Networks, Open Spaces, Horizontality: Instantiations

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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]

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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 Guaiba 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, GLAD[2] 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 'horizontals' and 'verticals'; 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 'horizontals' 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

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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 'horizontals'. I take as my starting point the same hypothesis ventured by Juris[5] – 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', 'horizontals' and 'verticals', '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

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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.

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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

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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

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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 parties[10]), 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

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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

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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 has 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 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.

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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

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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

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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'

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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, plaing transformation. An evaluation of the World Social Forum 2004', *Interventions*, 7(1): 118-130.

24 Cf. Mumbai Resistance 'Why Mumbai Resistance 2004?' [http://www.mumbairesistance.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 action 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 'horizontals' (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

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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 Guaiba 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

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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 Tranformacao! Texto do Movimento Metamorfose para o Seminario Preparatorio 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 were 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

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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

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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]

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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

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         Rodrigo Nunes

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 activites 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

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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

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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

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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

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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 responsibilization: (...) 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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