plan that would lead to the reunification of both German states, and within a year of the establishment of the New Forum Germany was reunited on 3 October 1990 – most New Forum activists probably saw it as a de facto annexation of the GDR by West Germany. Part of the New Forum took part in various post-GDR elections in an alliance called Bündnis90, which later merged with the West German Green party. Other fractions of the New Forum

1 These paragraphs on the *Neues Forum* are based on http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neues_Forum.

2 <http://www.ddr89.de/ddr89/nf/NF1.html>

wanted to remain independent and not become a political party. Today the New Forum still exists, but its visibility and ability to mobilise people are fairly limited.

Why do I report on the New Forum and the collapse of the GDR in such detail in the context of this short intervention? There is a two-fold reason for this. First, I think there are important lessons to be learned from the radical change that took place in Eastern Europe more than one and a half decades ago. Especially the history of the New Forum in East Germany should be closely studied by social forum theorists and activists, as we might be able to learn something from its fate. The second reason is more personal in nature. I still vividly remember the crazy days of change at the end of 1980s. The few months between September 1989, when the New Forum was formed, and the first (and last) free election in the GDR in March 1990, felt like a lifetime. Every day brought news of seemingly life changing importance: masses of people fleeing over borders to the West; others were occupying Western embassies; mass demonstrations; the opening of the Berlin Wall; and the Roundtable discussions that genuinely tried to look for an alternative way forward for the GDR. People, I felt, had tremendous hope at that time; hope that a different world would be possible. Many people were not naïve; they knew very well what capitalism would bring; and today many East Germans feel disillusioned, disappointed and disenchanted – some even want to have the old GDR back. The hope many had back then was not that we would simply be rushed into the West and capitalism. Many hoped for something else, a different world, and that hope produced an enjoyment that is hard to describe. This enjoyment was not simply an individual experience; it was a shared and communal experience. For many years I did not feel such an enjoyment, such as sense of possibility, again – until I travelled to Florence for the first European Social Forum in November 2002. So, whenever I think about social forums, I'm immediately reminded of the history of the New Forum and my own history at that time.

I think social change is as much about political strategies as it is about a bodily and communal experience. Change means nothing, if it's not connected to personal experiences and histories. Also, if a project of change cannot engage people – that is, if it cannot produce some kind of intense enjoyment of collectivity – then it is unlikely to go anywhere. I think it is historically significant that the contemporary social forum movement is the first movement after the Velvet Revolutions in Eastern Europe that can repeat the event of collective hope and possibility felt back in 1989.

* * *

When I returned from the first European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence I knew something had happened to me. I was touched by this joyful experience. In this way, the ESF was a real event for me; an event which, in fact, is still taking place at the time of writing these notes. One of the most immediate effects the forum had on me was that my PhD thesis, which I was working on at that time, changed direction. Although the specific empirical details of social forums only featured in one of the chapters, the thesis – entitled *The Political Event*³ – was, in a way, all about the event of the social forum,

3 Since then the thesis has been partially rewritten and it will now be published by Palgrave Macmillan as *Repositioning Organization Theory: Impossibilities and Strategies* by December 2005.

and the theoretical, organisational and political challenges it poses. In this thesis I was interested in conceptualising the political event; I wanted to explore the political possibilities and strategies for events taking place that can fundamentally change the way a society is organised. Implicitly, of course, I already knew the answer; I knew that it would be possible to change the world, because I experienced it myself with the collapse of the GDR. But the point is that today's political constellation is perhaps quite different to the one the New Forum and other movements faced at the end of the 1980s. Today's political and organisational strategies will therefore have to be different, which is not to say that we cannot and should not learn from history. But this is precisely why theory is important: there is a need to analyse historical constellations so that contemporary struggles can be informed about the type of organisational and political strategies that are likely to be effective.

But theory is, of course, not enough. There are many who claim to do critical and politically relevant social and organisational theory today without being connected with the practices of any contemporary social movements. Theory, it seems, is still often hidden away in university departments. Academics are more concerned (and pressed to be concerned) to do well in the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise), which by and large measures academic research output in terms of the number of papers submitted to 'high-quality' (according to certain rankings) academic journals, which on average will be read by probably only a handful of people. Open access journals like *ephemera*, which are actually read by thousands, do not seem to matter in the world of academic performance measurement. On one hand, the academy is pressed to be more practice relevant; on the other, practice plays almost no role in the way academic work is evaluated. And then there is, of course, the big question of what counts as practice. Is practice only related to what benefits companies (the economy) and government departments (the state) – and sometimes NGOs (civil society)? What about social movements, like the anti-capitalist or social forum movements – do they count as practice that academics should engage with? And what about teaching? Surely, the most immediate and important practice is to teach students to look at the world critically. Yet, teaching plays a relatively minor role in the way academics are evaluated. But let me not go on about the shortcomings of the politics of the academy today. Let's get back to the issue at hand: social forums.

So, for me it was not enough to simply theorise the political event and reflect – from a distance – about the politics and organisation of social forums. When I returned from the Florence ESF I knew I had to get involved; I had to get my hands dirty, as it were. For the next two European Social Forums in Paris (2003) and London (2004) I was part of a gang of people organising the Radical Theory Forum (RTF) – and more events are planned for June and July this year.⁴ What we try to do with the RTF is to provide a space that brings together the theory and practice of contemporary radical social movements. In a way, the RTF is a forum within the Forum; a forum that specifically tries to bring academics and writers into the same space as activists. Without trying to privilege one over the other, the RTF tries to be an open space for theory and practice to

4 www.radicaltheoryforum.org; for wiki space (i.e. online collaborative website), go to <http://radicaltheoryforum.omweb.org/modules/wakka/HomePage>

meet. In this way, the RTF hopes to bridge the gap between theory and practice, in order for both to inform and infiltrate each other.

For this meeting between theory and practice to be successful – if we measure success not in terms of academic league tables or RAE points but in terms of collective enjoyment – we needed to make the RTF space as inviting and non-threatening as possible. It was therefore natural for us to participate in the organisational politics of so-called ‘horizontal’, which practice principles of participatory democracy and non-hierarchical decision making. The RTF wants to be an open space, which makes it easy for people to participate and take part. This follows the principles of the WSF, according to which social forums are open, participatory spaces. Social forums are facilitators of a political process; forums provide a space for people to meet and discuss without stamping on them a pre-defined political agenda or bureaucratic rules of how to discuss and make decisions. In the first instance, social forums bring people together – they are tools for overcoming the increasing individualism of society by forming new communities that cut across national as well as political borders. Open spaces facilitate collective enjoyment, which is a political response to the neo-liberal agenda of the privatisation of all public spaces. It is for this reason that open spaces are of great importance – politically.

In this regard the term ‘World Social Forum’ (WSF) is significant. It was originally coined in opposition to the World Economic Forum (WEF), which is taking place in Davos, Switzerland, every year. At this forum the economic and political elite of the world is gathering. People like Blair, Bush, Bono and Buffet are meeting there, but ordinary folk are excluded. The elite is talking about the problems of the world and how they can be address mainly economically. The WEF is a high-security zone, because the elites have to be fenced off from the people they are governing or economically dominating. In contrast, the World Social Forum is a festival of those people who are on the other side of the fence. It is in the first instance a *social* gathering of those people who are economically dominated by the elites of the world. The WSF is a space of dialogue: a space for the exchange of ideas and the establishment of connections between different groups and networks from around the world. This social aspect of the forum is important; it reduces the traditional logic of politics to a kind of a ground zero. It brings everybody down to the same level playing field without privileging certain groups or ideologies – at least this is the idea.

This ground zero is of immense importance for the WSF, because, as for the New Forum in East Germany in 1989, there is an urgent need to first of all open the space of politics up again. Like in the Eastern Bloc at the end of the 1980s, today’s official politics is not an open space but a closed one, fenced off from wider, popular participation. Politics – at least the official version of it – is based on parliamentary democratic principles, which – over the years – has turned off many people. The last UK general election saw only about a fifth of the national electorate voting for Blair’s Labour Party; yet, he enjoys a significant majority in the House of Commons. This is just one example of how the current political system turns people off from politics.⁵ There is no or relatively little collective enjoyment in official politics today. Today

5 Also see S. Sullivan, this issue.

politics is a profession characterised by spin, career plans and individual agendas. The social forum process is one of the attempts to re-open the space of politics and let people participate again in the discussion of the important issues the world faces – and we are certainly not short of those.

Although the charter of the WSF follows horizontal principles of organising, many would say that the WSF process has been dominated by so-called ‘vertical’ organisational politics, which means that the open space of the WSF has never been truly open. Instead, many traditional forces of the Left have been trying to co-opt the energy of the WSF and use it for their own political agendas. We are not just talking here about a conflict between different organisational principles and agendas, but about different movements and their histories, identities and perhaps different enjoyments. The conflict between ‘horizontals’ and ‘verticals’ is the historical conflict between so-called new social movements (feminist, radical ecology, civil rights movements, indigenous peoples, queer, etc.) and their grassroots politics and participatory democratic principles on the one hand, and old social movements (labour movements, unions, socialist parties, etc.) and their more traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical organisational model, on the other.

There is no point repeating here what has been said about this conflict elsewhere in this *ephemera* issue.⁶ For those of us who organised the RTF it was important to follow this idea of a forum being a ground zero of politics. I think this is what made the New Forum so successful and important in 1989. The New Forum had to follow a strategy of *tabula rasa*, in order to start a new, non-corrupt political movement and thus give people hope of a different world – which is not to say that the different histories of the people and groups were simply erased. I think this is why horizontality cannot be dismissed; it is one of the most important political and organisational tools to explore possibilities of a future beyond the corruption of the liberal-democratic space of politics. Horizontality brings politics not only close to the ground – to the grassroots of social movements – but it also reduces politics to a ground zero, which opens new spaces of political engagement. The RTF also wants to engage people in a different way; it wants to cross traditional boundaries between theory and practice, academia and activism. For this reason it has to reduce politics to a ground zero. This ground zero doesn’t erase history, but it starts afresh with a project of building new social bonds.

* * *

I would like to add one minor tale to this story about the conflict between ‘horizontals’ and ‘verticals’, which, I think, might make the point clear again. Some of you might know that the AUT (a union for the higher education sector in the UK) recently voted to boycott two Israeli universities in protest against their direct or indirect involvement in the suppression of Palestinians.⁷ This resulted in an angry outcry among many of the paying membership of the union. In our local AUT branch at Essex, which is normally fairly quiet and not exactly describable as particularly active or controversial, the members’ email list suddenly came to life with many people expressing their anger and

6 See Nunes, Juris and other contributions in this issue.

7 <http://www.aut.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1201>; [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4472169.stm>]

disbelief about this decision to boycott the Israeli universities and threatening resignation – some also came out in support of this decision. The point here is not to revisit this hot debate, which I'm sure was held up and down the country in many local AUT branches. For many days the debate on the email list became ever more animated – it was clear that the members of our local union branch clearly felt strongly about this issue. So, a general meeting of the local branch was called for, which was supposed to decide how to go forward. As so many union members, I felt quite strongly about this issue. For the first time for a while I felt that my union is not just there to negotiate pay and conditions for its members – although I don't deny that these are important issues. No, this time my union, I thought, would not only concern itself with issues of economic distribution, but take wider political issues on board, which we are all indirectly implicated with. So, I specifically went onto campus for this general meeting, and – as it turned out – it was probably the worst political meeting I've ever attended.

Although I've been politically active for quite a while now, I've mostly been involved with horizontal politics. So, I was not well prepared for what was going to hit me at this meeting. The room was a fairly big lecture theatre. At the front we had two middle-aged men sitting – who were obviously in some sort of leading position in our local union branch. There might have been 30 people (a significant majority of them were white, middle aged men) in the lecture theatre, which – as I was told later – was actually quite a good turnout. I was surprised to see so few people there (the local AUT branch must have hundreds of members), given that there had been such a hot debate about this issue on the email list. The meeting had a very strict agenda and it was chaired in a very structured and no-nonsense sort of way. The first ten to twelve minutes were allowed for discussion of the issue. I think about 6-8 people managed to say something. At that time I had not quite made my mind up yet about how to express myself; so I just waited – I thought the time when I could make my contribution would surely come later on in the meeting. Then the chair went on to explain the only motion that was put forward to the meeting, which called for a meeting of the union council to re-open debate on the boycott policy. At least 10 minutes were spent on the chair of the meeting explaining the various bureaucratic aspects of this vote, which then led into a lecture – at least it felt that way – on various other aspects of how the local branch runs. The other middle-aged man then complained that there are not enough people who get involved with the local union branch and that the burden is really on him to keep the local union ship moving.

By that time I was paralysed by disbelief. I came to this meeting in the hope that there would be a real discussion – a discussion of the various pros and cons – of the boycott. That is, I thought this meeting would continue the hot debate that developed on the email list. Instead, we spent most of the meeting listening to some union bureaucrats lecturing us about how the union administration and the decision making should work. This meeting did nothing for the exchange of ideas; it was a big turn-off. It wasn't surprising that after that meeting the email discussion also faltered – and things just went back to 'normal'. Towards the end of the meeting I finally raised my hand – I wanted to share some of my concerns about how the meeting was conducted. But I was not allowed to speak, because my contribution was not relevant to the technical discussion that was going on at that time – I was told. I couldn't believe it. Needless to say that the chair didn't get back to me later on in the meeting, or indeed after the

meeting. My contribution was simply not invited. Before the meeting, I was secretly considering to get more involved with my local union branch – to spend time and energy on union politics, because I think there is indeed a need for this. But this meeting turned me off to such an extent that I don't think I will go anywhere near a union meeting too soon again. Ah, by the way, the motion was passed unanimously.

Why am I telling this story? Well, in a strange way this episode is the story of the conflict between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' in the social forum movement.⁸ The union meeting I witnessed at Essex is an example of the type of bureaucratic decision making and hierarchical organisation that horizontals criticise. It's exclusive, non-participatory, dependent on inflexible hierarchies – and it is simply a big turn-off. When one of the middle-aged leaders complained about not enough people getting involved with the local union branch, I thought: well, it's not really surprising, if you conduct the meeting the way you do. Who is supposed to feel invited to contribute to such an organisation? The point to make is that the AUT – and probably many other unions – are not close enough to the ground. Over a long period of time they have developed sophisticated organisational bureaucracies in order to negotiate pay and conditions with employers. They also sell insurance and other commodities to their members. In short, they've become big service organisations, which have found their place in today's so-called knowledge economy. Needless to say that unions are ill equipped to take on political issues that are not following the traditional agenda of campaigning for fair wages and salaries. The original boycott decision by the AUT was a radical acknowledgement of the fact that the economic struggle the union is engaged in cannot be disconnected from a range of global political, social and cultural struggles. Unfortunately, this wasn't communicated very well, and in May the general union council decided to reverse the boycott decision. Things have now gone back to 'normal'. (I think it's time for union bosses to pay attention to their overpriced insurance products.)

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But let us go back to the issue at hand: the forum as ground zero. When above I talked about my experience of joy at the 2002 ESF in Florence, I'm convinced that this enjoyment has something to do with what I've described here as the forum's ground zero of politics. Social forums open up spaces of politics and thus enable an excess enjoyment of people creating a political community. This enjoyment is absolutely key, in my view, for any social movement. Enjoyment creates new bonds between people, bonds which haven't necessarily existed before. In this sense the ground zero of the forum creates the social afresh – it begins to form alliances between people who otherwise are compartmentalised by neo-liberalism into reproductive economic bodies. At the most fundamental and most basic level, forums are a bodily and collective response to the individualism and economism of dominant hegemonies. This was the case with the New Forum in East Germany in 1989 – as it provided a space for breaking out of the dominant ideology of real-existing socialism, which forced people into their individual homes as the only non-ideological safe havens – and this is not much different today, as social forums respond to neo-liberalist capitalism and its ideology of the individual as the only unit of measure.

8 Also see Dowling and L. Sullivan, this issue.

But ground zero is not simply about bringing people together. Ground zero is the start of a new social bond, and it is precisely this new bond, which I think produces enjoyment. So, the type of enjoyment I'm talking about doesn't simply come from hanging out with people or being together with people from a range of different backgrounds. This social aspect is important; no doubt. But that's not all. I don't think it's enough to go to a music festival like Live8 – although this is, of course, fun, and its political message is important. But for me, enjoyment comes through the possibility of real political significance of creating a new social bond; creating a new society, a new world. The point of politics is to organise the social; it's about making decisions about who we are, and how we want to live our lives. And it's precisely this step towards a decision that can sustain enjoyment beyond the split second of an encounter at a social forum. Obviously, this decision can come in all sorts of forms and guises – and the type of decision I have in mind doesn't necessarily imply hierarchical organisation, representation and other 'vertical' principles. Not at all. The decision I'm talking about here cannot be foreclosed.

What I think was significant about the New Forum was that it wasn't simply about bringing people together in a new type of open space. The ground zero of the New Forum was about taking active steps towards the creation of a new society, a new world. Political demands were formulated; organisational structures were built that were able to sustain its assault on political establishments; the state was confronted head on; demonstrations and other mobilisations were organized. All these concrete political activities didn't stand in the way of the New Forum's social significance, which for the first time engaged citizens of the GDR in a different way. The social and the political go hand in hand together. The ground zero of the New Forum is described by its ability to create new social bonds and work towards the political creation of a new society.

The latest social forum I attended was the 2005 WSF, which again returned to Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January this year. It was a festival of a multitude of colours. Especially at the Youth Camp people came from all over the place, mainly South America. For me it was great to get to know the different struggles in that part of the world. What was striking to me was that neo-liberalist capitalism has much more intense social consequences in the Global South than in the Global North. Of course, one can read about this in numerous publications. But actually seeing with one's own eyes the way corporate globalisation affects indigenous people, the landless, the homeless and even the middle classes on such an immense scale and with such intensity, and indeed listening to their stories, is quite something else. Can someone from the Global North, like me, really imagine what it was like for the Argentinean economy to collapse from one day to the next? People lost their jobs, their life's savings, their economic and social security, their livelihoods – everything changed from one day to the next. It's incredibly difficult to exactly know what this might be like. But having gone through the radical change in East Germany, I can imagine it.

My question now is a very simple one. What is the role of the social forum in these intense political situations? Argentina collapsed in December 2001. The social forum movement was still relatively young then. But, in a way, Argentina is everywhere: it is now and here. The crisis we witnessed there is reproduced in multiple ways around the world a thousand times. These crises articulate themselves in different forms and guises.

Should social forums be able to become much more than an open space for people to meet, socialise and discuss possibilities of a different world? Should social forums be able to respond to these crises in a much more concrete and direct way than they currently do? Do we not have a responsibility to go beyond the talking shop format and accompany the social aspects of the forum with desperately needed political demands? I do not have answers to these questions, but I think it's important to put these questions onto the table – into the open space, as it were.

Of course, some might say: The most radical aspect of the social forum is to simply be an open space, which facilitates a multiplicity of rhizomatic connections to be made between people, groups and movements and their political agendas. So, in a way, social forums are already producing a range of different political demands; it's just that these demands are not visible within the view of traditional political horizons. For example, the connections made at the WSF might have helped different Argentinean movements to respond to the collapse of their economy by way of taking over disused factories or blockading streets. That is, there might be concrete actions that are outcomes of the WSF process; but they are indirect and not direct results of a representational decision of some sort of WSF body. So, the point is that the open space of the forum results in rhizomatic movement that cannot be controlled; and it is this non-controllability that makes them radical. In this sense the achievements of the WSF process are not visible in the traditional way: there are no concrete political demands that are issued on behalf of the WSF, because this would involve an institutionalisation of the WSF. I have a lot of time for such an argument.

But if we look closely, then it is self-evident that the WSF is not simply an open space, a facilitator. Even facilitation involves organisation and therefore some forms of institutionalisation – especially if we talk about 150,000 people coming together for several days. Let's not kid ourselves. There are important organisational decisions made by the International Council (IC) and the various organisation committees on behalf of the participants of social forums. Isn't this a form of representation? The problem is that this representation is often not acknowledged or problematised by either those who make decisions or those participants – often claiming to be 'horizontal' – who see the WSF as a totally open space. No, it's not a completely open space. The WSF is to some extent a closed space in the sense of there being people who make decisions about how things are run: Who finances the forum? Who builds the necessary spaces? Who provides food, which is produced in what kind of way? Which speakers are invited? What is put on the website? Where is the next WSF taking place? What technology is used? All of these are perhaps mundane organisational issues, but they are intensely political at the same time – as many contributions to this special issue show.

I still felt glimpses of enjoyment at this year's WSF. But somehow my mood had changed. I was increasingly getting impatient with the social forum process. Isn't it strange, for example, that there is no democratic control of the IC? As one of the IC's members acknowledged in one of the seminars, it's a fairly arbitrary process to become involved with the IC.⁹ In fact, she was saying that the IC is based on a kinship principle. The IC and the various organisation committees see themselves as facilitator and its

9 See, Caracol Intergalactika, this issue.

members frequently deny that they are in a position of power. How odd. I think when the Ford Foundation or big multinational corporations (like Petrobras or Banco do Brasil) partly finance the WSF then this involves important questions of power relations.¹⁰ What is even odder, though, is that I had a feeling that many participants of the forum didn't particularly question these power relations – although there were, of course, exceptions. So, there is a certain denial of power at work on both sides: on one hand, the organisers don't see or don't acknowledge the political importance of their work; and on the other, there is no big push by the multitude of participants to hold the organisers accountable for their decisions.

I'm wondering whether this is perhaps a necessary outcome of the open space methodology. The open space mantra gives us the impression or even illusion of the social forum being a completely horizontal space. What is often not realised, however, is that each open space needs to be opened up by someone; and in this sense each open space is already closed. Horizontals might respond: therefore we need to make sure that open spaces are *really* open, to which I would say: it's an illusion to think that a completely open space is possible. It is for this reason that I think that it is important to ask questions of how social forums are organised. Organising events on the scale of the WSF involves questions of institutionalisation and representation. There is nothing inherently evil about these two words – although sometimes I have a feeling that they are seen as such by some horizontals. The problem I see is that, if organisational questions of institutionalisation and representation are not acknowledged, or if they are dismissed, then this doesn't mean that these questions go away, but that simply someone else makes the decisions for us. I'd rather have these questioned discussed and decided upon democratically.

As horizontals frequently point out: the way we do things, the way we organise ourselves, the way we conduct our action, is as important, if not more, as the political demands we issue. That is, the process of organising social forums is the thing itself.¹¹ Organisation is politics. It is for this reason that I think it's important for us to question the way decisions are made at social forums. The WSF is now into its fifth edition and there are literally hundreds of social forums taking place in different localities around the world. I think they are immensely important for all the reasons that I described above. But I'm increasingly wondering whether it's enough to open spaces for people from different backgrounds to meet. I think a ground zero of politics is not only about socialising and talking. The enjoyment of a ground zero is about the possibility of creating a different world. But for this to actually take place, forums need to be able to respond to crises that happen around them; they need to be able to organise themselves democratically; and they might also need to be able to engage in specific political situations, and, if necessary, place political demands on whoever oppresses communities. My feeling is that, unless this political dimension of the ground zero of forums is articulated in some way or another, social forums will simply become an annual social festival where colourful differences are celebrated. This might be fun, but the question is whether it can create enjoyment beyond the split second of a forum

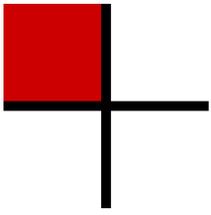
10 See, Caracol Intergalactika, this issue.

11 See de Angelis, this issue.

encounter. Only if enjoyment can be sustained beyond a temporary, ephemeral moment an event of politics has taken place, an event that can make a different world possible.

the author

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The Future of the World Social Forum*

Caracol Intergalactika

abstract

The following is a transcript and translation of a public meeting at the WSF'05 between members of the International Council, the Brazilian Organising Committee of the WSF, organizers of the Intercontinental Youth Camp and Caracol Intergalactika, as well as individuals without any affiliation. This meeting took place in the Caracol Intergalactika, between the Youth Camp and the official Forum, on 30 January 2005 and was chaired by Teivo Teivainen. Due to the fairly poor recording of the event, there are many holes in this text; three dots [...] or [not clear] are supposed to represent these manifold holes of understanding. But we still think that there is value in including this transcript in this special issue, although the text can, of course, not claim to fully represent the things that were voiced there. We apologize for any mistakes and errors. The full recording of this event is accessible at <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/5-2/caracol.mp3>.

English Speaker 1 at 00:00:00min: ...very quickly, when you go to the a demonstration against the World Trade Organization or against the war, what is striking is that half the demonstrators are young people and usually the young people are at the front and they are the first to get teargased... Now, when you talk to a panel or a workshop or a seminar at the World Social Forum half the panellists are not young people; this is a serious problem. It's not only a problem of identity or representation, it is a problem of politics; we are not incorporating young people and the new politics they embody into the World Social Forum process. So, this is one of the reasons Teivo and I have wanted to have this event. I am going to pass the microphone over to Teivo and ... then he is going to pass the microphone over to Michael Hardt. He will add a few points and then I will pass the microphone to Teivo, and then the two of us will co-facilitate the rest of the event.

English Speaker 2 (Michael) at 00:01:31min: My impression of the Forum for each year that I have been – that I have participated in the World Social Forum – is that there have really been two World Social Forums each year. There has been what has seemed to me the most beneficial and positive part of the Forum; and this has been the encounters

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among activists, among people working on similar issues. This has really been the anonymous Forum. There is also the second Forum, which has been the one that is reported in the newspapers, the one also that everyone sees. In other words, the huge auditoriums with the well-known speakers. This difference between the two Forums is either a problem or at least seems to be part of the issues that we are talking about here. Actually, the visible Forum – the one that gets reported in newspapers, the one that is tempted to make pronouncements – is quite separate from the other Forum, the grassroots Forum. I think there are two ways in which this happened: I think there is the temptation – and after debating within the organizers about this – whether the Forum should act as a subject and whether the Forum itself should present the pronouncements against the war, against neoliberalism etc. There is also I think, despite the will amongst the organizers, the demand for this from the press. In other words, even if the famous participants don't claim to represent the Forum, they are taken by the press as representatives of the Forum. What the problem I think in all of this is – what troubles me – is the false notion of representation: in other words, either for organizers to make an announcement in a formal way on the basis of the Forum, or even for the most well-known of the participants to make pronouncements to the press, giving the impression of a formal representation. It is this formal representation that bothers me. There is one other impression I have had of the Forum, which is that between these two Forums, even though it appears that the visible Forum is the more powerful, I think that it is in fact the invisible Forum which is the more powerful one, and that little by little, we'll – in a way – erode the visibility and the power of the few that speak in the name of it. So, I think we should criticize all along, but when we are opposing the power relations, I think that we should also recognize what seems to me the greater power – in fact, the majority of the anonymous participants – that seems to me the greater power of all. I will stop there.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 1 (Teivo) at 00:04:39min: Thank you Michael. So, the idea is to try to have a debate, a conversation where we have some people invited and some are from the establishment, some from the Forum, some from the International Secretariat, some from the International Council, some are intellectuals from outside. The idea is not to have a panel, not to have long presentations, rather to keep the presentations short, maximum 3 minutes, and from there to open up a space for a debate, the most horizontal possible. It is never possible to have total horizontality, right? But we will try. I am going to act as facilitator. ... I think Rodrigo will raise the issue of power relations in the Forum and I propose that the speakers present themselves in the way that they wish, before starting to talk.

[Background noise]

Spanish Speaker 2 (Rodrigo I) at 00:06:43min: Well, I do not think that I will speak merely of the power relations within the Forum, but of the criticism that emerges from some situations of power relations in the Forum. I am referring here to the criticisms which emerge from the experiences of autonomous spaces. Obviously, I am not representing here any autonomous space, not the Caracol, not the GLAD in Paris, the Hub in Florence, not the autonomous spaces that took place in London during the

European Social Forum, not the Camp, but I believe that it is possible to highlight some general lines out of which we can derive the criticisms. The first criticism relating to the Forum is the criticism of its format. With regards to the format there are two issues: the issue of the size and the issue of the Forum's budget. Where does the Forum's money come from? And what are the relations that are established? Because a much larger Forum has resulted than what the social movements can do themselves; and this depends on money that comes from the State, and what are the relations established in there? Another issue is the issue of methodology and I believe at this point in 2005 there is an advance in the World Social Forum, because this year's methodology appears in fact to be much better, even though, this is a point we will return to later, it does not appear to me to be perfect. The other issue regarding methodology is I believe a story of the criticisms and critics of the Forum; that is, this year we do not have the plenaries organized by the Organizing Committee and by the International Council which in fact were, as Michael Hardt said, were a space of false representation of the Forum; that is, a small group that nobody had elected, a group which in turn selected the main themes and the people who would be presenting on these main themes. It is a victory that in 2005 we don't have any of this. Another issue is the issue of the frontiers, of what exactly is the Forum, of who stands in it and who stands outside of the Forum. I think that this is an issue in which progress was reached in regards to the autonomous spaces, because now the autonomous spaces do not appear to consider so much the issue of inside/outside but rather that the Forum is there, it is there in a time and space and they have to be occupied. But it appears to me that a good future for the Forum would be that the Forum could create a constellation of spaces, such as the space of Caracol here, spaces organized by groups who already worked jointly, who already had activities and a history of joint work, and it appears to me that this would be a much better possibility than the presence which we nonetheless still have in 2005 of a group which decides which themes will be brought together, which groups will be brought together, etc. So, it seems to me that a good future for the Forum would be a constellation of spaces rather than the existence of one central space which is then subdivided. But, perhaps a much stronger line of criticism which emerges from the autonomous spaces may be the criticism of the way things are done, because this is – in the 2005 Forum – very clear, for this is why it is being said that the Forum has changed into the Camp. And well, we see that three years were necessary for the WSF Organizing Committee, the International Council before they realized that it is incredible that a World Social Forum can exist where proprietary software is utilized in computers rather than free software, that it is incredible that a World Social Forum is held where the food is served by firms, well, and not by social movements or by popular solidarity economy enterprises, and it is incredible that the independent and community media do not have a space in the media spaces of the Forum. This is a line of criticism which emerges out of the autonomous spaces not as theory but as practice, because this was already carried out in the Camp of 2002, this was already carried out in 2003 in the Camp, at GLAD, in the autonomous spaces of London; this is a part of the history of these autonomous spaces. But also this year it appears to me that there is a serious problem; that is, this creative potential which we saw in the examples of Babels, Nomad, and of the Caracol organization, of the Camp organization – they nonetheless serve a false representation because those who work ultimately are not the ones who get to be seen/who are visible. In the end it seems that people appear who did not produce the Nomad software, people appear who were not involved in the organization of the Camp, who speak about the

Camp. And there is also another problem, and this is the last line that I raise, which is the problem that after the Mumbai Forum in 2004 there was the text of a person involved in the Forum who was talking about the inclusion of the youth. The question being asked was: how are we going to include the youth? Well, the youth is there, the youth has long been there, and it is one of the most creative and powerful things of the Forum. But there is a problem: to them this appears as rhetorically serious, because they cannot see what is happening – that four years were necessary that free software was used, for example. And in addition it is a question which shows a lack of knowledge about what are the debates surrounding these things, which they call ‘youth’. For example, it is a title which many of us do not like at all, and yet one they use, because perhaps it creates a difference between that which is ready, that which is already prepared, and that which has to be prepared. But we prepared the Forum many years, many times, and I believe that the criticisms that come out of these practical experiences, are very serious criticisms and which can guide a transformation in the future of the Forum.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 3 (Julia) at 00:16:10min: Well, I’ll speak in portunol to make it easier. ... I’ll give you some numbers to show the development of [the Youth Camp] over the years. ... In 2002, when there was a greater rapport with the decision-making levels of the Forum, the Camp was planned for 10 thousand people, there were around 17 thousand people, 14 thousand registered people. In 2003 we planned for 30 thousand people, and there were around 23,500. And now we had a planning for 30 thousand campers, and we believe there’s around 40 thousand people, considering also the people who just go through it. ... It would be great if we could have food provided exclusively by family businesses, organic producers, cooperatives, popular solidarity economy enterprises. It’d also be great if all the WSF computer ran on free software. And many other things that we propose to society. But, for example, it’s clear today that popular solidarity economy is not sufficiently developed to face all this demand; it’s a typical offer-demand case. The reflection I want to propose is then: well, what does the organisation of the Forum, of the Camp do? Do we insist with something that doesn’t meet this reality? Or do we bring the debates but say, ‘well, let’s all eat GMOs, because that’s what we have’. This is where my worry is. The Camp is overdimensioned today, and I wonder to what point does it represent a transformation, to have something so grand, so mediatic, so famous, if at the end we are reproducing practices of the capitalist world. And this in many organisational ways as well of the Social Forums and the Camp; practical things about the organisation of the Forum, hierarchies, ‘I’m the one who calls the shots’, ‘you have autonomy but I have the money’. The Forum is full of contradictions. We need to redimension what we want, and ask ourselves, especially after 2005, where do we want to go with this movement that’s so big, so grand, but

[applause]

English Speaker 3 (Friede) at 00:21:56min: (unclear)

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 4 (Teivo) at 00:25:00min: There is a line of debate, as was said by Michael Hardt, that there is a false representation in the World Social Forum, and Friede said that the whole idea of representation has shown to be an alien idea, an idea that is not worth it. Therefore, if anyone holds reflections on this matter when we speak of power relations, the possibility to democratize the World Social Forum, we need to be aware of whether we are talking in terms of representation or whether we are talking in other terms.

[pause]

Spanish Speaker 5 (Maite) at 00:26:05min: I believe that my position is a bit particular because I participate in the International Council for my own work and in this space for my activity. Therefore, I have quite a lot of information on how the Forum is constructed. I wouldn't like this debate to be construed as a debate entre the 'young' and the 'adults', because that is not accurate; this should be about different levels of radicality and political positions at work inside the Forum. ... [not clear, because music takes over]

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 6 (Virginia Vargas) at 00:28:33min: Me too, I'm in a particular position because I'm a member of the International Council The WSF for me is this space of movements, which is a permanent site of struggle, where there's a permanent struggle between the old and the new. ...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 7 (Teivo) at 00:31:59min: Another line of debate asks what is radicality? If I have understood correctly, radicality means to focus on the anti-capitalist dimension in the deepest sense, or it refers to the different struggles in their variety and there I believe you have different [views], which we can also go about exploring in this debate, in addition to the theme of representation where there are different lines of argument.

Portuguese Speaker 1 (Fatima) at 00:32:52min: My name is Fatima, I've been a member of the Brazilian Organising Committee and Executive Secretariat since the first Forum. On the relationships of power and representativity in the Forum ... I agree with Virginia that ... they represent nothing else but the different power relations that exist in our society; in it are reflected and reproduced the power relations that exist in our movements, in our society; the Forum is then a mirror of all this. Thus, the extremely low level of youth participation in the International Council is not only a consequence of the problem of how to organise a representation of youth in the Council, but also of the power that those who are in the Council have and and the difficulty the youth have of occupying that space. So i think the Forum is a mirror of our relations, but it should also be a laboratory that deals with these problems. We are trying all the time to question generational issues, issues of race, of gender, of class, also at the organising levels of the forum, and this is what this space should do.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 8 (Rodrigo II) at 00:35:11min: I agree with most of the things which have been said so far. I appreciate and value very positively the exchanges from this year and I believe that the process of listening is important; it is a process of the Forum and it is important to value it. I only have one thing I want to say. I believe there is the danger that the agenda of the World Social Forum is defined by the ... and I believe that in all the enormous variety of ideas and proposals in this Forum, some of which are more radical than others... but at least more or less we all share the need to revise the resources between the people, between the human groups in a more equitable way. It appears to me that we need to start applying these principles to the Forum itself. It is very difficult that these principles can be applied to everyone, applying them right here now ... [but we need to get more] money so that others can influence and distribute their information. I believe there are many forms of guaranteeing that resources of all kinds which are concentrated each year in the Forum are more equitable, and I believe that greater resources are needed so that the social movements can have a greater place in the decision-making.

[applause]

English Speaker 4 (Tadzio) at 00:38:00min: I've got a question, which seems maybe rather abstract, but it's rather important to me. ... The Forum needs money because it is very big and it is growing all over... So, there is the question of size... So, I wonder if it becomes too big... This also connects to something that happened in London at the European Social Forum – the Socialist Worker Party had lots of power because of its control over the money. So, if size, money and democracy hangs all together, what does this mean for our ability as a social movement... For example, if we can't manage a Forum with a few thousands people ... how can we manage large urban conglomerations ... democratically ...? So, how can we manage 150,000 people coming together in a democratic way... I have no idea. I don't have an idea about how to solve this problem about the relationship between size and democracy ... So, it really worries me that we cannot manage lots of people getting together in a democratic way. This has something to do with money, power relations... and I would be really grateful, if [we could talk about this here].

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 9 at 00:39:57min: The fact that we're having this meeting here ... I think this is a brutal participatory development. ... In the International Council of the World Education Forum we were discussing how to relate to the WSF, and the first point was adopting the Charter of Principles. We see there are problems with parties, with governments, and a companero from Porto Alegre reminded us that the parties that call themselves 'socialist' can have neoliberal policies, governments, trade unions, NGOs too. We must be aware of that and think how we can articulate this, if not on a world level, on the local level. The strategy of the Forum ... is to get to farthest places in the world, so that we can articulate from below, in a democratic way, an encounter ...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 10 at 00:43:50min: I am Pablo Bergel; I am an Argentinean citizen ... because at this time all of us, those of us who are in one or another position, all of us

– the more official, the more autonomous – all of us, we all are being represented at a negotiating table [thousands of] kilometres from here in a place ... against which this space here was created ... [We are being represented] by the President of a state, of a national state, Brazil, who uses this Forum to be able to negotiate with the Forum, in the very space against which this Forum was created... [This happens] with the silence, complicity, tolerance or the impotence ... of the Organizing Committee of the Forum and all of us. This is taking place now and the moment and the possibility is current now. When I say it is current now, I mean to say that this Forum, including its Executive Committee as well as all of us in this Forum, we have the chance to ... It must be clear that Lula does not represent [the Forum]... Simply, there is a principle of the Forum that is being violated – which critically prohibits [this representation] and we all and the Executive Committee in the first place have been silenced, and this before the Forum has even ended. It is necessary to say something or this I believe will end the Forum.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 11 (Female) at 00:46:45min: [not clear, too much background noise/music]

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 12 at 00:48:31min: It appears to me that the criticism has so far been quite soft [laughter], quite consensual ... on the bureaucracy of the Forum, on the International Council, on international power relations...

Spanish Speaker 13 at 00:49:10min: The problem of representation is not the greatest of problems ... the process of the radicalization of horizontality ... when we think of the first Forums, there were 8 organizations ... the second problem, which for me is a real problem, is that power is not only vertical power, there is power inside of ... [not clear].

[applause, chit chat...]

Spanish Speaker 14 (Ms. from Mexico) at 00:52:45min: ... the Forum is more democratic and also has a greater presence of movements, but it is certain that the logic continues to be a logic of power, a Western logic, a logic in which the majority of those who sit at the table are men, they are white, they are senior, they are not the women or the young people or the children of indigenous people, or ... It is very important to include the young people in a country like Brazil, which, even though it may not be recognized as such, is a Latin country. Therefore, effectively there is a crisis of forms of power, of representation which is in the hands of the few ... not only autonomy of the poor, black autonomy, indigenous autonomy... [not clear].

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 15 (Teivo) at 00:55:51min: There are a lot of people who have asked and are asking to speak. It would also help if these people say what theme they are going to talk about, in order to have a better debate... I hope this means that Fernando will say something that is going to be very critical... let's see.

Spanish Speaker 16 (Fernando) at 00:56:28min: Well, all the problems we have discussed here... we have various moments of criticisms. But we need punctual debates, because many times those doing the work on the ground ... [too much background music].

Spanish Speaker 17 (Moema) at 00:58:55min: I'm Moema, I work for IBASE. ... I wanted to have a dialogue. The Forum is effectively a process of collective construction which we share, or it is nothing. ... [too much background noise].

Spanish Speaker 18 (Ricardo from Chile) at 01:02:10h: I believe that within the criticism, we should go back to a more radical position in criticizing the Forum as a macro space. I believe the Forum tries to embrace different social spaces within its quite big name and it leaves aside those spaces that are really generating radicalism: the small movements, and the professional movements. I believe there is a need to stop thinking that this has to be a macro event, and not just an event, a process in which we are all involved. I believe that the majority of people that could not attend this place are left aside and in their place there are other people that do not tend to think about the Forum as a space for communication, convergence, and jubilation to be able to have more radical projects within the spaces. I believe it is not valid to think so widely, knowing that in fact you are leaving aside the regional Forums, the people who really deal with struggles. Beyond of what can be done with words, there is a need for action and results. The plans of the Forum have always been dedicated to portray the Forum to the world as an event that has to be perfect without any problems, but they have a lot of capacity as well as a lot of lack ... In the regional Forums we have been working in a daily battle for the Forum camps. I believe that going beyond the speech is important. Some people after listening to big thinkers, to big intellectuals who speak about world famine, then go and eat a lunch of thirty dollars in a bourgeois restaurant. I believe that the Forum is much more than that; it is what we do on a daily basis: you are from Argentina, tell me your reality; you are from Colombia, tell me your reality; you are from United States, tell me your reality; I believe this is what really fulfils the people. There is a lack of money, lack of capacity and lack of logistics to be able to bring here the people who attended all the regional Forums and that really [requires] a bigger effort of this beautiful movement. Thank you.

[applause]

English Speaker 4 (Female) at 01:04:49h: I was really confused when we started talking about power relations when I first got here [not clear]... because I don't think they are the same thing. I think that one of the problems with locally ... and talking about the struggle ... and talking about the organizing committee, is that 'why' do we come to the World Social Forum? One of the questions I'm asking myself is 'why', why bother? ... This movement keeps sounding like something is gonna make some sort of new international organization, some sort of new religion. ... But this movement is about so much more; it's about creating new ways of being in the world, new relations ... I actually like to hear about why he did that because I think it would take us back a little bit from where we were going. I also would like for us to begin a discussion of the future of the World Social Forum at the content level: what do we want to get out of it?

Because just talking about the power relations gives them actually the power and something they can control.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 19 (Teivo) at 01:06:38h: Excellent, she is absolutely right, right? OK, I thought we were not going to be so philosophical and deep into why we are here in the World Social Forum. ... We are here to discuss power relations and we have to do it together; unity to what it means ... Time is running out and the case as well.

Spanish Speaker 20 (Enrique from Mexico) at 01:07:09h: Hello I am Enrique from Mexico. I believe that, if there's not a dichotomized discussion, then there isn't. I think we didn't propose it like that. But if there are dichotomous organizational roles, then an International Council is needed: someone has to say where to send the letters, send the money, ... or not? We need an International Council, but the Council and the Forum, they would be nothing without all the movements. As movements we do need the Council and the Council needs the movements and in this dialogue we have to progress. Now, I think that the problem of the Forum at present ... [not clear] but this was a big progress, wasn't it? Amazing, I think it deserved it. For example, I think that the consultation process regarding the eleven topics is an improvement. The Zapatistas always consult their communities when they are about to take a decision. So, we have to intensify the consultation, and we have to radicalize the topics. Let us open a discussion to all the organizations about the money; because now we can say that we don't accept money from Santander [the bank]. This is something that this Forum [can decide]. Santander did several things in Mexico; so it is strange to accept money from them. But we can neither say not to receive money from them, because then what do we do? Let us open a discussion to all the organizations of how we can finance this Forum autonomously. Let us also open a discussion of how we can organize this Forum. Because it is quite clear that we cannot bring the problems of the movements to be solved here, but there are forms of organization. Since 2003 we fought and we asked for convergence spaces, to build action centres, reference centers, places where people won't just open a workshop, but could also organize assemblies, be organized, build networks and collective spaces coming from a single organization. Then, if you follow such consultation process, then the moment of the ruling by obeying, as the Zapatistas say, can arrive: ruling but taking decisions by obeying the below, and I believe what we must do is to build a certain autonomy in the eleven axes and also build action centers that don't belong to one or two organizations but rather to multiple action centers so that they strengthen network. Going back to the beginning I feel that the role of the Council is to listen very carefully, to rule by obeying, to listen and to open consultation, and that role is up to you to play it ... We have to make our dreams and our organization become reality to make this Forum objective and autonomous.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 21 (Immanuel) at 01:09:37h: I'm Immanuel, from the United States. I am not a member of the International Committee, but I'm part of the group that has signed this manifesto, which is not called the Group of Nineteen, and we have not 'produced' a consensus, this is what the manifesto says. We have done this not because

we have power, but because we don't have power, to protest against power. This text People ask 'who's got the power?', and finally if we conclude that Moema doesn't have it, that no single person has it, this is the miracle of this Forum. This [the Forum] is a structure where power is the least important thing. In this Forum we have taken the power from below, in the Organising Committee, ... the money, why the money? Because we need the money to build the marquees; we don't have money to pay for each trip, but we have the money to This is the minimum of money we need for the qualification of our work. The political problem as many people have said is to reconcile the idea of open space, which is fundamental, very important, with reality; the real necessity to make political actions in a variable conjuncture across the world, to make what the Forum was set up to do, which is to change the world. Now in constituting this group [the 'Group of Nineteen'] that made these proposals, these are just proposals, and if you don't appreciate them, there are others. The problem for the Forum, is not the problem of power, is not the problem of money, is the problem of reconciling this Forum, this open space with political possibility.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 22 (Teivo) at 01:13:29h: The idea at this time is not to repeat interventions of the ones that have already spoken but, as Friede mentioned in the beginning, the topic of those who signed this declaration and now she has asked to make a short comment about that, I suggest that we give her the opportunity for a very short reaction.

English Speaker 5 (Friede) at 01:14:06h: I thought it was interesting that the G19 was self-chosen ... so it's not another intervention by nineteen people. I thought the number that 85 speakers here at the World Social Forum have been people with at least a BA or more education is interesting. And problem also of the 'remasculinisation' of the Forum. So, we do have the process of the old hegemonic group again. The other thing is that this manifesto [by the G19] is media based, ... focused on media attention. I'm sure you wouldn't ... Why can you have success in something like this? ... But the people who protest, and people who are opposing this, are the people with power.

Spanish Speaker 23 (Teivo) at 01:15:07h: Perfect, ... it is necessary to read the manifesto, to continue the debate. Carolina, are you still waiting; you had requested me a while ago?

Spanish Speaker 24 (Carolina) at 01:15:27h: Carolina, from Peru. I'd like to mention two things. ... To what race do I belong to? I think this is important because ... On my way from Buenos Aires to here, I met six workers from Porto Alegre who work in Chile; they came because they knew about the Forum; among the six, two were in agreement with the Forum and they were optimistic about it and they did have a positive vision for the Forum, ... and then we talked about the workers, we talked on behalf of the workers, on behalf of the natives, as a colleague from Mexico previously said; in my country there are small groups calling themselves self-representatives of this and that, and this arises from the problem of representation; I don't have the answer and I would like to confirm this reflection, because the problem of representation arises from the

monarchy; it is not even born with liberal democracy. So, I want to forward this motion to expand representation.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 25 (Teivo) at 01:17:19h: Thank you; the colleague has been waiting for better times like many others.

Spanish Speaker 26 (Ericson) at 01:17:26h: I am Ericson, I'm from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I am going to talk about two points. The first point is that I totally disagree with Virginia and Fatima. The Forum is not only a space that works following the logic of [political] parties, where one tendency seeks the hegemony over another one. This is a trap that is made to capture us, and from which we have to escape. You have to fight for spaces, for representation, so that you can move to do something. No, it's not true, this is very bad. We are [thus] repeating the working of parties; this system of parties is exactly what we are trying to break away from; we want to get away from this. So it's very bad, this logic of institutionalisation, of power. This logic of institutionalisation of the Forum is something we have to be aware of. This is my first point. The second point is about the size of the Forum: I remember in Buenos Aires [at the Argentinean Social Forum], everything was very concentrated, and very powerful – everything took place at UBA, Universidad de Buenos Aires, and it was very powerful. And people were talking about doing stuff, planning actions. And here, if you don't know... The Youth Camp was a very revolutionary thing that totally lost its original meaning. I'm sorry to say this, I appreciate you very much as *companheiros*, but 35 thousand people... There is a lack of water, they toilets are crap, the girls are being harassed; everyone knows that, this is the pure reality. I'm sorry, I do understand that it is not their fault.

[applause]

English Speaker 6 (Meena Menon) at 01:20:08h: I'm Meena Menon, I'm from India; thank you for inviting me here. We didn't have young people in India as part of the Social Forum as it's here. This is the opportunity for me to talk to each other; learn from each other, from each other's experiences. What makes me feel very proud ... those of you who were there at the World Social Forum in Mumbai. Although I think we had a lot of problems and perhaps we decided to hide them away ... we feel all the problems, we feel the weaknesses, we had a lot of weaknesses there too, I'm sure ... I hope that in the next Social Forum we'll do in India there will be more participation from the Youth Camp; we are actively helping the Youth Camp in India and Asia to work. ... Experience is important, you have experience in organizing. The same thing applies to older people. Older people have experience, good and bad, and some we learn from, some we don't; and I think that experience is what you need to affect; learn, keep the good things and drop the bad things, and in that process pick up the wealth. I think the youth have many things to teach. Many youths want an organization ... Some of the issues raised here maybe you know the issues, maybe you don't, but I would definitely like to hear whether you can [solve some] of the issues you are raising. ... The problems about what Professor Wallerstein said is true, and it was very amusing, because I think the professor is quite right ... in order to put some kind of political content, some kind of political consensus building on the agenda. Yet, I am one of those who think that the

time is not right for the WSF ... It is not possible to build consensus so easily. I think we need a vision through the movement; we need to start with something the movement wants. How they try to visualize the world. How they strategize water. I think we need to start with that. I think the Youth Camp; the youth also needs to talk about that. What kind of world do you want? What kind of dreams do you have? Because as you get older the dream are denser, when you are younger you can dream much stronger. ... When I was younger I would smoke, drink, I had a small dream that I could do all the things that I felt like doing; ... I wondered, is it alright; is it all right to smoke more than two dopes a day; is it alright to do it; you see; and is it alright for my son and daughter to do these things; Is it alright to let her go? And I think to myself, ... I wonder how you would like your parents to deal with it. I think it's not a question of ...; it's about how you are dealing with it, when you are in the position of power again, because you are in a position of power with respect to your children and it's about responsibility; were do you draw the line? And I think is not about those things. I think is a question of what kind of dreams we have. And I think it's far more complex than young or old. If the Youth Camp consists mainly of educated white youth, mainly male, maybe this is also a problem of articulation. Because there you are again deciding what kind of spaces you occupy on how much space you are giving to someone else. ... because the need for organization is best served, when you have to solve problems of water, housing and other issues in a Forum, in a Camp. You need an organization in order to do these things ... [not clear] ... but I think there is a need for organization to do these things, and this organization can be oppressive on some level. ... I'd really like people to respond to this. ...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 27 (VG) at 01:26:14h: I'm VG, from Brazil; I would like to begin with the same critique that [Moema] made, and turn it back on her; I think you resorted to the same dichotomy of one side against the other. I think we are looking for solutions, the 'youth' and 'the adults' here, we are working together, and don't need to get stuck on this difference. I think it is really important to think how it works; the question is how to do it; because we all know that we have many thinkers, we have many people theorizing, but practice is something else. I believe there is a big difference when we see one of the organizers of the Forum drinking Coca Cola. I also believe that the Forum is a site of struggle, and that all of us make a Forum; we all are the Forum. Then I will also tell you a very important thing that in order to [interruption] maybe there is a difference but [interruption] well, let's not turn it into a debate. Yes, it is a site of struggle, but it must also have a position; we cannot have a 'soft body', as we say in Portuguese. Are we anticapitalist? I think we should start from that.

[applause]

English Speaker 7 at 01:27:49h: I'm from Belgium and I work for Belgium's Social Forum. I'm a member of ATTAC... In the Belgian Social Forum we have the same problems with young people and grassroots movements; ... if there are some ideas, we can share them. What I think is that we need some change; that is the idea. I have seen one concrete thing, but some people won't like it. The ... party from Belgium has been here, and some NGOs and trade unions; some good contacts have been made. So, this

has led to some coalitions that this party has established. So, this is a change. So, their programme has changed. They've now got some ideas. So, if you have some bright ideas, NGOs and trade unions take them; because they are more visible than we are here, they can pass on the information. The problem is that information is not radical change. So, if you can keep with these changes; the question is how can we improve the visibility, the contact with the NGOs and trade unions and the contact with the powerful people in the planet. If you want something else, we have to find something else...

[applause]

English Speaker 8 at 01:30:13h: My name is Ashani and I come from South Africa and I just wanted to comment on the issue of the Youth Camp in 2003 and this year. ... [There haven't been just] young people; there've been old people and children ... and some of the nicest comrades I met come from Argentina are not so young ... The challenge to organization, the challenge to leadership, comes not just from youth. I think it's not just a young idea to organize differently. I think having been able to share those experiences have been outside of these [forum structures]. ... The World Social Forum is coming to Africa pretty soon. And we are a bit worried because the African Social Forum ... has been dominated by people from NGOs ... I don't have an answer to that, but I think we all have to put our mind on how we get the movement in Africa actually involved in the World Social Forum when it comes to us.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 28 at 01:32:12h: Well, I will start saying that I come from Greece, and I live in France and I am travelling around here. Then, being here with all of you, I had to realize that I am part of a power and also of a minority, that we all form this power because we can be here. Good, for that reason we can start to link up differently what is 'how' and what is 'what'. Then I believe we cannot say there is not a problem and that we will find the consensus of doing what we want to do. No, the 'how' is not for consensus, first, because it is not necessary to have consensus. What we are trying to defend here is something else that leads us to other different things – not to mention 'worlds', which is directly from the Zapatista movement ... What we need to see is that we have to ask 'how' with another question. 'How' do we include, or how do we think about a space where the remaining 80 percent of people existing in this world cannot talk. We can't go on saying, 'what are we going to do to include the groups of women, or the group of the indigenous in the Forum'. I'm sorry, we are the 'group', they are everyone. They are a lot. I still haven't heard anybody talking about the people from Guatemala, the natives from Guatemala, I have not heard anybody talking about what is going on in Burma, and yes, I have heard of people who are trying to show a documentary of what is going on in Burma and nobody shows it because they don't have a tape. Everybody has to do what he has to, and has to talk about it, for this reason we are here, because we are trying to converge. Then the most important thing for me is that we must consider how we integrate with the real world.

[applause]

Portuguese Speaker 2 (Kiko) at 1:35:30h: Kiko, from Rio de Janeiro. First of all, power never ceases to exist; I think our problem, our commitment here is how to make it

transversal. We're not going to put an end to power, or these multiple powers; we need to modulate them so they can be the most radically democratic. I agree, for instance, with the criticism made by Rodrigo on the issue of free software; at the same time, I think it's great that it's finally being used [by the Forum]. This is process of appropriation that happens ..., happens with the punks, the krishnas... I think this is inevitable, this appropriation; what we should consider is how to stop this appropriation from being a form of capture. Another important issue is: of course, we are human; of course, we make mistakes; we look at each other and make criticisms, and that's good. But then we fall into this dichotomic game of saying 'yes, he makes criticisms, but look at what he does'. But criticism is everywhere; we still haven't overcome these problems. We must be serious about acknowledging these problems, we must criticise, we must evolve, but we must smile! We need an open space, a radically democratic one, where this can happen. How to make this happen? It must be done in some way.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 29 at 01:37:51h: Partner, the colleague who requested to speak, go ahead!

Spanish Speaker 30 at 01:38:00h: Well I speak Italian ... and I will have to speak a language that is not mine ... so, a little bit of mercy please. ... Well, I heard the Forum has changed. Well, I am a simple participant and I don't belong to any organization; so, I don't know if the Forum has changed. What I can see is that the attitudes of the big figures didn't change, because I saw today and right here, people, partners ... their point of view ... I am not very young; I've already seen these attitudes several times. But they are not simple attitudes ... they are political attitudes like the ones I saw in the unions, in the political parties; the leaders arrived, spoke, and then chatted with their friends and leave. I don't believe that it is a simple attitude, ... I lost the plot a bit – when is my turn to speak the ideas don't come out so easily; well then ten more seconds. All of us, we are the Forum, but that all of us are indigenous, no, it's not true, certainly not, each one have his own power relation and of its relationship it does arise its relationship of power and I say I have prepared ... because no, is not true, why the relationships of power have to be kept out? We are men and women in here. Then ... in my country there were people, colleagues, members of the council, etc. and then they decided for the quantity of the parties ... and they won but anybody requested permission. Then we don't have to include anybody, no, we are not liberals. If the other ones they want to come, then they will come but what do we do to include them? No, it is not necessary to include. The others who ... we have to know our own political limits. If the others, those excluded, if they don't come, maybe it is the case that they have other political limits.

Spanish Speaker 31 (Teivo) at 01:41:00h: Thank you. We still have half hour of the official time and we have certain flexibility to continue with the discussion later on than this, if we want. But I would suggest that from now on people will try to focus a little bit more on some debate axes, without making a very structured debate, and I believe that this is good; but we have talked about some topics here; it has been talked about representation and democracy within the Forum; it has been talked about inclusion and exclusion, the politics of those who enter the Forum the ones who don't; it has been talked about money: this is a topic that I've always found strange – that the World

Social Forum where there are a lot of people with very good Marxist formation, it is pre-supposed that there is political economy, relationships between money and power, and very little attention has been paid to relationships between money and power in the Forum – so, this is another topic that it has arisen here. There are also other debatable axes, but it would be good and in the interest of everybody if those persons who are going to talk would not drag these for too long but would focus a bit more on the debate itself, or they can start a new topic of discussion, if they have a good reason ... then it's welcome, right? But we are not trying to build consensus; it is not a reunion with this purpose, but it would be nice to see what are the disagreements and the agreements, to have an idea about certain topics, possibly advance a little bit the axes of debate. Here there is a colleague that asked to speak a while ago.

Spanish Speaker 32 at 01:42:36h: Hello, good afternoon, Mariana from Argentina. My concerns about the Forum at present are two: first, one that has been mentioned and repeated is the extension and the amplification of the Forum, with the idea of including many people that are now excluded; and the second, it could be a question for you and Manuel, which is of the topic of the Forum's challenge: how to reconcile, how to produce effective global actions. Therefore I would like to listen to different proposals, something that I think this year we are missing a bit; how to generate effective social actions mainly coming from experiences in the past years...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 33 at 01:43:38h: OK, my name is Camilo, I am from Colombia. I would like to add a little bit of pepper to three points: the first one that indeed, apart from the sounds and the annotations, I don't see any of the members of the International Committee, or either any of the representatives of the social movements whom are the ones that also give the strength, body, there is not this ... The second point, to face up to the political differences, I believe it is necessary to understand that capital has had the possibility to adapt according to particularities and in that are mainly the organizing groups because I believe that the attitude should be more pro-active and more positive in order to analyze these type of things; this leads my country to an everlasting condition of irregular war which has generated a discussion about a different connotation of peace or war... Or in India, but there the structural dominance through the castes, we can say, leads to another type of determination, and I do believe that the problem there is not to locate the differences but to determine how they have structured socially and historically in forms of domination. ... I believe that if the left is criticized so much, I believe that you cannot criticize it from the air. I don't believe ... neither here in the camp, neither in the city, neither in the neighbourhoods, I do believe that we are products of the struggle with many errors, with many faults, expensive, even worse I believe that we are products of that and to ignore them I believe it would be a brilliant stupidity. And in face of that, what I believe is that the word 'process' is to understand it according to the effects that we owe ourselves and not according to people that we assemble with. Then, if we think that the process is temporary and the status of the Forum as well, we will surely reproduce internal questions as the Fourth International and all those things of the Left, but the people and the real subject are outside and it is there, in front of those subjects that we have to look for the reality of the process. And the third, about the power, I believe that it has to carry out in the same line but

definitively within a space, I don't think we can request so much, it is not necessary to request so much, but it is necessary to know how to request what it can give and within this, I believe that there are fundamental problems in the economic issue, I don't think money is bad or not. I believe that this is a capitalist system and it is necessary to get money and without money it doesn't work. But I also believe that it is necessary to democratize and to be able to radicalize to the maximum the possibility of collecting money and the possibility of preparing the necessary resources for those characters that come every year, so that they can give us a video conference for example and that this passage becomes a way of accessing other people; but too many options can be located. But I am convinced, and with this I finish, that the revolution is not made in events, the transformation for some, call it as you want, it is not made in events. The events complete a role and in front of that I am not saying it is necessary to mount straight into the requesting permission to the coordinating committees, but stopping that feeling of resistance that we all share would neither be good.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 34 (Teivo) at 01:47:45h: Mike had asked me the word for something so important that it will justify a very short intervention.

Spanish Speaker 35 at 01:47:54h: ... that he comes five minutes and is the best economist of all of us, but well, OK. Hey, no, first I will say one thing, I find that we are discussing the Forum, the Forum, the Forum, but we are not discussing the movement. I say the Forum, it is the result of the struggle of the principle we can observe it in the movement against hunger, and the mobilizations in Europe, of Seattle, of Geneva, and all that. ... But now there will be more time to continue the discussion because we won't make another chat that we wanted to have and did it seem to us that it had a lot to do with this issue and that I find that it is previous to this one which is where the global movement is today? Where and how does the Forum serve the global movement? Do I find that if we would have these where are the Europeans? Where are they, ... what is happening? On the other hand, there are Asians participating in the Forum each year. Do I find out about these things before coming to the Forum...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 36 (Teivo) at 01:49:06h: ... later we're going to have Maite and some other colleagues who were organizing a debate some years after Seattle and the idea was to continue this event with another event but the other event has taken place in parallel to this event. And there exactly to say what we are talking about that issue, of the importance of connecting, to talk about the Forum or to talk about the movements; to me for example to talk about Seattle was that in Seattle you politicize the economic issue, the international issue, in a reaction against the capital power and that political dimension to me at least is the spirit where the Forum is born. As a result there are concerns of different types of depoliticization within the Forum: where is a space or movement, if it can be a relationship of representation and democracy within the Forum; [this is] something that we should debate, or if it is an apolitical space. And those are the concerns that arise from this, the idea that the movement has been a political movement and for that reason we are now having this debate, Steffen.

English Speaker 8 at 01:50:30h: Hi, I'm Steffen from London, the UK. I've got a very practical question; we are lucky to have some members of the International Council in the crowd: how does one become a member of the Council? How are decisions made in the Council? It's a question of power and organization. Some would argue; well, it's not really a relevant question: ... we are all the Social Forum, we can all take decisions, we have all responsibilities to include as many people as possible. But I think there is also a certain naïve position, which says, it doesn't really matter to the International Committee how decisions are made. My response to that would be, yes it is very important, and your point early on to say, it is not about power; I totally disagree with that because even in the smallest decision made in relation to where the Social Forum will take place, how money is raised, where the money is spend, is in the end a political question, is a question of power. So, we have all the responsibility to question who is on this committee: how does one become member of it? What do these people do? As far as I can see, as many people have raised it, you know, gray-haired man on the committees making decisions for us. So, somebody like Holloway has been going around saying we can change the world without taking power; well, sorry, but I really disagree, I think we have to take power and we have to start taking power and we have to start taking it in our own organization which is the Social Forum, and this to my feeling also includes the question of representation, and we briefly touched on this question early on ... as the Forum becomes bigger and bigger we can't... we have to confront the question of representation which does not mean that we have to go back to some weird liberal democracy, we all agree obviously that this is, you know, their model; but representation is something much broader ... but this becomes more theoretical and I had a very practical question: who is on the committee [International Council]? And how does one become a member?

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 37 (Teivo) at 01:53:34h: As there was a direct question, I suggest that somebody will respond to that, Fátima? No? How does someone end up being a member of the International Council? Or do I respond? Does somebody want to respond to that? Somebody wants to respond to that, I can respond, no, I want to. It's like somebody said that to be on the International Council [laughs] ... to be on the International Council of the Forum is like being in the Central Committee without knowing who Stalin is! [laughs]

Spanish Speaker 38 at 01:54:32h: Well, the first idea that I can talk about is that this process was a quite an arbitrary process, it didn't have any rules. The movements and the networks that exist are those born somehow in the beginning ... of the Forum, and this ... space where the functions have arisen changes throughout time ... The International Council has a methodology basically ... it doesn't necessarily mean that it lacks authority ... As he said, ... it is not the case of somebody taking control and decide, because the decisions are taken by consensus; sometimes there are terribly boring discussions in which we eventually achieve to decide on something ahead ... But ... there is ... a lot more from the bottom to the top. I believe that two things need to be strengthened: first to discuss representation; what does representation mean? But am I sure that Fatima can add something else.

Spanish Speaker 39 at 01:56:23h: Fatima, responding to that concrete question.

Spanish Speaker 40 at 01:56:27h: ... Formally the members of the Council ... to be a member of the Council, there is a commission that evaluates [the selection] ... who agrees with it ... The problem is that a formal representation [is not possible] ... [We shouldn't be] ... the representatives of the party, the new party. ... [not clear]

Spanish Speaker 41 at 01:57:28h: Maybe the point is still incomplete, as it keeps expanding, right? There is something interesting about the concept of open space, it was emphasized a lot ... [not clear] ... but this was all I was going to mention ... that we talk about if rules are necessary or not, ... is it important to have rules? It is a concept of open space, and open space for many means not to have any rules. And then the International Council chose the modality ... concrete applications, ... claims to become new members; and because it was a supposedly open space, no rules are needed. If there are no rules at all, it won't be possible to decide about applications, and when it is not possible to decide then it is a closed space. So, this is a paradox of open spaces that we can think about and this was very important in the expansion of the International Council, because during two years it decided that it could not take decisions because this dilemma was too complicated. ...

Spanish Speaker 42 at 01:58:53h: ... only to say that the European example shows how opening the process actually helps; it does help ... that others control; the Greeks are very divided, which is ... and in the end I think the answer is Greek ... and the balance of all this to me is that the open process is better than any selected council that is considered to be quite good.

Spanish Speaker 43 at 01:59:29h: Good afternoon, I am from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; my name is Jordano. I work with the homeless movement, the movement against the police violence in Rio de Janeiro, and the institutional movement. Well, the first point ... that grabbed attention was the point that the colleague from Argentina mentioned before, the fact that Lula is looking at our names in Davos, and I think this is unacceptable and something should be done in respect of this. [applause] We can't just sit here looking at each other without doing anything. But I would like to discuss this again with the colleague because I arrive at the same position, but starting from a totally different history of the Forum. I was at the first World Social Forum here and we participated together with twenty other ... about an action against the World Social Forum where we denounced and shared with all colleagues who came from other parts of the world and didn't know Lula and the bureaucracy and technocracy of the PT ... that this was a trick for electoral purposes on a national level, and on an international level it was a manoeuvre of the reformation of capitalism. We wrote the manifesto 'Another World is Possible Destroying Capitalism'. Later in the second Forum we wrote the manifesto 'Another Exclusive Forum'. In all the Forums we've tried to change this. I do believe that it worked, right? Today, this fifth Forum, is a tourist event, right? It was maintained for political questions not because their objectives were already concluded. I think it was an example of the movement ... and all this was called at the second Forum 'About the Parallel'. I think this year there are some kind of spaces for things like this one here, for example; but, on the other hand, there is much less energy, and the Forum in general has less energy. Because ... the Forum ... I don't agree with it being started, and we

were deceived, ... the idea of those that began the Forum already had this in mind; because it was begun with bureaucrats of the PT that are capable, if you don't know them well, ... people that are in the popular struggle are behind the police, right? We do know them well ... The Ford Foundation; well, there are other things that I wanted to say, but my time has already run out.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 44 (Teivo) at 02:02:25h: The colleague referred to the Forum having less energy than in previous Forums. A concrete question is how much energy we have to continue? [audience talk] Do we still have energy; do you find the debate important or very slack? [audience talk] Is it good? Do you agree? Perfect! Here another colleague.

Spanish Speaker 45 at 02:02:53h: Hello, I am Gabriela from Peru ... In fact, I think the participation of all the people in the Forum is quite ephemeral ... I think that the absence of convocation ... I came here to find people that thought the same as me, to strengthen what I believed in, and to form certain networks to continue, but I have not achieved it. So, this has discouraged me. I believe that the people should look for a way to articulate ... young ones as well as adults ... I think that the committee has to facilitate; ... so that there is an encounter; not so many commissions, but a way of dialogue ... that they have networks that can help to ... I do think that it is not [only a question of] listening; ... but we have to discuss, to be more articulate, because if we don't the situation weakens ... [The Forum] doesn't have enough energy ... I feel that it is very important and that I have learned so many things, but what for? What for? I don't know. I do think that it is very important to foment a dialogue, a situation...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 46 (Teivo) at 02:04:43h: For it to be more ... the situation as Gabi requested, will we hear the colleague ... from Japan, right?

Portuguese Speaker 3 at 02:04:53h: ... I'll speak in Portuguese, but I'm from Japan. Two problems. First, Brazil for example is very far away from Japan; so people in grassroots movements from Japan can't come. Who can come then? Second, there's a huge problem of translation. ... [not clear]

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 47 at 02:07:41h: The colleague asked for some time now, compañera

Portuguese Speaker 4 (Fabiana) at 02:07:51h: I'm Fabiana, from Porto Alegre, from the Youth Camp Organising Committee. I'd like to draw people's attention to the design of the Forum this year: the differences between this Forum and the last one, this Youth Camp and the last one. I think this has contributed a lot to the mediatisation of the Forum, and we should ask how much we profit, and how much we lose because of that. What does it mean for the Forum to have the Youth Camp here? What is our political gain? I used to joke with my companheiros that this new design would be great for 'Zero Hora' [largest Porto Alegre newspaper]; and today, that was the picture in their

front cover. We should question ourselves: is this what we are? I think we're a lot more than a bird's eye view. For the money that is spent, the energy that's wasted, and the little... [interruption] Something else that has scared me a lot – and now the Youth Camp OC is in the Brazilian Organising Committee, in the International Council – is the importance given to 'diversity' after the Forum in India. This goes hand in hand with the mediatisation. 'The more diversity' [the better]. But what diversity is this? What do we gain from this? What I want to say is that we must start thinking again about a concise Forum, a space for debate, as the *companheiro* said, I think it's too...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 48 at 02:09:56h: I'm Mateo from the northwest of the United States, and, OK, we are thinking about the future, right? Thinking of the urgency, what is our main urgency? For our movement to grow, and to protect our neighbourhoods. The urgency is not to make a false consensus here for the world, as an answer to the ones in control. I believe that the urgency is to give voice to those that don't have one, to strengthen what we are building. And, well, it is necessary to take the time with the world forums and to leave space for local issues, for regional issues, for thematic forums, so that the process grows more democratic; and, well, how can the Forum be then? How can the Forum strengthen our movement in this approach? How can it strengthen our dream? How can it facilitate our convergence points that we can find in other places and then, eventually at world level? And, then, at the same time, we have to think about the spaces we are building ... What are those spaces and the democratic consensus? ... At the same time, we are thinking about the power within the Forum...

[applause]

Portuguese Speaker 6 at 02:11:56h: Thank you. I'm going to raise the ethnic diversity here, I'm Polish. I'll address the issues of power and representativity, as they are directly linked. As professor ... said yesterday, So I think the Forum itself produces power, the problem is how to distribute it. ...

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 49 (Teivo) at 02:14:03h: Now it will be just about seven o'clock, but as I said we will continue a little bit longer with the debate especially because we will have an intervention now that I find interesting, very interesting. But before that I want to thank those who maybe have to leave because it is seven o'clock and have other commitments, like Emmanuel and Beatriz already have [applause]. But as a substitution another gentleman has come who will help us to respond a little to the question of how the organs that govern the World Social Forum were chosen, and the International Council that governs ... He has been very involved in that and so I do believe that he can give us some hints; we will tell him that here we have talked, we have criticized a little a certain lack of democracy, and all that ... and one question was, how the International Council or the Brazilian Organizing Committee were selected. And then Chico Whitaker who has been very involved in the process from the beginning and I suggest that we give him at least three minutes to say something on that issue because I believe that he can complete the answer.

Chico at 02:15:31h: I'll use my first half minute to apologise. ... I'd like first of all to apologise for not having been here before, I intended to arrive at four, but I was attending the preparations for the closing ceremony tomorrow. Do you know about it? You don't know? I'll tell you. The closing event will be tomorrow morning at 8.30, in the stage behind the Gasometro. When the idea of the Forum occurred – 'let's make it' – it was a proposal to which we had to reply 'either we do it, or we don't'. So the people who accepted this challenge invited a few other people – not just the people, but the organisations they belonged to; but mainly the people who could work to make this happen. So we started working, and it was mostly a matter of getting it off the ground, because we had very little time: the idea first appeared in January, February, in March the first meeting took place, in July we opened discussions with the Rio Grande do Sul State government, the local government, to know whether they accepted working on it, they wouldn't intervene. This was in July. So this proposal was then taken to a world assembly of social movements, of these movements who'd been very active in mobilisations of the late 1990s, and once it was accepted we had from August to January to organise everything. Thus, the group that had accepted this task started working on it together, and other organisations eventually joined by helping with all the tasks that were necessary. The International Council: the International Council was born out of a decision taken after the first Forum here, when we said, 'this can't be restricted to Brazil, we need to make it global, we need to have forums in other places', and we need to connect at a world scale much more than we had until then. For that, we said 'it'd be good if we had the systematic support of international organisations'. This Organising Committee, and other organisations that were close to it, drafted a list of all the organisations that had attended the first Forum which could join something like a council, we still didn't quite know what; so this Council resulted from a sort of election of people and organisations. In all the first list we drafted, there were around seventy organisations, and they all met in June 2001. This Council started functioning from then. After that there was a whole discussion on how to bring in new members, with what criteria, and this was a discussion that took the Council itself almost two years to arrive at some conclusions. This was concluded in 2004, when another group of organisations joined the Council. We are now still debating the criteria. Zero minutes. I apologise, but i have another commitment now, and I'll have to leave you. Thank you very much.

Spanish Speaker 50 at 02:20:35h: Come on, compañera.

Spanish Speaker 51 at 02:20:37h: The comrades that brought me here are waiting for me; I have to go back to Patagonia and I cannot leave without telling the organizers what has happened here in the Forum in the last few days because there was an exact reproduction of what is subjugation, oppression and discrimination. I came to this Forum with the intention of being able to participate in different discussions fundamentally related to the issues of the indigenous people; to present the problem of ... corporations in Patagonia, Argentina. Besides the surprise of the Forum being financed by corporations against which we usually fight, I was also censored in the space of the indigenous. I asked the coordinators of the space for indigenous, who had designated it. Then I realized that not all organizations are invited; it is impossible for those organizations that are in the real fight, for those who are not ideologists of the revolution but their practitioners, to be in these spaces. ... We've tried to summon

everybody to be able to organize, but we could not, and do you know why? Because we have to prevent the Santander group, which keeps all the territories, so that they stop messing around with us and they make some cleaning for us; we cannot participate in the meetings because many times we don't have enough money to come to Brazil. We don't even have enough resources to travel around our own communities, and to arm the fight like we want to. So, I arrived here thinking it was going to be a pluralistic space in which we could speak, but then we realized that the indigenous space was invaded by Chavistas (pro-Chavez) ... and many 'istas' were going around; but we, the ones who put our body, we do not have a right to vote, we don't have a voice. We cannot speak because we weren't included in the programme. Maybe we could have five minutes ... but we have different perspectives of time. Which new world are we talking about, if we cannot have a respectful, retrospective look of the other world; if it was possible, if it lived, if it was useful to us, and that they destroyed without consulting us. Now we want to be part of these consultations, of this new and possible world, but following our own parameters; it is a shame, *compañeros*; it is shameful how Mapuche, as an earth warrior, to have to be in front of *compañeros* who are supposed to want to build the new world together and they didn't give us the opportunity to speak because we could not be in Brasilia. I hope that these things will be modified. I'm leaving extremely disappointed. I do not know if I will be able to return because at this time, while I am here denouncing this situation, in my community thousands of kilometres away from the federal capital, my family, my four children, are surrounded by the police because we live in a terrorist state – by the rule of democracy ... Mr Kirchner's democracy. He is a very close friend of the president and we live in a terrorist state ... The Santander Group murders our rivers and evicts us, and I am here trying to present the issue and in fact it has been impossible. Finally, I would like to tell you something: I conclude now; only two more points ... colleagues ... two perspectives: no to capitalism, and the perspective of socialism, where the indigenous perspective has been included; the issue underlies in the indigenous towns perspective, *compañeros*, and in those experiencing the conflicts because of the forestation companies, mining companies and oil companies, that perspective ... we have the answer. They say that we want a pie that is equally distributed. Capitalism says we want the pie, and that the pie should be distributed according to the capacity. The indigenous people, we want to come here to say to all of you that we don't want the pie, we want to knead the pie with our hands, with Indo-America's ingredients; and we were not present to be able to share this. That is what I wanted to say, thank you.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 52 (Teivo) at 2:24:58: I do not know if the Organizing Committee wants to comment something about the spaces' issue ... Let's listen ... OK, then ... a comment, an answer ...

Spanish Speaker 53 at 2:25:40: Can I? I only want to try to explain from another perspective, which is not better, neither worse, it is simply my point of view ... We'll convert in Quito ... as Quito was the first town of the God summit. ... It's absolutely special to try to do something about the question of the [indigenous] towns ... with greater strength coming from themselves. In the World Social Forums that we previously had here in Porto Alegre, the indigenous towns seemed to be very dispersed,

they were not organized, some of the NGOs were not even there; I worked for an NGO, ... the indigenous towns ... what we did when we were in Quito was talking to the people that organized the summit of the indigenous towns of Quito and we told them: what do you think? How can we help, radicalize and deepen the nation's indigenous towns participation to the interior of this Forum's process, not only to be there ... Then we began a discussion with the people of Coica[?], of Collar[?], which are the political representations of the town ... But it's not enough, we have to deepen the participation, but I would argue that we have made the effort ... It's very important for ... a self-managed presence, starting from those who represented us as organizations of indigenous towns of the America. Of course, nobody has got a unitary representation, there are many forms ... we have to radicalize and deepen, but at least, for the first time, we had a space within the World Social Forum that has been chosen by the coordinators of this space ... they built a programme for the discussion with us ... and we have built the programme. I would say that there is much more to be done, much to be done to deepen, we are very far from what would be better, but we have to recognize that we have had a political effort ... a political and cultural, logistical effort to have in the World Social Forum those towns from the indigenous nations. In my opinion, it is a shame that you are disappointed because we try to do our possible best ... here I invite you very fraternally to discuss, to a dialogue and to try to deepen this process which is just at the beginning; there is a ... on the wall which I love 'what is freedom for if I cannot travel?' We travelled, we travelled ... I tell you with all fraternity again that I invite you to continue this dialogue, to deepen this debate and to see how we can include more ... the indigenous towns not only ... but in all the process of ... the World Social Forum.

[applause]

English Speaker 9 at 02:29:31h: What about the companies involved?

Spanish Speaker 54 (Teivo) at 2:29:34: Here comes a suggestion to use this space to talk about the companies, the money, the finances and the conditionings. If I understood properly, there is a question from here and another one from there, first this, than that. How is the energy level, if we continue for a while – but we are starting to conclude, right? [We want to know about the companies]; then we do have to talk more about the companies or not? [Yes], I don't know if the colleague's question has something to do with or is about another topic; let's talk about the companies first and then we will discuss another issue. ... OK, somebody still wants to emphasize something or do people believe they made the question, they've asked the questions, and they do have the answers as well. Then, I understood that there is an answer to the organizing committee or the International Council about which is the role of the international companies and their financing of the World Social Forum and what type of conditioning this can cause; someone mentioned Santander, right? Petrobras, what else? Ford, what else? Bayer. Petrobras, Santander, Ford, Bayer, any other company to be included? ... OK, we can deconstruct the frontier between private companies and public entities. OK, I don't know if it will be Moema again who will answer the question, or maybe Fatima is still here... because the Brazilian Organizing Committee is not.

Spanish Speaker 55 at 2:32:47: First, I totally agree with the concern about the financing question, it is a problem that we should try to deepen in the discussion and that we should cover in a better way. First, we don't have answers, and personally I do not have answers for everything. First of all, the private companies do not finance the Forum at all. Santander doesn't finance the Forum at all, Monsanto doesn't finance the Forum at all. We don't have any private company that puts its money into the World Social Forum. Second, the Ford Foundation, the Ford Foundation, yes the Ford Foundation doesn't finance this World Social Forum, it doesn't finance it. The ideologists have ... requesting support from the Ford Foundation ... But, yes the Ford Foundation finances the process. That is important to say it. The Ford Foundation finances many of the movements ... many movements have projects financed by the Ford Foundation, and that is it. Third, the Bank of Brazil, and what else? Petrobras. Yes, they are the Brazilian government's companies ... they are state companies, and these companies of the government were there since the beginning of the World Social Forum, from the first World Social Forum the government, the federal governments, the state and municipal governments, they all put money ... This is public money of the Brazilian people, it is not Lula's government money, it is not the government's money. It is the product of the hard work, very hard work of the Brazilian population. This is money ... with the sweat and the effort of the Brazilians, men and women. Being a public resource, we have to ... and in my opinion, ... we have to use the public resources to the service of those ... The World Social Forum, in my opinion, is a process of transformation of the reality; and therefore, it is a public space for the construction of a new order. The government's money is not money taken from a company; if we treat it in that way, we leave others to do ... and that the government leaves the public money for ... a family, that will denounce change in another place, there is going to be public money for the agrarian reform. Public money has to be argued 'hand in hand' to make popular steps to support the transformation process. Public money is ours; in my opinion, it should be under our control.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 56 (Teivo) at 2:36:17: Are we all satisfied? Does anybody want to comment on that? OK, compañero.

Spanish Speaker 57 at 2:36:37: I'm talking about climate change, which is fucking us all. We [live] in an oil culture; They are attacking cultures ... taking their water ... the water from the people, OK. ... The public companies are under the control of the people, or not? They are not under the control of the people. Petrobras; I don't control Petrobras, you don't control Petrobras; do we control Petrobras or the other oil companies? OPEC ... it is the most murderous company in the world; that is to say, the most murderous industry in this world; and, this guy is talking about another world that is possible out of this shit. Who are you trying to fool? They are using us, and they are using this dream to clean their faces. Next year BP perhaps is going to put money in ... BP, or billion petroleum. All these companies are using us because they use all of us; because they are parasites. ... We need an anti-oil movement; let's see how long Petrobras will last in the public hands. What we should not do is to wash their faces ... Petrobras is going to take out some little pamphlets with Che Guevara on it and we will all go to buy gasoline from Petrobras or the Bank of Brazil. And when Petrobras will be

going to mess around with the people of Bolivia, or to put another company ... these people are working for the market, the market is not ... for ten cents, neither now or in the future; ... above that they are not defending us, that is to say, they are using you as they use us ... To defend them here, we are defending the companies ...

Spanish Speaker 58 (Teivo) at 2:38:39: Here compañero, here Mina of the Indian Organising Committee asked a question about ... which kind of money would then be acceptable?

Spanish Speaker 59 at 2:38:50: Yes, what type of financing would be accepted by the doctor?

Spanish Speaker 60 (male) at 2:39:00: Me? In my deplorable opinion, the infrastructure here is superfluous, half of the infrastructure here is superfluous. That is to say, we can have other meetings, even smaller than this, right? So, it would not be necessary to take money from here and there, have all this ... paper, garbage, plastics ... I do not know, [but we don't need all this] money.

[applause]

Portuguese Speaker 8 at 2:39:39: There was a working group on sustainability in the Forum organisation, where this use of Petrobras money was questioned. And the whole working group was in fact against it. This a stance I think all of us Brazilians such have, a mediatic stance as well, against a company that is having a negative impact, acting like a multinational, in another country. In Ecuador there's a huge struggle against what Petrobras is doing there, and we as Brazilians should be against it. I think the Organising Committee's stance should have been of refusing these resources, because within this process [of organising the Forum] we have a lot of power. The question is not what money we use or we don't use, but how we can use the media impact of the Forum process [to denounce these things].

Spanish Speaker 61 (Teivo) at 2:41:01: Now, in the list I see there is ... We are lucky that ... has responded several times, so, we can give the word to another colleague again.

English Speaker 10 (Steffen) at 2:41:16: I think there can't be any question about this ... I mean we need money; we need some sort of money. But again the question is who makes these decisions? When? What kind of companies ... are involved? I mean, I think any local government is more democratic than the current International Council. We need to take control of these decisions because it is just absolutely vital. Only after the decisions are made, we are kind of consulted. But, obviously, this consulting process is some sort of arbitrary information process – after things have happened. We need the consultation process before; we need democratic structures on how these decisions are made.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 62 (male) at 2:42:26: A simple question and only a few seconds, no more ... Would it be possible that someone from the commission ... did a report which

states more or less how much money was used and what comes from which companies ... That's the questions, right? So, that we can think about this ... Where does the money come from? But where is the interest of these companies to invest money in here? This is to say, if a company works on a profit logic, why [are they interested]? The question that I want to leave for your contemplation is, why are they profiting from what is lacking here?

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 63 (Teivo) at 2:43:16: About that? About the financing from companies? Yes, but that is another issue.

Spanish Speaker 64 (female) at 2:43:39: OK, it is never pleasant to talk about money, for everybody there are many ... The problem has arisen because of including people of other countries, like Asia, and other groups. You are talking of how ... and I believe that the fact that the Forum does not ... this becomes treacherous in relation to the participatory [principle]. I believe that the Forum should be inspired ... in the same way that it was done here, but I believe that in the money discussion ... that it should apply to ... participatory what are the real basic necessities ... to participate in expenses ... and to consult with all the people of the Forum in order to know how the money will be managed.

[applause]

Spanish Speaker 65 (Teivo) at 2:44:30: Perfect, one question then. I do not know if it can be observed little by little ... the colleague from Argentina, the one who asked questions about the financing question, let's see ...

[recording stops]

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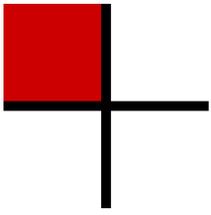
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Open Office and Free Software: The Politics of the WSF 2004 as Workplace*

Giuseppe Caruso

abstract

Is free software likely to help address issues regarding the complex politics, often factional and fragmented and informed by strong power dynamics, of complex organisational events of global civil society such as the World Social Forum (WSF)? The question is addressed in the paper by investigating the organisational, political and technical interactions at the level of the office of the organising committee of the WSF 2004 and with reference to the management of the WSF 2004 website. It is argued that the adoption of free software is an important political step towards the construction of the forum as an open and inclusive space, but there remain significant impediments to its effective use. In particular two main issues have been encountered: 1) that free software carries a political relevance that cannot be reduced to its use as a technical instrument and 2) that problems with free software in the WSF are often linked to the deployment of the 'efficiency discourse' on part of some forum organisers with the result of pre-empting the strength of the free software (FS) movement and therefore limiting the political incisiveness of the implementation of an information management system that relies fully on FS.

Introduction

A fundamental achievement of the WSF 2004, as proudly stated by a member of the Indian Organizing Committee (IOC), was that "all information management of the WSF was done without Microsoft".¹ It was not only a success against the most powerful corporation of the information business, it was also a success of a different way of thinking regarding technology² and software as product of human creativity, as civil rights, and as instruments of emancipation for the global citizen of the information society. Choosing to use GNU/Linux³ in all computers used in the organisational setup

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- 1 Notes taken by the author at the evaluation meeting held in Mumbai, 28th and 29th of February 2004.
- 2 For an important debate on the role of technology as a political process in the modern information society see Hand and Sandywell (2002). For a thorough discussion of the role of the new technologies in the global civil society see Bach and Stark (2004).
- 3 GNU is a recursive acronym that stands for GNU is NOT UNIX. Linux is the name of the kernel of the UNIX-like operating system GNU/Linux.

was a political choice made by the organizers of the WSF 2004. It was not just a technical or economic decision that referred merely to the highest quality of the GNU/Linux software and to its being practically free of cost as well. The WSF chose free software (FS) as one more way to support people's struggle against marginalization and uneven and unfair distribution of resources (in this case information) – struggles that all the groups involved in the WSF process are conducting in their aspiration of building another, more just, world.

I will analyse here the importance of the achievement referred to by the organizers of the WSF 2004 with reference to some of the most striking inconsistencies between the declaration of intent of the organizers and the application of FS in the WSF 2004. I will explore the complex political and organisational dynamics that took place in the WSF 2004 process with reference to the use of FS. These dynamics were informed by different and often contrasting perceptions of the technical and political implications of FS carried by the organizers of the WSF, activist of the FS movement, users, participants of the WSF and actors involved in its organisation, and volunteers.

The conclusion of this paper are twofold. Firstly, I suggest that a set of loose but coherent guidelines set up in advance would have helped reduce the stress produced by conflicting interpretations of the political meaning and implications of using FS in the organisational process of the WSF. I argue that a more detailed political reflection on the implications of using free software, might have avoided the conflicts that emerged between views and behaviours of some IOC members that often were incommensurable with the political and ethical positions sustained by the activists of the FS movement. Such thorough political analysis conducted beyond the simply technical considerations of the quality and the characteristics of FS, which too often are built on the 'efficiency discourse', might have allowed for a more satisfactory and less confrontational approach to material and human resource deployment. Perhaps more importantly, this would have contributed towards maintaining the working space of the WSF office as a more consistently open space, thereby meeting more coherently the guidelines embodied by the Charter of Principles of the WSF. Secondly, the case study shows how crucial is the role of education in the use of appropriate technology if a more aware approach to technology has to be expected from users. In a broader sense, the material of the case study analysed here provides also some insights regarding the implications and potentialities of using free software beyond the WSF process within the broader arena of global civil society and the building of new 'creative commons'.⁴

Introduction to the Case Study: Free Software

The organizers of the WSF 2004 chose FS and the Free Software Foundation (FSF) India, to design and build the information system of the WSF 2004, to make a strong political statement on the implications of the use of alternative technology in building 'other worlds', as advocated in the principle slogan of the WSF. Both information

4 The website www.creativecommons.org is built under the inspiration of Lawrence Lessig and his work on FS and property rights.

management and information system configuration and management imply fundamental issues that directly affect the rights of dispossessed and marginalized people. In this particular case, the dispossessed people are those whose access to information and information management technology is limited by the business policies of transnational corporations as well as by strict patent policies and copyright legislations.

In the information age,⁵ societies are increasingly based on access to and control of information to conduct business or take informed political decisions, the condition of those who do not have access to the necessary technology can become extremely weak and therefore marginalized. The gap between those with regular access to information technology and those without such access is often referred to as the ‘digital divide’.⁶ This digital divide is therefore a direct deprivation of large strata of the world’s human population of access to information and, indirectly, to material resources that increasing information sharing would allow to secure. This amounts, in the elaboration of the FS activists and in the political statement made by the organizers of the WSF 2004, to a limitation of a fundamental right comparable to the right to free speech and free press as maintained by the founder of the FSF, Richard Stallman.⁷

Bridging the digital divide would allow for a better and more sustained global information exchange avoiding the creation of elites who can access and exchange information and a vast majority of people who will be forced day after day in an anachronistic information blackout. A more intense exchange of information among all actors of global society would favour the creation of an aware global citizenship based on common knowledge, shared access to material and immaterial resources through free access to information and information management technology. Moreover, access to information technology would allow the global citizen to take part in the new experiments in global democracy that heavily rely on virtual participation.

Although the commitment to the FS political and philosophical approach was fully embraced by the organizers of the WSF, the actual enforcement of this choice in the daily practice of the WSF was not completely consistent with this radical choice. Many aspects of the organisational structure of the WSF, and the main political implications of the use of FS have not been fully assessed by the IOC. Issues related to the politics of technology and the access to information have been undervalued in the daily practices of the WSF 2004 organisational process generating contradictions, misjudgements and misunderstandings, which need to be thoroughly assessed.

As a participant in the dynamics of the office and as a volunteer myself I took part to all these dramas and had the chance to interview the actors involved and to take extensive notes. I worked in the Mumbai office from October 2003 to January 2004 during the

5 Castells, 1997

6 “The digital divide is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing three different aspects. The *global divide* refers to the divergence of Internet access between industrialized and developing societies. The *social divide* concerns the gap between information rich and poor in each nation. And finally within the online community, the *democratic divide* signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life” (Norris, 2001: 4, italics in original).

7 For more detailed discussion on this, see www.fsf.org/philosophy and Stallman (2002).

fieldwork for a PhD research on the WSF 2004. The documents collected during that period will help me draw some reflections and formulate some conclusions on the strong link between the use of FS and its consequences on the office dynamics. This assessment promises to create important understanding of the role of free technology in the context of global civil society and in particular of the use of FS to empower the users and to ensure their total and unrestricted access to information management systems. In particular, in the context of the WSF, the political understanding underlining the struggles for FS needs a specific and careful implementation: the WSF is an organisational setup where the need to access and process information in an open way is not only an organisational necessity but an ethical and political statement.

The overall question that I will address in this essay is the following: is the strategic shift to FS likely to restructure the systems of power related to the ownership and access to knowledge, making access to technology more open and inclusive for all global citizens? This question will assume a slightly different form in the present analytical context: is FS likely to help address issues regarding the complex politics, often factional and fragmented and informed by strong power dynamics, of complex organisational contexts such as the WSF? In other words, are FS and free information systems able to help bridge the consistent gap between the actors involved in the WSF process in their access to information and, therefore, in their decision-making processes? What are the conditions for this to happen? The lessons learnt from this case study will show how to assess some of the shortcomings of the use of FS in an open organisational setup and how to offer suggestions for a better implementation of a fully free information system that benefits all the participant of the WSF organisational effort and enhances their participation in the whole process. The broader consequence of the findings of the present paper refers to the development of a set of guidelines to be used beyond the space of the WSF and in other organisational spaces of the global civil society.

Free Software in the WSF 2004

On the 15th of November 2003 Dr. Nagarjuna, director of FSF India, was called to support the person in charge⁸ of the information system in the Mumbai office and to design the system of the media centre of the WSF in January. The moment in which Nagarjuna joins the WSF process was a very difficult one in the Mumbai office. Conflicts were exploding more and more frequently and they were more and more virulent. The obvious consequence of these conflicts was that the work did not get done while the time of the event was approaching fast. Too many technical issues seemed to need thorough attention by specialists and the hope in their technical knowledge was great. Nagarjuna's approach to the use of FS went beyond its technical aspects, and although he started immediately helping solving the problems afflicting the office system and the website, he worked at a different level as well. In order to make sure that

8 Brian is the FSF India member who is responsible of all the information system of the office and the technical aspects of the website and their implementation by IntSys. He is 19 and is managing all alone a system of high complexity, political more than technical as is evident at that point.

the staff and the volunteers working in the WSF office understood the reason to use FS instead of proprietary software (PS), and in order to smooth the dissatisfaction created by the complexities of the new system, Nagarjuna designed a presentation and gathered all personnel to introduce everyone to the ethics of FS. His approach had a central pillar, education.⁹ He proposed¹⁰ to oppose the current dominating paradigm of PS with Swatantra Software (SS).

He defined FS and SS as synonymous but he stressed the need to use a concept dear to Indian activists.¹¹ He explained what software was and why to it applied different conditions than to material goods when it came to define the limits of its use and commercialisation. SS is not a commodity but knowledge¹²: this is, Nagarjuna claimed, the main difference to PS. As a consequence, with SS copying is not illegal or restricted; it is, in fact, encouraged. Knowledge creation is based on sharing; so software must also be based on sharing. Nagarjuna made a distinction between those who wrote code/software in the two different dimensions of SS and PS: “In SS, the hackers are like poets, who, as soon as they write a small piece of ‘verse’, look for ‘listeners’. In PS, software engineers sign a contract when they join a company, that the code that they produce will be the exclusive property of the employer and they disown all the rights”. The effect of the presentation on the audience was enlightening. When Nagarjuna asked who discovered the theory of relativity everyone could produce an immediate answer, but to the question who wrote MS Office, the silence was complete. In SS all the authors, poets or hackers, have a name. Moreover, in SS “the users are participants, and they have a role to play”. They can test the software, report bugs and fix them as well, or adapt the software they use to their needs and then show their creation to others. Nagarjuna explained that “PS thrives on the ignorance of their users (properly called customers or clients). SS is technology shaped by community and belongs to them. PS is made by a company and belongs to the company”.

The core of Nagarjuna’s presentation was articulated around the four freedoms of FS: “Freedom to run the program for any purpose; freedom to study how the program works; freedom to redistribute the copies; freedom to improve the program”.¹³ Free doesn’t mean free of charge: “FS is a matter of liberty not price” (Stallman quoted in Nagarjuna’s presentation).¹⁴ The rights and freedom of FS users are protected by the GNU Public License (GPL), stressing the link between knowledge, software, rights,

9 “It is good to use free software, and it is good to teach people about the philosophy of free software. To do the utmost good (in this area) one needs to do both”, Richard Stallman (personal communication).

10 The presentation, that lasted almost one hour, had 49 slides. All references in this paragraph are to the text of those slides unless otherwise indicated.

11 Swatantra in Hindi means roughly ‘following one’s own way’.

12 Nagarjuna insists that “we should treat software as scientific knowledge”.

13 For a thorough discussion of these freedoms see The Free Software Definition on the FSF website, (www.fsf.org).

14 See www.fsf.org/philosophy, and on an interesting and coherent extension of Stallman message see Lohr (2004). In this article the author builds a chain of similitude that goes from free software to free speech to free press; a Tocquevillian approach to the issues discussed is immediately evident and requires further investigation, see http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html.

patents and licenses.¹⁵ The crucial message was that the right to free speech must be ensured to everyone, whereas proprietary software limited drastically the number of operations that users can do on and with the software they bought. As a consequence, software is in relation to knowledge what speech is in relation to knowledge. Software is knowledge and knowledge is power, therefore control over software creates imbalances of power and intolerable limitations of the chances of citizens to access resources through informed economic, social and political actions.¹⁶

This approach to rights and to ethical issues defines what Coleman has called the *informal* political scope of the FS movement (2004). She describes, in the terms defined by Marcus and Fisher (1996), the FS movement and analyses the way in which its actions and political critique create a contrast, with the mainstream dominating one, by exposing different understanding and practices around questions of software coding, patenting and copyrights. This strategy is able to constitute a strong political critique of the established understanding and offers solid and viable alternatives.

After examining the political implications of the use of PS and the importance of using FS, Nagarjuna, moved to the technical and economic level. He showed how FS is convenient and technologically more advanced than PS. The reason for using SS were 'stability, security, virus free, open standards, scalability, good for education, economical, ethical, socially relevant'. The list was impressive and produced an intense debate in the halls of the Mumbai office in the following weeks. Finally, the message and the political reasons for the use of FS made their way between staff and volunteers. It was, however, too late to leave a durable sign in the memories of the users and it was not sufficient to erase the image that depicted GNU/Linux as inefficient, difficult, esoteric. But everyone remained fascinated by the last message in Nagarjuna's presentation: "SS is not good because it is economical, it is good because it keeps you independent and self-reliant. Even if you gain this virtues at a price, please run for them (...) SS is not owned by a company, it is a social movement and a self-organised system": these were the reasons why FS was the software of the WSF, no other choice was possible without incurring irresolvable ambiguities and contradictions.

After making this strong point, Nagarjuna went through the technical and economic reasons to prefer FS. PS often carried with it prohibitive prices, FS was free of cost and offered a valid alternative to the continuous increase in PS prices. Further, the continuing necessity to upgrade the hardware to support the increasing requirements of processor power and computer memory by new proprietary software also drove up costs on the part of the users. The possibility of choosing less demanding software was jeopardized by the *de facto* status of standard carried by applications, such as Microsoft Word or Excel. In this case, it was possible to observe a clear imposition of dominance

15 Stallman has written an illuminating paragraph in which he shows that, in the US constitution, the natural right of the author has been rejected, privileging the right to knowledge. The struggle of the FSF is in line with that of many other social movements fighting for the civil rights of citizens and directly involved in the WSF process.

16 See in particular the work by Foucault on knowledge and power (1980); and by Bourdieu on domination (1988) and (2001).

by the Microsoft Corporation over the users that greatly limited their freedom of choice regarding both software and hardware.¹⁷

The technical aspects related to stability, security, protection from attacks by viruses, openness of standards, scalability. PS proved to be of lower quality when compared to FS.¹⁸ This low quality was sustainable in the world market because of the dominant position of the software corporations and self-reinforcing standards maintained by their products. This state of affairs compromises progress in the field of software design with negative outcomes for the users. The efficiency shortcomings of corporate software production as opposed to 'open source' development, have been analysed by Raymond (2000).¹⁹ He demonstrated how a closed source code and a closed designing and development strategy did not permit timely software development. The latter would be possible if the global community of hackers could access, test, rewrite and redistribute, the software they use. At the same time security and privacy are hampered through this poor software development. For example, some software produced by corporate actors, Microsoft Internet Explorer being a case in point, presents innumerable security holes that allow for easy access to the user's computer by crackers.²⁰

These so far were the consequences of a wrong political approach to software writing and commercialisation that directly affect end users. There were also more general consequences that affect the global information society as a whole. The consequences were socio-political, economic but also environmental. The economic argument referred to the fact that a reduction in the disparities in the access to information and information management system would consequently favour a fairer competition between actors in the world market, ensuring a more even distribution of both material resources and knowledge, a more just productive and distributive global system, and a continuous progress in technical innovation not limited by monopolies. The socio-political consequence of a fairer redistribution of material and immaterial resources, Nagarjuna stressed, would help address the political disparities among those social actors who benefit from a privileged position in accessing information and those who were cut off from those resources. The environmental clause referred to the fast replacement of hardware to support the requirements of new software. Whereas machines have an average life span of eight years or more, the time of obsolescence of home and office machines was much shorter and usually calculated in three years. This created a serious

17 Most PS is linked to a specific hardware platform. The scalability of FS makes it more versatile expanding the options of the users for what concerns the choice of hardware platform.

18 A very detailed comparative study of several operating systems and their performances compared to FS has been conducted by David A. Wheeler (2005). In his study he thoroughly assesses the dimensions of market share, reliability, performance, scalability, security, total cost of ownership, and a number of non-quantifiable parameters like flexibility and innovativeness.

19 See also the work by Anita Chan (2004) on the debate about the use of free software in public administration. In this article, the author analyses the reasons of the free software movement in Peru and of its institutional allies, showing how relevant the use of free software, that can customized freely, is to state administrations and state security. Interesting as well in this context is the work by Christopher Kelty (2004).

20 Crackers are those who use their knowledge of programming to access other's computers and, sometimes, disrupt them. Improperly they are often called hackers, who instead are those who write code but do not perform intrusions or attacks to private or public machines.

environmental problem: the increasing amount of techno-waste is due to an improper use of the electronic hardware. Although some amount of scepticism remained in some of those who followed the presentation, it was clear to everyone that something important had been missed so far in the WSF process with respect to the software used.

The WSF Website and the Mumbai Office

The four domains where FS was used during the WSF process were: the office of the organizing committee, the website, the media centre and the translation system. By analysing in detail the vicissitudes of the website and the work dynamics in the office, I will highlight how a common feature acted in those domains causing major shortcomings in the way FS was understood. This seems to be related more to the social and political domain than to the technical one as opposed to a general approach shared by many (especially in the IOC) according to whom the failures related to the information system were due to technical errors. These indicated inappropriate technical choices made by humans or general faults of the equipment and it usually signified something that could be fixed with the appropriate technical knowledge.

A number of misunderstandings gave a very contradictory picture of the use of the FS in the WSF. Why was it so? I suggest that the most crucial misunderstanding was due to a non-perfect correspondence between the perception that organizers, users and FS activists had of the role of FS in the struggles for civil rights, democracy and global citizenship and their understanding of the necessity of a daily implementation of FS at the organisational level and its political implications.

The programming of the website was a major locus of contention for political and technical reasons. I will state at the outset that it proved a poorly designed strategy to entrust the development of the website to a company that had no experience in developing websites using FS. A politically aware implementation and use of FS has much more to it than merely with customer's financial remuneration. The relationship with the company in charge of the website was tumultuous since early in the process. Notwithstanding the poor quality of the service provided by the same company during the Asia Social Forum (ASF) and the conflicts generated in that context, and notwithstanding the decision taken in a meeting held in Mumbai on the 3rd of July to "discontinue our arrangement for the Website with IntSys given our experience over the past few weeks",²¹ the arrangement was finally confirmed.²² This decision produced tensions that escalated into a fierce conflict.²³

21 Message posted on the IOC mailing list.

22 In fact, not only the contract was not discontinued but a much more important contract is signed. On 2 August a new deal is offered to IntSys that replaces the one agreed in April for 18,000 rupees per year for "all HTML changes in the existing website". In this new deal the functional specifications provided by IntSys few days earlier (on 17 July and 2 August) are accepted fully and a new offer is made to IntSys: 220,000 rupees for "design and development of our website and backend database".

23 In an interview with a member of the IOC, I asked about his interpretation of the furious conflict between the Media and Communication group and Finance. His ideas were clear. It is because of the

On the 8th of August 2003 in an email to the IOC list, but with special attention to the Media and Communication group (M&C), a member noted that “the website has been down for three days, when will it be up again?” On the 20th of August the Delhi office of the WSF 2004 sent an email to the IOC providing a thorough assessment of the website. Not much is working and many documents provided to IntSys for upload are yet not online. On the 29th another IOC member wrote that she has tried for three days, to “have a look at the events registered, but (the website) was not accessible at all”. On the 1st of October the Delhi Programme office sent to all IOC members the following instructions: “Please find attached the event registration form. Fill it up and send it to us by post”. But the website received not only internal criticisms, on the 10th of October, M&C received the following email: “please forward detail as to the venue and registration and accommodation formalities plus costs for both Indians and foreigners! Getting into and finding anything on your site is not easy!” The most relevant information were not accessible on the website, but it was also not easy “getting into” the website that was most of the time down for maintenance.

Who, then, was in charge of what? Who was to blame if these dysfunctions were not fixed? On the 22nd of October Deepa²⁴ sent an email clarifying that “I deal with IntSys and [M&C] deals with the content”. It could be legitimately asked why those responsibilities were not clearly stated at an earlier stage. But something else was happening in those days. The server was going to be transferred to a more powerful installation. This process was creating further frustrations. Delhi office on the 23rd: “One would question the wisdom of switching server during the most critical part of the Programme registration. Since it seems to be going through with minimum glitches (fingers crossed) ... One of the problems we are having is that we do not know whom we should look for answers. So our frustration.” So it is not only ordinary members who were not sure about who was in charge of what, but also the Delhi office had no idea of what was happening in Mumbai.

On the 24th of October, and in direct response to the previous email, Deepa wrote to M&C. “There are some urgent issues regarding the website that need to be discussed in your group and decision taken very urgently. Right now M&C seems to have washed its hands of the website ... the site is always out of date”. The situation reached such a state that seemed to require the intervention of a specialist external to the IOC. On the 25th of October two members of the Mumbai group asked Rakesh to provide his professional advice. Rakesh consented to undertake the task to solve the problems that the website was facing. The tasks will be divided in the following way: “The content and general website responsibility will still be part of M&C. The Venue and Logistics group (V&L) will have to cooperate with Rakesh and give him all the help he needs. Also Finance.” Everything seemed clear in the minds of the IOC members: the website was showing technical problems and only an external IT professional like Rakesh could solve them.

website. During the ASF the same company produced a very poor service so people are not accepting that the same company had the contract for the WSF. In fact, even more than this, Finance knows how the company is close to the consultant who has been put in charge of the website by M&C, who at the same time is considered to be responsible for the choice of the FS solution.

24 All names in this paper are fictitious.

All the involved functional groups of the WSF process must cooperate with him. The whole process will take one week.

The following day the publisher of an activist newsletter joined the debate. “This business of ‘open space and everyone working’ means no one is responsible or contactable for any specific needs. I have been around for last 6 months volunteering my services It is extremely frustrating to just hang around in the office. ... No more meetings, just action, I think is what is needed. Fast.” According to her and to many who I interviewed during those days, it was high time that the IOC, for practical reasons, forgot this whole story of open space and FS and gave space to professionals and business oriented people who could deal with other business oriented people (the manager of IntSys) and solve the problems that were affecting the WSF process in Mumbai.

Accountability, transparency, responsibility. These were the main issues affecting the website and many other aspects of the WSF 2004. On the basis of the agreement negotiated with Deepa and some members of V&L, Rakesh started with energy and good spirit. However, he soon realized that things were different from what he expected. On the 27th of October he sent an email to the IOC in which he described what he found. “I have not as yet to date seen such gross negligence in a system. (...) Given the date of the conference and the date today, as well as the arrogance in the face of absolute incompetence, as displayed by IntSys and related entities, is a cause of grave concern.” What he meant by ‘related entities’ will become clear in a following email reported below. What seemed to be a trivial problem risked instead to jeopardize the entire event. The technical explanation did not convince him anymore. After few more days into the process Rakesh finally decided to declare all his findings. On the 31st of October he sent his ‘*j’accuse*’. This letter exposed the level of conflict that the WSF India was able to make explode first, and control subsequently, and which were the issues that would detonate such apparently irreconcilable conflicts. He stated

that the work (...) has been completed (...) in 6 working days, despite lacunae severe enough to initiate civil and criminal prosecution (...) What are you there for? Who is accountable? Most importantly, is any one of you competent or even trivially qualified, given the total absence of any professionalism, crony corruption and the least of it is plain incompetency in any manner whatsoever to undertake a task of this magnitude? (...) The staff there is working under absurd conditions! (...) What is the total travel and ALL related expenditure of all the key personnel? (...) BEFORE any OTHER disaster of this magnitude happens – and there are at least several dozen possibilities. Choose one – Perhaps a STAMPEDE. (...). If this is not done (“it’s too late”, “you find me another person”, “it’s the process” and yes of course lets move him/her to another committee, split up the committee and such other balderdash are nonsense. J’ ACCUSE”

Rakesh’s intervention²⁵ proved almost irrelevant: problems with the server and the website were continuous.²⁶ Finally the server was moved on the weekend between the

25 Only one email is sent in reply to IOC list by a member who wonders what is Rakesh talking about, and alleging that “something rotten smells in Mumbai”. All the others must know what Rakesh is talking about.

26 On the 16th of November one of the coordinators of the Mobilisation Groups complained that as the previous week the server is down and he couldn’t send the invitation for the meeting of his group. On the 18th the communication groups sent two emails regarding the website. The first to Brian, details

5th and the 7th of December. This painful operation did not have any substantial influence on the performance of the website. In the evaluation meeting held in Mumbai on the 28-29th of February, a member of V&L in her report, provided a clear picture of the extent to which the unreliability of the website caused major dysfunctions in the WSF process. She focused on the effects on the accommodation part of the website.

Wrong calculation of monies to be sent by delegates for booking of room/rooms; duplication of ID numbers; missing data; receiving of blank forms after input from various individuals from across the world; mess up in data transfer: part of the data sent without any prior intimation to original website (...); Double code on accommodation because of which while other sites received information/emails, accommodation did not; Back end of exhibition stalls was a big mess. The stall were not even numbered sequentially. after several attempts at persuading IntSys to do the needful it was decided that the data be manually handled. (...) That the website did not crash and the Media Centre worked was a result of WSF efforts under the supervision (...) of FSF (...). Their commitment and hard work enabled the 'bugged' website to remain functional despite the consistent recurrence of many avoidable problems and the presence of IntSys.

From the political point of view, the choice of the specific company that was in charge of the development of the website was consistently criticized. It would have been a wiser solution, it was maintained by many members of the IOC,²⁷ either to choose a more professional company committed to FS or to have the staff working on the website in the WSF office with, if necessary, one coordinator (Dr. Nagarjuna could have played such a role) to supervise the most critical aspects of the payment gateway and the registration and accommodation databases. This would have allowed the publication in real time of all material needed, better content management with a consistent amount of information readily available in the website for the hundreds of thousands of users around the world, it would have also allowed multilingual translation of the content that was mainly in English and, moreover, this arrangement would have avoided furious political fights within the IOC and would have built on the previous experience of the ASF where the same problems were faced. It is not easy to rewind the film to understand when these lacunae were generated in order to assess the technical origin or again the political causes. When the 'severe lacunae' of the website became visible to anyone it was already impossible to stop the vicious cycle that was generated by the recursive pattern of technical and political motivations and causes. Until the end, the problems of the website were dealt with a great amount of improvisation, contingent patching and severely flawed approach by all the parties involved. This generated a deployment of material and human resources not consistent with what stated in the WSF Charter of Principles. Moreover, severe political and technical misjudgments generated grave deterioration of personal relations and produced an atmosphere of suspicion that

some of the problems with the free lancer registration form: "1. Its not an individual reg. form; 2. the deadline has not been given; 3. translation – no method of choosing English as an option; 4. Areas of interest – tick box option required – if I want to select more than one; 5. Use of media centre – if I select NO option – then the rest of media centre options should get disabled; 6. A lot of options are not numbered; 7. website is an compulsory option; 8. Visa letter – if I select NO option – then the rest of the options should get disabled." And this is only one registration form.

27 In the 10 and a half months I spent in India I had the chance to discuss extensively this subject with many of the actors involved from all sides, IOC members, users of the website, developers and volunteers.

undermined the possibility of having a fully efficient website and a healthy work environment.

Few days after Rakesh's email, one of the coordinators of the Finance group resigned stating that his decision was due to the lack of accountability for what concerned the website. From this moment on, the decision not to tackle with strong commitment the serious malfunctioning of the website and the already aggravating situation in the Mumbai office made the two explode at the same time by exposing the intertwined nature of those confrontations and their direct link with the system of information management chosen by the WSF 2004. Technical and political issues converged to create one greater problem that shook the very foundations of the WSF in Mumbai, and how, at the same time, the crisis represented a fully creative moment. However, the distress caused by these recurring crises could have been reduced if a set of collectively negotiated guidelines had been defined and periodically renegotiated by all members involved in the running of the WSF office.

The Open Office

The office of the WSF in Mumbai was an exciting experiment in openness. The doors of the different sections were always open as were the external doors. It did not have a very clear hierarchical structure²⁸ or specific people to refer to for task distribution or reporting of work done, but very loose coordination and that, as well, changing constantly. Late afternoons the atmosphere was surreal with an average of 50 or 60 people in the vast central meeting area and in the slightly more demarcated office space doing anything from socializing to green room politics to any other 'normal' office task. In the office there were at the highest peak of the workload, 37 computers running GNU/Linux. Three people of the FSF India were in charge of administering the system. The same people were handling the servers; two of them were contributing to the publication of the website. One volunteer from the Czech Republic joined the group later to contribute his precious programming skills.

The openness of the office and the FS were meant to give to the people involved in the organisation of the WSF 2004 a glance of what 'another world' could look like. A 'horizontal' world, where hierarchies were not present and where the coordination of the work was done collectively and the implementation was orchestrated by all the actors involved in the organisational process; a world where social borders were permeable

28 However, there was a vertical separation between political and operational tasks and actors coordinating those tasks. Power struggles were evident at all levels of this hierarchy: at the political level, at the managerial level and at the staff level. Later in the process it became clear that there was also a clear imbalance of power between those who were in charge of the system and those who operated it. But other issues also became evident. The disillusion on the open office that was shaking all the members of the staff and all the volunteers of the office, made them realize that other positions were subjected to a hierarchical articulation. A vast number of young boys were employed to put registration forms into envelopes. Two office runners took care of all minion tasks. The cook and her family spent their time in the kitchen and rarely talk to the others.

and continuously crossed generating complex processes of creative hybridisation; a world where the borders between work and leisure were not strictly drawn.

But the Mumbai office of the WSF, gave also a clear idea of what should not happen in a free world. A series of shortcomings were due to inexperience, improvisation at the organisational and coordination levels, lack of thorough consideration of the political aspects involved in the management of an open office and in the use of FS. This open process, which was experimented with in Mumbai, came with almost no documentation attached. The management of the system caused slowness and innumerable sudden halts to normal work as documented above. Most important of all: GNU/Linux was a new system for almost everyone in the office. No consistent training was provided to show its potentialities and only one presentation was given by Dr. Nagarjuna to the staff of the office. All interventions of the technicians of the FSF were contingent and related to troubleshooting. This never solved the dynamics of dependence between users and technical staff.²⁹ At the origin of the mistakes mentioned was the lack of coordination at the level of system projecting and realization, the miscalculation of the relevance of the software in the daily routine of an office, and the fundamental misjudgment made at office coordination level (and at the IOC level) to consider the project and management of the system a technical issue.

When there was the chance to discuss all these issues, there were strong objections to discuss the GNU/Linux related problems that were put forward by some IOC members at the general meeting the 3rd of November in Mumbai. That meeting could have been an important moment to try and address politically and technically the problems related to office and website management and to avoid many future problems. The opportunity was missed and in the following weeks things continued to be dealt with on an emergency basis with all the consequences that this comporta. Moreover, the accusations voiced by Rakesh provoked a sudden worsening in the relationships, already tense, between coordinators of groups, coordinators of the office, staff and volunteers.

Anuj's Resignations

On the 7th of November, one of the coordinators of Finance resigns. Anuj's resignations shook the process further. These were difficult weeks of the process in Mumbai. The stress was growing day after day, the differences between actors became more and more obvious and some dysfunctions were simply too important not to oblige people to take

29 From an interview with a member of staff : "I got used to the basic Linux features pretty soon...the only problems that I always faced was with the printer. In fact, everyone in the office seemed to be having the same problems, and at that time all the technical help that we had gave some technical explanation which I could never understand...solved the problem in a jiffy only to have it messed up again in half an hour. At that time I thought it was because Linux is new...plus these guys must be recently trained in it...but they have not been trained to communicate with the user. Their attitude always gave the vibes that the problem was too small to bother them and that we were a dumb lot to solve it ourselves. The natural reaction was that the staff shifted from being polite and understanding to rude and bullying the technical help".

position. Rakesh denounced in his email racketing, corruption, incompetence, lack of accountability, lack of democratic practices, political struggles, hierarchies not exposed: the WSF office seemed to be the place where all the issues that the WSF was fighting against were concentrated. These are the most important extracts from Anuj's resignation email:

My resignation is to do with the continuous, perpetual incompetence of some IOC members in Mumbai and protection of it by lobbying, manipulation etc by some other ioc members. (...) I want to state here that it is Bhopal's unaccountable, arrogant and boastful ways, unfortunately protected by some IOC members who has contributed to a large extent for the present mess in the office, website and communication group crisis. (...) This applies to issues raised by Rakesh too. Are we willing to fix responsibility and hold each other accountable or we close our ranks to protect falsehood is the question that "we the dreamers of another world" need to answer.

Arun from Delhi writes a long email that reflects on the deep problems within the WSF process, that this crisis exposed.

(...) If we insist upon a pluralist and inclusive culture in the WSF, there is a price all of us have to pay for it. (...) The WSF was not meant to be a "project" or an "event". It was meant to be something much beyond that -- a vision, a dream. You can opt out of a project, but can you opt out of a vision? (...) First, we are aware that in a process such as the WSF nobody is indispensable, but the participation of everybody is critical -- even crucial. (...) Third, (...) do we need to allow things to reach crisis proportions before we react by taking precipitate actions and inflexible positions? (...) I am aware that all differences that we have within us do not relate to the WSF office. But it is also true that the flash point in these differences at the moment appears to be the office and its functioning.

It was in moments of crisis like this one that the most important reflections are made and the longest leaps in such processes are taken.³⁰ It is true that crises could end up destroying the process forever, but strong processes are, in fact, reinforced by crises. This is the case of the WSF India. The letter reported above is one of the most important documents produced during these days and clearly defines the complex framework of the WSF process in India. This won't be the end of the negotiations opened by this crisis but it starts an open and deep process of conflict resolution that will last a full week. On the 13th of November Anuj responded to the exhortations of many IOC members withdrawing his resignations and reporting back on the meeting that the Mumbai based IOC members had that morning. At that meeting many important dynamics took place and the same nature of the meeting was completely different from every other meeting of the WSF process. For the first and only time there was a call to have a closed meeting. The motivations were reported in the minutes of the meeting: "Since this meeting would discuss the resignation of one of the IOC members it would be confined only to IOC members". The first item of the agenda was Anuj's statement. In the minutes the statement was reported in the following way: "he pointed out that he had three reasons for his resignations, namely, problems with office functioning, website and M&C group".

A full restructuring of the office takes place during that meeting, with many new people getting involved, and others changing roles. The overall changes in the structure of the office involved the relations between coordinators of the office and coordinators of the

30 See Caruso (2004).

Functional groups and their new task in the office. All this restructuring was meant to reformulate the conflict between Finance and M&C. However, one of the coordinators of the M&C group makes clear that “he has been involved in running the office from May onwards and he would continue in that capacity although he would work with the team of IOC members who had offered to devote time in the office”.

These are not the most important outcomes of that meeting. A new important issue, latent so far, has been exposed in its most evidently incoherent way with the vision of the WSF, but much more in line with some of the actor’s belief on human behaviour and human resources management. The first point highlighted by Deepa made reference to “some complaint regarding the content and wording of communication that goes out of the WSF mailbox. She therefore proposed that in future when office staff responds to emails a copy should automatically be marked to Arun for reference so that some amount of monitoring from our end can be carried out”. Moreover, “some guideline on protocol when receiving phone calls should also be laid out for the office staff”. The discussion then escalated further: “There was some discussion on the email of [two volunteers] to the IOC list serve and it was felt that although the staff should have certain autonomy in office functioning that does not preclude office discipline. Members decided that when the steering group on office functioning meets it should also draft guidelines of functioning of office staff including disciplinary issues”. After exhausting the current item of the agenda the following was tackled: the website.³¹

An important chapter of the WSF process closed with that meeting. It is likely that those conflicts will reappear at the next opportunity. However, it is also likely that this continuous negotiation process, as also maintained by some in their attempts to make Anuj withdraw his resignations, will build a net of trust that will help move beyond the present crises, perhaps toward other and creative crises along the path. Rakesh’s accusations about the treatment to the staff has not been solved or not even negotiated during that process. This opened a deep fracture in the office dynamics between the next group of coordinators and the staff. The staff resented the exclusion from the meeting, and resented even more the reference to disciplinary codes. The mention made by Deepa about the communication protocols was a clear attack towards one particular member of the office staff. In a month’s time the accusations about her behaviour translated into an official letter sent by one of the coordinators of the office to Anupama, an office associate. In Anuj’s letter Anupama’s behaviour was described as unprofessional, not nice and unpolite behaviour and was strongly sanctioned. In that letter Anuj asked for a written reply for the same day in response to the letter from one of the auditors. In that other letter it was mentioned that Anupama demonstrated a strong bias towards one of the contractors. In the letter therefore was provocatively asked to Anupama: “whose side are you on?” The response to that letter was a joint staff action against the coordination of the office. On the 9th of December a petition was circulated to stop the “systematic harassment” against Anupama. The text of the petition

31 From the Meeting minutes: “Naresh pointed out that (...) Rakesh’s evaluation of the website was that it was professionally poorly designed with several structural problems. In addition to limitations in software design the hardware inputs of the website were also too low for the load we were carrying. (...) It was decided to invite Dr. Nagarjuna (...) to advise us.”

letter deserves thorough attention because it exposed some fundamental issues regarding the politics of the workplace in the WSF India office in Mumbai.

The real responsibility of dealing with issues concerning the entire office has been lost in the midst of the continuous jugglery of the responsibility for office functioning. (...) we need clarification on the following: a) who is being appointed, b) how have they being appointed, c) what is the scope of their work. (...) It is only because of our strong belief in what the WSF stands for that the staff has never resorted to expressing concerns in such an explicit manner. However, it is evident that this sort of harassment that we undergo is contrary to all the principles of the WSF. We demand an immediate stop of the systematic harassment and also an explanation for the above. In absence of an immediate and appropriate response, we would be forced to take up the employment practices of the WSF 2004 with the entire IGC, IWC, IOC, BOC, IC and the funders of the WSF 2004.³²

After signing the petition we all took part in a meeting with the coordinator of the office on the 10th of December. The main issue highlighted was that of personal accountability. IOC had severe difficulties in allocating resources and individuals to the right place. Anuj said that this is “part of the process”. Appointments were made by raising hands in meetings and have nothing to do with personal skills for specific tasks. But, according to him, the question of the office was different: in this case management in the office and accountability were tackled in a much more serious way, and in what he called “a much more professional manner”. A clear distinction between the office (the operational department) and the political organisation, the IOC, was illustrated by Anuj. But other fractures started to take place in the office as a consequence of the new divisions of roles, responsibilities and blames.

On the 13th of December some of the members of the staff had, over lunch, an interesting conversation about the people who were in charge of fixing the technical aspects of the office information system. Many felt that they could keep the staff on their toes because they could fix the computers. No one understood anything of what they did when they pretended they were repairing something and they, when asked, explained things in a very cursory way and with an incredible show of technical terms obscure to almost everyone. All machines were not working properly, the system was being redesigned in those days (the servers were shifted the previous weekend). The feeling of frustration was high, the new efficiency, business-like, professional approach started creating problems. These feelings added up to those caused by the other conflicts between staff and management, between the different people involved in the management of the office and between them and the IOC. The tension seemed at times unbearable in the office.

On the 18th of December registration, accommodation, backend, email accounts didn't work yet. The staff wandered in the office, trying to do their best, the technicians worked hard to do something, everyone mentioned Dr Nagarjuna like the saviour, and waited for him to come. Some general consideration were made on the relative power that technical people had in the office. However, not much could be discussed around this topic: whenever this conversation started everyone realized that this could create problems for at least one of the techies: he was a friend of most of the staff, his position

32 IGC (Indian General Council), IWC (Indian Working Council), IC (International Council), BOC (Brazilian Organising Committee).

was not easy, he was young, he did not deserve more problems than he had. One of technicians told the staff that they should relax and enjoy the fact that if the system was down they were allowed not to work, they could rest, but they were still paid. Someone tried to explain that the mentality in that office was different, but with not much conviction: doubts were starting clotting in the minds of many: if the malfunctioning of the system was a problem linked to what Rakesh had denounced, why should the staff not be happy to relieve themselves from work?

On the 26th of December all the issues of the office and the confrontation between M&C and Finance are taken to the extreme level from the perspective of this article. This seemed to be the obvious outcome of two months of draining conflicts in the office all centred on the website and on the FS used in the office. In my notes I reported a conversation with one of the people in charge of the office system: “He says that there was a very heated meeting about the management of the office and the media centre at the venue. The FSF has received attacks from many sides because of all the problems we had at the office with computers and servers and because of the website. Finance asks with strong voice that we revert to Windows. They said that with Windows we wouldn’t have had technical problems and confrontations between those sustaining FS and those opposing the lack of accountability and the shameful incompetence of the people who were implementing those systems”. The attack was not reiterated and the obstructionism did not lead to a full reformulation of the WSF stand on information management. The media centre ran on Gnoware (a distribution of the GNU/Linux operating system prepared by the FSF India for the WFS) and was a major success.

Conclusion: The Lessons Learnt

The analysis of the use of FS in the WSF 2004 exposed some incongruence in the articulation of the claims by the IOC and those of the FS activists for what concerned the use of FS in the WSF 2004. Moreover, I showed that the conflicts exploded in the office were also centred on conflicting understanding of the role of technology in civil society organisational setups and the political nature of the decisions taken with respect to it. Moreover, the incommensurable nature of the efficiency and open space discourses illustrated one of the major inconsistencies in the daily practice of the WSF 2004 with the principles of the WSF and the quality of the conflicts that built on the unresolved nature of those ambiguities. In the following paragraphs I will summarize the findings of the article.

In the office, roles and responsibilities were never clear, they used to move from people to people, tasks were never consistently assigned. Due to this, the coordination was often not efficient and caused frustration, inefficiency, and waste of human and material resources as voiced by many IOC and staff members. Although the main discussions related to software and information technology were informed by efficiency arguments, the implementation of the different information system designs never really responded to the demands of the ‘efficiency requirements’. Insofar the efficiency argument was the *leitmotiv* of the discourse on system management in the WSF 2004, it exposed the necessity to assess deeply what are the consequences of this discourse when applied to a

politically defined environment like the WSF. It was in fact the case that the efficiency argument became too often the way to displace crucial discussions on the political reasons of the failures observed.

At the same time, when the efficiency argument was used, the open space argument was opposed. This argument maintained that the WSF is an open space where it is difficult to impose rules and where other principles must inform the work mentality other than the efficiency one. All sorts of mismanagements, wastes, frustrations, and political dynamics were explained as the colours of the beautiful rainbow that is the WSF. It will be noted here that the concept of open space is ambiguous and difficult to define, yet it has served successfully the purpose of resolving many conflicts in the WSF 2004 process.³³

Building on the issues discussed so far, it is possible to draw some important lessons. The technical and the organisational aspects were not closely articulated, giving to the technical staff of the organisation the status of service providers. Also, the staff of the FSF were never really put in the condition to provide an efficient system. A well planned modular system should have been put in place since the beginning with a solid core that would have allowed adding workstations and further servers at any stage without the need to rethink the whole structure when some changes needed to be implemented. This would have avoided the several patches applied to the system in conditions of stress, lack of time and pressing necessity.

Notwithstanding the many technical issues reported above, the commitment and the passion of any single person working in the office, from the coordinators to the technical staff of the FSF, the desk officers, and the volunteers have made the WSF 2004 an exhilarating experience and have left everyone with the feeling of having been part of an extraordinary experience. These passion and commitment solved every problem whenever they occurred. Yet passion and commitment can be sustained only for limited periods and did not help to avoid considerable frustration and emotional distress.

In some circumstances differences tend to radicalise, as happens in moments of stress as those that precede important events such as the WSF. This happened in Mumbai for what concerns the office management and the website development. Whose responsibility was it? This question bears scarce relevance in the present context. What could have been done to coordinate in advance all the energies involved in the different processes to avoid the failures and to maximize the outcomes of an overall extremely inspiring experiment of FS application? It is on this question that I will put forward few suggestions built on the case study analysed here.

First, there is a political and strategic necessity to keep the use of technology and political activism very close, in global civil society organisational setups. In the WSF there was a wide gap between these two aspects: this caused ambiguities, frustrations and unlikely hybrids between corporate and activist mentality, between efficiency oriented and the 'open space' discourses.

33 See, for instance, Caruso (2004).

Second, careful attention should be paid to the designing processes of the organisational structures and the systems to process the information produced within them and exchanged with the outside. System design is not merely a technical issue but involves important political aspects as claimed by the activist of the FS movement.

Third, together with a politically informed technical design of the open office, a set of flexible guidelines must be consensually agreed in order to help smooth the process of interpersonal and intercultural negotiation in moments of acute stress and in contexts of crucial information management. Such a set of guidelines and organisational precautions should be carefully implemented along with an ongoing process of assessment of the openness and inclusiveness of the system in its daily performance to make sure that all the power dynamics at play could be timely exposed and dealt with appropriately, carefully avoiding to rubric them as mere technical issues. The mentioned guiding principles are not strict rules that could risk jeopardizing the openness of the process and the freedom within the organisational space: instead they will make sure that the process keeps its openness against the tension to factional behaviour and power dynamics that can be often observed in organisational processes like the WSF.

The openness and inclusiveness of FS in an organisational setup like the WSF is not inherent or achieved if simply stated. The complexity of the personal, social and political relations involved in the access and use of information and information technology creates barriers that limit openness sensibly hampering the perception of the social and political relevance and of the difference between FS and PS as in the case analysed here. To fulfil its promises, to help build a more aware and empowered global citizenship, FS needs to be implemented with a thorough attention to its political implications and along with a system of guidelines that enhance its role in global civil society. Otherwise, the risk of the trend towards FS to be reverted as a consequence of the market position regained by PS is always present. Moreover, it is necessary to reinforce the political and ethical meaning of the daily use of this technical instrument to avoid the hijacking of the FS message by the “efficiency” discourse that informs PS. Surprisingly, as observed in the case study, the efficiency discourse seems to be linked not so much to the environment where the technology is used but to technology itself. As often declared, in the WSF process there was a diffused belief that software should be considered, because of his technical nature, merely deserving technical attention.

The dedication and the commitment of all the people involved at the organisational, technical and political levels of the WSF can get wasted if poor political decision making processes are associated with that commitment. Weak and generally unaccountable outcomes, poor interpersonal and intercultural management, obtuse and illegitimate beliefs that simply stating openness in the organisational setup would magically open gates and tumble fences are also counter-productive. These irresponsible and often naïve practices had too often brought the whole process into unconstructive chaos and had handed it to usual hegemonic practices (that happily proliferate in the undefined territory of the gentlemen’s agreements).³⁴ The lessons learnt in Mumbai could help start a process of thorough revision of the practices and perceptions related to the domain of the information technology used in the WSF

34 See Caruso (2004).

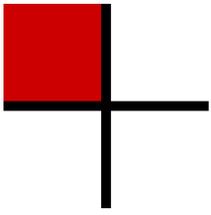
context and help limit the shortcomings observed in the Mumbai experiment. Moreover, the important lessons learnt in Mumbai could offer important material for reflection to those organisations of global civil society that decide to engage in the struggle for FS by implementing FS information systems in their organisational setups.

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PR like PProcess! Strategy from the Bottom-Up

Massimo De Angelis

abstract

In this piece I want to contribute to the broad debate on strategy for the overcoming of capitalism by drawing a connection between the struggles for democracy, inclusiveness and participation within the European Social Forum (ESF) process, and the struggles for overcoming capitalism as a mode of production, a mode of doing and consequent social relations. I first begin by describing and evaluate the controversies on process during the last ESF held in October 2004 in London. These broadly divided activists in two camps that came to be known as ‘horizontalists’ and ‘verticalists’. I will then move to a more general plane and problematise the meaning of ‘strategy’ and ‘victory’ – terms often used within the managerial and ‘vertical’ concept of politics to urge people to follow a particular line – from the perspective of political practices that aims at the overcoming of capitalist social relations.

Evaluating the London ESF After the Horizontal Posse Came to Town

From the perspective of those who seek a politics of alternatives, one that is firmly rooted in a critique of the beast we are confronting, capitalism and war, the story of internal contrasts in the process that led to the recent ESF in London might seem a trivial story, away from the high theoretical plateau that characterize debates on strategy in our movements. However, often these plateaux turn into platitudes, banal assertions of the ‘right’ way forward that select out the motivations and aspirations emerging from the ground-up of real struggles and lived practices and instead follow templates rooted in timeless ideological models. In this piece I want to contribute to the broad debate on strategy for the overcoming of capitalism by drawing a connection between the struggles for democracy, inclusiveness and participation within the ESF process, and the struggles for overcoming capitalism as a mode of production, a mode of doing and consequent social relations.

The story of the battle inside the ESF process during last year is the story of the contrast between those coming from many networks and organizations to make the ESF a temporary space-time common that would prefigure alternative practices and multiple non-exploitative doings in a ‘global city’ like London with the efforts of those following the various shades of bureaucratic socialist lines to monopolize and centralize the

event.¹ This became to be known as the struggle between ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’.² I must make clear to the reader that I have actively participated in this struggle, and took side with the ‘horizontal’.

Perhaps this distinction caused some confusion, since the definition of ‘horizontal’ or ‘vertical’ did not identify a specific group, organization or network, but a *mode of doing* predicated on opposite *organizing* principles, modes of doing and relating that was common to many belonging to a variety of networks and organizations. One, based on participatory, open and inclusive democracy, in which participants through their *iterative* relational practises seek to reach consensus on both means to be employed and ends to be achieved and were willing to engage in the *continuous* learning process necessary for these practices. The other in which democracy was identified with a rigid vertical structure within which ends are defined by the few, and the means are seen purely as *instrumental* to those ends. For ‘horizontal’ the means embody values as much as the ends (whether we use free software or patented one, whether information is posted freely or under coordinating committee control, whether working group emerge from the ground up or ‘allowed’ by a coordinating committee), and indeed because of this, the shape of ends *emerge* from negotiations of means. For the ‘vertical’ it was just about ‘getting the job done’, that is, their concept of ‘job’ and final outcome.³

A brief history here is perhaps useful. The first reference to the word ‘horizontal’ in the context of the ESF process, was in an email that Stuart Hodgkinson sent to the ‘democratize_the_esf’ list on 30 January 2004.⁴ This was already after few months in which activists from loose networks and movements were growing frustrated of what they saw to be traditional devious and manipulative tactics to monopolize and push through pre-established agendas by the usual suspects of UK left-wing politics. In this e-mail, Stuart tells of a little anecdote:

Last year, I went to the Argentina Puppetera show as toured around the UK. It was a beautiful event for many reasons, but I remember one thing more than any other. The piquetera sister from Argentina was explaining the political divisions within the piquetera movement (roadblockers movement). She was an autonomist and explained how in her part of the movement, they worked in a non-hierarchical way: with assemblies meeting, deciding by consensus and then selecting

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- 1 In this context these included the Social Worker Party and Socialist Action lines, union bureaucracies mentalities and the directives of Ken Livingston’s office.
 - 2 For a broad account of this story, see Levidow (2004).
 - 3 Horizontals self-define themselves as those “who believe that the most important thing in the politics for a New World is how we relate to each other in making it happen” (Horizontals, 2004d). This means to “recognise and respect our differences and always strive to find common ways to articulate them in order to meet the challenges of the day”. Furthermore, the horizontals believe that “our organizing and getting things done must be founded on the non-hierarchical contribution of all, including decision making powers.”
 - 4 The Democratize_the_esf list was one of the two lists in Britain in which participants discussed, coordinated and, often, ranted on themes surrounding the ESF in London. The other list was the ESF_UK list, which attracted a core of more conventional ‘vertical’ political activists plus. There was of course a lot of overlapping between the two, as debates occurring in one list spilled over to the other. There were two other lists that were European based. The ‘official’ FSE_ESF list that pulled together activists of a broad range of social movements, trade unions and NGOs across Europe. There was also the esfdemocracy_eurodebate list which was set up to inform and coordinate actions among European activists and social movements who were sympathetic to the ‘horizontal’ case.

delegates to go meet with delegates from other assemblies, relaying information and finding a common agreement. However, they were constantly undermined by Trotskyist parties who tried to hijack protests, reneged on agreements and would not work by consensus. She said they had all tried to work together, to find a common way of working, but in the end, she had found it impossible. Her explanation was simple but perfect: “Horizontal people cannot work with vertical people”.

He continues with a comparison between the way this meeting and the ESF meetings were conducted.

That meeting was organized in a circle, there was a facilitator who simply facilitated the discussion, ensuring that everyone who wanted to speak could speak, was respectful of everyone’s views and created an atmosphere of common humanity. Because we all agreed with the process of the discussion, what the discussion would be on, what time we would finish, who would provide translation etc. etc. and because we all wanted to work together to be able to hear about what was happening in Argentina, the meeting worked beautifully. The ESF process in the UK, from the moment it began in the minds of the SWP central committee last year, right through to now has never, ever been conducted in such a way, nor have those people pushing the process forward ever wanted us to work in such a way. They are not interested in the process of consensus-based decision-making. They do not respect it, do not agree with it, and will never, ever work in that way. Neither will trade union officials, nor most representatives from NGOs and mainstream campaign groups. They are vertical people.

In this original intervention, verticality and horizontality do not define states of being, but *modes of doing*, that is modes of *relating* within *processes* of social production. Also, as it will become clear in the months that followed, these modes of doing are not static set of procedural rules to be agreed upon once and for all and then to be applied in various contexts. Instead, they were modes that develop and emerge from the interacting agents themselves. The anecdote captured very well the feeling and experience of the people involved. Soon after this email was sent around, people whose attempts to democratize the ESF process in the previous months were frustrated immediately recognised themselves in the experience of the *piquetera sister* and started to refer to themselves as ‘horizontals’ and their opponents as ‘verticals’. Few days later, beginning on 7 February, a ‘log of evidence’ was circulated through lists and posted on the ESF.net web site providing a case against the organizations which begun to monopolize the process of the ESF production. The concerns ranged from the opaque way to candidate London to the next ESF, to the abolition of the working groups that were spontaneously emerging to deal with a variety of organizational aspects, from the ‘blackmails’ of the type “either this way or without trade unions money”, to what was seen as an opportunistic management of general assemblies, little respectful of democratic principles of inclusion and participation, principles that many sought to be at the very basis of World Social Forum.⁵ On the basis of this document, a *Call for democracy* was then circulated (Horizontals, 2004b), signed by 128 people belonging to a wide range of groups, loose networks and organizations, from the European parliament, trade unions and NGOs, to a ‘Northern anarchist network’, Indymedia and local social forums (Horizontals, 2004c). The signature methodology was revealing: it lists all individuals and affiliations in two different places making clear that individuals were not representing organizations and, at the same time, that “horizontals are everywhere, even in the organizations of the verticals” (Horizontals, 2004e). Hence,

5 See Horizontals (2004a).

from the beginning, the political identity and positionality of horizontality was not defined in terms of a label, or belonging to a particular group, but a mode of doing that was *transversal* to a variety of groups and networks, to a variety of identities and positionalities.⁶

The conflict among what clearly appear as two divergent political cultures (Ruggiero 2004), will then explode publicly and openly during the European assembly for the preparation of the ESF, held in London on 6 and 7 March 2004. The European delegates could bear witness of the accusations made by ‘horizontalists’ in the way the meeting was chaired, in blatant tactics to force through a pre-established controversial agenda.

The ‘verticalists’ were forced to the negotiating table in the midst of the assembly in order to renegotiate the terms within which the ESF process would proceed. The outcome of what several horizontalists saw as a major victory, will however in the following months be frustrated by the continuation of the same practices, in an endless war of attrition between the two political cultures. By June, only few months away from the event, most of the people involved in horizontal networks opted to put their organizational energies and skills in the organization of seminars, workshops, accommodations, and logistics of autonomous spaces (www.altspaces.net), which, as we will briefly discuss below, become the most diverse, vibrant and most attended of the brief history of the ESF.

Indeed, the latter spaces showed that the two camps held quite different meanings of democracy; they *valued* different aspects of it. On one hand, a hierarchal concept of democracy, rooted in apparatus, in which the powers of the social body (in this case the people involved in the production of the Forum) are articulated through a vertical scale of representations and mediations that constructs and rigidify roles, bureaucratically define the boundaries of the subjects’ inputs, of *what* they can or cannot contribute to, of *how* they can and cannot contribute, and confine the free expression of their *powers* within a wall well guarded by bureaucratic socialist principles. In this country, this vertical line is the *mainstream* of politics. On the other hand, a horizontal plateau of encounters, relations, and doing through which the exercise of the subjects’ powers, and their reciprocal feedbacks, construct norm, rules, spaces and temporarily defined roles.

Keeping in mind this contrast, what can we say ex-post about the ‘event’ ESF held in London in October 2004? Ambiguous result. On the one hand, it has represented a clear step forward for our movement. This, not only because 25,000 people have attended, and all large events like these encourage people encounters across networks. Also and especially because a section of the movement has overcome its insularity at events like these and, working with organizing principles based on horizontality, inclusiveness and participation, has *broadened* substantially the program of and participation in self-managed and autonomous zones. About 5000 people, many of whom were wearing the bracelet of the ‘official’ event, have been estimated to have participated in the broad range of activities of the autonomous zones, and defined future action programs on crucial themes such as precarity, refugees and communication rights.

6 Indeed, this is also demonstrated by the resistance I have witnessed by several *practicing* ‘horizontalists’ against defining themselves as such, perhaps fearing that labels could rigidify identities in such a way as to contradict the necessary fluidity of ‘horizontal’ practices.

On the other hand, there is also a sense in which the process of the ‘official’ ESF in London has not been a way forward for our movement, but a serious step back: The degree of subcontracting of the various processes of the ‘official’ events, culminating with the hiring of an ‘event management’ company; the environmental unawareness of its practices; the vertical control freakery that has dominated all moments of its production, suspicious of all productive networks from the movement that did not match the habitual practices of union bureaucracies and socialist parties; the contractual ‘terms and conditions’ email sent to anyone purchasing tickets; the petty self-promotional splashing of UK union names on the walls of meeting rooms, instead of reaching out to symbols that belong to all movements across the globe; not to mention the bullying, the trade unions’ and Greater London Authority’s financial blackmails and the monopolization of platforms such as the final rally are just an indication that in terms of these practices, another world is still far away. In the effort to ‘build’ the movement, to ‘outreach’ to people who have not yet heard about the horrors of the world, the organizers have forgotten that a process of radical social transformation takes much more than an increasing number of people laid down as ‘building bricks’. This relational incompetence is a heavy political liability in our movement, and cannot be justified by the ends of ‘educating’ more people or outreaching into the mainstream union organizations as Callinicos (2004) has recently argued.

From the London ESF to the World

We need to ‘zoom out’, because the ‘verticals’ strategy of excluding subjectivities, themes and organizational processes that are not compatible with its ideological templates is not a prerogative of the production of one specific ESF event. The struggle that has emerged in the case of London, also happened in Mumbai (Sen, 2004) and, more generally, is reproduced within the movement in many occasions: inside the anti-war movement in London, in the street and assembly in Argentina, and so on. There are always ‘template strategists’ ready to fly in circles over concrete problems encountered by the movement and processes such as the Social Forum, who read the problems in their own terms and offer solutions that go in the direction of the goals hidden and predefined in their particular political cook-book. ‘Verticality’ in this sense is not simply the ‘management’ of an event such as the ESF, but *a culture of politics that is managerial* with respects to movements and struggles. Let us zoom out once again and reach those plateaux of generalizations that characterize debates on strategy in our movements, without however loosing our sanity.

A recent contribution by Susan George (2004) offers a good and intelligent entry point to tackle this managerial conception of politics, a culture that by and large informs many of the ‘reformists’ and ‘revolutionary’ tendencies in our movement, to use an old classification not much meaningful today.⁷ In *Taking the Movement Forward*, she raises

7 I want to make clear that in what follows I will only engage with one of George’s many short contributions to the debate in our movement because it is a straightforward piece that poses some very relevant questions and that enabled me to clarify my own thinking while critically confronting them. My engagement does not pretend to pass judgment on her overall valuable work as intellectual and activist, which extends far beyond the short contribution cited.

some serious strategic reflections and confronts us with the problem of how can our movement win its battles, and push “‘our adversaries backward’ until they fall over the edge of the cliff.” She raises four main points that in her view are “vital for the continuing success of the movement.” For mnemonic reasons, they all begin with PR and are “PRogrammes, PRiorities and PRagmatism, ending with a warning about Precautions”. PRogramme has to do with the activities at our social forum, which she sees quite correctly as dispersive and repetitive, lacking of focus on strategic reflections, of understanding of powers of our enemy, etc. ‘Priorities’ is where the problems start. They indicate the needs of “defining a minimum, common programme every activist in the world (or, when relevant, in Europe or another region) can agree on and in whose service political campaigning can be undertaken and pressure applied, right now”. This is a common programme that not only identifies the most urgent and strategically important battles, but that also state the kind of globalization we want, “otherwise, why should anyone bother listening to us, much less joining us?” Pragmatism is a sober reminder that our priorities cannot be a laundry list, that they have to be selected with intelligence, and that intelligence is to step out of one’s partial world view and preferred ‘pet issues’ and embrace the perspective of the whole, if what is do-able here and now, what issue would bring us more allies, what type of victory will weaken our opponents most, etc. Finally, PRecaution is a reminder that “in order to take the movement forward, let’s not get side-tracked or bogged down with huge, unwieldy abstractions like ‘defeating the market’ or ‘overthrowing capitalism’”. Since there is no winter palace to seize, any victory we achieve will always be a partial victory.

What Kinds of Victory Do We Need?

Let me engage with the type of argument that Susan George puts forward starting however from a different concept of precaution, one that recognizes the fact that there is no centre of power, no Winter Palace to storm and hence that ‘any victory’ is a ‘partial victory’, but that at the same time, does not want to root its strategic horizon and thinking in *anything else* but the *overcoming* of capitalism, that is the ‘overthrowing of capitalism’ through a process of social radical transformation and constitution.

Now the recognition that any victory is a partial victory implies that we need to be able to judge the value of such a victory. In the traditional socialist mythology, there are two ways to judge a victory. One is to consider a victory as something that goes in the direction of a new social deal with capital (‘reformism’). The other considers a victory as something that goes in the direction of the seizure of state power (‘revolution’). A third option is that a victory is something that goes in the direction of the abolition of exploitation and oppressions, as well as promoting our own empowerment, self-determination and autonomy over our lives and contexts of interaction. Some may say that these three are complementary, and others would disagree. I say, maybe so, but it depends on contexts – but I am not interested to debate this issue here. What interests me here is to reclaim a unit of measurement, a yardstick within which we can formulate and frame our broad strategic judgments. To do this, we must ask: which of these three is our ultimate end, our *goal*? What are we really fighting for? My stand is that if any generalization is possible regarding the goals of the people engaged in struggles, is

closer to the last of these three options, which, given the multiplicity of positionalities, desires and needs, it means a multiplicity of goals and new relational fields to articulate them.

Obviously, one can make the argument that institutional ‘victories’, whether through ‘reforms’ or ‘revolutions’, are means to empowerment, autonomy and end of exploitation. Fine, make this argument. In any case, they are means, not goals. The question then becomes whether these ‘victories’ also become means for our opponents; that is, if they are also means to goals that go against our own goals, then it is strategically shortsighted to embrace them as our means. For example, the goal of the ESF event through the means of its verticalization defines it uniquely as an event to be ‘consumed’. The goal of environmental sustainability through the means of the sustainability of business and capitalism metabolizes the original meaning of sustainability and turns it into a means of ‘competitive advantage’. The goal of ‘poverty reduction’ through extending the realm of markets and competition, turns discourse on poverty into an instrument to promote a social mechanism through which somebody’s else livelihood is threatened (this is what market competition is all about).

It is very dangerous these days to make people think that we are going to have ‘victories’, or that we even should hope to get them. I mean those types of victories that imply or even hint to a ‘progressive’ *institutional* shift of paradigm: something like the Tobin tax (Attac), a world parliament (Monbiot), a Keynesian inspired International Trade Organization (George), or broadly a system of governance of global markets predicated on a deal between capital and selected organizations of civil society. This is not a judgment on the merits of such regulatory reforms *in abstract*. It is a judgment on the processes that such victories would imply and a rejection of an approach that *aspires* to the institutionalization of social movements. *Within* the boundaries of capitalist systems, institutional shifts in paradigms never come without some forms of exclusion *and* militarization of our lives because they have to be contained *within the limits* which are acceptable to start a new round of accumulation.

The last big ‘progressive’ shift of paradigm was the welfare state and Keynesianism, and this would have not been acceptable by capital without the Second World War that turned trade unions into bureaucracies (Glaberman, 1980) coupled to the priorities of growth and global (under)development, that is capital accumulation (De Angelis, 2000). No welfare state would have been possible without the cold war, the constant fear of nuclear obliteration and networks of spies infiltrated in our movements that attempted to confine struggles within geo-politically compatible limits.⁸

8 Indeed, the reading of the end of this era would involve a more grounded analysis of struggles and capital reactions than those provided by George (2004). She blames it to “self-gratifying hippies” who have abandoned the movement to get jobs in advertising thus opening a space for Maggie and Ronnie!

Linear Thinking and The Marginalization of Struggles

The emphasis on empowerment and autonomy is not simply an ‘ideological preference’. It is also a question of the constituent social powers we are capable to mobilize when we ground our politics on this. Thus, for example, we have to realize that none of us, including the most trained and up-to-date political campaigner on any particular issue has sufficient knowledge of what is at stake for any particular community in struggle, let alone the innumerable ones of our global movement. Nobody knows what priorities might emerge from the ground up on the day after some steering committee has decided the list of priorities as they see fit. Nobody has full knowledge of context, desires, needs, aspirations but the subjects themselves.

The swarm nature of our movements allows the best use of knowledge of priorities that is available because it relies on peoples and communities to ground them in their own contexts, to share that knowledge and articulate their priorities with those of others as they see fit to their own processes of empowerment, struggle and production of relational fabric. Knowledge, including the knowledge of priorities, can only be conceived in a networked form, as an ongoing relational field among the many worlds and aspirations we comprise. Hence, while it is tactically important, sensible and conceivable that in given times and circumstances and for short periods of time we reach consensus to focus our efforts on specific objectives, it would be a disaster for our broad movement to strategically prioritize campaigns and define a common programme for which in the article quoted Susan George hopes “every activist in the world (or, when relevant, in Europe or another region) can agree on and in whose service political campaigning can be undertaken and pressure applied”. This way of putting it risks to reproduce the worst of the political parties, the hierarchy between a central committee (read ‘secretariat’) entitled to shape broad political ends and all the rest who ‘service political campaigning’ and serve as means to externally defined ends. We would lose the flexibility and replace the dynamic swarm nature of our movement with a new bureaucracy.

These types of arguments are predicated on a linear, cumulative understanding of social transformation, with no connection to the dynamics of the existing social struggles. In this George is not alone and she shares much with many classical ‘revolutionary socialists’ tendencies she seems to oppose. The metaphor she uses, for example the idea that by pushing and pushing we can send our opponents off a cliff, and the representation of this pushing in term of a series of ‘victories’, reminds us more of a football competition than the ‘game’ of social transformation. In the latter, there is no independent recording of the score, the rules of the game are *not* accepted by all, and, most importantly, our ‘scoring’ a victory today may well result (as it has resulted) in changing some aspects of the ‘game’ in such a way that the fundamental aspects we are opposed to remain unchanged! The victory of the Winter Palace, for example, implied some real material gains for the Russian people, but its institutionalization deep-froze hierarchical social relations (and consequent gulags) for seventy years into the process of ‘socialist accumulation’. The working of the Keynesian state implied the institutionalization of wage rounds and the entrance of trade unions into the ‘deal’ room with government and bosses. Yet, women remained confined as unwaged workers in patriarchal homes, US black communities were confined in their poverty stricken

ghettoes, South East Asian peasants were bombed and napalmed in their villages and rice paddies, while the effects of CO₂ emissions of the 'golden age of capitalism' are chocking us all and are the basis of today's change in weather patterns.

There is a long and variegated tradition of autonomist thinking, rooted in the 1960s and 1970s Italian movements and *operaismo*, but then branching out into a broad range of contributions worldwide, for which one does not just come up with strategies. Instead, strategies must be 'read from the struggles' and their evaluation should begin with the present's complexity and urgency. Thus, for example, what is the status of the cancellation of the debt versus the Tobin Tax strategies now? Which of the two have been more effective in recomposing the movements in Africa, South America and Asia? How would popular movements be (dis)empowered by a Tax negotiated and administered from above? By a generalised refusal to pay the Debt imposed on States by the movements themselves? Which would cause capitalist institutions like the World Bank and IMF to retreat? How does the debate around the Iraqi debt cancellation open a contradiction in the capitalist structural adjustment strategy? It is only with a discussion of questions of such detail that the debate between the different strategies can be evaluated.

It is obvious that from the perspective of a concept of social transformation that wants to promote empowerment, we must abandon linear thinking, since social transformation emerges out of our actions, subjectivities, desires, organizational capability, ingenuity and struggles in unpredictable ways. Indeed, we must be very wary of thinking that the achievement of a victory, of *any* victory, is a move towards the promised land. And this is because what we call victories (or defeats for that matter) represent turning point for *both* us and our opponents. And by our opponents I do not mean a particular set of elites, specifically and contingently defined. From a broad *strategic* perspective of social transformation, our enemies are not Bush and Blair, not this or that corporate shark, this or that politician. These only serve the machine in particular contexts, and they are our enemies *within* those contexts. Strategically speaking, what we are confronting as enemy are not personalities, but social roles, and roles emerge out of social relations and processes of particular forms. When a pope dies, goes an Italian saying, another takes its place, and the death of a pope does not question the role of the pope, its position within a hierarchical scale, or the ongoing processes that reproduce that hierarchy. Our movement, like each and one of us, has a potential to transform those roles or to fall back onto the old ones.

Tactically speaking, we simply do not know who will take the place of our particular adversaries in the here and now after the 'victory' on this and that issue has been achieved; we do not know what strategic direction capital will take to perpetrate the social system most congenial to it. We can identify some general lines on current debates within the elite, we can learn from history. However, we do not know how, whether and to what extent our victory will bring about a re-alignment of social forces that helps to redefine a new era of capital accumulation, with its inevitable injustices, exclusions, stupidity, and madness.

Just to make a simple example: the Bolkestein Directive, upon which Susan George draws our attention, which "would introduce a new legal principle and allow firms to

apply the social and labour laws of the ‘country of origin’ to workers in all the European countries where the firms might happen to do business”, is not very much incompatible with the strategic aspirations of *some* tendencies in international trade unions. I am thinking, for example, about global business unionism, for which international unions should engage in alliances with global capital to compete against other global capitalist alliances (Hodkinson, 2004). Now, who is our adversary here, the proponents of the EU directive which set the legal framework within which corporate-union alliances on a global scale would also become possible, or those trade unionists who work for making such an alliance the policy of trade unions? They sound complementary to me, in that they are both ways to understand human social production as competitive and profit oriented, that is envisage a *process* of doing that is incompatible with our transformative goals. Such complementarities are discernable only if we measure the proposal strategically in the sense discussed before, whether it would help further capitalist disciplinary markets or set a *limit* to them and open spaces for empowerment and new modes of doing and social relations.

From the perspective of radical transformation and moving beyond capitalism, our true enemy, the beast we are confronting, is the way through which we articulate our social doing and (re)produce our livelihoods, our needs and desires, a way that is a social *process*, which is predicated on a certain distribution of property rights and access to resources. This is what we call capitalism. This is what our historical memory and diverse body of knowledge in the form of theoretical and empirical work as well as lived experience and biographical narratives tell us: however regulated and however fine tuned, capitalism reproduces the same patterns of injustices and delirium.

This form of human doing and mode of articulation of difference through disciplinary markets has always proved dynamic and flexible enough to absorb, contrast and co-opt any fixed ‘institutional progressive’ programme that we come up with. Instead, we need to beat it with the spread of alternative modes of doing, alternative *processes* of social cooperation and articulation of diversity, one that is a billion times more creative, flexible, diverse, innovative and at the same time communal and cohesive than capitalist disciplinary markets. But in order to be emancipatory and empowering, these processes can only be defined by the interacting agents themselves, not by a grand design or by a ‘general programme’.

A programme and the prioritization of action can only be helpful to concentrate our forces in specific contexts and situations, in order to build a critical mass *to set a limit* to capital. But even this limited understanding of programme must *emerge* from a process that is alternative to the mode of doing of capital. Even this programme must be *produced* by an alternative mode of production and social relations. It is for this reason that the struggles for the problematization of *process* within our movement, like the one that have emerged in the context of the London European Social Forum are so *strategically* important.

Process!

How can we reconcile our broad strategic goal of radical transformation of global society beyond capitalism with the tasks of activism, the nitty-gritty of political campaigning, of defining priorities, mobilizing, agitate, educate, set contexts and goals which are workable? To me, the answer is centred around the 'PR' left out from the list provided by Susan George: PRocess. This in a twofold sense.

First, we have to see the whole of our diverse movements as setting up a limit, an insurmountable barrier to the *process* of social doing of capital. This is a process of social reproduction that is based on pitting one against the other, one's livelihoods against those of others. The barrier is a multitude of 'no!' to this type of process. We do this in the diverse struggles that emerge: against debt, against further trade liberalizations, against privatizations, for land, food sovereignty and different relations to nature. And we do this by pushing back the market agenda to pervade all dimensions of our lives.

Second, from the perspective of a radical transformation of society, these capital-limiting struggles *also* enable us to do two other things. They enable not only to quantitatively 'build' the movement, but more important, to thicken the networks and extend the relational fields of action of social cooperation *predicated on other values* than market values. Also, and consequently since thickening of the web implies the extension of relational fields of action, of social cooperation, we have opened new spaces within which we consolidate our relational practices. Our many powers have grown, and they have grown not arithmetically, but exponentially.

We can understand these two dimensions of our struggles in terms of 'one no, many yeses' vis-à-vis capital, a slogan emerged from the second Encuentro promoted in 1997 by the Zapatistas. One that keep in throwing a spanner in its wheel and seek to push it back and keep it at bay, the other that thickens the web of social cooperation grounded on different values; one that dents, challenges and destroy its drives to colonize life with monetary values, the other that push desires and aspirations away from being coupled to disciplinary market loops. One that cuts back enclosures and the other that creates new commons predicated on new communities and relational practices. In this framework, we can call victories all the moments, opportunities, events and spaces of empowerment, whether these are the establishment of a new connection among communities in struggle, or the winning of a major concessions from the state that effectively reduces the dependency of people from markets.

The dictatorship of capitalist markets is predicated on a social consensus that make us act upon reality in ways compatible with them, to follow our desires and meet needs within social forms that pit our livelihoods against each other. To the extent that consensus is manufactured, we have then to challenge *how* that manufacturing takes place and practices a different type of production *process* through which new consensus emerges. Again, it is a question of process, as for example our independent media people teach us again and again. To the extent the manufacturing is the result of our daily engagements within markets, an iteration that creates and normalizes norms of engagement with the other, we must find ways to disengage, construct a politics of

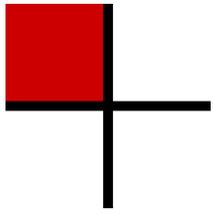
alternatives that focus on the reduction of degree of dependence from markets, and therefore struggles for different types of commons. In other words, to the extent we do not consent, but we must interact in these ways because this is what our livelihoods depends on, then our struggle must seek to push back our degree of dependence on capitalist markets, reclaim resources at whatever scale of social action, and on the basis of these invent and practice new forms of exchanges across the social body, new types of local and translocal communities. In all these cases, what is required is an emphasis on *relational and communicational processes*, as well as on the conditions within which we access resources. Competition is replaced by communication and enclosures by commons.

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The Ethics of Engagement Revisited: Remembering the ESF 2004

Emma Dowling

This is totally unacceptable ... there is no room for this in our movement...¹

The organisation of the third European Social Forum (ESF) in London was fraught with clashes between the different actors within the UK movements. My contribution here is a short excursion into my memories of the British preparatory process (also see piece by Laura Sullivan, this issue). I don't intend to provide a political analysis, but rather to give a few glimpses of a personal story of a participant in the process. What struck me most about the organising process was the huge discrepancy between the political and ethical visions held out as alternatives by the activists involved in organising the ESF, and their actual behaviour towards one another in the process. Here, I explore some of the intense difficulties I experienced in trying to participate and describe some instances where my own political and ethical ideas clashed with those of the actors dominating the process. I conclude with a brief reflection on my views about political organising, ethics and social transformation.

In December 2003, the UK networks and organisations wanting to be involved in the ESF had their first meeting at the London Mayor's headquarters, City Hall, to discuss the possibility of holding the Forum in the UK. On this occasion I entered the room early and watched it fill with people. Noticeable was a core of 'busy-bodies' rushing around, arranging the meeting. The first two rows of chairs were filled by people (mainly men) huddled in groups in pre-meeting discussions. I asked my friend to tell me who they were: so and so from the SWP (Socialist Worker's Party), so and so from x trade union, so and so from the GLA (Greater London Authority). All were sat near the front, ready to rush to the infamous microphone and reel off their political speeches. It was an exciting atmosphere: I felt I was 'at the heart' of the UK anti/alternative globalisation movement. As the meeting began, about forty people lined up to speak and we spent two hours listening to their visions for the ESF. Nothing really happened, except that I began to understand that there were two camps in the room,² both wanting

1 These two sentences were articulated like a mantra by various 'vertical' players on many different occasions when dealing with people who disagreed with them. It was a way of claiming ownership over 'the movement', and with that the knowledge about what 'the movement' did or did not require.

2 With a history of involvement or conflict with each other.

the ESF to be organised their way. On the one hand, were those who were to become dubbed the ‘verticals’: representatives of trade unions such as the RMT (Rail and Maritime Transport Union, www.rmt.org.uk), TGWU (Transport and General Workers Union, www.tgwu.org.uk) and NATFHE (National Association For Teachers in Higher Education, www.natfhe.org.uk), some NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) (e.g. The Tobin Tax Network www.tobintax.org.uk and CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, www.cnduk.org), and the GLA. Also in this ‘camp’ were individuals who were unknown to most other activists I talked to, but who appeared to belong to Socialist Action (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Action_%28UK%29)³ – a Trotskyist organisation connected to and, in the ESF 2004 process, seemingly acting on behalf of, the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. These individuals avoided declaring their involvement with this organisation, but acted as a bloc under the guise of numerous peace, anti-war, anti-racism, and ‘women’s issues’ organisations, as well as for GLA-backed campaign groups for ‘a multicultural London’. Further, there were representatives of the Stop the War Coalition, Globalise Resistance (GR) and Project K. Representatives of these three groups, as well as some of the trade unions involved,⁴ were all also members of the SWP political party, and acted mostly as a bloc in line with their party’s objectives.

On the other hand, there were the as yet unnamed ‘horizontals’ – a loose group of independent activists (associated, for example, with the independent Left publication Red Pepper (www.redpepper.org.uk), Indymedia (www.indymedia.org.uk), the organisation Just Peace (www.4justpeace.com), London Social Forum participants (www.londonsocialforum.org.uk) environmental activists, libertarian-anarchists and autonomist Marxists, human rights campaigners, some NGOs such as Friends of the Earth (www.foe.co.uk), and ATTAC UK (www.attac.org.uk), the organisation I was representing.⁵ It was a little tricky to pinpoint precisely who was a ‘horizontal’ and who

3 These individuals never declared their affiliation to Socialist Action, and knowledge of their involvement either came through my own research, or through conversations with other activists or local politicians who could share information. When they were associated with the organisation at meetings, none of the individuals ever denied their affiliation, although they never actually confirmed it either. To this day, I am intrigued as to why they were so secretive about it.

4 E.g. UNISON, the union for public service workers, as well as workers employed in the private and voluntary sectors, www.unison.org.uk, AMICUS, the manufacturing, skilled and technical workers union, www.amicustheunion.org, and CWU, the Communication Workers Union, www.cwu.org.

5 ATTAC stands for Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions in the Aid of Citizens and has become a global network of independent local and national, groups, now comprising of 84,000 members in total (www.attac.org). ATTAC is involved in the antiglobalisation (or altermondialiste) struggle, campaigning in particular on issues concerned with the democratisation of global financial and political regimes (e.g. Tobin Tax, Water privatisation and GATS). ATTAC has been a leading actor in the development of the WSF and other Social Forums and was originally set up in France in 1998 by the editors of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Ignacio Ramonet and Bernard Cassen. The idea was to create a broad-based campaign network including different types of organisations (trade unions, NGOs) to lobby the government for the introduction of the Tobin Tax, a currency transaction tax intended to curb short-term currency transactions that are used for pure profit making and that have contributed to causing severe currency crises in developing economies. The idea behind ATTAC is that both local and national groups are as autonomous as they wish to be, meaning that ATTAC could and has managed to bring many different activists together under the one banner. For this reason, it also has quite different organisational structures in different places, and the extent to which ATTAC groups actively collaborate with each other transnationally varies. In the UK, ATTAC has four active

was not. Certainly there was a core group of self-declared ‘horizontalists’ subscribing explicitly to the type of politics associated with the term (see de Angelis, Juris, Laura Sullivan and Tormey, this issue), but included in this group were people who might prefer the broader title of ‘democratic opposition’⁶ to the ‘verticals’, made up of people who shared the same goals within the process, and who increasingly worked together to achieve them. This ‘democratic opposition’ included people from groups as diverse as the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB, www.cpgb.org.uk), the World Development Movement (WDM, www.wdm.org.uk) and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF, www.wilpf.org). These two adverse groups – the ‘verticals’ and ‘horizontalists’ – left not many ‘diagonals’ in between as time went by and the process of organising became ever more polarised.

The most arduous dispute amounted to a battle for control over the organisation of the event, whereby the ‘vertical’ coalition acted in line with the maxim that the ends (controlling the Forum as event) justified the means of organising. But entangled in this battle for power over the event, was not only a battle over the ESF organising process, but also a battle over the most pertinent question of the antiglobalisation movement, namely *how* to ‘change the world’. This entanglement makes sense if one recognises that the way the event itself is organised – how decision-making processes are conducted and what thematic content is given to the Forum – is intricately bound up with its politics. These issues are two sides of the same coin. In this process, the outcome of the battle was pretty much determined at the outset, given that some (the ‘verticals’) had more access to resources and political clout than others (the ‘horizontalists’). Nevertheless, the struggle continued to play itself out in the organisation of the ESF.

In terms of ideas, the ‘horizontalists’ were committed to developing an organisational process that lived up to the ideals of inclusiveness (regardless of whether an individual was from a large organisation or a small network), consensus decision-making in a non-hierarchical way, and an ethics that would reflect in the here and now the kind of world that was to be brought about through the anti-globalisation struggle. Some of the ‘verticals’ were motivated by their ideas for social and political change along Trotskyist-Leninist lines, where the ‘road to revolution’ is paved by those that know best, i.e. the Central Committee of the party. Others had much more immediate interests in either simply ‘getting the job done’ their way, or in promoting the Mayor of London as a progressive force for multiculturalism and ‘good governance’ in the UK’s capital. The strategic alliance between these so-called ‘verticals’ lay in the desire to have the event organised by a core group of ‘important’ Londoners, in a particular way, i.e. one

local groups, ATTAC Jersey, ATTAC Oxford, ATTAC Cambridge and ATTAC London. ATTAC London became a convergence group for individuals with no local group in their town and recently became renamed ATTAC UK. The organisational principles of ATTAC UK are strongly influenced by the work developed by Toni Prug and Benjamin Geer (a founding member) on ‘Open Organizations’ (www.open-organizations.org), whereby participatory democracy, openness and transparency and a commitment to avoiding exclusionary hierarchical relations of power and knowledge are key.

6 This is the term used by CPGB member Tina Becker in her articles on the 2004 ESF preparatory process as published in the CPGB newspaper, ‘*Weekly Worker*’ (see, for example, *Weekly Worker* 533 Thursday June 17 2004, <http://www.cpgb.org.uk/worker/533/esfprov.html>)

that was professionalized and centralised, and produced a ‘manageable’, politically uncontroversial event. Thus, for example, the development and maintenance of the website for the ESF was subcontracted to GreenNet, with the whole tender process for this conducted and decided upon by the GLA directly,⁷ and much of the management of the actual event, including security and catering, was subcontracted to profit driven companies. Forum themes also were somewhat predetermined to reflect the Mayor’s and the GLA’s interests, highlighting, for example, the Iraq war/occupation, fascism and racism, and many GLA/Socialist Action/trade union ‘verticals’ (not the SWP on this occasion) even tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent an explicitly anti-neo-liberal thematic axis.

In terms of behaviour and decision-making, the Charter of Principles of the WSF⁸ is the only external guiding document for the conduct of the process. However, these abstract codes of conduct beg the same question as any international agreements between sovereign states that rely on good will. Namely, in the absence of any mechanism for enforcement or accountability, and given unequal political and economic power relations, how can abuse of such agreements be prevented? In the UK process, much energy and time was spent interpreting the Charter of Principles, where one faction would accuse another of not adhering to its principles, almost like in a court case, where ‘the law’ is called upon to mitigate a conflict as if this carries some sort of external, transcendental and objective reality, when instead ‘the law’ is open to different interpretations, not least in relation to the identities and experiences of whoever is doing the interpreting. In other words, a struggle for meaning occurred, which at times gave the impression of being a genuine search for what the Principles might mean, whilst at others seemed a more opportunistic use of the Charter for certain ends.⁹ At the same time, there were those who argued that the Charter itself was problematic, requiring revision. For example, representatives of the political party Worker’s Power and representatives of the political tendency League for the 5th International, who were in actual fact the same individuals, argued that the process by which the Charter of Principles had been drawn up was profoundly undemocratic and therefore should be reformed where necessary to include the wishes of the actors involved. In particular, they felt that the policy on excluding political parties should be reconsidered, because this exclusion lead to a ‘dishonest’ participation of parties through other groups and/or trade unions (see Footnote 9). In the midst all of this, the office of the Mayor of London, whose policies for London are predominantly neo-liberal (i.e. hardly in the explicitly anti neo-liberal spirit of the WSF Charter of Principles), was called upon to fund the event, thereby creating a further imbalance through the political and economic power that it could wield as a local authority with greater command over resources.

7 The fact that there should even be a tender process was decided by the GLA too, when there would have been sufficient expertise amongst the participants to the organising process for the website to be managed internally.

8 See WSF Charter of Principles at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

9 For example, the formal exclusion of political parties, supported by members of the political party SWP, actually enabled the SWP to have a larger presence in the process, because they could formally act through many other civil society organisations and trade unions, whilst informally effectively acting together along party lines, and thereby de facto increasing party influence.

Having participated only in the ESF 2003 as event, I came to the UK ESF 2004 preparatory process as someone who, somewhat naïvely, thought of the ESF as an ‘open space’, a friendly space in which anyone was welcome and everyone would be heard. What I found instead was a vicious power struggle and the most exclusionary, intimidating and emotionally draining process I have ever been part of (also see Laura Sullivan this issue for interpretations of the emotional implications of the ESF 2004 organising process). Sometimes it was like a bad dream, where your perception of reality is turned on its head and you find yourself aghast that the world around you is run on a different logic to the one you thought was in place. At the second European Assembly in March 2004, for example, ‘horizontal’ activists drew up some proposals for the UK process that would include their wishes, arguing that a decision on them needed to be made on a European level. They argued that they needed the support of European delegates due to the fact they were being ignored and excluded in the UK process. When actors of the ‘vertical coalition’ argued that it was not true that anyone was being excluded, Italian delegates from the trade union COBAS (Confederazione dei Comitati di Base, www.cobas.it) in particular retorted that it had to be sufficient for a person to state that they felt excluded for it to be acknowledged and acted upon. This reasoning was alien to the UK ‘verticals’ who believed that they held the necessary objective insight to decide who was excluded and who was not, regardless of what those who felt themselves to be excluded thought.

Working with other ‘horizontals’ in the organising process, I found myself at best ignored and at worst being branded ‘crazy’. If I were to side with certain groups or individuals involved, push for more openness, or make proposals for the planning of the event that were not liked by ‘the ‘verticals’’, I was accused of wanting to ‘wreck the ESF’. For example when I, with others from the Babels volunteer interpreting network (www.babels.org), presented a proposal for a process for deciding on office workers, as well as a call for a finance working group, I was accused of being threatening and confrontational. When I drew up some guidelines on minute-taking for the meetings, the discussion of them was put off for so many weeks by the Chair due to ‘lack of time’ that it became irrelevant. Sometimes, when unfavoured individuals raised items for the agenda at meetings, ad hoc procedural rules might even be invented to stop the agenda item being accepted if it did not suit ‘vertical’ interests.¹⁰

Participants also found themselves being held to ransom by promises of trade union and GLA money. In Birmingham, at an Organising Committee Meeting, participants of the meeting were told by a representative of NATFHE and the GLA that if the proposal for a company structure drawn up by the lawyers of NATFHE and the GLA were not accepted by the meeting, there would ‘be no ESF’ and the trade unions along with the GLA would withdraw their involvement and most importantly, their resources.

The apparent lack of self-reflection by the more ‘vertical’ hegemonic actors led me to think more about the problems of individual behaviour in relation to political

10 For example, at one meeting, someone from the GLA remarked that the person who had just made a proposal had to put it in writing, photocopy it and bring it to the next meeting, which was not a procedure that had previously been in place, or even been put as a proposal to the meeting there and then.

engagement and activism. Too many people involved seemed to have completely dislocated themselves from the worlds they were active in. Thus, imperialism meant the imperialism of a nation-state, notably the United States, over another country – not any attempts to control and manipulate the ESF preparatory process. Being against neoliberalism meant being against the WTO and the GATS or TRIPS agreements, not against allowing money to equal decision-making power in the ESF process. Being for diversity meant adding race/gender/disability/ethnicity or religion and stirring – i.e. a form of tokenism of the worst kind, not acknowledging (and respecting) different political views within the ESF organising process and trying to find a way of working together. Being against oppression meant, being against women being told whether or not they should wear the ‘hijab’, not about whether branding dissent as crazy, violent or racist was oppressive. Being for women’s liberation meant agreeing hook, line and sinker to certain abstract themes that some women invited to a poorly advertised meeting called by the GLA at City Hall had decided they wanted to have plenaries and seminars on; not about questioning the macho discourses and ways of behaviour with which some men and women dominated the preparatory meetings. Another possible world was going to happen sometime in the distant future, not in the here and now through our own behaviour towards one another. And most distressingly, the people behaving like this and dominating the process time and time again took the moral high ground, arguing that anyone not in agreement with them was a selfish misguided individual; part of a minority who did not understand how to ‘change the world’. Their utopia of another world obviously was going to be brought about with big money and professional ‘officials’. Furthermore, conflict was seen as the negative contribution made by ‘crazy horizontals’, not as a possibility through which to forge progressive, creative and dynamic consensus.

For some time, I was able to play an interesting role. Being from ATTAC, a founding organisation of Social Forums, I had some political clout in the process. However, I felt far too intimidated to ever get up and say anything in meetings and, with other people from ATTAC UK, I spent the first few weeks trying to figure out whose ‘side’ we were on. I was taken into the higher echelons of the process (albeit at a distance from any real decision-making) by virtue of being from ATTAC but also by virtue of being an unknown quantity with no history – a good-natured, willing independent activist with very little experience of politics on the British Left and with a good dose of naivety and trustworthiness thrown in. I trundled down to London every two weeks from Birmingham, spent most of my time on the phone to different people involved and rode the wave of excitement obsessively as City Hall became an almost pilgrimage-like destiny, spell-bound by the political fight that was unfolding. I saw how core people from the GLA, SWP, Socialist Action and some trade unions and NGOs drew up and fixed agendas before meetings and took decisions behind closed doors on how the event (and the imminent meeting) would be organised. The *modus operandi* was that all organisational matters, from the decision on the venue of the ESF to the design and printing of leaflets, were presented as *faits accomplis* to the Committee and objections were thwarted as being petty, time-wasting or even malicious obstructions by people ‘obsessed with process’ or, as already mentioned, ‘wanting to wreck the ESF’. From the ‘vertical’ side came constant comments of how this or that ‘horizontal’ was crazy and how the ‘horizontals were the laughing stock of Europe. No holds were barred – everything was fixed at all meetings – there was never any agenda item that was not

pre-ordained to be decided in a certain way and all dirty tricks were used to stop dissenters from speaking or when they would, a wave of ‘Nos’ or laughter would seize the room.

Having now figured out who was who and what was happening, I would feed back everything I found out to my ‘horizontal’ ‘allies’ and work with them – to the extent that I succeeded in bringing the Organising Committee meeting to Birmingham and chairing it, allowing for more ‘horizontal’ to speak during the meeting. This led to a complete break down of this meeting: because ‘horizontal’ voices were less stifled than they usually were and the existing conflict could actually feed into the meeting, rather than be crushed by the Chair, the apparent conflicts were brought to the fore. A breakdown of the meeting happened, in my opinion, due to the unwillingness of the ‘verticals’ to make any compromises whatsoever on key issues, which catapulted everyone into entrenched positions, and elicited unmanageable shouting and heckling on all sides.

At one of the European preparatory meetings, I agreed to take official minutes. My minutes included an account of what people had said at the meeting, as well as points of discussion and disagreement, rather than merely listing abstractly what had been agreed at the meeting, which was how the ‘verticals’ wanted minutes to be published. I was shocked to experience them being censored first by the Chair of the meeting, a representative of the trade union RMT, and then again by an employee of the GLA, with whom I had to argue about the nature of minute taking. The trade union representative sent me an email titled ‘private and not to be circulated’, which I already felt was rather intimidating. The content and tone of the email further led me to feel that he might be attempting to silence me. First, he alluded to the ‘obsessive’ way certain people kept bringing up matters of internal democracy and process, imploring me to not to ‘rock the boat’ at the next meeting and bring up process points like minute-taking, implying that this was a waste of precious time. Secondly, on a point I had raised about how the Chair had moved the meeting on without consensus when some people had tried to speak and introduce a petition of the ‘horizontal’ on inclusion and democracy (see www.esf2004.net), he claimed that I had completely misinterpreted what had happened at the meeting, stating that he thought I had ‘got completely the wrong end of the stick’. Clearly his memory of events was the correct one – after all, he had been the Chair of the meeting and ‘things might seem a little different than they really are when you’re part of the audience and not actually sat at the front of the room’ (personal email correspondence).

This was my most striking lesson from the process: that the tactics employed were on the level of reality construction, such that when I attempted to question some people’s behaviour, I was told that I was under illusions, i.e. that *my* perception of reality was skewed whilst *they* held the ‘truth’. As time went on, I grew tired, exhausted and disillusioned. I also became so nervous before meetings, I would be physically shaking. When arguments became particularly hostile, I felt the tears welling up in my eyes, afraid of the aggressiveness that would seize the room, sometimes from both ‘sides’; and also so sad about how people would be silenced through the laughing off of their experiences or their branding as liars or fools. It really was like being in a dystopian film with no external point of reference.

These were two different realities clashing together with no common culture or language to communicate. I did not know how to express how I really felt in the presence of the ‘vertical’ players, as they would just tell me outright that what I was saying was ‘absurd’ or ‘not true’. When finally I plucked up the courage to be more vocal in my opinions at another particularly antagonistic meeting, in which the ‘verticals’ ended up walking out because they didn’t get their way, I received an angry phone call from the Chair of the meeting. When I uttered my disapproval about what was going on (on this particular occasion that people were being appointed jobs in the office who were all from either Socialist Action, the GLA or the SWP, with no fair advertising process or open call for volunteers), I was told that I was misguided and should not believe the rubbish I heard in the pub. In other words, not only discrediting my interpretation of events as ‘rubbish’, but also not crediting me with the ability to form an opinion at all, portraying me as someone who was merely repeating people’s pub chatter.

In Europe, there were also disagreements on how to react to what was going on in the UK. On one occasion, when the ‘horizontal’ took their grievances to a European meeting in Berlin, some key people just didn’t want to know: the office of the Mayor of London was hosting the event and thus UK internal politics were not to be discussed at transnational meetings. This, of course, elicited smirks from various ‘vertical’ players. It was like being back at school, evocative of plucking up all your courage to confess to the teacher that you’re being bullied and the teacher telling you that s/he doesn’t believe you, whilst you catch the playground bully smirking as he escapes a telling off. Where certain agreements would be forced on the ‘verticals’ at European meetings by those of the more understanding European activists, they would just pretend the decisions were never taken when we got back to London, or punish those that spoke out at the European meetings by making their lives in the organising process even more difficult – like when you get an extra beating from the bully for ‘telling tales’.

On the other hand, there was an intervention from some individuals in the Italian and French delegations. In June 2004, the GLA-SWP-Socialist Action-union axis threatened to call off the ESF. It was suddenly announced that due to ‘lies’ that were being fed to the European delegations, some people from the French and Italian delegations had written letters of concern about the process to the UK Organising Committee. In actual fact, these ‘lies’ were based upon the personal experience of these delegations. In an unofficial report about a programme meeting in Paris at the end of May 2004, Italian delegates stated that “the meeting was more tiring than the previous ones and was often tense, conflictual and disagreeable [...] this was due mainly to the more powerful groups in the British delegation (the SWP, Socialist Action, [...] RMT, [...] and other small trade unions), who were constantly unwilling to enter real dialogue, attempted to impose their own way, were often arrogant or used blackmail, repeatedly refusing to accept decisions and titles which had already been decided hours before [...] in general terms, the work is still affected by the provincialism of the British contingent [...] who believe the matters they are dealing with in their ‘province’ are of universal importance and the whole thing is aggravated by their incapacity or unwillingness to discuss things [...] this does not concern the entire British delegation: the other half are not used to shouting and it would have been far more constructive if they had been allowed to play a part [...] before leaving Paris [members of the Italian and French delegations] agreed

on sending a letter to the UK Organising Committee outlining our criticisms of the way the ESF process has gone, explaining calmly but firmly that there is a need for them to find a much better way of working together and relating to others than they have at present, otherwise we shall pull out” (‘Italian document 10 June’, translated from Italian). At a UK meeting, it was argued that as a result of these letters, all of the UK trade union money had been withdrawn and the ESF would not be able to take place. When a week later it was announced that everything was going ahead after all, many of us were left musing whether the original crisis that had been evoked by the ‘verticals’ had perhaps been a desperate attempt to shock all dissenting voices in the UK into submission.

Money was always a huge issue, as unsurprisingly, money equalled power: it was difficult to really know what the financial situation of the ESF was because budget information was never discussed in any detail at meetings and even the little that was, was kept out of all official minutes. I think this was for three perhaps obvious reasons. Firstly, I think that the GLA in particular may have been quite nervous about public opinion with regard to using public resources to fund the ESF, an explicitly left-wing event, especially as local elections were to happen in the midst of the preparatory process. GLA spending on the ESF indeed was a cause for some turmoil in the local press, prompted by the Mayor’s political opponents. Secondly, I think there were deliberate attempts to implore a sense of gravity and necessary secrecy around the issue of money, so as to be able to centralise decision-making and also, because money was the major ‘comparative advantage’ that the larger ‘vertical’ organisations held in the process, they did not want to weaken their bargaining power by opening up access to information about it, not to mention any wider involvement on deciding how it would be spent. Sometimes, even the ‘fascist enemy’ as the threatening ‘other’ would be invoked to instill a sense of necessity of this procedure in the people pushing for more openness. Thirdly, of course, access to and ownership of resources always is the ‘sensitive subject’ because it is the root of power in a capitalist society, which the ESF organising process, of course, does not exist outside of.

On the issue of secrecy, a clause was even added to the Organising Committee statement to prevent ‘sensitive information’ (money matters) being made public, on some occasions leading to the expulsion of ‘journalists’ from the meetings (which actually meant the expulsion of two specific people who happened to be particularly avid critics of the machinations of the ‘verticals’ and happened to be from newspapers of parties involved in the process).

If it wasn’t the money issue that was used to force agreements on people, then it was criticisms of behaviour; the times I heard the words, ‘this is completely unacceptable behaviour’ are uncountable – it was regarding behaviour that the most stress was placed when trying to de-legitimise people. Many times, the way that meetings were rigged made unsolicited interventions the only way to interfere with the monopolisation of the process. This would play into the hands of the ‘verticals’, as it would leave people wide open to accusations of misbehaviour, which would serve to put someone’s behaviour in the limelight at the expense of the concerns raised. I myself became so angry at one European meeting in Berlin at the persistent manipulation of the process by UK ‘vertical’s that I raised my voice at one of the women from the NUS (National Union of

Students, www.nusonline.co.uk) and Socialist Action, who had taken the microphone at the end of the meeting to (it seemed to me) prevent the meeting from deciding in favour of official support for autonomous spaces (by arguing that agreements could not be forced on people last minute with the excuse of there being no more time to discuss the matter). I raised my voice and accused her of insincerity as, apart from even discussing whether this were even the case on this occasion, this method she was now deploring was precisely the one employed by members of her organisation to force agreements on meetings in the UK. The next day I was advised by a female member of Socialist Action 'to apologise for my unacceptable behaviour' (personal conversation), accompanied by the statement that no matter what someone says, such 'abusive behaviour' is always uncalled for. I do not wish to unpack the wrongs or rights of either my behaviour or that of the other woman in this situation. What I am attempting to highlight, is that people, like myself on this occasion, cannot help but scream after having been constantly silenced and misrepresented: that they use the only means they have when all other channels of criticism and dissent are always already closed to them by virtue of the way 'reality' and 'truth' are constructed within a process. And that the occurrence of the supposed offending behaviour should be cause for reflection on its rootedness in a relationship of oppression, not an opportunity to condemn the person behaving in a (supposedly) offensive way; especially by using terminology such as 'abusive', i.e. to imply that something is morally unacceptable and very serious, thereby further delegitimising the dissenter and their concerns. Indeed, this was never acknowledged by the women supposedly championing women's liberation from oppression. To me, this was incredible and, as a woman, immensely problematic, not to mention upsetting and frustrating.

Given the way that consensus was evaded by the 'verticals' who implemented their visions for the event with little respect for anyone else involved, the 'horizontal democratic opposition' was often left having to claim its role as the 'oppressed': constantly reacting to the undemocratic manoeuvrings described in this text, and trying to 'open up' the process and challenge the exclusionary discourses and practices of those dominating events, rather than being able to claim a space to put forward ideas that would be taken seriously, although many creative proposals for the event and the process did exist. In a situation of unequal power relations, where a non-oppressive and more inclusive, democratic politics is more likely to be crushed, one of the challenges for a 'horizontal' politics thus becomes how to move out of this victim role to an affirmative one in which its ethos can inform modes of being. And to do this without in turn becoming another dogmatic identity position, which is one of the problems that ideas invoked by 'horizontalism' seek to address.

By this I mean that the organisational process of any Social Forum brings together individuals, organisations, networks and groups of a diverse political background. This 'diversity' is heralded as one of the Social Forum's biggest successes. However, as my experience of the UK ESF organising process has shown me, this celebrated 'diversity' is not sufficiently deconstructed in terms of the unequal power relations that are played out in the process, beyond the statement in the Charter of Principles that the organising committee should not be used as locus of power to be disputed by its participants. There are no mechanisms in place to deal with the difficulties that arise when people try to work or indeed live together, if we think about the ESF organising process as a

microcosm of the bigger problems that this movement is trying to address. First and foremost, people are complex, they are not one-dimensional 'implementers' of static political principles or mere representatives of the organisations that ensue from such principles, although these may inform part of their behaviour.¹¹ In any social situation, people bring with them their personalities, their constructed identities, their behavioural patterns, their fears and their distresses, and these are acted out in some of the ways I have described in this text. Therefore, any emancipatory project needs to develop ways of addressing and working through assumed truths, conflict, oppression, exclusion and unequal power relations that exemplify the shortcomings of the neo-liberal model critiqued by Social Forum participants, to create that other, desired world that is invoked in the now infamous Social Forum slogan, 'another world is possible'. Elsewhere I have attempted to theorise what we can do in this respect. I have, with others, proposed an ethics of 'critical engagement', based upon self reflexivity and 'self de-colonisation',¹² as well as openness to the 'other' (see piece by S. Sullivan, this issue), in the spirit of what I understand as a 'horizontal' politics, as a way of dealing with problems that arise in our relationship with each other, so that we work towards undoing the world we are trying to change.

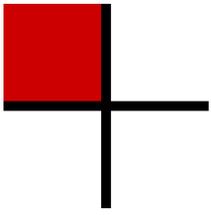
In conclusion, as well as hopefully leaving the reader with some provocative thoughts regarding issues of political organising, ethics and social transformation, as well as some compelling insights about the 2004 European Social Forum, I would like to share two questions that the ESF 2004 preparatory process has left me thinking about more concretely. First, how can we even get to a point where such an ethics of engagement and openness to the 'other', might be taken seriously, when the harsh realities of oppression and inequality even within 'our' own movements seem antithetical to creating the kind of environment necessary for this? And second, how can I and my fellow travellers involved in this political struggle even begin to reach out to others with proposals for a better world, when what we do too often reproduces the old in our ways of engaging with each other?

the author

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11 In this text, I have focused primarily on organisations and political tendencies. However, I hope that I have also conveyed something of the role of key individuals in the process, without singling them out either as heroes of my cause or perpetrators of what I deem as injustice. I have not wanted to write a text that reifies organisations over the individuals that make them up. At the same time, I have not wanted to single out individuals in a negative way; not only for the obvious reason of not wanting to become embroiled in any legal battles; but on a political level, because I wish to hold out for a transformative politics where certain behaviour can be criticised without this leading to condemnation of the person behaving in this way, as I believe this to be a counterproductive way of working through conflict.

12 See Andreotti and Dowling (2004): WSF, Ethics and Pedagogy, in 'Explorations in Open Space: The World Social Forums and Cultures of Politics', *International Journal of Social Science*, 182: 605-613.



Research in Progress: Making Feminist Sense of 'the Anti-Globalisation Movement'*

Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguascha

From the Zapatistas to Seattle, from the World Social Forum to Bolivian campaigns against water privatisation, struggles against the globalisation of neo-liberal, corporated, war-mongering capitalism have been grabbing the headlines and reshaping political imaginations worldwide. Many commentators and activists consider these struggles to constitute one of the most significant social movements to emerge on the world stage in recent years. Despite a general interest in what is still widely (and problematically) referred to as 'the anti-globalisation movement', and much controversy over its political significance and course of development, little attention has yet been paid to feminist involvement. This has resulted in the absence of feminism from dominant accounts and images of the movement (see Eschle, 2005a; for recent moves in a more inclusive direction, see Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Sen et al. 2003). Feminist academic literature has reinforced this impression. While paying substantial attention to women's organising in the context of globalisation (e.g. Rowbotham and Linkogle, 2001; Naples and Desai, 2002), it has not yet provided a systematic account of women's participation or gendered relations of power within 'the anti-globalisation movement' as such (for pointers in this direction see Mohanty, 2003; Marchand, 2004). It is our view that the impression that feminists are absent from the movement is both empirically wrong and politically problematic: it feeds off and into the marginalisation in practice of those feminists who are striving to influence the anti-globalisation movement from within.

We believe that feminist anti-globalisation activism is a significant phenomenon worthy of serious study. Why? Our fieldwork has shown that there are very many feminist activists and groups who strongly identify with the movement, who are a vibrant and creative presence within it, and who continue to struggle for visibility and voice. Further, we, like many others, would insist on the blurred line between activism and academia, and between activism and the production of theory. Activists should thus not be treated simply as objects of study, a case study of particular movement practices, but as producers of knowledge about that movement. Reflection on the interrelation between subject and object of study and between theory and practice is a particularly

* This research project has been funded since October 2001 by the Economic and Social Research Council. For more information about the project, or to give feedback, please email catherine.eschle@strath.ac.uk or b.maiguascha@ex.ac.uk.

strong tradition in feminism, and feminist 'anti-globalisation' activists have important things to say about theories of globalisation, gender, resistance, movement politics and social change. Finally, we would argue that the erasure or marginalisation of feminist activists within dominant accounts and practices of 'the anti-globalisation movement' is a product of oppressive power relations that need to be exposed and challenged as a vital part of the pursuit of other possible worlds (also see pieces by Dowling, L. Sullivan and S. Sullivan, this issue).

These are the reasons behind our ongoing book project, which aims to provide an empirical and theoretical study of feminist 'anti-globalisation' activism. Based on field research conducted at the European and World Social Forums over the last two years, the book will make women's and feminist activism visible by mapping the organisational and ideological linkages and disjunctures between groups, and outlining their practices. It will also bring women's and feminist self-understandings centre-stage, exploring interview material on the reasons why feminist anti-globalisation activists mobilise, their negotiations of movement identity and their dreams for the future. In so doing, we aim to make a little-studied phenomenon visible and audible to other activists and to scholars. We thus hope to contribute to a richer, more critical understanding of this movement and its theoretical and political implications.

Why the World Social Forum as a focus for empirical work? Importantly, it attracts activists, including feminists, from all over the world. Moreover, participants are encouraged to articulate strategies and alternative worlds as well as critiques of the current world order, and they use the site to build broader networks and advertise diverse activist practices and agendas. This allows us to glimpse the wider terrain of feminist 'anti-globalisation' activism. We recognise that many activists choose not or are unable to attend the World Social Forum in its various manifestations, and that it is a contested and problematic space/process in which some activist practices are privileged over others. However, this is true of all other sites in which anti-globalisation activism can be observed and mapped. Further, while we would acknowledge that there are some significant limitations to fieldwork ranging over diverse geographical sites, it nonetheless enables us to offer a broad-brush map of transnational contexts and historical processes in ways that deeper ethnographic studies may miss. Our mappings are situated, partial and preliminary and we hope they will be a helpful precursor to further work on specific feminist anti-globalisation groups.

So who, exactly, are we talking about? We have talked to over seventy activists from fifty-eight women's organisations, or organisations which seek gender equality or the revaluation or disruption of gender difference as one of their basic goals – feminist by our definition, if not necessarily by theirs. These groups range from the All India Democratic Women's Association in India, 'an independent left oriented women's organisation' with a membership of over seven million and a focus on the urban and rural poor (see <http://www.aidwa.org>) to feminist ATTAC, a working group within ATTAC Austria, concerned to factor a feminist voice into critiques of neo-liberal globalization (see <http://www.attac.at/907.html>); from NextGeneration, a European-wide network of students/graduates interested in the connections between feminist theory and practice and 'anti-racist, anti-heterosexist and post-colonial standpoints' (<http://www.nextgeneration.net/>), to the World March of Women, a federation of

groups from over 160 countries, striving to get women into the streets to protest neoliberalism, poverty and violence (see www.marchemondiale.org). These groups are highly diverse and often in acute disagreement. In addition, a proportion of our interviewees identify as feminist or as pro-women's emancipation or rights but are active in more mixed or non-feminist groups – Marxist and anarchist organisations, radical samba collectives, peace groups, etc. This is highly complex terrain and these are only the first steps to making sense of it. We need to consider the divergences and conflicts as well as connections between activists, and to pay attention to hierarchies and exclusions in their/our practices.

Our conduct of the fieldwork and analysis of its results have been influenced by three main sets of academic debates: social movement studies, critical theorising in International Relations (IR) on the politics of resistance and, most fundamentally, feminist scholarship. As academics located primarily in the discipline of IR, we root this project in the attack by critical theory, broadly conceived, on the very constitution of the discipline, its subject of study and methods of enquiry. Critical theorists share the notion that “[t]heory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose” (Cox, 1986: 207): that is, the act of theorising is always political. Thus they interrogate the relation between power and knowledge production; they expose and denaturalise power hierarchies and relations of domination more generally; and they seek out immanent possibilities for disruption, resistance and transformative change. It is in this context that they insist on the importance of exploring social struggles and resistances, whether conceptualised as social movements or not, as crucial sites of world politics, or what can be referred to as ‘the politics of resistance’ (see Eschle and Maiguascha, 2005; e.g. Gills, 2000). Our project both draws upon and hopes to contribute to this politics of resistance literature. Although we find it theoretically suggestive, we would also argue there have been few sustained empirical studies of movements within this literature or attempts at reflection on how such study should be conducted.

For tools to do so, we turn in part to social movement theory. Largely developed within the discipline of Sociology, social movement theory is a highly diverse field. Arguably, a synthesis is currently occurring whereby researchers pay attention to changing state, inter-state and economic structures, the economic and cultural resources available, the structures of organisation and ideological ‘frames’ that develop, and the shared identities that emerge (e.g. Kennedy and Zald, 2000). This project speaks to all these themes but it has also been influenced most directly by the ‘constructivist’ approach (e.g. Melucci, 1996), with its insistence that movements are not stable actors with pre-formed interests but rather ongoing processes in which diverse actors, including academic commentators, contribute to the construction of a common identity. This means being explicit about the fact that the researcher helps call the movement into existence (see Eschle, 2005b). It also means paying close attention to activist self-understandings, specifically through interviews.

This resonates strongly with feminist methodology. Now, it should be clear that feminism provides the overarching political impetus of this project: it is one form of and approach to the politics of resistance. But it also brings with it some key methodological imperatives. We would stress that feminism is *not* unified and thus does not offer one set of prescriptions for research. However, generally speaking, feminist social science

generates its questions from women's lives, experiences and struggles, in the context of a gendered world. To put this another way, feminists insist upon 'adding in' gender as a key dimension of social science analysis, treating it as a power relation, one intertwined with other structures and relations of power in complex, context-specific ways. Moreover, the best feminist work takes care not to reduce women and men to mere effects of power, instead paying close attention to the ways in which individual and collective subjects are constructed and can have an impact on the world around them (see Harding, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ramazanglu, 2002). As self-conscious students of and contributors to the feminist movement, feminist academics frequently focus specifically on the dynamics of movement organising. They have long insisted on crucial modifications to social movement scholarship, which we try to take on board here. These include the need to pay close attention to interpersonal, informal connections between activists as well as to formal organisational linkages and structural contexts; the importance of the 'private' sources and impact of political engagement as well as the more obvious 'public' dimensions; and the need to supplement studies of narrowly instrumental activist motivation by engaging with emotional and expressive drives (e.g. Taylor, 1988).

In our view, a feminist approach to social movements also strongly reinforces a constructivist emphasis on activist self-understandings and researcher reflexivity. We strive in this study to treat women and feminist activists as sources of knowledge rather than simply objects of study. However, we also recognise that activist narrations of their experiences are mediated by language, context and representation by the interviewer; that the relation between experience, identity and political mobilisation needs to be interrogated; and that the relation between ourselves as interviewers and our interviewees is a complex and hierarchical one. Fundamentally, feminist analysis emerges from political engagement; feminist researchers should situate themselves on the same critical plane as the object of study. Thus we would locate ourselves as part of feminist anti-globalisation activism and reflect self-critically on our relationship with the activists with whom we are engaged in dialogue.

We are currently constructing the book in three parts. The first explains the rationale of the book, telling the story of our fieldwork at the World Social Forum and encounters with feminist activism, and situating ourselves as feminist scholars. The second part offers tentative mappings of feminist anti-globalisation activism more generally, in terms of its historical origins, organisational composition and practices. Having established the feminist presence in 'the anti-globalisation movement' and outlined its contours and activities, we turn in the third part to the self-understandings of activists and the meanings they attribute to their actions. We explore activist accounts of personal motivation, collective identity formation and utopian aspirations, as articulated in interviews. We conclude by drawing out the implications of these mappings and self-understandings for rethinking 'the anti-globalisation movement' more generally, and for theorising the interplay between resistance, movements and politics.

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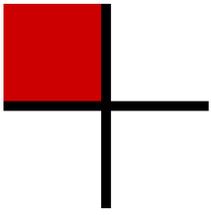
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The Forum and the Market: The Complexity of the Social and the Struggle for Democracy

Jeremy Gilbert

abstract

This paper starts from the observation that the very concept ‘social forum’ is to some extent predicated on a distinction between the market – the primary organisational model of neo-liberalism – and the forum, conceived as a different kind of model. It explores the different logics of social organisation implied by the competing concepts of the forum and the market, taking off from Arendt’s assertion that the transformation of the former into the latter was always the project of the tyrants of ancient Greece. It explores the complex political logics by which the collectivism and partial homogeneity required by any democratic situation have increasingly been undermined by the socio-economic processes of liberalisation and marketisation typical of post-modern capitalist societies. It goes on to explore different ways of understanding human collectivity in the light of the ‘democratic paradox’ by which individualism and egalitarianism are, at a certain level, logically incompatible. It ultimately takes issue with any attempt, such as that exhibited by Hardt and Negri, to resolve this dilemma by willing the social into a more ‘simplified’ state than that it has always hitherto existed in, but argues that by contrast the very strength of the social forum project has been its willingness to experiment with the creation of multiple and overlapping new sites of democratic representation and deliberation. It finally suggests that if this project is to have useful correlates in the UK context, it must be understood in relatively abstract terms, as the lack of a history of radical democratic invention in the UK renders any direct public critique of representative democracy unlikely to win popular support.

Two Forums?

The World Social Forum was initially launched in direct opposition to the World Economic Forum, which describes itself as “an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders in partnerships to shape global, regional and industry agendas”¹ and which is widely perceived as one of the key institutions through which the neo-liberal ‘Washington Consensus’ has been formulated and implemented. The World Social Forum charter describes the WSF as “an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to

1 <http://www.weforum.org>

domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centred on the human person”.²

The semantics and symbolism of these contrasting self-definitions are worth considering. Firstly, the titles themselves: Economic Forum, Social Forum. The social is hereby contrasted with the economic, in a manner which might or might not be philosophically sustainable, depending on how those terms are used and understood. The question of whether there can be any form of sociality which is not constituted by certain kinds of economies is an intriguing one, although it is not exactly the question to be treated here. More important, I would suggest, is the contrast between the function of the two organisations described. The WSF’s self-description sounds like a description of a forum as the word has been understood for a very long time, the WEF’s does not. The latter makes the WEF sound like exactly what it is: a body for the implementation of common agendas by corporate and state institutions committed to the socio-political agendas of neo-liberalism, to which the WSF explicitly opposes itself. The real opposition which emerges here, then, is between the classical ideal of a forum as a democratic space and a space *for* democracy, and the neo-liberal model of elite technocratic governance in the service of global economic liberalisation.

The two key slogans of the movement associated with the WSF make much clearer what the stakes are here. The most famous and widely circulated, ‘Another World is Possible’, while positing no concrete alternative to neo-liberalism, conveys a brilliant understanding of the first necessary function of any counter-hegemonic discourse: to reject the ideological assertion that ‘there is no alternative’ to hegemonic discourses and practices. In this case, it is quite clear that it is the hegemony of neo-liberalism and the consequent erosion of democratic institutions and their capacities which is being rejected. The other great slogan of the movement is even more telling. Radical farmer Jose Bové’s slogan ‘*le monde n’est pas une marchandise*’ has come to be customarily translated into English as ‘the world is not for sale’, but would be more accurately (though far less evocatively) translated ‘the world is not a commodity’, and the etymology of the French *marchandise* links it directly to *marché*: market (Bové and Dufour, 2001). It is, the drive to commodify every aspect of social life, most vividly illustrated by the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) process, with its attempt to create as well as forcibly liberalise markets in the provision of essential services (Whitfield, 2001), which the World Social Forum and the movement associated with it oppose.

The forum which is a real forum opposes itself to the hegemony of the market. By contrast, the forum which is not really a forum is committed, above all else, to the substitution of a wholesale programme of marketisation implemented by means which bypass even the meagerly accountable channels of representative democracy. This dichotomy surely occasions some reflection on the differences between forums and markets, or between the forum and the market as abstract modes of social organization. In what follows I will offer some reflections on this topic, drawing particular attention to a number of issues which are not always comfortable for radical democrats to confront. Perhaps most importantly, I want to think through the implications of the

2 <http://www.wsfindia.org>

observation that liberalism – historically the cultural-political correlate of markets in all shapes and sizes (Braudel, 2001: 26) – and democracy are *not the same thing*. Democracy, whether we like this fact or not, does not necessarily produce tolerant, diverse polities and cultures. Why should it? The term ‘democracy’ does not denote and never has denoted any of these things: it refers to a principle of government which places popular sovereignty, the will of the majority, above all other sources of power and authority. This can just as well lead to fascism as any other political outcome. The problem of how to reconcile democracy with liberal values is not one which can ever be simply resolved, and it is one which becomes particularly stark at a historical moment when prevailing forms of social and cultural liberalization are bound up inextricably with the success of a particular form of post-Fordist capitalism which increasingly undermines the social bases for all established forms of institutional democracy (Crouch, 2004; Bauman, 2001). Ultimately it is this problem, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Social Forum project as a means to engage with it, which is the concern of this paper. In the process of considering these issues, I will also consider some classic and recent contributions to relevant philosophical debates and, finally, the relative implications for the social forum project in the UK as well as elsewhere.

The Forum and the Market

In Greece...it was the ever-frustrated ambition of all tyrants to discourage the citizens from worrying about public affairs, from idling their time away in unproductive *agoreuin* [public debate] and *politeuresthai* [civic affairs] and to transform the *agora* into an assemblage of shops, like the bazaars of oriental despotism (Arendt, 1958: 160).

The ancient Greek word *agora* is usually translated as ‘market-place’, this being the apparent original function of Athens’ central public space. However, from early on in the classical literature, the term is understood to designate the space in its role as an arena for political debate and public discussion over issues affecting the life of the whole city: a forum, in other words. Even so early in the imagination of the West and the history of political democracy, the public realm could be seen to have this dual aspect.

The great question facing us today is that of the extent to which these two aspects can be reconciled and how far they must come into conflict with each other. While the agents of the ‘Washington Consensus’ pursue the relentless dismantling of public services and any governmental institution which might stand in the way of full-blown marketisation, its opponents increasingly see themselves as defending the very principle of democracy. On the other hand, explicitly or implicitly, the neo-liberals argue that ancient methods of collective decision-making – from direct democracy in small communities to party politics and representative government – are no longer adequate to the fluid complexity of post-modern capitalism. In this context, they argue, the market is the only effective form which the public sphere can take. Rightly or wrongly, it is this version of reality – in which every space of collective discussion and consensus-seeking is transformed into a marketplace – which is being constructed violently and forcibly by the collusion of the G8 governments, transnational organisations such as the WTO, and the major corporations (Frank, 2001). Arendt’s evocation of ancient Greece perfectly

encapsulates the fundamental logic of this tyranny. While it is possible to understand the project of neo-liberalism in terms of its relentless hostility to any form of public space or public good whatsoever, it is perhaps more useful to see the great struggle of our times as a struggle between two models of public space: a struggle to realise or to prevent the transformation of every forum into a marketplace.

What is at stake here, in part, is a recognition of the fact that neo-liberalism does have a view of the public sphere and how it can best operate, and it is an idea which is impressive in its internal consistency. According to this model, the market is the most effective means for general decision-making in a complex and fluid social situation, and as far as possible market mechanisms should be introduced into any situation in which individual, collective or institutional decisions need to be taken, in particular over questions of resource allocation (Whitfield, 2001). The current manifestations of this view can be seen as a continuation of the tradition of liberal democracy, which has always regarded the protection of individual rights and property as the *sine qua non* – both the limit and the ground – of any desirable form of democracy. However, it can also be seen as the limit point of that tradition, the point at which the long-term compromise between liberalism and democracy comes unstuck.

Chantal Mouffe has recently drawn attention to the contemporary relevance of Carl Schmitt's analysis of liberal democracy (Mouffe, 2000: 36-57). Schmitt (later to become a fascist sympathiser, but nonetheless prescient in his analysis) argued that there was a long-term contradiction between liberalism, with its privileging of individual rights and personal freedom as the supreme politico-ethical goods, and democracy, which tends towards the constitution of a homogenous community of opinions and actors. One can certainly see why Schmitt, writing in the 1920s, would draw such a conclusion: it should never be forgotten that one of the first obvious results of the emergence of mass democracy in Europe was the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes put in place by popular movements enjoying widespread popular support, at least in their initial stages. Simply to notice this fact is not necessarily to rehearse the old canard about all types of totalitarianism being the same, or the implicit assertion of much liberal ideology that all forms of collectivist politics tend towards such totalitarianism, but it is to try to discern the grain of truth in such views which makes them so pervasive and persuasive. There is a logical contradiction between the democratic will to constitute the *demos* as a singular consensual body capable of making definite decisions with the liberal desire to free the individual from the constraints of tradition, from unwanted interference by other individuals and, most importantly, from 'the tyranny of the majority'. Mouffe argues that the challenge of liberal democracy is precisely to hold these two sides of the liberal democratic equation – liberal individualism and democratic collectivism – in a creative tension, preventing either from collapsing or from coming to dominate the entire scene of democratic politics, via a process which can never be finally resolved or concluded (Mouffe, 2000).

It is useful to pay some attention to the precise social reasons as to why this task has become so difficult in recent times and to the extra ammunition which these factors give to the cause of anti-democratic liberalism. The characteristic features of post-modern, advanced capitalist societies are widely understood. A general complexification of social life accompanies a widespread weakening of social bonds and an erosion of

traditional structures and roles, resulting in the ‘individualisation’ of many areas of life and a general decline in the capacity of societies to achieve consensus over significant political and ethical issues, while in many cases obviating the requirement for them to do so by enabling them to accommodate a proliferating range of diverse lifestyles. What is not so often observed is the extent to which all of this tends to further the objectives of the liberal project while rendering those of any kind of democracy increasingly remote and tenuous. In a culture whose fundamental logic seems to be the proliferation of heterogeneity, even the temporary and delimited homogeneity of a democratic body is increasingly difficult to realise. The result is the widespread sense of a crisis in representative democracy, indicated in the developed world by plummeting voter turn-outs, by the demonstrable willingness and ability of governing elites to ignore the express opinions of their publics (on issues such as the invasion of Iraq or the privatisation of rail services in the UK) and by the consensus amongst all major parties and major corporations as to the limits and aims of macro-economic policy, a consensus which in many cases diverges from the majority view amongst the governed populations.

It is in this context that the ideologues of neo-liberalism make their boldest claims – implicit and explicit – as to the superiority of markets over any other system of collective decision-making. For example, the Blair government in the UK has made the introduction of market forces the central element of its programme of public-service reform. The insistence that offering users a choice of products and services, encouraging a degree of competition between different sections of the education or health service, is more important than raising general levels of investment, characterises the pronouncements and policy assumptions of the most resolutely neo-liberal wing of New Labour, while provoking enormous hostility from even the most moderately social democratic sections of the Labour party. Although they are rarely reckless enough to make their contempt for traditional democracy explicit, the promoters of this agenda implicitly argue that it is only through the introduction of markets that services can be made adequately accountable and adaptable to the needs of an increasingly diverse and complex user base. More conventionally democratic mechanisms of consultation and accountability, in particular those relying on input from locally elected representatives – for example, the community health councils and local education authorities – are largely dismissed and their traditional powers frequently curtailed (Gilbert, 2004).

Market (Post) Modernity

This victory of the market over other types of deliberative body should be understood in a global political context. In very real terms, the international hegemony of neo-liberalism is the direct result of the defeat of the Soviet system at the end of the 1980s. It is hard to imagine the WTO coming into existence in its present form or exercising anything like its current influence in a truly bi-polar or multi-polar world: the Soviet Union, notwithstanding its unquestionably appalling features, would have presented a major geo-political obstacle to the forced implementation of the ‘Washington Consensus’ and arguably did forestall its implementation outside of the English-speaking world up until its demise. Indeed, it is possible to understand post-modernity

simply as the historical condition in which capitalism has overcome all organised systemic resistance: the victory of one version of modernity and its associated notion of public space over another. If the USA is the capital of political and cultural liberalism (notwithstanding the marginalisation of that particular term in mainstream US political discourse) and the extreme example of a culture produced by unregulated market capitalism, then the USSR's command economy represented it diametric opposite.

Modernity was always a complex and contradictory phenomenon, but both negative and positive responses to it have tended to understand it in one of two aspects. On the one hand, modernity has been understood in terms of a general process of rationalisation, whereby the capacity of human beings to control their environment, themselves and each other has increased with the development of new technologies, new machines and new organisational techniques. Both optimistic believers in the reality of social progress and pessimistic critics of the regulation and bureaucratisation of modern societies (Weber, Foucault, Adorno, etc.) have understood this as the essential feature of modernity. This dimension of modernity might be understood in neutral terms as a general increase in the power of human beings to control their destinies, a power absolutely necessary to the achievement of modern democracy – which depends on the capacity of the community, embodied in the state, to take and effect major decisions – but also prone to abuses with potentially disastrous consequences. On the other hand, modernity has been understood as a condition of perpetual upheaval, that endless condition of change and changeability wherein ‘all that is solid melts into air’ in the formulation of Marx and Engels made famous by Marshall Berman (Berman, 1983). The most persuasive analysts in the latter tradition have tended to see this process as entirely coterminous with the deterritorialising progress of capitalism, whose fundamental logic of commodification extends to more and more areas of social life the processes of ‘creative destruction’, (Schumpeter, 1992) and ‘separation’ (Jameson, 1991) produces effects of detraditionalisation (Giddens, 1991) and dislocation (Laclau, 1990).

We might say, from a contemporary vantage point, that both views of modernity were correct, and that the history of modernity was precisely the history of capitalism *and* the history of attempts to use the new technologies which capitalism gave rise to in an effort to control the direction of social change, to replace the communities it destroyed with the new imagined communities of nation, class, and political party (cf. Hardt and Negri, 2000: 74).

According to this formulation, it is at precisely the point where the deterritorializing force of capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 224-48) overwhelms even the modern mechanisms of control and the social structures which underpinned the invented communities of modernity that post-modernity begins. At this moment, anxiety as to the consequences of modernisation and the uncertain and apparently uncontrollable consequences of social and technological change becomes the underlying fact of contemporary political discourse, the point at which we enter the era of ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992), wherein it is the minimisation of the risks generated by the process of modernisation which becomes the primary objective of state politics, corporate strategy and personal life-management. This is the moment when, as Jameson puts it, nature disappears and the project of modernisation reaches its completion (Jameson, 1991: 9).

It is also the moment when the modern ideal of control – the idea that human beings, collectively or individually, might acquire full control over their physical, economic, social and cultural destinies – is abandoned. It is surely the failure of the Soviet experiment which marks this most decisively. The communist ideal was always a fully consensual society in which the community acted as one body, through the state, to direct its future according to a rational plan. The defeat of such Apollonian collectivism by the mercurial violence of capitalism clearly represents, on one level, a victory of the market over the forum, a defeat of the ideal of the public as the space of rational discussion and clear-minded decision-making by the idea of the *agora* as an assemblage of shops.

Democracy in America

This is certainly true to an extent, but such a simple schematisation is bound to generate problems, and in this case these problems can be themselves revealing. The eclipse of all other world powers by the US must focus the minds of radical democrats on the contradictions and multiplicities of the US itself, as both a cultural model and political tradition. Hardt and Negri, in both *Empire* and *Multitude*, give a good deal of attention to the history of American political theory and republican practice, praising the originality of its break with ‘European conceptions of sovereignty, which consigned political power to a transcendent realm and thus estranged and alienated the sources of power from society’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 164). US political culture is historically characterised not only by a commitment to the free market but also to the liberal principle of free speech and to the democratic ideal of collective self-government. In his classic account, *Democracy in America*, published in the 1830s, Alex de Tocqueville writes that

The citizen of the United States is taught from infancy to rely upon his own exertions in order to resist the evils and the difficulties of life; he looks upon the social authority with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he claims its assistance only when he is unable to do without it. This habit may be traced even in the schools, where the children in their games are wont to submit to rules which they have themselves established, and to punish misdemeanors which they have themselves defined. The same spirit pervades every act of social life. If a stoppage occurs in a thoroughfare and the circulation of vehicles is hindered, the neighbors immediately form themselves into a deliberative body; and this extemporaneous assembly gives rise to an executive power which remedies the inconvenience before anybody has thought of recurring to a pre-existing authority superior to that of the persons immediately concerned. If some public pleasure is concerned, an association is formed to give more splendor and regularity to the entertainment. Societies are formed to resist evils that are exclusively of a moral nature, as to diminish the vice of intemperance. In the United States associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality, and religion. There is no end which the human will despairs of attaining through the combined power of individuals united into a society.³

An interesting tension already animates this early account, between the individualism it describes as constitutive of the American personality and the tendency to *collective* self-organisation which it also posits as characteristically American. This illustrates nicely

3 http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/1_ch12.htm

the ‘democratic paradox’ described by Mouffe and by Schmitt (and memorably addressed by de Tocqueville himself) while demonstrating how deeply it organises the political traditions of the US. Clearly, American republican democracy emerged in part as a critique of the first, European, model of Enlightenment politics, which posited the ‘Enlightened despot’ and not the *demos* as the guarantor of individual liberty, and in the process raised the possibility that the market form – in which isolated individuals compete and trade – might not be the only possible form of modern socio-political organisation. While a common emphasis on the value of autonomy can be seen to animate both the collectivism and the individualism referred to in de Tocqueville’s account, there is nonetheless an implicit tension between these two elements, which problematises any understanding of the US as simply the model of a fully marketised society. At this moment of global American hegemony, it becomes more necessary than ever to emphasise the extent to which it is the objective of the neo-liberal project *in the US* precisely to promote such a vision and to marginalise all possible alternatives, while paying attention to what those alternatives are.

Such attention should leave us feeling both inspired and frightened, depending on exactly where, or when, it is focussed. While the long history of American democracy suggests that it is by no means inevitable that the US should be an agent of liberal marketisation against any form of democratisation, the current most powerful manifestation of that democratic tradition is not one which anyone on the left can be happy with. In many ways, the current neo-conservative reaction against political and cultural liberalism can be understood as a democratic response to the individualism of neo-liberal culture and its social consequences. There may be no element of economic democracy in the neo-con view of the good life, but there is a strong emphasis on the importance of shared values, shared culture, and the capacity of the community to act to enforce its views. Of course, this is wholly articulated to an aggressive free market, anti-redistributionist economic agenda, but the resulting formation nonetheless represents the only significant force opposed to liberal individualism in US politics and culture today. On the other hand, an ideal of inclusive and egalitarian democracy is clearly present as a key element of the American political tradition, and it is one which is routinely activated in local contexts, as opaque as they may often be to observers outside the U.S. As Mouffe demonstrates, the problem of how to reconcile liberal individualism with democracy is never going to be simply resolved (Mouffe, 2000). It is a problem which can be approached in any number of possible ways, by limiting both the democratic power of the collective and the personal autonomy of the individual in specific regards. The neo-con model is one way of achieving this. Indeed, and this is a crucial, sobering, strategic point to grasp, the neo-cons and their fundamentalist counterparts elsewhere in the world today represent the most powerful defenders of one key aspect of the ‘forum’ – the ideal of the community as collectively self-governing – against the deterritorializing power of the market.

Liberal Post-Democracy

By contrast, the model pursued by ‘Third Way’ governments such as Blair’s and Clinton’s can be understood as more radically liberal and conversely less democratic,

tending as far as it can towards the minimisation of democratic participation, reducing elections to plebiscites making minor adjustments to the personnel of technocratic elites while encouraging the development of a highly individualised and competitive culture. This is the political situation described by Colin Crouch as 'post-democracy' (Crouch, 2004), and alongside the various rising fundamentalisms (Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Zionist, and ethno-nationalist) the project to implement it represents the most widespread response to the crisis of liberal democracy, and that clearly most favoured by a majority amongst the elites of the developed world. Neither set of responses is particularly welcome from the perspective of more radically democratic and egalitarian political traditions, and we can see the range of new types of democratic engagement to have emerged from the 'new social movements', and in particular the ecological movement and Latin American struggles against neo-liberalism and authoritarian dictatorship, as attempts to renew these traditions in the post-modern context.

It is worth reflecting here, however, that this new radical movement and the agents of post-democratic neo-liberalism do share some core assumptions that are rejected by the 'forces of conservatism' (to use Blair's own notorious phrase) and even by the residual organs of social democracy. Both neo-liberals and radical democrats recognise that many social changes of the past 3 decades – the emancipation of women, the decolonisation of the world, the proliferation of lifestyle choices and the development of a global cosmopolitanism – as both welcome and irreversible. Both perspectives recognise that the institutions of representative democracy and the welfare state which grew up during the high phase of Fordist capitalism are no longer capable of representing or supporting populations as diverse and mobile as those which these social changes have created. Both recognise that any attempt to turn back the clock to the 1950s – be it the Europe of post-war social democratic hegemony or the America of Eisenhower and McCarthy – is doomed to failure.

In the face of these assumption, it is easy to see the appeal of the neo-liberal argument. Implicitly it offers a vision of a world in which both the real and formal freedom of individuals reaches historically unimagined levels. Freeing citizens even from the burden of real democratic participation – instead conferring more-or-less permanent power to administer the state and the economy on a range of hypothetically benign institutions hampered by only very limited degrees of accountability to the public (central banks, the European Union, government ministries) – it offers them unprecedented opportunities to explore all forms of consumption and private self-fulfilment. Increasingly, the relationship between citizens and all public agencies – from national governments down – is modelled on that between corporations and their customers or shareholders, a model which Anthony Barnett describes as 'Corporate populism' (Barnett, 2000). Against this model, radical democratic movements tend to promote an ideal of a deepened and more generally participatory form of democracy, as most famously manifested in the participatory budget-making process implemented by the Workers' Party government of Porto Alegre. It is an ideal which invariably involves some commitment to economic redistribution, if only to the extent that significant redistribution from the wealthiest to the rest of the population would be required if ordinary citizens even in the wealthy countries were to be enabled to cut down their working hours sufficiently to participate meaningfully in any substantial democratic process.

Both the complex negotiations around the Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum and the recent philosophical work of Hardt and Negri can be understood as attempts to re-imagine relationships between individuals and collectives in such a way as to make it possible to push forward liberalisation and democratisation across a range of social, political and cultural spheres, without collapsing either side of the democratic paradox. At the same time, it is worth noting that neo-liberal ideologues are themselves engaged in interesting and at times surprising attempts to reconcile their fundamental individualism with a perspective which allows for the effectiveness of some form of democracy. James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2004) – a transatlantic bestseller aimed squarely at the middle-brow management theory market – presents a fascinating example of a neo-liberal *critique of individualism*. In a certain sense this should not come as a great surprise. The basic tenet of free-market ideology is the idea that markets can determine efficient and universally-beneficial distributions of resources more effectively than any other mechanism. In this, it has always appealed to a certain notion of collective intelligence: certainly, the political objective of liberal economics has always been to persuade governments of the superior intelligence of markets, compared to any conceivable policy-maker or small group thereof. Surowiecki makes an intriguing critique of the individualist cult of the celebrity CEO-as-superhero, which characterised US business culture in the 1980s and 1990s, and points to the well-known fact that virtually no stock market analyst ever actually manages to make investment decisions which are superior to those of the market in general over the course of a whole career (despite the fact that this is precisely and almost exclusively what they are paid to do).

However, Surowiecki's ideological commitment to neo-liberal individualism comes through in a number of telling ways. His book does not so much argue for the intelligence of groups in general as set out the conditions under which he thinks groups tends to make intelligent decisions. Unsurprisingly, these turn out to be exactly those conditions which enable them to behave as the ideal markets of liberal economic theory, composed entirely of rational, self-interested and bounded actors in possession of perfect information whose only interaction consists of buying and selling. Any departure from these norms is judged – generally on the basis of wholly anecdotal evidence – to render groups far less intelligent. Worst of all are those situations – from stock market bubbles to riots to ineffective committees – in which group members influence each other. Instances of such actual collective decision making are only cited where they appear to prove this general thesis, that “the more influence a group's members exert on each other, and the more personal contact they have with each other, the less likely it is that the group's decisions will be wise ones” (Surowiecki, 2004: 42). Most telling of all, Surowiecki does describe, a few pages away from the book's inconclusive final pages, experiments in deliberative democracy designed deliberately to raise the level of their participants' engagement with political questions, but pointedly fails to say anything at all about their results, merely offering the existence of those experiments and the fact that they have their critics as evidence that there is a debate to be had about what democracy is and how it should work. The silence speaks volumes: we can be fairly confident that if the experiments had found that collective sustained deliberation does not improve the quality of participants' opinions, as the book's general hypothesis maintains that it should not, we would have been told (Surowiecki, 2004: 259-62).

This passage constitutes the last part of Surowiecki's wholly confused and inconclusive section on the implications of his hypothesis for thinking about democracy, the persistent absence of reflections on this topic being a marked feature of the book. In particular, Surowiecki is full of praise for the capacity of 'decisions markets' – artificial trading environments in which participants speculate on possible decisions to specified problems as if they were shares on a stock market – but pays no attention at all to the fact that the most ancient and traditional form of democratic procedure – the secret ballot – seems to fulfil all of his stated criteria for effective group decision-making mechanisms, the most important criterion of which being the capacity to aggregate a set of individual positions which are stated simultaneously without being subject to direct influence from other group members (Surowiecki, 2004: 66-83). His vague assertion that democracy doesn't result in good decisions because the kinds of decisions made by governments are not of the same order of those made by markets, being long-term, open-ended and substantive in nature, in addition to being based on a highly tenuous distinction between 'cognition', 'coordination' and 'cooperation' problems, entirely overlooks the widespread use of referenda to decide specific issues in US local and state politics, this being one of the most obvious examples of the use of secret ballots to determine specific issues in a highly developed society today.

The Market vs. the Multitude

The ideal form of collectivity for Surowiecki is a diverse collection of autonomous agents who find a way to aggregate their views without actually communicating with each other. There could hardly be a more perfect description of the ideal liberal 'community', as the tradition of Anglo-American political philosophy has imagined it ever since Hobbes. Most specifically, this is an ideal of a collective which lacks any *horizontal* connections, in which mutual communication is simply absent from the collective. It is by contrast with this that the recent contributions of Hardt and Negri can be seen as particularly important. Their central concept of 'multitude' is precisely an attempt to name the collective agency which emerges in the communicative networks which constitute post-modern systems of communication and production to challenge 'imperial' power. Thus:

The fact is that we participate in a productive world made up of communication and social networks, interactive services, and common languages. Our economic and social reality is defined less by the material objects that are made and consumed than by co-produced services and relationships. Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities. (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 302)

The problem we have to confront now is how concrete instances of class struggle can actually arise, and moreover how they can form a coherent programme of struggle, a constituent power adequate to the destruction of the enemy and the construction of a new society. The question is really how the body of the multitude can configure itself as a telos... The first aspect of the telos of the multitude has to do with the senses of language and communication. If communication has increasingly become the fabric of production, and if linguistic cooperation has increasingly become the structure of productive corporeality, then the control over linguistic sense and meaning becomes an ever more central issue for political struggle. (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 404)

Since we have begun to realize (from the standpoint of the critique of political economy) how the singular figures of post-modern labour do not remain fragmented and dispersed but tend through communication and collaboration to converge toward a common social being, we must now immerse ourselves in this social being as in something that is at once both rich and miserable, full of productivity and suffering and yet devoid of form. This common social being is the powerful matrix that is central in the production and reproduction of contemporary society and has the potential to create a new, alternative society. (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 159)

We can see from these passages, along with their deployment of Marx's concept of 'general intellect' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 29, 364) to name the collective social intelligence which capitalism enables and thrives on that they have a radically different idea of collectivity to that regarded as 'intelligent' by Surowiecki. Whereas mutual communication is more-or-less wholly inimical to group intelligence as conceived by Surowiecki, for Hardt and Negri it is its very substance.

What we have here is two distinctly competing models of sociality, one stressing the irreducibility of atomised individuality and the other stressing the constitutive nature of those lateral connections which can exist between the members of a group or social network. In this, these two models can be seen as figuring the fundamental differences between the neo-liberal ideal of collectivity and that promoted by the movement for alternative globalisation, wherein a stress on the value of 'horizontal' relationships between members of groups, organisations, and forums has become one of the hallmarks of its political novelty, and one of the consistent features of its diverse constituent elements. A fear of the 'madness of crowds', a conviction that collectives wherein such lateral relationships obtain are necessarily dangerous, stupid, and violent, the idea of the unruly mob as the only form which any true collectivity can take, has been a feature of Western culture for several thousand years (McClelland, 1989). The conflict between this view and a more democratic one becomes urgent today as never before, as Hardt and Negri call on us to will the multitude into political existence while Surowiecki warns his readership of cautious investors that "the process by which a violent mob actually comes together seems curiously similar to the way in which a stock-market bubble works" (Surowiecki, 2004: 257), both identifying the communicative matrix of capitalism as a potentially dangerous site for the elaboration of unruly collectivities, but from diametrically opposed perspectives.

The Complexity of the Social

These opposed perspectives can be seen as differing responses to the increased complexity of post-modern social life. Where Hardt and Negri stress the democratic potential of the multiple communicative connections which now link people, places, and institutions, and the alternative globalisation movement dreams of a fuller and more participatory democracy emerging from these networks, neo-liberalism warns that only market mechanisms can cope adequately with the dynamic unpredictability of post-modernity, and that their efficient operation requires the implementation of a wholly individualised mode of sociality. It is worth reflecting at this stage that the complexity of social life is not a new phenomenon. Arendt, in fact, argues that a certain complexity

is inherent in all social life, constituting a field of relationality which can never be fully circumscribed either cognitively or institutionally.

Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a “doer” but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings. These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts in a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes. Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others. Thus action and reaction among men never move in a closed circle and can never be reliably confined to two partners. This boundlessness is characteristic not of political action alone, in the narrower sense of the word, as though the boundlessness of human interrelatedness were only the result of the boundless multitude of people involved, which could be escaped by resigning oneself to action within a limited, graspable framework of circumstances; the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation...Action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries. (Arendt, 1958: 190)

The implications of this passage are profound. While demonstrating that social life is inherently complex, it also makes clear that any attempt to map fully the relations which constitute it will fail. Any aspiration to render the social fully transparent to itself, depending as it does on the assumption that human relationality can be cognitively bounded and resolved in the singular moment of, for example, an absolute collective will, is undermined by this view. This might be thought to provide some ammunition for the view of post-modern neo-liberalism, which seeks to abandon democracy, with its search for consensual homogeneity, in favour of mechanisms which can cope with the complexity of the social. As we saw at the beginning of this essay, however, Arendt makes a categorical distinction between the forum and the market as modes of sociality, as well as denouncing any autarchic solution to the problem of social complexity, or any attempt to reduce its plurality and its inherent contingency (Arendt, 1958: 220-1). For Arendt, this contingent complexity is the condition of possibility of democracy itself, and the reduction of public space to a sphere of commodity exchange is no better than a form of tyranny.

If, as most commentators agree, post-modern capitalism intensifies the complexity of social life, then it similarly magnifies the relevance of these reflections. The emergence of the Social Forum project can be seen as the most substantial attempt yet to create new democratic forms which can rise to the challenge of this complexity without reducing the public to a sphere of atomisation and commodification. The stress which the WSF charter and the practices of the movement place on diversity of opinion and the right to dissent manifest just that commitment to plurality which Arendt’s perspective recommends.⁴ At the same time, the WSF charter’s prohibition on participation by political parties – the paradigmatic political form of modernity – can be understood as an attempt to prevent the concentration of power into the type of singular and homogenous formation which the enemies of plurality have sought to build at least since Hobbes dreamed of the Leviathan, the meta-subject, the community-as-individual.

4 http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4_2&cd_language=2

There is a problem here, however, with the social forum as a model of post-modern democracy. I don't propose to enter into the debate around the success or failure of the forums to constitute the basis for a global 'movement of movements' or to constitute sufficiently participatory democratic spaces. Both might or might not be judged significant failings, but given how far the forums have come in simply coming into existence, it is clearly too early to tell. Instead I want to address a specific problem raised by the general critique of representative democracy which seems to inform the prohibition on parties and much of the rhetoric and politics of the social forum movement (e.g. Borrits, 2002).

The resistance to any form of representation in favour of an ideal of participation springs in the main from an appreciation of the limits of representation under precisely the condition of social complexity which I have been discussing. It is easy to see how this comes about. The increasing complexity of contemporary culture creates a situation in which the social identities of individuals are less and less firmly tied to particular roles within homogenous 'imagined communities'. As such, it is less and less likely that given individuals will feel confident that any other can represent the complex multiplicity of their own unique social situation with any adequacy. This is a phenomenon which is likely to persist even in a context wherein Ernesto Laclau's important analysis of the logic of representation is fully understood. Laclau argues that, because every identity is incomplete, it can never be represented in a full and transparent way, as a singular political will to be channelled in its entirety by the 'empty vessel' of the representative. As such, in fact, the very act of representation itself always adds something to the identity which is being represented. This is a view fully in accordance with Arendt's understanding of the complex relationality of social action: the simple fact of being put into a relationship with a representative will alter, however slightly, the identity of the represented. More than this, every representation involves elevating particular elements of a subject's identity as the basis for representation: I am represented by my MP as a British citizen, and to some extent as a Labour voter, but not at all as a fan of house music and not, in theory, as a white man; I am represented by my trade union branch secretary as a union member and working university lecturer, not as a resident of Leytonstone or as a member of my particular family, etc. As such it is increasingly apparent today that every act of representation is at best partial, as well as effectively reconstituting the identity of the represented within the particular sphere of representation. To make this clearer: 50 years ago my identity as a working man might have been taken to define almost every aspect of my identity, allowing a stranger to predict with some accuracy my political views, by mode of dress, my lifestyle, etc., and as such I might have expected my Labour MP to thereby represent almost the totality of my subjectivity with some success. Today, this cannot apply, as the differences in lifestyle and values between working men are much greater than at that time. Laclau's political conclusion from such observations is that "we cannot escape the framework of the representative processes, and that democratic alternatives must be constructed that multiply the points from and around which representation operates rather than attempt to limit its scope and area of operation" (Laclau, 1996: 99).

At first glance, the social forum project may seem to be based on a naïve rejection of Laclau's position in favour of a simplistic belief in the power of self-representation to achieve a state of absolute transparency. However, I would suggest that this is not the

case, for three reasons. Firstly, the anti-representative bias of the social forum movement is largely concerned with the operation of democracy in singular contexts, in which all of the issues confronting human beings today are up for a discussion in a single space, and in which binding decisions are not to be taken. Social forums are not generally proposing themselves as substitutes for representative legislative bodies (yet – although who knows what the future holds?), but as deliberative spaces within a complex network of political institutions, constituencies and networks. *Within* the boundaries of such a forum, Laclau's call for the proliferation of democratic spaces has no logical purchase (only because the forum is a space defined by its singularity), and the simple fact of representation's constitutive impossibility must be confronted head on. The implicit logic of the social forum solution is to recognise that under post-modern conditions the problems which social complexity poses for any form of representation become so great that representative mechanisms cannot be expected to function with any degree of legitimacy, and so to conclude that the full participation of concrete subjects is the only mechanism – albeit still an imperfect one – able to cope with the complexity of individual identities and collective situations. There are objections to make to this, but we will let those pass for the moment, simply observing that there is nothing illogical in drawing this conclusion from Laclau's premises. The second observation to make is that the social forum movement's own proliferation of different thematic and regional forums to some extent manifests Laclau's own ideal solution of a proliferation of public spaces for democratic contestation. The third is that the participatory budget process in Porto Alegre – the process which to some extent gave birth to the WSF, and which is the best actual example of participatory democracy actually administering which the movement has produced – operates entirely according to a process of delegation and representation, proliferating rather than contracting sites of representation much as Laclau recommends (Wainwright, 2003).

The conclusion to be drawn here is that the social forum process should not be seen as one by which a new and simpler mode of sociality replaces the imperfect complexity of advanced liberal democracy, nor as a new version of the Soviet model of democracy, whereby a homogenous community becomes fully transparent to itself. Rather, it should be seen as a process by which the democratic ideal of human relationality is defended against both the conservative will to simplify the social through a process of cultural homogenisation (be it a moral crusade or wholesale ethnic cleansing) and the neo-liberal will to reduce the complex relationality of the social to a set of atomised individuals relating only through the mechanisms of the market. Now, it would be setting up straw men to suggest that anyone really ever has argued explicitly for the social forums, or even the workers' soviets, as agencies by which the a homogenous community could become fully transparent to itself. Rather, I wish merely to draw attention to the fact that some of the rhetoric around the alternative globalisation movement is frequently in danger of falling into this trap, in particular with its characteristic references to representation as an inherent evil, and in the notions of 'self-organisation' and 'constituent power' typical of writers influenced by complexity theory on the one hand and Italian Autonomism on the other (e.g. Escobar, 2003; Hardt and Negri, 2000). My point is that any notion of the community, organisation, network or multitude as simply self-constituting risks occluding precisely that dimension of boundless relationality which we have seen to be necessary to any effective democratic thought, especially in the context of complex post-modern societies. In practice, it risks avoiding the difficult

but necessary task of *proliferating* sites of political representation in the attempt to radicalise existing democratic institutions, as has happened in Porto Alegre, for the sake of a naïve understanding of what a ‘participative’ rather than a ‘representative’ democracy might actually look like.

This problem is at its clearest in Hardt and Negri’s own reflections on political representation as a ‘disjunctive synthesis’ which ‘simultaneously connects and cuts’ the represented and the representatives, the people and the state. After considering a series of strategies by which democracy can be rendered more and more genuinely participative in nature, by introducing such measures as the direct accountability of delegates, they conclude wistfully that “such attempts can undoubtedly improve our contemporary political situation but they can never succeed in realizing the promise of modern democracy, the rule of everyone by everyone. Each of these forms...brings us back to the fundamental dual nature of representation” (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 246).

What is this ‘rule of everyone by everyone’? What would it look like? Hardt and Negri cannot tell us. Instead they spend the remainder of the book cataloguing some of the well-known manifestations of the alternative globalisation movement – the Seattle events, the activities of the ‘White Overalls’ – and suggesting some reforms to make the UN and other international bodies...(wait for it)... genuinely *representative* of the global population. So having bemoaned the inadequacy of all forms of representation to their ideal of pure democracy, the only solution they can propose is to increase the power, scope and scale of representative institutions. Surely this combination of millenarian rhetoric and self-contradiction reveals that Hardt and Negri cannot get past the fact that they themselves announce as irreducible in all thinking of democracy to date: the fact that the logic of representation simply *is* ambivalent and complexifying and that it simply *is* at once the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of any ‘true’ democracy. They nonetheless assert the possibility of some ‘true’ and simpler democracy but cannot substantiate this assertion at even a hypothetical level. As such Hardt and Negri seem, like the conservatives, to be partly blinded by the fantasy that the social can be simplified, even though they cannot imagine what such a simplification would look like. What’s more, Hardt and Negri’s formulation here should make us very uncomfortable. It echoes precisely Hobbes’ famous assertion that the human ‘state of nature’ is a ‘war of all against all’, arguably the founding statement of bourgeois individualism. In simply reversing Hobbes’ formulation when proposing an ideal alternative, Hardt and Negri actually preserve its logic: both formulations equally deny the constitutive, contingent, irreducibly relational and boundless complexity of the social.

What is at stake here is a matter of some considerable philosophical and practical importance. Ultimately, Hardt and Negri seem to dream of a world in which the social is made simple: ‘the rule of everyone by everyone’. Arendt’s highly persuasive arguments suggest that the social cannot be made simple, that it is inherently complex in its boundless relationality, and that all attempts to stabilise it are tyrannical in nature. This is in fact very close to the thinking of Derrida, who from his earliest writings warned against the authoritarian implications of Western philosophy’s habitual desire to stabilise the undecidability and unpredictability which the radical relationality of language and all phenomenal experience produce (Derrida, 1976; 1978; 1982 etc.). We

have already seen how it is close to Laclau's thought, which is in turn directly influenced by Derrida's. In all cases, I would suggest that what is at stake here is a particular way of thinking the social, or rather, *sociality itself*, which does not dream of reducing its inherent complexity and contingency. According to this logic, sociality is a condition of irreducible complexity. As such a *social forum* should be understood as distinct from the classical model of the forum precisely in that it constitutes a space wherein this complexity can proliferate in unpredictable ways, unhindered (as far as possible) by hierarchy or by the ancient dream of simplifying the social, a dream which can only ever be realised in some version of that violence which founds the very idea of the private, the proper, the owned.

This is a crucial point. According to its logic, the *common*, which Hardt and Negri and many other thinkers of the alternative globalisation movement are committed to defending from the neo-liberal drive for privatisation and individualisation, must be understood as constituted by Arendt's boundless relationality. It must therefore be understood as destroyed (in being privatised) at exactly the points where that relationality is bounded. Boundaries are precisely what turn the commons into private property through the act of enclosure (Lindenschmidt, 2004).

This is not to promote some naïve ethic of pure deterritorialisation. Boundaries are also what make identities, communities, politics and democracy possible: no forum without a square, no democracy without a *demos*. But they are at the same time that which is always threatened by the destabilising force of sociality as such, and if the social forum has a characteristic feature it is its constitutive willingness to let that force work in it and on it as far as can be allowed. If another name for that force is 'Multitude', then by the same logic we would do well to modify Hardt and Negri's position and stop dreaming of a perfect forum wherein the Multitude becomes wholly present to itself, and accept that the ambivalent logic of representation is never going to be finally resolved. The alternative? Keep dreaming of the simplified social, and find ourselves on the same side as the other dreamers of that dream: the neo-cons and fundamentalists.

Does any of this matter, outside the world of academic political philosophy? I think it does, and I will offer one example as to why. Much of the theoretical and practical critique of representative democracy which informs the rhetoric of thinkers such as Hardt and Negri has come from national political traditions – Italy, Argentina, Brazil – wherein there is very little positive experience of representative democracy and a long history of its failure to function in any meaningful way. In a country like the UK, from where I write now, there is no such historical experience for proponents of more radical forms of democracy to draw on. Put very simply, the history of democratic struggles in Britain has been a history of struggles for the right to representation, and historically when that right has been won, it has tended to prove relatively effective at delivering social benefits to the newly victorious constituencies. Britain simply does not have the history of authoritarian rule or endemic corruption which characterises many other countries.

Now, I do not say this in order to sing my homeland's praises. In fact, it may be that at the current historical juncture this will prove a major obstacle to democratic progress in the UK. With a long history of political and economic liberalism and no historical

experience of participatory democracy to draw on (even amongst the most radical sections of the labour movement), the opportunities are many for neo-liberalism to remain hegemonic, articulating its presuppositions to long-established and still potent elements of the national culture. For example, the British tradition of personal liberty and religious freedom is easily articulated to a neo-liberal discourse of ‘small government’ and low public spending, even without the racist and authoritarian elements which characterised Thatcherite discourse in the 1980s. Under these circumstances, without even the democratic history of institutions such as the town meetings traditionally common in many parts of the USA, there is virtually no chance of bodies such as the local social forums which have sprung up in Italy and France proving successful. Under such circumstances, it is only through attempts to radicalise the existing institutions of representative democracy, and, through the attempt to substitute neo-liberal reforms for democratic reforms, by proliferating sites of representation within the public services, that we are likely to have any success at resisting neo-liberal hegemony. A vast range of sites across British society – schools, universities, Health Service institutions, media outlets, local government – are being progressively transformed from ‘forums’ into ‘markets’, a project legitimated by the claim that only market mechanisms can render them responsive and efficient in the context of post-modern capitalism, capable of meeting the needs of a diverse constituency which will never come together consensually in the forum. Against this claim, what is required is a constant effort of invention guided by the principles of the social forum, allowing the creativity inherent in the complex dynamic of the social to work and proliferating sites of representation and maximum participation, whether that means defending local councils, demanding more power for student representatives, or setting up non-commercial media outlets. Democracy has a future, and the forum can resist the market, but only where the boundlessness of human sociality is acknowledged and encouraged, and where the dream of its final simplification is abandoned once and for all.

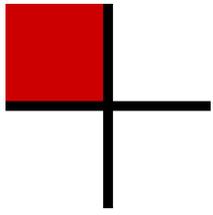
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Deliberation or Struggle? Civil Society Traditions Behind the Social Forums

Marlies Glasius

Why Call it Civil Society?

Many names are given to the transnational activism that has emerged in the last decade: global social movements (Cohen and Rai, 2000); advocacy networks in international politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998); the Third Force or transnational civil society (Florini, 2000); global citizen action (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001); 'globalization-from-below' (Falk, 1999; Brecher et al. 2000). Using the term 'civil society', rather than the more neutral 'networks' or 'movements', may seem at first sight like a recipe for trouble. There appear to be as many definitions of civil society, and global civil society, as there are authors – or perhaps even more: Lewis extracts four definitions of civil society from the literature on Africa alone, Howell and Pearce juxtapose two versions, and Kaldor gives no less than five versions of global civil society (Lewis, 2002; Howell and Pearce, 2001: 13-37; Kaldor, 2003: 6-12).

My own definition is a very brief one: 'people organizing to influence their world'. It involves some sort of deliberate getting-together, and it is a political definition, excluding people who organize to play darts or make money. It is normative to the extent that it may be considered a good thing that people should be organizing to influence their world, but not prescriptive in the sense that it includes those who attempt to influence their world in (to this author) undesirable directions, or by unpalatable means (for instance violence or extortion). But, this fairly minimal definition apart, I believe the term 'civil society' is fertile precisely because of its rich intellectual history. I will argue that the idea of the World Social Forum and subsequent other social forums is based on two different, and in fact conflicting, theories of civil society. Although the two traditions do come into conflict with each other not just in theory but in practice, it is precisely the creative tension between the two that make social forums such an exciting new phenomenon in global politics.

In the next section, I will briefly describe and analyse the spread of social forums. In the third section I will discuss two major traditions of civil society theory. The fourth and

fifth sections will show how these continue to inform, and inform us about, what is happening in social forums today.

The Spread of Social Forums

Beyond the battles of Seattle and Genoa, one of the most eye-catching ways in which activists have responded to globalization in recent years is through the organization of social forums. It could be argued that the social forums represent a new infrastructure for a new generation of social movements more concerned with social justice than were the movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

Parallel conferences of civil society to official summits have occurred since the 1970s, and grown in number and importance during the 1990s (Pianta, 2001), but the Porto Alegre summit was a symbolic step forward. In a way, this was the first truly parallel, rather than subordinate, summit of global civil society, deliberately held in a different place, with a different name, from the elitist Davos forum. The message of Porto Alegre was 'we have an alternative'. Instead of scaling the walls at Davos (which others were still doing as well), global civil society actors held their own alternative debates, proposing alternative policies, in the South, under the slogan 'Another world is possible'. While some may have been sceptical about the utility of having a meeting in a different place, where power-holders could not be directly confronted, the formula was clearly a success in terms of empowering civil society groups. Participants called it a fertile and inspiring experience. The first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre had 11,000 participants, the next, in February 2002, saw more than 50,000 visitors, and the third and fourth approximately 100,000.

At the second World Social Forum, the decision was taken to disperse the idea of the social forum, organizing regional and thematic forums, the ideas and conclusions of which would feed back into the WSF. Even before this decision was taken, there had been a first regional Social Forum in Africa (<http://www.50years.org/cms/ejn/story/106>) and a national Social Forum in Costa Rica (no website), and an angry counter-meeting of Durban citizens during the World Conference Against Racism decided to call itself Durban Social Forum (Desai, 2002). But, especially in Italy, the social forum phenomenon has taken off like nowhere else. When the first WSF decided to postpone regional social forums (national or local social forums do not appear to have been considered), the large group of Italians present, which met frequently as a delegation, decided nevertheless to frame their planned counter-summit to the Genoa G8 meeting as a 'social forum', a format capable of unifying the Italian left (Cannavo, 2001; Sullo, 2001a; 2001b). More than 200,000 people, mainly Italians, united in Genoa, and many carried away the idea of a social forum. There are now at least 183 local social forums in Italy (<http://www.sconfini.net/fori.php>), but probably many more.

Since the second World Social Forum, Social Forums have mushroomed elsewhere too (Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius, 2003: 20-23; Glasius and Timms, forthcoming 2005). While most simply adopt the format of the WSF, organizing a one to three day event with workshops, panels, and plenary discussions on a wide number of topics, other

organizational forms are also being experimented with: the Brisbane SF operates on an 'open space' principle, which means the agenda is determined by participants on the day of the meeting (<http://www.brisbanesocialforum.org/>); the Ottawa SF (May 2003, possibly to be revived May 2005, (<http://ns.artengine.ca/pipermail/artlist/2004-October/000615.html>)) emphasized that 'this is not a conference' but rather a 'community carnival for change', and the Tarnet (France) SF tries to make its web site function as an interactive virtual social forum (http://www.forum-social-tarnais.org/article.php3?id_article=151). Some social forums, including those of Madrid (<http://www.forosocialmadrid.org/>) and Limousin (France) (<http://fslimousin.free.fr/>), have become permanent organizations, while others, such as Tübingen (Germany) (<http://www.social-forum.de/index.php>) and Toronto (<http://www.torontosocialforum.ca/what.html>), have regular events they refer to as 'social forums'. Many of the social forums in Europe are organized to coincide with EU summits of heads of state and government. The European Social Forum in Florence (<http://www2.fse-esf.org/florence/scrifa/index.php>) and Paris (<http://www2.fse-esf.org/>) have been the biggest, with tens of thousands of participants in the workshops, and even more in the final marches; the Philadelphia SF (<http://robinsbooks.tripod.com/philsocforum.html>) (apparently defunct), must have been one of the smallest, meeting in a bookshop once a month.

The explosion of social forums can be seen as a new stage in the development of what was initially termed the 'anti-globalization movement', what Desai and Said (2001; Said and Desai, 2003) refer to as the 'anti-capitalist movement', but what is now increasingly referred to as the '*altermondialiste*' or the 'global social justice' movement. The initial phase was one of protest, in Seattle, Prague, Genoa, Quebec, and many other cities. Some of this protest involved direct action, a small proportion of it was violent. There is no doubt that the media's focus on violence, along with the sense that the protesters were expressing a more widely felt sense of unease, helped to put the movement on the map. Apart from the violence, the main criticism levelled at the movement was that it was just 'anti', that it protested but proposed no alternatives. The social forum phenomenon is precisely a response to this criticism.

Social forums combine the advantages associated with person-to-person interactions, as with community building and leadership, with the efficiency of web-based organizing in terms of information dissemination and management. It is perhaps too early to say whether social forums are the characteristic form of civil society organizing in the first decade of this century, just as sit-ins and occupations were in the 1960s, demonstrations in the 1970s, and the NGO proliferation in the 1980s and early 1990s. Yet much speaks in favour of this assumption, in particular also the low cost of organizing and the flexibility and mobility this form allows. At present, social forums are a complementary form of global civil society to the vast and highly institutionalised network of international NGOs.

One of the most noteworthy features of the move to social forums is that, while there still are marches and protest actions, they avoid the violence that has sparked both media attention and much controversy within the movement. Again, this shift is most evident in Italy, where, after the black bloc activities in Genoa in July 2001, the Berlusconi-controlled media had been warning Florentine shopkeepers to board up their

shops and flee the city. Instead, the European Social Forum in Florence was entirely peaceful; most shops stayed open, did good business, and cheered the march on the last day of the Forum (Longhi, 2002).

The absence of violent action from the social forums might be attributable to three related causes: while initially the non-violent majority would not condemn the violent minority, there was a mounting sense of frustration which culminated in Genoa, where the possibly police-infiltrated black blocs (see Caldiron, 2001) formed the excuse to crack down on peaceful activists. Second, while violence may seem appropriate in direct confrontation with the power-holders, the G8, the World Bank, or the WTO, it has no similar logic in a civil society-only forum, where internal debate is the main item on the menu. Third, many anti-capitalist protestors have focused in the last three years on anti-war activities. While there may be a logic to using violence in protest against capitalist exploitation, it appears to be generally understood that using violence in protest against war undermines the message.

So, what are social forums for? Why have they spread so quickly, attracting so many? I would argue that the answer lies in the intriguing attempt to bring together to very different conceptions of civil society.

Two Civil Society Traditions in Political Theory

The first theoretical root of the civil society idea lies in enlightenment theory, and focuses on humankind's capacity for non-violent, rational debate. In its initial exposition by John Locke, human reason was seen as God-given, and in a providential world, this capacity for reason allowed human beings to see that "no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions" (1690/1988: 271). Civil society is a society in which the citizens recognize such Natural Laws. A century later, Adam Ferguson in his famous *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767/1995), based a similar belief in at least the potentially positive impact of human reason on quasi-anthropological observations, rather than theology:

If it be true, that men are united by instinct, that they act in society from affections of kindness and friendship . . . if even in the case of those to whom we do not habitually wish any positive good, we are still averse to be the instruments of harm, it should seem, that in these various appearances of an amicable disposition, the foundations of a moral apprehension are sufficiently laid, and the sense of a right which we maintain for ourselves, is by a movement of humanity and candour extended to our fellow creatures. (Ferguson, 1767/1995: 38)

In this passage, Ferguson emerges as a theorist of human solidarity.

Kant takes the notion that the use of human reason can be for the public good a step further by emphasizing the notion of a public debate: "But I hear on all sides the cry: Don't argue! The officer says: Don't argue, get on parade! The tax official: Don't argue, pay! The clergyman: Don't argue, believe! . . . All this means restrictions on freedom everywhere. But which sort of restriction prevents enlightenment, and which instead of hindering it, can actually promote it? I reply: The *public* use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment amongst men" (Kant,

1784/1991a: 55). Kant was no revolutionary, his thrust was not that the authorities should be disobeyed, but rather that the best rules, in everyone's interest, would come about through public reasoning. His circle of potential participants in the debate was extremely narrow: "[B]y the public use of one's own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*" (Kant, *ibid.*). While this now sounds unacceptably elitist and sexist, the value of a reasoned public debate for humanity has continued to inform ideas of global civil society, as will be seen below.

The other contribution by Kant was to put forward the idea of a universal, rather than a nation-bound civil society, which in his version is a society governed by just rules. While we might read a universal intent into some of Ferguson's passages, in Kant it is explicit: "The greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally (...) The problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution is subordinate to the problem of a law-governed external relationship with other states, and cannot be solved unless the latter is also solved" (Kant, 1784/1991b: 45; 47). In his own day, many 'men of learning' would have ridiculed this position, but in today's interdependent world the idea that there can be no secure rule of law unless it is extended universally is widely accepted, and informs the thinking of actors in global civil society.

Habermas, although still sometimes classed as a 'neo-Marxist', famously took inspiration from Kant's idea of the public use of reason (but not, strangely, from his cosmopolitan aspirations), and elaborated it as the much more democratic idea of the public sphere. He shows how every conversation, spoken or written, in a public space, has the potential of becoming a wider debate:

Every encounter in which actors do not just observe each other but take a second-person attitude, reciprocally attributing communicative freedom to each other, unfolds in a linguistically constituted public space. This space stands open, in principle, for potential dialogue partners who are present as bystanders or could come on the scene and join those present (...) [It] can be expanded and rendered more permanent in an abstract form for a large public of present persons. For the public infrastructure of such *assemblies*, performances, presentations, and so on, architectural metaphors of structured spaces recommend themselves: we speak of forums, stages, arenas, and the like. (Habermas, 1996: 361)

The role of civil society he sees as follows:

Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distil and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere. The core of civil society comprises a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres. (Habermas, 1996: 367)

The deliberative ideal may appear rather naively harmonious, privileging reason and solidarity over self-interest and power dynamics. Neither Kant nor Habermas are naive thinkers: rather, they are imbued with a 'desperate optimism'. They saw this model as the only possible alternative to what Kant already presciently called "the vast graveyard of the human race" (Kant, 1795/1991c: 96). Thus far the deliberative strand of civil

society thinking, which is based on the idea that human beings, who share some sense of solidarity and connectedness, can solve their problems by reasoning them through in public, and that they do so through the medium of civil society.

A very different, but equally influential, line of thinking about civil society originates with Antonio Gramsci, who is in fact much more deserving of the label 'neo-Marxist'. He rejected the view (which he attacks in Rosa Luxemburg, but which is equally apparent in some of Marx's own writings) that revolution would one day take place spontaneously and immediately as the capitalist system collapsed as "iron economic determinism (...) out and out historical mysticism, the awaiting of a sort of miraculous illumination" (Gramsci, 1971: 233). Unlike Marx, he conceptualised civil society as a separate realm from that of economic interaction. (Bobbio, 1988: 82-83, is emphatic on this distinction in Gramsci). While in Russia all that had been needed was to overthrow the state, in Western Europe civil society was a formidable obstacle to revolution, that would still stand even if either state or economy were crumbling: "[C]ivil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.)" (Gramsci, 1971: 234) and "when the State trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed" (1971: 238). Thus, civil society is the sphere, somewhat independent from economy and state (although Gramsci contradicts himself in this regard), where the consent of the masses to the capitalist system is produced. In many places, he uses the terms 'civil society' and 'hegemony' interchangeably. While Gramsci explains how a slow 'war of position' must be fought against civil society, and gives us some clues as to how this might be done, he never explicitly says what has been read into him by subsequent generations of activists and academics: that civil society itself is also the sphere where hegemony can be contested. Cohen and Arato have constructed the following argument:

This [the bourgeois] version of civil society must therefore be destroyed and replaced by alternative forms of association (...) intellectual and cultural life (...) and values that would help to create a proletarian counterhegemony that might eventually replace the existing bourgeois forms (...) The alternative, conflict-theoretical view of hegemony-building in civil society implies (even if Gramsci never explicitly draws such a conclusion) a *positive normative attitude* to the existing version of civil society or, rather, to some of its institutional dimensions. Clearly a principled version of radical *reformism* could be based on such an attitude. (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 151; 150)

According to Howell and Pearce, this was just the route that many activists took:

The Gramscian contribution to the alternative genealogy [of civil society] was to give permission to the left and radical activists to reconsider the concept of civil society, which many then used to extricate themselves from Marxism yet justify remaining active in politics (...) Many felt they could abandon or shelve the issue of revolutionary teleology, and use instead the terrain offered by civil society for a radical project of reform through which dominant ideas and structures of power could be contested without recourse through the discredited, vanguardist political party. (Howell and Pearce, 2001: 34)

Thus, although Antonio Gramsci may well be turning in his grave at the thought of it, civil society has acquired associations, quite distinct from the 'reasoned public debate' associations of the lineage from Locke to Habermas, with 'contesting hegemony through alternative associations, cultural institutions and values'.

The World Social Forum and the Double Heritage of Civil Society

The Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum shows just how much the social forum idea owes to both these traditions. This is immediately apparent from the first article:

The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth. (WSF, 2001)

The first part of the article uses almost exactly the language of Habermas, providing a space for communication that is ‘open’, ‘democratic’ and ‘free’. The second part, which defines what the groups coming together in the Forum have to be against, is neo-Gramscian: here is the idea – quite against Marx – that groups and movements of civil society can be fighting ‘domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism’. The third part is again more reminiscent of Kantian cosmopolitanism, with some environmentalism thrown in which is not in Kant. Article 11 of the Charter is a similar mix of Habermasian debate and reflection and Gramscian struggle to ‘resist and overcome domination’, while the final article 14 again reflects Kantian cosmopolitanism. While the WSF’s broad aim of opposing neo-liberalism and corporate domination could be seen as neo-Gramscian, some of its most unique features, its prohibition on party representation and on voting and taking positions as an organization, owe more to the deliberation than to the struggle tradition.

There is, of course, tension between the ‘deliberation’ and the ‘struggle’ functions that social forums seek to combine. While deliberation values plurality and diversity, and debate for its own sake, effective action against the domination of capital requires a certain level of unity. On the other hand, a debate that is a priori against something is never an entirely open debate. The Zapatista movement, an important intellectual forerunner of the social forums, sought to resolve this dilemma with its formula of ‘One big no and many yesses’ (Kingsnorth, 2003; Klein, 2001).

The practice of the World Social Forum is, of course, not as high-minded as its principles (see Waterman, 2003; Klein, 2003; various contributions to Sen, 2004). But one of the main areas of tension, in practice as in principle, remains that between deliberation and struggle, or as Patomaki and Teivainen (2004) have put it between being a space and being a movement. One senses this tension as soon as one enters the site of the WSF. The first impression, with South Korean socialists singing ‘ciao bella ciao’ and middle-aged Latin-American men making histrionic speeches on solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela, is of a struggle, a global but time-warped one. But as soon as one enters the – mostly unbearably hot – smaller rooms or tents, one finds people going great lengths to overcome climatic, language and cultural barriers in order to share experiences, communicate, debate and strategise, and the deliberative element takes over.

For years, the tension between space and movement, deliberation and struggle, had been fairly subterranean because of the large size of the forum, and because of the device of having a separate ‘assembly of social movements’ that could adopt positions. In 2005, however, it came to a head when a group of 19 launched what it called ‘the Porto Alegre Consensus’ as ‘a synthesis of what the WSF is proposing globally’. The group included WSF co-founder Bernard Cassen, two Nobel Prize winners, and other anti-globalisation stars such as Aminata Traoré (the only woman in the group), Samir Amin, and Walden Bello. However, another founder of the WSF, Chico Whitaker, said that it should only be seen as one of ‘dozens, maybe hundreds of other proposals’ (Anthony and Silva, 2005), and another member of the Brazilian organisation committee, Candido Grzybowski, felt that, while he had nothing against the contents of the manifesto, ‘it goes against the very spirit of the Forum. Here, all proposals are equally important and not only that of a group of intellectuals, even when they are very significant persons’ (Anthony and Silva, 2005).

The 150,000 or so other participants in the fifth WSF took relatively little notice of the manifesto, and it would not appear to have become the latter-day heir to the Communist Manifesto that the authors may have hoped it would be. Indeed it takes some effort to find the Manifesto on the Internet (an English version can be found at OD Today, 2005). On this basis, it might be argued that, at the WSF, the deliberation vs. struggle controversy seems at the moment to be veering towards the former. But equally, there are indications that point into the opposite direction, such as the adulation of Hugo Chavez, who was cheered by a twenty-thousand strong crowd at the same WSF.

The Practices of Local Social Forums

The same dilemma rears its head in local social forums. Some tend much more to one direction than another. The Madrid Social Forum, for instance, while much more anti-militarist than anti-capitalist, is clearly in struggle or movement mode. Its founding manifesto declares that its aims are ‘the defence of peace, solidarity, human rights and democratic liberties,’ and that in order to do so, it must form an ‘action unit’ launching a ‘great offensive’ with a ‘single vocation,’ and in a peculiar piece of double-speak, be a “space of tolerance and necessary consensus” of the left in Madrid (http://www.nodo50.org/estudiantesdeizquierdas/article.php3?id_article=29; translation MG). A mark of social forums with a struggle conception is that they often fail to take seriously the WSF Charter’s prohibition on adopting political positions. Thus, the Senegal SF has adopted a petition to halt privatisation of the national lottery (‘Senegalese NGOs’, 2005), the Kenya SF has addressed itself to a WTO meeting (‘Don’t Trade Away’, 2005) and the Hamburg South SF has adopted a declaration of solidarity with the striking workers at a local Opel car factory (Solidaritätserklärung, 2004).

An increasing number of recent local and national social forums, on the other hand, emphasise open space, plurality and debate. Thus, the Ivry (France) SF identifies itself as a ‘simple meeting space for those organizations and individuals who share the objections and aspirations of the ‘altermondialiste’ movement. One comes to be

mutually informed, to debate, to deepen knowledge on questions of common interest and to propose initiatives. These are then carried out by whoever is interested' (<http://www.fsivry.free.fr/>; translation MG). The Melbourne SF is 'an annual open space event, and a network, for facilitating debate, self-expression and imagination in addressing global issues. In particular for seeking out, articulating and helping to establish more sustainable and just versions of globalisation' (<http://www.melbournesocialforum.org>). The Netherlands SF, finally, is "an open meeting place for the exchange of ideas, the creation and the strengthening of networks and a breeding ground for action" (<http://www.sociaalforum.nl>; translation MG). Social forums which emphasise the 'open space' or 'debate' function often refer to the 2003 article by Chico Whitaker (English version, 2004), 'the WSF as an Open Space', which has been translated into many languages. Such forums are less likely to breach the charter, but it is questionable to what extent they can keep alive the counter-hegemonic aspect of the forums, and avoid lapsing into NGO or academic workshops.

Other local forums continue to debate whether to emphasize deliberation or struggle, or try to reconcile the two. Thus, a web debate and evaluation of the second Austrian social forum has one participant arguing that "social forums are the widest possible amalgamation of critical forces in society. Their success or failure depends on their ability to be an 'axis of struggle'. Otherwise they will stagnate, turn into debating clubs, lose their explosive potential and become integrated into bourgeois society. I consider the occasional debate about whether we are an 'open space' as idle". Another counters that "here of all places we need a public space, in which alternatives in all fields can be discussed." ('Rückblick und Ausblick', translation MG). Meanwhile, without resolving this issue, the third Austrian Social Forum is being organised for October 2005. In Berlin, the dilemma is resolved in a different way. The Berlin Social Forum emphatically chooses the 'space' over the 'movement' model in a number of 'self-understanding' documents, and insists that we 'represent nothing, really nothing whatsoever' (Impulsreferat, translation MG). But there are no big annual social forum events. Instead, it organises smaller workshops on specific themes but also has a struggle-oriented function, publicising and mobilising for the campaigns, demonstrations, direct action and reports of others, without ever explicitly associating the forum with these groups and activities (<http://www.sozialforum-berlin.de/>).

Conclusion

The tension between the two will probably continue to characterize the social forum movement. In fact, it is to be hoped that it will not be resolved in one way or another. The conscious emphasis on debate as a value in itself is important in the post-September 11 world, where Al-Qaeda, other terrorists, and the Bush Administration are successfully promoting violent confrontation instead of debate. Nonetheless a social forum movement that would focus only on debate would become a tame and stagnant affair, with little to offer those who have a passion to change, and not just discuss, the world, and not much of a challenge to any governmental or corporate power-holders. The other extreme is a worse nightmare: a social forum movement purely based on counterhegemonic struggle would soon return to dogmatic vanguardism, and in the

unlikely event that it would gain governmental power somewhere, to the totalitarian dystopias of the twentieth century. It is precisely the attempt of the social forums to have it both ways, to be both a locus of open deliberation and a meeting place for real-world counter-hegemonic campaigns, that makes it such an interesting experiment, that has managed to attract so many.

On the basis of the discourses in the plenaries of the last European Social Forum in London (<http://www.ukesf.net/>), a third scenario can also be discerned: an atrophied social forum that does not encourage serious debate between different perspectives, but does not concretely organise to advance specific causes either, instead holding forth to the converted in stale revolutionary jargon (Glasius and Timms, 2005). This would be the death of the social forum.

Against this scenario, which spells institutionalisation and marginalisation at the same time, there are two counter-trends. First, there is the increasing contestation within the forums, manifested in autonomous spaces and spontaneous take-overs. Autonomous spaces are now a standard feature of the largest forums, and they have received a certain level of tacit recognition from the organising committees. 'Allied events, fringe events, and autonomous spaces' were, for instance, listed in the official programme for the first time by the ESF 2004 in London. The other trend is the still increasing number of and coordination between local social forums, some of which include an agenda of democratising the ESF and WSF from below.

If social forums can tear themselves away from any form of vanguardism, and foster genuine debate and collaboration between those who have real differences of opinion, approach and priority within a variety of counter hegemonic frameworks, they can make a vital contribution to the strategic and discursive infrastructure of global civil society.

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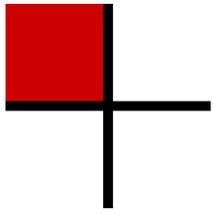
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Social Forums and their Margins: Networking Logics and the Cultural Politics of Autonomous Space^{*}

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abstract

The World Social Forum (WSF) emerged in the wake of a global wave of protest against capitalism characterized, in part, by the expression of broader political ideals through network-based organizational forms. The WSF was thus conceived as an “open space” for exchanging ideas, resources, and information; promoting initiatives; and generating concrete alternatives. At the same time, many grassroots activists have criticized the forums for being organized in a top-down fashion, including political parties despite their formal prohibition, and favoring prominent intellectuals. Radicals thus face a continual dilemma: participate in the forums as a way to reach a broader public, or remain outside given their political differences? Based on my participation as activist and ethnographer with the (-ex) Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) in Barcelona and Peoples Global Action (PGA), this article explores the cultural politics of autonomous space at the margins of the world and regional social forums on three levels. Empirically, it provides an ethno-genealogy of the emergence, diffusion, and proliferation of the concept of autonomous space. Theoretically, it argues that the cultural politics of autonomous space express the broader networking logics and politics increasingly inscribed into emerging organizational architectures. Politically, it suggests that the proliferation of autonomous spaces represents a promising model for rethinking the Forum as an innovative network-based organizational form.

Introduction

There were two different worlds in Porto Alegre, one slow moving, totally grassroots and self-managed, and another organized along completely different lines, two worlds coming together at different velocities. (Nuria, activist: Movement for Global Resistance)¹

On the evening of October 17, 2004, the second day of the third European Social Forum (ESF) in London, 200 activists stormed the stage of an anti-Fascist plenary at London’s Alexander Palace, where Mayor Ken Livingstone had been scheduled to speak. After a brief scuffle, organizers from several radical groups that helped produce a series of

* I would like to thank the special editors of this issue and two anonymous external reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any remaining shortcomings are, of course, my own. I am also grateful to my fellow activists, particularly from (-ex) MRG, without whom these reflections would not have been possible. Indeed, all knowledge production is a collective endeavour.

1 Personal Interview, conducted June 11, 2002.

autonomous spaces during the forum, including the Wombles, Indymedia, Yo Mango, and others, occupied the stage for roughly thirty minutes. Their intention was not to stop the plenary, but rather to publicly denounce what they perceived as the non-democratic, top-down way the Forum had been organized, including the exclusionary practices of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Mayor's Socialist Action faction (e.g. see Emma Dowling's and Laura Sullivan's pieces in this issue). To that end, activists read a statement released by Babels translators earlier in the week, including the following, "Perhaps our most important principle is that of self-organization... However, many opportunities of experimentation and innovation have been missed... resulting in the exclusion of many people, organizations, networks, groups, and even countries".²

As protesters left the Palace several were beaten and arrested by the London police. More conflict occurred the following day when anti-capitalists were harassed prior to the mass march, and as police dragged away two radical activists when they tried to access the podium to speak out during the final rally. An intense debate ensued in the London Guardian and forum listserves, Members of the SWP and the Mayor's allies denounced their critics as illegitimate, non-democratic, and even racist, while radicals defended their right to make their voices heard.

By staging such a highly visible direct action, grassroots activists succeeded in provoking a heated public debate, and thus bringing two interrelated conflicts within and around the Forum into full view. On the one hand, their critique reflected the long simmering contest inside the London organizing process pitting the self-ascribed 'horizontals', who support more open and participatory forms of organization, against their more traditional institutional counterparts, who they dub the 'verticals'.³ Although particularly pronounced in London, this tension has long characterized the forum process, corresponding to an ongoing conflict between what I refer to as 'networking' and 'command' logics within the broader anti-corporate globalization movements from which the forums emerged (see below; Juris, 2004a).⁴ Despite popular conceptions among radicals, the forums cannot be dismissed as attempts by mainstream political parties, NGOs, and the older left to co-opt grassroots movements. These traditional formations are certainly present, in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, and arguably to a greater degree than during earlier mass direct actions, yet so too are newer network-based movements. Indeed, horizontal networking logics are inscribed into the

2 The entire statement can be downloaded from www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/10/299292.html, retrieved on April 13, 2005.

3 For an insider analysis of this conflict, see Rodrigo Nunes 'Territory and Deterritory: Inside and Outside the ESF 2004', [<http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=04/10/29/1410226&mode=nested&tid=14>], accessed 13 April 2005.

4 This tension reflects traditional debates between socialists and anarchists over the nature of organization within movements of the radical left dating back to at least the First International and the conflict between Marx and Bakunin. However, the rise of new digital technologies and emergence of a broader networking logic have reinforced anarchist-inspired ideas and practices with respect to decentralized coordination and directly democratic decision-making. In this sense, horizontal forms of organization are diffusing rapidly, even among many forces of the traditional left. At the same time, contemporary activists would do well to avoid the rancorous sectarianism of the past. Indeed, the social forums may be emerging as an interesting hybrid form, involving both horizontal and vertical elements.

organizational architectures of the forums themselves, perhaps most clearly expressed in the concept of 'open space' (Sen, 2004). The main point is that the forums, and the organizing processes surrounding them, are highly uneven, contradictory, and contested terrains.

On the other hand, by staging direct action protest at the London Forum, activists also expressed and physically embodied the conflictual relationship between radical anti-capitalists and the broader social forum process. Belying facile inside-outside dichotomies, diverse radical networks have alternatively participated within the forums, boycotted them entirely, or created autonomous spaces straddling the porous boundaries separating official and alternative events. Indeed, the social forums have largely eclipsed mass protests as the primary vehicles where diverse movement networks converge across urban space to make themselves visible, generate affective attachments, and communicate alternatives and critiques. Many radicals thus implicitly recognize that complete disengagement from the forums means exclusion from the broader movement field. By creating autonomous spaces at the margins of the Forum, radicals generate their own horizontal practices, while staying connected to mainstream currents and pressuring official spaces to live up to their expressed ideals. Moreover, this cultural politics of autonomous space reflects a broader networking logic, and demonstrates how contemporary ideological struggles are increasingly waged through battles over organizational process and form.

This article explores the cultural politics of autonomous space along three distinct levels. Empirically, it provides an ethno-genealogy of the emergence, diffusion, and proliferation of the concept of autonomous space.⁵ Theoretically, it argues that the cultural politics of autonomous space express the broader networking logics and politics that increasingly are inscribed within emerging organizational architectures. Finally, on a political level, it suggests the proliferation of autonomous spaces represents a promising model for rethinking the Forum as an innovative network-based organizational form. In this sense, the Forum is best viewed not as a singular open space, but rather as a congeries of shifting, overlapping networked spaces that converge across a particular urban terrain during a specific point in time.

I am both an activist and ethnographer who has participated actively within the world and regional social forum process, as well as activist networks in the United States and Catalonia, including the (ex-) Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) in Barcelona and Peoples Global Action (PGA).⁶ The analysis for this paper was based on activism and research carried out in Barcelona from June 2001 to September 2002, and participation in subsequent forums.⁷ I have taken part in the organization and

5 I use genealogy in the Foucauldian sense as a specific, situated history of the present rather than an overarching view from above. The ethno- side of the equation refers to the fact that my analysis is based on thick description rooted in my own particular experience as activist and ethnographer.

6 MRG-Catalonia ultimately 'self-dissolved' in January 2003 due to declining participation and a broader political statement against reproducing rigid structures in response to an official invitation to participate within the World Social Forum International Council.

7 I have also taken part in numerous mass direct actions in cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Prague, Barcelona, Genoa, Brussels, Seville, and Geneva.

implementation of diverse autonomous spaces during several World and European Social Forums, as well as early discussions where the concept was first debated with respect to the Forum. My research is practically engaged, based on the refusal to separate observation from participation, constituting what I call a 'militant ethnography' (Juris, 2004b). I feel this is the best way to generate useful analyses and interpretations, designed to make interventions into ongoing political, tactical, and strategic debates. I situate myself within more radical grassroots movement sectors precisely because they most clearly express an emerging networking logic, which is among my primary analytical *and* political concerns.

Emerging Organizational Architectures

Facilitated by new information technologies, and inspired by earlier Zapatista solidarity activism and anti-Free Trade Campaigns, anti-corporate globalization movements have emerged through the rapid proliferation of decentralized network forms. New Social Movement (NSM) theorists have long argued that in contrast to the centralized, vertically integrated, working-class movements, newer feminist, ecological, and student movements are organized around flexible, dispersed, and horizontal networks (Cohen, 1984). Mario Diani (1995) defines social movements more generally as network formations. Similarly, borrowing terms used to describe kin networks and other elements of pre-modern social organization, anthropologists Gerlach and Hine (1970) argued years ago that social movements are decentralized, segmentary, and reticulate. However, by promoting peer-to-peer communication and allowing for communication across space in real time, new information technologies have significantly enhanced the most radically decentralized network configurations, facilitating transnational coordination and communication.

As I argue elsewhere (Juris, 2004a), contemporary social movement networks involve an emerging 'cultural logic of networking': entailing a series of broad guiding principles, shaped, perhaps counter-intuitively, by the logic of informational capitalism, that are internalized by activists, and generate concrete networking practices. These include; 1) forging horizontal ties and connections among diverse, autonomous elements; 2) the free and open circulation of information; 3) collaboration through decentralized coordination and consensus decision-making; and 4) self-directed networking.⁸ Networking logics have given rise to what grassroots activists call a new way of doing politics. While the command-oriented logic of parties and unions is based on recruiting new members, building unified strategies, political representation, and the

8 Manuel Castells identifies a "networking, decentred form of organization and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the information society" (1997: 362). My own work builds on this insight by further theorizing how networking logics shape, and are generated by, concrete networking practices. Indeed, contemporary anti-corporate globalization movements involve an increasing confluence among network technologies, organizational forms, and political norms, mediated by activist practice (Juris, 2004a). For an ethnographic account of how networking logics, practices, and politics play out in Barcelona and within transnational networks, such as PGA and the world and regional social forums, as well as how they are expressed via embodied action during mass protests, see Juris (2004b).

struggle for hegemony, network politics involve the creation of broad umbrella spaces, where diverse movements and collectives converge around common hallmarks, while preserving their autonomy and specificity. Rather than recruitment, the objective becomes horizontal expansion through articulating diverse movements within flexible structures that facilitate maximal coordination and communication.

At the same time, networking logics are never completely dominant, and always exist in dynamic tension with other competing logics, often giving rise to a complex ‘cultural politics of networking’ within particular spheres. This is precisely how we can best understand the conflict involving ‘horizontals’ and ‘verticals’ surrounding the London ESF, the former guided by an emerging networking logic and the latter more influenced by a traditional logic of command. This is not the first time such conflict has occurred. In fact, struggles between network-based movements and their traditional organizational counterparts are constitutive of the forum process itself, and the broader anti-corporate globalization movements from which the forums emerged. Indeed, similar dynamics were present during earlier mass mobilizations in Seattle or Genoa, and during Campaigns against the World Bank and European Union in Barcelona.

Horizontal networks should not be romanticized. Specific networks involve varying degrees of organizational hierarchy,⁹ ranging from relatively horizontal relations within radical networks like PGA to more centralized processes, such as the world and regional social forums. Horizontal relations do not suggest the complete absence of hierarchy, but rather the lack of formal hierarchical designs. This does not necessarily prevent, and may even encourage, the formation of informal hierarchies (Freeman, 1973; cf. King, 2004). What activists increasingly call ‘horizontalism’ thus precisely involves an attempt to build collective processes while managing internal struggles through decentralized coordination, open participation, and organizational transparency rather than representative structures and centralized command. At the same time, the broadest convergence spaces (Routledge, 2004), including the social forums, involve a complex amalgam of diverse organizational forms.

Horizontalism is perhaps best understood as a guiding vision. Beyond social morphology, networks have more generally emerged as a broader cultural ideal, a model of and model for new forms of directly democratic politics at local, regional, and global scales. Moreover, such values are increasingly inscribed directly into emerging organizational architectures. Decentralized communication structures, such as PGA or the (ex-) MRG in Barcelona, may be more or less effective at coordinating grassroots struggles and initiatives, but even more importantly, they also physically manifest horizontal network ideals. Indeed, activists increasingly express utopian political imaginaries directly through concrete political, organizational, and technological practice. As Geert Lovink suggests, “Ideas that matter are hardwired into software and network architectures” (2002: 34). This is precisely why contemporary political and

9 Specifically, diverse network formations include hierarchical ‘circle’ patterns, intermediate ‘wheel’ configurations, and the most decentralized ‘all-channel’ networks, which refer to those where every node is connected to every other (Kapferer, 1973). New digital technologies specifically enhance the latter.

ideological debates are so often coded as conflict over organizational process and form (cf. Juris, 2005).¹⁰

Social Forums as Contested Terrains

According to official accounts, the idea for the World Social Forum (WSF) as a space for reflection and debate about alternatives to neoliberal globalization originated with Oded Grajew, who, together with Brazilian compatriot Francisco Whitaker, presented the proposal to Bernard Cassen, President of ATTAC-France (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens) and Director of the *Le Monde Diplomatique*, in February 2000. Cassen liked the idea and suggested the Forum be held in Porto Alegre, given its location in the Global South, renowned model of participatory budgets, and the organizational resources provided by the ruling Workers Party (PT). Although following on the heels of the recent mass anti-corporate mobilizations in places like Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Prague, the WSF would specifically provide an opportunity to generate concrete alternatives to neoliberal globalization, coinciding with the annual World Economic Forum in Davos. The WSF built on previous convergence processes, including Zapatista Encounters in Chiapas and Spain, global PGA gatherings, U.N. civil society forums, and NGO-led counter-summit conferences organized by networks such as San Francisco-based International Forum on Globalization. The Brazilian Organizing Committee (CO) was soon formed, involving the main Brazilian Labor Federation (CUT), Landless Workers Movement (MST), and six smaller organizations.¹¹ The International Committee (IC) was created after the first WSF to oversee the global expansion of the process.

Although to a certain extent the WSF provided an opportunity for the traditional left, including many reformists, Marxists and Trotskyists, to regain their protagonism within an emerging global wave of resistance, radical network-based movements from Europe, North, and South America, also participated from the beginning. Moreover, the Charter of Principles, drafted after the initial WSF to provide guidelines for a permanent

10 The concept 'coding' refers to how activists communicate their broader political visions, ideologies, and values about the world through expressions of and debates over organizational structure and process. Organizational form thus operates as a synecdoche, pointing to wider models for (re-)organizing social relations more generally. I am arguing that ideology is increasingly expressed through organizational practice and design as opposed to discourse, which contradicts the view that network-based movements are 'ideologically thin' (Bennett, 2003). Osterweil (2004b) makes a related claim about the expressly 'political' nature of social movement practices among radical activists within and around the forums, which involve a 'cultural-political' approach. For more on the relationship between cultural politics and the WSF, see the special edition of the *International Social Science Journal* 182: 'Explorations in Open Space: the World Social Forum and Cultures of Politics', edited by C. Kheragel and J. Sen (2004). While I fully agree with this general claim, I am identifying a much more specific mechanism through which contrasting ideas and values are expressed through conflict over organizational architectures.

11 These included the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ABONG), ATTAC-Brazil, Brazilian Justice & Peace Commission (CBJP), Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES), the Brazilian Institute for Social and economic Studies (IBASE), and the Center for Global Justice (CJG).

process, reflected the network principles prevailing within the broader movement. The Forum is thus defined as “an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences, and interlinking for effective action”,¹² the Charter further states, “The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body... it does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants... nor does it constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it”. This should be taken more as an ideal than actuality (cf. Waterman, 2002: 4), and perhaps more importantly, as a reflection of a much broader horizontal networking ethic. Indeed, as Jai Sen has consistently maintained, the WSF should be viewed as an open space:

The Forum... is not an organization or a movement, or a world federation, but a *space*- a non-directed space, from and within which movements and other civil initiatives of many kinds can meet, exchange views, and... take forward their work, locally, nationally, and globally.¹³

Again, this vision should be understood as a guiding ideal, not an empirical depiction, and is often contradicted in practice. For example, the hierarchical format of the main plenary sessions undermines a horizontal networking logic, while the prominent role of the organizing committees in determining program content belies the idea of non-directed space.¹⁴ In addition, social movement assemblies at World and European Social Forums serve as de facto deliberative bodies (cf. Whitaker, 2004), while the Organizing and International Committees constitute arenas for power struggle. Furthermore the injunction against political parties is rendered meaningless by the close relationship between the forums and the Workers Party in Brazil, *Refundazione Comunista* in Italy, or the Labour Party in London. Still, the ideal of open space does represent the inscription of a broader network ideal within the Forums’ organizational architecture. At the same time, differently situated actors hold contrasting views of the forum, often setting horizontal network movements against their traditional organizational counterparts. Indeed, the Forum is a ‘hotly contested political space’ (Ponniah and Fisher, 2003), and nowhere has this been more evident than within the International Committee (IC).

This was made abundantly clear at an IC meeting in Barcelona in April 2002. Numerous grassroots groups were invited to attend as guest observers, but MRG had received an invitation to become an official member, presumably based on its reputation as an exemplar of the new radicalism. Since its organizational principles precluded taking part in this kind of representative structure, MRG decided to offer its delegate status to an open assembly of grassroots movements in Barcelona. The assembly drafted a statement criticizing the IC for its lack of transparency, which, given my command of English, I

12 Cited from http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2, accessed 13 April 2005.

13 Cited from <http://www.choike.org/PDFs/introduc.pdf>, accessed 13 April 2005.

14 This appears to be changing, however, as the fifth edition of the WSF in Porto Alegre moved away from an emphasis on large plenaries in favour of more self-organized spaces and workshops. Moreover, organizers sponsored a consultation process allowing participants from diverse movements, networks, and groups to participate in the process of selecting the broad thematic areas (see Nunes, this issue).

was entrusted to record, translate, and read aloud on April 17, the second day of the meeting.¹⁵ The text included the following charge:

MRG is part of a new political culture involving network-based organizational forms, direct democracy, open participation, and direct action. A top-down process, involving a closed, non-transparent, non-democratic, and highly institutional central committee will never attract collectives and networks searching for a new way of doing politics.

The declaration was meant as a provocation, a kind of communicative direct action from within the heart of the IC. We expected a cold, if not downright hostile reception. Much to our surprise, however, many Council members were extremely supportive. A prominent European-based figure later suggested, “We have to figure out a way to include this new political culture despite their unique organizational form”.¹⁶ Moreover, beyond an attempt to co-opt our movements, others recognized the validity of our critique, expressing support for a process based on openness, transparency, and diversity, which reflected a broader networking logic. In fact, the IC was internally divided. Some wanted to change the Charter of Principles, allowing for the development of collective strategies through the political leadership of the IC. Others were steadfastly opposed to this view, as one member argued, “In response to the radicalization of the right, we have to radicalize our process of diversity and participation. We are not a central committee!” Much like the broader forum, the IC was a contested space, not in terms of formal quotas of power, but rather over the underlying vision of the Forum. As we have seen, the same has also been true within the European process. The main point here is that the conflict between networking and command logics does not so much position the forum against its external critics, as constitute the very process itself, involving heated debates over the Forum’s organizational architecture among those espousing very different ideological perspectives.

The Intergalactika Laboratory of Disobedience

After the unexpected success of the first WSF in Porto Alegre in 2001, several hundred Barcelona-based activists made the trip across the ocean for the second edition of the Forum, including dozens, like myself, from grassroots networks such as MRG. Although many of us were critical of the Forum given the key role played by traditional parties, unions, and NGOs, we also recognized it had become a major pole of attraction among movements, networks, and groups opposed to neo-liberal globalization. Beyond simply providing a space for debating and constructing alternatives, the Forum is also an opportunity for diverse networks to physically converge, generate affective ties, communicate alternative messages, and physically represent themselves to each other and the public. More than an arena for rational discourse, the WSF is also, and perhaps

15 For a traditional social scientist, this kind of participation would constitute an unacceptable breach of normative objectivity, which is itself a politically normative construct and ideal. However, as a militant ethnographer, it allowed me to gain valuable first-hand knowledge of the complex logic of social interaction and micro-level cultural politics within the IC.

16 Unless otherwise specified, direct quotations were recorded during public meetings by the author on the date indicated within the text. Names have been omitted or changed to maintain anonymity.

primarily, a collective ritual where alternative social movement networks become embodied. Indeed, the innumerable self-organized workshops, cultural events, and constant flow of networking activity within the corridors, plazas, streets, and cafes around the Catholic University generated a rush of stimulation, excitement, and bewilderment. As an MRG-based colleague suggested after the Forum, “I didn’t learn anything new, but it was an amazing experience. You really felt part of a huge global movement (February 5, 2002)!” Indeed, since mass actions are increasingly difficult to organize given waning enthusiasm and growing repression, the Forum has become a key organizational platform for broader movement and identity building, which is why so many radicals feel obliged to engage the process.

Many of us from MRG helped organize and coordinate the *Intergalactika* Laboratory of Disobedience, which would become a prototypical model for future autonomous spaces at the forums, even if not originally conceived as such.¹⁷ *Intergalactika* provided an informal, participatory forum of exchange among grassroots activists from Europe, South, and North America, many of whom felt ambivalent about participating in the larger institutional forum. Moreover, because it was situated in the International Youth Camp (see Nunes, this issue), many young Brazilian anarchists explicitly opposed to the official Forum could also take part. On the other hand, many of us moved fluidly between alternative and official spaces.

Intergalactika thus provided an arena for engaging in grassroots, participatory forms of political exchange, while also creatively and sometimes confrontationally intervening within the official Forum to make its contradictions visible. Indeed, the ideal of the Forum as open space was perhaps most fully expressed along the margins, particularly within the Youth Camp. Though relatively marginal, *Intergalactika* prefigured the strategy of organizing autonomous, yet connected spaces within the larger Forum, reflecting a networking strategy MRG had already employed in Barcelona, and would promote leading up to the European Social Forum. It was here where the broader movement’s horizontal networking logic was most clearly apparent.

For example, on February 4, 2002, the penultimate day of the Forum, *Intergalactika* sponsored an excellent discussion of strategies and tactics, one of the few sessions in Porto Alegre to address direct action. A large crowd assembled in a circle around a well-known activist from London, not far from a photo exhibition displaying action images from Buenos Aires, London, Milan, and Barcelona. This was in explicit contrast to the massive lecture halls housing the official plenaries. The speaker gave an inspirational talk about decentralization, diversity, and interdependence, arguing at one point, “Our movements are like an ecosystem: very fluid, always changing, working toward their own survival”. Reflecting the networking logic that had been muted, if not absent, within the larger Forum, he went on to enthusiastically exclaim, “I hate the slogan Another World is Possible – Many Other Worlds are Possible!”

Intergalactika also provided a space for planning and coordinating several creative direct actions targeting the official WSF. The idea was not to question the legitimacy of

17 For an insightful description and analysis of the 2003 edition of the *Intergalactika* space at the Youth Camp in Porto Alegre, see Osterweil (2004a).

the Forum, but rather to criticize the perceived top-down manner in which it was organized. Indeed, the WSF represented an opportunity to reach masses of potential supporters, but its more institutional and reformist elements were viewed as undermining the self-organizing network logic within the broader movement. Immediately following the tactics and strategy discussion, dozens of us took the bus from the youth camp to the university for a 'guided tour' of the VIP room.¹⁸ Soon after arriving, we joined the anarchist Samba band from Sao Paolo (dressed in black, rather than the usual pink we were accustomed to) and danced our way up to the second floor. We continued to march through crowds of surprised, yet delighted onlookers. When we burst into the VIP room, a heavy-set Brazilian with long Rastas jumped onto the counter, tossed plastic bottles of water to the crowd, and led us in an enthusiastic chant, "We are all VIPs! We are all VIPs!" We then gave ourselves, and a group of nervously amused NGO delegates, an impromptu bath. The Forum organizers were livid, and only the intervention of our well-connected allies spared us from a direct confrontation with the police. However, as a Brazilian OC member confided to us at the IC meeting in Barcelona later that spring, there would be no VIP room the following year.

One Foot In, One Foot Out

These experiences at the WSF in Porto Alegre in January-February 2002, and at the IC meeting that spring in Barcelona had been particularly instructive. On the one hand, we learned the Forum could bring together tens of thousands of people from diverse movement networks, thereby creating a unique space for encounter and exchange while generating powerful global identities and affective attachments. On the other hand, although the Charter of Principles expressed an open networking logic, there were serious contradictions in practice with respect to grassroots participation, open access, and horizontal organization. However, it was also clear that critically engaging the Forum from the margins not only proved useful in terms of bringing our own projects forward, it allowed for the promotion of constructive change from within. Indeed, confounding clear boundaries between inside and outside, we recognized we had important allies within the very heart of the organizing process. As preparations began for the first European Social Forum the following November in Florence, we began debating among our colleagues in Barcelona and elsewhere how best to engage the process. This led to the first proposals about creating an autonomous space in Florence.

The notion of building an autonomous space 'separate, yet connected' actually came quite naturally to many in Barcelona. The concept itself expressed a horizontal networking logic, and the previous fall we had negotiated similar dynamics surrounding the mobilization against the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in Barcelona. Tensions at the local level actually began in Spring 2001 during the Campaign against the World Bank, a broad convergence space involving grassroots networks like MRG or the Citizens Network to Abolish the Foreign Debt (XCADE), critical elements of

18 A group of radical French activists also organized a pie-throwing action to denounce the presence of French parliamentarians during an official press conference organized by the Socialist Party of France.

ATTAC, leftist parties, and unions, as well as more institutional sectors. Although some anti-capitalists participated in the Campaign, many militants, including radical squatters, had formed their own autonomous platform.

The World Bank Campaign involved a great deal of conflict between radical grassroots networks and their institutional counterparts. Even when the latter decided to found their own organization following the June mobilization,¹⁹ debates continued to rage between the traditional Marxists, who wanted the Campaign to continue, and many from XCADE and MRG who preferred to dissolve the Campaign, at least until the next mobilization against the EU. Given this ongoing struggle between networking and command logics, some within MRG proposed to forge a large autonomous space the next time together with radical militants and squatters, which could then coordinate with the broader Campaign against the EU.²⁰ An MRG-based colleague sent an e-mail to the Campaign listserve explaining the reasons for the proposal to create an autonomous space, which included the following:

We can't force each other to integrate within organizational forms we don't share. The best thing would be to organize within different spaces according to our own traditions, but coordinate in order to complement one another in daily practice. Separating does not necessarily mean dividing. On the contrary, it means moving forward in order to take advantage of both the newer and older experiences and organizational ideas, learning from the errors of the past, toward a new form of understanding collective action. It's about separating in order to work more effectively together.²¹

When discussions began about whether to participate in the Florence ESF it was thus a relatively simple step to apply this networking logic to a proposal for building an autonomous space there. I am not suggesting MRG was the first or only group to formulate these ideas. In fact, they seemed to emerge simultaneously from many different directions. Rather, I want to illustrate how at least one version of the idea emerged, and further, how networking logics and politics at local, regional, and global scales are often mutually reinforcing.

The Strasbourg No Border Camp in July 2002 provided an initial opportunity to debate the various proposals for building an autonomous space at the ESF in Florence, leading to the now famous formulation: 'one foot in, one foot out'. The debate around the ESF on July 26, 2002 drew significant interest, as dozens of grassroots activists from the Italian *Disobedientes*, Cobas, and PGA-inspired activists around Europe came together to share ideas and experiences. An activist from Berlin began with a brief outline of the situation, "People say everything is open, but a small group makes all the decisions. There are mostly Trotskyists, trade unionists, political parties, and ATTAC, but very

19 The institutional sectors created a more traditional membership organization, which they confusingly, and perhaps manipulatively, called the 'Barcelona Social Forum'.

20 Because the institutional sectors ultimately pulled out themselves, militant anti-capitalists and squatters decided to participate within the Campaign against the EU. Rather than create a separate space, different networks thus divided themselves up internally around distinct commissions and logistical tasks.

21 Cited from a document called, 'Opening the Debate after the Statewide Meeting in Zaragoza: Separating in order to Work Together More Effectively', posted on the bcn2001@yahoo.com listserve on December 4, 2001.

few from networks like PGA or the broader movement. How do we bring radical ideas and proposals without becoming part of the power structure?"

Several argued that we should participate, but organize things differently, highlighting a vision of self-managed social change from below. Many felt it would be better to stay outside, as one activist pointed out, "Participating is a way of legitimating their attempt to make the ESF *the* space of the anti-globalization movement!" Others thought it was more important to intervene, as the Berliner suggested, "In Porto Alegre many people never saw the youth camp; there was not enough interaction. We should have one foot outside, but also another inside". Her position was widely shared, as an Andalusia-based squatter added, "We should organize a different space, beyond, but not against the ESF, although we should also participate within". After a long discussion, the group ultimately decided to release the following statement:

We agreed to launch the idea of constituting a concrete space for those of us who traditionally work with structures that are decentralized, horizontal, assembly-based, and anti-authoritarian; a space that would maintain its autonomy with respect to the "official" space of the ESF, but at the same time remain connected... This would mean... having one foot outside and another inside the ESF... This autonomous space should visibilize the diversity of the movement of movements, but also our irreconcilable differences with respect to models attempting to reform capitalism. The space should not only incorporate differences with the program of the ESF in terms of "contents," but also in terms of the organizational model and forms of political action.²²

Indeed, ideological differences were largely coded as disagreement over organizational process and form.

The European PGA conference in Leiden provided an opportunity for further defining the autonomous space in Florence during a session on September 1, 2002. Some were still reticent about participating, but as one activist argued, "The ESF is a perfect moment of visibility. We are a ghetto here in Leiden; there is very little media coverage". At the same time, there was growing support for a space completely outside the forum. Specific groups could make their own decision about whether to take part within. Others were concerned about being integrated into a social democratic project, leading to consensus about the importance of clearly 'legible' actions to communicate the underlying political distinctions. Indeed, such complex networking politics would involve a delicate balance: "The challenge... consists of making sure, on the one hand, the initiatives are not co-opted; and, on the other hand, avoiding... isolation".²³ We ultimately decided to recast the autonomous space outside the forum, which would allow individual activists and groups to make their own decision about where to position their own feet with respect to the boundaries dividing official and autonomous spheres.

Specific actions and contents were also discussed, and this is where major disagreements emerged. For example, as someone from the *Disobedientes* suggested, "We should organize a series of actions around three issues: global war, labour, and new

22 Cited from www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/index.html, accessed 13 April 2005.

23 Cited from http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/pgaeurope/leiden/autonomous_space.htm, accessed 13 April 2005.

social subjects”. Reflecting an open networking logic, and subtle critique of the *Disobedientes*, an activist from Indymedia-Italy countered that process was equally important, arguing that, “An autonomous space should be defined by open access. We have to create spaces and tools that allow people to come together”. Disagreements over whether spaces should be more or less open or directed are not only found within the official forum process; they are also present along its margins. What began as a single project thus ultimately broke down into parallel autonomous initiatives in Florence, including Cobas Thematic Squares, the *Disobedientes* ‘No Work, No Shop’ space, and Eur@ction Hub.

Proliferation of Autonomous Spaces

The official ESF in Florence surpassed all expectations, involving 60,000 activists from around Europe in debates and discussions, and drawing nearly 1 million to the demonstration against the war in Iraq on November 9, 2002. In addition, many more activists passed through the autonomous initiatives mentioned above, as well as a feminist space called Next Generation (cf. Waterman, 2002). Although criticized for being relatively marginal, the Eur@action Hub, in particular, provided an open space for sharing skills, ideas, and resources; building new subjects; exploring issues related to information, migration, and self-management; and experimenting with new peer-to-peer communication technologies. The project thus manifested a particularly clear horizontal networking logic within its organizational architecture, emphasizing process and form over content. Above all, it was designed to facilitate interconnections, inside the Hub and between the Hub and other spaces around the Forum, as the flyer explained:

Hub is... a connector. It is not a space already marked by pre-established content. Anyone can contribute proposals designed specifically for the Hub, but ‘also connect’ to this space others that might take place in other places or moments in Florence. Hub is also an interconnection tool: for bringing together proposals or ideas that have been dispersed or undeveloped until now, which might acquire greater complexity.²⁴

After Florence, the autonomous space model caught on, becoming standard practice at subsequent events. For example, at the 2003 WSF in Porto Alegre, grassroots activists organized several overlapping parallel spaces, including a follow-up Hub project, the second edition of the *Intergalactika* project, and a forum organized by Z Magazine called ‘Life After Capitalism’. In addition, Brazilian activists hosted a PGA-inspired gathering involving activists from Europe, South, and North America. Although emerging from distinct political contexts and histories, autonomous spaces at the 2004 WSF in Mumbai were even larger, particularly since grassroots movements in India were extremely critical of the institutional NGOs leading the process. These included: Mumbai Resistance (an initiative of Maoist and Gandhian peasant movements), the Peoples Movements Encounter II (led by the Federation of Agricultural Workers and

24 See www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/hubproject.htm, accessed 13 April 2005.

Marginal Farmers Unions), and the International Youth Camp.²⁵ PGA also held another parallel session, involving mostly Asian and European movements.²⁶ Finally, activists organized various parallel initiatives at the second ESF in Paris in November 2003, including an autonomous media center, Metallo medialab, and a highly successful direct action space called GLAD (Space Towards the Globalization of Disobedient Struggles and Actions).

At the same time, many anti-authoritarians have refused to take part in the forum process entirely. With respect to the ESF, Paul Treanor, a Dutch anti-authoritarian, has thus argued that, “The organizers want to establish themselves as ‘the leaders of the European social movements’. They want to become a negotiating partner of the EU (2002)”. As pointed out above, however, the forum process is much more complex, contradictory, and contested, involving anti-capitalists as well as reformers, libertarians as well as vanguardists. On the other hand, many grassroots anti-capitalists recognize the strategic importance of the social forums, as Pablo Ortellado, a Brazilian activist has argued, “The social forums are attracting a wide range of people, many of whom we really want to bring to our part of the movement. It’s not enough to sit and criticize the Forum... We should somehow set our own events and attract those people (2003)”. In a widely circulated essay, Linden Farrer thus comes out in support of a ‘contamination’ strategy:

The best way of working with the ESF [is] being constructive in criticism, attempting to change the organization from inside and outside, preventing liberals from tending towards their self-destructive habits of strengthening existing structures of government. Rather than abolishing the ESF because it had a shaky- but ultimately successful- start, we should work to make the ESF a truly revolutionary force (2002).²⁷

Many grassroots radicals would agree, and if the most recent ESF provides an indication, in ever increasing numbers. Indeed, the cultural politics of autonomous space

25 The largest and most well known alternative space at the WSF in 2004 was Mumbai Resistance (MR), which involved a coalition of 300 political movements and organizations, including Lohiaites, Marxists, Leninists, Maoists, and Sarvodaya workers. MR, which criticized the main forum for its funding practices and its unwillingness to reject capitalism, was initiated at the International Thessaloniki Resistance Camp in June 2003. It took concrete form when the Coordinating Group of the International League of Peoples’ Struggles decided in July 2003 to organize a parallel event during the 2004 WSF. The social composition and political visions characterizing such spaces in Mumbai differed from the largely young, middle class, and urban-based activists (with the exception of Cobas) behind previous alternative spaces at the forums. Previous spaces also were more inspired by a left libertarian vision and a commitment to the politics of autonomy in the strict ideological sense (I want to thank Michal Osterweil for reminding me of this point, personal correspondence). In other words, autonomy can refer to both a specific politics and a structural relationship. In this sense, while recognizing these important differences, I continue to use the term ‘autonomous space’ to characterize MR and other alternative initiatives in Mumbai to signal their structural relationship vis-à-vis the main forum, which captures a key aspect of the emerging networking logic explored here: decentralized coordination among diverse, (structurally) autonomous elements.

26 See Olivier de Marcellus, ‘Divisions and Missed Opportunities in Bombay’, posted to the pga@lists.riseup.net list on 12 February 2004.

27 For a subtle critique of the contamination strategy, and an argument in favor of anti-authoritarians developing their own grassroots networks, if not abandoning the Forums entirely, see Grubacic (2003).

perhaps reached their fullest expression at the European Social Forum in London in October 2004.

European Social Forum- London 2004

As conflict between horizontals and verticals around the London ESF process continued to escalate, numerous activists and groups, some against the forum process and others holding out hope for reform, decided to organize and coordinate a series of grassroots autonomous spaces. Despite important differences with respect to ideology and position vis-à-vis the official Forum, the various alternative projects were united in their commitment to horizontal, directly democratic processes and forms. As a Beyond ESF spokesperson explained during the opening plenary presenting the autonomous spaces at Middlesex University on October 13, 2004, “We have spent six months defining ourselves in opposition to the ESF, but our way of showing opposition is by organizing ourselves in a different way”. Delegates from other spaces were not so much against the Forum itself, but the perceived heavy-handed tactics of the SWP and Socialist Action. As a main organizer of Life Despite Capitalism explained, “To fight the top-down, vertical culture we created the horizontals based on our own culture of openness”. In many ways, the autonomous spaces represented an affirmation of the open space ideal expressed within the Forum charter, as their collective declaration clearly articulates:

We want to create open spaces for networking, exchanges, celebration, thinking, and action. We believe our ways of organizing and acting should reflect our political visions, and are united in standing for grassroots self-organization, horizontality, for diversity and inclusion, for direct democracy, collective decision making based upon consensus.²⁸

The autonomous spaces in London were ultimately more numerous, well attended, and perhaps more fruitful, in terms of generating synergies, cross-fertilization, and debate, than at any previous Forum. Thousands of grassroots activists engaged in a dizzying array of alternative projects, direct actions, and initiatives. Although it was impossible to be everywhere at once, particularly given the long distances between venues, I attended many of the alternative events and workshops, which included:

1. *Beyond ESF* – October 13 to 17, Middlesex University

Beyond ESF was an alternative gathering of anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist struggles, involving hundreds of workshops, discussions, and events organized around five themes: Autonomy and Struggle, No Borders, Repression and Social Control, Zapatismo, and Precarity/Casualization. In addition, activists also used the space to plan and coordinate ongoing activities within grassroots formations like PGA, No Border, or the Dissent Network, which organized a daylong workshop to prepare for the July actions against the G8 in Scotland. Perhaps even more important were the informal networking opportunities around the bar, canteen, vegan kitchen, and hallways.

28 Cited from the free paper ‘Autonomous Spaces’ circulated around the London ESF. For additional information, see www.altspaces.net.

2. *Radical Theory Forum* – October 14, 491 Gallery

Radical Theory involved a series of workshops and discussions among activists and committed intellectuals exploring how theory can inform action. Specific themes included: feminism, post-Marxism, popular education, complexity theory, as well as the politics and organization of the European Social Forum, among many others. The conference was followed by a party with film, art, music, and spoken word.

3. *Indymedia Centre* – October 14 to 17, Camden Centre

The Indymedia Centre provided a space for independent reporting and multi-media production around the ESF and autonomous spaces, including numerous protests and creative interventions. It also housed a bar and public access computing facility, as well as evening cultural events. In addition, the Camden Centre also housed a four-day conference around communication rights and tactical media production.

4. *The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination* – October 14 to 17, Rampart Creative Centre

The Laboratory provided a self-organized space for creative intervention and exchange, where participants shared ideas and tactics through a series of workshops, discussions, and direct action events throughout the city. Some of the specific actions included: Corporate Olympics, the 5th biannual March for Capitalism, Yomango collective shoplifts and Tube parties, and Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army recruitments and trainings.

5. *Mobile Carnival Forum* – October 14 to 17, Rampart and throughout the city

The Carnival Forum was housed in the London to Baghdad bio-diesel double-decker bus, which circulated from site to site around the Forum and other parts of the city. The project specifically used political theatre and music to generate discussions and workshops around various issues, including peace, democracy, and neo-liberalism.

6. *Solidarity Village* – October 13 to 17, Conway Hall and London School of Economics

The Solidarity Village involved a series of projects and initiatives that specifically focused on alternative economies. Concrete spaces included the Land Café, Well Being Space, Art Space for Kids, Local Social Forums Area, the Commons Internet Café, and SUSTAIN! which included presentations, leaflets and information stalls.

7. *Women's Open Day* – October 14, King's Cross Methodist Church

This one-day gathering involved speak-outs, food, video screenings, childcare, and information stalls focusing on the non-remunerated survival work carried

out by women around the world, including breastfeeding, subsistence farming, caring, volunteering, and fighting for justice.

8. *Life Despite Capitalism* – October 16 and 17, London School of Economics

Life Despite Capitalism was a two-day forum for collective debate and reflection around diverse issues and struggles involving the idea of the ‘Commons’. The goal was to begin to generate a new discourse and analysis, including a critique of capitalism and the articulation of alternative values and practices that represent what we are fighting for. These alternatives do not lie in the distant future when capitalism has been abolished, but rather exist here and now. Two series of workshops explored the idea of the Commons in diverse spheres: cyberspace, the workplace, public services, free movement, and autonomous spaces, as well as several cross-cutting themes, including power, networks, democracies, creative excesses, and the commons more generally.

Throughout the London Forum I was thus able to move fluidly across the city’s urban terrain from one space to another, and between the autonomous spaces and the official forum at Alexander Palace and Bloomsbury. Boundaries were diffuse, shifting, and permeable, as spaces literally flowed through and across one another. Indeed, the movement’s broader networking logic was physically expressed through the division of urban space, allowing diverse forms of organization to converge in time, without imposing one form over another. This does not mean there was an absence of interaction and struggle, as illustrated, for example, by the highly public direct action against London Mayor Ken Livingstone. However, conflicts were largely localized in space and time, and were, in fact, productive: making underlying tensions visible, generating collective debate, and pressuring the Forum to abide by its expressed guidelines and ideals. The autonomous spaces thus allowed grassroots radicals to engage in their own alternative forms of political, social, and cultural production, while moving out from their radical ghettos to tactically intervene within the broader forum, and throughout the entire city as well.

Conclusion: From Open to Networked Space

At this point, I hope to have accomplished my first two objectives. On the one hand, I have traced the emergence, diffusion, and implementation of the autonomous space concept with respect to the social forums from my situated experience. I have thus considered complex local networking politics in Barcelona as well as my participation in *Intergalactika*, the IC, and the debates over the “one foot in, one foot out” principle. Finally, I discussed the proliferation of autonomous spaces at recent World and European Social Forums. On the other hand, this paper has also explored the cultural politics of autonomous space from a more theoretical perspective. In this sense, I have argued that building autonomous spaces reflects the underlying networking logic within anti-corporate globalization movements, involving the creation of horizontal ties and connections among distinct elements or nodes across diversity and difference. At the same time, as we have seen, networking logics are never completely dominant, and are

always challenged by competing logics, generating complex networking politics within specific spheres. Given that such political logics are increasingly inscribed directly into organizational architectures, it should come as no surprise that ideological debates have often been coded as struggles over process and form, particularly within and around the social forums. But what does this mean politically? How does the preceding analysis generate a new vision for the social forum process?

If activists have learned anything over the past few years it is that our movements, networks, and groups are exceedingly diverse. Conflicts over political vision, ideology, and organizational form are simply unavoidable – within and between sectors. Indeed, they are constitutive of the broader convergence processes that characterize mass-based movements. At the same time, given such high levels of diversity, it may be impossible to work effectively together within a single space. This does not mean abandoning the Forum, as many radicals and anti-authoritarians would suggest. But neither does it imply a mere strategy of contamination. Rather, it suggests radicalizing our horizontal networking logic by not only continuing to build autonomous spaces within and around the forums, but also by working to inscribe the politics of autonomous space within the very organizational architecture of the Forum itself.

In this sense, the proliferation of autonomous spaces at the London ESF ought not to be viewed as an aberration due to the extremely bitter conflict between horizontals and verticals. Instead, the successful organization of so many interesting, diverse, and often disjunctive spaces represents a model for re-conceptualizing the Forums entirely. Interestingly, the most recent WSF in Porto Alegre in January/February 2005 moved in this direction by shifting from a central site at the Catholic University toward a networked terrain involving diverse thematic areas. Moreover, the youth camp and the various projects housed there, including a new instantiation of *Intergalactika* called the *Caracol*, were geographically situated at the centre of the Forum rather than along its margins. At the same time, however, there is also a danger this kind of shift may represent the cooptation of difference, as opposed to its full expression.

In this sense, rather than view of the Forum as a singular open space, even if networked internally, it should be conceived in the plural as a complex pattern of politically differentiated, yet interlocking networked spaces, open not only within, but also with respect to one another. Boundaries are always diffuse, mobile, and permeable. Despite the contradictions noted above, openness and horizontality are important ideals, but they should be extended outward, reflecting the often conflictual interactions among different spaces and the relationships between them. Indeed, radical networking logics explode any rigid divisions between inside and outside. Such a view recognizes that the Forum is always a work in progress, evolving as diverse networks and groups interact, alternatively connecting, disconnecting, and recombining.

By re-conceiving the Forum as a horizontal network of autonomous spaces that converge across an urban terrain at a given point in time, we would thus be reproducing the organizational logic that allowed activists to successfully organize mass direct actions against multilateral institutions in places like Prague, Quebec, and Genoa. In each of these cities, activists divided up the urban terrain to facilitate and coordinate among diverse forms of political expression. Indeed, diversity of tactics represents the

manifestation of a horizontal networking logic on the tactical plane.²⁹ What I am suggesting is that the forums provide a unique opportunity to implement a similar networking logic through the articulation of alternatives rather than simply protesting what we are against. Of course, much of this work will continue to happen within our own networks, but building mass movements requires periodic moments of broader convergence, interaction, and exchange, however complex and contradictory they may be. In this light, reconstituting the Forum as a multiplicity of horizontally networked spaces does not mean dividing, but rather working more effectively together, and thereby breathing new life into a process that desperately needs continual revitalization.

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29 I refer to diversity of tactics here with respect to the underlying organizational logic, not the merit of any particular tactic. This is not the place to recapitulate debates surrounding violence and non-violence.

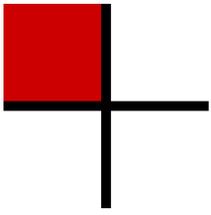
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Notes from the WSF 2005: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Tadzio Mueller

How to describe an event with ca. 150,000 people, and a programme of workshops about as thick as the Sunday newspaper? Well, I guess – and I really don't mean this as some postmodern trope – there are about as many Forums as there are participants, so what I'm about to write may or may not reflect anyone else's experiences.¹

But still, where to start? Maybe with the lack of media coverage in the main papers of at least the countries whose press I sometimes look at (i.e. Sweden, UK, and Germany – so, of course, this is in no way representative, but I think it may be the same all over Europe and the United States). Why was there so little in the Western mainstream press about this gigantic event? Because the process has run out of steam? Because it's not important anymore? Or maybe because, by its very nature as something that's not supposed to be an institution or an organisation, but an 'open space' (never mind that this very concept is self-contradictory, and not a fancy dialectical contradiction, but of the old fashioned logical kind), a Social Forum cannot, in the long run, satisfy the demands of mainstream/profit-driven media. Social Forums are not supposed to produce declarations to be pronounced publicly by big talking heads, large-scale actions with their sexy pictures, or general agreements. In fact, were they to produce general declarations, then they'd cease becoming Forums, and start becoming political parties.

And this prospect I find quite scary: because, if we follow Gramsci, a hegemonic order always requires the integration into the hegemonic bloc of subordinate social forces – their occupation in other words. And since right now we live in a non-hegemonic global order, the powers that be need someone that they can negotiate with, and can please and integrate into their bloc, like they did with trade unions back in the days.² Creating something called 'global civil society' is exactly such an attempt (which is why we should all stop using this ghastly concept). So, if the Forum were to start making

1 For the ultimate, objective, and perfectly democratically legitimated account of the WSF, check out the 'what's hot and what's not' list at <http://hotandnot2005.blogspot.com>. This text was originally an email I wrote to friends to describe my experiences at the Forum. So bear with me if the style occasionally seems too colloquial.

2 For an extended argument explaining this point of view, check <http://fluke.omweb.org/modules/wakka/WhenWeWereWinning>.

general declarations, global demands, etc., suddenly there would be someone to negotiate with, someone respectable, who can make concessions and all that. Someone who can form the junior partner in a new global hegemonic bloc, a new global neo-liberalism with a human face. Someone, in other words, who can sell us out. Or as America Vera-Zavala (a very clever Swedish radical) put it, more eloquently than I: “My fear is that someday the head of the IMF will pick up the phone to call ‘the movement’ and that somebody answers the phone”.³

Alright. So, the Forum is not about agreements, declarations, or even actions (in the radical ‘Caracol Intergalactika’ space at the WSF 2005 we talked about spectacular direct actions for a while – but then we just dropped it, which I thought was excellent). So, what is it about? It’s about connections, about meetings, conversations, flows, convergences, etc., by which I mean: the really important processes at Social Forums happen way below the radar of most media outlets; they happen in all the little meetings and workshops (all hail the International Council’s decision to scrap these ridiculous panels with eight to nine thousand people attending) and informal gatherings that are facilitated by the creation of the Social Forum space. Ideally, Forums are about a counterhegemonic politics *from below*, where the intensification of connections and flows between different projects of resistance enables us to link our struggles (without ‘unifying’ them) in such a way that we can become a serious threat to capital, whilst not having general agreements formulated by a politburo or other such institutions.

In this sense, the World Social Forum 2005 was a success. The number of meetings and intersections of flows was uncountable, and that’s good. Just a few examples of this real globalisation from below: my partner, an anthropologist working with Somali migrants, and more generally with victims of racism in the UK, for the first time met people from the African Social Forum, a process that’s generally been ignored in the European political scene. Then she talked to someone from the UK about what she heard there. This person is carrying that information onward to a meeting in Leeds. Activist researchers from the Global North finally linked up with activist researchers from Latin America, and are continuing their discussions and connections via an e-list and website. We met some Argentinean activists there who we later started working with on arriving in Buenos Aires after the Forum. The Dissent! Network⁴ mobilising against the G8 meeting in July in Scotland linked up with anti-FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas – a primarily US-driven attempt to expand NAFTA to include all of the Americas) campaigners across Latin America, and potentially even with anti-WTO campaigners from Hong Kong (where the WTO will meet at the end of this year). And so on and so forth. And all this happened without any general declarations being signed, any grand agreements formulated – it was counterhegemonic politics without anyone hegemonising them.

So this was the good stuff about the Forum. Here’s the bad stuff. Of course, there were people trying to hegemonise Forum politics: a group of nineteen intellectuals and general bigwigs, many of them members of the International Council (cheekily referred to as the G19 by Forum media) wrote a declaration that they hoped to get somehow seen

3 <http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2003-11/11vera-zavala.cfm>

4 <http://www.dissent.org.uk>

as a general statement by the Forum, calling for all kinds of good stuff, like unconditional debt relief, fair trade, enshrining countries' right to food security, etc. Not that I mind these proposals, but I hope I made clear above why I don't like these kinds of politics: if I were the head of the World Bank, and I wanted to talk to 'civil society', the 'G19' would be a great, respectable group of people to talk to. Good lord, the group even includes two Nobel Prize winners! Connected to this were issues (not new) of the representativeness of the various bodies organising the Forum, in particular the International Council (probably the closest thing the Forum has to a politburo, although with quite a few good people in it). How do you get in, how do they make decisions, etc. – all a bit tricky, that.

Then there were issues of size: the so-called 'solidarity economy' was entirely incapable of supplying the Forum with all that participants needed in terms of food and drink, and so most of the Forum spaces became sort of anarcho-capitalist free-for-alls: from the infamous 'earring avenue' in the youth camp (where crazed hippies aggressively peddled their jewelery); to the ubiquitous sellers of beer and water 'bem gelada'. The amounts of trash produced were of epic proportions, and the atmosphere was far from 'solidaric'. So what does this mean for the future of the Forum? Continuing to grow the Forum in ways surpassing our abilities to democratically organise and sustainably produce and consume might not be the best idea. Split it up, maybe? And: how are size and democracy connected? If we can't organise a 150,000-people Forum democratically and sustainably, as the problems about the representativeness of the organising bodies seem to indicate, then what does this say about our ability to contest capital's and states' control of, say, big urban centres?

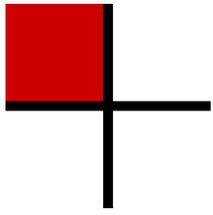
Which in turn connects to yet another serious problem perceived by many participants of the Forum, namely a problem of 'security' (such a terrible word, and so politically occupied by our enemies – but so important). And here's where it gets ugly. The 'International Youth Camp' – a strange creature, somewhere between camp-space for those unable or unwilling to afford/find a hotel, music festival, and supposedly 'self-managed alternative space'; inhabited by 30,000 people and criss-crossed by many, many more – was a terribly unsafe space, especially for women. While it's difficult to find even unofficial numbers of sexual violence and rapes in the space, it's certain that rapes did happen; as did many incidents of sexual violence. This was to the point that women were warned not to walk around alone in the camp at night. In the many, many parties going on there (a lot of Porto-Alegreñ@s and people staying in the camp never did seem to go to workshops, but primarily party a lot) women continuously were grabbed, touched, chatted up, and worse. For the first time in six years of being with my partner I felt I had to physically intervene when two guys on a dancefloor grabbed her at the same time and pulled her in different directions (normally, of course, she is way more hardcore than I and perfectly able to take care of herself). And then there was theft: sooo much stuff was stolen from the camp, it was completely nuts. Some people in our little camp space (a circle of tents housing people somehow connected to Dissent!) were robbed *three* times. Basically, the space was frequently aggressive, unsafe, very very macho, etc.

I had a hard time starting my notes on the WSF, and I'm having an even harder time ending them, let alone summing them up. The encounters of millions of flows excites

me; the issues about representativeness and democracy worry me; and the aggressiveness and violence of the spaces angers me. I'm thinking a lot right now about this whole question: how to *do* counterhegemonic politics without creating new centralised (discursive, material, organisational) structures to replace them with. I saw glimpses of that in the World Social Forum, and I saw glimpses of its opposites. So, whatever anyone else took away from the Forum, I think I can end like this: I jumped into a sea of flows, saw lots, missed much, and was enriched and inspired by many of those I touched. *La lucha sigue*, the Social Forum process goes on. We'll just have to make the good outweigh the bad and the ugly in the future...

the author

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The Intercontinental Youth Camp as the Unthought of the World Social Forum

Rodrigo Nunes

Despite being as old as the World Social Forum (WSF) itself – it has existed since the first edition in Porto Alegre, 2001 – the Intercontinental Youth Camp (IYC) remains a mostly unknown and untold story, perhaps even to the people who ‘lived’ there for five (2001, 2002) or ten days (2003): the way it was organized, the understanding of the WSF as open space it involved, its political origins and outcomes remain a very obscure part of the history of the WSF, even now when so much academic work has started to be done about it.

From its humble beginnings in 2000 – about 1,500 people, mostly Brazilians – to its peak in 2003 – 23,500 people from all over the world, its own social currency and a full-fledged cultural and political programme connected to, but also arguably more wide ranging than, the WSF’s – the kind of politics put into practice in the Youth Camp could already have had some of the impact that the move to India in 2004 has had in the Social Forum process.

This paper aims at describing what this impact could have been, and discussing why it did not happen; it does so by telling this untold story, including the ideas and concepts employed in the organization of the Youth Camp, behind-the-scenes stories of how it was organized, and a debate on what it tells us about the different political cultures (Portoalegrense, Brazilian, Latin American, generational) that played a great part in the first three WSF, and what this reveals about the political culture and practice of the Social Forum process itself.

A Short Genealogy of the WSF and the IYC

One thing lacking in many of the recent accounts and even critiques of the WSF is a proper genealogy: a study of the political forces that shaped it from the inside and outside, of what Nietzsche calls the *pudenda origo*, the humble origins, as opposed to a

grand narrative of men who had ideas and how these ideas produced important outcomes. Such a genealogy does not, and cannot, begin with the WSF itself; it must refer to the political panorama of the late 1990s where it appeared.

From Chiapas to the WSF

After more than a decade of neo-liberal advance in the world, and the events of 1989-1990 that saw all officially existing, self-appointed alternatives to capitalism in the Soviet bloc wiped out of the map, the mid-1990s saw a period of rampant financial speculation and the announced success – in fact, inevitability – of capitalist globalization, encapsulated in Thomas Friedman’s infamous ‘vanilla’ theory:

There is no more chocolate chip, there is no more strawberry swirl, there is only plain vanilla and North Korea. (...) Not only is all that we’ve got plain vanilla, but everyone is basically happy about it.¹

Then it happened: in the first hours of 1994, the Zapatista uprising in Mexico created a certain amount of disruption around the edge of this triumphant picture. Not a typical Latin America guerrilla of the 1960s-70s, it aimed not at taking power and creating a socialist regime; its communication was not the usual cliché-ridden leftwing discourse, but full of irony, poetry and sophistication; those who had ‘put on masks so that they could be seen’ wanted to make the voice of the indigenous communities living in subhuman conditions in the poor region of Chiapas heard; and these voices cried for ‘justice, dignity and freedom’, and the establishment of new, horizontalised, community-centred forms of governance.

Not only was the quick success of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) in establishing a territorial autonomy from the central government a wake-up call for people all over the world, its subsequent success in surviving as a political force depended on the support, material and immaterial, of international public opinion. This turned Chiapas into an important locus of political inspiration and interchange, which led to the organization of the First International Encounter Against Neo-liberalism and for Humanity in 1996.

If anything, this is the direct forerunner of the WSF. What was remarkable about it was that, instead of looking for support in traditional Western leftwing parties or international NGOs, the people the EZLN spontaneously gathered around belonged to small, grassroots groups espousing principles of horizontal, networked-based organisation, whose appearance itself was a relatively new element in the political scene. These were also the groups organized behind the organisation of the Second Encounter the following year in Spain, which led to the creation in 1998 of People’s Global Action, the first international ‘anti-globalisation’ network, self-defined as a ‘coordinating instrument’ for groups and movements struggling against international financial institutions such as the IMF and the WTO.

1 Friedman, T. (2003) *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*; cited in Notes From Nowhere. *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*. London: Verso, 500.

These first steps in organisation would eventually come to full fruition in the anti-WTO and anti-G8 protests of J18, Seattle and Prague. These massive, plural, spectacular demonstrations against capitalist globalization for the first time in years managed to break through the 'consensus' of the 'vanilla theory' (what the French have dubbed *la pensee unique* of neo-liberalism) and make newspaper headlines all over the world. For the first time in years, the idea of inevitability in the ways of global economy was challenged, and mostly by network- and internet-based, non-traditional, new forms of organisation, which instead of couching their political agendas within the framework of this or that nation-state (as political parties and trade unions, for obvious reasons, are bound to do), used the global situation as their background and simultaneously demanded for and helped create a transnational political sphere for their discourse and practices.

From Seattle to Porto Alegre

It is only then that the WSF comes into the picture. Despite much having been said about its being something like an international party, NGO, corporate business or even CIA-funded conspiracy to coopt antagonistic movements, I would like to argue here that its history is at once more complex (as in less simplistic and more context-dependent) and simpler (as in less dependent on sweeping assumptions about the overarching power of this or that international agency). A good way to start might be by examining the decision to hold it in Porto Alegre, which moves our genealogy further back in time.

Sometime in 2000, after events such as Seattle, the moment was ripe for another, more organized (and perhaps less threatening-looking) mediatic attack against neo-liberal hegemony. This, the initiative of groups with an older background and outlook, would take the form of an anti neo-liberalism event, gathering intellectuals and movements from across the world, to raise the profile of the struggle and reach out to larger numbers of people. It would be pitched as the counterpart of the World Economic Forum in Davos, hence the name (World Social Forum, the 'social' versus the 'economic') and the date when it should be held. The political forces involved – ATTAC and Brazil-based social movements and NGOs – could quite naturally spot Brazil as the perfect place in the so-called 'Global South' to hold it; from there to choosing Porto Alegre, it was a very quick step.

All the Brazilian actors involved had some kind of long-standing relationship with the Workers' Party (PT), the largest leftwing party in Latin American history. To understand what this means, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of PT in the late 1970s. After almost two decades of military dictatorship, the last years of the 1970s saw a progressive 'thawing out' of the political sphere: a certain level of dissent was tolerated, political prisoners and exiles were given amnesty (along with torturers and the like, it must be said), and many of those started joining the ranks of MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement), the only 'opposition' party available. Many elements were lying around, waiting for a catalyst: the 'comunidades de base' organized by the left of the Catholic Church (Liberation Theology); growing peasant movements, especially in the south; the environmental and trade unionist struggle of the 'seringueiros' (rubber tappers) in the North; ex-guerrillas, remnants of various small splinter groups who had reneged the politics of the Communist Party in the 1960s; the birth of independent trade

unionism; various political tendencies within the student movement. The catalyst came in the form of the strikes in Sao Paulo, led by a trade unionist called Lula; it was then that the idea of organising a new, grassroots-based party came about, which resulted in the foundation of PT in 1981.²

PT was not only the first case of a leftwing party in Brazil to be born out of struggles ‘on the ground’ rather than created by a mostly middle-class, educated elite; it was also an important experiment in democracy. Most of the elements that came together in its foundation remained active in themselves, despite acting under the umbrella of the new party; the organisation was based on the local nodes that had come about during the ‘pro-PT movement’ that preceded the creation of the party, and these possessed a good deal of autonomy. Everyone who, like me, grew up in the Brazil of the 1980s, felt its impact on the political scene and the role it played in politicising and engaging a great part of the population. Just seven years after its creation, the party was elected for the local government in Porto Alegre, the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where it went on to remain 16 years in power, and implement some of their most innovative policies, such as the Participatory Budget.³

In 2000, when the first WSF was planned, PT was a rather different party. As a result of being in power in many cities and states, its internal democracy had grown a lot stiffer, and its politics, perhaps as a response to the neo-liberal decade Brazil had just gone through, closer to the centre; it had grown to resemble more and more a ‘normal’ party, with its leaderships and authorities. Porto Alegre remained the place where it was arguably closer to its origins, and in 1998 Olivio Dutra, the first ‘petista’ to be elected mayor there, won the elections for state governor. Thus, the WSF could go ahead with the backing – and funding – of both the local and the state governments.

Much is said about the role played by PT in the first three editions of the WSF; it is noted, for example, that the WSF Organizing Committee – a body composed of ATTAC, the Brazilian Commission for Justice and Peace,⁴ the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), the largest Brazilian trade union federation (CUT), the NGOs IBASE, Cives and Rede Social, and the NGO association ABONG – was composed of organisations that had some level of involvement with PT. This is true, especially in the case of the MST and the CUT; more than simply ‘related’, they were cut from the same cloth, came from the same ‘primordial soup’ whence PT sprung forth in the early 1980s. What must be noticed here is that, more than simply an example of an ‘infiltration’

2 It should be remarked how different this is from the political history of Argentina, for example, where State repression claimed the lives of around 20,000 activists, effectively wiping out much of the existing political forces on the left; this meant that these were much weaker at the end of the military dictatorship, and also made it more difficult for something to act as a catalyst. When something like this happened – with the 2000 crisis known to Argentineans as ‘19/20’ – it was met by a political scene with a number of self-organised grassroots movements on one side, and a myriad small political parties on the other.

3 Now functioning in various towns and even states across Brazil, the Participatory Budget is both a policy and a method of governance that allows the population, divided into regional and thematic areas and through an elaborate system of open assemblies and elected councils, to choose the priorities for the application of a part of the overall budget, and monitor its employment.

4 A commission of the National Confederation of Brazilian Bishops (Catholic).

tactics on the part of the party, this resulted from the fact that there are very few political actors in the Brazilian left that are not in some way related to it; rather than a conscious strategy, this was a contingency of local politics: if you were going to do something in Brazil, it was impossible not to do it in an environment shaped by the presence of the Workers' Party.

This was the most important role played by PT: helping define the landscape, rather than having a coordinated intervention such as choosing speakers or plenary themes. What seemed to be the common thread among the PT-related actors – the state government, some of the OC members – was not orders emanating from some point, but a shared understanding of what other political actors should be included, and what the Forum should look like.

However, the point to be made by means of this genealogy is: whereas the wave of protests that created the global political space where the WSF could happen was mostly the result of a new political culture and where 'young' people (whatever that means) had a prominent role, the organisation of the WSF was shaped by older, previously-existing political cultures and forces. In the Youth Camp, this came to be defined in generational terms: 'new' and 'old political generation'. This leads us to the subject of this article.

The First WSF and the First IYC

What did the first WSF look like? Clearly, the idea was a mixture of old-style politics and NGO culture. On the one hand, a place for people to gather to listen to the 'thinking heads' of the global movement, who could illuminate the ways ahead; on the other, a vast amount of workshops, many of which dealing with local problems and solutions, most of which presented by NGOs.⁵ The two categories in which one could take part were 'listener' and 'delegate' – a rather pointless one, considering there was no voting to be done, and most delegates were listening most of the time.

As such, this did not have much to do with something like Seattle: no big warehouses turned into convergence centres where people could crash with their sleeping bags, no spokescouncils, no communal meals. It was meant for a political world where people could afford hotels and restaurants, and would not be in the least fussed by the fact that the event took place in the very comfortable facilities of a private university where Coca-Cola vending machines could be found in the corridors. It seemed presented both as a one-off and as unrelated to the events of recent years – the only official acknowledgement of which being, perhaps, the resonance of the title of the opening march: 'Against Neo-liberalism and for Life'.

The Youth Camp came about as a very practical consequence of this situation: despite the fact that the event had the potential to mobilise a great number of students and

5 The immediate Brazilian forerunner of the WSF was the Rio 1992 Summit, where outside of the governmental meetings a big event was organised by environmental groups and NGOs; that was indeed when NGO culture became visible in mainstream Brazilian politics.

young people in general, no thought whatsoever had been put by the organisers into making this possible. Therefore, the idea was raised as an emergency solution to provide accommodation for lots of people who otherwise would have been prevented from going to Porto Alegre. As it happens, the city has a massive public park right in its centre; just the perfect place for people to come and put up their tents for five days.

The organisation of the Youth Camp, as much as of the WSF itself, was a very local affair: less than two months before the event took place, a number of youth groups got together as the WSF Youth Committee and negotiated with the state and local governments their financial and structural support. To say that it was a local affair means that it was a natural consequence of its political landscape: since most youth organisation in Brazil is channelled through political parties, the groups involved were basically the youth of two different tendencies of PT,⁶ and that of two other, smaller parties, PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil) and PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers' Party, a group expelled from PT in 1992).

It is clear, then, where the name 'Youth Camp' came from; it makes sense in most Latin American countries, where it is used as a political category by leftwing political parties. Most of these people are engaged in student politics, which is heavily taken over by organised party structures. Again, it is a good example of how existing political cultures helped shape the Forum: in their wish to bring together 'intercontinental' 'youth', the organisers were unaware of how badly the concept translated for those people who were in Seattle and Prague. As I shall argue later, this self-branding may have been one of the Youth Camp's downfalls.

In any case, there were only two continents represented at the first IYC, Europe and the Americas. And in the end, it served mostly as free accommodation: of the 1,500 to 2,000 people who lived there for five days, most would take the bus to the Catholic University in the morning and attend the official event. A small cultural programme was organized for the evenings, mostly revolving around a very small stage; still, most people would rather go to the big concerts happening just round the corner at the Por-do-Sol Amphitheatre. A small 'political' programme was devised as well, which consisted of a 'Youth Plenary' in the mould of a Brazilian students' encounter; it was attended by around 70 people, almost all of which belonging to one of the groups involved in the organization. Naomi Klein was said to be expected, but she did not show up; she probably did not miss much.

6 These two were Left Articulation (AE) and Socialist Democracy (DS); the latter is the largest PT tendency in Rio Grande do Sul, to which former Porto Alegre mayors Pont (1997-2000) and Verle (2002-2004) and vice-governor Rossetto (1999-2002) are affiliated. The Brazilian chapter of the Fourth International – Unified Secretariat, it is the only tendency that really became involved in the WSF (as did its sister organisations in other countries, such as the LCR – Revolutionary Communist League – in France). Contrary to what many people think, President Lula's tendency, the nationally-majoritarian Articulação, never had much interest in organising the event.

The Second IYC, and How it (Arguably) Surpassed the WSF

Many things changed between the first and the second editions of the WSF/IYC. On the WSF's part, the realization that the experiment had succeeded and could be more than a one-off led to the issuing of the Charter of Principles, which defined the Forum as an open space and not a 'locus of power',⁷ and the establishment of the International Council (IC). On the IYC's part, organization started as early as ten months before, when the WSF Youth Committee became the Youth Committee. It sought to replicate the change in the organizational logic of the WSF – where the IC was responsible for the politics, while the Brazilian Organizing Committee (BOC) dealt with on the ground executive decisions – in having a National Youth Committee and a Rio Grande do Sul Youth Committee, the executive body in Porto Alegre. This, however, would prove not to be such a good idea.⁸

Many things had changed in the world as well: the heavy repression in Gothenburg and Genoa and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 meant a further widening of the gap between those groups involved in direct action and the ones organizing the WSF; where the latter saw the need to distance themselves from anything that could be labelled violent, the former saw themselves as having been left to their own devices and, in some cases, criminalised both by the State and the corporate media *and* by political forces on the left. The gap was made evident at the WSF IC meeting in Barcelona,⁹ when the now-extinct, PGA-related Catalunyan MRG (Movimiento de Resistencia Global), having been invited to join the IC, replied by organising an occupation of the meeting to ask why other, similar groups were not invited, and to expose the contradiction in a network belonging to a representative body.¹⁰ On the other hand, the crisis in Argentina had given rise to various forms of self-managed grassroots experiments, and provided the world with a vivid picture of the depths neo-liberalism could create, as well as where the alternatives to it could come from.

The Youth Committee, in the meantime, underwent a very significant transformation. Gone were some of the original political party youths; in came new elements, such as queer groups, the National Homeless Boys and Girls Movement, the growing Porto Alegre hip hop movement, and lots of individuals and smaller groups. One of these was to provide extremely valuable input: the Free Metropolitan Council of Architecture Students (COLMEA). Along with the less-structured, less party-influenced organising practices of the Architecture students' movement, they brought with them the concept of the Youth Camp as a city. Both things were what would start setting the IYC apart from the WSF.

7 *World Social Forum Charter of Principles*. Approved by the International Council of the WSF in July 20th 2001.

8 One important difference is that where the executive centre of the IYC was Porto Alegre, the BOC office was in Sao Paulo; contrary to what many people believe, the centre of the WSF process in Brazil is the latter, not the former.

9 April 28th – 30th 2002. Report available on http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.asp?id_menu=3_2_2_3&cd_language=1

10 Cf. Juris, this issue.

The IYC as a City

'I still have to go to work. The Forum won't make a blind bit of difference to my life', said the Portoalegrese on his way to work, before storming off the overcrowded bus, under the curious looks of a mostly European throng of delegates on their way to the Catholic University in January 2001.

The scene stuck with me as a perfect example of what was wrong with the WSF; like a huge circus, it would come to town, stay for a few days and go away without leaving many traces apart from the boost to local economy. A strange kind of circus, indeed; more people came from out of town to watch than to perform.

The IYC that year would start to present an alternative. In thinking itself as a city within the city, it not only had to deal with its relation to what was there before and would still be there after the event had ended; it also had to consider what it meant to be a city under the motto 'another world is possible'. This was done simply by tapping into what the creativity of social movements everywhere was producing. Whereas the second WSF had an emphasis on 'proposing alternatives' (another natural response to the post-9/11 attempt at conflating opposition to capitalist globalization and terrorism), the IYC was all about practicing them, and showing that they already existed.

Thus, whereas the WSF remained within the expensive buildings of the Catholic University, all the common spaces at the IYC were built with environment-friendly techniques, such as employing vernacular technology (mud, wood etc.), or recycled waste (plastic, milk cartons, etc.). Whereas the WSF still struggled to make itself heard by corporate media, and only spoke to that, the IYC was the only place for alternative media, with a free-software-based computer lab and a radio station shared by Indymedia, local community and free radios etc.; instead of Coca-Cola vending machines, most of the food was provided by social movements, organic producers and solidarity economy enterprises, and part of the litter produced was recycled by a local cooperative; while the WSF remained an event, the Harmonia Park¹¹ was a space for people to live and share, with a (although entirely successful) self-management proposal that divided the tents into zones and expected people to share the responsibility for things such as security and cleaning.

This was almost entirely the work of the Rio Grande do Sul Youth Committee based in Porto Alegre; the national body, in the meantime, had turned into a 'locus of power' taken over by political party youth groups, who just carried the infighting and practices characteristic of Brazilian student politics into the process. They were not particularly interested in the arcane discussions on how the space could and should be; they were more interested in how the Youth Camp could be used for their agendas.

11 The name of the 3km² park in central Porto Alegre that has housed the IYC is in itself, as many things there, a political issue. Although officially named after the founder of the largest media empire of Southern Brazil, many people resist to that by calling it after the farm that used to be in that area, Harmonia ('harmony'). Cf. map next page.



This is a bird's eye view of the Youth Camp (on the left), the small neighbouring favela (centre) and the MST camp (upper right hand side) taken in 2002. In 2003 and 2005, the rest of the park area (treeless area in the upper left) would also be occupied as well as the strip of land by the lake. The areas under the trees are also all occupied with tents. Photo credit: Leandro Anton

In an unprecedented move within the WSF to strengthen the ties with the (mostly) Global North groups who had been prominent in the anti-WTO and anti-G8 mobilisations, and to establish a line of continuity with recent history, the city was named ‘the city of youth Carlo Giuliani’; some friends of the young Italian who was murdered by the Genovese police showed up, and built a totem in the central square of the Youth Camp as a tribute. Besides, a specific space was provided for an encounter of horizontal, anti-hierarchical groups from all over the world, the Intergalactika Laboratory of Global Resistance.¹² The participation of Brazilian groups, however, was remarkably small, and by then most eyes were turned to Argentina anyway; after the encounter, some of the ‘Northerners’ who attended went to Buenos Aires, which was to create strong ties between groups in Argentina and Europe and North America; not much, however, happened in Brazil, let alone in Porto Alegre.

If the Intergalactika Laboratory was the result of the work from different parts of the world and some people in Porto Alegre, the National Youth Committee devoted itself to organising something called the International Youth Encounter. Symptomatically held in a big room at the Catholic University, it was an amplified version of the Youth Plenary of 2001: without a clear purpose, with a chair full of representatives from big youth organisations directly or indirectly connected to political parties, it came crashing down when there could be no agreement on its bombastic final statement: some groups demanded that it were titled ‘a socialist world is possible’, whilst others argued that not everyone in the room was a socialist, and the vast majority probably could not care less.

That could not diminish the impact and success of the IYC – in fact, it helped to prove a point. The IYC made many of the WSF-related headlines, and most of the pictures: for the media who could only see exoticism in what was going on, what could be better than thousands of fresh-faced, body-pierced, tattooed, dreadlocked youngsters living in tents? Or the bonfire in the middle of the central square, around which people gathered everyday at sunset to join the epitomic Mexican shaman Oscar? There were 12,500 people from all continents living there in those five days, and the IYC had its own programme of cultural activities (music, films, visits to MST and MTD¹³ settlements, exhibitions) and workshops where the emphasis was on collective, informal environments rather than the ‘talking head’ framework employed by the WSF.

Still, most of the comments read afterwards focused on bad aspects, like the showers not being clean – showing perhaps that some people understood that not as a space they were responsible for, but as an event like a concert. Even thornier was the police issue, which arguably had more to do with the local political environment of those years than with the Forum as such: the PT state government had started tackling head on the problem of institutionalised violence and bigotry in the police – the ostensive police

12 The first Intergalactika Laboratory of Global Resistance was attended by people belonging to groups such as MRG (Spain), AAARG (France), Disobbedienti (Italy), Reclaim the Streets! (UK), Colectivo 501 (Argentina), as well as Independent Media Centres belonging to the Indymedia network from all over the world, and ATTAC ‘youth’ groups from places such as Argentina and Germany.

13 The acronym ‘MTD’ is shared by movements of unemployed workers in Brazil and Argentina; there is one important difference between the two countries, however, in that whereas in the latter this is a generic name for various local groups with different political profiles, in Brazil there is one national organisation with that name.

presence inside the park, allegedly there to protect the campers from the possibility of theft, was clearly instructed not to act against the ‘visitors’; there was no case of anyone being arrested for drug possession, even though drug use was also quite ostensive. Were they there to repress any possible riot, as most outsiders complained? It is hard to say, since nothing of the kind happened. The state government was under permanent attack from the press for being ‘soft’ on ‘criminals’ like the MST, and the homeless movement had occupied a building right in the middle of the opening march that year. It was possible to tell from the looks of some of the policemen they would have loved to lunge on us; it was also clear they were under pressure from above not to do it.¹⁴

These are just a few examples of how the second IYC seemed to be a great opportunity for dialogue that was partially lost. There was never any dialogue between the two extremes of the ‘youth’ assembled – the youths of political parties and the horizontal, non-hierarchical networks – the two inhabited parallel universes. Insofar as the latter political culture was more characteristic of the groups coming from the global North, and the former from the global South (and specifically Brazil), an exchange between these different cultures never really happened. Finally, as it could be seen from the subsequent negative comments, many people missed the point of what the IYC was trying to do. The sense of shared space was never really a shared one. The differences remained mostly where they were, and the ‘autonomous individuals’ working in the organization were often caught in the crossfire between the two camps, trying to mediate a few common grounds.

Still, for those paying attention, the IYC pointed ways forward. Not only was it the first time that the historical link between Seattle and the WSF was explicitly made from within; it also pointed to new ways of practicing politics that seemed increasingly at odds with what the Forum had been so far. The second IYC wholeheartedly embraced the ‘prefigurative politics’ of those new movements, trying to ‘be the change it wanted to see’. The comparison between the Intergalactika Laboratory and the World Youth Encounter pointed to another problem of the WSF: if it was supposed to be a place for people to get together to network and coordinate, what was the point in having hundreds fill a room to listen to a few people no-one knew who had put there? Unfortunately, between the cynical, self-interested support and an almost immediate rejection, there seemed to be few people left to ask these questions.

It was by then that the concept of ‘new political generation’ started being used by people in Porto Alegre. What it meant did not have much to do with age as such: it referred to new ways of organising and practicing politics, to that new political sensibility that had made itself visible in the late 1990s. Thus, the ‘new’ referred to the

14 The IYC 2003 already took place under the new, centre-right state government, who had used the ‘crisis of public security’ as one of the staples of its campaign. On the afternoon of the penultimate day some policemen repressed an Indigenous girl bathing naked in the open-air showers, which led to a ‘naked protest’ later that evening. The police said they would not do anything to the protesters if they stayed within the park, but when around thirty of them tried to walk to the Por-do-Sol Amphitheatre they were charged at by policemen on horseback, leaving between 5 to 10 people wounded. Generating a rift between the ‘petistas’ and the ‘autonomous’ inside the IYC, the IYC OC was entirely bypassed by the WSF organizers and some local PT politicians, who decided they would take the problem in their hands. Nothing happened.

appearance of new practices and new political actors, not to age. And it was true that, from 2002 on, the IYC had little to do with 'youth' as such, either in the sense of 'young people' or with the qualification 'in a political party'; the involvement of social movements such as the MST, homeless, environmentalist, free software, solidarity economy, Argentinean *piquetero* and *desocupado*¹⁵ groups – all implicated in the functioning of the 'city' – blurred definitions and made the picture much more complex.

Therefore, when the Bangkok meeting of the WSF International Council later that year decided that the IYC was an integral part of the WSF, and should happen wherever the WSF went, the recognition had a bittersweet taste. Was it because the 'old' political generation that ran the show had realized they had underestimated the Youth Camp? Was it because they thought it was useful for establishing a connection with those groups – or that political sensibility – that had got the ball rolling in Seattle? Or was it because the concept of 'youth' sounded most unthreatening, since it either meant fairly depoliticised young people, or the young people who would 'grow up' within the framework of an older type of politics? Or was it because it brought numbers and made good copy, and they had not cared to pay attention to what had been done there? Was it because they recognized all those volunteers were indeed very competent free labour?

Some of these questions would answer themselves in time.

Porto Alegre 2003, and How the Future Failed to Pass

The failed experience of the National Youth Committee and the resounding flop of the World Youth Encounter it had organized led to its dissolution. The decision-making and executive bodies were merged into what became the Porto Alegre-based IYC Organizing Committee; by now, it had grown larger and undergone several transformations in its composition: many new groups, movements and individuals had joined, quite a few others had left. The relative weight of the youths of political parties had grown much smaller, and it was clear that now the 'autonomous individuals' by far outnumbered the amount of people who were in any kind of political organization. It was under these conditions, with the bittersweet experience of the previous year, that the work on the next IYC began.

By now there was not only a very clear distribution of tasks among working groups (infrastructure, environment, culture, communication, food, etc.), the idea of what to do was a lot clearer. The point was how to do the same, but better and bigger: the next IYC was to last eleven days (spanning the World Education Forum and the WSF) and the expected attendance was 30,000.

In fact, the third IYC tried to improve on the second's improvements. 'Only' 23,500

15 'Desocupado' is the word Argentinean movements use for 'unemployed'; 'piquetero' is literally someone who practices the tactic of picketing – one of the most recurrent (and efficient) methods the Argentinean MTDs have for getting governmental response to their demands.

people showed up,¹⁶ but this meant a substantial increase in the area employed, which included the annexation of a nearby patch which was then officially declared part of the park by the local government. The spaces for seminars and workshops were exported to the other side of the avenue separating the park from the shore of Lake Guaiba, a stretch of public land very seldom used by anyone. New public toilets were built with money donated by the Geneva local government. The other things – free software computer lab, eco-constructed spaces, food provided by organic producers, social movements and solidarity economy enterprises etc. – were all there, but in larger quantities. What was probably the greatest novelty is that now the ‘city’ had its own internal currency as well: called ‘Sol’ (from ‘solidarity’, but also ‘sun’ in Portuguese and Spanish), it could be exchanged for *reais*¹⁷ on a 1:1 rate, and was accepted by all the stalls inside the camp and some outside, thus providing an incentive for people to spend their money there, which in turn helped the profits of those groups providing the food. There was an advance in the self-management process, and some of the areas of the Camp indeed became pretty much self-managed.¹⁸



Another area that tried to introduce new ideas was culture. ‘Culture’ in the WSF had always meant ‘entertainment’, usually translating into big concerts; a similar thing could be said about the IYC, although by dint of its very nature of a diverse environment where people shared the same space for days, it was very natural that a whole different level of cultural exchange and cooperative creation would be permanently taking place. There was some attempt at tapping into this, while at the same time adding another layer of politics to it, inspired by the growing barter trade movement in Argentina; that led to the Cultural Exchange Fair, which employed its own internal currency (half-jokingly called ‘Moon’). This, however, worked only for a few days; perhaps the most successful attempt at updating the WSF’s cultural agenda – or rather, to challenge its instrumentalising and simplistic approach to culture – was the Flag of the Flags, a patchwork of flags of parties, groups and movements collected at the IYC and sewn together by a local solidarity economy cooperative. Dissolving the various ‘logos’ into one, it created a multitudinous visual identity where all logos became none, and questioned ideas like ‘the work of art’ and ‘authorship’: it had no author, or a multitude of them; it was not made to be hung and shown, but to be carried in the streets.

16 Examining the official numbers of the WSF, it can be said that the IYC steadily followed the growth of the former, always housing around a third of the overall attendance.

17 *Real* is the Brazilian currency.

18 It is interesting to notice that the areas where this was more effective were occupied by groups with a living experience in self-management practices, such as Argentinean *piqueteros*.

It was this idea of a global sphere of cooperation and production, innovation and transformation, exchanging in ways that were not necessarily mediated by capitalism that was translated in the word ‘community’ in the call-out to the Youth Camp. The first ‘official’ text of the WSF to employ the expression ‘movement of movements’, peppered with ironic covert quotations, it went against the grain of the overhyped celebration of ‘the spirit of Porto Alegre’ of that year’s edition in saying:

The springtime of the peoples does not begin in Porto Alegre. It begins nowhere, it begins everywhere, in each place where men and women are today experimenting with forms of living in society that go beyond capital.

However, (...) this has been one of the places to which people have looked to see that yes, other worlds are not only possible, but are being bred today. The present is pregnant with the future, and the future lasts a long time.¹⁹

By then, it was already common usage to say that the WSF was not an event, but a process. In using these words, the IYC was once again trying to create a line of continuity between what came before the first edition in 2001 and the process that had come to exist after it. However, it seemed that it was more of a process for some than others: while some groups were indeed coming together and working on common campaigns and actions (e.g. the Social Movements Network), many others remained mere observers, and many parts of the potential constituency were not even in the organisers’ imagination.



Inside the eco-constructed
Independent Media Centre in
2003. The community and free
radios were next door.
Photo credit: Eduardo Seidl

The WSF had grown to be a much stronger, but apparently increasingly self-referential, self-congratulatory process. Besides, by dint of its spreading through regional forums to other areas (Europe, Argentina, India), new local dynamics of cooperating and clashing political cultures started adding up to the overall complexity. The centripetal movement that brought actors from more and more different places towards the ‘centre’ that could

19 Intercontinental Youth Camp Organizing Committee ‘We Are New, but Are Also the Same as Always’, Call-out for the Third Intercontinental Youth Camp, in Intercontinental Youth Camp Organizing Committee. *Camper’s Guide to the Third Intercontinental Youth Camp*, 6.

be identified as the International Council was a success according to all standards the main powerbrokers in the process could have; what they failed to see was the corresponding centrifugal movement, that made other actors drift further away from the Social Forces process precisely because of the local forces that started constituting themselves around it.

That would be visible in the sequel to the Intergalactika Laboratory in 2003. The European groups involved had already gone through their own social forum, where instead of dealing with forces they were not very familiar with (MST, CUT, PT, etc.), they could see nodes of power being organised around the more traditional left they were critical of in their countries. Many of them had grown more critical of the whole Social Forum experience, and that year's Intergalactika, despite having been very positive for those who attended, was a mostly internal affair, very little publicised and invisible for those who were not already 'in the loop'.²⁰

In fact, most activities that year apart from the massive official rally-like plenaries were very badly publicised. Both the 'main' WSF and the IYC had serious organisational failures in making the programme and the spaces for workshops and seminars available. The feeling was of something huge, but amorphous; perhaps due to the aftermath of Genoa and 9/11 having sunken in, or because of the smell of the new Gulf War that hung heavily in the air, or the uncritical celebration of PT's presidential victory, or perhaps because of the sheer size of everything – the crowds, the uncountable plenaries – the general mood seemed to be one of slightly pointless, rather alienating celebration, as if the 100,000-strong attendance meant transformation in itself. If after the decision taken by the WSF International Council at the Bangkok meeting the IYC seemed poised to finally receive some recognition that would go beyond the acknowledgement of its existence, that year's WSF simply seemed a big effort with no output at all. Not only because they were happy to see the big picture become a lot more complicated and the Brazilian Organising Committee having to share some of its power, most people in the IYC Organising Committee were quite glad to know that the next edition was going to be in India.

After India

Not having been to India, I am not in a position to evaluate what happened there. What I can do is sketchily present how the 'transfer of knowledge' (and decision-making power) happened between Porto Alegre and Mumbai, and the impact the experience of the WSF 2004 had in the Brazilian organisers.

After the International Council meeting in Porto Alegre that decided the following WSF would be in India, two 'safeguard clauses' were introduced by the Brazilian Organising Committee: one, that it should come back in 2005; two, that the BOC would become the

20 For a lively report that also sketches the kind of 'critique from the periphery' I will advocate in the last section, cf. Osterweil, M. (2003) 'Decentering the Forum: Is Another Critique of the Forum Possible?', in Sen, J., A. Anand, A. Escobar, and P. Waterman (eds.) *The World Social Forum: Challenging Empires* [http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1557.html].

Executive Secretariat (ES) of the International Council, thus still being able to actively engage with the organizing process in India. No such thing happened with the IYC; there was very little ‘independent’ contact between Porto Alegre and Mumbai, and no prioritisation on the part of the ES in terms of helping some kind of exchange to take place. This might have had something to do with the fact that some of the main actors in India were the youths of Communist parties, who would probably recognize their Brazilian counterparts as either too ‘autonomous’, or as PT members. In the end, the ES provided four plane tickets for people from the Porto Alegre IYC OC (three ‘autonomous’, one a PT member) to travel to Mumbai.

It is obvious, however, that the WSF 2004 represented a new point of departure for the process. For the first time not in charge of the executive decisions, the BOC/ ES watched as the Indian Organising Committee refused money from the Ford Foundation, employed free software on all levels, and instead of the comfortable installations of a top-level university held the main event in an abandoned factory whose inside was transformed by means of relatively cheap, vernacular architectural techniques. More importantly, the plenaries in which the ‘intellectuals’ of the ‘movement’ spoke were largely unattended, whereas the self-organised activities overcrowded rooms. Even the cultural programme was a big challenge to the lacklustre and limited understanding shown by the three Porto Alegre editions. From now on, the actors involved in the Indian process were forces not to be reckoned without, and the Brazilian groups had to show they were capable of keeping up.



One of the eco-constructed workshop spaces by the river in Porto Alegre.
Photo credit: Eduardo Seidl.

One of the immediate moves was the enlargement of the BOC, including among others the two members who had ‘conquered’ the right to be there by virtue of their initiative within the process: the African-Brazilian WSF Committee, and the IYC OC. This was followed by the creation of International Council working groups in areas such as programme, communication, translation and solidarity economy.

The incorporation of the IYC OC, however, went much further than its simple inclusion in the Brazilian Organising Committee. After India, the discussion turned to how the

next Porto Alegre could be entirely different from the previous three, and the only ones in the Brazilian WSF process who could boast some experience in doing just that were those involved in the IYC organization. This began with a spatial incorporation of the Youth Camp: the next WSF would happen entirely in public spaces on the bank of the Guaíba Lake, with the Harmonia Park right in its middle. Since these spaces had to be used in creative and environment-friendly ways, the people responsible for the whole of the WSF infrastructure were now PK Das, the architect who designed the Mumbai WSF, and the infrastructure working group of the IYC OC. The latter also had important input in International Council working groups such as solidarity economy and communication (by virtue of its internal dynamics, the culture working group remained the least open and the only exclusively Brazilian of them).

This, however, did not represent a significant transformation in the BOC's (or the IC's, which is mediated by the former) relationship to the Youth Camp. It was clear in the vast amount of texts written by key members after India that it was only in Mumbai that they 'discovered' the importance of free software and alternative media, or that the event worked better if downsized and practicing what it preached. All of these were identified as 'the lessons of Mumbai', even though they were already present in Porto Alegre since 2002.²¹ This was made clear in the presentation of the overall design of 2005 WSF, were both the then mayor of Porto Alegre (himself a relative newcomer to the process) and the head of the Porto Alegre WSF office spoke of the changes as being entirely the consequence of the learning process of India.²²



The famous outdoor showers.
Photo credit: Viliano Fassini

Even if we assume that this is indeed the case (which means that some of the most important actors of the WSF process paid no heed whatsoever to what was happening inside the very process for over two years), some things sound more disingenuous than others. The space occupied by the event in 2005 was named 'World Social Territory', and was called 'a city within the city', 'the territory of a possible world', all

21 For instance, see HONTY, G. *Las lecciones de Mumbai*. Text circulated by the author.

22 Weissheimer, M. A. (2004) 'Porto Alegre Começa a Construir Território Social Mundial' [<http://agenciartamaior.uol.com.br/agencia.asp?coluna=reportagens&id=2464>].

formulations close if not identical to the 2002 IYC proposal. True, the oversized 2003 edition and the failure of the big plenaries in 2004 have caused the format to be entirely transformed, but the solution that was found was very similar to one found in 2003 by the Youth Camp.

Instead of having five thematic axes around which plenaries, seminars and workshops were proposed, the 2005 WSF saw its ‘territory’ divided into eleven ‘thematic terrains’, areas with installations for the realization of self-organized activities around certain key themes; instead of the BOC proposing activities, these resulted from the merging of proposals from different organisations, with the intention of facilitating common projects and campaigns resulting from their encounter – like the IYC after 2002, the event was entirely self-managed. This is very similar, but still less than the idea of Thematic Convergence Spaces of the 2003 IYC, where groups were invited to get together in proposing activities, organizing the programme, managing the space and (as the expected result) working together afterwards.²³

And thus some of the questions raised after the IC Bangkok meeting may find their answers.

Conclusions

The question of why the IYC has remained the ‘unthought’ of the WSF process – that which is present, but not visible or articulable – may elicit two kinds of answers which are not *per se* mutually exclusive. One points to its intrinsic problems and determinants; the other looks at the WSF process as a whole.

On the one hand, we have the evident gap between the kind of thing the IYC set out to do from 2002 on and the prevailing ‘youth’ political culture of Porto Alegre, Brazil, and to a lesser degree, Latin America. The label ‘youth’ remains caught up between two different meanings: that of marketing and commerce (the ‘young’ market) and that of the youth of political parties, with all its patronising connotations. This is reflected in the media coverage received by the IYC, half of it focused on the exoticism and exuberance of most of its constituency, half of it oblivious to the autonomy of its organizing process and taking its cue from the ‘adults’ in the BOC or other political authorities.²⁴ Between these two poles, young people appear as recipients – of marketing subjectivities, of public policies, of orders coming from higher cadres – never as protagonists.

As such, the Youth Camp became permanently stuck between the ambition of its ideas, and the conservatism of its original conception; while the former tried to incorporate new elements into the prevailing political culture it moved in, the latter showed precisely the limits it would have to transpose. One of the possibilities for this

23 This idea is fleshed out in my other article in this issue.

24 One of the most important leftwing magazines in Brazil quoted an employee of the local government of Porto Alegre as the ‘mayor’ of the IYC, belying an understanding of it as something organized for the ‘young’ by the ‘adults’. Such a mistake is in fact not uncommon.

transposition lay precisely in the possibility of establishing a dialogue between different political cultures, particularly (but not exclusively) that of the 'new political generation' of the Global North, and the 'youth' of Latin America. For various reasons, structural and conjunctural, it never happened. These range from material conditions (access to the internet, language skills, mobility, etc.), to fluctuations in the political landscape (Genoa imposing a change of direction to groups in the Global North, the victories of PT still carrying some belief in party politics); from deep underlying differences (in terms of what social demands are in Europe and Latin America, for instance, or the relative weight of party politics) to sheer mutual incomprehension.

The extrinsic problems are also epitomised in the self-branding. Because of the vocabulary in which it is inscribed, 'youth' immediately means something of a lesser importance. The political landscape determined by this vocabulary is precisely that of the 'adults' in the Brazilian Organising Committee and the International Council; as late as 2004, immediately before the Forum in India, one of the main actors in the BOC/Executive Secretariat was asking the question 'what are *we* going to do to include the youth?' It showed his position to be oblivious of the existence of the IYC and other autonomous spaces, and the fact that the 'youth' were 'old enough' to occupy their own space without having to be recognized by anyone, and had enough to say so that their inclusion did not mean attending the big plenaries.²⁵

Despite all its innovations, even at the time of its incorporation by the WSF, the Youth Camp remained invisible to the main actors in the International Council and the Brazilian Organising Committee. This could be understood in either of two ways: that there is an important part of the post-1990s political scene (the 'new political generation') that remains largely unseen by these actors; or that there is a deliberate effort to ignore it. The two, of course, are not mutually exclusive, and are probably both true to a certain extent. In fact, they point to a critique and a counter-critique of the WSF that I would like to discuss briefly.

The most common critique of the WSF sees it as something emanating from a centre of gravity, the OCs (Brazilian and Indian, the former also constituting the Executive Secretariat) and the IC. The stronger form of this critique would argue that this is where decisions are made, and that these belie a conscious political project, an alliance policy etc.; the weaker form would simply focus on these as the decision-making bodies in which only a certain number of actors, all of them sharing similar backgrounds and political cultures, wield any power. I expect my argument throughout this essay to have moved closer to the latter: there is a plurality – though, unfortunately, a small one in both qualitative and quantitative terms – of political projects and cultures being played out in these bodies, and any attempt to reduce everything to just one of them would be unconvincing.²⁶

25 Gryzbowski, C. (2004) Olhar Atento Sobre o Forum [http://www.novae.inf.br/fsm2004/olhar_atento.htm]

26 See, for example, accusations that the WSF was used in Brazil to raise PT's profile. Although it is certainly true it had this effect, I believe this was mostly marginal, and attributing to that a driving power in the initiation of the process seems to ignore a) the risks it also represented, especially in a moment when the party was moving quickly to the centre; b) the strange economic rationality such a

Although this line of thought is fair, it is only so to a certain extent. What it fails to acknowledge is that, once begun, the process was much too big to be ‘controlled’; regional forums, for instance, enjoy total independence from the International Council, the Executive Secretariat and the Organising Committees; the space taken up by the IYC in the process was usually occupied rather than offered. In fact, the incapacity of the ‘centre’ of the WSF process to acknowledge the IYC, while at the same time incorporating its experience, could be seen as a counterfactual argument for a politics that prizes connection over accumulation.

Instead of ascribing infinite powers to the decision-making bodies that turn any sort of engagement always unbalanced, a more productive approach is for groups and movements to focus on the pores and, by trying to understand how the process works, find the ways in which it can be best used to their advantage: for publicising campaigns, internal organisation, network-building etc. Instead of the old ‘abandon’ or ‘contaminate’ dichotomy, or even the disillusioned ‘consume’ option, this critique points to a fourth alternative: ‘use’. Here, one can see that some of the ‘peripheries’ of the WSF process were a lot bolder and forward-looking than its ‘core’: while the IC/BOC went from seeing the WSF as a traditional talkshop to realizing it as a larger process, but were unable to make the passage from the first, rigid model to a more fluid one, ideas coming from ‘fringes’ such as the IYC would prove more productive and offer a way forward.²⁷

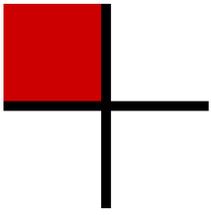
London, July 2004 (revised June 2005).

the author

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gamble would have involved; c) the fact that the Rio Grande do Sul PT, and the forces within PT which were closely involved in the WSF, are not the same of the party leadership and President Lula.

27 We could note, for instance, that the idea of the Thematic Convergence Spaces in the IYC 2003 came from a similar concept employed in the Argentinean Social Forum in October 2002. This was an attempt to answer the same question the IC was asking itself at the time – how to go from a diverse gathering with diffuse ideas and proposals to concrete convergence? This is a very good example of how the answer came from the ‘periphery’, and would take long to be appropriated by the ‘core’.



Networks, Open Spaces, Horizontality: Instantiations

Rodrigo Nunes

An Epilogue To Be Read First

We speak of many networks and open spaces, but only one horizontality. It is clear that the latter is a principle rather than a reality: like a Kantian regulative idea, it hovers above the particular instantiations of networks and open spaces that we can experience, enjoying the ambiguous status of both means and end. ‘Networks’ and ‘open spaces’, therefore, are also ambiguous by nature: on the one hand, they are what we perceive as the conditions of possibility of horizontality, the means by which it can be achieved; on the other, they are only partial actualisations of the idea they make possible – and make possible not only as instantiation, but also as idea, since it is only within the horizon of a politics of networks and open spaces that horizontality becomes a means and a goal.

What I intend to do in the following lines is to explore a few conceptual tools to examine a particular instantiation of the idea of open space and its relationship to network organising; or rather, to examine a shifting ‘ecosystem’ of networked politics and open space-organising, that of the relationship between the WSF, the Youth Camp, and autonomous spaces in the Social Forum process, starting from the end: where they are now.

This text stems from the necessity of providing some theoretical insight into the other article I have contributed to this issue (on the history of the Youth Camp); since there was a lot of historical ground to cover there, it left a few questions unanswered and a few conclusions only outlined, without further analysis. This is why I return to the end of that story to start again.¹

1 These articles are also related and complementary to Jeff Juris’ article on autonomous spaces in this issue; not only do we share similar interests in the Social Forum process, we also share a lot of our experiences and conclusions.

Porto Alegre 2005 and London 2004

The WSF 2005 was set to be an entirely different experience in Social Forums so far: 100% self-organised, without the big plenaries organised by the International Council (IC) and the Organising Committee (OC); all set in public spaces, sprawling across an open area by the Guaíba Lake; committed to the employment of free software, food provided by social movements, organic producers and solidarity economy enterprises; environmentally-conscious in its impact. In a way, very much like its critics wanted it to be.

Or very much like the Intercontinental Youth Camp, which had been doing exactly this since 2002. All the changes introduced are ascribed by the members of the IC and the Brazilian OC to the lessons taught by the Mumbai edition in 2004 – raising the question asked in the other article: why could they not see these lessons when they were right beside them? The point, however, is even larger: why was the experience of the Youth Camp not relevant either for the WSF key players or its critics – for example, those who have organised and taken part in Social Forum autonomous spaces like Intergalactika, the Hub, GLAD² or the numerous spaces at the European Social Forum in London? How did it manage to slip through the cracks?

The experience of the London ESF is remarkable for three reasons: first, because of the clear clash, taking place inside the organising process for the first time, between two political cultures always active in Social Forums, which were dubbed ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’; second, because another important element in this struggle was the hegemony possessed by the Greater London Authority (GLA), the event’s main funder, which traded money for decision-making power; third, because the ‘horizontal’ alternative of organising various different but interconnected spaces proved just as, if not more, powerful than the main event itself, pointing towards a potential future of the ESF as a galaxy of interconnected, self-organised spaces.³

All three points are relevant for the discussion that follows. The first one, because not only the clash we speak of was open and inside the organisation of a Social Forum, but because it was phrased as the opposition between two ways of organising, two ways of ‘doing’. The second, because part of the discussion around how to organise hinged very openly on what has been since the beginning one of the touchiest – and least disclosed – spots of the Social Forum process: that of its funding, which includes the dependence on local governments (Porto Alegre, Florence, Paris, London) and on big international foundations and NGOs whose participation many see as being at odds with the development of an anti neo-liberal, anti-capitalist politics (something that was publicly addressed for the first time in the WSF 2004 in Mumbai, when the Indian Organising Committee refused funding from the Ford Foundation). This point is made even more

2 For the sake of brevity, I will not go into details about any of the ESF autonomous spaces, and only a little more in the case of Intergalactika; I would again direct the reader to Juris’ paper, to my knowledge the only one that covers all of them to some extent.

3 Cf. Nunes, R. ‘Territory and Deterritory: Inside and Outside the ESF 2004’ [<http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=04/10/29/1410226&mode=nested&tid=14>]; also see Juris, this issue.

pressing by the fact that, for the first time since the first edition, the fourth WSF to happen in Brazil took place in a city and a state whose governments are not in any way historically related to any of the political forces behind the Forum.⁴ The third, because in London, for the first time, there was a huge, visible ‘fringe’ to a Social Forum, whose attitudes ranged from full-fledged ‘anti-Forum’ opposition to a practical demonstration that it could, in fact, be organised differently; and because by doing so, these spaces managed to definitely blur any easy distinctions between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

Our purpose here is two-fold: in general, to analyse the organisational and political background and implications of this clash of what could be broadly defined as two different political cultures; and in particular, by seeing them in the context of the four editions of the Porto Alegre Youth Camp, to try to answer the question that my article on its history raised: why and how did it manage to ‘slip through the cracks’, that is, why did its experience go mostly unnoticed by most parts involved, and was never reclaimed by either of these ‘sides’ that were given in London the very general names ‘verticals’ and ‘horizontal’. I take as my starting point the same hypothesis ventured by Juris⁵ – that the kind of organisation employed by the autonomous spaces at the London ESF and which were at the core of the political disputes in its process express the inscription of a networking logic/political culture into organisational architectures – to read the Youth Camp as one particular, hybrid and perhaps contradictory, instantiation of the concepts of network and open space and the ideal of horizontality. By doing this, I intend to show how these manifest themselves within the limits of their possible actualisation in a particular case. I do so by developing and applying a few pairs of opposing concepts – ‘shared space’ and ‘hub’, ‘prefigurative politics’ and ‘manifest architecture’, ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. In the conclusion, I also propose a brief evaluation of the new methodology employed by the WSF 2005 and what its main challenges could be in the light of the discussion that follows.

‘Shared Space’ and ‘Hub’

What happened in London 2004 was also interesting in terms of the history of autonomous spaces because, also for the first time, there was no clear ‘main’ space. While most people saw the Hub in Florence and GLAD in France as such space, and either the Youth Camp as a whole or Intergalactika in particular as their equivalent in Porto Alegre, London offered a variety of spaces and events – the Radical Theory Forum, the Indymedia space, Beyond the ESF, the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, the Solidarity Village, RampArt and Life Despite Capitalism – which, also

4 The first two editions in Porto Alegre had support from the local and state governments, both held at the time by PT (Worker’s Party). At the third, PT had just lost the elections for the state government to the centre-right PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement). The fourth took place just after PT lost the local government to PPS (Popular Socialist Party), the reformed, centre-to-right old Brazilian Communist Party. Both centre-right governments pledged their financial and structural support to the event so that it could go ahead, which was no doubt the source of great discomfort for many people, including members of the Brazilian Organising Committee (BOC), with a longstanding relationship with PT.

5 Juris, this issue.

importantly, did not happen separately because of any important political divergences or because the groups involved refused to work together. Instead, it was partly a result of the absence of public spaces in that city (as opposed to the massive and central Harmonia Park in Porto Alegre, or the gym that housed GLAD in Paris) and partly a result of a divergence in focus or interest – one concentrating on tactical media, another one on alternative economy, another one on the relationship between culture and politics etc. The groups behind these spaces did in fact work together, but only to the extent that they could ensure good communication between them and that they would all be ‘connected’ in a very loose sense – that is, to ensure that despite their geographical distance, information would flow between them and anyone going to any of them would be able to know what was happening in all the others.

This is the best example of what I call here ‘hub’. A hub is, by definition, a non-space, an empty centre that facilitates ‘plugging in’. It should be no coincidence that the metaphor should have technological connotations, since it is the most radical expression of a networking logic.⁶ It is as if each group arrived with their own machines, and simply had a shared place they could plug them into – a practice that will indeed sound familiar to anyone who has taken their computers, cameras etc. to a counter-summit. Therefore, the bulk of the organisational process has to do with ensuring the existence of the (physical) conditions for plugging in: space, logistics (audiovisual equipment, but also infrastructure for producing and providing food for instance) etc.; and although these tend, for obvious reasons, to be taken over by local organisers, they can also be shared with people coming from different places (by contributing money, by bringing equipment, by taking responsibility for the catering, etc.).

The model of the hub has two relevant implications for the SF process, which can – only formally, since the distinction itself is what becomes problematic under this model – be distinguished as organisational and political. The organisational one is that it points to the possibility for a Forum to be organised through the free association of elements – usually, but not necessarily, groups who share interest in a subject or area and have some experience in working together – and become a centre-less galaxy of concomitant spaces and events. The political is that it places organising at the centre of the ‘political’ aspect of the event – that is, the event fully becomes process, since the organisation becomes both end (where groups sharing interests or which have a history of working together will tend to join forces) and means (because in the process of association required to ‘make it happen’ new networks and alliances will tend to emerge) of the ‘political gathering’ itself. In other words, the ‘organisation’ of the event ceases to be split into a logistical sphere and a thematic/political one; ‘organisation’ and ‘politics’ coincide.

The ESF still largely follows the model of the first three WSF: there is an organisational core – in the former, the European Preparatory Assembly, which is open; in the latter the Organising Committee (OC) and the International Council (IC), both to a greater or lesser degree self-appointed – that is only relatively responsible for the structural organisation of the event, which tends to fall heavily on the shoulders of the local

⁶ As much as it is no coincidence that the space called ‘Hub’ at the ESF 2002 in Florence was organised to a great extent by ‘techies’, media- and ‘hacktivists’.

organising committees. What the core does is decided on the 'centre' of the event itself, that is, choosing the thematic axes, the themes of the plenaries, and appointing their speakers. After the WSF 2004 in Mumbai, where the self-organised activities were far more important and better attended than the plenaries, the WSF IC has decided to do away with the latter altogether, and take on a role of mere facilitation in the process: after a period of online consultation where organisations are invited to point the questions they would like to propose activities on, the IC presents a summary of the main thematic areas emerging from those, which are then divided into physical spaces (eleven, for the 2005 edition) where the activities in that thematic area are supposed to take place; the IC then facilitates the voluntary merging of these activities, with the objective of making sure that each of them is presented and supported by more than one organisation, although merging is not compulsory.⁷

As opposed to the hub and the one employed in the ESF/ first WSF, I would call this model 'shared space': there still is some level of coordination and a central organisational core, but its task is one of facilitation and provision of infrastructure, not of steering. This is the model that has been employed by the Youth Camp since its second edition in 2002.

The shared space was a model that was arrived at almost naturally by the Youth Camp Organising Committee. Firstly, because its reality was very different from that of any other space or event in the SF process: it was not just a place for activities, but where people lived for five (2001, 2002) or ten (2003) days.⁸ This meant that 'providing the infrastructure' carried much bigger implications: it was providing living conditions (toilets, showers, catering) for as much as 25,000 people (in 2003) to share the area of a huge, beautiful park in Porto Alegre – as well as media facilities, spaces for workshops, a cultural programme etc. Secondly, because a huge part of the whole idea was precisely that the experience of sharing this space should be central: it was supposed to be more than just accommodation, but a place where people could practice everything that was only theoretical in the main event: free software, alternative/community/independent media, solidarity economy, and, above all, the self-management of the area itself. If I say 'almost' naturally it is because in 2002 there was an ill-advised attempt, by the youth of some Brazilian political parties, of creating a political 'centre' – which resulted in the International Youth Encounter, whose complete flop made sure that from then on the Organising Committee would be responsible exclusively for the logistics and registration and allocation of self-organised activities.⁹

However, arriving at this was also natural considering certain limits imposed on the organisation, first of which was the composition of the Youth Camp Organising

7 The post-ESF 2004 European Preparatory Assembly that took place in Paris in December 2004, faced with the many shortcomings of the London process, has started to introduce changes in the ESF organising process. It is still not clear what direction these will take, which is why I leave them outside my analysis.

8 In this sense, it has more in common with the conferences of People's Global Action or the No Border camps. Something that still has not been written on is how the experience many European activists had at the Youth Camp in January 2002 may have informed the preparation of the No Border Camp in Strasbourg in July of the same year.

9 Cf. my other article on this issue.

Committee itself, but above all the political environment it moved in. Even though by the second edition of the Youth Camp the number of ‘autonomous individuals’ (as they were called) outweighed that of ‘organised youth’ (which in Brazil essentially means the youth of political parties¹⁰), when it came to making decisions that helped shape the space politically, the ‘organised youth’ would exercise a much greater power. To put it simply, the basic political frame of reference when it comes to ‘youth’ in Brazil was theirs – even though it has been shown that the majority of people who attend the IYC do not belong to any political organisation.

What does this mean? It must be remembered that Brazil (or Latin America, for that matter) does not meet many of the material pre-requisites for the flourishing of a culture of networking – for instance, mobility and wide, constant access to computers and the internet.¹¹ This puts a very practical obstacle to the development of translocal networking of forms of organisation outside more traditional, hierarchical ones; that, coupled with the sway that political parties, and PT in particular, still hold over the Brazilian left, meant that not only the latter were the strongest forces in the process (networks such as Indymedia, besides being smaller and less disseminated, kept at a distrustful distance from it), but also presented the either/or problem of choosing between working with political parties, or no-one at all – which would also have meant antidemocratically closing the doors on parties.

These limitations actually led in 2003 to a radicalisation of the idea of ‘shared space’ as a sort of compromise. On the one hand, the larger organisations were expected to have a commitment to the running of the IYC that corresponded to their capacity to mobilise, particularly in getting volunteers involved and taking on responsibility for the collective management of the camp (security, garbage management etc.); this would only partially come true. On the other, it was decided that no groups would have a space – either to camp or to organise activities – for themselves, thus preventing material strength being translated into a stronger presence. This meant that registered activities would all go to the same ‘pot’, and then be allotted workshop space more or less at random. Finally, because it was a shared space, there was no ‘political direction’ to the IYC; instead, there would be a management council, whose function was strictly ‘organisational’ and not ‘political’, and whose composition was through spatial (the different spaces of the camp) rather than political representation.

This, however, would also mean that any possibility of ‘plugging in’ would be precluded. The choice of emphasising the shared condition of the space led to anything that did not fit into this proposal being made virtually impossible. The Brazilian National Student’s Union, the Union of Socialist Youth and the PT Youth, groups with a large membership and financial resources, were prevented from putting up their marquees, so that their presence would not be overbearing. On the other hand, the loose network of autonomous groups organising the Intergalactika Laboratory – which had

10 When these were banned from taking part in the IYC OC in accordance with the Charter of Principles, they went on getting involved through organisations such as the National Students’ Union (UNE) or the Pastoral of the Youth (PJ).

11 It is estimated that 25 million people, out of 180 million, have some kind of access to the internet in Brazil today.

been ‘invited’ to ‘plug in’ in 2002 – were almost stopped from organising their space for the same reasons: all space was shared, no group could have a space for itself. Of course, no distinction was drawn between large organisations with structured membership and financial conditions to build their own spaces and *ad hoc* networks of small groups that would come together with the purpose of organising something. In other words, traditional and networked forms of organisation were lumped together, which in practice meant that the possibility of networking – understood as freely associating and ‘plugging’ – was limited. Therefore, the ‘shared space’ of the Youth Camp showed its dark side: blind to forms of organisation alien to its immediate political culture, it was open to all groups and organisations on an equal footing, *provided all their demands and needs were channelled through the Organising Committee, in the form determined by the latter*. Instead of a hub, a centre; still shaping the possible forms of participation, even if on a minimal level if compared to the centre the WSF before the 2005 methodology (i.e., the International Council and the Organising Committee). As opposed to the latter, the IYC Organising Committee did not ascribe to itself the task of defining ‘what the event was about’ (the thematic axes and the themes of the plenaries) and ‘who should talk about it’ (the speakers). In fact, before the new methodology, the only ‘shared space’ in the WSF was that of the self-organised activities (workshops, seminars), which was both in dimensions and in terms of media interest secondary to the ‘main event’ constituted by the plenaries with the famous personalities.¹²

‘Prefigurative Politics’ and ‘Manifest Architecture’

The distinction between ‘shared space’ and ‘hub’, however, does not exhaust the differences that set the autonomous spaces apart from the ESF or the pre-2005 WSF editions, nor does it suffice to highlight what is particular about the Youth Camp’s trajectory between those two poles. A key element of all the spaces placed at the so-called margins of the Social Forum process has been that, to put it bluntly, they ‘practiced what they preached’. A huge source of disappointment for those attending the first three WSF was that it looked exactly like any other large-scale event.¹³ The first case when this criticism became practical was at the second Youth Camp in 2002, which favoured products provided by solidarity economy and organic producers, free software, alternative media, eco-construction, public spaces. With different emphases, that would also be the case with the Hub, GLAD, and the autonomous spaces at the London ESF.

As Juris has argued,¹⁴ these autonomous spaces – a point he makes particularly about their distribution during the London ESF – are architectural manifestations of an

12 The imbalance in media attention being, of course, largely a result of the architecture of the event itself.

13 The WSF 2002 also had an infamous VIP room that was ‘victimised’ by a protest organised by autonomous groups taking part in the Intergalactika Laboratory. It disappeared in subsequent editions.

14 Juris, this issue.

underlying cultural logic of networking. In other words, the way things are disposed in space – the configuration of that space in its elements, functions and connections – are to a great extent determined by a logic that runs deeper than mere political and organisational decisions; in other words, it belongs to a shared background of practices, to what may be called a political culture. In these cases, the spaces themselves simply express in their actual functioning practices that are common to those using and/or organising them; these constitute a repertoire of organisational knowledge and practices that does not have to be created anew for these spaces, or looked for elsewhere.¹⁵ This is what I call here ‘manifest architecture’.

Now, most characterisations of the ‘new movements’ that came to prominence in the mid- to late-90s in events such as Seattle and Prague refer to at least three recurrent points: their networked nature; their use of direct action; and their commitment to ‘prefigurative politics’. The latter, commonly used in connection to Gandhian politics, is summarised in the motto ‘be the change you want to see’. In a positive sense, it can be portrayed as the idea that change is brought about in the transformation of individual or collective practices, and must start in the ‘here and now’. In a negative sense, it represents a practical imperative of not submitting means to ends, of not accepting that the immensity of the task of social transformation requires whatever effort it takes, however undesirable one might find it. In this sense, it is construed as a lynchpin of the distinction between ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ leftwing politics, since the latter would tend to defer questions of means and practices to a post-revolutionary future.¹⁶

It was precisely this idea that was constant in the explanation of the development the Youth Camp underwent between 2001 and 2002; a recurrent shorthand used by the organisers to introduce the concept was ‘how would the city of another possible world be organised?’. As I mention elsewhere, it was when architecture students joined the IYC OC that this discussion began; but when it came to actually organising it – that is, getting the groups and movements working on solidarity economy, free software etc. involved – relations had to be established from scratch, in most cases dependent on the financial backing supplied by the WSF’s organisation, the input from large movements such as the MST, or the existing Rio Grande do Sul state government programme in those areas.¹⁷ This is easily explained, on the one hand, by the sheer size of the event: in 2002, where for instance ‘food’ meant not a small soup-making self-organised collective, but catering for 12,500 people for five days. But it also reveals something about the local political culture, with a prevalence of hierarchical organisations and a large dependence on the state.

15 Of course, to say they do not have to be created does not mean that large-scale employments of these practices (e.g., an activist kitchen at a summit protest) do not require adequations, even posing problems whose solution then becomes part of the said repertoire.

16 It is interesting to notice, however, that the very etymology of the word ‘prefigurative’ reintroduces the idea of a future that is not yet present, but can be represented in the present. The distinction between presentation and re-presentation in contexts where prefigurative politics is said to apply is a very interesting, if overlooked, theoretical question.

17 These government programmes included the Popular Solidarity Economy, the Family Agriculture (dealing with agrarian movements, family-run farms and cooperatives), the Free Software and the Local Systems Development Programmes. All of these four concepts were absolute buzzwords for the IYC organisers – the camp itself being defined as a local system.

In this case, one could say that the IYC from 2002 onwards demonstrated a commitment to prefigurative politics – although this is not the whole picture, and perhaps just as central for those involved in organising was an understanding of the potential impact of the WSF to the local economy, and the idea that these profits should be given to the movements themselves, so as to support and strengthen them. The expression or prefiguration of this politics, however, had to rely on relations and practices that were not organic to the groups involved in organising the IYC, but external. Whereas the ESF autonomous spaces relied heavily on structures and practices of cooperation which are embedded in the culture of social centres and countersummits (hacklabs, activist kitchens etc.), no such things were (or are) available to the members of the IYC Organising Committee.¹⁸ Thus, the Youth Camp can be said to exemplify prefigurative politics, but not manifest architecture.

‘Horizontals’ and ‘Verticals’, ‘Inside’ and ‘Outside’

In a way, these issues of horizontality and the particular solutions given to them in that context were arrived at by the IYC OC in a natural way, through a hybrid development rather than explicit political confrontation. Nevertheless, to depict the overarching tension between what have been called ‘horizontals’ and ‘verticals’ within the Social Forum process exclusively as being around organisational issues – or better put, issues whose politics is to a great extent organisational – is to miss important parts of the puzzle. After all, it cannot be ignored that it was mostly those who can be broadly identified as ‘horizontals’ who were at the forefront of the global opposition to neo-liberalism in the years immediately prior to the first Porto Alegre WSF – countersummits, world-wide encounters and structures such as the first two *Encuentros* and People’s Global Action predating it by a few years – and that the WSF effectively takes off in a moment when the protest movement retreats under the triple weight of media criminalisation, Genoa and 9/11. Through the Social Forum process, many groups and organisations which had for the last years taken the backseat were able to come to the fore again and give their particular twist to alterglobalisation. This, of course, would reanimate such tired discussions as the old reform-revolution dichotomy, as well as accentuate new and more interesting ones, such as the opposition between groups that see their field of action as a post-national, global political and economic sphere, and those who see in the reinforcement of the Nation State the only alternative to protect people from the free movement of capital.¹⁹

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse and complexify the very rough sketch given above. What has to be pointed out here is that the Social Forum process has succeeded in drawing other social actors into the alterglobalisation debate, providing a

18 The only important exception is that of eco-construction, where even though a great deal of help had to be brought from ‘outside’, groups involved in the IYC OC mastered the techniques and practices.

19 To add another layer of difference, one can identify among the ‘post-national’ ones, those who believe that lobbying and reforming global institutions can alleviate the negative effects of globalisation, and the ones to whom the word ‘globalisation’ should apply exclusively to the free association of local initiatives, and the existing institutions should be done away with altogether.

less confrontational, more structured and more media-friendly space where more conventional political perspectives, such as those of NGOs, political parties and more traditional movements such as the peasant groups gathered in Via Campesina, would feel more at home.²⁰ The way in which it has done so, however, has meant that, due to the architecture of the event and the profile of the main political forces behind it, these perspectives have been given more prominence than others. From the slightly obscure relations of the WSF with the PT governments in Porto Alegre and Rio Grande do Sul; to the inevitable identification of the plenaries as representing ‘what it stood for’; to the predictable role attributed by the media to plenary speakers and leading IC/OC figures as the spokespeople of ‘the movement’ – the Social Forum process has been accused from the start of basking in an ambiguous state of ‘false representation’. That is, even if the Charter of Principles states that no-one speaks in its name and it issues no final declarations, the Social Forum process supplied traditional political figures with a large putative ‘constituency’ they could then be seen in the media as speaking on behalf of.²¹

This has created for ‘horizontal’ groups such as those involved in People’s Global Action the problem of either not taking part at all, and running the risk of allowing these other actors to become identified as ‘leaders’, ‘ideologues’ or ‘representatives’ – or to engage in something they were very critical of, among groups they were sometimes suspicious of, sometimes openly hostile to. This ‘abandon or contaminate’ debate has been the origin of the autonomous spaces around the WSF and the ESF; although the tactic itself has never been an unanimity, many groups went ahead with the idea that, if lots of people (who arguably would rather not go to potentially more confrontational situations such as summit protests) attended these events looking for political alternatives, it was better to be visible than to let others have all the space for themselves by default.²²

This has also been named the ‘one foot in, one foot out’ approach, which has included proposing workshops within the official event, setting up autonomously organised spaces that nevertheless were included in the official programme, and holding events and spaces which took place in the same town and at the same time, but were publicised independently and were sometimes pitched as being ‘anti-Forum’. It seems, however, that the success of the autonomous spaces in London 2004, or of Caracol Intergalactika in Porto Alegre 2005, where people moved seamlessly between the ‘official’ and the ‘alternative’ programme, has in practical terms rendered the ‘inside-outside’ distinction rather secondary. In fact, even those ‘anti-Forum’ events that take place at the same

20 This does not flatten out the differences between these groups, however; in fact, even inside the organising ‘core’ of the WSF the tensions between groups such as the MST and certain NGOs is very clear.

21 Perhaps the most extreme cases here would be that of Brazilian president Lula, at an event organised by the Brazilian Organising Committee in 2003, and at a self-organised event in 2005, stating that he was heading off to the World Economic Forum in Davos to make the voice of the WSF heard. In both situations, it was clear that grey areas in the interpretation of the Charter of Principles were explored to attract media attention and raise the profiles of the Forum and of Lula himself.

22 Cf. Farrer, L. ‘World Forum Movement: Abandon or Contaminate’ [www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/wsf/worldforum.htm]; Grubacic, A. ‘Life after Social Forums’ [www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/wsf/life-after-sf.htm]; Ortellado, P. ‘Whose movement?’ [www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/wsf/whosemovement.htm].

time implicitly recognise that a Social Forum is, on a more elementary level, simply defined by the convergence of people who are interested and/or active in certain issues at the same time in the same place; therefore, all that comes with it – the opportunities for strategising, building networks or carrying out actions and demonstrations, the potential attention of the media – is largely independent of any official programme defined by whoever in whatever way.²³ Most of the critiques in which the ‘anti-Forum’ instance is grounded seem rather unaware of the functioning of the Social Forum process, stating that ‘it’ is organised by the local government, ‘it’ is ‘for’ this and ‘against’ that etc.²⁴ In doing that, they reproduce the ‘false representation’ captured by the media, who look for ‘leaders’ in the most renowned and public figures, and identify the proposals and agenda set by the ‘movement’ in the words of the plenary speakers; they judge the process almost exclusively from the point of view of their unofficial, *de facto* centre (the plenaries); and by assuming it to be a monolithic *organisation* rather than a contested *space*, they fail to see the opportunities and potentialities both the process and each event present, as well as the shades and internal differences in the organising processes and their cores.²⁵ Ironically, they reinforce all the accepted ideas about Social Forums – those held by their key players, by the media, by the ‘general public’ – consequently strengthening the (actual or presupposed, voluntary or involuntary) ‘hijacking’ exercised by more traditional, hierarchical groups, not only by giving the latter more space for manoeuvring, but also by accepting and retransmitting the basic terms of the debate.

This does not mean, of course, a denial of how much the outcomes of an event/process can be predetermined by political decisions concerning its architecture; and much less a denial of the democratic deficit of the WSF process and of structures like the Organising Committee and the International Council.²⁶ It is, in any case, a reminder of three things: that a closer analysis reveals things to be a lot less monolithic than many ‘horizontal’

23 It is interesting to compare the argument presented here with an analysis of the complementarity of the 2004 WSF and Mumbai Resistance. Cf. Asher Ghertner, D.; Kapadia, K. ‘Transforming place, plaining transformation. An evaluation of the World Social Forum 2004’, *Interventions*, 7(1): 118-130.

24 Cf. Mumbai Resistance ‘Why Mumbai Resistance 2004?’ [<http://www.mumbaioresistance.org/why%20Mumbai%20Resistance%202004>]; Wombles ‘A short analysis of the socio-political role of the ESF-WSF’ [<http://www.wombles.org.uk/auto/esfcritique.php>].

25 Two remarkable examples of a use of these potentialities: at the ESF 2003 in Paris, the entertainment-industry workers known as *intermittents*, who in no way had been involved in the organisation of the event, timed very publicity-savvy actions for the time around it, attracting great attention to their struggle against the welfare reform in France; at the WSF 2004 in Mumbai, NGOs and organisations working with issues of the ‘untouchables’ (*Dalits*), who were not major actors in the organising process, coordinate their actions in a way that made that sector of Indian society the highlight of that year’s edition. This shows how having ‘control’ over the organisation of an event does not necessarily translate into being able to ‘hijack’ it. It must be said, despite my critique of their critique, that it was from the Beyond the ESF space (which was the largest in area, programme and attendance in London) that most direct actions – on migration, public transport, and even against the Greater London Authority’s overbearing influence on the event – were launched, with the participation of hundreds of people from outside the UK. Cf. Nunes, R. (2004) ‘Territory and Deterritory: Inside and Outside the ESF 2004’ [<http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=04/10/29/1410226&mode=nested&tid=14>].

26 Cf. Teivanen, T. ‘Twenty-two Theses on the Problems of Democracy in the WSF’ [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.php?pagina=bib_teivo_fsm2004_in].

critiques seem to make them; that architectural determination does not rule out the possibility of interventions that totally transform the face of an event; and that the 'horizontal-vertical' rift that manifests itself in politico-organisational divergences is also a broader struggle as to what problems face the alterglobalisation movement, and what responses they call for.

If the politico-organisational distinction between 'horizontals' and 'verticals' can be posed as the difference between a logic of connectivity and a logic of linear accumulation – on one side, the loose, shifting associations of small elements that combine to produce larger effects, which translates into non-hierarchical, networked structures that (tend to) see themselves as acting apart/outside of/against institutions such as the State; on the other, the search for general programmes that can bring together the largest number of people into a unified acting body, which tends to translate into hierarchical structures and (generally) into an understanding of the goal of political action as the taking control of, or at least influencing, existing institutions, national or global – the Social Forum process, and post-2005 WSF in particular, poses an interesting problem to the possibility of the two sides relating to each other. Those whose principle is connectivity find it hard to or simply avoid entering in relation with those whose principle is linear accumulation; and if the previous paragraphs problematise this obvious contradiction, the problems of the ESF 2004 organising process bear witness to the extent in which 'vertical' practices can make this relation difficult. On the other hand, 'vertical' groups find themselves at the core of a process that tries to build on the advantages of 'horizontal' practices – consensus decision-making, non-totalisation, non-representation – and that is indeed described by its Charter of Principles in very 'horizontal' terms, while grappling to adapt this repertoire to their political cultures, even if (in most cases) still trying to hold on to some kind of 'central' power. With the changes in methodology introduced in 2005, which bring the WSF much closer to the 'horizontal' ideal of politics and organisation, it remains to be seen whether 'horizontal' groups will find it easier to become involved, or whether they will actually want to. It could be that these transformations, while bringing these two constructed camps together, will also highlight the broader divergences at stake, and make the dispute to define the nature and role of the alterglobalisation movement clearer.

Slipping Through the Cracks

As it becomes clear from the above section, there are two meanings to the word 'autonomous' when we speak of 'autonomous spaces' in the Social Forum process. Strictly speaking, it refers to those spaces that are self-organised, that is, that are organised autonomously from the main organising bodies of the WSF (or the ESF); broadly speaking, it denotes the spaces organised by autonomous groups among and for themselves, which invariably express some degree of divergence or opposition to the 'official' event. Of course, all the latter are also the former, but not necessarily vice-

versa. The Intergalactika Laboratory, the Hub, GLAD and the spaces in London are example of the second case; the Youth Camp in Porto Alegre, of the first.²⁷

This, I believe, begins to answer the question raised in my article on the Youth Camp,²⁸ and recalled in the beginning of this one: how did it happen that the experience of the Porto Alegre IYC, however rich and innovative it was within the WSF process, manage to slip through the cracks, and not be reclaimed by any of the political forces involved?

As the pairs of distinctions made above tried to show, the IYC – as opposed to other autonomous spaces *lato sensu* – was one particular instantiation of the politics of horizontality, an open space that developed itself within a political space where the culture of networking, open spaces and horizontality was not predominant, to the point that saying it was a hybrid is slightly missing the point: it was not just an attempt to transplant an idea into an alien culture, but was forged out of a complex give and take between different ideas, cultures, and material conditions, which eventually found that form as the most workable one, and tried to promote certain principles as the best ones to serve the purpose of bringing together different ideas and cultures. At the heart of this process, there was an underlying assumption that some kind of ‘open space’ would provide the best way of achieving these goals. Many of the individuals (the ‘autonomous individuals’ in particular) involved in the IYC OC became to a great extent politicised through the WSF; in a sense, it was as if they were trying to find a way of realising its political tenets – those of the Charter of Principles -- in a way that was better than the actual practice of the main event itself.²⁹

Thus, the IYC found itself promoting organising values characteristic of networked structures within an environment where most of the organisations, including those which were active members of the IYC OC, were traditional, top-down, hierarchical structures. It found itself between ‘youth’ – the prevalent concept to denote politically active young people in Brazil and Latin America, with the connotations given to it by ‘vertical’ structures (parties, the church, the State) that also signify the inexperienced, the unprepared – and ‘new political generation’ – the term coined in Porto Alegre to refer to the ‘horizontal’ groups that had risen to prominence in the mid-90s.³⁰ As a consequence, it was reclaimed by neither side: the ‘horizontal’ (such as the Indymedia network and anarchist groups in Brazil, networks and groups from other Latin American countries and the Global North) were put off by the large presence of ‘vertical’ ‘youth’; the latter were put off by a methodology that they saw as too ‘horizontal’ and

27 For lack of first-hand information, I leave the Youth Camp that took place at the Mumbai WSF in 2004 entirely out of my study. From what I have gathered, however, it enjoyed a lot less of autonomy from the Indian OC, and was largely dominated by political parties.

28 Cf. my other article on this issue.

29 It would not be an exaggeration to say that this experience has indeed managed to transform ‘youth’ political culture in Porto Alegre, introducing principles and practices of horizontality such as consensus decision-making in an arena still largely dominated by political parties. It is as if the ideas that the ‘vertical’ core of the WSF incorporated from ‘the outside’ (‘horizontal’ groups) were then transported to a new outside (‘vertical’ ‘youth’ groups in Porto Alegre), and bore fruit there.

30 My other paper in this issue goes into more detail as to the meaning and use of this term.

unmanageable, instead of the large plenaries and conferences they were used to, where the group that brought the greatest numbers would have the final say.³¹

On the other hand, the WSF OC and IC could ignore this experience by the sheer fact that, since they were expressions of the ‘youth’, they were of no particular relevance; when a similar experience was carried out by the Indian OC for the 2004 WSF, they became the turning point that caused the methodological transformation of the WSF.

These elements, added to the ‘invisible forces’ constituted by the material conditions that shape a political culture meant that the methodological and practical innovations the IYC contributed to the WSF remained in a political limbo where only the IYC OC would go to defend them.

The 2003 edition of the IYC, in any case, did not help the case much either, as most groups who proposed activities at the Camp were severely let down by the organisational shortcomings that led to most workshop spaces, as well as the printed programme, not being ready in time, and, as a consequence, the majority of activities not happening. Although this was not a necessary consequence (on the contrary!) of the ‘shared space’ methodology, the fact that the responsibility for building and allotting spaces was centred exclusively on a body with no fixed membership and limited resources, instead of shared with groups that would organise amongst themselves before presenting needs and demands to the IYC OC, made these shortcomings nearly fatal to most activities. Ironically enough, the groups involved in the Intergalactika Laboratory, which squatted a marquee by the Guaíba Lake, were probably the only ones that managed to make most of their planned programme happen.

The 2005 edition had to face this problem, and the solution arrived at consisted in reformulating a failed proposal of 2003. Apart from the smaller workshop spaces (‘axons’), the 2003 IYC had five marquees called Thematic Convergence Spaces which, in an ‘artificial’ manner in accordance with the abstract ‘shared space’ concept, where supposed to be collectively occupied by groups and movements working in areas related to each of the five thematic axes of that year’s WSF.³² If on the one hand the choice made for 2005 was based on this innovation and tried to find a solution to the lack of political debate caused by the failings of 2003, it also happened through the pressure of the more networked elements around and inside the IYC OC: as the groups organising the new Intergalactika Laboratory (rebranded as ‘Caracol Intergalactika’) demanded a

31 A critique of the IYC written by a Porto Alegre ‘horizontal’ group that bears very close relations to a small tendency within PT considers the methodology employed in 2003 too ‘European’ and ‘anti-institutional’, holding it responsible for the ‘pulverising’ of the workshops of activities and the fact that many of these did not even happen. This text also makes a distinction between ‘organic youth’ (without explicating what that means) and the model criticised. Cf. Movimento Metamorfose. *Anticapitalismo, Unidade e Transformação! Texto do Movimento Metamorfose para o Seminário Preparatório do 5º Acampamento Intercontinental da Juventude* [www.mov-metamorfose.org]. In fact, as I argue in my other article in this issue, the problems that led to many activities not happening were not methodological, but infra-structural, even though they could perhaps have been bypassed with a different methodology, as argued below. The use of the terms ‘European’ and ‘middle class’ as tools of political criticism in the IYC process in Porto Alegre would merit a study of its own, but are very much close to the point of this article.

32 This idea is fully fleshed out in the conclusion, where its potentialities are explored.

space to hold their activities and meetings, when the accepted rule was that no group (or network of groups) could have a space for itself; and as the expected number of campers was up to more than twenty times that of the first edition (40 thousand; in the end, there were around thirty-five thousand people camping), a compromise was found where the Camp would become polycentric, organised around seven Action Centres, each of which with its own profile. These were Caracol Intergalactika; the Free Knowledge Lab (fully equipped for alternative/community media and free software 'techies'); Che (for groups working around health issues, also offering health services and alternative healing practices for campers); Logun Ede (sexual orientation groups); Raizes (ethnicity movements, hip hop movement); Terrau (student movements and the youth of political parties and 'traditional' social movements); and Tupiguara (environmental groups). Of these, only the first relied exclusively on previously existing networks and networking done entirely apart from the IYC OC – in fact, most of it was organised through a mailing list and internet chats between activists in the Americas and Europe – , which reflects the profile of the groups involved; it was also the most international of them. All the others, to a greater or lesser degree, depended on invitations and networking made by groups within the IYC OC, or the IYC OC working groups themselves.

Again, the decision to make this shift was taken from the 'inside' (the IYC OC) out; any 'plugging in' attempted outside these standards would have been very difficult, if not impossible, and that was in fact the reason why Intergalactika had to be incorporated as an Action Centre. But even if it felt for some, as a key organiser described it, that the Youth Camp's shared space had become 'a cake sliced into seven pieces' due to political divergences, most agreed at the end that this new methodology had been a correct move in that, by creating smaller spaces with an easily identifiable profile where groups with certain affinities could find each other, it facilitated the creation of networks and the development of common goals and strategies. The 2005 IYC as an inhabited shared space, however, succumbed under the difficulty to accommodate the unmanageable number of campers and other structural problems,³³ and the collective management idea hardly took off apart from very small, scattered areas. Anyway, perhaps the new 'hybrid' transformation the shared space methodology went through – which in practice meant the division of this space for heightened efficiency – arrived too late; no groups were interested in reclaiming the relevance of the four years of this experience, and the WSF core, despite relying heavily on the expertise and knowledge accumulated by the IYC organisers when it came to setting up the 2005 'World Social Forum Territory', remained oblivious or simply dismissive of the IYC as a political event in its own right. As the WSF moves on to other places – Venezuela, Mali and Pakistan in 2006, and a yet to be defined African country in 2007 (possibly Kenya) – unless direct channels of communication between the Porto Alegre organisers and those

33 First and foremost among these, the unilateral decision of the WSF Porto Alegre executive office to cut down on the expenses in a very crucial area, security; a clearly unprepared and insufficient security team was hired, and the Youth Camp faced innumerable cases of sexual harassment and theft. Although there were no reported cases (which does not exclude the possibility of their having happened), there were recurrent rumours about rapes.

in other places are built, it is likely that some of the lessons learnt over these years will have to be learnt somewhere else.³⁴

A Debate Too Late?

In any case, the WSF 2005 renewed itself both in architecture and methodology. 'Architecture' here is used to refer not only to overall configuration of the space, which includes the methodology, but even the actual architecture itself: it was the infrastructure working group of the Youth Camp who designed the whole of the new 'World Social Territory', including eco-constructed venues. As for the translation, for the first time the event relied exclusively on Babels, a network of activist translators who have organized after the first ESF in Florence 2002, and mostly on Nomad, a network that designs translation equipment and archiving systems based on the principles of cooperation and free access that characterise free software networks. The methodology as well underwent significant changes: the event was entirely self-organised, the International Council's role being of facilitation, rather than organising activities.³⁵

Both moves were rather bold ones, but their appreciation was far from unanimous: for some, like a number of members of the IC, its advantages did not outweigh the drawbacks; for others, like those following a more 'horizontal' line of critique, it was too little too late. Some of these views could be heard at a session proposed by the Network Institute for Global Democratisation – itself a member of the IC – that took place at the Caracol Intergalactika. It was certainly the first time that many people with critical perspectives gathered in a room not to listen to International Council and Organising Committee members talk about the future of the WSF, but to discuss with them in an open mic sessions (according to an unspoken principle of all activities at the Caracol). Three members of the Brazilian Organising Committee, five of the International Council, and one of the Continental Council of the Social Forum of the Americas were there; as well as members of the Youth Camp Organising Committee, and people who had been involved in setting up the Caracol, the Hub, GLAD and autonomous spaces around the London ESF.³⁶

A blind spot of the debate was, of course, that many criticisms applied to previous editions – and so the possibility to publicly discuss them had come ironically late. Other moments, however, would show substantial differences in underlying assumptions. The architectural transformation undergone by the WSF, praised as the result of a learning

34 The three countries for 2006 have been recently decided upon at the International Council Meeting in Barcelona, June 17th-19th, 2005. Kenya has been nominated as a likely candidate for 2007, but it is of the nature of the process that this should be rediscussed and possibly changed in the future.

35 One area where the 2005 WSF did not particularly move forward was its treatment of alternative/community media, whose preferential space was still the Youth Camp

36 It is interesting to note that, predictably, at the beginning someone pitched it as an encounter between some key players in the WSF process and 'the youth'; only to be immediately rebutted by a speaker saying the discussion was not about 'youth' and 'adults', but about political and organisational divergences, and 'degrees of radicality'.

process on the part of the IC/OC and as a show of ‘coherence’, was criticised along two lines. One, for the fact that it had to come from this core (when things like free software are a daily practice of so many people everywhere), and that the lesson was only learnt after the Indian Organising Committee organised the WSF in Mumbai that way, despite all previously existing experiences – in other words, this learning process shows the existing political limits of the process quite transparently. Two, because to call it ‘coherence’ was still not to get it; this was not a choice as one in clothes, but a political issue: when you use free software you are contributing to its diffusion and development, when you employ solidarity economy and social movements you are giving them publicity and financial support etc.; that is, it involves an awareness of the socio-economical impact of the WSF. Also, issues were raised about the lack of openness in the relationship between the WSF Secretariat in Porto Alegre and the IYC OC, Babels and Nomad, where these three had been treated as service-providers and not political partners.

The size of the Forum – attended by 155,000 people, 35,000 of which in the Youth Camp, where many more would go to in the evening – and the observation that the infrastructure had been stretched too thin to accommodate that many people (in terms of security, for example) were responsible for another batch of questions. Autonomous spaces generally rely on very tight budgets and voluntary cooperation; an event of such size as the 2005 WSF cannot be organised in the same manner, and becomes very dependent on funding – which in turn means depending on local governments, foundations (such as Ford) and businesses (such as Petrobras, the Brazilian State oil company) whose participation is highly contestable. Demands made at the debate ranged from the WSF refusing this money altogether, to consulting participants about which funders are acceptable, and making publicly available information on the funders’ activities, including the least approvable ones.

Interestingly, the doubt whether it was even worth organising an event this big was also put forward. Would it not be better to have smaller, more local events, whose size would fit the local groups’ capacity to cooperate and mobilize, rather than pushing things into an unmanageable scale? There are many variables to be considered in this equation. If, on the one hand, a small, local event is better for networking (and can actually build greater levels of cooperation simply because of the effort needed to organise it) and places connection above linear accumulation, it must not be forgotten that the WSF is to a great extent a place for people who are not involved in any groups and want to get a ‘taste’ of what is happening – that is, a space for politicisation besides networking. Besides, more local events (how local depending on networking capacity of organisers) could also mean that international networking would be reduced to a small class of activists who could manage to travel around – arguably already the case with the WSF, the ‘World’ in its title little more than wishful thinking. It is an argument that can go on forever. In any case, the experiment of splitting the WSF into three simultaneous continental events in 2006, the so-called ‘polycentric WSF’, might prove an alternative.³⁷

37 The expression ‘polycentric WSF’ employed by the International Council sounds ironic since, to my knowledge, the first time it was employed was in a text the IYC OC prepared for a debate with the

As the changes in the methodology were too close to be evaluated then, the debate had little to say about it. Another irony, since this point is in a sense a triumph of 'horizontal' critique: a move towards a logic of connectivity (self-organised activities with facilitated merging) rather than linear accumulation (large plenaries with famous speakers). If one considers the methodology of such an event as the WSF as an equation that tries to balance three variables – network-building, strategising and politicisation – one can see how 2005 necessarily links the first two, placing strategising as a consequence of network-building and emptying the central spaces where some people would appear to be presenting 'the strategy'. This could create the problem, however, of pulverising the role of politicisation (that the plenaries theoretically fulfilled because the famous names would draw audiences), and of presenting to the general public and the media a clear-cut picture of 'what it was all about'. That the latter has been a critique of the new methodology conveyed by some members of the IC makes it clear that, for some at least, 'false representation' was just 'representation', and the plenaries, speakers and the IC indeed had the function of speaking on behalf of the movement, even if just to summarise ongoing discussions.³⁸

The 2005 methodology, however, does not do away with 'false representation' altogether, rather than move it to a new level where a contradiction of this new-found 'horizontality' can be found. Since there were neither plenaries nor opening and closing ceremonies organised by the International Council/Organising Committee in 2005, the *de facto* 'main events' that opened and ended the Forum were activities organised by groups who had the political influence and/or financial conditions to arrange large activities with speakers as notable as Lula and Hugo Chavez – the two having unofficially 'opened' and 'closed' the WSF by dint of their position in the schedule. This shows how this new model, at the same time that it brings the IC/OC members to same level of other groups (i.e., having to organise their own activities rather than the 'main' ones), makes no distinction between groups whose material realities are actually quite different. A good reminder of how an abstract 'horizontality' can run into the same problems of liberal democracy. It remains to be seen how this question is going to be addressed by the IC.

Still, it seems a clearer choice for connectivity – putting an end to the schizophrenic separation between the top-down plenaries and the open market of the self-organised activities – is a move the full significance of which cannot be overstated: for the first time, there is a close match between the discourse and the architectural practice of the WSF, where the event is configured in a way that is supposed to facilitate the bottom-up

Brazilian WSF Council and the WSF Executive Secretariat. In that case, it meant acknowledging, supporting and stimulating autonomous spaces! Cf. Youth Camp Organising Committee. The Intercontinental Youth Camp: a history, a concept. Text presented at a meeting of the Brazilian WSF Council, Sao Paulo, June 2003.

38 In fact, this problem was clearer than ever at the WSF 2005. Some members of the IC and public figures who had been keynote speakers in previous years wrote a manifesto to say what the proposals of Porto Alegre were; because of their position, they were of course given much more attention than all the other people in Porto Alegre who had proposals.³⁸ This attitude can be easily seen as a reaction to the new, centre-less architecture of the Forum; if the event did not provide central spaces for politicising people and presenting programmes, this had to be done from the 'outside', even if by 'insiders'.

construction of strategies that arise out of the free association of elements. The change in the Youth Camp's methodology, on the other hand, shows that this process of association can be further facilitated by a clearer definition of the spaces, where they have an identity that may go beyond thematic affinity and is, to a greater or lesser degree, the result of the existing demands of networked actors rather than the result of an effort of systematisation made by an organising core; thus making participating groups co-responsible for the programme and the space, rather than these two being managed by the organisers.

Conclusion

At the beginning, I showed the difference between the models of the 'hub' and the 'shared space', where the latter still retains a greater or lesser substantive role for such a 'core', and argued that the former was the most radical example of a cultural logic of networking and horizontality. It has been shown how this was not the model one could see at work in the WSF or the Porto Alegre IYC, even though there were great differences between the two that have been diminished by the WSF 2005 methodology – which arguably for the first time shows a full-fledged form of the shared space model. I have also tried to contribute some elements towards an interpretation of the background out of which their respective models had arisen, especially with the IYC; through this, I would like show how it is a doubtful move to reduce horizontality to one particular model, and that it is preferable to understand it within the constraints that determine its possible instantiations.

One of the intellectuals who has been given a lot of space at the WSF, Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, has said that the main challenge to groups and movements attempting to coordinate a global response to neo-liberal globalisation was that of 'translation'; not just of languages, of course, but of incommensurable local differences, trajectories, practices, experiences and cultures.³⁹ The line I have tried to pursue here shows precisely that, by following the story of how the guidelines expressed by the Charter of Principles of the WSF were borrowed from a political culture that was diverse from that of its initiators, and how they were in turn applied by and for different actors in a different context, leading to the adaptations that spawned the IYC methodology and principles – adaptations that the WSF core itself would be slow to catch up with. The IYC appears then as a very particular instantiation of the idea of horizontality, within its cultural and material specificities, that is just as valid as any other. The fact that a cultural logic of networking depends heavily on conditions that are characteristic of advanced capitalism, and labour therein – heightened mobility, computer literacy, language skills, internet access, versatility – necessitates the conclusion that horizontality, like any other ideal, does not exist in an ether independent of social standing, cultural capital and formation, gender etc.; therefore, abstracting one particular model as its 'true' instantiation would be turning a blind eye to many of the things that are actually at stake today in political practice. It would be a paradox that

39 Sousa S. B. 'As Tensoes da Modernidade' [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic/boaventura.php].

horizontality, sought for as the politico-organisational framework that best serves the purpose of combining differences without flattening them out, should be hypostasised into a particular, 'correct' way of 'applying' it. Maybe the old opposition of 'formal' and 'material' democracy has just moved on to another, if more interesting, plane.

The model of the hub could manifest itself around the London ESF because some conditions – those mentioned above, but also the relatively small scale of the autonomous spaces if compared to an event the size the WSF – were there. The presence of these conditions cannot, and should not, be presumed. As a participant at the session at the Caracol Intergalactika highlighted, there is a difference between a 'produced' forum – one that is moved somewhere because that place offers funding, or is deemed of strategic importance (or both) – and a forum that 'happens', that is, one that is carried out by the initiative of groups that are already working together and doing a lot of organising on a daily basis.⁴⁰ To a certain extent, being 'produced' necessitates an organisational centre, and is opposed to the idea of a 'manifest architecture'. The question we are left with is then: can the WSF, given its own conditions, ever move closer towards eliminating the centre, and to becoming a 'hub'?

In political terms, the methodological transformation shows a victory of those in the core who defend a more 'horizontal' approach to the organization, to the point where the role of the International Council/Organising Committee has become mostly that of keeping the process going between events (by maintaining the website, for instance), dealing with the funding, deciding the place for the next forums, organising the material of the online consultation into thematic areas, and facilitating the merging of activities; all of which, nonetheless, very political in themselves. Since some kind of structure is necessary for the first three unless the whole Social Forum should go through very deep changes that do not seem likely in the foreseeable future, a core with these responsibilities will continue to exist – even though measures to make it at least more transparent and accountable in areas such as funding have already been proposed, as seen above (could not the issue of the location of future forums be included in the consultation, when local groups propose a particular place? How would the work of evaluating the possibilities of such local groups actually holding a forum be carried out, however?).

If these things need not be problems in and of themselves, they show that the problem of 'false representation' is also unlikely to go away. Which, in any case, only reminds us of the logical contradiction of the very concept of 'open space': there can only be an open space when it is defined against what is outside its limits, and when someone opens it up before others can come -- opening up is always already shaping.

It is evident, though, that some of these responsibilities are self-produced: the relation between size, budget and funding, for instance; or the facilitating work that is a direct

40 This distinction was made by Pablo Bergel in reference to the Argentinean Social Forum that took place in 2002, after almost a year of intense social mobilisation following the late 2001 crisis. Democracy within the organising committee, he exemplified, was never an issue: all major decisions were taken at large, open assemblies, which brought together groups ranging from traditional parties and trade unions to small grassroots organisations and the fledgling 'neighbourhood assemblies' of that period. This could be another, very different instance of 'manifest architecture'.

consequence of the new methodology. And here it would be perhaps interesting to return to the IYC and the autonomous spaces in London one last time, and see what they could suggest.

I have commented on how the autonomous spaces at the London ESF suggested the possibility of Social Forums becoming a polycentric ‘constellation’ of spaces rather than a more or less unified event with other centres around it.⁴¹ The refinement of the idea of the Thematic Convergence Spaces at the IYC 2005 moves more or less in the same direction. In 2003, the latter were supposed to be organised according to the thematic axes of the WSF; in it, groups registering activities in an axis would immediately be registered in an e-group corresponding to that space, where a facilitator would encourage them to get together in order to merge activities, organise the programme, and take responsibility both for the furnishing of the space (financially cooperating to provide chairs, for example, or networking to bring equipment such as microphones, speakers etc.) and its functioning during the event (ensuring the programme was followed, taking responsibility for the security of the equipment etc.).⁴² The idea included allocating slots for *ad hoc* convergence meetings everyday, a visible lack in the editions of the WSF that had taken place until then.

In 2005, the Action Centres’ proposal remained largely the same, but the decision on the profile of the space, thematic and otherwise, was supposed to be the result of the networking itself. This shows the possibility of doing away with the work of defining general thematic areas altogether, which in the new WSF methodology is done by the IC based on the results of the online consultation, and opens up the possibility of spaces which are not identified thematically, but for other reasons – such as already existing networks – or even if thematic, based on immediate issues and temporary networks (for instance, an anti-war, anti-occupation space) rather than abstract themes (such as anti-militarism). This would potentially make the focus on practical questions and strategies sharper, and networking would be made easier by ‘elective affinities’, either already existing or that arise through the work prior to the event. It also means the brunt of the budget can be more widely shared, as well as some responsibilities that cost money (such as security), making the event cheaper; by doing this, it may also serve the purpose of diminishing the impact of ‘false representation’ in the new methodology – where groups who can organise larger sessions and bring famous speakers receive more attention – by making organisations with more funds invest more in structures to be shared. Finally, it opens up the ‘shared space’ model to larger possibilities of ‘plugging in’ where the consultation, instead of being the material from which the profile is

41 Cf. Nunes, op. cit.; see also Juris, this issue.

42 “What does this mean in terms of innovation? Firstly, the dynamization of spaces, which are occupied in a collective way over time, from the mailing lists before the event to the event itself and afterwards. Second, an incentive to convergence (...). Third, empowerment and responsabilization: (...) having to manage something collectively. Finally, catalyzation: further possibilities for the appearance of effective convergence, common agendas and actions... which takes us back to the discussion on the necessity of affirming the WSF as a polycentric process, not of organizing an event, but the organization of movements themselves” (‘Youth Camp Organising Committee. The Intercontinental Youth Camp: a history, a concept’, Text presented at a meeting of the Brazilian WSF Council, Sao Paulo, June 2003).

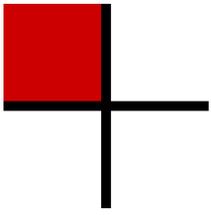
entirely determined, serves as an open bank for groups to look for each other so as to self-organise.

It also means, of course, that groups intending to participate will have to take on more responsibilities, rather than relying on the work of the IC/OC, which might not be interesting for many – it might be preferable for many to arrive at an event that is already pre-organised for them, rather than having to do it themselves. It also does not exclude the need for some ‘central’ facilitation altogether, since not all participants have the same access to the internet and other basic prerequisites. It could be that, for reasons both political and material, the WSF might have reached its limit of ‘horizontality’. To be seen.

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the author

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Constructing the Intercontinental Youth Camp*

Romualdo Paz de Oliveira

abstract

This text is a report on my experience as a volunteer at the Fifth Intercontinental Youth Camp (IYC V). I worked with the Infrastructure Commission during the construction of the camp, which was built in Harmonia Park, before the Fifth World Social Forum (WSF V). Through this report, I intend to address the main difficulties faced by the Organizing Committee of the IYC V and the solutions found in order to solve the problems. First of all, I will provide a brief report on the first three Youth Camps that were also held in Porto Alegre, including my own view of the organization processes as a participant, observer and volunteer. I hope I am able to offer some interesting insights into how the Youth Camps were organized as well as pass on some of the spirit of companionship and friendship shared by organizers and volunteers, and the feeling of concern and responsibility to make things work at the Youth Camp.

The First Three Youth Camps in Porto Alegre

The first Camp was organized by left-wing parties and groups of students' movement (UJS, PSTU and PT)¹ with the support of the City Council of Porto Alegre through its Human Rights and Citizenship Coordination (CDHC). The first Camp was autonomous of the Forum. About 2,000 people were expected to attend the Forum as listeners; they were supposed to camp on the premises of Harmonia Park. However, the Organizing Committee of the Camp was caught by surprise when 3,500 participants registered. Organization was generally poor; things were done in the last minute and decisions made in haste. The Committee began to meet only two months before the event. Everything was unclear; even the WSF was something vague for all, including Porto Alegre residents.

The center of all events at the first WSF, located at PUC (The Catholic University) where the conferences, workshops and talks took place, was rather far from the city

* I wish to thank Maria Ceci Misoczky and Rafael Pavan dos Passos, my partners in self-management and IYC studies. Maria Ceci was also my teacher in UFRGS. My thanks also to Giuliano Reali, who translated this paper.

1 UJS is União da Juventude Socialista (Socialist Youth Union), a left-political entity of young people around Brazil. PSTU represents Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificados (Unified Workers Socialist Party) and PT stands for Partido dos Trabalhadores (Labour Party).

center and Harmonia Park. During the event, the City Council provided bus services, in the morning and afternoon, to cover the distance between the Camp and PUC. However, many people preferred to stay in the camp and enjoy their day there, instead of taking part in the activities that were being held at PUC, taking the opportunity to meet different people, cultures, and ideas that could aggregate new concepts to the ideals for which they fought.



Porto Alegre and Harmonia Park

When the Organizing Committee decided that the following year's WSF would also be held in Porto Alegre, a Youth Committee was created in order to organize the next Camp. The left wing parties' youth organizations received the support of other social movements such as the student movement, street children's movement, hip-hop movement, community radio stations, black movement, and the free sexual orientation movement. This time the City Council, through the CDHC, gave more support to the event. The WSF's local Organizing Committee, linked to the State Governor, also gave its contribution, as well as the ABONG (Brazilian Association of Nongovernmental Associations).

The second Intercontinental Youth Camp was named Carlo Giuliani City and organized by the Youth Committee. During the Architecture Week at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) a three-day workshop was held in order to develop an environmental planning project for the Camp. The workshop counted about thirty architecture students. About one third of these students later became part of a Planning Commission of the Organization Committee. At first, this group of students made clear that they did not want to get involved with politics. They only wanted to do urbanism (Di Giovanni, 2002). However, the actual process of planning and organizing changed that: they discovered politics!

Commissions were created within the Organization Committee. Some of these commissions and their participants included:

Planning and Infrastructure: architecture students organized by the Free Metropolitan Council of Architecture Students;

Culture: street children, hip-hop, free sexual orientation and black movements; PT's Youth (the youth group of the Labor Party);

Communication: community radios, communication students of the metropolitan area, and PT's Youth;

Mobilization: PT's Youth with the support of the WSF Gaucho Committee.

During the preparation phase many plenary sessions were held: fifteen local, a few regional and two national. Regional Organization Committees were organized throughout the country. The project was calculated for 10,000 people, but 15,000 participants from 140 different countries were welcomed at the second Camp.

Carlo Giuliani City was divided into three main axes: Residential, Conviviality, and Activity. The Residential Axis provided the campers with areas to assemble their tents, toilets, tables and barbecue places. The tents were set under the sun and covered by *sombrite* – a special cover used in greenhouses to reduce the incidence of sun radiation. The campers were expected to leave their tents early in the morning and head to the Conviviality and Activity Axes located near the green areas of the park. The Activity Axis comprised the following spaces: the Cultural Axon, a space built with bioconstruction techniques where the workshops took place; the Cultural Decentralizer Spaces located outside of Carlo Giuliani City in many central areas of Porto Alegre; the Contestation Cinema where movies and videos were exhibited; The Kaleidoscope Space, a place for testimonials, debates, chats, and musical shows where people of different cultures could interact; and finally, the Convergence Axis which was composed of the Communication Factory, the Administration Shed, the Recycling Shed, the Sanitation Area (with showers and chemical toilets) as well as kiosks, barbecue places, and the Central Square where a huge bonfire was kept burning throughout the event. The Food Court offered only chemical free products produced by agricultural cooperatives and the MST (the Landless Movement). The participants made clear their abomination for transgenic products. The social movements that were represented in the International Organizing Committee of the WSF, especially Via Campesina,² joined the Camp giving the IYC more strength at the National Organizing Committee as well as a place in the International Committee. In contrast to the first Camp, the Organization Committee of the WSF now recognized the IYC as an integrant part of the WSF.

The Youth Camp organization grew and acquired a more international status. The Argentinean Social Forum was held in August 2002 and the Uruguayan Social Forum in October of the same year. The way these two Forums were organized was strongly influenced by the organization of the second Youth Camp, which also influenced the organization of the third IYC in Porto Alegre.

The first Camp was organized without any notion of management at all; at the second Camp, on the other hand, there was clearly a need for planning, although this was not made a priority. In contrast, for the third Camp there was a management proposal approved in a National Plenary session.

The management proposal for the third Camp – named the City of Cities – involved self-management principles based on a historical context of experiences that goes back

2 “Via Campesina is an international movement which coordinates peasant organizations of small and middle-scale producers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities from Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. It is an autonomous, pluralistic movement, independent from all political, economic, or other denomination. It is integrated by national and regional organizations whose autonomy is respected. Via Campesina is organized in eight regions as follows: Europe, Northeast and Southeast Asia, South Asia, North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America and Africa” (http://www.viacampesina.org/welcome_english.php3).

to the Paris Commune (1871) and the Barrios de Pie Movement in contemporary Argentina. Offering themselves as a laboratory of ideas and practices, the organizers of the City of Cities invited the citizens of this city to build a space where it is possible to create concepts, theories, and exercise transforming practices that, based on the everyday life, question the ways of living and the values of capitalist society.

The City of Cities was divided into structural axes – the Residential axis and the Activity axis. The Residential Axis was divided into four regions, which again were divided into 31 numbered sectors. Each region was identified by a different color. The color and number were written on the identification badge provided to each camper. The sector was thought of as the basic management nucleus. Its boundaries were signaled by natural barriers, ropes, and banners. Collective services were also provided: security, environment management, interpreters and translators, accreditation, health, monitors, facilitators, communication, as well as food courts on both axes.

Designed for seminars, plenary sections, meetings, panels, etc, the Thematic Convergence Place included five areas located in the Activity Axis, with a capacity of 1,000 people. The rooms were based on the themes of the WSF: sustainable and democratic development, principles and values; human rights, diversity and equality; media, culture and counter-hegemony; political power, civil society and democracy; global democratic order, fight against militarization combat and peace promotion. Around these topics, networks and movements could build physical structures as well as their actions.

In terms of infrastructure, the City of Cities employed the same molds of Carlo Giuliani City. The Environmental Work Group led an awareness campaign among the campers. Neutral or environmentally friendly soaps and shampoos were sold in the Camp. Leaflets on ethic consumption of water were distributed to campers. Posters indicated those showers where inorganic products were allowed. Half of the waste from the toilets was sent to the public waste disposal system in the center of Porto Alegre. The other half – from organic products – was diverted to a pool that is part of the Park's drainage system.



Shower area

Garbage cans of two different colors were placed all over the City of Cities: the green ones for solid waste and the orange ones for organic waste. There was a Recycling Shed in the Park where organized groups screened solid waste. This activity generated extra income for those people. The organic waste was sent to DMLU (the Urban Waste Municipal Department). A daily production of 24 tons of waste was expected. Approximately 60% of this waste could be recycled. In order to reduce the amount of solid waste, the Environment Working Group provided the campers with plastic mugs, avoiding, therefore, the use of disposable cups.

These were the roles involved at the third IYC:

Facilitator: the first contact that organizes access to registration and to sectors. The facilitator also provides general information about how the camp works.

Monitor: one camper from each sector. The monitor is the person who is able to provide all information, resolve or forward problems to the local organization, help campers to organize the occupation of the lots and to find help for their local problems.

Camper: participates in the management of the Camp discussing and organizing the sector where he or she is based; manages, through his or her social movement, the spaces where collective activities happen (by the Guaiba Lake), or organizes the camp as a whole through participation in voluntary services.

Self-management implied that the campers themselves were responsible, collectively, for the organization of their sectors (neighborhoods), the collective services and other created spaces. The following gives an overview of how the management of the Camp should have occurred:

Each sector would be responsible for organizing itself in order to guarantee safety and cleanliness, create a communication/information scheme with the rest of the Camp, and organize translation, besides allocating volunteers for all collective services. The Monitor would be responsible for kick-starting the self-management process, calling the first meetings and guiding campers on the management tasks to be fulfilled via self-management. There should be one Sector Meeting per day, or differently, if so collectively agreed on the first meeting. The Meetings would be the arenas to define rules and procedures for the Sector, being sovereign to decide and execute responsibilities and functions belonging to each Sector, and to indicate volunteers. The interested parties should define how the Sector Management Group would deal with internal demands. The first Meeting would choose the Sector Group representative, who could be a temporary in order to relate to the Management Board.

Collective services would be based at a so-called Central Services. In the Central Services area there was a separate room for each service, a space where the daily Meetings of service agents should occur. The Collective Services Meeting should choose the Management Group, which should report activities and inspect the execution of collectively defined tasks. The first Meeting would be installed and coordinated by the Monitors and members of the Camp Organizing Committee. The Group of Representatives, permanent or temporary, would be at the Management Board.

When a group, network or social movement registers collectively, it has to choose a WSF thematic axis. From then on members become co-managers of their Thematic Place. Each group of people has to manage the schedule, safety and cleanliness of its space and organize activities, and try to solve problems with collective services. The Thematic Convergence Place Meeting would serve as an arena for debates on convergence themes among groups and for the organization of demands

and managerial tasks. Also, it should define a methodology related to the spaces, respecting the program organized by the Camp Organization Committee.

The Management Board would act as a convergence space for all management agents from all sectors, collective services, thematic spaces, institutional relationships and other representations. The Board would be the place for sending queries relative to internal relations or queries that need to be forwarded to other bodies. Its attributions and responsibilities include: guarantee harmony and information flow among all management levels and the camp, deliberate on proposed questions and notify the Camp on the decisions. It has an articulating role since most problems must be solved by sector management groups. The Management Board would gather at the end of every afternoon. In the first meeting a Secretariat should be chosen so that, in connection with the Camp Organizing Committee Management Group, it would be in charge of the motivation and methodological conduction of the meetings, and of transmitting information to the Camp through a sound system and through various billboards.

In order to re-state the reality of the *City of Cities* as an autonomous space of conviviality for a myriad of people, and in order to facilitate monetary exchange, mainly for foreign campers, two currency types were created in partnership with the Mosaic Monetary Movement and the Planetary Art Network. The first currency was called Sol (Sun) and used as monetary unit within the Camp. It valued one Real. The other was called Lua (Moon) and served to facilitate exchange within Culture Exchange Fairs, promoted by the Arte Planetária Network.

Overall, the third Camp achieved relative success, considering its magnitude – about 30,000 people. It suffered from problems that happened largely in the Forum as a whole and that reflect a ‘perverse’ integration into the life of Porto Alegre. This city, like any other, suffers from problems related to urban violence. What appears to have happened was the ‘discovery’ of the Camp by local thieves. This kind of problem implicated in both safety concerns and problems with the security organizations needed to attenuate it – namely, the state police and contracted security firms.

In practice the self-management proposal worked rather partially. Some activists, such as some organized Argentinean groups who had practical self-management experiences, immediately understood the situation. However, in most sectors the proposal never materialized itself. Thus, groups from the latter sectors were represented by Monitors in the Committee and in collective bodies.

The Youth Camp in 2005

In 2005, the WSF returned to Porto Alegre and so returned my desire to participate in the process of building the IYC V. Helping to construct a different world, a world of equality of rights and opportunities for all; that was what I wanted the most in January 2005. However, how could I reconcile this willingness with a normal 8 hour a day job? The solution: work as a volunteer from 6pm to 9pm, taking advantage of the daylight saving time period.

The IYC Organizing Committee, which in previous editions ranked young members from Porto Alegre political parties and from representatives of social movements, this time had a more autonomous profile, with only 30% representing social entities or

political parties. The Organization Committee delegated missions to different commissions, such as Environment, Communications and Infrastructure, which were responsible for the organization of their spaces in the camp.



Camping area before its occupation and the 'sombrite' material to filter sunshine

The Infrastructure Commission was responsible for the construction of the communitarian spaces in the camp. The commission was divided into groups. Each one was responsible for the construction of a different space. One of these groups was composed of recently graduated architects and students of architecture from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Two members of the Unemployed Workers Movement (Movimento de Trabalhadores Desempregados, MTD) worked as carpenters with the group. Their help was crucial to complete the construction of the structures. The camp opened two days before the WSF V, so the commission needed a great number of volunteers at that moment. It was two weeks of hard work, learning and enjoyment.



Tents in the camping area

My group was responsible for the construction of the spaces destined to the dry garbage screening produced in the camp. An existing shed was reformed and walls, doors, windows and the floor were built in it. In this shed was the so-called Screening Center.

Three other buildings were built inside the park area to work as dry garbage pre-screening places. The construction style chosen was meant to establish a relationship of respect towards the environment. Therefore, some recyclable materials, such as milk cartons and plastic bottles, were used to make the walls and roof of the shed, and the furniture was made of plywood. All the groups made sure to use materials that are harmless to the environment, through unconventional construction techniques, such as bio-construction.



Screening Center



External trashcan – Screening Center

Using recycled materials in the building of pre-screening areas was a group's idea and had full support from the Infrastructure Commission. Among the reasons that influenced the Commission were the following: show that most of the garbage we produce can be re-used, show that costs can be reduced by using recyclable materials, identify the pre-screening centers by the materials they collect, train non-conventional construction techniques that produce satisfactory results at low costs (allied to the easiness in obtaining the materials).

Of all jobs that I helped doing, my biggest challenge was to make the external trashcans of the Screening Center. In fact, after spending a long time in the construction of the first one, we learned a building method that sped up the process and reduced the effort put into it so that the trashcan was more easily made. The bottom of the trashcan was made of plywood, and the external walls of plastic bottles. We had enough time to help another group to construct a geodesic. Geodesics are structures made of treated bamboos, incased in metallic structures, forming a semi circumference. After incasing the bamboos, the structure is covered with an external canvas. In the geodesics, workshops and other types of events took place during the camp. The satisfaction of seeing the spaces ready and functioning after the persistence and energy used in this task was indescribable and very rewarding.

On my first day, two weeks before the beginning of the WSF, the primary feeling was that the camp would not be completed in time. All the process seemed to be behind schedule and the camp seemed very empty to me. A few volunteers were working on it.

Only the pre-existing structures in the park were actually active, and not more than half of the brick bathrooms placed inside the park were working.



Construction of Geodesic structure

In a house in the middle of the park the Camp Organizing Committee (COA – Comitê Organizador do Acampamento) and its basic infrastructure was located – from computers to stationery. In the adjacent shed the kitchen and the volunteer's canteen were installed. This shed became a meeting point for the volunteers, since they all used the space to mingle everyday after work, at sunset. The food was really good, natural and balanced, adequate enough to recharge the batteries after a long day's work.



Health center: the wall was built with adobe

The number of people in the camp kept growing day after day. One week before the camp's official opening, there were about five hundred campers, then eight hundred two days later, and ultimately over five thousand on the opening day. Che Guevara and Bob Marley were seen on many flags and T-shirts around the camp. Left political parties were present on many bands and flags too. Since the number of volunteers increased greatly, as well as the number of people camping, almost all structures could be finished in time.



Opening March - WSF

The first security problems in the camp came with the increase of people camping. Fights between punk groups happened on a regular basis, and one man was injured with a machete. It was then that tent robberies began. The movement of people in the camp area was intense, especially at night. The parties and shows inside the park had just begun, and locals would visit the camp. By then, my main opinion had changed: I thought that the infrastructure was indeed going to be ready in time, but it would be insufficient to serve the thirty thousand people camping and all the visitors who certainly would show up at the camp every day.

Self-Management at the Fifth International Youth Camp

As it had happened to its predecessors, the IYC V was conceived by the COA to serve as a laboratory where new alternatives are constructed, concepts are created, and so are theories and practices that question the capitalist way of life from the daily conviviality among people: a laboratory that relates proposals to action but doesn't fear errors. Once again, the IYC brought self-management as a proposal for the social and territorial organization of campers at the WSF.

In the context of a laboratory, self-management refers to the management of production and social organization in line with the principles of freedom and equality in which all popular movements, groups and individuals have equal rights and equal participation. A more literal concept of self-management would postulate the complete suppression of any distinction between directors and directed, i.e. a call for humans to organize themselves collectively. Self-management is a constantly changing project, a model that is never finished. Its structure and organization, its very existence is, and will be, the fruit of the willingness, thoughts and action of group members, without prejudice or imposition.

The target was to make the community organization horizontal, which implies all members being able to make decisions together and manage their own borough. Some groups, such as some political parties and university excursions,³ already had some organization system defined prior to coming to the camp, so the self-management process was more easily acquired by them than by other groups, such as, for example, the punk movement. Those who had pre-existing organizational structures had a patrolling schedule and sent people to represent them in the meetings and commissions; others had great difficulty in understanding the meaning of the self-management process. This generated a territorial division in the camp, noticeable from day one; the craftsmen, the political parties, the punks, the hip-hop movement each occupying a different area. Due to the territorial separation, integration between these groups did not happen as expected and, as a consequence, a totally fruitful interaction between those movements did not actually occur.

Perhaps the major problem was that, similarly to what happened in the third IYC, planning often followed hierarchical and authoritarian forms. The city was planned by few to be later occupied and managed by others. Hierarchies reproduce forms of domination through the perpetuation of control and dependence situations. This fact was among the main reasons for the low level of involvement from the campers with the management proposal. This notorious territorial separation among movements generated small neighborhoods within the park; a fact that not only imposed an obstacle to the exchange of experiences that were supposed to happen among campers but also isolated those groups which were less prone to social co-living, specially the punks. The craftsmen, concentrated in the same area, disputed the attention of passers-by, sometimes annoying and embarrassing campers and visitors. The hip-hop group, linked to cultural and social movements from shantytowns and to community radio stations, interacted better with the campers. The food courts traded only organic, non-genetically modified, and pesticide free products. Commercial relations, however, reproduced the practices of the capitalist market – selling for profit and timid usage of the ‘solidarity’ currency.

The relationship between some groups of campers and the COA was a little ambiguous too, concerning the self-management concept. For example, some students of UFRGS were not formally registered in the COA and did not pay the camp’s joining fee. To make matters worse, they camped in a Special Protection Area, located inside the park. The COA’s allegation was that the area had vestiges of native vegetation, and its occupation was prohibited. In fact, the native vegetation was actually behind the place where the tents were set up. The group camped in an intermediate area between the Special Protection Area and the open park area, but that space was not supposed to be occupied either, anyway. Even being off-limits in theory, the place where the organic garbage is treated was right beside the area where they camped, and garbage trucks would dump rubble every day on the other side of the group’s camp. However, according to the group, the COA’s intention was to build a communitarian kitchen in

3 In other cities of Brazil, students had organized bus excursions to come to Porto Alegre to participate in the WSF. These excursions were organized by the Students Representatives (Academic Directories), and almost all students stayed at the IYC. It is for this reason I call them university excursions.

the shed under which the group put its tents. If the intention was to preserve the special area, the group proved to be more efficient and organized than the formal organization, which itself was a contradiction to the self-management proposition. I spent some time with the group and was rather divided on the issue. On the one hand, as a nature activist, I believe that buffer areas between preservation and urban areas should not be inhabited. Small animals normally seek refuge there, and human presence can scare them or put them in jeopardy. On the other hand, most of the members of that group were friends of mine; therefore I could verify that their practices were not harmful to the place. Their tents were positioned below the existing shed, not in a virgin area; the log for fire did not come from the woods, but from scrap spread around the park; garbage was separated and trashed in the right place.



Compost area: place where the organic garbage was treated

Final Comments

For the first time the WSF V had all its events by Guaíba Lake; many of them at Harmonia Park. This finally made the Youth Camp to become an integrated part of the Forum. For the first time the Camp occupied the whole area of the park and not only a single sector, as it happened in the previous editions. With such a large area available the number of campers increased to 35,000 people. This fact also generated some problems when a group of students, as I mentioned, occupied a Special Protection Area of the park.

My group's targets for the construction of the Camp had been reached with an almost complete success. However, the pre-screening structures had not been finished as planned. The plan was to use plastic bottles as the roof, and milk cartons below them, as a ceiling lining. During the construction of the structures, we had to opt for one solution or the other, due to the lack of time and material to make them. The people who worked in the project were very tired, mentally and physically, but also very satisfied with the results of their work. Unfortunately, the pre-screening centers did not manage to achieve their goal (since the campers did not buy the message about recycling) and were almost completely abandoned, eventually.



Pre-screening Center abandoned in camping area

The pre-screening centers were designed to stock the solid waste (such as cans and cardboard milk boxes) produced in the Camp. The amount of stocked waste would be later collected by garbage catchers. The aim was to help the garbage catchers as well as to awake environmental awareness among the campers. Unfortunately, this experienced was the perfect example of what did not work. There was more garbage spread all over the park than in the pre-screening center. Only the main shed was successful, receiving thousands of visitors per day.



Screening Center inside

During the WSF, the Camp looked very dirty, like any city with high demographic density. The garbage, though, was not the only source of visual pollution: posters, flags, garbage cans, craft stalls, food courts, tents, all contributed. A huge amount of garbage was produced but little was recycled. Many campers carefully separated their garbage (solid or organic waste) and disposed in the right place. However, a lot of people did not show the same concern. Despite all efforts of the volunteers providing information and orientation, not everyone was sensitive to the garbage issue. It is clear that the

environmental teaching-learning process cannot cease with the end of the Camp. New allies were incorporated to this struggle, and the example they will set in their cities will compensate for the lack of engagement of those who were not touched by this idea.

My expectations as a volunteer have been totally reached, though. The integration with so many people and groups different from me was very rewarding. We had a very beneficial exchange of ideas and also an experience of fellowship and brotherhood in the camp. Besides learning how to use a hammer, a level, a plummet, a brush, a measuring tape and scissors to create spaces to be used by the camp community, I had the chance to learn about different practices and customs.

The camp can be considered a great success. It had many problems like robberies, fights and confusion, as it happens in any city. After all, receiving thirty five thousand people in a reduced space and providing them with all the services they need for ten days is an arduous task. All the spaces worked well, even though not as perfectly as they had been conceived. With a little patience, though, the volunteers were able to solve almost any problem.



Volunteers preparing the adobe (clay)

The total number of volunteers reached a thousand⁴ and everyone who wanted to take part was welcomed. Despite the large number of volunteers, all of them were willing to do their utmost to help, but the practical and technical knowledge of the Unemployed Workers Movement members was the crucial factor for the completion of the tasks in time. The architects had it all planned out, but at the moment of building, things would always turn out to be somewhat different, and this is when the MTD members really made the difference.

Despite all the problems, the process was successful, as a whole. The groups coexisted in almost complete harmony, sharing spaces, tasks and beliefs. All of them respected one another's values, creeds, races and sexual orientation, although it has to be said it

4 The official record is around 1,000 volunteers. But many volunteers were unofficial or informal. So, the absolute number is unknown and hard to specify.

was not perfect. It lacked a better organization and more engagement from the campers to the self-management proposals, even though the very self-management theory encourages its followers to organize themselves and break away from traditional organization models.



Workshop in a geodesic

Working at IYC V was a unique experience! Watching and sharing activities with fellow professionals from other areas, such as journalism, architecture and biology, as well as with unemployed workers, all working together in the construction of another world, made the moment eternal. Had all worked as planned, and had all sorts of problems not happened, surely we would have been camping in the wrong Forum. The ability to improvise which organizers and volunteers showed in solving difficulties shows us that the process is on the right track. Solutions do not come to us ready as prescriptions, but as everyday problems arise and we see ourselves forced to deal with them.

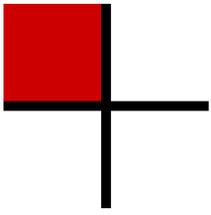
And if there is something in which the IYC V was rich, it was in the will to learn and teach new ways to face difficulties, ways that differ from those normally used by the establishment. Sharing ideas and ideals to overcome difficulties: that is the major goal reached by the IYC V.

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World and European Social Forums: A Bibliography*

Oscar Reyes

Annotated Web Bibliography

World Social Forum [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br]

The official World Social Forum (WSF) website is the best place to start. It describes the Forum's origins, aims and organisational structures, as well as containing accounts of all five WSFs and initial details of the 'polycentric' WSF 2006 process. The official 'memory project' for the WSF is Memoria Viva [<http://www.memoria-viva.org>]. Details on the 2004 World Social Forum in India are still available from its website. A number of initiatives associated with the WSF also have their own websites, including the World Social Library and the Intercontinental Youth Camp.

European Social Forum [www.fse-esf.org]

The official website of the European Social Forum, including archived copies of the programmes and websites of the first three ESFs. Assessments of the ESF 2004 in London are gathered in the Euromovements newsletter. Further documents and opinions can be found at the unofficial ESF activist website [www.esf2004.net].

Autonomous Spaces at the ESF [www.altspaces.net]

The ESF 2004 was surrounded by a variety of autonomous spaces. These included the European Forum on Communication Rights, Beyond the ESF, Life Despite Capitalism, the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, the Urban Forum and the Carnival Forum.

Assembly of the Social Movements [www.movsoc.org]

The Social Movements Assembly is one of many spaces within the WSF that coordinates actions.

Babels [www.babels.org]

* Online at <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/5-2/5-2biblio.htm>

Babels is an international network of volunteer interpreters and translators whose main objective it is to cover the interpreting needs of the Social Forums and of other international events, as defined in the calendar of the 'call of the social movements'.

Choike [www.choike.org]

A web portal disseminating the work of NGOs based in the global South. Choike contains an informative collection of reports and links about WSF in Porto Alegre [http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/eventos/10.html], WSF IV in Mumbai [http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/eventos/1.html] and WSF III in Porto Alegre [http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/738.html]. It also contains an online copy of World Social Forum – Challenging Empires [http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1557.html], which is the most comprehensive book yet published about the WSF.

Delibera [<http://www.delibera.net/>]

An online tool for participatory democracy used by the WSF International Council. It also contains evaluations of WSF 2005.

Euromovements [www.euromovements.info]

Guide for social transformation in Europe, related to the ESF and its surroundings. Includes networking tools, social movement chronologies, newsletters and a directory of all the organizations registered to the first three ESFs.

Memoria-Viva [<http://www.memoria-viva.org>]

Memory of World Social Forum and regional forums, including reports on seminars and database of proposals.

Nomad [<http://www.nomadfkt.org/>]

An international network developing alternative technologies. Developed the Nomad Interpretation Free Tool (NIFT) as an alternative to commercial translation systems in use at social forums.

Network Institute for Global Democratization [www.nigd.org]

A transnational research association that has been heavily involved in the WSF process. Free, downloadable materials include a 240-page working paper called 'From a Global Market Place to Political Spaces' [[http://www.nigd.org/docs/Global Market Place.pdf](http://www.nigd.org/docs/Global%20Market%20Place.pdf)] with several important essays on the WSF; 'We, the Peoples of the World Social Forum' [[http://www.nigd.org/Discussion Papers.html](http://www.nigd.org/Discussion%20Papers.html)], with reflections on WSF II at Porto Alegre, and a report on 'The Politics of the WSF's "Open Space"' [[http://www.nigd.org/WSF itself summary.html](http://www.nigd.org/WSF%20itself%20summary.html)] a seminar with several key WSF organisers held at WSF IV in Mumbai. It is also a good source for keeping up with discussions within the WSF International Council.

Open Democracy [www.opendemocracy.net]

A global online magazine of politics and culture. The DIY World section contains informative articles on the WSF and its Davos rival the World Economic Forum.

Open Space Forum [<http://www.openspaceforum.net/>]

The politics of open spaces. This website was put together by contributors to the International Social Studies Journal special issue on the World Social Forum [<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/issj/56/182>], and contains online versions of their articles.

Other Worlds [<http://www.mundi.org.uk/otherworlds/>]

Educational project inspired by the World Social Forum.

People's Global Action [www.agp.org]

An international anti-capitalist network that pre-exists the WSF. People's Global Action became known for calling Global Action Days (J18, N30, S16, etc.) [<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/mayday1.htm>] to coincide with international summits. Its website also contains an excellent library of writings on globalisation and war, which includes several pieces on the World Social Forum. Useful documents on the WSF are also collected in the All 4 All Global Action Database [<http://www.all4all.org/wsf/index.shtml>].

Red Pepper [<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/>]

Independent magazine of the green and radical left in Britain, which has a special section on European and World Social Forums (<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/socialforum/socialforum.html>).

Transform! [www.transform.it]

Transform! is a European network of research and political education organisations. Its informative 140-page newsletter, 'World Social Forum: a Debate on the Challenges for Its Future' [http://www.transform.it/newsletter/news_transform01.html] was produced by Transform! Italia in association with the Transnational Institute and Red Pepper.

Transnational Institute [www.tni.org]

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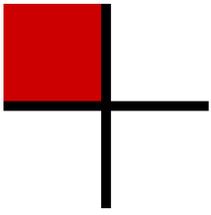
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Activism, Affect and Abuse: Emotional Contexts and Consequences of the ESF 2004 Organising Process

Laura L. Sullivan

abstract

Written without prejudice, this essay addresses the emotional dimension of activism through an informal account of my experiences in the UK-ESF organising process. I provide a record of the conflictual process as considered through the lens of my professional training and background in Re-evaluation Counselling (RC). I also suggest strategies for dealing with emotional dynamics in future activist efforts.

Introduction

I have never procrastinated so much in my life about the writing of a text as I have with this essay. Upon reflection, as I finally face what has been underneath this delay all along, I realise that it would be more accurate to say that I have never dreaded to such an extent what I would have to recall and feel in order to write and think about the topic I proposed as a contribution to this special issue of *ephemera*, namely the emotional dimension of the organising process of the UK-ESF. And now I recognise this dread, for it is familiar from many experiences in my past, some quite a while ago, and some more recent: it is the dread of returning to the scene of abuse.

And this language is accurate, for this is precisely what the UK process of organising the European Social Forum was from the start. I am reminded of a definition given by a leader of a seminar on sexual abuse and incest that I attended years ago; she advocated that we define incest in the broadest sense, as ‘a betrayal by a person or people in power’. This conceptualisation of ‘incest’, then, would include abuses of power by institutions and their representatives. From this perspective, the frequent expressions by those of us who were disempowered in this process, that ‘we were screwed’, takes on a deeper resonance.

So I invoke this scenography of abuse not to overly personalise the experience, but as a way to connect the individual and collective levels of the role of emotions in the UK-ESF organising process. In this essay I will highlight key points and instances of conflict and focus upon the emotional aspects involved, contextualising these with descriptions and analyses of the specific power dynamics involved, the political groups

wielding and not wielding power, and the situatedness of power abusers within political parties and government structures.

I will offer two concepts to help untangle these emotional dynamics: 'internalised oppression' and 'restimulation', both borrowed from the theory and practice of Re-evaluation Counselling.¹ 'Internalised oppression' refers to the way members of oppressed groups internalise the messages directed at their group, begin to believe they are true, and act out these messages, hurting themselves and other members of their group. Internalised sexism is one example. A less familiar but nonetheless salient instance relevant to this situation is the internalisation of oppression of activists. 'Restimulation' occurs when a situation in the present reminds a person of some hurtful experience in the past from which s/he has not healed and brings up the feeling(s) associated with these old hurts. In this reading, recipients of the controlling hostile behaviour of UK-ESF central organisers were often restimulated to past hurts, such as those which occurred in school, in our families, and in other social groups (e.g., 'cliques').

While a consideration of the history of the Social Forum movement is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to keep in mind that some of the specific power struggles experienced in the UK-ESF organising process have been encountered before in efforts to put on Social Forums at the world and regional levels. In particular, there has been a growing tension between the emphasis on openness and democratic process in the WSF's Charter of Principles and the actualities of various organisations and groups working together on the ground in organising Social Forums. Another central area of tension has been the Charter's forbidding of the participation of governments and political parties and the role that these have nevertheless played, to varying degrees, in all the world and regional Social Forums.

Nonetheless, the primarily (and problematically) London-based UK-ESF 2004 organising process took these pre-existing tensions to an extreme not previously confronted. From the start, this process was consistently characterised by fear-driven abuses of power and attempts to control, manipulate, and exclude others whose political affiliations and organisational methods differed from those of the central organisers. These attempts, which usher out of particular political viewpoints and particular plans and visions for large scale emancipatory social change, simultaneously have an emotional basis. Recipients of the hostile, manipulative, patronising, and controlling behaviour of these central organisers found ourselves negotiating much on the emotional front as well. Participating in this process engendered many feelings in us, including fear, humiliation, shame, shock, sadness, frustration, fury, outrage, betrayal, powerlessness, and feeling overwhelmed.

Context and Backstory

The factions that went forward to seek approval to get the ball rolling for an ESF in the UK were visible from the start. Broadly, on one side were the London Social Forum and

1 For more information about Re-evaluation Counselling, see <http://www.rc.org>.

other grassroots organisations, who approached the organisers of the Paris ESF in the fall of 2003 with the proposition that the ESF be held in the UK in 2005, allowing enough time for thorough and effective organising. On the other side were some large UK trade unions, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), and people associated with the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, and the Greater London Assembly (GLA) (later revealed to be members of the 'secret' party called Socialist Action (SA)); members of this contingent were keen to have the bid to host the ESF in London approved for 2004. With the latter group's assurance that the process would be transparent and inclusive of grassroots and other less institutionally powerful organisations and groups, the Paris ESF organisers gave the go-ahead for the planning of the UK-ESF in late 2003 and the event's occurrence in 2004.

From the start, UK-ESF organising meetings were a shambles. Agendas were not pre-circulated; chairpersons were drawn exclusively from SWP-big union-GLA/SA camps; and speakers from other circles were either cut off or disallowed from speaking entirely. Shouting matches and complete chaos ensued. I joined the organising process in January of 2004, just after the first of such meetings. While some participants, for example members of the antiauthoritarian/libertarian 'group' the Wombles (<http://www.wombles.org.uk>), were quickly disillusioned, others – newcomers like me, some members of the LSF, and folks from other grassroots groups – decided to stay on board and see if there was any room for negotiation with those who at that time seemed fully in control.

At this point, let me stop and stress that already the different choices, in this case about the question of whether or not to participate in the organising process at all, were informed not only by different levels of knowledge and previous experience with the power dynamics in interactions amongst the already-emerging 'sides' in this arena, but were also influenced greatly by different emotional states and responses. The disillusionment and frustration, even infuriation, that many long-time activists from social centres and other alter-globalisation efforts experienced at this point led them to pull out and already to turn their attention to organising 'alternative' spaces (which have become increasingly visible and important to Social Forums in general, and were, at this very time, central to the WSF held in Mumbai in January 2004). Those of us who chose to stay and try to engage were feeling some initial shock, disbelief, and frustration at the tactics of the people controlling the organising committee. But we also were invested in retaining hope, which led us to try to bring negotiation and democracy back into the organising process.

I should also say that some of us just found it very difficult to believe that people who were (supposedly) on the same overall 'side' – something broadly conceived of as 'the left' – could be so seemingly irrational, so unreachable. To have come to that conclusion that early would have felt defeatist, and we were committed to persistence. Another feeling that came into play was the belief that the UK-ESF itself had the potential to be such an important event for so many thousands of people, that to cede the official process to the people who were so rigidly controlling it seemed a shame. We literally believed that by staying involved, we could influence not only the organising process, but the flavour, inclusiveness, and – equally important – the *political* scope and focus of the event. We hoped to counter the increasingly apparent desire by the

organisers for a conservatively liberal event that would marginalise and exclude refugees, homeless people, sex-workers, etc., as well as people and groups whose efforts are aimed specifically against the current neo-liberal regime of capitalism.

Thus, right from the earliest meetings, there was an interrelationship between people/groups in power, process, specific decisions taken, and participants' emotional experiences. One issue that characterises all activism was urgently on the table: the question of when to engage, and when to leave a process or group, and do something else or work with other people/groups. This is also frequently framed as the question of whether or not to 'give up', a phrase that is particularly telling, with its tone of resignation. This negotiation, this 'giving up', echoes with what many if not most of us experienced in our childhoods. While a generalisation, it is still true that most of us as young people experienced surprise, shock even, to find that the people around us, our parents and caregivers first, and later teachers and other authority figures, treated us in hurtful ways, frequently as a displacement of their own distress. As young people, we often felt compelled to reach out and try to engage with these very shut-down adults who were in charge of our care, and in our first years, of our very survival. This impulse was both one of working to ensure our survival and also one of still believing in the best of human beings, wanting to help these people be more present and open to life and to connection.² But for many of us, at some point while we were growing up, and frequently as a product of being hurt/damaged/traumatized with little emotional support to assist with healing, we 'gave up'. We gave up fighting for the attention and love of the people around us. Some of us became 'tough' and tucked away our sense of abandonment, or isolation, or hopelessness. Others of us became stuck in the sadness, hopelessness, or disappointment. Perhaps rage and the desire for revenge was a response of others of us to these kinds of dynamics.

So those of us who in January and February of 2004 decided to 'stay in' and who attended weekly meetings that took on an increasingly farcical if simultaneously Stalinesque character, were, in part, motivated by hope, by a desire to 'not give up', as well as by the real belief that we would make a significant difference to the many people who would be enabled to attend the more politically radical and inclusive ESF which we intended to make happen.

Underneath My Personal Involvement

Several particular moments from the UK-ESF organising process were also key emotional moments for me, and I will use them as narrative contexts for making larger points about the affective dimension of this process. One of these pivotal moments was

2 I realise that such sentiments are immediately open to the theoretical criticism of 'essentialism'. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that we must explore, and in some cases adopt, such thoughts regarding what it means to be/become human, in the spirit of what Gayatri Spivak, in a feminist context, refers to as 'strategic essentialism', in the endeavour to move forward in envisioning and building a non-exploitative world that values all forms of life. So I will continue with these broadly conceived ideas about the psychological dynamics from early life that appear to me to be typically involved in our emotional struggles in activist processes.

certainly the highly charged meeting of the European Assembly that took place in London over the first weekend of March 2004. In order to describe the events of that weekend and my experience of it, I will first provide the ‘backstory’ to my personal involvement in the UK-ESF organising process.

Prior to 2004, my life in London primarily revolved around doing research and writing my Ph.D dissertation. I had decided to defer and delay getting involved with many specific activist groups and efforts until that document was done. I had, however, been part of one London-based group, a loose network of folks interested in the intersection of politics and spirituality. Calling ourselves ‘Spirit Matters’ (after the title of one of U.S. activist/rabbi Michael Lerner’s books, 2000), we had put on one-day events that combined talks, debates, group discussions, and experiential elements such as dancing, music, and yoga. At the time that we decided to branch out, at the start of 2004, someone forwarded an e-mail to the Spirit Matters organising committee about the UK-ESF organising process. Not only a lovely and inspiring invitation, this letter also articulated the politics in quite an anti-capitalist fashion and emphasised inclusiveness to a great degree (see Appendix 1). Some of us went along to investigate, and we were shocked by the chaos and oppressive treatment that we saw at the meetings (which contrasted greatly with the loving, inviting, and hopeful tone of the initial letter we received). Knowing nothing of the political and power context and history involved, two of us, who have experience in counselling and mediation and who saw that the heavy-handed chairing of meetings was pivotally influential in the resulting chaos and resentment, sent a letter to the UK-ESF organising committee and volunteered to offer our skills. We offered to chair meetings and to facilitate workshops training others in democratic and consensus-based chairing/facilitation. We received no response.

At the next meeting of the Organising Committee (OC), we decided to reach out again, in person. There were again shouting matches and emotional conflicts, mostly concerning the declaration issued by GLA staffmember (and prominent member of Socialist Action), Redmond O’Neill, who proclaimed that the previous working groups – who had been in place for a few months and many of whom had undertaken significant amounts of work already – were thereby abolished. The meeting was chaired by the then president of the RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport Union), who was abrupt, authoritarian, and expressed favouritism in allowing some people to speak, and for long periods, while denying these privileges to others. We spoke with him afterwards, acknowledging first the difficulty of chairing a meeting where there was so much tension. For a moment – about five seconds – he was ‘real’, that is, we could see the fear in his eyes, and he spoke about his anxiety and how hard chairing the meeting had been. Then the guardedness and rigidity went back up, and that was it. This rigid, hard, severe stance was displayed by many of those ‘in control’ throughout the process and we were met repeatedly with a similar rigidity, coupled with overt hostility for the people who had tried to have their voices heard at the meeting. Clearly, our skills as mediators and negotiators of emotional conflict were not at all desired; those ‘in power’ merely wanted the dissenters either to acquiesce to their plans or to leave the process. My colleague in Spirit Matters decided she would no longer participate in the official organising process, while I continued to go to the weekly OC meetings as well as those of the Programme working group. Knowing no one, and at this point having little knowledge of the history of context for the tensions, I attended meetings and soaked up

what I could glean about the various ‘players’ and their political allegiances, which I quickly realised were also parallel with the differences in style and treatment of others at meetings. Each week many people tried respectfully to raise questions or to propose policies, and each week they were shot down, either dismissed outright, or told there was not enough time to address their concerns.

I began to realise that an abuse of power on a deep level was occurring yet was being denied. That is, there was a pretence by those in power that there was no abuse happening. Yet everyone knew that it was, and those without power were not only subjected to this denial and pretence; we also were forced to *witness the abuse*. Frequently actors from the ‘side’ in charge would scream at or shame very directly and personally actors who had tried to shift the power dynamics, to interject new ideas, or to suggest that the process itself be made more ‘democratic’ (comments which were received with particular vitriol). What I want to flag up is that within the context of these official meetings, a space supposedly characterised by inclusiveness and consensus, those of us not in control – that is, we were not from the organization hosting the meeting, we did not chair the meetings, and we had no say in the agenda nor how it was discussed or implemented – not only saw the most egregious abuses of power, we also *had many feelings* about these abuses, including the sadness, fear, shame and sense of powerlessness one experiences while watching someone else be abused.³ In January and February 2004, the fact that I did not know the other attendees of the OC meetings meant that I was alone with my feelings. I was informing Spirit Matters, as well as other members of an editorial collective I am part of, (for a London-based magazine called *Mute* that deals with art, culture, new media, and politics), about what was happening at the UK-ESF OC meetings, and I felt some sense of duty as a kind of reporter. But as the weeks went on, I increasingly dreaded each Thursday night meeting. Now I can see that I dreaded re-experiencing the sense of powerlessness, the frustration, and the grief and shame of watching abusive treatment go on unabated (and actually worsen each meeting). There was also a sense that surely, this abusive atmosphere would change, and every week I entertained some hope that perhaps it would, this time, be different. It never was. Nonetheless, I carried on going, and took copious and detailed notes, not really sure why I was doing so and what purpose they might serve.

The Horizontals Come to Town. . .

After several weekly OC meetings, the European Assembly (EA) took place over the weekend of 6-7 March 2004. Just before this, I was surfing the Web and came across the documents of the ‘horizontals’, who were calling a gathering on the Friday night preceding the Assembly for everyone interested in trying to make the organising process more democratic⁴ (see papers by de Angelis, Dowling, Juris and Tormey in this issue

3 One particular example comes to mind: when a man from Brazil, representing the World Social Forum, was completely unacknowledged, disrespected, and treated in an entirely patronising manner at a UK-ESF OC meeting in February 2004.

4 The Horizontals’ ‘Call for Democracy’ document can be found at <http://esf2004.net/en/tiki-index.php?page=CallForDemocracy>, and the longer document, the ‘Horizontals’ Statement’, with background and explanations is at

for more information regarding the debates and disagreements that emerged between the 'verticals' and the 'horizontal' in the process of organizing the London ESF04). I went along, and the attendance of over fifty people, many from continental Europe, as well as their passion, gave me hope for the first time since I had joined the organising process. This meeting itself did not run entirely smoothly, as there was so much to be decided about how to intervene during the Assembly that people became anxious. The man who had volunteered to chair the meeting became overwhelmed with the massive requests for speaking, and began to be short with some people and to cut them off abruptly (including me at one point). As I was one of the few people in the room who had actually attended most of the OC meetings, I was knowledgeable about the actual behaviour, tactics, and plans of the 'verticals'. Many people directed their questions at me, and I sought to give them enough information with which to make their suggestions and decisions. The chairperson started rolling his hands, indicating 'wrap up' to me, when I was speaking. I felt hurt and shamed (being restimulated to school and other past incidents). But what was wonderful was that, unlike in the official ESF organising process, I was able to speak with him after the meeting, and not only did we connect, he apologised for his behaviour and I was able to detach from my earlier feeling of taking it personally, and even to laugh about it. To describe the role of humour in making it through this experience of being part of the official UK-ESF organising process would require a whole essay in itself; suffice it to say that it was essential for our emotional survival. In sum, after this meeting of the horizontals, the first face-to-face meeting after only virtual communication, I think most people felt what I did: excitement, a sense of connection and collectivity, and a sense of purpose. Despite the slight tension and the tight time frame with so much on the agenda, we had managed to come out of the meeting with a consensus to distribute two documents at the Assembly: (1) the original 'Horizontal's Call for Democracy, and (2) another short document that highlighted the abuses of power going on within the organising process and that listed simple and reasonable requests for changes within it.⁵

On Saturday morning, this excitement of the horizontals was in the air. We greeted each other warmly; I felt I had 'found my people'.⁶ However, as the SWP/GLA-SA folks placed their numerous stacks of handouts on the tables, a few of us horizontals became concerned: where were our documents? In the midst of focusing on the content of them,

<http://esf2004.net/en/tiki-index.php?page=HorizontalStatement>. And thanks to Teresa Hoskyns of the LSF for organising the meeting of the Horizontals that preceded the 6-7 March 2004 European Assembly.

- 5 In this short document, which we called 'Principles for Democracy', we proposed 10 concrete changes to the organising process: 1. Affiliation of individuals (max. £5); 2. Working groups freely organized; 3. Individuals working in the process must participate in the decision-making process; 4. Meetings around the UK and around the EU – the timetable has to be accessible to the majority; 5. Transparency: sending meetings to all lists and web; 6. Rotation of facilitators; 7. UK assembly/organising committee as the place where decisions are taken and individuals as organisations have equal voice in the process; 8. No more meeting in GLA; 9. Prioritizing spaces for workshops and seminars at the heart of the ESF; 10. Fees are too high!
- 6 I admit that this might sound overly sentimental. Nevertheless, I maintain that it is important to risk this rather than hiding or feeling embarrassment over these feelings. Our ability to connect with each other in these situations is precious and integral to our intent to build community and solidarity in our desire for a world beyond capitalism, exclusion and violence.

had we made sure that specific people would ensure their printing and distribution? No, we hadn't, we realised. And then all of a sudden, other horizontals arrived, documents in hand, and began to distribute them to the ultimately two hundred-plus people who attended the Assembly (again, held at the GLA). This kind of spontaneous taking charge of things as exemplified by the way these documents materialised that morning seems a strong feature of horizontal organizing processes, indicative perhaps of a sense of being empowered to *do*, rather than wait for someone else to do for you or to tell you to do. It certainly brought smiles to our faces, as we prepared for the meeting proper.

The chairing of the Saturday morning EA meeting again was autocratic, aggressive, and about as far from 'consensus' as you could get. Our plan had been to propose that 'democracy and process' should be added to the agenda – as the first item to be discussed. The chairs took the first five speakers to speak to the agenda; two were from continental Europe (Hungary and Greece, I believe) and made our suggestion, i.e. that issues concerning 'process' be discussed first. The chairs agreed to other recommendations for additions or changes to the agenda, but as for ours, they said that it would 'come up in the discussion of the specific proposal' (to host the ESF in the UK, in other words the "bid" that the "Europeans" were being asked to support, which was their first item on the agenda). Several people voiced support (yelling it out) and some (fewer in numbers) voiced disagreement. The chairs then declared that this is how it would go down – 'process' discussed with the proposal/bid – and acted as if the issue was closed.

It was at this point that I decided that I had to say something. I just could not let it go, incensed not only that someone who had chaired a zillion meetings – always dictatorially – was one of the chairs, but also that they were running things in this fashion. I gathered my courage and went to the microphone to speak, thinking I was first in the queue and would be part of the next group to speak (they were taking speakers in groups of five). While I was standing at the mike, the chair seemed to pretend that I wasn't there, and announced that someone would give the welcome (a guy from a union). I waited behind him, assuming I would be able to speak next. But again the chair announced that someone else would speak to formally present the proposal for hosting the ESF in the UK. I was hesitant, and the man (from the Tobin Tax Network, ATTAC) said to me personally, 'Look, you can be the next one to speak'. I was about to say O.K., but I thought, *No, this is ridiculous – I want to object to the silencing of our proposal that the process/issues of democracy be discussed first*. So, I said no and insisted I be allowed to speak before him. The chair looked at me, furious, and angrily snarled, 'You are occupying the microphone, for ten minutes now – you are blocking the process'. It had only been a minute, maybe two, but of course his tactic did not involve accuracy; it was an attempt to shame and silence me (and by extension, us, the horizontals).

I was quite taken aback, to say the least. As the next two speakers who presented the details of the proposal spoke, I stood behind them, at the front of the large room with a few hundred people seated before me, and felt on the verge of tears. I had to use all my experience of counselling and healing and tell myself that I could not cry at this moment, that I would have to get support for that later. As they went on for quite a while, I had plenty of time to regain my composure. I was allowed to be the first person

to speak after these two had presented the proposal. I started by saying that as I was representing a group interested in the intersection of spirituality and politics (namely, Spirit Matters), I found it ironic to be from a group so much concerned with 'peace' and to be accused of 'occupying the microphone'. I made it clear that it was not my intention to disrupt or block the meeting. I spoke to the issue of the facilitation of meetings, which had plagued the organising process from the start, and I mentioned that several weeks earlier some of us from my group had offered our skills as facilitators and mediators and had been told there was no structure to accept our offer and that chairs would rotate. I emphasised that this did not happen over the course of the next several weeks. I then spoke to what had just occurred – three of five speakers' proposals of changes to the agenda were agreed by chairs; the other two speakers' proposal to speak first about 'process' had not been agreed to by the chairs, and was just unilaterally denied its own place. The chairs objected loudly – 'There was consensus!', they shouted; 'Everyone agreed!' But plenty of people shouted back, 'No, we didn't!' and 'No, there wasn't!' So, I just said that I found it completely unacceptable that chairs could railroad through their desire and that what I saw was not consensus in any fashion, and I requested that they define 'consensus' as it would be applied at this gathering.

The rest of the morning people continued to speak not only to the actual proposal to host the ESF in the UK (issues of venue, budget, accommodation, and the like), but also to the issue of process. What was so wonderful was how many people from other European countries said that our list of suggestions was reasonable and voiced support, and also how many of them spoke against the proposed registrations fees (which were quite high – £20 unwaged, for example) and which had been one of our main points of complaint.

Later that day, the SWP/'big union'/GLA-SA leaders huddled together in the front of the room and finally agreed that this issue of 'process' deserved its own working group that afternoon. Over 50 people crowded into a room for this working group, and after some chaos and shouting and general lack of progress, someone from France suggested that each 'side', 'vertical' and 'horizontal', choose three people and these six would have a discussion and see what negotiation could occur. A few of the Europeans would facilitate and mediate, and we would stay until a resolution was reached (by this time the other working group sessions had ended, and the rest of the assembly had gathered again for the closing discussion).⁷

We retired to our respective corners – this was becoming quite dramatic! – and hurriedly chose our three people: Massimo De Angelis, for his knowledge of the political theorisation/contextualisation and his skill at articulating the 'big picture' (see de Angelis in this issue for more comments regarding the ESF04 organisational

7 I should note at this point that I am adopting the language that was used, by everyone involved, throughout the UK-ESF organising process, that is, calling people from outside the UK 'the Europeans'. Being from the states, I found this language extremely strange, as in the U.S., the UK is considered 'European'. However, for convenience sake and to reflect convention, in this essay I do adopt this language. At some point this very distinction could be a very useful point of investigation itself, as it reveals much about the pre-existing divisions and tensions that characterised this UK-ESF organising process and event as well.

process); Javier Ruiz, because of his association with Indymedia (www.indymedia.org.uk), and autonomous and other networks; and me, because I had been at almost all the meetings and had the knowledge of the nitty-gritty details (and the notes!). The ‘verticals’ chose Hilary Wainwright (from *Red Pepper* magazine – and it should be noted that she was one of several folks in the process who at this point wasn’t really allied with either ‘side’); Chris Nineham (who used the front group Globalise Resistance in this process but who is a very involved member of the SWP); and Peter X (about whom we knew little at the time, but later learned is a member of SA). Europeans from France and Italy in particular were facilitating. We used the ‘fishbowl’ technique, where only the nine of us (three verticals, three horizontals and three facilitators) who were in the inner circle could speak, with any observers welcome and around us in another circle. We agreed to start with ‘their’ document and to go through each point.⁸

We had only got through a few points, agreeing on changes and additions, when a GLA rep. came in and said they would be locking the building in ten minutes – we had to leave the room. We were determined to carry on and decided to find a nearby pub or restaurant to do so. The search for this venue itself was hilarious, and I thought would have been good for inclusion in a video of this whole crazy process. After much wandering, we found an Italian restaurant down the way from Tower Bridge, and dug in again, the nine of us at a table, with observers all around us.

We managed to go through the whole document and agree to additions, deletions, and rewordings. There were compromises on both sides, as well as discoveries of many places of mutual agreement. We were honest about our concerns and insisted that they be kept on the table. There was, for the first time, genuine dialogue between folks from the ‘sides’ who had been in conflict with each other for so long. From the people ‘representing’ the Organising Committee at this meeting, there was acknowledgment of all the problems, such as negative facilitation of meetings, lack of communication, etc. With the exception of the recalcitrant Peter X, we both heard each other about many important issues. We spoke honestly and openly about our fears and concerns. Given the dynamics that occurred before, it was pretty amazing.

After a few hours, we had finished going through the UK-ESF organising document. There was not enough time then to address our document of short points (see footnote 5), but we agreed mutually that someone from our ‘team’ would stand up the next day at the European Assembly with ‘their’ document, present the changes to the audience, and voice support for these changes. Then someone from their ‘team’ would stand up and say that they supported the spirit, of our (other, longer) document, ‘A Call for Democracy in the ESF process’. The two people chosen to do this were Chris Nineham (‘vertical’ SWP-er) and Javier Ruiz (‘horizontal’ involved with Indymedia).

8 This document, sometimes known as the ‘Alex Gordon proposal’ after the president of the RMT who chaired several of the early meetings, was drafted on 24 January 2004 and amended a few weeks later by the OC. Its full title is ‘For a UK Organising Committee to host the European Social Forum in London’

We felt such a sense of relief and excitement. Only then and in later discussions that night was it revealed to us that they actually had thought that our whole intention was to make sure that the ESF did not happen in the UK, and that we came to block the whole process. This was their fear, and it indicates how much fear distorts: they were not hearing us accurately for a long while, and they chaired meetings etc. from the place of this fear. So they actually seemed shocked when they realised we did *not* want to sabotage the process, only to increase the democratic and inclusive character of its organisation.

The energy after this smaller process group meeting was incredible: people who had been yelling at, or furious with, each other only hours before were walking along the riverfront hugging each other. ‘Mixed’ groups of both horizontals and verticals (as well as those located more in-between these two positions) retired to another pub and another restaurant, sharing with others the ‘good news’ of this breakthrough. Then, across ‘sides’ and various affiliations or political investments, we were able to have some real exchanges about details of how we would proceed. I left feeling astonished at the turn of events, quite positive, but, I felt, not in a naive sense. Hopeful, for the first time since I became involved. I also felt proud to have been a part of this collective effort by the horizontals – we pooled our knowledges, resources, thinking, suggestions, and energies, and it worked. I appreciated all of the work done behind the scenes to get us to that point: the creation of web sites; the attendance of meetings; the thinking about language, proposals, and strategies; the booking of rooms; and the arrangement of accommodation. It seemed a truly collective and collaborative effort.

I was not able to attend the EA on Sunday, as I was leading a long-planned workshop (‘Emotional Support for Activists’ for some of the leaders of a London group that works to support the non-violent resistance in Palestine). Actually, this workshop provided the only space for me to release my emotions around the ESF organising process.⁹ The tradition in which I am trained, Re-evaluation Counselling, promotes the idea that everyone has distress and that leaders are facilitators who also need support for emotional healing. Thus, at groups and workshops, the leader also takes a turn for a ‘session’, as I did that Sunday. In my twenty-minute session, I went back to the previous day’s experience, remembering that moment when the chair yelled at me and the rest, and I was able to release much grief, fear, and anger (through crying, shaking, and sweating, respectively). I remembered in my session the moment when people in the audience were all yelling, when horizontals shouted ‘Let her speak!’ and others said the opposite. After releasing some feelings, I then recalled that one woman in the front (someone I didn’t know) had shouted ‘We don’t want to hear you!’. This memory, especially, brought up much shame and many tears. At the end of my session, I’d cleared enough of what had been restimulated that I was able to remember all the people, some of whom I’d met for the first time that day, who had come up to me and thanked me for my intervention. Other activists at this workshop indicated their appreciation for my willingness to ‘show myself’ and my struggles with feelings around

9 The theory and practise of Re-evaluation Counselling refers to the process of ‘discharging’, the physical release of emotions, which comes in the following forms: tears for grief; hot perspiration for anger; cold perspiration and shaking for fear; laughter for light embarrassments, light fears, and light anger; yawning for boredom and physical tension.

tensions in activist circles. Indeed, I believe we need many more spaces like this in which to acknowledge, release, and process the hurts that get restimulated during social change efforts, and one reason for writing this piece is to open a space that places value on the affective experiences including trauma that might be encountered in activist practice.

I was told that at Sunday's meeting of the EA, Javier and Chris expressed their support for each group's document (as described above), and the amendments to the proposal for the UK Organising Committee to host the ESF in London which were read out to the assembly (i.e. the changes we had so laboured over the previous evening) were accepted. Javier and Chris hugged. Amazingly, Javier was asked to be one of the facilitators of the meeting that afternoon. While we were clear that it was just a start, a first step in what would have to be an ongoing process, we felt this negotiation was significant. Most of what we achieved addressed the meta-level of process, for example, language about a 'spirit of trust' and 'an atmosphere of mutual respect', or the meta-level of inclusion, for example, language of 'networks' and 'local Social Forums' being added to organisations as participants in this ESF organising process and the event itself. There were many specific items and issues that remained to be addressed, and the 'spirit of trust' and real consensus had yet to be created and implemented. But I and many other horizontals felt that enough progress and real dialogue had occurred that we could recommend wholeheartedly that folks from all backgrounds, including those who were previously excluded from the non-democratic nature of this process, could jump on board and become involved with the UK-ESF organisation. Indeed, in an e-mail to the democratise the ESF e-list, I urged others to 'Join working groups, attend the meetings of the Co-ordinating Committee and Organising Committee when you can, post ideas on the Web, reach out to other groups and bring them into what will hopefully now be an ever-widening circle of groups, networks, forums, and individuals coming together to plan, create and experience the ESF in London in October 2004' (8 March 2004).

When I read these words that I so passionately expressed (and believed) at the time, I feel sad and somewhat angry. Disappointment, and some sense of regret, not to mention the resurrection of that internalized critical voice saying: *you should've known better than to trust them*. This is what abuse and a betrayal of trust does; it makes one doubt oneself, and feel 'stupid' for being conciliatory and trusting. However, from the space outside these feelings, I can also observe that: (1) we (meaning the horizontals who were involved in this negotiation at the time) did not have enough information to realise what was likely to happen; (2) given this, it made sense to try to reach out and work through things with the 'vertical' folks; and (3) there was another dynamic to the power structure that came through much more forcefully after this experience and which was largely responsible for the continuation of abuse and lack of democratic process: namely, the entrenched position and power of the rigid, secretive, and hostile members of the 'party' Socialist Action, linked to the Mayor and the GLA.

Dashed Hopes and More Abuses of Power

In the meantime, given the information we had and what we had experienced, we found ourselves feeling hopeful, positive, and eager to move forward the work of the organising process. We issued a letter calling for more horizontally minded folks to join the organising process. We envisioned being able to work within the structures of the process more successfully after the Assembly experience, and we also sought to bring in more people with horizontal leanings to support one another at these meetings.

The reality starkly contrasted with our expectations (also see Dowling, this issue). From the time of the 'breakthrough', the SWP-SA alliance was already swinging into action, and working hard to prevent any real changes being introduced into their plans, or into their way of organising (which for them, went hand in hand). Over the next few weeks, several of us attended not only the OC, but the weekly Co-ordinating Committee (CC) meetings, and meetings of all the working groups. What we discovered was that the CC – unlike what had been articulated when it was proposed (namely that it would be a committee to co-ordinate tasks, such as phone calls, between the then weekly meetings of the OC) – functioned effectively as a kind of Central Committee. It actually took away the power from the OC. Most decisions about the organising process and the ESF were made in these meetings; we saw this straightaway, which is one of the reasons we fought so hard to have the meeting time changed from 10 a.m. on a weekday morning, which was hardly enabling of 'inclusion' for those of us who were also holding down day-jobs. In this and in every other contribution, we were prevented from allowing changes to be implemented. Attending these CC meetings was like showing up for dinner, invited, but only under external pressure. And the metaphor is apt in another way, for we were, the entire time, treated as unwelcome guests. (I should add that, as became clearer over time, many SWP members were more flexible and willing to engage with us, in contrast to the incessant rigidity and hostility of the SA contingent).

There is no way to really capture the flavour, or the abusive nature of these meetings. At times, there was pretence, as we all feigned being civil and 'on the same page', while underneath the surface anger and mistrust seethed and fermented. The verticals resented our presence. We resented their control and the betrayals of promises. Members of SWP and SA came to meetings with already agreed upon agendas, and they blocked any other ideas. They used several tactics to maintain this control and rule out other options: dominating the chairing of meetings; refusing to add items to an agenda; putting items at the end of the agenda and never getting to them; saying a particular subcommittee was already working on something; twisting our proposals so as to frame them as asking for the opposite of what we intended; and, when all else failed, eschewing the usual condescension and patronising, and instead being directly hostile and shaming.

There also were institutional elements that held up these strategies in ensuring control. Certainly the foremost of these was the role and involvement of the GLA. Almost every OC meeting, and all CC meetings, as well as several (usually unannounced) outreach meetings to particular constituencies, were held at the GLA. The minute-takers were GLA staff. E-mail was received and answered by GLA staff. A GLA staffperson, whose specialisation was not IT, was put in charge of the tender for the web site (the battle for the web site not to be given to a corporation had long been lost). Not only the central

involvement of the GLA, but also the physical presence of the City Hall building that houses the GLA, were eerie to experience. For one thing, there was this sense of an odd split between the awareness that it is against the Charter of Principles of the WSF for political bodies to be directly involved in a Social Forum, and the feeling of being part of something exclusive and important (the work of the 'London Mayor's office and the GLA'), a feeling reinforced by the gorgeous, contemporary and comfortable City Hall building itself. In this way, the weekly experience of undergoing the security search at the GLA mirrored this double aspect, this schizophrenia. On the one hand, one felt the *wrongness* of it all: not only the continual reminder of the fascistic 'war on terror' that characterizes the contemporary moment and the accompanying proliferation of security searches all over the west, but also in the way that security searching before an ESF organising meeting acted as a reminder that the GLA should not have been involved at all – and it certainly should not have become the *de facto* Central HQ for organising the ESF, which it was for months. On the other hand, undergoing the security search was part of the ritual, part of feeling included and even perhaps 'important', and as everyone went through it, occasionally a moment that levelled the 'horizontal-vertical' separation. For me personally, being searched was a moment to gather myself, to try to retain some sense of hope and empowerment regarding the meeting ahead, and to try to remember everything we wanted to address that day.

What happened between the first weekend of March 2004, and the end of May 2004, which was the end of my involvement with the UK-ESF organising process? Accounts more detailed than mine can be found on the web, for example at esf2004.net.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that the transgression of 'process' – the abuse, underhandedness, secretiveness, manipulation, and even downright lying – increased dramatically.

Two other dynamics occurring during the horizontals' concentrated involvement in the spring of 2004 are important to consider. First, verticals often arranged 'closed door' secret meetings with individual horizontals, which echoed the oppressive 'Central Committee' mentality that pervaded the whole process and which were blatant attempts to create divisions *within* the horizontals. Needless to say, none of these divisive tactics worked, because we shared everything with each other and increasingly experienced a vital sense of solidarity. However, as the verticals chose their 'favourites' to consult with, and worked blatantly to ostracise others (including me), we were often left with feelings reminiscent of the school playground, with its hierarchy of insiders and outsiders. In any group setting, including those within activist efforts, we must acknowledge and negotiate these feelings of 'not being liked' and of being excluded. Second, all of the feelings that we experienced as a result of the abusive and irrational way that these meetings were conducted made it very difficult for us to continue to think clearly. This is another dynamic that warrants consideration in activist efforts, as we need to address the emotions we experience in such situations and figure out ways to help each other retain and reclaim clear thinking.

10 Hodkinson, S. and L. L. Sullivan (2004) 'Transgressions of Process from 6/7 March Assembly Until Now', 16 April, the (now obsolete) URL is <http://www.esf2004.net/wakka/EvidenceLogTwo>.

Emotional Overload and Disaffection

Looking back, I would characterise the period between the March European Assembly and the May-June disaffection of almost all the horizontals as one of trying to keep our heads above water. We rapidly clocked how naive our position had been following what we perceived as the 'breakthrough' of the Assembly. We regrouped and came together to try to strategise how to work at all within the process. On the one hand, we did have many meetings in-between the official ones, starting with a meeting held during the first European Creative Forum (ECF, <http://ecf2004.org/Mambo/index.php>) on 10 April, where about a dozen of us retired to a pub and made much headway in outlining plans and drafting proposals, etc. These continued, with meetings in the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall and other locations. All of these gatherings were characterised by much laughter and comradery, as well as concrete achievement. However, not only were the documents and plans that came out of these meetings blocked on every front at the 'official' organising meetings (we produced outlines for the web site structure, a list of keywords that would facilitate workshop/seminar proposal merging, proposals for norms concerning minutes, and many more documents that were all ignored or rejected), but we also found ourselves with no real outlets for the emotions that we were experiencing in this process.

In general, I noticed two responses to these abusive meeting experiences by those of us who were not in control: (1) bitching sessions detailing all the (admittedly pretty unbelievable) transgressions of 'democratic process' and even of dignity and respect and (2) drinking copious amounts of beer at pubs (and often these were combined). As I don't drink, I often joined in (or even initiated) the bitching – a typical way that one reaches for feeling some kind of power in a situation in which you have little. However, I was also often feeling much more than anger, and I felt there was nowhere to go with these feelings, no way to express, in a London pub, the sadness of watching people behave so cruelly, or the shame of having been forced to witness the abuse of others.

The London Social Forum did sponsor two workshops on 'Emotional Intelligence for Activists' during the spring of 2004, led by a colleague and myself. These were useful spaces for a handful of horizontal folks to receive support for our feelings around the organising process: spaces where these feelings could be articulated, and where those who wanted could have sessions to release directly the feelings and hurts that had been restimulated by being part of organising the ESF. Yet these spaces were far and few between. People needed sustained support along these lines, and we found ourselves not only emotionally overwhelmed, but also completely overstretched in terms of time, energy, and resources just dealing with all of the CC, OC, and working group meetings and what occurred at these. This feeling of being overwhelmed and overextended, which often translates into being 'burnt out', is very common for activists. It often is accompanied by difficulties in setting boundaries and maintaining balance (time for self-nurturing and the rest of 'life' as well as explicit activism), by feelings of guilt (that sense that one is never doing enough), and by feelings of urgency ('We must work hard and implement radical social change NOW!'), (see also, S. Sullivan, 2004; 2005). I believe that we need to work together to create space and time for support in working through and releasing these feelings, as part of all our activist efforts, not just the organising of Social Forums. The saturation point is different for all of us, but without

the actual release of the emotions that are triggered in these situations – whether from the abusive treatment of those in control such as the SWP-SA folks in this case, or from the abusive and oppressive treatment of the police and other state forces in other instances – we become overwhelmed, feel hopeless, find it hard to think, and eventually feel that we have no other choice but to withdraw from the particular effort or process entirely.¹¹

This is precisely what happened when very late one night, Emma Dowling (this issue) and I found ourselves entertaining an idea that up until then we had not allowed ourselves to explore: that of pulling out of the official ESF organising process entirely. On 27 April 2004, at 2 in the morning, we composed an e-mail message over the phone and sent it out to several horizontals with whom we'd been working closely.¹² We asked, 'Why don't we walk away?' We also noted that meetings were 'hostile and ridiculously time-wasting' and acknowledged that we were 'burnt out, overworked, frustrated, attacked, broke, and overwhelmed'. That about sums it up. And 'broke' points to another key dimension of this organising process, one not at all divorced from emotional concerns, namely money. The verticals were almost unanimously being *paid* for their participation in this organising process. Most horizontals, in contrast, were not

11 Or, we might become confused and overwhelmed and perhaps not realise that it makes sense to withdraw until quite late in the game.

12 I should note that by this time, which was mid-April 2004, we had discovered that all of the lists, including the 'democratise the ESF' list, as well as the unofficial websites, were being monitored by the verticals. Although these lists were 'open', we had mistakenly assumed that only horizontals were signed up. The verticals never posted any messages, but we became aware of their presence when they brought up things which were discussed only on these lists in meetings. Such surveillance was not pleasant to experience and only added to the Stalinesque quality of the organising process. At any rate, because we wanted to ensure privacy, we found ourselves, reluctantly, going against the very notion of transparency that we had been calling for so fervently in the organising process, and producing internal lists with names of particular horizontal folks who were centrally involved in the process. Horizontals who were not involved on the ground, some of whom, for instance, lived outside of London or the UK, eventually sensed this and called for more communication of what was actually going on, on the public lists. I can only speak for myself in this regard, but I know that I was completely swamped, with barely time to stay in contact with those of us who were attending meetings and strategising, and while I desired to continue to write 'reports' to the public lists, I was never able to get back into that habit (and I did feel guilty about that). I regret, as do others I'm sure, not being able to stay plugged in to that larger horizontal community at that time. However, I also see how structurally dictated this lack of communication was. One other factor was also influential in how things were handled on this level. After the March European Assembly, although more horizontally inclined folks did step forward and begin attending CC and other meetings, at any given time there were only a small group of us doing this. At best, we might have ten or twelve, but with impossible CC meeting times of 10a.m. – noon on a weekday, and the frequency of meetings overall which was quite demanding, and with horizontals being generally quite busy with activist efforts of the groups and networks of which they are a part, it was very difficult to get more folks to become part of the official process. And I'm sure that knowledge of the abusive dynamics that I have been outlining here was not a big draw either! At any rate, low numbers were definitely a factor. We were all stretched quite thin, and at this point the UK-ESF organising process had pretty much taken over our lives. At the same time, of course, many 'antiauthoritarians' involved for longer in radical left politics in the UK could see quite early that the ESF organizing process was going to reproduce familiar exclusionary dynamics. This contributed to peoples' decision not to stay with the formal organising process and instead to focus on self-organising autonomous spaces. In other words, people who nonetheless put a lot of time and energy into the London ESF had already made conscious choices not to become involved in the formal process.

only *not* being paid, but were spending money that we did not really have to spare (at least this was definitely my case), as the expense of travelling to meetings (in London, to the only non-London OC meeting in Birmingham, and to EAs held outside the UK); having coffee, drinks, and meals before and after meetings; and printing and photocopying documents often added up to quite a lot over time. This is not to mention the ‘cost’ of our time and labour, which was considerable. A kind of ‘class divide’ was thus replicated in the very structure of the organising process itself, with the folks from big unions, the SWP, and SA (whatever the front groups of members of the latter two organisations) being externally supported, flown to meetings of the European Assembly outside the UK, and being paid for their days of attendance of the CC. Horizontals instead found ourselves at a disadvantage when it came to time and resources, a dynamic exacerbated by the key role of the GLA, whose staff, photocopying capacity, public relations machine, etc. were at the disposal of the verticals 24/7. Again, aspects of the organising process such as this reinforced the sense that we were the unwelcome guests, poor relations who were reluctantly tolerated but were blatantly disrespected, as poor and working class people often are. (As with so many other things, this was ironic, given that many of the groups the verticals ‘represented’ purport to support the liberation of the ‘working class’ and the eradication of exploitation and poverty).

By this time many of us noticed that the organising process had become the main topic of our dreams at night. Or, more accurately, I should say nightmares. It was an almost universal experience for the horizontals who were regularly attending meetings to have frequent nightmares about the ESF organising process. Certainly mainstream frameworks for activism don’t address phenomena such as these! My interpretation would be that: (1) these nightmares reflected the state of post-traumatic stress that we were in; and (2) because we were not getting a chance to release any of our constantly triggered emotions – because we were not dealing with these emotions effectively in our waking lives – they came out while we slept, as they were going to manifest somewhere. They were sparks of messages trying to get our attention and let us know how deeply we were being affected, and what emotions needed to be acknowledged and released. Fear, shame, sadness, anger, and the feeling of being attacked and powerless were some that were revealed in the themes of our nightmares.¹³

My ‘Final Straw’ Moment. . .

As it turned out, the ‘walking away’ of the horizontals didn’t happen straightaway at the end of April after our e-mail. We decided to give it another go, and geared up for the next Organising Committee meeting, set for the 16th of May. We had a plan we felt was foolproof. An agenda for the meeting was in circulation, and we met beforehand to discuss the proposals we wanted to make with regard to each issue on it.¹⁴ In particular,

13 These nightmares have returned to me as I’ve been writing this piece, revealing that I have much more to process in the wake of having participated in the official UK-ESF organizing process. I imagine that other horizontal folks also are in the same boat.

14 Proposed Agenda circulated at the meeting of the UK ESF Organising Committee, May 16, 2004, LSE. Agenda: 1. Apologies; 2. Changes to the Agenda; 3. Minutes of last meeting; 4. Report back from Istanbul; 5. General state of play: Finance, Affiliations, Company, Office, Website; 6.

we intended to insist that the issue of the staffing of the office be discussed, and we were going to protest the way that issue had been handled thus far: i.e. there had been no open call for secondees to the office staff, and two people from SA and SWP had simply been 'appointed' by the verticals. A Unison/SWP member was one of the meeting's co-chairs, and he opened the meeting with a proposal that the agenda be changed, with programme concerns being addressed first, and allotted two hours. We saw this as (1) a blatant attempt to delay addressing process and practicalities (finances, office staffing, accommodation, the nature of the legal company, the web site) and (2) an abuse of power by the chair. He attempted to railroad this proposal through time and time again, and instead of acknowledging there was no consensus to accept a proposed change to the agenda, a debate about it was allowed to go on for 40 minutes. In the end, the programme was discussed anyway within the report back from the Istanbul European Assembly, and when I and others tried to raise a point of order to object to this, we were ignored and then shot down straightaway. Even three hours into the four-hour meeting, the chair continued to insist that the programme themes be discussed, despite many people's objections and requests that these be more appropriately dealt with in the Programme Working Group and elsewhere. The programme content was still being discussed with less than an hour of the meeting to go. A prime point of contention was around a proposal of a member of SA (present here in the context of the front group 'Abortion Rights') and other verticals, who insisted that because an outreach meeting of women's groups had reached consensus that the phrase 'women's liberation' should be added to one of the six programme themes/axes then this previous decision meant that we automatically had to agree to that. Of course many of us did not, arguing instead that the principle of transversality compelled us to insure that women's liberation issues were addressed *across* all axes.

Any objections raised or alternative viewpoints to these two proposals met not only with hostile responses, but also with a strategy that the verticals' repeated numerous times throughout the organising process: namely, a passive aggressive restating, inaccurately, of the horizontals' proposal or objection, accompanied by a false characterisation of a person's/group's position. For example, when over a third of those attending the meeting objected to the chair's proposed agenda change (which effectively meant that practicalities and process would not be addressed), Alex Callinicos (SWP/ front group Project K) took the microphone and in faux lamentation mode, said, 'We do indeed have a responsibility to the European process. I find it amazing that people do not want to talk about the programme, which is what will mobilise and excite people the most.' Later in the meeting, he declared that 'These people who constantly go on about process are in fact really wanting to get power. It is a power struggle.' This latter accusation was of course laughable – the horizontals did not want power, but a proliferation of democratic possibilities in the organising process (see article by Jeremy Gilbert, this issue). It also was a prime indication of the pot-kettle mentality that pervaded the verticals' discourse throughout. I also want to highlight the first accusation here: i.e. the twisting of the objections over giving the programme two hours of time that afternoon, into the formulation that we 'didn't want to talk about the programme', and the implication that we *didn't care* about the programme, which was simply untrue. Later in

Programme: Updates, Axis/themes, Representatives for the international working group; 7. Report back from working groups; 8. Date/Place of next meeting.

the meeting this abusive dynamic was repeated by women involved with Socialist Action, who accused everyone opposing the adding of the wording 'women's liberation' to one of the programme axes of being 'opposed to women's liberation'.

Two other things occurred at this meeting that added to its elevation to surreal heights of abuses of process and that contributed to our already great feelings of frustration. First, in cases in which there was not consensus for verticals' proposals, the chair or another vertical would immediately call for a vote 'only by members of affiliated organisations'. This request (1) violates the Charter of Principles; (2) goes against the agreed upon 'For a UK-ESF Organising Committee' statement hammered out at the March EA negotiation (as described above); and (3) added insult to injury, in that many organisations had not been able to affiliate at that point, due to the verticals' refusal to give out information about the nature of the company that had been created to assist with the organizing process and the precise legal parameters accompanying the affiliation process (others had not affiliated because of financial difficulties, even though that, too, was against the organising statement's parameters). This was not the first time that the verticals played what we had come to call 'the affiliation card', and we were sick and tired of this blatant discriminatory practice. The other thing that occurred was that the chair led a SWP-SA walk-out at the end of the meeting. When no agreement could be reached about a slate of people who would represent the UK at the upcoming European Programme Working Group that was to meet in Paris later that month, the chair announced that the meeting was over and physically disconnected the power from the microphone, even though someone from Babels (the organization of volunteer translators/interpreters, <http://www.babels.org>), was trying to give the report they had been promised time for.

So, there was manipulation of the order of the agenda, consensus processes were ignored, objectors and their objections were falsely characterised and then attacked, the 'affiliation card' was played, and in the end the verticals refused to stay and negotiate when some of their pet proposals were not adopted. The spirit of these actions was one of contempt, condescension and disregard for non-vertical ideas or reasoning. There were interesting emotional responses to these dynamics, some of them overtly expressed at the meeting itself. One horizontal ended up shouting 'Fuck you!' to the chair, who at times had been directly verbally attacking this person. There were many other instances of both verticals and horizontals swearing, but mostly at a lower volume. Nonetheless, the verticals began a smear campaign against this one loud swear-er over the mainstream ESF e-mail lists, once again labelling horizontals as 'troublemakers' and righteously insisting that they could 'not condone abusive behaviour' (!) such as this at meetings. In fact, this was the first time that anger had been expressed by the horizontals in such a strong way. It can be interpreted as a standing up to the abuser(s), and many of us in the audience felt both embarrassment and relief when this indignation was (finally) expressed. 'Fuck you!' might not be the most elegant or effective language, but its rawness reflects the way it feels to be in that place of having been abused, of being falsely accused of being the abuser (classic 'blame the victim' stuff), and of simply not be able to take it any more. There is probably much more to be thought through and theorised about the nature and role of anger in these situations; I offer this anecdote as a contribution to starting that conversation.

I came away from this 16 May 2004 OC meeting with a complete sense of disgust. And I think this meeting was, for me, the final straw. Somewhere a line had been crossed; the abusive behaviour was simply too blatant, and, well, too abusive.

It was necessary for me to be out of the country in June of 2004. Once away from the ESF organising process, I felt as if a huge burden had been lifted. I felt a sense of relief, like I could breathe again. And now, looking back, I can see that this relief was precisely that of being *removed from the scene of abuse*. I also felt quite keenly that sense of 'having my life back'. And so I was relieved that upon my return to London, I had an excuse for not getting back into the organising process: I had to finish my Ph.D. dissertation. By this time, July of 2004, the horizontals had, by and large, pulled out of the 'official' organising process entirely. A meeting of many groups, horizontals and Wombles and many others, had been called at the end of May, and folks had started working very hard on organising alternative events for the ESF. I was completely supportive of these efforts, but by July had simply run out of time and energy to contribute to these efforts, as my dissertation needed attending to. I still felt relieved, and as the ESF itself approached, I had mixed feelings. I was amazed, heartened, and quite grateful at the array of wonderful, well-planned, and politically substantive alternative events that were being announced on various e-mail lists in the late summer and early autumn (see <http://www.altspaces.net/>; <http://esf2004.net/en/tiki-index.php?page=AutonomousSpaceForESF2004>). I felt a slight twinge of guilt, and an even greater sense of sadness that I'd been missing out on the camaraderie and energy of the collective efforts that had been undertaken along these lines, but I was excited about attending as much of the 'alternative ESF' as I could. As the October date came closer, I discovered that, actually, I felt complete disgust and loathing for the entire official event, and I had no desire to attend it at all. It seems clear to me now that going to the official ESF felt like going to visit someone who had abused me as a child – something I wanted to avoid at all costs. I was stuck in a place of wanting to avoid, to shut down, to ignore the feelings – and the abusers – and almost pretend that the abuse did not happen. There was, to be fair, a more rational dynamic that was occurring as well: I decided that I wanted to take in the positive energy, brilliant thinking, and collective spirit of the alternative spaces. As I hadn't been able to contribute much to the organising of these spaces, I very much wanted to support those who did. So I attended many of these fantastic events, such as the Radical Theory Forum and the Life Despite Capitalism workshop, to name just two out of a plethora of alternative offerings. How much came out of the hastily organised alternative ESF events was impressive, in both the quantity of alternative events, as well as the quality (depth, interweaving of cultural and experiential elements with the analytical and political, proposals for the future, and a hell of a lot of fun and solidarity). I was inspired by what everyone who helped organise these alternative events was able to achieve; thank you to all of you.

Denying and Disavowing the Abusive Reality

I want to mention one more emotional dynamic that was part of this whole process, one that was quite insidious: denial. When the abused or powerless person/group requests acknowledgment of the reality, the abuser refuses, continues to talk from the place of

the lie, of the fantasy, pretending that everyone is really ‘on the same side’, disavowing by this very pretence not only the real differences in power (and in this case of politics) but also the reality of the abuse. The abused are left feeling frustration and disbelief. Head shaking – ‘can this person or these people really be in this much denial?’ ‘Can there really be this refusal to acknowledge what is really going on?’

One of the ways this denial and pretence happened time and time again was in the SWP-SA invocation of the ‘we’ of the ‘Left’. This is akin to the address used by the dominant media all the time, what Stam (1983: 39) calls “the regime of the fictive ‘We’” used, for example, by announcers in U.S. television news. Allen explains that “the signified” of such a fictive we “is usually left vague enough to cover both the addresser and the implied addressee” (1992: 122). The result, according to Stam, is ‘misrecognition of mirror-like images’. Like that of television newscasters, the discourse of members of élite left organisations such as the SWP and the GLA “claims to speak for us, and often does, but just as often it deprives us of the right to speak by deluding us into thinking that its own discourse is our own” (Stam, 1983: 39). Speaking of television news, Stam says, “Often it gives us the illusion of social harmony, the ersatz communication of a global village which is overwhelmingly white, male and corporate”. (Ironically, this characterisation reflects the SWP-SA-big union discourse that pervaded the entire UK-ESF organising process.) Those of us who were not at all convinced of such unity in fact or in purpose were left to say constantly, “Wait a minute. ‘We’ are part of a different ‘We’ – not your ‘We’. And our ‘We’ comes out of a completely different political context, different political goals for social change, and different ideas of how we effect social change as well.”

Confronted with this denial and pretence, as well as with frequent outright lies, the abused find ourselves feeling like *we* are ‘crazy’. The irrationality of the abuser(s) is thus transferred onto the victims of the abuse and irrational behaviours. This is just one of the emotional bases for the horizontals’ frequent experience of feeling distraught when people not privy to participation in the organising process itself expressed disbelief at our characterisations. ‘Surely you must be exaggerating – it can’t be that bad!’ many externally located folks would say. The only response to this is first to insist: ‘No, this *is* happening’, and then to feel a very deep need to describe the events themselves, to document the abuse (of power, of process) in great detail, and then the concomitant also very strong *need to be believed*. This need obviously has a personal resonance, as it is difficult to deal with feelings of not being believed and heard when one has seen and experienced abuse first-hand. But at the same time this need also is politically vital: for if the real dynamics are not acknowledged, analyses of the situations and decisions about how to respond to them and move forward cannot happen, or at the very least, they will be distorted and ineffective. Nonetheless, it does put the people who make the effort to speak out about and document the abuses in the position of being defensive and almost child-like, ‘Hey, really, we’re not making this up!’ Add to this the incessant false characterisation of all of us horizontals as ‘the “real” troublemakers’, which made any expressions from horizontally minded folks outside the UK suggesting we were either exaggerating, or distracting from the very real work to be done by our complaining, all the more painful and exasperating. The ‘blame the victim’ phenomena are even more difficult to experience when it comes from potential allies.

The ESF, the Emotional Aftermath, and a Few Ideas on How To Proceed

I must admit that once the ESF was over, I did retreat again. I needed to focus on my dissertation writing, it is true. But I also, mostly unconsciously, took steps to distance myself from anything related to the ESF, past or future. In fact, it was only in realising that I did still actually want to write this article I'd so delayed, that I acknowledged what was holding me back, i.e. all this repressed emotion. Others I've spoken to in recent weeks as I've been composing this, and re-experiencing many of the emotions I've just described here (along with the return of the nightmares, though thankfully less frequently than last year), have agreed that the ESF organising process was a scene of abuse, and that they, too, are still in the throes of post-traumatic stress. (And whole organisations and networks, such as the London Social Forum, have had to collectively recover from the emotional devastation the ESF organising process caused). I hope that the narratives and thoughts I've shared here are an initial step towards helping us address this post-traumatic stress and towards formulating strategies and plans to acknowledge and deal with our emotions in Social Forum processes, and in all activist efforts more generally (see www.activist-trauma.net).

I also note that throughout the writing of this article, I discovered big gaps in my memory. As many of these events happened quite a while ago, perhaps that does not sound surprising. However, usually I can quote exact dates and times of particular conversations and events, even years after they have occurred. I attribute this fuzziness in my memory directly to the distresses that are, for me, still attached to this whole experience. Distress makes us forget. So, the shame, dread, fear, grief and sadness, frustration, and shock that coalesced around this organising process have been dormant, repressed for months, and as a result, they have affected my memory. I believe that many of the horizontals, myself included, are still walking around in a state of post-traumatic stress. Writing this piece, documenting the abusive dynamics and the emotions that I and others typically experienced during this process, and trying to articulate these in some coherent fashion, has led me to face much that I had been avoiding. Now, I realise that the UK-ESF organising process was precisely a scene of oppression and abuse. Equally, those of us who went through it need to acknowledge what feelings and issues we are still carrying around as a result of having experienced the irrational, abusive, and hostile behaviour that pervaded the process as a means of avoiding our perpetuation of such dynamics in other contexts.

My initial suggestions for what we can learn and carry forward from these experiences are:

- (1) To incorporate an understanding of the role of emotions, and in particular the common experience of restimulation, in any activist efforts.
- (2) To set aside space and time for attention to these emotional dynamics as well as for the more practical issues and tasks.
- (3) To work to build an activist community (or, more accurately, communities) in which we give each other support for our feelings, such as those outlined here.

(4) To create spaces for us to release our anger – at the exploitative society, at oppressive dynamics, at ‘the state’, as well as at abusive factions ‘on the Left’ that we run up against.

(4) To learn about the oppression of activists and the common internalisations that result (such as feeling overwhelmed, guilty, and hopeless, and such as being out of balance in terms of how much time we devote to ‘organising’ in that larger sense and how much we devote to ourselves).

(5) Along these lines, to create a climate of encouraging us to be, individually and collectively, as nurturing to ourselves as possible. This will mean remembering to treat our bodies well (I have never smoked so many cigarettes in my life as before, after, and in between UK-ESF organising meetings!). Giving ourselves validation, nurturing ourselves and each other, and creating spaces to release our triggered emotions will lead to less of the self-destructive behaviours, such as excessive smoking and drinking (and lack of rest, to name another frequent struggle for many of us who engage in social change efforts). It will also help us to think more clearly, and to choose more effective actions (or non-actions, as the case may be).

I also have a sense that it would be useful to learn how to reach for the humanness underneath all the patterns that people in power display. As yet, I have not cleared enough of my despair and hopelessness around this issue, so I do not have much clear thinking to offer here. But in the longer term, I do think we will have to learn how to reach for and connect with people in positions of power more successfully. It may be that in cases that are abusive in the way that the UK-ESF organising process was, the rational thing to do is to avoid or leave that process. After all, expectations of humanness are a basis for any possibilities of negotiation, and therefore are essential for any politics to take place. But there may be other instances in which it will be possible for us to reach around the distresses of those with whom we are working to connect with the human being, and thereby move forward together more effectively.

APPENDIX

Letter received by Spirit Matters, via e-mail, January 2004:

16 Jan 2004
European Social Forum Programme Group
c/o World Development Movement
25 Beehive Place, London, SW9 72R

Dear Friend,

We want to inform you of the chance for your organisation to be involved in an extraordinary and far-reaching event later this year. The European Social Forum (ESF) is an opportunity for trade unions, community groups, anti-racist organisations, women’s groups, lesbian and gaygroups, the anti-war movement, campaigns around the environment, privatisation, health,

disability, asylum, housing – everyone trying to create another world – to make vital connections with people organising on the same issues across Europe and internationally.

This, the third ESF, will be held in London in November 2004. The previous events in Florence in 2002 and Paris in 2003 brought together 60,000 social movement, community and trade union activists from across Europe and the world. These inspiring three day events included workshops, debates, seminars, cultural events and rallies united by the theme: Another World is Possible!

What makes the ESF special is that the themes for debate and the seminar and workshop topics are decided by campaigning, cultural and political organisations across Europe. We are writing to you on behalf of the UK group co-ordinating the programme of the ESF and to encourage you to get involved in this process. The Programme Group is one of several groups set up to plan the ESF in London. See details overleaf of how you can find out more.

The European Social Forum is part of a global movement for change and social justice. It was inspired by the World Social Forum (WSF) which came out of the belief that protest by itself is not enough. Movements for social change need the space and the international exchange of ideas and experiences to develop alternatives to the free market madness which dominates mainstream politics and our daily lives. Social Forums, global, regional and local, are attempts to create opportunities to exchange information, learn, be inspired, think aloud about future visions and strategies and plan joint international action, all in an atmosphere respectful of diverse opinions and experiences. A sign that this idea is one whose time has come is that as we write, tens of thousands of people are gathering for the 4th WSF in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India.

In the WSF spirit, the organisation of the ESF in 2004 is intended to be participative and egalitarian. The Programme Working Group is made up of reps from around 30 trade union, campaigning, political and cultural organisations. We come from many different parts of the left and labour and social movements. But we are all united in wanting to organise an international event which will be of real practical use to men and women on the frontline of resistance and alternatives to environmental devastation, privatisation and war. Public sector workers demanding better wages and conditions for the vital work they do, asylum seekers fighting for the right to work and against destitution, detention and deportation; black and immigrant people fighting racist attacks; single mothers or part-time and low paid workers refusing to be sidelined; women organising against subordination, rape and other kinds of violence; people with disabilities and older people defending day care, transport and pensions; lesbians and gay people active in all these movements; sex workers fighting eviction and harassment; workers in manufacturing resisting redundancy and insecurity; people taking action on international issues of war and peace; unfair trade and third world debt – the list is endless but all these groups and many more have a common interest in working together across Europe and internationally. We want the programme to be strongly influenced by the needs and ideas of all these movements and struggles.

As outlined above, the programme will include large debates (kept to a minimum), seminars to debate strategies and propose action for resistance, and smaller workshops dealing with practical cooperation and movement building. Our job is to encourage the widest possible participation of organisations in workshops and seminars – and to help them in whatever way they need.

We are not asking you to commit to anything at this point. This is just to sound out your views and ideas. Later this year there will be a chance formally to register interest in organising

specific workshops or seminars. We will let you know the timetable table. There will also be a financial appeal for the ESF and organisations will be urged to affiliate.

Don't hesitate to contact us if you have any queries. See e-mails and addresses below. If you would like a speaker about the ESF then please let us know.

We look forward to hearing from you and possibly meeting you at the first UK Assembly for the ESF in 2004 on the 24th January, from 1.30-5.00 pm, at the GLA, City Hall, the Queens Walk, London SE1 or Assemblies in the future. The purpose of the UK Assembly on the 24th is to discuss the structure for the organisation of the UK ESF. Future assemblies will also discuss the programme.

All the best,

Alex Gordon (RMT), Hannah Griffith (Friends of the Earth), Jonathan Neale (Globalise Resistance), Anna T (Crossroads Womens Centre), Dave Timms (World Development Movement), Hilary Wainwright (Red Pepper)

=====

How you can become involved in the ESF in 2004?

We hope you or a colleague will fill in the form enclosed, adding any further comments. Join the email list for information and discussion on the ESF. E-mail esf-uk-info@lists.mobilise.uk

[<mailto:esf-uk-info@lists.mobilise.uk>](mailto:esf-uk-info@lists.mobilise.uk)

We hope you will send a delegate to attend the next UK Assembly for the European Social Forum on 24th January, from 1.30-5.00 pm, at the GLA, City Hall, the Queens Walk, London SE1 to discuss the structure for organising the UK ESF.

Send delegates to the next European Assembly, which will be held in London on March 6th and 7th.

Yes, my organisation would like to make an input into the ESF programme

Form: Name of organisation:.....

Name and position of contact filling the form:

Main activity of organisation:

What issues would your organisation like to see on the ESF agenda?

Please give your three priorities.

Have you any suggestions about how we present these issues? What kind of debates for example?

Would you be willing jointly to organise a workshop or seminar on any of these issues?

Are you already part of a European or international network or does your organisation have international connections?

What resources can you bring to the ESF ? Time? publicity? Help with fund-raising? Access to rooms or accommodation – if you are based in London?

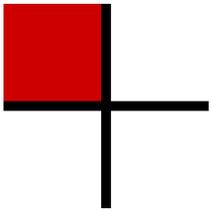
PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY POST TO: ESF Programme Group, C/O WDM, 25
Beehive Place, London SW9 72R

references

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the author

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An *Other* World is Possible? On Representation, Rationalism and Romanticism in Social Forums^{*}

Sian Sullivan

abstract

In this paper I engage with the question of what place the Other and ‘otherness’ have in the so-called ‘open space’ of Social Forums? In doing so, I attempt to coax into the open some of the multiple experiences of being and becoming human that are excluded within and by the construction of these spaces, and by the discourses – the powerful knowledge-frames and their epistemologies – which to a large extent they uphold. My hope is to open up the key terms of my title, namely representation, rationalism and romanticism, via a consideration of the cross-cutting domains of subjectivity, ontology and experience in contemporary resistance politics. I write as simultaneously part of, and co-opted by, the distributed society of control of Empire; *and* as othered by the assumptions of what it means to be human on which it seems based. My intention is to explore the possibilities for presence of such othernesses in Social Forums, and therefore of the potential for Social Forums to genuinely respond to its stated and radical desire for ‘*another* possible world’.

Open: ... *adj.* 1 not closed or locked or blocked up; ... 2 ... b (of a container) ... in a position allowing accessing to the inside part. 3 unenclosed, unconfined, unobstructed ... 4 a uncovered, bare, exposed ... b unprotected, vulnerable. 5 undisguised, public, manifest; not exclusive or limited ... 6 expanded, unfolded, or spread out ... 8 a (of a person) frank and communicative. b (of the mind) accessible to new ideas; unprejudiced or undecided. 9 ... b admitting all ... 11 ... receptive to enquiry, criticism ... 12 ... a willing to receive ... *v.* ... 8 *intr.* ... come into view; be

* Social Forums are emergent events, the happening of which cannot be predicted or anticipated in the organising. Since participating in the ESF in Florence 2002 the events for me have been infused with the stimulating friendships of Steffen Böhm, Marc Bourgeois, Zoe Young, Yasmin Khan, Tazio Mueller, Rodrigo Nunes, Emma Dowling, Michal Osterweil, and many others not named here but nevertheless remembered. I really thank you for this. The Social Forums also have provided a networking and discussion space for a growing and increasingly trans-border community of ‘activist academics’ and collective intellectuals. Plateaux in this trajectory include the Radical Theory Workshop at the Paris ESF 2003; the Radical Theory Forum e-list; the Radical Theory Forum #1 at the London ESF 2004; the Activist Research initiative (www.euromovements.net); and the recent Latin America-Europe-US *bemgelada* network opened in Porto Alegre at WSF 2005. I am glad to have been involved with these initiatives and grateful to all the people and experiences that made them happen. Finally, I acknowledge the support of the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation (CSGR, University of Warwick), and particularly Richard Higgott and Jan Aart Scholte for sanctioning a space for this work.

revealed. 9 *tr.* reveal or communicate (one's feelings ...) 10 *tr.* to make (one's mind, heart, etc.) more sympathetic ...¹

Other: ... *adj.* 1 not the same as one or some already mentioned or implied; separate in identity or distinct in kind ... 2 a further; additional ... b alternative ...²

Openings ...

Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today.³

There is a voice crying in the wilderness ... – the voice of a body dancing. Laughing, shrieking, crying. Whose is it? It is ... the voice of a woman, newborn and yet archaic, a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage.⁴

Supposing truth is a woman – what then?⁵

Many commentators on Social Forums and other contemporary resistance activities of the alternative globalisation movements refer to the existence of, and need for, 'new movement subjectivities'.⁶ Such a call draws on a significant intellectual lineage. Foucault, for example, observes "the immense labour to which the West has submitted generations in order to produce ... men's (*sic*) subjection: their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word". And, by commenting furthering on the fragmentations and ignorance of self accompanying this process, seems to imply that, through 'working on itself', thought and subjectivity (i.e. sense of self) might transgress the distributed docility and subjective ignorance required by modernity in its present embodiment as the 'society of control'.⁷ More recently, Hardt and Negri take up this project in their call

1 Fowler, H. G. and F. G. Fowler (1990) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed., R. E. Allen (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 830.

2 *Ibid.*, 841.

3 Clément, C. quoted in S. M. Gilbert (1996) 'Introduction: A Tarantella of Theory', in H. Cixous and C. Clément (1975/1996) *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. B. Wing. London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, ix.

4 Gilbert, S. M. (1996) 'Introduction: A Tarantella of Theory', in H. Cixous and C. Clément, *ibid.*, ix.

5 Nietzsche, F. (1886/1966) *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. W. Kaufman. New York: Vintage Books, 2.

6 E.g. Sullivan (2002) 'Altered States: The Cultural Politics Of Subjectivity In Resistance To Globalisation' [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/research/keytopic/resistance/sian_research_proposal/]; Sullivan, S. (2004) 'We Are Heartbroken And Furious!' (#2): Violence and the (Anti-)Globalisation Movements. *CSGR Working Paper* no. 133/04 [<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CSGR/wpapers/wp13304.pdf>]; Nunes, R. (2004) 'Territory and Deterritory: Inside and Outside the ESF 2004, New Movement Subjectivities' [<http://fluke.omweb.org/modules/wakka/InsideOutsideESF2004>]; Osterweil, M. (2004a) 'De-centering the Forum: Is Another Critique of the Forum Possible?' in J. Sen, A. Anand, A. Escobar and P. Waterman (eds.) *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, New Delhi: The Viveka Foundation, 183-190.

7 Foucault, M. (1976/1998) *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. R. Hurley. London: Penguin Books, 60, 70; Foucault, M. (1984/1985) *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, trans. R. Hurley. New York: Pantheon, 9. This is not the same as saying that there is some essential core or kernel of self occluded by layers of personal history, revealed intact through processes of psychoanalytical excavation. It is to affirm that 'the self' is continually

for finding “an ontological basis of antagonism within Empire, but also against and beyond Empire”.⁸ They suggest further that such an autopoietic (i.e. self-making) subjective and socio-political movement is inescapable, given the escalated and multiplicitous possibilities for exchange and relationship immanent in the use of new communications technologies.⁹ The flipside of such developments, of course, is an unprecedented escalation of civilian surveillance, with all the actualising fears for the erosion of civil liberties that this entails,¹⁰ as well as the emergence of a ‘just war’ continually intervening against all those desiring, (self-)organising and experiencing beyond Empire’s historically-situated and constructed ontology.

Poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial domains of theory iterate this theme of the possibility of going beyond, subverting, transgressing, and unravelling the assumed (and enforced) ontological bases of patriarchal modernity. Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, theorise the movement – the transgression – pregnant in the process and possibility of becoming: becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-sorcerer, becoming-molecular, becoming-outside. Becoming-*other*, in other words:

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing [along an established series]; ... Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to or lead back to “appearing,” “being,” “equalling,” or “producing.”¹¹

But if the assumptions that inform and produce contemporary being flow from – are potentiated and necessitated by – patriarchal modernity (or phallogocentrism to use Irigaray’s provocative term¹²), as well as from the circumstances that in turn produced this historical epoch, then becoming-other implies opening to what is othered by this epoch, the current incarnation of which is Empire. And what is othered is what is simultaneously outside/excluded *and* required to sustain the logic of this emerging, self-reinforcing ‘culture’: witches-women, madness, indigenes-nomads, shamans, nature, life/spirit/vitality. Thus the European rationalist ‘Enlightenment’ was preceded by a viciously and maliciously violent holocaust – a purification – of witches-pagans-

produced in relationship with circumstance and history; that a becoming-‘I’ implies awareness of these multiple contexts; and that, given the power dynamics and inequalities pregnant in all relationship, such awareness might engender a simultaneous transgression of both contexts (‘the rules’/ ‘authority’/ ‘expertise’) and of subjectivity/self. On this point, it is worth noting that ‘even’ Foucault, famous for his analyses of all subject positions, of all resistances, as located within and constructed by the multiplicitous micro-forces of power/discourse, also framed his life and work in Nietzschean terms as an ethical and purposeful endeavour to ‘become what one is’ (e.g. see Miller, J. (1993) *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 5-7).

8 Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 21. I use the term Empire throughout this essay as shorthand to refer to the contemporary assumption and vesting of sovereignty in a globalising neo-liberal project that prioritises corporate, military and US interests, whilst giving the impression of civil society’s ‘participation’ through ‘representative democracy’, particularly at national and subnational levels.

9 *Ibid.*, 33.

10 E.g. Ball, K. (2005) ‘Organization, Surveillance and the Body: Towards a Politics of Resistance’, *Organization*, 12(19): 89-108.

11 Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, 239.

12 Irigaray, L. (1977) ‘Women’s Exile’, trans. C. Venn, *Ideology and Consciousness*, 1: 62-76.

'heretics', predominantly women.¹³ And, as emphasised in postcolonial theory and social anthropology, the 'developed' world – the colonisers – require the 'other' (the native, the primitive, the savage) of the 'developing world'; an other that can be simultaneously 'civilised', Christianised, proletarianised, 'developed', suppressed and violated, in sustaining the power, wealth and expertise of the metropole, the core (as explored in the paper by Biccum, this issue).¹⁴

But what might this mean *in practice* for alternative globalisation struggles? Why subjectivity? And what might it mean to go beyond – to become other to – the subjectivities that permit and organise modernity and Empire? Do Social Forums answer or obfuscate this call? Can they meet the challenge set by their organisers: to create an 'open space' for the bringing together and interlinking of civil society movements and organisations seeking to produce 'another world' – one departing from the extreme inequalities, environmental transformations, identity-based exclusions and militarism characterising neo-liberalism, speculative-capitalism and US-imperialism?

The concept of 'open space' and its manifestation in Social Forums has been interrogated in depth in a number of recent publications. These include Patomäki and Teivainen¹⁵ and a recent *International Social Science Journal* devoted to exploring the virtual and actual vibrations of the open space ideal in Social Forums.¹⁶ Unsurprising, these ruminations observe an outcome embodied by the concept itself: that since any opening will come from somewhere, i.e. will actualise from a striation – from a set of initial conditions in which inequality and difference will play a part – then the open space of the Forum will itself manifest these inequalities and differences. Giving pattern to the included and the marginalised. Structuring Forum form. Thus it has been argued, for example, that some expressions of identity seem more comfortably received than others,¹⁷ and that the secularistic vocabulary, grammar and culture prevailing at the Forum is a narrowing of possibility for many participants.¹⁸ Further, it frequently has been the spaces on the margins of, or beyond, the 'formal Forum' where arguably the more cogently radical and creative organisational and other practices (or spaces) for

13 E.g. Merchant, C. (1980/1990) *The Death Of Nature: Women, Ecology And The Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco; Ginzburg, C. (1990) *Ecstacies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, London: Hutchinson Radius; Frederici, S. (2004) *Caliban And The Witch: Women, The Body And Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia.

14 This was a process that also was vehemently resisted in many contexts: see, for example, R. Gordon and D. P. Sholto (2000) *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass*, 2nd Ed., Oxford: Westview Press.

15 Patomäki, H. and T. Teivainen (2004) 'The World Social Forum: An Open Space Or A Movement Of Movements?', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 21(6): 145-154.

16 Keraghel, C. and J. Sen (eds.) (2004) 'Explorations in Open Space: the World Social Forum and Cultures of Politics', *International Social Science Journal*, Special Issue, 182.

17 Khan, T. N. (2004) 'Trio', *International Social Science Journal*, Special Issue, 182: 541-549.

18 Daulatzai, A. (2004) 'A Leap Of Faith: Thoughts On Secularistic Practices And Progressive Politics', *International Social Science Journal*, Special Issue, 182: 565-576.

becoming human have manifested.¹⁹ As Michal Osterweil observes on reading accounts of the WSF 2004 in Mumbai:

I was struck ... by the choice of emphasis. Rather than spend a great deal of time discussing the contents of particular workshops, or even of central debates over forms of governance, specific policies, and alternatives – things which we would typically expect out of a *political* event – many authors tend to focus on a different register. They point to the Forum's lively sounds and colours; the exhilarating mix of different languages and cultures; and even the uncanny and ubiquitous sense of magic and possibility. In other words, they focus on a register that includes feeling and energy, that values difference and subjective location.²⁰

It is as though it is what happens at the Forum's own 'outside' that is most significant culturally – and therefore politically – about the Social Forum.

My desire then in this paper is to ask explicitly to what extent Social Forums engage with, learn from and become modernity's multiplicitous Other. Given the multiple exclusions, purifications and disappearances associated with modernity in its (non)relationship with the Other, it seems to me that it is this question that moves towards the heart of what a contemporary radical politics might constitute. This then is my conventional opening:

1. The raising of a question: do Social Forums open spaces, representational and otherwise for 'the other(s)' of rationalist modernity?
2. The suggestion of a hypothesis: in themselves, they do not, and may even maintain and foster the continuing exclusion of what is othered by modernity's hopeful but constrained humanism;
3. And a hint of my conclusion: that Social Forums, while opening significant networking opportunities for those able to participate (see Juris and Mueller, this issue), tend to iterate the constructed universalisms associated with modern and patriarchal humanism; that this iteration (or repetition) obfuscates the possibility of conversation with, and/or the becoming of, 'the Other'; and that this acts against the movement and emergence of a significantly counter-hegemonic culture able to unravel the ontological assumptions underpinning modern institutionalism, and the multiple rationalist exclusions on which such organisational culture is constructed.

My discussion moves through a consideration of three terms that I think are illuminating in this context, namely representation, rationalism and romanticism. I move from a critique of the inescapable disempowerments (over-decision-making) accompanying modern representational politics; to a review of the excluding rationalisms infusing

19 De Angelis, M. (2004) 'Opposing Fetishism By Reclaiming Our Powers: The Social Forum Movement, Capitalist Markets And The Politics Of Alternatives', *International Social Science Journal*, Special Issue, 182: 591-604; also his paper in this issue; Osterweil (2004a) *ibid.*; Osterweil, M. (2004b) 'A Cultural-Political Approach To Reinventing The Political', *International Social Science Journal*, Special Issue, 182: 495-506; also see Dowling, Juris, L. Sullivan, Tormey, this issue.

20 Osterweil (2004b), *ibid.*, 495.

modernity's *culture* and on which representational politics is based; and to a suggestion that modernity's *other* – which remains the other of the formal Forum – is embodied and inspired by the presence of a radical and revolutionary romanticism. By this I mean that it is animated by the subjective experience and generation of meaning and possibility in all relationship.

So far, so good. But I also write here as 'irrational Other'. This is an academic space – a 'radical theory' journal constituting an ephemeral space for thinking ephemeral confluences of organisation and politics. It is a space for writing as theoretician, intellectual, researcher, academic. But this is not the only realm of experience that I bring to my understanding of phenomena, to my *thinking*, Social Forums or otherwise. I also am woman, body, ecstatic, anthropologist, indigene (i.e. at home here), activist, learner, raver, animal, pagan, ecologist, 'sufferer' of 'bipolar personality disorder' (how interesting that modernity makes a 'disease' of strong emotion²¹), dreamer, occasional seer. A schizoid, wandering/wondering rhizomatic becoming.²² Desiring to embrace the constitutive possibilities of being always present in the world.²³ Yearning for spaces where *a philosophy and praxis of openness* might nurture practices of desire and creative imagination that go beyond the dualistic *cul-de-sacs* of Being and Otherness, of transcendence and immanence, that seem to be enlightenment philosophy's devastating gifts to our world(s). And desiring possibilities for exchange and permeability with those of 'other cultures' and locales, and with the non-human but nonetheless sentient and communicative world,²⁴ while acknowledging, even celebrating, the 'othernesses' that I myself embody.

Bringing these realms of experience to bear on my analytics in this paper is not (I hope) motivated from an ego-driven desire to assert difference and thereby make some sort of case for special expertise; claiming what Foucault calls "speaker's benefit"²⁵ (by stating this I, of course, reveal that I am not blind to its possibility). It flows instead from an intuition (and hope) that even in the rationalist academic world that I occupy I am not alone. That there are others for whom the languages gained through particular socialisation and education processes permit the playing of the discursive games required by this particular club, but in doing so participate in the masking and silencing

21 On which, see for example: James, W. (1902) *The Varieties Of Religious Experience*. New York: The Modern Library; Laing, R. D. (1967) *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, London: Penguin Books; Foucault, F. (1861/2004) *Madness and Civilisation: A History Of Insanity In The Age Of Reason*, trans. R. Howard. London: Routledge; and, of course, Deleuze and Guattari's encyclopaedic volumes on capitalism and schizophrenia, *ibid.*; Clarke, E. (2000a) 'Psychosis and Spirituality. Finding a Language', *Changes* 18(3): 201-214, and (2000b) 'Madness and Mysticism: Clarifying the Mystery', *Network. The Scientific and Medical Network Review*, 72: 11-14.

22 Yes, very (and unashamedly) D & G! Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*

23 Kristeva, J. (1997) 'Psychoanalysis and the Body', in S. Kemp and J. Squires (eds.) *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 228-231.

24 Cf. Abrahm, D. (1996) *The Spell Of The Sensuous: Perception And Language In A More-Than-Human World*. New York: Mantheon Books; Narby J. (1995/1999) *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and The Origins of Knowledge*. London and Phoenix: Orion Books Ltd.

25 Foucault (1976/1998), *ibid.*, 6.

of our 'other worlds'. And who also have painfully twisted, contorted and subsumed experience so as to fit the arrogances and epistemic violences²⁶ of expert discourses, observational distance and the ideal of objectivity, whilst producing in the bland and unengaged language seemingly required in much academic work: sensing throughout our complicity in ontological heresies and culturally constructed falsehoods. It also reflects a call made by Foucault in a different context: "for the knowledge to be gained from ... [experience] *and the right to speak about it*".²⁷

So, below and beyond the layers of what I experience as normative practice, I hereby attempt to *do* anthropology – as in a transdisciplinary philosophy (and practice) of being human (isn't this what all social 'sciences' engage in?) – beyond the methodological conventions of 'participant observation', 'observant participation', and debates within 'social movement studies' regarding the relative values of the organic or traditional intellectual.²⁸ I try to unlearn my own discipline (and disciplining): to become the three-year old child; and to stalk Steven Biko's challenge to 'write what I like'.²⁹ Groping towards opening and legitimating a space for that 'other voice': the voice that speaks as a yawn at the incessant talking and the NGO (Non-Government Organisations) trade fair of the formal Forum; that feels distanced and bored by the glitzy concert of popstar-politicians on the opening night of this year's WSF – a performance that constructs 'us', the audience, as conventional consumer-receivers of 'art' – of the 'stars', the personalities – displayed/staged 'up there' and out-of-reach; that feels alienated (unheard and thereby silenced) by the predominance of white men embellishing the plenary platforms or shouting out the droning chants on left-political protests; and that passionately desires something other:

... the Muse is the other voice. ... the passionate cry laden with the hopeless force of its own idealism ... there are always two voices, the safe voice and the dangerous one. The one that takes the risks and the one that counts the cost. The believer talking to the atheist, cynicism addressing love.³⁰

On Representation (or, 'Not In My Name')

High up in the mountains of the south east of Mexico an experiment is taking place which tests some of the most cherished notions ... held about the nature of politics, of rationality, of order, of emancipation. The experiment is being conducted by the Zapatistas ... [who] are seeking a way in which people ... can not merely find their own voice, but be heard by those who would otherwise

26 My thanks to Vanessa Andreotti for opening me to this term in recent email correspondence.

27 Foucault, *ibid.*, 6, emphasis added.

28 E.g. Barker, C. and L. Cox (2003) "What Have The Romans Ever Done For Us?" Academic and Activist Forms of Movement Theorizing', [<http://www.iol.ie/~mazzoldi/toolsforchange/afpp/afpp8.html>], accessed 20 January 2004; Gramsci, A. (1971/2003) *Selections From The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and S. G. Nowell. London: Lawrence and Wishart; also see Euromovements 2005 'Activist Research: Practice(s) to Challenge the Investigation' [<http://www.euromovements.info/html/index.htm>].

29 Biko, S. (1978/1989) *I Write What I Like: A Selection of Writings*. Oxford: Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks.

30 Duncker, *ibid.*, 61.

remain deaf, which, predictably, includes those who would seek to 'represent' them: the official parties of the Mexican political establishment; various Marxist and revolutionary groups; and movements representing the poor or particular indigenous groups. ... Why have they set their face against what, for occidental political thought, *is* politics?³¹

The quote above speaks of the critique of representational 'democracy' associated with 'new social movements' worldwide, and that has been most clearly articulated in Zapatismo and autonomist political tendencies. But, as Candeias (2004) comments, today's longest established liberal democracies, whereby elected *representatives* more-or-less are given carte blanche for a number of years to make decisions on behalf of their electorate, also are experiencing 'a deep crisis of representation'.³² This is indicated in part by low voter turnout in major elections, and in part by the resounding '*Not In My Name!*' that epitomised a broad public mood against the recent US-UK war on Iraq (which was, of course, fought (ironically? cynically?) in the name of instituting democracy). As Tormey says, "[f]ewer people are voting (particularly at sub-national level and for supra-national institutions such as the EU), joining political parties, or engaging with 'official' political processes, which are for the most part resolutely 'representative' in orientation".³³ This withdrawal frequently is 'written-off' as voter apathy flowing from the high material wealth of the electorate in the world's 'advanced democracies': people, it is argued, are too materially comfortable to care about politics.

But politics/power is not only about voting. At the same time as people seem to be withdrawing their participation from representative democracies in the West, the last few years have seen a proliferation and intensification of expressions of dissatisfaction with the contemporary distribution of power and resources; as well as with the 'culture' of modernity in its current incarnation as patriarchal neo-liberalism, authoritarianism, hypercapitalism and militarism. The scale of this dissatisfaction – the multiple alienations (authority's 'nos') that become articulated in a subject's 'NO!' – can be hinted at by the recent eruptive moments of the (anti-)globalisation 'spectaculars' (Seattle, Prague, J18, Quebec City, Genoa, Evian, Thessaloniki, Miami, Cancun, etc.), as well as the Social Forums of the last few years. History clearly did *not* end with the post-1989 'arrival' of neo-liberalism.³⁴ Or with the current elision of right-left political parties into the somewhat indistinguishable 'mush' of liberal/representational democracy under Empire. Given that hegemony requires the consent and participation of the dominated in their (our) own domination³⁵ – producing 'the [oppressed] mind of

31 Tormey, S. (forthcoming) 'Not in My Name': Deleuze, Zapatismo and The Critique of Representation', submitted to *Political Studies*, 3.

32 Candeias, M. (2004) 'Antinomies: Relations Between Social Movements, Left Political Parties And State. Reflections on the European Social Forum in London and Beyond', in O. Reyes, H. Wainwright, I. Fuster, M. Morrell and M. Berlinguer (eds.) *European Social Forum: Debating the Challenges for its Future* [<http://www.euromovements.info/newsletter/>] *ESF Newsletter*, accessed 10 January 2005, 3.

33 Tormey, *ibid.*, 3. In a sense, the organisation of Social Forums is even worse, since there is no attempt at democratic representation in decision-making processes regarding its organisation.

34 As famously espoused in Fukuyama, F. (1991) *The End of History and The Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

35 Cf. Gramsci, *ibid.*; Stirner, M. (1993) *The Ego and its Own*, trans. S. Byington. London: Rebel Press; also analysis in Newman, S. (2001) *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*. Oxford: Lexington Books.

the oppressed'³⁶ – each saying of 'NO!' becomes a movement beyond easy consensus in the hegemonic order. It has been accompanied by further deterritorialisations – the 'opting out' suggested by consumer activism, direct action politics, and DiY culture in multiplicitous manifestations³⁷ (which, of course, since nothing is static, also are open to potential reterritorialisations/recuperations/cooptations). Such deterritorialisations – such assertions and praxes of autonomy and autarky (i.e. self-sufficiency) – create conditions ripe for resistance: the resistance of the state and Empire against those who refuse representation, and who refuse the policies and practices, not to mention the assumed authority, of those who seek to represent. Of those who seek *power-over* others.

This then would seem to embody a paradox: people in today's 'democracies' are both less and more politically engaged. There are many ways in which this simultaneous engagement and disengagement with discourses and practices of power can be interpreted. Bourdieu, for example, speaks pragmatically of the alienations and distrust generated over the last few years by an increasing separation between what he terms the right and left hands of the state: between private and public, between business and welfare. Speaking of France and beyond, he writes that:

I think the left hand of the state [“social workers”: family counsellors, youth leaders, rank-and-file magistrates, ... secondary and primary teachers ... the set of agents of the so-called spending ministries which are the trace, within the state, of the social struggles of the past'] has the sense that the right hand [‘the technocrats of the Ministry of Finance, the public and private banks and the ministerial *cabinets*’] no longer knows, or, worse, no longer really wants to know what the left hand does. In any case it does not want to pay for it. One of the main reasons for all these people's despair is that the state has withdrawn, or is withdrawing from, a number of sectors of social life for which it was previously responsible: social housing, public sector broadcasting, schools, hospitals, etc., which is all the more stupefying and scandalous ... because ... it was done by a Socialist government, which might be expected to be the guarantor of public service as an open service available to all, without distinction ... *What is described as a crisis of politics, anti-parliamentarianism, is in reality despair at the failure of the state as the guardian of the public interest.*³⁸

These processes, and this despair, is mirrored in supranational contexts flowing from a globalising neo-liberalism: in the advocacy and institutionalisation of privatisation policies worldwide; in Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPS) and the range of neo-liberal conditionalities built into loan, aid and debt relief packages to 'developing countries';³⁹ in the 'free trade area' agreements mediated by the WTO (World Trade Organisation), a supranational institution in which US interests are grossly over-represented; and in the justifications for, and timing of, military interventions by the

36 Biko, *ibid.*

37 E.g. McKay, G. (ed.) (1999) *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*. London: Verso.

38 Bourdieu, P. (1998) 'The Left Hand And Right Hand Of The State', in Bourdieu, P. *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge: Polity and the New Press, 2, emphasis added (First published as interview with R. P. Droit and T. Ferenczi, in *Le Monde*, 14 January 1992).

39 Look underneath the rhetoric of debt relief and debt cancellation and there are a host of IMF structural adjustment type conditionalities regarding the opening of markets and resources to corporate interests, and for the privatisation of utilities.

United Nations and/or NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), or by the West into the rest. These are distributed globally by virtue of the structural power of a 'centre' that also is to some extent distributed: the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank, the US, the UN (United Nations) Security Council, and so on. Unsurprisingly, these initiatives which are supposed to be good for 'them' – the public, developing countries, labour etc. – just so happen to be extremely good for business/capitalism/militarism/US hegemony (also see Biccum, this issue).

Increasingly, when people attempt to have a voice to speak for themselves about both desires and despair, even if by simply using their right to protest under democratic systems, they find that they are not listened to (and therefore not heard: i.e. silenced). Even Tony Blair recently acknowledged the need to at least give the impression of listening more to 'the people' if he is to sustain his power. Such silencing is, and feels, patronising, alienating and frustrating. But when protests and protestors also are criminalised and violently policed – and when the world's leaders of states meet in contained zones, protected against 'civil society' by armies of armed police – then the contradictions built into the democratic state under global corporate capitalism and neo-liberalism become blatant. As described by a woman involved with the Argentinean MTD – Movimiento de Trabajadoras Desocupadas/Desempleados, the Movement of Unemployed Workers – in a meeting at the Caracol Intergalaktica, in the Intercontinental Youth Camp held to coincide with the WSF 2005:

The state always plays the same role – whether under dictatorship or democracy. This is to maintain those in power. While government might change, political economic circumstances and realities don't. ... The enemy is clear to us – it is the capitalist state, be it dictatorship or democracy.⁴⁰

It seems that the emperor indeed is wearing no clothes. But more importantly, is there an emerging multiplicity of adult-3year olds validating and voicing that this is what they see?

As well-articulated in Zapatismo and autonomist politics, in post-structuralism and an emerging post-anarchist and antiauthoritarian politics, serious conceptual contradictions arise from affirming a need to take the power of contemporary institutions in order to effect change. Modern institutions and forms of organisation themselves flow from a self-sustaining grid of rationalities – a culture – that sanctions, requires and perpetuates the (violent) will to *power-over* others – and over difference. This will-to-power-over others – this authoritarianism – is built into modern representative democracy, and in the authority of state institutions and rationalist organisational structures.⁴¹

As noted by Holloway,⁴² there is a critical lack of equivalence between this and the will-to-*power-to-become*. By this I mean a subjective sense that "[t]he State does not let me come to my value, and continues to exist only through my valuelessness",⁴³ as well as a

40 At 7pm, 28th January 2005, personal notes.

41 Also see Tormey, *ibid.*

42 Holloway, J. (2002) *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. London: Pluto Press.

43 Stirner, *ibid.*, 254, quoted in Newman, *ibid.*, 72.

sense of the possibility that subjectivity might work on 'itself' in contesting and resisting its subjectification, and in permitting the desire for, and embodiment of, difference. Of coming into oneself – of becoming one's own, minoritarian.⁴⁴ This also is an affirming of the possibility – the uncertainty – always present in the holonic⁴⁵ and necessary organisational dance between autonomy/individualism and community/structure (both of which are compromised and fragmented in today's 'representative democracies' and bureaucratic [militarised-]society of controlled consumption⁴⁶). And it is the possible-becoming latent in agentic experience of, and

44 After Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, also see discussion in Tormey, *ibid.*

45 The term 'holon' refers to a seemingly consistent organisational phenomenon that organs/organisations always are both parts (of broader scales of organisation) *and* wholes ('in themselves'). Holons also are open such that information flows bidirectionally between different holonic scales such that parts influence wholes and vice versa, i.e. they are in communicative relationship (e.g. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holon_%28philosophy%29, after Koestler, A. (1967/1975) *The Ghost in the Machine*. London: Macmillan). A complementary organisational phenomenon can thereby emerge: namely a holographic principle that means that all parts simultaneously contain information about wholes, such that the character of broader scales is both distributed and emergent and *to some extent* can be 'read' or implied from smaller scales (D. Bohm, in R. Weber, 'The Enfolding-Unfolding Universe: A Conversation with David Bohm', in K. Wilber (ed.) *The Holographic Paradigm and Other Paradoxes*. London: Shambhala, 44-104). 'To see a world in a grain of sand ...', as William Blake observed. These phenomena give rise to the qualitative self-similarity – the eternal return, perhaps? – observed at multiple scales (e.g. illustrated at <http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/>; or <http://www.wordwizz.com/pwrsof10.htm>; or in computer-generated fractal geometries of the Mandelbrot set and other fractal equations e.g. <http://www.jracademy.com/~jtucek/math/picts.html>; Gleick, J. (1987) *Chaos: Making A New Science*. London: Cardinal). Further, because 'holons' always also are open, i.e. are relational, as well as having a character that exhibits qualitative persistence, then connectivity, relationship and feedback between holons and between different holonic 'levels' or scales also is always present, generating the potential for emergent phenomena, i.e. changes at broader scales that might not be predictable from observation at smaller scales. This is the always enfolding-unfolding, implicate-explicate (virtual-actual?) universe (or holoflux to use David Bohm's term), whereby the 'zone' of enfoldment is the generative, unmanifest meshwork where parts are distributed throughout wholes at the same time as every part of the whole contributes to – is in relationship with – the part. In terms of social-political organisation, these organisational phenomena and theories affirm the possibility of a *proliferation* of democratic processes (also see Gilbert, this issue) in which people participate and which people self-organise, together with fostering the dynamic feedback possible via connectivity between scales. A *fractal democracy*, in other words. Instead, patriarchal organisation and civilisation, including Empire today, tends towards circumstances in which wholes – the molar structures – of modern institutions (including representative democracy), constrain and violate the desire for molecular movement – for becoming (as theorised by Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*). Such conceptualisations provide theoretical succour for the possibility (and necessity?) of a molecular and minoritarian politics that might infiltrate, infect, dislocate and counter-balance the predominating molar structures whose destructive (i.e. unhealthy) tendencies seem only to clear (mass production/proliferation of death technologies; unprecedented suicide rates; palpable disregard for the non-human world (unless amenable to commodification), etc.). Such ideas also mesh well with Max Stirner's suggestion of reaching towards a 'union of egoists'. While frequently misread through the lens of the 'rugged individualism' – the ego-driven selfishness – sanctioned by neo-liberalism, hyper-capitalism, neo-Darwinism, etc. Stirner's thesis is that healthy (valued, empowered) parts (individuals/egos) will recursively constitute dynamic and healthy wholes (communities) (*ibid.*).

46 Cf. Lefebvre, H. (1984/1971) *Everyday life in the modern world*. London: The Athlone Press.

participation in, ‘imaginal’ realms: of intermediary and ecstatic spaces between the sensual and spiritual – what the ancient world referred to as *nous*.⁴⁷

How can there be a meeting, a conversation, between these different constitutions of power: the juridical-monarchic power-over of institutions and the law, and the omnipresent power-to-become that is “local and unstable ... produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another”.⁴⁸ How can minimal voting and representation by others satisfy the desires of questing seekers – self-conscious egos⁴⁹ – able and wanting to participate in everyday choices regarding how we produce, consume and organise our lives?⁵⁰ When Holloway, for example, asks the question of ‘how to change the world without taking power’ he is denouncing the former conception and sedimenting of power whilst simultaneously affirming a seizing of the multiplicitous and distributed will-to-power-to-become that is the desire animating all presence and relationship. As he states: “[t]he only way in which revolution can now be imagined is not as the conquest of power but as the dissolution of power”⁵¹ (although it is unfortunate that he uses the term ‘anti-power’ to describe the latter). This is possibility that the distributed *will-to-power-to-become* of conscious subjectivities (people) can participate – can assert agency – in the unfolding – the becoming – of their/our lives. It is to make an opportunity of Foucault’s formulation that “there is no escaping from power, ... it is always-already present, constituting the very thing which one attempts to counter it with”. This is “[p]ower’s condition of possibility”;⁵² or “frontlines are everywhere”.⁵³ The possibility that we can ‘conceive of sex without the law, and power without the king’: inflaming “a plurality of resistances”⁵⁴ and embracing the uncertainty – the ‘maybes’ – of opening to a ‘post-representational’ politics.⁵⁵

47 Indicative of more fundamental closures, more structured discourses, is the following discrepancy between the contemporary dictionary definition of this philosophical term, and its apparently ancient Greek conception. For the former, it is ‘*n.* ... 2. *Philos.* the mind or intellect. [Gk]’ (Fowler, H. G. and F. G. Fowler (1990) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed. R. E Allen (ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 811). For the latter, it is the *psyche* – the ‘intermediate realm between the purely sensory and the purely spiritual’; the *creative imaginal* zone of experience that both embraced and transcended body, mind and affect to constitute something akin to ‘our’ notion of ‘soul’ (Leloup, J-Y (2002) *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene: Translation from the Coptic and Commentary*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 14).

48 Foucault, *ibid.*, 93.

49 Stirner, *ibid.*

50 Nb. this is not the same as saying that the practice of voting and/or of representation by a trusted other is never useful.

51 Holloway, *ibid.*, 20.

52 Foucault, *ibid.*, 93.

53 Sullivan, S. (2003) ‘Frontline(s)’, *ephemera*, 3(1): 68-89 [www.ephemeraweb.org].

54 Foucault, *ibid.*, 91, 96.

55 E.g. Tormey, *ibid.*

On Rationalism (or, 'Capitalism Is Boring!'⁵⁶)

Scientific rationalism – the rationalism of the mathematical models which inspire the policy of the IMF or the World Bank ... that of rational-action theories, etc. – is both the expression and justification of a Western arrogance, which leads people to act as if they had the monopoly of reason and could set themselves up as the world policemen, ... Economic coercion is often dressed up in juridical reasons. Imperialism drapes itself in the legitimacy of international bodies. And, through the very hypocrisy of the rationalizations intended to mask its double standards, it tends to provoke or justify, ... a very profound revolt These 'irrationalisms' are partly the product of our rationalism, imperialist, invasive and conquering or mediocre, narrow, defensive, regressive and repressive...⁵⁷

So be filled with spirit but lacking in human reason, for human reason is only human reason ...⁵⁸

In the previous section I make reference to pragmatic issues regarding power, authority, representation and organisation. I also noted a range of assumptions empowered in Empire regarding the most 'efficient' way for wealth, resources, labour and services to be distributed; which also conveniently create conditions ripe for the consolidation of expansive and colonising business/capitalist/militarist interests. But infusing, inside and *underneath* these practical, political and policy outcomes are a range of constructed rationalities: the taken-for-given norms – the *culture* – that permits, sustains, and breathes life into modernity's assumed ontology. These have been extended and sedimented into the institutions associated with, and conventionalised/normalised/naturalised by modernity; making consideration of what is othered by these institutions key to finding and conceptualising radical resistant praxes today.

But what might be discerned as significant elements of patriarchal modernity's rationality/discourse/culture? And why are the (ir)rationalities of 'the Other' established as so different (and dangerous), and therefore radical, in relation to this referent?

A starting point is the dichotomous thinking – the thinking in terms of fixed and essential binary categories (male/female; culture/nature; reason/emotion; mind/body; civilised European/savage other, etc.) – embodying the heart of 'Enlightenment thought'. This is the privileging of a static splitting of 1 from 2: without appreciating either the dynamic relationship of 1 with 2; or their possible and unpredictable emergent union or communion into something different (3). It is accompanied by the conception that each member of a category is the same – a replicant, a clone – rather than distinct: its own being/becoming in relationship with other beings/becomings. Given a further discursive (and recursive, i.e. self-referential) privileging of the first part of the pair as the ruling sex, race and class, a rupture (or at least a range of conceptual constraints) regarding the possibility of relationship with 'the other' occurs:⁵⁹ and so '*Men are from*

56 Slogan seen on a placard at the Mayday protests in London, 2002, personal notes.

57 Bourdieu, P. (1998) 'Abuse of Power by the Advocates of Reason', in Bourdieu, P. *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*. Cambridge: Polity and the New Press, 19-20. (Intervention at a public discussion organized by the International Parliament of Writers at the Frankfurt Book Fair, 15 October 1995).

58 'The Secret Book of James', in Meyer, M. W. (1984/1986) *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vintage Books, 5.

59 Cf. Irigaray, L. (2002) *The Way of Love*, trans. H. Bostic and S. Pluháček. London: Continuum.

mars, women are from venus’, as the popular book proclaims.⁶⁰ Never mind that the ensuing veneration of rational waking ego consciousness as the norm, the referent, the One, is an ontological heresy for many.⁶¹ This is modernity’s hopeful and universalising humanism as that of the essential, but constructed, white, male, bourgeois experience, against which ‘women, people of colour, ... the insane, homosexuals and other identities’ have been constructed and differentiated “as exclusions of the white heterosexual bourgeois man, as ‘the Other’”.⁶²

And so modernity’s expansionary, expropriating and ordering/enclosing discourse and practice becomes the ‘mania for the One, one country, one truth, one way’.⁶³ Such closure precludes constitutive relationship with ‘the irrational Other’: constructed and named as the essential categories of women, indigenes, non-human nature, the sacred imaginal – the other, demoted half of the pair. These then constitute *danger* to the emergent hegemonic order, and are vigorously purified as such. As Cixous and Clément write ‘[w]e almost forget that there were thousands of sorceresses burned throughout Europe – real disappearance, sanctioned by real death – for which the ecclesiastical power was legally responsible’.⁶⁴ Indigenes everywhere were and are proletarianised through violence: from Columbus’ genocidal encounter with the ‘New World’; to oil companies currently involved with the violent removal of West Papuans from their land and lifeworlds; to multinational corporation sweat-shops and Export Processing Zones creating cheap labour out of ‘developing’ country populations. And the logic, the rationality, of the modern state – fascist, secular Arab, dictatorship, democratic – has sanctioned and perpetuated repeated disappearances: from Nazi Germany’s sustained eradication of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and anarchists; to Saddam Hussein’s gassing of Kurds, and the disappearances of some 30,000 Argentineans under dictatorship. It is this logic – the fear and suppression of difference – that prevails in the violence, death and arrests silencing neo-liberalism’s protestors everywhere; and in the criminalisation and suppression of rave and informal economies wherever these occur and grow. As

60 Gray, J. (1993) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. London: Thorsens.

61 Lumpkin, T. (2000) ‘Perceptual Diversity: Is Polyphasic Consciousness Necessary for Global Survival?’ Paper presented at the Anthropological Association of Southern Africa conference on ‘The African Renaissance’ held in Windhoek, May 2000.

62 Habermann, F. (2004) ‘Economic Man – Superstar: Identities, Hegemonies and Economic Theory’, paper presented at the Conference of the International Association for Feminist Economists, Oxford 4-7 August 2004.

63 Hölderlin, F. (1946/ late 18th century) *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Beissner, F. W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, quoted in Blechman, M. (1999) ‘The Revolutionary Dream of Early German Romanticism’, in M. Blechman (ed.) *Revolutionary Romanticism, A Drunken Boat Anthology*. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1-34.

64 Cixous and Clément, *ibid.*, 5. This speaks of an astonishing and long-lasting *misogyny* in the consolidation of patriarchal state-church authority and their denial and fear of contamination by direct experience of the erotic. The following words, for example, are attributed to Martin Luther – the 16th century *father of a church*: ‘I would have such venomous, syphilitic whores broken on the wheel and flayed because one cannot estimate the harm such filthy whores do to young men ...’. By this time women had been burned at the stake and subjected to other violent deaths and torture since the council of Salzburg in 799, which approved the torture of witches. In Jensen, D. (2000) *A Language Older than Words*. London: Souvenir Press, 92.

Foucault writes: “so many precautions to contain everything, with no fear of ‘overflow’”.⁶⁵

Thus, while the operations and bio-politics of capitalist power have produced proliferations (i.e. possibilities) of their own, repressions and exclusions also have infused modernity’s rationalisms. All that these othered became “a sentence to disappear, ... an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there ... [is] nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know”.⁶⁶ As a paradigm for organising sensory and conceptual experience it has generated the peculiarly and totalising modern “order of things”⁶⁷: an amoral canvas of predictabilities discernible/understandable through stabilising binaries ordering ‘the same’ into arboreal, descent-based classifications (rather than generative processes).⁶⁸ This rationality itself is recursively ordered and produced by particular practices of objectification, classification, categorisation, ordering and universalising produced by (and for) the colonising classes, races, and sex: practices which animated the emergence of science and capitalist colonialism alike, a partnership producing the technoscience of such utility to contemporary neo-liberalism and militarism.

Flowing from these categorising orientations are the denying and dehumanising numbers games – the 1+1=2 rationality – that transforms the body count in Iraq, the numbers of children dying of poverty every several seconds, into the ‘collateral damage’ abstractions of the cost-benefit analyses guiding war and neo-liberalism. They produce the banal proliferation of sameness – of mass production (and reproduction/repetition) – and sustain the silencing of variety, of excess (i.e. life), of difference, of Other beyond its own self-referential parameters. Thus certain ‘things’ – ontologies, experiences, subjectivities, becomings – are “taboo, non-existence, silence[d]”.⁶⁹ And ‘we’ thereby arrive at “the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie”;⁷⁰ the “horror of dailiness”, and “terrifying indifference”⁷¹ of wage-slavery, ‘leisure’ and war. “[T]he order of things that are counted”.⁷²

This modern *episteme*, to use Foucault’s term,⁷³ further informs a range of additional and fetishised assumptions regarding how people organise and make decisions, and what they/we might desire: about what it means to be human. That ‘we’ conceive and experience ourselves primarily as individual/particulate; as competitive and narrowly self-interested; as requiring reining-in – controlling – in order to mediate our necessarily aggressive tendencies, and so as to become productive in terms beneficial to states and

65 Foucault, *ibid.*, 5.

66 Foucault, *ibid.*, 4.

67 Cf. Foucault, M. (1966/1997) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge.

68 Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*; Ingold, T. (2000) *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.

69 Foucault, (1998, 1976) *ibid.*, 5.

70 Foucault, *ibid.*, 3.

71 Duncker, *ibid.*, 109, 111.

72 Foucault, *ibid.*, 4.

73 Foucault, (1997, 1966) *ibid.*

business; as ontologically separate from each other and the non-human world; as aspiring to a disembodied rationality as the highest-state of being. Such assumptions – classically articulated in the unbelievably empowered modern humanist notion of ‘economic rational man’ – recently have been critiqued as informed and maintained by an ‘autistic economics’.⁷⁴ Notwithstanding the problematic reference here to the experience of what is categorised as autism, such a critique is instructive since it implies that politically and economically we are guided and constrained by an economics that curiously embodies symptoms exhibited by what is understood as autism or Asperger’s syndrome: of difficulty relating with others; of withdrawal from community, sometimes associated with destructive behaviours; and of often astonishing literacy with numbers (remember the Dustin Hoffman character in the film *Rainman*?).

But arguably, the experience(s) of being human also constitutes a more dynamic conversation between being both individual *and* member of community; both self *and* social being; bounded *and* in relationship; particulate *and* relational. Dancing from the ‘[e]xcess essential to the production of austerity’, and back again.⁷⁵ This is not to affirm some sort of mirror deep structure which provides predictable and deterministic form to what it means to be human (i.e. what has become humanism’s universalising Achilles’ heel). But it is to affirm a different ‘(dis)order’ based instead on the ontological possibility of mutually constitutive and continuously present relationship between ‘things’.⁷⁶ Such a possibility would underscore a very different ethical openness to the world and to processes of living, emphasising for example the continual constituting of, and participating in, self, society and nature as ‘one community’,⁷⁷ whilst also affirming relationships of respect and fascination for the ontological distinctness of beings/becomings.⁷⁸ And it would posit a very different kind of political engagement and ‘productivity’. An embracing and becoming of *other*.

The news travels fast that the secret of men is nothing, in truth nothing at all. Oedipus, the phallus, castration, “the splinter in the flesh” – that was the secret? It is enough to make women, children, lunatics, and molecules laugh.⁷⁹

Romanticism (or, Forums and ‘Freaks’)

Romanticism is not only a literary and artistic school from the early nineteenth century: it is ... a powerful worldview, a style of thought, a structure-of-sensibility that is present in all spheres of cultural life One could define the romantic *Weltanschauung* as a protest against the modern

74 E.g. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post_Autistic_Economics, accessed 19 June 2005.

75 Duncker, *ibid.*, 31.

76 Ingold, *ibid.*; Brody, H. (2001) *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-gatherers, Farmers and the Shaping of the World*. London: Faber and Faber.

77 Sullivan, S. in press. ‘Reflections on ‘new’ (Neoliberal) Conservation (with case material from Namibia, Southern Africa)’, *Africa e Orienti*.

78 Tormey, *ibid.*, 5, after Deleuze, G. (1994) *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton. London: Continuum.

79 Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, 289.

(capitalist) civilization, ... a cultural critique of the bourgeois-industrial world responsible for the quantification and mechanization of life, ... for the *disenchantment of the world*.⁸⁰

As now numerous texts relate, the recent wave of anti-establishment protests – from the poetry of Zapatista subcommandante Marcos to the rave-inspired Reclaim the Streets (RTS) of UK nineties;⁸¹ in the libertarian antiauthoritarian politics of self-organising groups and networks worldwide; from antipsychiatry and mental health activism to a tangible and global upwelling of paganism, shamanism and psychonautical exploration – draw on and derive their potency variously from the *transgressive* character of the Festival,⁸² from the distributed empowerment of self-organisation and DiY (Do-it-Yourself) politics, and from an affirmation of polyphasic consciousness and ‘non-ordinary’ experiences of ‘reality’.⁸³ Within the wave of global protests characterising the neo-liberal era, many groups actively seek these spaces as embodying their protest. In the context of Social Forums, however, and as noted above, these practices typically are marginal to, even excluded by, the formal Forum process and events. This is despite their apparent embodiment of radical and prefigurative organisational and communicative praxes, as well as their embracing of subjectivities and ontological experiences kept outside of – othered by – modernity.

In literature and documented experience there is a rich *oeuvre* exploring the subversive (to modernity) potential of such ‘beyond-self’ transgressions. Thus, ‘[t]he great medieval carnivals were a time of inversion, of mockery of authority, of ritualised transgression, a celebration of excess and of the low, and of the body with all its appetites and unpalatable functions ... creating renewal and the possibility of social change’.⁸⁴ *Noise* signifies and embodies revolution – the entrance into liminal, outside, *other* spaces – everywhere.⁸⁵ It is here – in these times and spaces at the edges of chaos – where different and sometimes chaotic rhythms are delved into, and where unpredictable possibility is released and becomes. Of course, such subversions also can be viewed as ‘safety valves’; times of brief release that permit everything to stay the

80 Löwy, M. (1999) ‘Under the Star of Romanticism: Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse’, in Blechman, *ibid.*, 197.

81 <http://www.reclaimthestreets.net/>

82 Which, as Lefebvre noticed, is everyday life’s potentially revolutionary, i.e. disordering, celebration ‘... resurrection of the Festival’ called for by Lefebvre (*ibid.*, 36).

83 Narby, *ibid.*; Kharitidi, O. (1996) *Entering the Circle: Ancient Secrets of Siberian Wisdom Discovered by a Russian Psychiatrist*. San Francisco: Harper Collins; McKay, G. (ed.) (1999) *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*. London: Verso; Pinchbeck, D. (2002/2003) *Breaking Open the Head: A Visionary Journey from Cynicism to Shamanism*. London: Flamingo; Notes From Nowhere (2003) *We are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism*. London: Verso.

84 Letcher, A. A. (2004) ‘Bardism and the Performance of Paganism: Implications for the Performance of Research’, in J. Blain, D. Ezzy, and G. Harvey, (eds.) *Researching Paganisms*. Lanham MD: AltaMira Press, 7 (page numbers refer to draft chapter from author), after Bakhtin; also see chapter on ‘Carnival’, in Notes From Nowhere Collective (2003) *We are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism*. London: Verso.

85 Cf. Knight, C. (1997) ‘The Wives of the Sun and Moon’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 3(1): 133-153; hence the reclaimed and energising significance of percussive music, sound systems and noise in protest everywhere, from the pots and pans demonstrations in Argentinean city plazas to samba from Sao Paulo to London, e.g. www.rhythmsofresistance.co.uk.

same. On the other hand, and as Letcher asserts, these are real ‘non-ordinary experiences’ that ‘demand to be taken seriously’.⁸⁶

In this reading it is the very noise and colour of the Dalits at the WSF 2004 in Mumbai that made them radically Other and thereby so noticeable (e.g. see Biccum, this issue). It is the overflowing excess, and questioning of authority (i.e. which defines the normative parameters of the possible) that make Reclaim the Streets, Yo Mango, raves, self-organised and open distribution systems, Indymedia, paganism etc., radical, fun and *interesting* (i.e. meaningful) to be involved with (and therefore subject to systemic resistance by the modern state, both nationally and supranationally). These incorporate what we might consider as pre- and post-modern rationalities; *amodern* praxes of human becoming that modernity’s endlessly consumptive and trivialising possibilities is without the tools to engage or converse with. And they also are present as always constrained, coopted, effervescences in many contexts beyond the Forum: think eco-pagans, ravers, psychonauts, ‘New-Age travellers’, urban shamans, Harry Potter, psychedelic trance, etc. People are *hungry* because they/we have been starved: hungry for meaning and mystery – for a resacralisation of the world and of the experiences of living as relational beings.

For anyone who has seen the recent film *King Arthur*,⁸⁷ We are the Woads! Earth(ed)-people. A galactic network of communications and differences, imperfectly manifesting the idiom of ‘unity *in* diversity’. Shapeshifters tumbling between perspectives, walking between worlds, juggling perceptions and uncertainty. Pagan (atheism is *so* modern). Variously nomadic, tattooed, painted and not. Excessive and entwined. Bedded with the rhythms and cycles of the world: of female and human periodicities, of the lunar cycle, of the solstice. We are warriors, not victims: contesting and reconstituting our own consumption of ‘the system’. Overflowing and rhizomatically escaping the predatory enclosures of the economies of the body, sensation and sexuality that constitutes modernity’s biopolitics:⁸⁸ in temporary autonomous zones;⁸⁹ in DiY self-organisations; in reclaimed yet criminalised mind-body-spirit spaces; and in multiplicitous desires for autonomy, autarky and affective affluence.⁹⁰

This is *not* the romanticism that molarised into the kitsch Bavarian rationalism of the hideously homogenising Nazi utopia. And neither is it something just invented, making ‘us’ pioneers of the future, subversive sufferers of repressions silencing our own lineages.⁹¹ It is the anarchic, revolutionary and subjective sense of possibility of the early romantic poets and artists.⁹² It is ‘an anomic longing for an enigmatic and utopian

86 Letcher, *ibid.*, 20.

87 Touchstone Pictures, 2004.

88 Foucault, *ibid.*, 106.

89 Bey, H. ‘The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism’, [<http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/taz/taz.htm>], accessed 20 June 2004.

90 Sullivan, S. (2001/2005) ‘On Dance and Difference: Bodies, Movement and Experience in Khoesān Trance-Dancing – Perceptions of ‘a Raver’’, in W. A Haviland, R. Gordon, and L. Vivanco (eds.) *Talking About People: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, 4th Edition. Harcourt.

91 Foucault (1976/1998), *ibid.*, 6.

92 Blechman, *ibid.*

world'.⁹³ It is an affirmation of desire, meaning, mystery and creative play – *jouissance* – as central to the experience and possibility of being human; a brave embrace of the logic of uncertainty.

But, in the formal Forum, where are the spaces for reflecting on, communicating about and experiencing the possibility of being/becoming radically other? Where are the anti-psychiatry discussions? Or the radical critiques of prisons and detention centres? Where are the possibilities for shamanic and psychonautical experiences? Where are the men participating in discussions regarding feminism and 'women's issues': not as a way of creating more possibilities for women to participate in patriarchal institutions, but as opening to a conversation with *other* experiences that might permit the emergence of something beyond the hegemonised discourses of women's rights and equality with men (which is not to discredit the achievements of these movements)? Where are the possibilities for learning from those who tread relatively lightly on the land? Where are the bodies entrained in rhythmic movement? – or the possibilities for a conscious accessing of *zoē* – the 'bare/biological life', that although now regulated and controlled by the modern state,⁹⁴ also is an experiential zone that opens up these territorialisations, making possible the desire for, and actualisation of, subjective biopolitical resistances in encounters with Empire.

In other words, how *other* – how radical – are the Forums prepared to be?

Making it up As We Go Along: Building a Politics of Possibility and Openness

That is how we sorcerers operate. Not following a logical order, but following allogical consistencies or compatibilities.⁹⁵

Only through walking this path will we build it...⁹⁶

... modernity's 'freaks', everywhere?⁹⁷

I am not suggesting a replacing of one suite of essentialisms with another. This would amount to a simple turning of the tables; enabling some essential, marginalised Other to become the centre. It would imply the banal replacement of one form of institutionalised and strongly hierarchical power-over with another: as arguably occurred with the revolutions of the former USSR and China, and post-independence in many African states, with devastating impacts on many people and communities.

93 Letcher, *ibid.*, 2.

94 After Agamben, G. (1995/1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

95 Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, 250.

96 Woman Speaker from the Argentinean MTD (Movimiento de Trabajadoras Desocupadas/Desempleados, Movement of the Unemployed Workers) at the Caracol Intergalaktica, the World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, 7pm 28th January 2005.

97 Sullivan (2004), *ibid.*, 32.

No. Without devaluing the immensely important successful struggles in locales worldwide for concessions such as legal tenure to land, rights for women and indigenous peoples, etc. (and with cognisance of probable dismissal as a liberal hippy, idealistically anxious for the promised dawning of an Aquarian age), a globally revolutionary politics today surely is something more complex, emergent, multiplicitous, responsive, aware, heart-full, transgressive. As guiding slogans such as 'think globally, act locally', and 'the personal is political' declare, it also is consciously and holographically holonic: affirming the mutually constitutive relationships between parts and wholes (as well as the presence of information regarding the whole in each part); linking the knowing *anthropos* or full, listening, human to global and other communities. Whole individuals – egoists – wrestling or quietly breathing in 'authority's' power, and thereby dispersing and dissipating power's molarising structures.⁹⁸ Playing and infusing the "the polymorphous techniques of power".⁹⁹

Without indulging in some sort of modern nostalgic romanticism for a constructed ideal of 'indigenous peoples', is this not something of what we can glean and learn from the processes and embodiments of dwelling and lifeworlds that seem consistent amongst land-involved cultures around the world?¹⁰⁰ And, in circumstances where the house of cards that is neo-liberalism has come crashing down (e.g. Argentina in December 2001), is this not something of what we might learn from the processes and practices of building different livelihoods and lifeworlds that necessity has asked of people experiencing these circumstances? But further, and without falling into some sort of

98 I am not naïve to the immense questions for movement(s) raised by the weaponry of the state. I have no answers regarding how best to contest the brute force exerted by institutionalised power, in support of the orders and rationalisms it protects. Nor do I believe that any simple answers are available. In the two references that follow, however, I do consider at some length the issue of violence in relation to 'anti-capitalist'/globalisation struggles. Whilst I do not dismiss the value of confrontational violence against property and police in these struggles, I cannot help but arrive at the overall conclusion that violence to, and violation of, an-other, always sediments into structures and ways of being that generate more violence/violation (Sullivan, 2004: *ibid.*; Sullivan, S. in press "Viva Nihilism!" On Militancy and Machismo in (Anti-)Globalisation Protest', in R. Devetak, and C. Hughes, (eds.) *Globalization of Political Violence*. London: Routledge).

99 Foucault, *ibid.*, 11.

100 Kuper argues that such a romanticism, and a delineating of 'indigenous peoples' more generally, effects a 'return of the native' in anthropology, i.e. echoing the characterisations used by the discipline and the modern powers it served to denote the 'other', conveniently understood as primitive, backward and savage and in need of civilisation through colonisation; Kuper, A. (2003) 'The Return of the Native', *Current Anthropology*, 44(3): 389-395. Today, labels such as 'indigenous people' also become a means whereby people can play the games of identity politics, with winners and losers created by the ability or otherwise to assume labels valued by the development and rights discourses sanctioned by modernity (discussed in Sullivan, S., 2001, Difference, identity and access to official discourses: Hai||om, "Bushman", and a recent Namibian ethnography', *Anthropos*, 96: 179-192). In a sense, however, there is a risk here of throwing the baby out with the bathwater; of implying that a concept such as 'indigenous' can only be understood within a modern frame that devalues all that is associated with this label, and is thus unable to witness or listen to the experiential differences and alternatives of which it might speak. It becomes, in other words, another means of silencing 'the other'.

liberal universalism that discounts difference, are these not also the openings of possible ontologies for any human inhabiting the world?¹⁰¹

Thus, if you've experienced the ecstatic creative freedom forming the calm on the edge of chaos you cannot settle for anything less than this *possibility*. This experience permits the *gnosis* – the direct knowledge – that 'My life has value, *goddammit!*'¹⁰² Not the quantifiable 'value' of economic 'rationality', but the value latent in knowing that we can experience and become more full, less alienated, than contemporary structures permit – from those reining in and pathologising our psyches (as brilliantly expressed in the image below), to those harnessing our labour. This is not to promote some sort of 'cult of transgression without risk',¹⁰³ whereby irresponsibility and non-observance of individual and collective limits lead to violation and harm. It is to affirm that 'we' cannot and do not live as 'full humans' under the structures bequeathed us by modernity, and that we thereby look to, and attempt to create, experiences and futures that are more enabling for more beings/becomings.

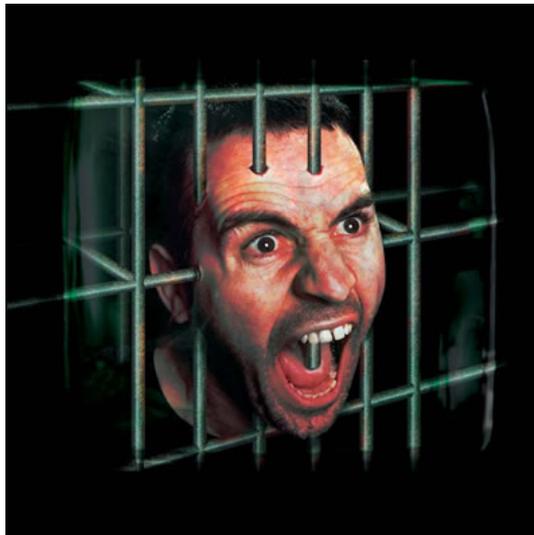


Figure 1. The cage within our heads, the walls within us.¹⁰⁴

Source: Anne Stokes and Yap, One Minute Silence album art, used with permission.

Isn't this is why we struggle: why we desire; why we dream? And isn't this why the rationalities of the modern world and its colonising power-over the Other resist us; with platitudes, with laws, with violence, with terror? It will require an epistemological shift of seismic proportions for a reversal of history, an effort of unlearning modernity, to occur. But this is what I understand by 'radical politics' and revolution. By changing the world without taking the means to exert power over others. By walking a different road into existence; engaging in a path-dependent, glocal, sinewy dance that is opened, but

101 Cf. Sullivan, 2005, *ibid.*; Lumpkin, 2000, *ibid.*

102 Quote from the TV series 'The Prisoner' sampled on Ronin, *Chronic subversive*, Black Headfuk Records.

103 Bourdieu, P. (1998) 'Sollers *tel quell*', in Bourdieu, P. *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time*. Cambridge: Polity and the New Press, 12 (First published in *Libération*, 27 January 1995).

104 Duncker, *ibid.*, 119.

not determined, by what has been before. To do/create/perform this magic requires delving into the chthonic and archetypal energies of Pan, Dionysus and Bacchus; the *amodern* and thus revolutionary disorder of woman and nature – of periodicity and rhythm; of wanton, excessive, non-equilibrical unpredictability.¹⁰⁵ Invoking, rekindling, inviting, desiring the life of sex and nature in transgressing modernity's and patriarchy's violence and art.¹⁰⁶

Social Forums provide significant networking spaces for a range of contemporary social movements, campaigns and socio-political concerns, and as such constitute important moments in the building of trans-border alliances, at least for those fortunate enough to be able to participate. And they have generated substantial and dynamic critique regarding modes of organising: e.g. in the articulations and non-articulations between the Youth Camp and the formal Forum at the Porto Alegre WSFs (see Nunes, this issue), and between the 'verticals' and 'horizontal' in the London ESF 2004 (see de Angelis, Dowling, Juris, Laura Sullivan and Tormey, this issue).¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, in their current form they appear unable to embrace or embody the radical and irrational othernesses implicit in any significant departure from the rationalities of patriarchal modernity, rationalities that manifest today in hyper-capitalism, neo-liberalism and perpetual war. Indeed, by coopting the creative excesses of the 'counter-summits' of the late 1990s and their brave lineages of Zapatismo, rave, eco/pagan activism, indigenous peoples movements, Reclaim the Streets, and DiY culture, it could be argued that Social Forums have seduced struggles into the niceties of liberal universalisms and normative, talking ideals, while doing little of value to reach out to the experiences and knowledges of modernity's depressed, immobilised, violated 'Other'.

Indeed, speaking with palpable anger at the perceived sell-out of the WSF 2005 (given its problematic support by public corporations such as Petrobras and the Banco de Brazil, see images in S. Sullivan and Böhm, this issue), a woman from Patagonia asserted that:

We don't want a piece of the cake. We want to make a new cake so that we can all share it. ... And we have the models for other worlds.¹⁰⁸

105 Cixous, H. and C. Clément, (1975/1996) *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. B. Wing. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

106 Paglia, C. (1991) *Sexual Personae: Art & Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. London: Vintage.

107 Unfortunately, such debates and conflicts reproduce many of the the previous schisms and sell-outs that have characterised the relationship between the socialist and anarchist left, from the Bolshevik Revolution to the Spanish Civil War to May 1968. Thus, for example, '[t]he role played by the French Communist Party in May 1968 paralleled that played by the Spanish Communist Party during the Spanish Civil War; that is, counter-revolutionary', Christie, S. (2004) *Granny Made Me An Anarchist: General Franco, The Angry Brigade and Me*. London: Scribner, 280.

108 Open meeting of Forum and 'Youth Camp' organisers in the Caracol Intergalaktica, International Youth Camp, WSF 2005, 30th January 2005, personal notes. Compare to the transcription of this meeting; Caracol Intergalaktica, this issue. Strangely, this echoes a statement by Foucault on seeking something more radical than 'revolution': that '[a]bove all, it is essential that the stick be broken' (quoted in Eribon, D. (1989/1993) *Michel Foucault*, trans. by B. Wing. London: Faber and Faber, 247.

Perhaps the Forum can go some way to opening constrained spaces for the beginnings of conversations with, and productions of, such an *other* world to emerge. But as I have suggested in this piece, in its discursive structuring the Forum falls short of its desire to be an incubator of *another* possible world. Indeed, some the accounts included in this issue indicate that the ‘formal’ organising process actively reproduces a neo-liberal, representational and narrowly humanist encounter, while suppressing the ability for different organisational and experiential tendencies to participate. On the other hand, several commentators have remarked that the vibrant alternative/autonomous spaces characterising the ESF in London, October 2004, *were* the Forum; not the local government, party-backed and privatised and professionalized NGO/campaigns ‘trade fair’ at Alexander Palace that constituted the official Forum. If the formal Forum thus is hegemonised – i.e. coopted by the contexts it claims to contest – then this implies thinking and communicating hard regarding the political value of participation in and/or beyond the Forum. In other words, the Forum brand is not necessary for organising effective forums (also see Böhm, this issue): places of, or meetings for, public discussion;¹⁰⁹ spaces for listening, exchange and relationship, for open-ended, uncertain encounters where the unpredictable – the *other* – might emerge.

Openings, for hoping, and for remembering.

For,

[w]hen “*The Repressed*” of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is *absolutely* shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before.¹¹⁰

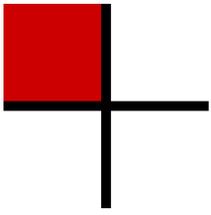
the author

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109 Fowler, F. G. and H. W. Fowler (1924/1984) *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, R. E. Allen, (ed.) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 291.

110 Cixous, *ibid.*, ix.



Sensing the Forum: A Collage

Sian Sullivan and Steffen Böhm

Social Forums, as with any encounter, are not simply about words exchanged and issues discussed. They also provide a context for sensual and embodied experiences through which all participants – all subjectivities – emerge somehow changed. In this collage we attempt to offer a hint of Forum sensuality through a range of images and recordings: an opening into some sights and sounds of Social Forums.

The collage, which can be found online at <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/5-2/5-2collage.htm> consists of four parts:

- Demonstrating
- Debating
- Decentralising
- Dancing

This online collage is an integration of images taken at various European and World Social Forums from 2002 to 2005. The sound bites were recorded at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2005.

Each Flash file is between 1MB and 2MB in size. So, we recommend a fairly fast Internet connection. This online collage can be experienced best by setting the speaker volume to medium. All photos were taken by Sian Sullivan and Steffen Böhm – except seven photos which Guto Maahs kindly allowed us to include in this collage. Many thanks also to Rafi Ahmad (rahmadb@essex.ac.uk) for the web-realisation of this project.

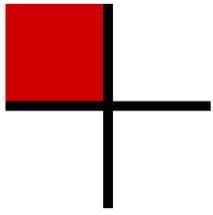
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From Utopian Worlds to Utopian Spaces: Reflections on the Contemporary Radical Imaginary and the Social Forum Process*

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

* A version of this paper was read at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, Oxford Brookes University. Thanks to the audience for a stimulating discussion. Thanks also to Andy Robinson, Lucy Sargisson, April Biccum, two anonymous referees and the editorial board for their comments and suggestions.

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

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 by 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’.

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

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-groupuscule. 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?

8 On these spaces, see the numerous 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

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/aggp/free/wsf/whitaker.htm>.

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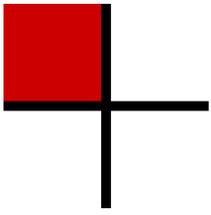
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Opening Spaces: Power, Participation and Plural Democracy at the World Social Forum

Colin Wright

abstract

This paper assesses the potential pitfalls of the ‘Open Space’ methodology employed at the World Social Forum by interrogating the shortcomings of a concept very close to the ‘Open Space’ – that of ‘Communicative Action’ proposed by the critical social theorist, Jürgen Habermas. The author argues that the ‘Open Space’ requires a more realistic conception of the nature of power, as well as an ethics of alterity to compliment its politics of difference, in order to remain both a radical, and an inclusive, form of democracy.

Precisely because the ‘open space’ methodology adopted by the World Social Forum (WSF) represents a genuinely important contribution to participatory democracy, it is vital to reflect on that methodology in a *critical* spirit. This probably sounds counter-intuitive. Why should we speak negatively of the WSF movement’s most innovative contribution to global political organisation to date? But this would be to confuse negativity with true critique, behind which there is always a certain generosity, as well as a willingness to test the boundaries that constrain us. Thus, what is being proposed here is not at all to speak negatively of the ‘open space’ in order to deny its value. Rather, it is to sound a note of caution in order to ensure that its huge potential has the chance to be realised in empirical practice. This mode of critique is therefore motivated by a kind of faith, rather than by cynicism.

The ‘Open Space’ Methodology

What is this ‘Open Space’, and how does it operate at the WSF? Essentially, the vision behind the open space is of a kind of refuge from the overweening influences of global capital and the distorting effects they have on free debate. A space apart then, which is inclusive, non-hierarchical, non-judgemental, and in which the voices of the victims of neo-liberalism might be granted a platform denied by traditional statist representational mechanisms. According to its Charter of Principles, the WSF is “an open meeting place” where “democratic debate” and the “free exchange of experiences” is welcomed and where “all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another” are

condemned.¹ In fact, such inclusive and egalitarian cosmopolitanism has been the most invigorating and, in terms of political mobilisation, most productive aspect of the WSF movement ever since Porto Alegre. The sublime spectacle of young and old, male and female, gay and straight, black, brown, yellow and white, all united in a principled opposition to systemic oppression and in a commitment to global justice undoubtedly motivates activists around the world. And from such demonstrations of unity in diversity there emerge deepening and widening solidarities – though hardly ones organised around a single defining agenda. More importantly still, the realisation that this is a grass-roots movement with a very broad-base indeed, and not merely the extremist rantings of disaffected Western youth, might jolt those in positions of influence into standing up and taking notice. Only the inclusivity of the open space approach can maintain and expand this broad-base of participation.

The forum in Mumbai in January 2004 was characterised by even more expansive participation than those witnessed at the three previous events. Attendees included not only diverse nationalities, races and ethnicities, but also, in the presence of the local Dalit or ‘untouchable’ class,² members of a truly indigenous, subaltern peoples. In contrast to the heavily circumscribed spatial and bodily politics regulating their movements within traditional Indian society, the Dalits encountered in the WSF a space in which to circulate, co-operate and communicate with relative freedom. Beating their drums and performing traditional dances, an estimated 1300 Dalits brought unprecedented attention to their plight in Mumbai. That they travelled from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in order to air their grievances in the open space demonstrates that the WSF is a truly popular mass movement with moral as well as political roots amongst the world’s dispossessed and downtrodden. Indeed, transferring the fourth WSF away from the American continent succeeded in indicating, and perhaps in galvanising, the emergence of a genuine transnational and trans-social solidarity which should give all critics of neo-liberalism great succour. The Dalit experience in Mumbai then, *seems* to represent a confirmation of the ability of the open space approach to transcend, or at least suspend, structures of oppression.

Potential Pitfalls of the ‘Open Space’

However, before getting too carried away with eulogies to the ‘caste-busting’ inclusivity of the open space – eulogies which so clearly echo the very discourse of the ‘Global Village’ which the WSF rightly challenges – one should also note the problematic *participation* of those same Dalits, and indeed Indians generally, in Mumbai. Achin

1 Charter of Principles, <http://www.wsfindia.org/charter.php>, accessed 26 March 05.

2 The Dalits represent the ‘lowest of the low’ in the Indian caste-system, being below the four recognised castes and thus symbolically, if not physically, outside society. They are considered ‘untouchable’ because contact with them threatens a carefully maintained hierarchy. The religious (but also and always political) binary of cleanliness and the sacred figures the Dalits as a radical impurity. This makes them genuinely subaltern insofar as they are economically the most marginal and most exploited members of Indian society, and also the most politically disenfranchised (despite constituting almost a quarter of the country’s entire population).

Vanaik, in the *New Left Review*,³ does exactly that. Painting a picture of a lamentably fragmented civil society in India, he claims that neither “leaders nor ordinary members of the many large organisations or groups that gathered there showed much interest or involvement” in the WSF, and that this was due to a “weakness, whose basic roots are political” (Vanaik, 2004: 59). This may sound like the resignation of the professional cynic, yet one should not be distracted from an important message: simply turning up, even in numbers, is not enough. As Vanaik suggests, the presence of subaltern peoples like the Dalits may add ‘colour’ and supposed ‘authenticity’ to proceedings, yet *effective and progressive* participation – even in an open space – may require what some would rather uncritically term ‘political literacy’, one of the many things such peoples supposedly lack. But should we not immediately ask, what politically, historically and socially locatable assumptions and strategic interests does this unreflexive notion of ‘political literacy’ contain? More importantly, to what extent might such assumptions and interests perpetuate the subalternisation of already subaltern peoples, such as the Dalits, even in the name of an emancipatory and supposedly benevolent politicisation?

To this extent, and to avoid the spectre of ‘tokenism’ looming here, it is crucial to view the open space, as both Thomas Ponniah and Chico Whitaker do,⁴ as also a *pedagogical* space in which a new kind of ‘political literacy’ might be learnt.⁵ Clearly, this would have to be a critical pedagogy conceived along Freirean lines.⁶ For the point of a truly open space is surely that the aims and modes of political debate are not pre-set, and are therefore not reducible to some assumed ‘literacy’ which might well be teachable, but which would certainly both exclude people and circumscribe possible perspectives. Just as Freire emphasises a reciprocal learning that flattens the hierarchy between student and teacher so thoroughly that the two positions become substitutable, so the open space enables the creative elaboration of a new form of politics through mutual exchanges of experience on a relatively horizontal plane. No-one in the open space is present simply to transmit a supposedly neutral knowledge to others who do not possess it. Rather, such strategic, local and perhaps temporary knowledges must not pre-exist the forums, but must emerge *at and through* the forums and their ancillary events.

In the context of the open space then, ‘reinventing the wheel’ can be interpreted as a positive mission, rather than as a wasteful tampering with something that already works. It is precisely the time-honoured efficiency of even counter-hegemonic political organisation that is no longer adequate to the contemporary terrain. This is why the WSF Charter also legislates against the forum being taken over by political parties whose own brand of ‘political literacy’ would very likely be foisted on all participants as the only way to ‘do politics’. If we are to move forward over that contemporary terrain towards other possible world’s with other possible economic, political, social and cultural topographies, then even the wheel must be subjected to a critical dismantling!

3 Vanaik, A. (2004) ‘Rendezvous at Mumbai’, *New Left Review*, 26: 53-65.

4 See Ponniah, T. (2004) ‘The World Social Forum: The Desire for the Unknown’, and Whitaker, C. (2004) ‘The World Social Forum: Recovering Utopia’, both in *Situation Analysis*, 4: 16-20; 111-121.

5 See Andreotti and Biccum, this issue.

6 Freire, P. (1996), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M. B. Ramos. London: Penguin.

In this sense, one of the most important pedagogical lessons to be learnt from the open space is that those endowed with so-called 'political literacy' must also, to use Gayatri Spivak's felicitous phrase, *unlearn their privilege*. That is, they must view their Western 'political literacy' as a form of loss, as the loss of other perspectives and, ultimately, of the perspective of the Other. Learning to unlearn, they must find ways of attending with ethical sensitivity to those who may not 'know' much (in the sense of possessing little capital in the global knowledge-economy), but who certainly know the despair that comes with not being able to feed one's own children (let alone dream of their upward social mobility). At stake here is the suspension or displacement of processes of subalternisation, notwithstanding Spivak's famous skepticism in this regard.⁷ Paradoxical as it may sound, the possibility of a subaltern form of political literacy has to be taken seriously. Not only must the testament of the Dalits, as victims *par excellence* of the complicity between corporate globalisation and pre-modern patriarchal class systems, be clearly heard, but so also must their valid proposals for solutions on the local and even familial levels. The open space is only partially about demographic inclusivity then. More crucially, it is also about opening up conceptual systems and interpretative paradigms to the inevitable 'skewing' effect of their own socio-political provenance (almost invariably, in the soil of the West).

The example of the Dalits at Mumbai therefore illustrates that the open space, precisely in its insistence on a kind of ideal and neutral inclusivity, opens *itself* up to the danger of so many essentialising gestures and patronising benevolences that, as already stated, it is in need of its own vigilant Critical Watch(wo)man (which is not the same as security on the door). To reiterate, this is not a negative criticism, but a warning regarding the potential co-optation of the WSF movement.

Having used the example of the Dalits to adumbrate some of the possibilities but also the potential pitfalls associated with the open space methodology, it is perhaps of value to interrogate some of the philosophical assumptions behind that methodology. I believe it is possible to do this by revisiting a critical social theory which undoubtedly paved the way for the very notion of the 'open space': the theory of Communicative Action proposed by Jürgen Habermas.⁸ By addressing some of the weaknesses of Habermas' theory, we might simultaneously signal some of the potential weaknesses of the 'open space' methodology. Then, by looking at the ways in which Habermas' original insights have been advanced by subsequent theorists, some positive implications for the 'open space' methodology can be enumerated.

7 In 'Can the Subaltern Speak' (in Nelson, C. and L. Grossberg (eds.) (1988), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press), Spivak defines the subaltern as that which falls beneath the radar of emancipatory discourses (pre-eminently Marxism, since the term comes from Gramsci). The subaltern is thus a category of structural exclusion and should not be conflated too rapidly with an ontological subject who is the 'victim' of a wrong for which there might be an adequate tribunal.

8 See Habermas, J. (1991) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press; and Habermas, J (1992) *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Cambridge: Polity Press; see also Ylä-Anttila, this issue.

Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

A second-generation critical theorist, Habermas has supplemented the Marxist analysis of labour as the engine of social relations with an emphasis on communication. On this account, forms of sociality emerge from acts of symbolic interaction as much as, or even more than, from relations of production. Much as the WSF views the 'open space' as a sanctuary away from the forces of global capital in which to constitute a new world view or views, so Habermas thinks of communication as both a realm apart from the regulatory mechanisms of what he calls the 'system' (institutionalised forms of power), and a space in which to constitute the 'lifeworld' (an inter-subjective realm of sociality negotiated through communication).⁹ What Habermas is reacting against is also essentially similar to that against which the WSF sets itself. Habermas shares the Weberian concern with the imposition of a scientific form of 'means-ends' rationality onto the spaces of appearance of social life, referring to this danger as the 'colonisation of the life-world' by the 'system'. While the WSF's common enemy, in neo-liberalism, is notoriously nebulous and protean, it surely encompasses something of this idea that forms of sociality are increasingly subjected to commodification.

In other words, just as the WSF can be understood as responding to a threat to civil society's capacity to recognise and reflect upon oppression, so Habermas argues that the free and open debate which should be characteristic of the 'lifeworld' is increasingly threatened by the penetration of the instrumental reason typical of modernity into our very lives, our very minds, our very speech. In common here is a fear about the dwindling capacity to articulate, even with exorbitant utopianism, an *alternative* form of life – hence the defiant motto of the WSF, that 'Another World is Possible'. Not only would a thoroughgoing colonisation of the lifeworld nullify the capacity to conceive of alternatives by attacking our very political imagination, but the resultant symbolic poverty would also reduce democratic debate to a façade of representation, behind which only the interests of the system would be served.

In the Habermasian lexicon, this specifically symbolic violence is referred to as 'distorted communication'. The colonisation of the life-world by the system denatures the very conceptual resources upon which we must draw to formulate meaningful critique. Here, Habermas indulges a novel take on Freud's notion of the unconscious by transforming it from a dark and primordial region within the individual's psyche, the existence of which can only be inferred from the distortions which ripple the surface of the conscious, to a public and social phenomenon, whereby social discourse becomes corrupted by passing through filters of administrative power. Condensation, displacement, contradiction and symbolism, on this account, are evidence not of repressed psychic material, but of the system's capacity to break the mirror-like clarity of critical discourse with which we might be able to speculate on reality, and the possibility of its inversion. Setting aside Habermas' jargon though, one can see the danger inherent in speaking only through received clichés, tired platitudes, and

9 See in particular the chapter entitled 'The Uncoupling of System and Lifeworld', in J. Habermas (1992) *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 153-198.

hackneyed sound-bites, particularly when the subject of debate is something as complex, ambivalent, rapidly changing and insidious as neo-liberalism. Again, the entire ethos of the open space testifies to the urgent need for incessantly renewing our critical vocabulary.

It is this fear of a negation of the emancipatory power of communication that leads Habermas to try to ground his theory of communicative action, and the radicalised democratic politics he believes can be built in its image, upon certain structural properties of language itself.¹⁰ Habermas attempts to get behind (and before) the danger of the absolute merger of system and lifeworld – pessimistically adverted to by the first generation critical theorists under the monolithic term, ‘the totally administered society’ – by positing what he calls an ‘ideal speech’ situation. For Habermas, this situation would be one in which “everyone would have an equal chance to argue and question, without those who are more powerful, confident, or prestigious having an unequal say”.¹¹ Participants in this ideal situation would have as their primary goals the reaching of “the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another”.¹² Moreover, this process actually generates a *sensus communis*: “In communicative action, beyond the function of achieving understanding, language plays the role of co-ordinating the goal-directed activities of different subjects, as well as the role of a medium in the socialisation of these very subjects”.¹³ Once again, one may be justified in hearing echoes of this ‘ideal speech’ situation in the idealism of the ‘open space’, where experiences are freely exchanged and all forms of domination condemned.

Crucially, Habermas tries to guarantee such an ideal speech situation by appealing to four validity claims that he insists are so intrinsic to communication that they can be considered a ‘universal pragmatics’. These are intelligibility, truthfulness, sincerity and rightness. Respectively, these validity claims imply that statements can be understood; indicate a true state of affairs verifiable by reference to the empirical world; are presented honestly and openly; and are uttered by someone who is enabled by the norms of a legitimate social order to speak in this way and of these things. Deploying a kind of Kantian formalism stripped of its restriction to individual psychology then, Habermas asserts that although language is prone to all sorts of abuses – which Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, discusses under the heading of ‘paralogy’ – these abuses are *a priori* predicated on the possibility of an ideal communication. In short, one can only lie effectively because language always holds out the possibility of communicating truths.

There are therefore numerous overlaps between the ethos of the open space and the assumptions of the theory of communicative action. There is a faith in language as

10 See the chapter entitled ‘The Foundations of Social Science in the Theory of Communication’, in J. Habermas (1992) *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 3-42.

11 Wallace, R, and A. Wolf (1999) *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Expanding the Classical Tradition*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 178.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Jürgen Habermas (1992) *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 5.

constitutive of alternate possibilities. There is an awareness of the distorting effects of power on that language. There is an emphasis on symbolic interaction as formative of social and cultural life, not simply in the service of an instrumental decision-making. There is also an emphasis on open and free exchange in a context which is not determined by hierarchical power. There is the implicit possibility of legitimating a collectively shared ethics by submitting it to a communicative rationality. Finally, there is a commitment to a radicalised democracy based upon this form of horizontal communication. But as the example of the Dalits in Mumbai has already signposted, the theory of communicative action and the open space methodology also have in common an idealism which can only be maintained by evacuating, on the analytical level (the only level on which this is possible), *the* most important factor: power. If we now review some objections to Habermas' theory of communicative action, perhaps they may also serve as caveats for the 'open space' methodology of the WSF.

Five Critiques of Communicative Action

Firstly, it is always possible to argue in exactly the opposite direction, as Jacques Derrida has,¹⁴ that the possibility of telling the truth, any truth, indeed of conceiving of the very notion of truth, is actually predicated on the *a priori* impossibility of full and complete communication. That is, it is always possible that lying can be said to be the condition of possibility for telling the truth, rather than vice versa. If, as Derrida has shown, iterability, as the necessity of repetition beyond any and every 'intentional' context, cuts across or expropriates logics of property as well as of propriety, it follows that nobody either owns the truth, or, moreover, has the capacity to transmit it to others in a pure form. Why attempt to communicate at all if there were not some difference (or even *différance*) between interlocutors, a gap across which messages must be sent in the hope – and it is only a hope – that they will arrive at their intended destination? Is not this difference and this gap the *raison d'être* of political debate, and what makes it, as Habermas himself claims of modernity,¹⁵ an unfinished, but also, as Habermas cannot claim, an ever unfinishable project?

Secondly, this structural necessity of the possibility of lying obviously opens up all the murkier aspects of communication – rhetoric, insincerity, fiction passing itself off as fact, emotional manipulation etc. – that Habermas is trying to avoid. Indeed, the textual tics that litter one of his founding statements on this topic, 'What is Universal Pragmatics?',¹⁶ betray his attempt to expel these dark forces from language. Thus, he confesses that "I start from the *assumption* [...] that other forms of social action – for example, conflict, competition, strategic action in general – are *derivatives* of action oriented to reaching an understanding",¹⁷ and again, "I shall take into consideration only

14 See 'Signature, Event, Context', in J. Derrida (1997) *Limited Inc.* Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1-23.

15 See Habermas, J. (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

16 'What is a Universal Pragmatics?' in W. Outhwaite (1996) (ed.) *The Habermas Reader.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 118-129.

17 *Ibid.*, 118, my italics.

consensual speech actions, leaving aside both discourse and strategic action".¹⁸ Surely what passes here for exegetical clarity is actually a founding exclusion of the very things which make political discourse necessary in the first place: conflict, competition, strategy and counter-strategy? It is as if Habermas takes the Greek conception of the *agon* which remains the foundation of our understanding of democracy and, by way of a forced conflation with the *Aufklärung*, purifies it of precisely its agonistic dimension.¹⁹

Thirdly then, this belief in the ideality of the speech situation leads Habermas to place his faith in a form of political action based on the legitimacy of a universal *consensus*. If everyone strives hard to achieve 'reciprocal understanding' and 'mutual accommodation' and in this way arrives at a decision, then that decision must be respected and acted on because all have been involved in debating it and because the proper protocols have been observed. To this extent, that decision is final. Indeed, one is licensed to move on to the next issue, and work towards consensual agreement on that as well. One can discern here an almost Hegelian teleological investment in the perfectability of language and its relation to the world. The problem is – and this is in fact where the WSF is far in advance of Habermas – that even *consensus* should be seen as the death of a truly radical democracy. Only an unthinking fidelity to representational democracy makes us find a practical and effective politics of *dissensus* so hard to imagine. Yet, in so far as it does not allow individuals to speak in its name, nor 'recommendations' chaired at its meetings to be in any way binding on its participants, nor, indeed, any document or statement to be produced and passed off as the sanctioned opinions of its constituency, the WSF is arguably already practicing such a politics.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the ideality of Habermas's posited speech situation is dangerous in the current context, precisely because the tentacles of neo-liberal value-systems and forms of consciousness suffuse the global system to such an extent that there really is no such thing as a hiding place or sanctuary. In terms of subject-positions from which to speak, are there really any that we can claim are now outside global capital? Part of globalisation is precisely the 'complex connectivity'²⁰ that intimately entwines the lives of, say, an affluent Wall Street lawyer, on the one hand, and an Aboriginal mother of six in Australia, on the other. If colonialism was always destined to put multiculturalism on the national political agenda, so globalisation, in its de- and re-territorialisation of heterogeneous subjectivities and identities, is destined to put a quasi-universal cosmopolitanism on the inter(trans?)national agenda. Given the intricate web of global relations and interrelations that now exists, power, more than ever, cannot be left at the door, even the door which opens onto the open space/ideal speech situation. Power-relations cannot be eradicated. Agendas cannot be purged from our debates, nor should they be! None of this is to say that the 'lifeworld' has now been so colonised by the 'system' that the possibility of counter-critique has been extinguished, like a candle-flame, plunging us into the long dark night of the totally administered society. For this relates to a fifth objection to Habermas's critical social theory, which is that, for all the other ways in

18 *Ibid.*, 120.

19 See also Gilbert, this issue.

20 This phrase is coined in Tomlinson, J. (2001) *Globalization and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

which he refines and surpasses them, he nonetheless inherits from Adorno and Horkheimer the Freudo-Marxian understanding of power as repression.

This repressive thesis is too blunt a tool for the formidable task of prizing open the mechanisms of globalised power. What we have witnessed at Porto Alegre, Seattle, Monaco, Genoa, Mumbai and elsewhere, *could* be described as an irruption of previously repressed psychic material, a kind of neurotic symptom of late capitalism, but is it not politically more optimistic, and probably more accurate, to describe it as the blossoming of *new* forms of resistance that are commensurate with the increasingly refined technologies of power to which we are subjected as global ‘citizens’? There is not space here to elaborate on the contrasting conception of power articulated by Michel Foucault,²¹ yet in so far as it posits power as productive rather than simply repressive, as therefore determining but also determined, and, perhaps most importantly of all, as necessarily productive of its own sites and modes of resistance, it is far better equipped than Habermas’s concept of power to explain the dialectical dance of oppression and resistance, capital and anti-capital, system and lifeworld, that we see performed at every WSF (and now ESF, or European Social Forum) event. Marx himself famously said that capitalism produces its own gravediggers, and although few of us now hope that the promised hereafter will be Communist in orientation, perhaps the WSF can continue to serve as a kind of joyous wake?

Building on Habermas

But we must not throw the baby out with the bath water! Habermas’s model of communicative action has much to recommend it. Its core propositions – that all those who are effected by policies should be given the chance to debate them, and that a set of rational principles should be used to ground such debate – are surely valuable correctives to top-down models of patrician power. The open space methodology of the WSF thus has a great deal to learn from the refinement, rather than the outright rejection, of Habermas’s theory of communicative action.

One such refinement comes in Iris Marion Young’s important book, *Inclusion and Democracy*.²² In this work, Young demonstrates an acute awareness of the problem of ‘political literacy’ adverted to above in relation to the Dalits. She observes that the ‘cultural capital’ (to use Bourdieu’s phrase) required to be eloquent in the conventional political arena necessarily excludes forms of ‘popular’ expression. Thus, the gendered, racialised and class-marked conduct of official state politics defines itself in strict separation from forms of personal narrative, emotive rhetoric, and public protest. Young advocates an expanded notion of the public sphere in order to redefine the discourses, events and actions of civil society as *already* modes of communicative action, effectively making the boundaries of the polity coterminous with those of society. This has the advantage of acknowledging the diversity of progressive expression in large and

21 Foucault is perhaps clearest on this in *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (London: Penguin, 1998)

22 Young, I. M. (2002) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

often multicultural social formations, and also of underlining the importance of the media as an arena in which to stage civic discourse. By recognising the multiplicity of both forms of, and outlets for, popular yet political speech, Young lays the basis for a politics of difference conducted in conjunction with a plural deliberative democracy for our times. If the ideality of Habermas's schema conveniently sidesteps the specific difficulties of political life as a woman, or a homosexual, or a non-white person and so on, Young challenges deliberative democracy to find ways of including such marginalised identities.

Another important refinement of Habermas's theory is articulated by Seyla Benhabib, in an afterword to her co-edited book, *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*.²³ Here Benhabib addresses many of the five critiques I have just levelled. Firstly, she qualifies the Kantian emphasis on universalisability present in Habermas's notion of a universal pragmatics. For Kant, universalisability, as a test of the categorical imperative, is a formal capacity of the Faculty of Reason. While Habermas displaces this capacity onto the discursive and therefore social level, Benhabib gives it an extra, almost Levinasian, twist, by transforming it into an injunction to reciprocal empathy: "Universalizability enjoins that we reverse perspectives among members of a 'moral community'; it asks us to judge from the other's point of view".²⁴ Such an ethics of reciprocal recognition is surely not only a regulative Idea but also a precondition for the convergence of difference and diversity constitutive of the WSF. Honoured in practice, it can allow marginal groups such as the Dalits to experience genuine communicative exchanges, even, perhaps especially, with those who are complicitous in their marginalisation.

More importantly still, Benhabib challenges the rationalistic primacy given to consensus in the Habermasian view (which brings that view uncomfortably close to the liberal parliamentary model, albeit of a radically inclusive kind). In fact, consent, she argues, is "a misleading term for capturing the core ideas behind communicative ethics: namely, the processual generation of reasonable agreement about moral principles via an open-ended moral conversation".²⁵ For Benhabib, communicative action should place less stress on the moment of consensual decision-making, and more on the rationality and transparency of the procedure by which agreements are reached. While this means that no decision can enjoy the kind of final legitimacy Habermas seems to dream of, it also means that it is possible to interrogate the discursive construction of specific claims to legitimacy. Crucially for the WSF, this has the consequence that communicative action may not be a blueprint for running democratic *institutions*, but it does have profound institutional implications. Thus, the liberal contract theory at the root of Habermas's model can be turned to critical advantage:

[I]t is not so much the identification of the "general interest" which is at stake, as the uncovering of those partial interests which represent themselves as if they were general. (Benhabib and Dallymar, 1991: 353)

23 Benhabib, S. and F. Dallymar (1991) (eds.) *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*. London: MIT Press.

24 *Ibid.*, 339.

25 *Ibid.*, 345.

From the point of view of the WSF, this counsels us to qualify the old Rousseauian dream of a single 'collective will' by both questioning the inherently *political* constitution of any notion of collectivity, with all their attendant exclusions, and by pluralising the 'wills' legitimately demanding democratic expression.

If Iris Marion Young challenges deliberative democracy to accommodate the politics of difference, and if Seyla Benhabib foregrounds an ethic of reciprocal empathy and procedural transparency over and above collective consensus, then Chantal Mouffe goes furthest in reintroducing to radical plural democracy the otherwise suppressed element of *conflict*. Building on her seminal work with Ernesto Laclau²⁶ in books like *The Democratic Paradox*,²⁷ Mouffe mobilises poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories in order to present a structural, and therefore necessary, *disequilibrium* that challenges the smooth and serenely rational workings of Rawlsian or Habermasian liberal deliberative democracy. If the subject is not whole, and society cannot be sutured, then the Habermasian scene – in which sovereign individuals politely convey their personal opinions and eventually secure agreement with a gentleman's handshake – starts to seem a little ridiculous. Thus, Mouffe would counter that just as the Lacanian subject is formed around a constitutive lack whose scar the Imaginary continually attempts to cover over, so political discourse is shot through by an inerradicable antagonism which is also its condition of possibility, and which it obfuscates beneath hegemonic articulations that – in their presentation of a particular interest as a universal value – deserve to be called 'ideologies'.

This antagonism²⁸ both cleaves the democratic imaginary in two and is its positive driving force. Accepting this tension between democratic inclusion and liberal equality and working with it is for Mouffe the only way of revitalising contemporary democratic practice:

'[A]gonistic' democracy requires accepting that conflict and division are inherent to politics and that there is no place where reconciliation could be definitively achieved as the full actualization of the unity of 'the people'. (Mouffe, 2000: 15-16)

While many on the Left are suspicious of her allegiance to certain tenets of liberalism, it is nonetheless the case that by bringing the competitive clamour of the ancient Greek *agon* back into the democratic equation, Mouffe ensures a more radical vision of democracy built not on consensus, but on the inerradicable possibility of dissensus. That is to say, while the concept of hegemony accounts for the possibility of decisions being made at all, insofar as 'empty' and 'floating' signifiers do get temporarily filled, it also guarantees a certain provisionality which always already invites further debate.

26 Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

27 Mouffe, C. (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

28 In fact, Mouffe develops this notion of antagonism as articulated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, where it is first explicitly opposed to contradiction in the Marxist tradition, by contrasting it to agonism. Antagonism becomes a potentially destructive relation among enemies, whereas agonism becomes a conflictual relation between adversaries within the same democratic 'game'.

So it is that the 'postmodern' post-Marxism of the likes of Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, Michael Ryan, and Yanis Stavrakakis, who all take the critique of essentialism seriously, can be said to represent a broadside against the Enlightenment rationalism inscribed in certain models of deliberative democracy. Blind to the potential tyranny of consensus, such models imply that the calm silence which follows a collectively and rationally made decision is the quintessence of political communication. In contrast, the poststructuralist postmodern post-Marxists advocate a far more voluble mode of politics which is unapologetically interminable. This is because they view debate not as representing pre-existing constituencies, and therefore as a process whose rational success should be measured by its capacity to be finalised, but as itself performatively constituting a fluid and heterogeneous hegemony. As participants in the WSF know, when discussing the injustices of neo-liberalism and their possible remedies, silence is extremely rare. When it does occur, that is precisely when one should reflect deeply on the discursive violence which probably paved the way for it!

Implications for the WSF

Having noted the inheritance within the open space methodology of Habermas's theory of communicative action, having criticised that theory, and now having seen how that theory has been adapted and advanced by others, we can conclude by briefly exploring some implications for the WSF.

I would argue that if the 'open space' methodology of the WSF is to realise its tremendous potential as a radical form of participatory, plural, and radical democracy, it must heed the following five caveats emerging from this critique of Jürgen Habermas:

1. There is no transcendental guarantee that can ensure the honesty and sincerity, and certainly not the 'neutrality' or 'disinterestedness', of participants in radical democratic forms;
2. Only a naïve understanding of democracy which denies the centrality of agonism as well as the gendered, sexed and racialised nature of political participation can even begin to imagine these twin theoretical fictions of 'neutrality' and 'disinterestedness';
3. A truly radical democracy is predicated on the ever-present possibility of *dissensus*, whereas a consensus that abuses the legitimacy of supposedly universal support is the opposite of democracy (consensus should be viewed as a strategic precondition for further dissensus);
4. Globalisation, as an ever densening network of complex connectivity, means that it is precisely the ideality of a neutral, utterly horizontal space that is now impossible (if, indeed, it ever was possible);

5. Viewing power as productive of its own forms of resistance enables one to embrace the ubiquitous nature of its effects, which in turn enables a rediscovery of the *agonistic* heart of radical democracy.

In fact, these five points really combine to recommend the continuation and intensification of the two fundamental existing strengths of the 'open space' methodology: firstly, uncompromising inclusivity, and secondly, the courage to resist the consensual model of modernist politics. However, they also indicate the need to supplement these two strengths with an ethics of alterity through which the open space opens itself up to the Other. The transformative and indeed politicising effects of Othering the Self, which includes displacing one's own assumptions about what politics is and how it can be done, deserve to be put at the heart of this process. To return to the example of the Dalits in Mumbai, encountering lived subalternity *should* productively question pre-existing epistemological, theoretical, and also emotional presuppositions. And yet, given the critique of essentialism which has informed the more radical elaborations on Habermas's model, the most difficult task for the WSF is perhaps that of charting a course between recognition on the one hand (for example, recognising the genuine and specific plight of the Dalits), and essentialism on the other (for example, setting up the Dalits as the embodiment of authentic victimhood). Political, but not only political, forms of representation thus remain at the heart of democratic praxis.

In general then, the WSF must not fall under the nostalgic spell of the Old Left and, in so doing, invite the political parties, of any stamp, to take the reins. It must withstand the jibes about it being little more than an *efette* and terminally liberal talking-shop. It must ignore the corollary demands for some kind of manifesto which will spell out 'where we stand, and what we must do' (who this constituent 'we' is is always already in question, and productively so). And shocking as it may seem, the WSF must also tolerate the imprecise definition of its enemy: the fact that 'neo-liberalism' means different things to different participants at the forums should be celebrated, and used, rather than deemed an analytic short-coming. Indeed, that this apparent catch-all term can encompass the experiences of sweat-shop workers, trade unionists, aid volunteers, small business owners, farmers, feminists, economists and environmental activists, indicates the kind of semantic reach absolutely necessary to the shifting complexity of a globalised world. And only a rhizomatic activism, rather than an arboreal political philosophy,²⁹ is appropriate to the networked nature of that world. Rather than some kind of cosmopolitan global parliament that uncritically adopts a simplistic notion of representation then, the WSF meetings must continue to be conceived as spaces which are open, but still criss-crossed by the inescapable, yet also enabling, constraints of power.

It follows that one of the greatest threats to the open space is the utterly unwarranted, but dangerously tempting, analogy with parliamentary democracy, as if what was being opened was a *stately* space of polite discussion in which diplomacy was the means, agreement the end, in which mostly white men, and always the elite, make decisions on behalf of those too uneducated or uncultured to make them for themselves.

29 This distinction is famously made in the introduction to G. Deleuze and F. Guattari's (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus*, London: Athlone Press.

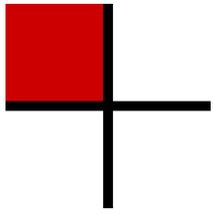
On the contrary, the open space creates a clearing in which a temporary, uncontrollable, and unruly cross-fertilisation and inter-contamination leads to experiences of both difference, divergence and commonality. What is important is neither that agendas are unified under a collective political identity, nor that binding decisions are reached in a rational manner, but simply that fragmented and even heterogeneous solidarities are forged, strategies swapped, alternate visions debated, and worldwide activism against neo-liberalism ushered into its own global phase.

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The World Social Forum and the Globalization of Social Movements and Public Spheres

Tuomas Ylä-Anttila

abstract

The intensification of social interdependencies at the global level has brought about a situation in which we must ask, how people from around the world could participate in democratic public debate over global political issues. This article investigates the World Social Forum (WSF) as an attempt to create public debate on a global scale. The WSF and the present state of development of global public spheres are contrasted with the birth of national public spheres in the early eighteenth century. It is pointed out that national social movements, media institutions with national circulation, and national identities were preconditions for the formation of national public spheres, and that from the early days of national public spheres, counterpublics contested the formal, structural and cultural exclusions from public participation. Contrasting these developments with the WSF, it is shown, first, that the conditions for social movement activity – the existence of repertoires of global collective action, associational networks and cultural frames – are increasingly being met at the global level. Second, it is shown that, as regards the media, the technological and to some extent also the institutional requirements to global debates have developed, but language barriers and persisting national characteristics of media institutions importantly shape the development of global public spheres. Third, it is noted that emerging global publics of the WSF lack a strong identity unifying the participants, comparable to national identities which served to commit citizens to common public debates in national public spheres. Last, while the WSF aims at countering exclusions from and limitations of global public debates, exclusions – formal, structural and cultural – remain within the forum itself.

Introduction

A central feature of democracy is that citizens have the right to freely debate, form opinions, and that these opinions are given consideration when political decisions are made. The turn in political philosophy towards deliberative models of democracy has laid particular emphasis on the role of public debate and will-formation as essential feature of robust democracy (e.g. Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Young, 2000). The central principle in such conceptions of democracy is that all citizens affected by certain political decisions should be able to participate in public debate concerning those decisions.

In the present state of development of the world system, decisions taken on one side of the globe impinge upon people's lives everywhere rapidly and more profoundly than

ever before. When the Chinese economy is opened to foreign investment, workers in Europe are laid off, when the US decides to show its military force in the face of international terrorism, a Polish NATO-soldier is sent off to Iraq and so on. From the point of view of democracy, this invites us to ask whether there are possibilities of global public debate, where people from around the world could express their opinions about decisions that may affect their lives. Where should we look for to find seeds of such global publics?

The answer I offer in this article is: in global social movements, mobilized around various political conflicts. I will show that social movements have played a decisive role in the process of the formation of national public spheres, and examine the possibilities of global social movements to contribute to a similar process at the global level.

Social movements have a long history of cooperation across national borders, but the intensification of global economic, political and cultural interaction has, during the last two decades, radically intensified these relations of transnational social movement cooperation. Recent years have witnessed convergence of different global movements in mass demonstrations from Seattle to Genoa and Gothenburg, criticizing the present system of global governance. This process has also given rise to the World Social Forum (WSF), to bring together global civil society actors to take part in public debates over global political issues.

This article contrasts the global social movements of the World Social Forum with movements that contributed to the birth of national public spheres starting from the 18th century, in order to understand the possibilities and challenges faced by those that attempt to transfer the idea of democratic public debate from the national to the global level.

I do not claim that public debate is today globalized to the extent that national contexts no longer matter – far from it. Nor do I wish to imply that the WSF would represent an ideal form of global public communication. Rather, I view the WSF as a kind of laboratory of global public debate, the study of which can help us to identify both the potential and the pitfalls of democratic public debate across borders of nations as well as those created by cultural difference. Thus, I do not attempt to give a comprehensive account of the processes which have led to the increasing globalization of public communication. My goal is more modest: first, to identify some important factors that are required for public spheres to exist on a national scale, and show which of these requirements are fulfilled at the global level, and second, point out exclusionary mechanisms which have operated in national public spheres and contrast these with the mechanisms of exclusion in public spheres that are global. Analyzing these similarities and differences of national and global public spheres leads to better understanding of the possibilities and problems of the WSF in particular, and global public spheres more generally.

Three Requirements for the Formation of Public Spheres at the National Level: Social Movements, Media Institutions and National Identities

According to Jürgen Habermas' renowned account (Habermas, 1989), the idea and institutions of national bourgeois public spheres began to take form in Britain, France and Germany around the turn of the eighteenth century. The national public spheres developed hand in hand with the capitalist economy and the rise of the bourgeoisie. Their extension to cover large territories of today's nation-states was accompanied by the intensification of social interdependencies, such as trade relations, cultural exchange etc. across these territories.

National public spheres were born as a challenge to the social order of feudalism. The arbitrary rule based on hierarchical order of status given at birth was to be replaced by rule based on truth, arrived at through rational argumentation; *veritas non auctoritas facit legem* (Habermas, 1989: 82). Besides increasing social interdependencies on a national scale and the idea of rational debate, the formation of public spheres at the national level required at least three things: social movements, media institutions and finally, a national identity shared to some degree by the participants of public debate.

Social Movements and Collective Action as Continuation of Debate by Other Means

Habermas describes adequately the structural changes of society which led to the development of national public spheres and the ideas that guided the debate. However, he fails to recognize the role that social movements played in the formation of national public spheres. The bourgeoisie did not bring down the feudal order by mere rational debate, but resorted at times to collective action. Not only have social movements contributed to the processes where issues are raised to the public agenda, but the very ideas and institutions of public debate have evolved in the course of political conflicts and through collective action in social movements. The formation of public spheres at the national level has required the formation of national social movements, with their repertoires of collective action, associational networks and cultural framing of political issues. I shall examine each of these three aspects of social movements in turn.

Repertoires of Collective Action. As soon as the idea developed that public opinion, formed in rational debates, should guide political decision-making, citizens developed a host of measures to back up the opinions they had formed in the course of such debates. Charles Tilly (1986) has famously called these measures the modern repertoire of collective action. Paraphrasing von Clausewitz, collective action can thus be seen as *continuation of debate by other means*. Boycotts, petitions, demonstrations and other means of collective action coordinated on a national scale developed in tandem with the institutions and norms of public debate.

The boycott, for example, as a part of the modern repertoire of collective action on the national scale, was born in 1765, when the inhabitants of the British American colonies organized to boycott the products of their mother country to oppose a new stamp tax. Petitioning the parliament became a part of the repertoire of collective action on the

national scale when a large part of the British population signed the great anti-slavery petition in 1787. The urban uprising, to give a third example, entered the modern repertoire of collective action in Grenoble, in a prologue to the French Revolution of 1789. The protest was initiated by officials threatened by unemployment after the decision of Louis XVI to dismantle the local *parlements*, but soon turned to an uprising of a large part of the population of the city. (Tarrow, 1994: 40-51; Drescher, 1987; Egret, 1977).

Boycotts, petitions, demonstrations and other types of collective action are today relatively widely accepted as ways to raise political problems to the public agenda, to have them recognized as common problems to be discussed. But the movements described above served not only to establish collective action as an accepted means to continue public debate; they were important also to the institutionalization of public spheres themselves. The American boycott movement and the uprising in Grenoble developed to the American and French revolutions, as a consequence of which the norms that guarantee the functioning of public spheres – freedom of speech and the press etc. – were institutionalized as parts of the declarations of the rights of citizens.

Networks of Associations. Advocates of deliberative conceptions of democracy today often remark that a lively civil society consisting of networks of voluntary associations provides a necessary infrastructure for the formation of public spheres. These associational networks that are today regarded as essential for a robust democracy have developed in the course of political conflicts. Associations do not only engage in political deliberation in meetings, but also contribute to public debate by participating in the mobilization of collective action. The relationship between associational networks and collective action is bidirectional. The historical cycles of protest outlined above have both required pre-existing networks of associations reaching across vast geographical distances, and given rise to new associational networks.

The movement boycotting British goods in the American colonies led to the mobilization of existing associational networks for the purposes of social movement action. Merchants' clubs, voluntary fire brigades, religious associations and others turned into a network of Sons of Liberty organizations to enforce the boycott and coordinate protest action. The network played an important role in the colonies' struggle for independence (Tarrow, 1994: 50; Maier, 1972). A similar development can be observed in conjunction with the British anti-slavery movement. Industrialists' associations had, in the beginning of 1780's, networked to oppose new taxes and a customs union with Ireland. The networks and expertise conjured in these campaigns were later mobilized for a cause of a wide moral concern by the anti-slavery movement. (Tarrow, 1994: 41-42; Drescher, 1987.)

Associational networks are, thus, essential for mobilising collective action in order to raise political problems to the public agenda. While existence of such networks on a national scale was necessary in order for cycles of political mobilization in this scale to develop, the mobilization cycles have been important in strengthening the networks and building national civil societies which are today regarded as being of great importance for democratic societies.

Cultural Frames. Social movements contribute to raising political problems to the agenda of public debate by developing and endorsing cultural framings of these problems. In order for people to mobilize around a political problem, it must be discursively framed by referring to shared cultural codes. The examples from the preludes to the American and French revolutions above illustrate the importance of framing for widespread mobilization. The boycott of British goods was initiated by merchants, but once the issue was successfully framed as a question of autonomy for all people of the American colonies, people from all social strata joined the actions which then developed to a revolutionary movement. Similarly, the uprising of Grenoble was first limited to the officials threatened by unemployment, but subsequently framed as an issue relevant for the political influence of all citizens (Tarrow, 1994).

Media Institutions and Collective Action

A second requirement for the birth of national public spheres was the existence of media institutions which circulate discourses on the national scale. Habermas' account on the birth of national public spheres points out how the spread of trade routes to remote areas necessitated the circulation of information in newsletters to ensure success in business. He shows how these newsletters evolved into the political press, and how cafés of the bourgeoisie provided the necessary institutional framework for face-to-face debate (Habermas, 1989: 15-21). However, Habermas seems to miss the fact that periods of intense political conflict and collective action had an important influence in the development of media institutions. Social movements both made use of the existing media institutions to mobilize people across large territories and gave rise to new media institutions.

For example, the newspapers in the British American colonies spread the news of collective action and turned local events into waves of protest flushing all over the colonies. The news of the February riots in 1765 spread in newspapers of New York, Philadelphia and Portsmouth and within a few days similar actions took place in New Jersey and Connecticut (Tarrow, 1994: 49-52; Maier, 1972: 56-57). In addition to utilizing the existing press, social movements gave rise to new newspapers. Preceding the French revolution of 1789, papers published in Paris numbered 184; a year later their number had surged to 335. The wave of revolutions that swept over Europe in 1848 resulted in a similar growth of the press all around the continent (Tarrow, 1994: 54).

Social movements, then, do not only contribute to public debate by raising new issues to the agenda. Rather, they have played an important role in the formation of the institutional backbones of public spheres – media institutions as well as associational networks – as we know them today.

National Identities, Mobilization and Commitment to Public Debate

Political mobilization at the national level has required the creation of national identities. The nationalist master frames of the revolutionary movements described above evolved into collective national identities that are exclusive, dividing the world into those who belong to the nation and those who do not. Mobilization of groups other than national seems to have required such exclusive identities as well. The opposition

between workers and capitalists is the most obvious example, but so called new social movements, like those of women or ethnic minorities have often created their own essentialist, exclusive identities (see Phillips, 1996: 145). Exclusive identities have been necessary for the formation of communities of solidarity and political mobilization.

But it is not only mobilization to collective action that has required exclusive identities. The commitment to debate over common political problems in the national public spheres seems to have required, to some extent, an exclusive national identity as well. Recognition of others as legitimate participants in public debate has required that they be recognized as equal citizens, belonging to the nation, and thus having the right to take part in debating the political problems common to that nation (see Calhoun, 2002).

It can be concluded that collective action, associational networks and cultural framings of social movements were an important requirement to the development of national public spheres. The formation of national public spheres also required media institutions which developed hand in hand with social movements, and national identities which evolved from the cultural framings endorsed by social movements. These observations provide an analytic framework for the assessment of the WSF as an attempt to create public debate on the global level. But before turning to the analysis of the WSF, a further characteristic of national public spheres needs to be investigated, namely, the mechanisms of exclusion which have limited the scope of public debates and the attempts of excluded groups to gain a position as legitimate participants in the public sphere.

Exclusions From National Public Spheres

Public spheres have always been sites of contention. Struggles are waged in public spheres not only over certain political issues, but also over the norms of debate itself, including the conditions of participation in the debate. Various mechanisms operate to exclude some social groups from public participation. There are at least three different types of exclusionary mechanisms, which I shall refer to as formal, structural and cultural.

Workers and women were *formally* excluded from the early national public spheres. Even though the principles of equality and open access to all citizens were important parts of the self-understanding of bourgeois publics, 'all citizens' here included only property-owning white males. The rules guiding the political institutions denied workers' and women's electoral participation, and the institutions of the public sphere – newspapers and cafés – were equally off-limits to these groups. These formal mechanisms of exclusion were cemented by structural and cultural mechanisms. The *structural* constraints to workers and women's participation stemmed from the economic and social relationships of early bourgeois societies. Many workers and women lacked the resources – financial resources, social networks and education to name a few – to participate in public as peers with bourgeois men. Furthermore, discursive use of power in public legitimized the exclusion of workers and women from

the public sphere *culturally*. They were portrayed in public debate as unqualified for independent, rational political reasoning and debating (see Fraser, 1992).

To combat their formal exclusion from public spheres, workers and women had to overcome the resource constraints imposed by structural conditions and struggle against the cultural conceptions portraying them as politically incompetent. This struggle took place in counterpublics excluded from the hegemonic public sphere. Elite women founded charities and other organizations that functioned as sites of debate. The non-property owning classes participated in debates in various associations and political movements of their own, and working-class newspapers and pamphlets were strong already in the early days of modern public spheres (Fraser, 1992: 115-117; Ryan, 1992; Eley, 1992: 303-306; Curran, 1991).

Counterpublics, then, can be defined as publics that aim to make new things public and include new groups as legitimate participants of public debate (see Fraser, 1992; Warner, 2002; Negt and Kluge, 1993 [1972]). The counterpublics of workers and women made workers' and women's rights public issues and their discourses penetrated the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, resulting, in the end, in formal inclusion of both groups as legitimate participants in the public sphere. By the means of debate and collective action the position of the two groups in question was politicized and both finally achieved formal rights of participation.

Even though the formal rights of these groups are instituted in the countries we regard as democratic, the struggle against structural and cultural mechanisms of exclusion is far from being over. Structurally imposed inequalities still prevent many groups from participating as peers in public debate, and discursively operating cultural mechanisms of exclusion still remain. Arguments presented, for example, with a working-class or an ethnic minority accent or those offered by women are still labelled as less worthy in certain debates (see Fraser, 1992: 199; Mansbridge, 1990: 127).

The World Social Forum and the Requirements for Global Public Spheres

As I have pointed out in the introduction, the intensification of social interdependencies at the global level has brought about a situation where political decisions taken on one side of the globe have increasingly significant effects on the lives of people everywhere. In the following, I shall examine the Global Justice Movement (GJM) as an attempt to bring these interdependencies and the political issues related to them to the global political agenda. I point out how repertoires of collective action and associational networks which were essential for the formation of national public spheres have been globalized, and how these developments coupled to the creation of the cultural frame of 'alternative globalization' have given rise to a new global social movement. I then move on to show that despite the conditions for global social movement activity being met, and media institutions functioning at the global level, the linguistic barriers, persisting national characteristics of the mass media and the lack of a unifying identity result in global public spheres being different from their national counterparts. Last, I examine

the ways in which the WSF aims to counter exclusions in global public spheres, and the exclusionary mechanisms operating in the WSF itself.

The Global Justice Movement and Recognition of Global Political Problems: Repertoires, Networks, Frames

In academic discussion of economists, sociologists and political scientists, globalization has been *the* buzzword for quite a while now. The debate on political problems related to globalization has slowly spread to the mainstream media as well, but it burst to everybody's living room through TV and newspapers with the wave of mass demonstrations which started from Seattle in 1999. The movement was made possible by the extension of repertoires of collective action and associational networks to the global level, and by the creation of the cultural frame of alternative globalization.

Repertoires of Global Collective Action. The central elements of the repertoire of action of the GJM are globally coordinated demonstrations and counter-summits. Demonstrations have been organized against the institutions of global economic governance in individual countries for a long time. In Latin America, the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank have been protested against since the 1970's (Teivainen, 2002, 1991); in France, the movement to cancel the debts of the poorest countries gained much attention with a massive outdoor concert event at Place de la Bastille on the day of bicentennial commemoration of the French revolution in 1989 (Agrikoliansky, 2003); and in Germany, some 80,000 people marched against the IMF and World Bank meeting in Berlin in 1988 (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992: 561).

Despite their focus on global political problems, these protest events remained, to a degree, as a national phenomenon. At least they did not give rise to a global political movement at the time – even though they, presumably, paved the way for the GJM.

The wave of protest that started from Seattle marked a shift from the national repertoires of collective action, which developed along with national public spheres, towards collective action coordinated globally in a more immediate way than before. Huge numbers of people from several countries have been mobilized to the main site of demonstration, and tens of thousands of people in hundreds of cities around the world have participated in demonstrations staged simultaneously (Almeida and Lichbach, 2003). The February 2003 demonstrations against the war in Iraq, organized using the internet and the networks of the GJM, gathered 11 million participants in 800 cities. This amounts to the largest one-day protest in history, leading the New York Times to declare global public opinion “the second superpower of the world” (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2003: 3). The internet has provided the tools required for the organization of such events and can, perhaps, be regarded as the most important explaining factor for the new wave of globalization of collective action.

Like their precursors at the national level, the global movements of today combine collective action with public debate. From town meetings and pamphlets, the sites of debate have been changed to global counter-summits and the internet. Counter-summits have been organized at an increasing pace starting at least from 1984, when a group of economists and activists countered the meeting of the G7 in London (Agrikoliansky, 2003: 4). The above-mentioned demonstrations in Berlin in 1988 and Paris in 1989 were

both accompanied by counter-summits. These summits have now evolved into a new element in the repertoire of global movements, the most important example of which is the World Social Forum (WSF), a permanent institution for conducting public debates by movement activists from all around the world.

Global Networks of Associations. The demonstrations and counter-summits referred to above did not, of course, come out of thin air. Like the national social movements linked to the formation of national public spheres, the demonstrations of the GJM and the WSF were made possible by networks of associations – and have also contributed to the creation of new global associational networks.

Global networks of associations have expanded dramatically during the past decade. The membership of international non-governmental organizations grew by 70% in the 1990's, and the steady growth rate of their number since WWII increased sharply during that decade. The growth has been particularly rapid in the field of development cooperation. At the end of the decade, the monetary value of aid by NGOs had surpassed that of all national governments combined (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2003: 11-14). These global networks of associations have been an important precondition for the mobilization of the GJM and the birth of the WSF. The coalition that initiated the first WSF formed in a node of a network of Brazilian (the trade union federation, CUT, the movement of landless peasants, MST, and others) and European (most notably Attac) organizations. The International Council (IC) making the decisions concerning the WSF has also been built on pre-existing associational networks. The IC was composed by all participant organizations inviting groups that they had worked with on previous occasions. Other networks besides those that cross in the IC are involved in the organization of the WSF: most events at the forum are set up by networks of organizations independent of the IC. Besides being a prerequisite for organizing the forum, global networks of associations are also produced and strengthened at the WSF. The IC has become an important node in global networks of civil society, and the events at the Forum are sites of creation of connections – formal, inter-organizational ones as well as more informal personal ones – that function as basis for future cooperation.

The Alternative Globalization Frame. In addition to the new global repertoire of action and associational networks, the unification of several national struggles to a global movement required a common cultural frame: alternative globalization. To begin with, the concept of 'globalization' and some shared understanding of it must exist before the concept 'alternative globalization' can emerge. The academic discussion on globalization began in the 1990s and began to spill over to the mainstream of public debate only towards the end of that decade. The Latin American, French and German demonstrations against the IMF and WB and for the cancellation of the debts of the third world in the 1970s and 1980s remained rather isolated national events not only because there was less means to coordinate collective action globally, but because there was no 'globalization' to resist, no cultural frame to unite these mobilizations to a movement. The fact that there is no consensus over whether the movement should be called anti-globalization, alternative globalization, critics of globalization, the Global Justice Movement or whatever – to take examples of terms used in different national contexts – demonstrates that the frame is not yet very well established. The definition

struggles over what is globalization and is it to be resisted or redirected are still a central feature of the movement.¹

The conditions for a movement to arise and take on the task of raising global issues to the political agenda have been, to some extent realized. We have every reason to believe that despite short-term ups and downs of the waves of mobilization, in the long run the new repertoires, networks and frames will contribute to intensification of global social movement activity and consequent increase in the recognition of global political problems by the world's citizens and decision-makers.

The WSF and Media Institutions

Another precondition to the formation of global public spheres is the existence of media institutions functioning on the global scale. Media institutions with a national circulation were essential forums for debate at the national level. But these institutions also served to spread waves of collective action on the one hand, and were developed in the course of these waves of protest on the other. In the present situation where mediascapes are an increasingly important part of our daily lives, the interaction between social movements and media institutions is even more important than before.

The decision of the actors of the GJM to concentrate their debates to a huge annual meeting to be held at the same time as the World Economic Forum, according to the WSF organizers, motivated by the will to seek the attention of the global media (Teivainen, 2002b). The meetings of those who hold political and economic power, like the WEF, are automatically news. Since citizens are affected by the decisions taken as a result of the debates in these meetings, they are, and ought to be, informed by the media about these meetings. The WSF seeks to make use of the fact that in order to offer balanced coverage and fulfill their democratic functions, media institutions also have to give voice to those opposing the meetings of the power-holders when covering their meetings. This does not mean that the WSF and the WEF would get equal and impartial coverage in all of the world's media, but it does entail that the WSF cannot be left with no attention whatsoever.

Thousands of journalists from around the world have, indeed, arrived at the WSF each year. The organizers have treated these gatekeepers of the global public sphere well. Numerous press conferences are organized, press centers with internet and telephone connections are provided free of charge and a press card opens the doors to all events even if they are too full for anyone else to enter. Although comprehensive data on the reporting on the WSF around the world does not exist, it seems that the WSF has managed to grab the attention of media institutions. Even though the media has concentrated rather heavily in a few global mega-corporations (see Held et al. 1999: 347-349), the counterpublics critical of these corporations seem to have possibilities to

1 I prefer to use the term Global Justice Movement rather than anti-globalization, because, like many activists involved remark, a large part of the movement is not opposed to intensification of global social interaction as such, but rather, to the ways in which the global economy is governed. However, I choose to use the term alternative globalization frame, rather than the global justice frame, in order to emphasize the fact that the existence of the concept of globalization and the attempt to formulate alternatives for its directions were essential for the movement to be born.

surface in the mainstream of the global flows of information. In addition to relying on the established global media institutions to voice their concerns, the GJM and the WSF have created new ways of using electronic media. As I have pointed out above, the internet has been an important tool for coordinating collective action at the global level. But like social movements linked to the formation of national public spheres, the GJM has also given rise to new media institutions and practices, including news sites for free publication such as Indymedia and practices of non-profit collaborative journalism based on the principle of *copyleft* such as Ciranda.net.

However, media institutions have not been globalized to the degree where we could properly speak of a global public sphere. The most obvious obstacle are language barriers. Despite satellite TV, the internet and news agencies whose material is translated to several languages, the global public sphere still consists mainly of national public spheres operating in national languages. Even though English seems to be gaining an increasingly strong position as the lingua franca of the global age, the system of national language media institutions is still relatively stable, and most people prefer to read their papers and watch their news in their mother tongue.

This is particularly true with regard to those forms of public communication where political opinions are most explicitly expressed. Entertainment is a highly globalized part of public communication. The same music and movies are listened and watched all over the world (even though this globalization of entertainment is to a great extent a one-way street with most material originating from the US). News, as well, spread rather extensively around the world. But are there opinion columns, letters to the editor of political TV talk shows, where the issues and participants of debate would come from every corner of the globe? Hardly. For example, the large protest events of the Global Justice Movement have been covered by newsflashes and images of the international news agencies, but when it comes to debating their meaning, the protestors' demands and the consequences of the protest, the commentary articles, columns and TV debates seem to be more confined to the national level.

As regards the media, the technological and to some extent also the institutional preconditions for the move from national public spheres to the global level have been met. However, many slowly occurring changes in national media institutions, media consumption habits, national cultures of political debate and language proficiency would have to take place before we could properly speak of a global public sphere. Due to the persistence of these differences, the global public sphere will most likely never be a simple replication of national forms of public communication at the global level.

Identities and Commitment to Global Public Debate

The processes of mobilization linked to the formation of national public spheres led, eventually, to the conversion of their central mobilizing frames into nationalist, exclusive identities. Mobilization required the formation of such identities and communities of solidarity formed around them, but they have fostered also the commitment of citizens to participate in public debate with those who they take to share an identity and be part of the same political community.

Perhaps the most marked difference between the nascent national public spheres and those global public spheres that are developing today, is the fact that the latter seem to lack any identity common to all participants. National identities, of course, were never uniform and uncontested, but they were, nevertheless, an important factor in creating commitment to public participation. In addition to the persisting national characteristics of media institutions and the importance of national languages, this lack of a unifying identity is one of the main reasons why ‘the global public sphere’ will never be a unified whole, even to the degree that national public spheres have been. If there is no such identity, what, then, can create the commitment to participation in public debate at the global level?

The global public sphere consists of circulation of discourse by various publics, some of which are connected to institutions of political power and some to their challengers. Many of them are constituted around certain exclusive identities. Very often these different discourses do not even cross each other’s ways. But if the notion of global public sphere is to have any meaning, sometimes they must face each other and engage in debate conducted in such arguments that the opposing side can understand them and accept the justifications that are presented, even though they do not agree with the conclusions.

The WSF is an example of a forum for global debate, where there seems not to be a very strong identity uniting all participants. The publics that meet at the WSF are formed around different political problems and often held together by shared identities, but the only thing committing all of the participants to the common debate seems to be the alternative globalization frame – which, as I pointed out above, is in itself contested. It does not seem very likely, that the alternative globalization frame would evolve into an identity that would unite the participants of the WSF to a revolutionary political movement akin to those linked to the formation of national public spheres. There are attempts at conceiving and mobilizing a revolutionary subject at the global level, most notably, perhaps, that of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004). Despite the popularity of these authors, not nearly all of the participants of the WSF, however, identify themselves with Hardt and Negri’s ‘multitude’ or their revolutionary project. The WSF is, thus, far from being a revolutionary movement or even a political actor with set goals.

The WSF is an example showing that public debate on a global scale, across cultural and linguistic difference is possible, and that commitment to such debate does not necessarily require an identity uniting the participants, but can rest on narrower grounds. However, the WSF does not attempt to be *the* global public sphere in a miniature form, inclusive of all possible actors and points of view. It is founded on the alternative globalization frame that is defined in opposition to neo-liberal forms of globalization and its agents. The WSF struggles against exclusions and narrowing mechanisms of global public spheres, but this counterpublic nature leads to exclusions within the WSF itself.

The Exclusionary Mechanisms in Global Public Spheres and the WSF

The WSF aims at countering various mechanisms of formal, structural and cultural exclusions in global public spheres. Many excluded or marginalized groups have been able to voice their concerns to the global political community through the WSF, and on the whole, the WSF process can be seen as an attempt to counter economic tendencies in global governance, which act as a discursive mechanism of culturally isolating economic issues outside the scope of public political contestation. However, exclusionary mechanisms still operate not only in global public spheres at large, but also within the WSF itself.

The WSF Countering Exclusions from Global Public Spheres

On the one hand, the WSF is engaged in the same struggles for political inclusion as the counterpublics of workers and women referred to above. The WSF has aimed at giving voice to those who are formally, structurally and culturally excluded or marginalized in global public spheres. Women in many countries do not have even the formal right to vote, not to speak of the resource constraints imposed by structural factors and mechanisms of cultural exclusion which remain strong. While far from bringing down these mechanisms with the help of the WSF, feminist movements have had a strong presence at the Forum and have been able to introduce the gender perspective in many of the debates conducted there. The same holds for some groups of the poorest workers of the world. Although endowed with formal rights to political participation, structural and also cultural mechanisms exclude them from or at least heavily marginalize them in public political debate. Brazilian landless peasants and Indian dalits,² to name two such groups, have participated actively to the WSF and thus taken the opportunity to voice their concerns to global publics. The WSF process, in particular the European Social Forums, have also offered possibilities of political participation to a group that is formally excluded from political participation in the well-off, relatively democratic countries of the North, namely, illegal immigrants or *sans-papiers*. Despite being able to use the WSF to some extent as a forum for public participation, these excluded or marginalized groups may not have had the possibility for equal participation even within the WSF. But before addressing this problem, I shall shortly examine a discursive mechanism which is narrowing the scope of global public debate and which the WSF is attempting to contest, namely, neo-liberal politics of economism.

The WSF brings together struggles of many groups excluded from or marginalized in public participation. The alternative globalization frame which unites the movement, however, does not refer to unification of all of the world's excluded or the like. It is a counter-frame, defined by what it is opposed to: 'neo-liberal globalization' and the institutions that are seen as its agents. According to its charter of principles, the WSF is:

...an open meeting place for...groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism... The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests...They are designed to

2 See also Wright, this issue.

ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. (The WSF Charter of Principles, 2001)

The structural power of transnational corporations in the world economic system has indeed grown significantly during the recent decades due to a combination of deregulation of financial markets and technological innovations, which have put corporations in the position to pressure states for policies that are useful to them. The international institutions seen as serving these corporations' interests, most importantly the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, have also strengthened their influence in global governance at the expense of some of the more democratic global decision-making structures such as the UN General Assembly and the UNCTAD (Patomäki and Teivainen, 2003: 30-38).

The discursive strategy that is used to legitimize these institutional changes can be called neo-liberalism as in the WSF charter, but from the point of view of public debate, the concept of economism, as defined by Teivo Teivainen, seems more apt. Economism is "a strategy of defining certain institutions and issues as 'economic' and using the doctrine of economic neutrality to produce a boundary between the 'economic' and political spheres" (Teivainen, 2002: 1). Economism, then, is a strategy used in scientific-political public debate to demarcate 'the economy' as a sector whose governance is founded on rational optimization and to protect it from critical public debate by ordinary citizens by accepting as legitimate only arguments based on a certain type of rationality and presented by experts with certain qualifications. Economism is not exactly a mechanism of exclusion, but one that seeks to limit the public sphere. The counterpublics of the WSF contest the demarcation of the economy as an apolitical sphere of society, outside the scope of democratic public debate. The measures required of the debtor countries by the Bretton Woods institutions are a case in point. Presented by these institutions as politically neutral (like privatizing water distribution to make it more efficient and thus better for all), these measures are insisted by the counterpublics of the WSF to be political, serving the interests of some more than others (a company may, for example, make profit by purchasing a privatized water distributor, but the ensuing hike in prices may leave some with no water at all).

The counterpublics of the WSF demand the scope of public debate to be widened to include economic issues, and the group of legitimate participants of debates concerning decisions on economic policy to be expanded beyond a small group of experts. It is demanded that, in principle, all that may be impinged upon by such decisions should be able to participate in debating them. The WSF aims at countering formal, structural and cultural exclusions from global public spheres and the economistic mechanisms of narrowing down the scope of public debate. However, many exclusionary mechanisms remain within the WSF itself.

Exclusions Within the WSF: Formal, Structural, Cultural

The WSF declares itself to be an open forum for all. In practice, however, some restrictions have been introduced even explicitly, at the formal level. First, organizations engaging in armed political struggles and political parties are excluded from the WSF. These exclusions are introduced in order to keep the WSF as a forum for non-violent political debate and to avoid being overtaken by some political party. In other words,

they are essential for the preservation of the Forum's nature as a forum for debate, as described in its charter of principles. Allowing political parties to participate could lead, it is feared, to a takeover by parties with a certain ideology and subsequent exclusion of all those who do not adhere to this ideology from the forum. A formal exclusion is needed, paradoxically, to protect the inclusiveness of the WSF.

A second form of formal exclusion from the WSF stems from the forum's counterpublic nature. As the alternative globalization frame defines the WSF as being against processes of globalization commanded by multinational corporations and international economic institutions, participants representing these organizations are not allowed. World Bank representatives have been told that they have enough forums in the world where they are listened so in the WSF they are not allowed to speak; the Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt was banned from participating on the grounds that his policies are neo-liberal and thus do not conform to the WSF charter of principles; and the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, who had expressed his willingness to participate, was not welcomed. The first WSF included a debate via satellite with the WEF in Davos and the third WSF did introduce 'roundtables of controversy and dialogue' to invite representatives from intergovernmental bodies that are otherwise banned. Despite these openings, dialogue with its opponents has not been very central to the WSF.

These attempts at dialogue have been sharply criticized by those participants of the WSF who see the institutions banned from the WSF as so illegitimate that they are not even worth talking to, and should rather be abolished than recognized as legitimate partners of dialogue (e.g. Aspects of India's Economy, 2003). There is, thus, a strong element at the WSF which wishes to retain the WSF's counterpublic nature as a forum where the GJM's arguments are refined and solidarities formed. These arguments may then enter debates in the global public sphere at large and confront arguments presented by the movement's opponents, but according to these critics, this is not to happen at the WSF itself. The WSF is continually balancing between the forces calling for dialogue and those denying it.

If this situation is contrasted with the early counterpublics of workers and women contesting the legitimacy of the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, we can see that counterpublics may need to first concentrate on their internal debates, but sooner or later the goal is to have the arguments enter wider public spheres and contest the lines of argumentation that may be in hegemonic positions there. In the case of the worker's movement, change has occurred in part through violent revolutions or the threat of such, in the case of the women's movement the process has been more pacific. But processes of influence through the public sphere are of course extremely complicated and slow; change through public debate does not occur rapidly and is not easy to measure. If influencing via the public sphere is the goal of the WSF, however, engaging in debate with its opponents is necessary at one point or another. If the goal is something else – forming a pressure group or a political party or a revolutionary movement – then dialogue with opponents may not be necessary.

Moving from formal to structural exclusions within the WSF, it is easy to see that resource constraints due to structural inequalities keep the WSF far from being an

inclusive forum for global deliberation. The most disadvantaged of the world obviously do not have the means to travel to meetings on the other side of the globe. The question of equal participation turns to a question of representation: since the poorest of the poor cannot be present, can some groups or persons be considered truly their representatives? Critiques of this kind at a general level are easy to present and impossible to answer conclusively. Political representation is always continually contested. Some persons claim to represent some group, the members of the represented group may contest the authenticity of the representation, and the representative needs to respond to these concerns or she may lose legitimacy as a representative. The elite women developing feminist counterpublics in their salons or the editors of the working class press in the 18th century were most likely not the most disadvantaged women or workers, but their role in raising debate on the position of these groups was nonetheless crucial. Similarly, the WSF may be of use in voicing the concerns of the world's disadvantaged, but only if it keeps its representativity open to continuous public contestation.

Culturally, many exclusionary mechanisms which are operating elsewhere, cannot be closed outside the WSF either. The WSF makes much of its openness: anyone can organize events at the forum, provided that they adhere to the WSF charter, (which does, as we saw, entail some exclusions). Despite, as many commentators have pointed out, those who dominate global public debates in general – white, older, academically educated men from the North – seem to have dominated, to some degree, the largest and best-publicized events at the WSF as well.

Besides the obvious reason that speakers belonging to this category are, in general, better resourced to participate events like the WSF, there are other reasons, which have to do with the cultural conventions of public debate. The institutions of the global economy which the WSF aims to challenge, are supported by the economic power-knowledge constellation and run, by and large, by white, older, academically educated men from the North. Challenging economism and engaging its proponents in a debate in which both sides agree to some rules of the debate and comprehend each other's arguments (which does not mean the same thing as accepting them) requires a certain amount of expertise and the mastering of some cultural conventions directing the debate. Those who govern the global economy are more likely to engage in a meaningful debate by those with a similar cultural background and, thus, a similar understanding of what debate means; to speak with those in power one has to, to some extent, speak the same language with them.

This is one important explanation to the fact that the same exclusionary mechanisms which operate elsewhere in global public spheres, are easily carried over to the WSF itself. It does not, however, mean that the WSF should content itself with the existence of these mechanisms. To the contrary, challenging hegemonic norms of public debate and economic forms of argumentation is one of the most important contributions the WSF can make. But the only way to influence through public debate is to continue the debate with the existing rules, and question these rules at the same time. Debate must here be understood in the broadly defined sense that I have been advocating, including the presence of counterpublics and collective action. The complete denial of all the existing conventions at the same time and the refusal of any dialogue whatsoever with

those holding opposite views would amount to a denial of public debate, even in the broadly defined sense, as a means of exerting political influence.

The WSF, thus, is in the difficult position between internal pluralism and the acceptance of various styles of argumentation and a variety of speakers on the one hand, and the requirement to formulate arguments so that its opponents may understand them and take them in consideration, on the other. This continual balancing seems to be part of the essence of the WSF as a public forum – otherwise the alternatives are either turning inwards and denying dialogue, or setting an aim other than influencing through public debate.

Conclusion

I have contrasted the GJM and the WSF with the social movements that contributed to the birth of national public spheres, in order to understand the possibilities and challenges faced by those who attempt to create public debate on a global scale. The birth of national public spheres has required national social movements, media institutions on the national scale and national identities.

A repertoire of nationally coordinated collective action, associational networks extending across nations and nationalist framings of political conflicts have been necessary for social movements to mobilize on a national scale, to make political problems recognized as common to the national political community. The protests of the GJM have marked a shift to a repertoire of action coordinated on a global scale more immediately than before; expanding global networks of associations have provided the base for global mobilization; and the alternative globalization frame has unified various political struggles to a global movement. This meeting of the requirements for global mobilization is a reason to expect more social movement activity on the global level, despite the periodical ups and downs in the levels of mobilization.

The birth of national public spheres also required media technologies and institutions making possible debate across vast geographical distances. National social movements utilized the media for combining public debate with collective action. The media was also used to spread waves of mobilization, and mobilization led to the creation of new media institutions. As regards the media, the technological, and to some degree the institutional requirements for global public debate have been met. This can be observed by looking at the GJM and the WSF: an important factor motivating the establishment of the WSF was the will to attract the attention of the existing global media institutions, a strategy which seems to have achieved some success. The Internet has been used as a technological resource to spread the wave of mobilization of the GJM across the globe, and the GJM and WSF have, like their national counterparts earlier, given rise to new institutions and practices of media production. The comparison between national and global public spheres points out, in addition to these similarities, an important difference: linguistic differences and the persistence of the national character of media institutions do not permit the creation of a global public sphere based directly on the model of the national ones.

Political mobilization on a national scale required the transformation of the mobilizing cultural frames of national movements into national identities, and these identities have also served to strengthen the commitment of citizens to participate in public debate with those sharing their national identity. At the global level, no such identity unifying the participants of public debate exists. The WSF is an example of debates in which the participants do not seem to be unified by a strong identity, but only the alternative globalization frame, which is not very likely to evolve into a strong identity. However, the alternative globalization frame is defined by what it is opposed to, giving the WSF with a counterpublic character.

Counterpublics at the national level have struggled against formal, structural and cultural exclusions, and the WSF does the same at the global level. The alternative globalization frame uniting the participants does not, however, refer to the unification of the world's politically excluded or disadvantaged, but is defined in opposition to the economic strategy which aims at pushing economic matters outside the scope of public debate. This counterpublic nature of the WSF leads to the formal exclusion of those defined as opponents from the WSF, which does not, then, represent the whole of the global public sphere in a miniature form, but only a certain part of it. The comparison of the WSF with counterpublics at the national level, however, shows that if it is through public debate that the WSF's aims to influence, then engaging in dialogue with its opponents is necessary at one point or another.

Structural factors also exclude many from participating to the WSF. These exclusions can only be combated by distribution of resources needed for participation among the groups participating at the WSF and keeping the question of representativity open to debate.

If the WSF aims at dialoguing with those in power, cultural exclusionary mechanisms present elsewhere are easily carried over to the WSF itself, as this requires, to some degree, the formulation of the WSF's demands in a way that conforms the conventions of debate accepted by the WSF's opponents. This requires a continual balancing between conducting debates by the existing rules and questioning those rules at the same time – which, in a sense, is the essence of counterpublics as political actors.

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