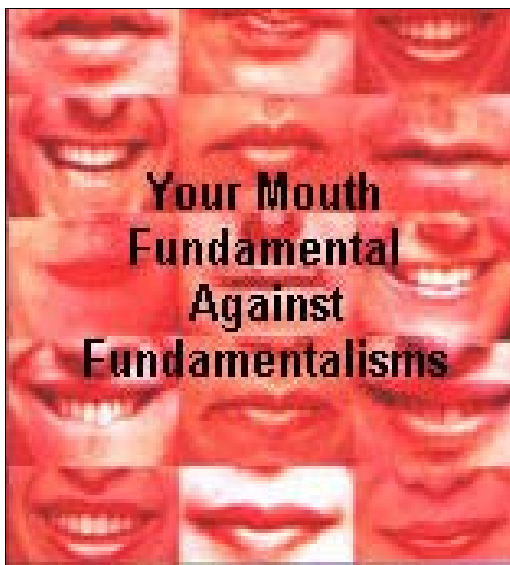


## 12 - Making the Road whilst Walking: Communication, Culture and the World Social Forum<sup>1</sup> (2005)

[Source: Waterman, Peter. 2005. 'Making the Road Whilst Walking: Communication, Culture and the World Social Forum', Network Institute for Global Democratisation.  
[http://www.nigd.org/docs/MakingTheRoad\\_WhilstWalkingPeterWaterman.](http://www.nigd.org/docs/MakingTheRoad_WhilstWalkingPeterWaterman.)]



Two videos by the Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur. The anti-fundamentalist campaign and masks provided possibly the most-memorable images at several World Social Forums.  
[http://www.mujaresdelsur.org.uy/index\\_i.htm](http://www.mujaresdelsur.org.uy/index_i.htm)

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<sup>1</sup> 2-3 years is a long time in the life of the rapidly mutating and spreading World Social Forum. Even more so is it in the virtual life – the cyberspatial life – of the WSF. Updating this chapter would require a new one. I have therefore added some more recent sites to the end of this piece.

*Politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in matters that properly concern them.*

(Paul Vallery 1871-1945)

*the connectivity and cooperation, the solidarity and simultaneity of the movement is much more sophisticated than the debates about whether to make official declarations and joint campaigns or the arguments over open space versus organising space are comprehending. It is done through internet and email. It is done through free software and free radio. It is done through free information, free intellectual property, and, to the greatest extent possible under repressive rule, free movement. It is done through network subjectivities that think of information and art and knowledge and power as something that is created in common and that must be kept moving. That not only do you not get to own it, you don't get to keep it. "It" is constantly transforming and can't be held. You are a node in the P2P [Person to Person] network of life and you cannot win anything by accumulation in what is not a zero sum game. You only win through connection, through the ever changing and expanding network. These are the kind of subjectivities created in a global struggle. It is done everyday, by kids in Brazil downloading free software, by women in Chiapas listening to Radio Rebelde, by farmers redistributing native seed to those who have lost its genetic strain, by authors and artists copylefting their work for free distribution.*

(Mara Kaufman 2005)

*There is a certain irony in suggesting a need to explore the place of knowledge management within social movements — particularly within those openly in opposition to global capital. After all, knowledge management as a discourse has commonly concerned itself with how best to 'capture' those insights and abilities that workers have to date failed to surrender to the organisation that employs them. In this respect, it stands firmly within a managerialist tradition that stretches back to Frederick Taylor's time...*

(Steve Wright 2004)

## **Introduction<sup>2</sup>**

This paper is intended less to evaluate, far less to theorise, the communications and culture of the World Social Forum (WSF), than to draw attention to these. My reflections are centred on one meeting of the International Council (IC) of the WSF, but I attempt both to reach back and to stretch out. The meeting I am referring to is the International Council meeting of the WSF, Amsterdam/Utrecht, March-April 2005 (henceforth: Utrecht IC).

The World Social Forum has grown exponentially since its first emanation, Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 2001. It has travelled to Mumbai, India, 2004. It has taken

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<sup>2</sup> Acknowledgements for provision of provocation, documentation, commentary, etc, to Gina Vargas (Lima), Teivo Teivainen (Helsinki/Lima), Sally Burch (Quito) and Andrej Grubacic (Binghamton), Ruby van der Wekken (Brazil/Helsinki). Even though the first two named were responsible for my presence in Utrecht and therefore, directly or indirectly, for this paper, I cannot, regrettably, hold them responsible for the outcome.

on regional, national and local form (sometimes on local rather than global initiative). And at Porto Alegre, January 2005, there were some 150,000 people present. Despite repeated complaints of organisational confusion and political incoherence, the WSF is the most organised expression of what the linked Call, or Assembly, of Social Movements has called the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement (GJ&SM). If even a protest demonstration of the GJ&SM has to be in some way co-ordinated, even more must be such a huge, annually-recurrent and dramatically-expanding event. Management of the WSF has moved increasingly to its IC, a body created by the Brazilian Organising Committee (OC) in 2001. Initially expanded by invitation, this now has a procedure for applications, but which nonetheless allows, for example, the shells of old Communist internationals to join the numerous overlapping, self-created and state-funded NGOs, many of dubious international membership or reach. Whilst the WSF has been criticised from its various peripheries, even more has this been the case for its 'opaque', 'bureaucratic', 'reformist', 'unrepresentative', 'oligarchic', 'NGO-dominated' International Council.

I have been one of the critics, coming from somewhere on what I would call the 'emancipatory' periphery of the movement. But I have also been fairly marginal to the action-oriented expressions at this periphery, the so-called 'anarchist', 'autonomist', 'libertarian' or 'direct action' tendencies. I have, moreover, argued against setting up such categories as those above in Manichean or even binary-oppositional terms. And I have co-edited a collection on the WSF, of a rather pluralistic nature, which thus included contributions from the Brazil-based Organising Committee, from IC members and from the WSF's various peripheries, including its Leninist/Maoist one (Sen et. al. 2004a, b, c, 2005). And it should be added that this critical publication project would never have come to fruition had it not been for funding from the distinctly-incrementalist Dutch development funding agency, Novib/Oxfam, itself dependent on the Dutch state for maybe 70 percent of its income. (Things were easier when the Left - however self-defined, basically self-funded - could unambiguously oppose itself to the Right - however specified - supported by capital and state)!

My attendance at this IC meeting was itself marked by the ambiguities common to the WSF. Resident in the Netherlands, I was asked to take part in the IC Communication Commission by the Network Institute for Global Democratisation (NIGD), a tiny Helsinki-based academic network, itself overwhelmingly Finnish in membership and also heavily oriented toward the incremental reform of the interstate institutions. The NIGD, however, has also one major social movement interest, this being the WSF itself (Teivainen 2003), of whose IC it is a long-standing, active and vocal member. NIGD has also, in my experience, been the most consistent public reporter on the IC (see <http://www.nigd.org/wsf/1114451710/index.html>). My personal qualifications for taking part in the Communications Commission are limited to the following: a long-standing interest in 'internationalist communication' and a 'global solidarity culture'; and repeated criticism of the WSF for what has seemed to me its surprising communicational/cultural limitations (Waterman 2005).

I say surprising *firstly* because the WSF has come into existence during the epoch of what might be called a 'communications internationalism', *secondly* because of the cultural/communicational fecundity of the GJ&SM in general. This is suggested in its major manifestations, such as solidarity with the Zapatistas (Olesen 2005), the protest events in Seattle, Prague, and local ones worldwide (Notes from Nowhere 2003a). The general movement, in large part, does not so much *use* the new media as *live* them – in the sense of understanding the potential and significance of such media for the articulation (meaning both joining and expression) of its events and processes. Juris (2004) argues for the concept of a 'cultural logic of networking' to characterise the broad guiding principles, shaped by the logic of informational capitalism, which are

internalised by activists and generate concrete networking practices... [T]his specifically involves an embedded and embodied set of social and cultural dispositions that orient actors toward: 1) building horizontal ties and connections among diverse, autonomous elements, 2) the free and open circulation of information, 3) collaboration through decentralised coordination and directly democratic decision-making, and 4) self-directed networking...*In practice, networking logics are unevenly distributed and exist in dynamic tension with other competing logics, generating a complex “cultural politics of networking” within concrete movement spheres.* [My emphasis – PW]

I emphasise the last sentence because whilst the WSF may be run and attended by networks, and networks of networks, it has seemed to me to function more like a coalition of collaborating NGOs, these often acting more as organisations/institutions which maybe require some cultural or communicational *service or expression*. Mark Poster (1995), asks whether cyberspace is a Hammer or Germany. My feeling is that it is a Hammer (tool), an existing Culture (Germany), but also Utopia (a non-existing but desirable place/space, that we ourselves must invent). (Waterman 2000, 2001).

I am going to have to leave out of consideration most of the major forms of communication coming out of the Forums, whether printed, audio or visual. For such resources, I refer readers to the documents and listings in Sen et. al. (2004a:372-95, 2004b, 2005, Fisher and Ponniah 2003 and Observatorio Social de América Latina 2005:249-313 – which covers other Latin American forums).

## The state of play

Early WSFs have been largely dependent for *internal communication* (but also for that to a wider public) on an official website and lists that were and are often limited, [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=13&cd\\_language\\_=2](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=13&cd_language_=2). On one of these sites is a ‘Library of Alternatives’, but the material here is frequently out of date, the principles of selection are obscure, the language of publication may be only Portuguese, and there is no visible human editor to whom one could submit entries or complain. Having on one occasion apparently discovered the gatekeepers, I did get an item of my own posted...and later removed (a painless extraction, given that this is not really a discussion site). The site looks good, and serves certain purposes, but as a place for exchange of ideas? Well, opacity and arbitrariness rule. A little-known, briefly existent but thought-provoking Yahoo Group list, *WSFItself* (requiring a password) was apparently inspired by Chico Whitaker, a leading figure from the Brazilian OC and the IC.

For its *external communication*, but also for participants and possibly also for committee members, the WSF has been largely dependent on a number of services, mostly of allied NGOs or ‘alternative’ media operations, of which the InterPress Service (IPS) seems to have been the key one. These have included a daily three-language Forum newspaper, *Terra Viva*, which currently has an online emanation at <http://www.ipsnews.net/fsm2003/index.shtml>, *Planeta Porto Alegre*, a six-language website <http://www.planetaportoalegre.net/publique/>, itself linked with *Other Words/Other Eyes*, which present analyses of general global issues. This is not to ignore *Ciranda* (market? exchange?), which describes itself currently as ‘International Independent Information Exchange’, <http://www.ciranda.net/cgi-bin/twiki/view/Portugues/WebHome?sticklanguage=Portugues>. This attempts to provide services for the alternative media present at the forums but, despite a multilingual interface, is a largely Brazilian operation. Amongst its international partners or supporters is the IPS. (Compare with *Women’s Media Pool* below).

One person responsible for all these external communication activities has been Roberto Savio, the now-retired founder of IPS who, as a member of the IC, is the WSF's most prominent media specialist <http://www.ips.org/structure/general/rsavio.shtml>. Savio also has - if I am not confused by another 'other' - a personal list, on global issues, *Other News* <http://www.other-net.info/index.php>. Although he, in correspondence, separates this last effort from those to do with the WSF more directly, others (other others?) may be inclined to see these as overlapping projects.

One awaits independent analysis of the form, subjects, discourse, reach and impact of all this activity. It is my impression that it is heavily weighted toward the incrementalist tendency within the Forum, which, given Savio's career, <http://www.ems-sema.org/forolac/cvs/savio.htm>, balancing or alternating between UN and other such institutions or media projects, on the one hand, and the WSF, on the other, should be no cause for surprise. These media projects are not interactive, in the sense of enabling feedback or dialogue. Yet, without all the above-listed activities, the media profile of the WSF would be low or flat, with international coverage largely confined to fifty alternative media efforts, each with its own viewers or readers.

## Communications proposals

Savio has also, I believe, been the earliest and most persistent campaigner for a WSF communications policy. This began with a discussion document several years ago (Savio 2002). Another document, this time budgeted, and with the contributions of IC commentators recorded, came to my eyes early-2005. This is an undated memo, apparently emanating from an earlier CC of the IC, but apparently also at least co-authored by Savio (Comisión de Comunicación 2005). In so far as this latter document was clearly meant for IC members, the contributors are indicated by first names only: Sally (Burch of ALAI, a longstanding alternative communications centre in Latin America), Gustavo (Codas of the OC and CUT, the latter being the major trade union centre in Brazil), Carola (Reintjes of a Solidarity Economy network) and Antonio (Martins of the OC, of Attac and, previously, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, or *Diplo* in Brazil), etc. Savio's latest effort has come *after* the Utrecht IC meeting I attended and was concerned with the future of the WSF more generally. A section on communication says in part:

I will finish my paper mentioning the case of information and communication as an emblematic [significant? characteristic? PW] evidence of our ineffectiveness. We cannot have 1,700 journalists attending each WSF, of which at least 600 come from the media, and accept the highly discouraging results of coverage in the media in each forum. But, all the proposals we've [Savio himself? PW] made on how to provide content mechanisms for the...journalists, have been rejected under the slogan: 'nobody delegates to anybody'...Another act of irresponsibility and selfishness is that we haven't even tried to create a communication mechanism between the WSF and the huge amounts of people that share our worries, and would like to receive information about what happens in our forums. Not to say, that those who think the WSF is a process, not an event, think we have done nothing to communicate the experiences and visions of each Forum with the others that are carried out on the same year. In 2006, with this Kafkaesque invention of a forum in four countries... the lack of communication will be a schizophrenic process. But communication means organization, participation, and debate of ideas, the lack of which is emblematic. There is another myth: we don't need organisation, since despite the errors, the movement rectifies them along the way and continues with its task. We cannot spend years fighting against the theory of the invisible hand of the market, and still think that we have another invisible hand that will solve everything. I challenge anyone to

demonstrate that this will happen in information and communication.  
[http://listas.rits.org.br/mailman/listinfo/wsfic\\_fsmci](http://listas.rits.org.br/mailman/listinfo/wsfic_fsmci).

That the communication issue has been hanging for two to three years could be understood in various ways: as revealing IC concern with a proposal that appeared too institutional and/or centralising (the Savio charge?), or too expensive (circa US\$ 140,000 in the Comisión de Comunicación 2005 document), or as indicating IC underestimation of the *centrality* of communication to the WSF. I prefer to think that this third reason is the underlying one. But to also consider that it would have been preferable for the IC to have approved the first, personal, proposal of Savio – an experiment from which we could have at least learned something – than to do nothing and have to begin at this late moment. Like it or not, social movements *do* need knowledge-management.

### **The late moment**

I found the initial commissions and the later plenary session of the Utrecht IC both prolonged and chaotic – which must have to do with my background in organisations and committees of the traditional bureaucratic kind. So I was later impressed with the systematic report of the Utrecht meeting, which I received just a couple of weeks later (World Social Forum Secretariat 2005). As for the CC itself, I was so impressed by its speed and efficiency that I failed to be delighted by it. We had, as I have suggested, three or four documents on the table, most of which appeared there for the first time and in Spanish (a language I read well enough but have difficulty with listening to or speaking). I had prepared myself on the basis of the now outdated document (Comisión de Comunicación 2005). But it was the new and briefer documents that appeared to be now under discussion. What came out of the surprisingly brief and amicable exchange, between the five or ten of us, was an impressively brief report to the IC plenary session.

This, it seems to me, is a broad and professional proposal, welcome in its apparent openness to those media projects outside the WSF itself. What, however, seems to me most significant for the future of WSF communication work may be what is *not* there spelled out and what is *postponed*. Not spelled out are the financial implications. Postponed to another moment (or level?) of WSF communications policy was decision on the detailed proposals made in the three documents tabled but hardly discussed. Or, for that matter, a document I only received after the Utrecht IC was over.

However, there is in existence yet another level or instance of communications initiative, the 'Brazilian Organising Committee's Communication Working Group'. This is not some clandestine operation, nor does it have any hidden agenda. On the contrary, it would seem to provide a model for local Organising Committee communication work during other editions of the WSF. The Brazilian document provides another set of relevant links to activity occurring in the WSF2005 in Porto Alegre. It was not, however, on the table in Utrecht. Savio appears, from the quotation above, somewhat less sanguine than the Brazilian OC about the communications achievements of the last WSF. In so far as I did not attend WSF2005 and was therefore required to follow this on BBC World TV and Radio, as well as through the 'alternative' international media, I am inclined to think that if there were such media/communication successes at WSF2005 as the Brazilian CC document reports, these must have been largely confined to the forum itself, to Porto Alegre or to Brazil.

We need, further, I think, to recognise the existence of other communications projects, tools or activities related to the WSF and its IC or to IC members.

The *first* is an IC instrument which might have preceded Utrecht but might have been given a new impulse by that meeting. This is the WsfToolsWiki at <http://www.wsftools.ras.eu.org/wikini/wakka.php?wiki=HomePage>. A Wiki is a Web tool, increasingly used amongst the internet-literate, and which allows for the discussion or collective editing of texts. Its best-known emanation is, perhaps, the Wikipedia, a collectively-edited, free, multilingual encyclopaedia. This explains that:

A **Wiki** or **wiki**...is a [web application](#) that allows users to add content, as on an [Internet forum](#), but also allows *anyone* to edit the content. "Wiki" also refers to the [collaborative software](#) used to create such a website (see [Wiki software](#)).

Those interested in seeing how the WSF has been so far presented in Wikipedia can consult, or amend or improve, it at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_social\\_forum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_social_forum). The Wiki is a rather sophisticated communication device, with which computer-savvy 14-year-olds are likely to feel more rapidly at home than 70-year-olds – computer-savvy or not. The potential of WsfToolsWiki, also for *communicating about communication issues*, may be suggested by the page on the Barcelona Forum, [http://www.wsftools.ras.eu.org/wikini/wakka.php?wiki=English\\_Version](http://www.wsftools.ras.eu.org/wikini/wakka.php?wiki=English_Version). This will probably, however, be as confusing to Wiki newcomers as to WSF newcomers, whether from the IC or not. They would be well advised to first visit, explore or play with the WSF Wiki at the previously listed URL.

Whilst I welcome IC adoption of this new and potentially democratic communications tool, I cannot but conclude that the growing complexity/sophistication of both the Wiki and the IC itself requires that the IC treat such as requiring significant educational/popularisation work within both the IC and the WSF community more widely. In the absence of this, specialisation and professionalisation will be inevitable, thus leading to the technocracy and hierarchy that the WSF itself has been seeking to surpass. Another requirement revealed by both the IC proceedings and the IC's new Wiki is mutually comprehensible translation. Familiar as I am with both French and Spanish, I have found myself struggling to comprehend translations into English of the terms (from Brazilian Portuguese?) which may, or may not, be comprehensible to those familiar with IC meetings. Work on a relevant multilingual vocabulary is underway. And the Utrecht IC report itself incorporates a definition of terms used in its own proceedings. Moreover, there exists, as an increasingly crucial part of the WSF community, the efforts of a voluntary network of translators/interpreters, Babels <http://www.babels.org/>. A discussion of this not only points to other projects and technologies (for which I provide URLs) but reveals that translation/interpretation is being conceived by its practitioners as a *problem of social emancipation*:

Babels issued a number of critical public statements and nearly pulled out of the London ESF [October 2004] on several occasions. Th[e] fact that Babels stepped back from the brink each time was partly due to the fact that reaching a consensus to walk away is far harder than agreeing to get involved, especially in a network bringing together people from different backgrounds and perspectives. Moreover, the UK coordinators of Babels who agreed to participate in this year's ESF did so with their political eyes wide open. The reality is that the Social Forums – and especially the ESF – are not politically 'pure' spaces where everyone works together in mutual respect and harmony. They are instead political battlegrounds where self-interested factions fight for leadership and control and are met with resistance from those opposed to vanguardism. Babels thus currently accepts that the innovations and alternatives being generated by projects like itself and and Nomad [\[http://www.babels.org/imprimer.php?id\\_article=77\]](http://www.babels.org/imprimer.php?id_article=77) come not only through the annual process of organising the ESF and WSF, but also in struggle against those within them.

And whatever the shortcomings of the organisation of this year's ESF, we still managed to gain an enormous amount of knowledge and experience that we will now share with future processes, particularly through adding value to the Lexicon [[http://www.babels.org/lexicons/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=24](http://www.babels.org/lexicons/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=24)] and Sitprep [<http://www.babels.org/a243.html>] projects. Most importantly, pulling out would have stopped the ESF from taking place – this was not a decision that Babels alone should have the power or right to make. (Boéri and Hodkinson 2005)

The *second* project I consider of considerable significance since it suggests, if successful, the possibility of holding consultations at distance, in principle therefore open to a wider circle of participants. This is an electronic chat exercise. I have not myself previously taken part in such. Once again a Wikipedia definition may be helpful:

Online [chat](#) is a generic term for what are now mostly known as [instant messaging](#) applications—[computer programs](#) that enable two-way typing to connect users to each other...Today there are many chatrooms, some incorporating instant messaging features without having to install additional chat software...Some of these systems also provide telephone [voice mail](#) access. These are usually known generically as just chat systems [...] A chat log is a record of a chat. Sometimes this is put on the [web](#). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online\\_chat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_chat).

The invitation to take part in this was received by me whilst I was drafting this paper. The announcement arrived indirectly, having been addressed to a WSF IC list, [wsfic\\_fsmci@listas.rits.org.br](mailto:wsfic_fsmci@listas.rits.org.br), May 6, 2005, and combined Utrecht documentation, the now customarily acerbic note from Roberto Savio, ('It is ironic that a commission of communication cannot find its way to communicate...let us do it in the most simple way, via email'), and the following proposed agenda:

1. Comments and observations on the CC meeting report
2. Comments on plans presented by Sally Burch and by Roberto Savio
3. Proposals for implementation of the plans
4. Financial issues
5. New proposals for adoption prior to Barcelona
6. Any other matters

This was to take place for an hour a day, May 9-15, at 1430 GMT. Before hypothetical contributors could find their way to the Chat site, however, the proposed discussion was moved to yet another mode, a Blog <http://wsfcom.blogspot.com/>! A Blog, this particular service informs us, is

a personal diary. A daily pulpit. A collaborative space. A political soapbox. A breaking-news outlet. A collection of links. Your own private thoughts. Memos to the world.

Your blog is whatever you want it to be. There are millions of them, in all shapes and sizes, and there are no real rules.

In simple terms, a blog is a web site, where you write stuff on an ongoing basis. New stuff shows up at the top, so your visitors can read what's new. Then they comment on it or link to it or email you. Or not.

Since Blogger was launched, almost five years ago, blogs have reshaped the web, impacted politics, shaken up journalism, and enabled millions of people to have a voice and connect with others.

Jason Nardi, who proposed the movement of discussion to this mode, clearly thought it the most accessible and flexible for IC discussion purposes. And, by Friday, May 19, several visible contributions had already provoked 10-20 comments. I also received the proposal, this time on the 'old-fashioned' WSF IC CC list, [Wsfic-communication@listas.rits.org.br](mailto:Wsfic-communication@listas.rits.org.br), that the discussion continue for another week or so. Nardi, who was not present in Utrecht, appeared from his mailings to be an IC veteran. Based in Florence and connected with One World Net, <http://www.oneworld.net/>, and campaigns for the democratisation of international communication, [www.crisinfo.org](http://www.crisinfo.org), Nardi seems, by default, to have become the coordinator and animator of this post-Utrecht process. The electronic discussion process seemed, from mailings, to have stimulated the contributions of various media groups and individuals likewise absent in Utrecht. I cannot here go into detail, nor do I wish to evaluate this exercise, which was on-going as I tried to complete this paper. My initial impression is that we are witnessing only the very beginning of an effort to move the IC, or at least its Communication Commission, from a geographical place to a cyberspace.

The *third* project I want to mention here was emailed to me by Christophe Aguiton, long associated with Attac-France and with Left unionism there, a leading figure in the Trotskyist 4<sup>th</sup> International, and a longstanding member of the IC. I have been given to understand, in correspondence with Teivo Teivainen, that it actually represents a merger between different WSF-related projects for more systematic collaboration between movement-oriented intellectuals/activists from Latin America, Europe and North America, some associated with the IC, others not. Those involved in such efforts include Teivo himself, Immanuel Wallerstein (USA), Anibal Quijano (Peru), Moema Miranda, Ze Correa (both Brazil), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Portugal), Hilary Wainright (UK), Marco Berlinguer (Italy) and Mayo Fuster (Catalonia). The last pair of these have themselves taken the initiative in creating the Guide for Social Transformation in Europe: ESF and Surroundings, <http://www.euromovements.info/english/who.htm>.<sup>3</sup>

What I will continue in this paper to call the Aguiton initiative is an 'Activists Researchers Website', based on a Wiki, <http://www.criticalnetwork.org/wakka.php?wiki=MainPage>. Intended as an online forum for activists and researchers, this had, a month or so after launch, not taken off. For those interested in learning about Wikis, however, its simple design might be less daunting than that of the IC. The Aguiton project also reveals a common feature of the WSF, the manner in which even leading members of the IC feel free to simultaneously express themselves in autonomous media or even organise themselves in ways that clearly both overlap with, yet can exercise independent influence, on both that committee and the WSF more generally. This has been already suggested above in the case of Roberto Savio. Christophe Aguiton is a leading figure within the Call of Social Movements, the action-oriented expression of the WSF, from which other IC members have tried to distance or distinguish the WSF as such. Whatever the confusion such multi-vocality might create in the minds of external observers (of which I have been one), this has to be considered a sign of a new networking rather than old institutional mode of operation.

*Finally*, we need to at least record the overlap between WSF communication concerns, in the narrow sense given by the IC's CC, and other areas, dealt with in other commissions. And then we need to consider the relationship of all this with culture in more general senses.

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<sup>3</sup> No apology here for naming individuals and sketching backgrounds. This is unavoidable when discussing an organisation-in-formation, like the WSF and its committees, during a period in which the bodies from which committee members are drawn may themselves be of an uncertain or changing character – partly as a result of their involvement with the WSF!

The *overlapping areas*, partly recognised as such, include 'Methodology', which has in large part to do with how WSFs should be programmed, and 'Memory', which has to do with documentation, archives and attempts to get participant organisations/networks to both record their evaluations and make proposals directed toward future forums. It is worth noting the latter, <http://www.memoria-viva.org/fsm05/indexen.htm>. On this page, entitled 'Social Forum's Living Memory', we can find 'WSF 2005's Wall of Proposals', this apparently being a site on which those registered for that forum can publish, read and research proposals for future WSFs. When I searched, there were over 300 such proposals. I searched for 'labour', in three languages – surely an important human activity, site of alienation, and of significant human protest activity - and found very little indeed. Nor was there too much either on 'women', apart from a contribution from the World March of Women. Moreover, this process seemed to attract, overwhelmingly, Brazilian contributions. Apart from this geographical/ cultural/linguistic bias, there are two inbuilt restrictions on the nature of contributions. One is that they appear to have been structured according to existing themes of the WSF. The other that the form hardly encourages more than the briefest of proposals [http://www.memoria-viva.org/bdf/listeespaces\\_en.html](http://www.memoria-viva.org/bdf/listeespaces_en.html). One can only assume that significant groups, organisations and even individual participants prefer to make their proposals, or consider that can have greater impact, elsewhere. Thus, for example, an individual such as Samir Amin, a veteran anti-imperialist theorist and a leading figure in the World Forum of Alternatives, has published his critique of, and offers his alternative for, the WSF elsewhere (Amin 2005). The same is the case for such an organisation as the traditional international union organisations (European Trade Union Confederation 2005). Such open and collective spaces as that represented by the Wall of Proposals will need to become much more sophisticated if they are to not so much compete with traditional individual or institutional commentary and proposals but attract them.

### **Not yet a cultural revolution**

This leads onto a major area unrecognised within at least the Utrecht IC. It seems to me that the IC, and the WSF itself, suffer from certain kinds of *cultural blindness*. I mean this in two senses. The first relates to culture in its traditional or commonsense understanding, the second in its relationship to the political.

The *first sense* has to do with cultural expression - plastic arts, banners, song, theatre, dance, street performance, film, posters, videos, CDs, DVDs and computerised multi-media production. The WSFs are, it seems to me, surprisingly weak here, particularly when one considers their base in Brazil, a country rich in cultural expression and counter-cultural expression (Vandresen 1993). Even in Mumbai, where there was apparently a surfeit of popular cultural self-expression, at least one critic pointed out that this was the sphere of the local popular sectors, distinct from that of the spoken or written word, largely in English (D'Souza 2004).

My point of comparison with the WSFs here, paradoxical though it may seem, would be the international Communist movement in its emancipatory moment, up to the 1930s. Exemplifying this period would be the songs of Bertold Brecht and Hanns Eisler, two giants of world high culture, who produced musically innovatory but popular words and music, for the movement, that could be and were spread worldwide. English speakers can consult Eisler, under the Resources, where they will find samples of music they can play on their computers, using the freely downloadable Real Player. Readers can also seek out the brilliant video on the life of Eisler (Solidarity Song 1997). Much of the music is in march time, clearly intended to accompany demonstrations and revolutions. It also presents a Manichean worldview. This was in terms of

capitalist/worker, capitalism/socialism, capitalism-fascism-war/*eine sozialistische weltrepublik* (a socialist world republic). This worldview might be literally out of tune with the aspirations and practices of a contemporary international and internationalist movement that has 'one no and many yesses'. Yet it raises the question of why neither the GJ&SM nor the WSF have yet found their Brechts and Eislers. (For a more critical view of international Communist cultural activity in this period see Waterman 2004).

A notable exception, at least in my experience of the WSFs, has been the activities of the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur*. This presented its campaign against fundamentalisms not only through the customary panels but also through hoardings, masks, balloons, and a five-minute Flash programme on CD, with a total of only about 100 words (divided between English and Spanish) projected to much applause at WSF2003 in Porto Alegre (*Articulación Feminista Marcosur* 2003). Unfortunately, however, the characteristic mode of communication, reproduced at the ESF, London, 2004, has been *the panel* – a few-to-many form of a strikingly non-dialogical nature.

I mean culture in a *second sense*, that of understanding the WSF in cultural terms. This matter is discussed by Michal Osterweil (2004), in an argument that clearly relates to the earlier-mentioned one of Jeff Juris. Osterweil herself finds the WSFs culturally innovative and rich, but argues that

despite the fact that the salience of culture to the WSF is more than evident, for the most part, the implications of this centrality have either been underestimated or have not been fully understood. More often than not, culture is perceived – notably, by many who have substantial influence within the Forum process – as subordinate to more serious political issues. As such, cultural elements such as diversity, internal democracy, epistemology, narratives, etc., are conceived of as desirable, but not nearly as important as the 'real' political issues at stake. (496)

Whilst not ignoring the meaning of culture as artistic expression, Osterweil is here primarily criticising a traditional understanding of the political and arguing for a 'cultural-political' approach to the WSFs. This approach is intended to subvert traditional liberal (and Left) understandings, practices and structures of 'the political', understandings that still inform much of what goes on in the WSFs. Her own approach is summarised as having the following implications:

- 1) Pointing to the importance of organisational form and political structure. This includes working towards internal democracy, the use of networks, as well as opposition to hierarchical and institutionalised political organisations. It is also related to a focus on the micro-processes of daily life, including social relations, the production of subjectivity, as well as many other aspects of daily life that are usually excluded from political reasoning.
- 2) Placing a high value on diversity and multiplicity...
- 3) And finally, working towards disrupting dominant truths and creating new narratives and notions of value. This is often done through the use of art and carnival, as well as other forms of communication that try to tell new stories and create new meanings about social reality. (504)

Osterweil believes that such understandings and practices are easier to find at the margins of the WSFs, amongst the so-called 'horizontal'. And she makes specific reference to three instances of such, *Intergalaktika* at the WSF, Porto Alegre, 2003 (see further below), the Hub at the ESF, Florence 2002 (for which see

<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/hubproject.htm>), and the Globalisation des luttes et actions de désobéissance at the ESF (GLAD, Globalisation of Actions of Disobedience. Paris 2003. <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/wsf/paris2003/evaluation.htm>).

The precise, or even imprecise, nature of these events or processes, is not dealt with in the Osterweil article, and therefore must be sought for in the Links or the Resources (including such as Jones 2003, Nunez 2005). But what they appear to represent (or re-present?) are anarchist/libertarian/autonomist happenings, mostly of a loosely-structured kind, often themselves based on or demonstrating (computerised) networking in its more radical forms, as well as exhibiting or learning cultural/communicational techniques, whether electronic or not. Despite the possibly Manichean opposition, in some libertarian declarations, between Horizontals and Verticals, an Intergalaktica event, in the Youth Camp at the WSF2005, Porto Alegre, was apparently the site of a discussion, proposed by the NIGD. It was attended by such IC stalwarts or WSF personalities as Teivo Teivainen, Michael Hardt, Meena Menon, Chico Whitaker, Moema Miranda, Gina Vargas, Thomas Ponniah and Immanuel Wallerstein (See Nunez, Dowling and Juris 2005, and photos at <http://www.yachana.org/reports/wsf5/fotos/jan30.html>). Although a couple of the participants have informed me that this meeting was for them a highlight of WSF2005, I have yet to see any extensive account. The point, however, is that such marginal or even 'satellite' events (meaning outside the official place, as in the London ESF, 2004) are open to, or overlap with, the more central spaces. And vice versa. Yet the absence of any public reporting by the influentials/notables means that any learning process from this encounter remains amongst them.

The Osterweil piece includes interesting and relevant discussion on the difference between a 'political-cultural' and a 'cultural-politics' approach to the WSF. The first might concern itself with the difference, in traditional Left discourse, between the political culture of Right and Left, which would not necessarily note or criticise the Left for occupying the positions or reproducing the cultural practices of the Right. The latter, as indicated in the quotation from Osterweil above, suggests the possibility and necessity for what I would rather call an 'emancipatory cultural practice' – i.e. a recognition that struggles for emancipation increasingly take cultural rather than political form. I think, in any case, that we need to de-naturalise 'the political', recognising that, as with 'political-economy' in the classical Marxist critique, this indicates both an alienating practice *and* a mystifying discourse.

### **Another world of communications is...*in existence!***

Although some mention is made of the media of the general GJ&SM in the documentation of the WSF-IC, these seem to be almost as marginal to the ongoing concerns of the IC as is the GJ&SM to the WSF itself.

Somewhere in the abundant documentation of the IC CC mention is made of an offer by Michael Albert, of the US-based *Znet*, <http://www.zmag.org/weluser.htm>, to host a WSF communication effort. *Znet* is a highly-professional and well-respected independent socialist site, and Albert promoted the ambitious 'Life after Capitalism' programme at WSF 2003 <http://www.zmag.org/lac.htm>. There is little doubt in my mind that *Znet* could host much of the WSF efforts for far less than the \$140,000 – the only estimate we so far have for a systematic WSF communication project.

Choike (Mapuche for Southern Star) describes itself as 'a portal on South civil societies' and is based in Montevideo, Uruguay, <http://www.choike.org/>. It belongs, in my mind and memory, as belonging to the same wave of alternative international

communication work as IPS. It is an attractive, well-presented two-language site (Spanish, English) that has as its main rubrics People, Society, Environment, Communication and Globalisation. But it also indicates such different types of material as a Directory and In-Depth Reports. The latter are of particular interest in so far as they cover not only many, if not all, of the topics coming up at the WSF but also the WSF itself. The index page on the WSF 2005, moreover, contains much of the discussion around the event, and links to previous editions of the forum and other relevant matters. Indeed, Choike carries most of the book on the Forum I co-edited in 2004, [http://www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/1557.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1557.html). And it has published several other items of my own, and various other pieces I have recommended. However, Choike has also done In-Depth reports on matters not so well covered by the WSF, in particular, Global Labour Rights, [http://www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/1872.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1872.html), where it goes far wider than this subject as legally understood. I mention Choike, finally, because of its proximity (overnight by bus) to Porto Alegre. It seems to me that it could be approached by the IC CC both as a possible carrier of WSF material and as a contributor to discussion on IC communication policy.

Mention is made in WSF-IC CC documentation of the *Independent Media Centre* (IndyMedia, IMC), the dispersed multi-media network, now operating in maybe 50 countries and all continents, appearing in 20 or more languages – and reaching into a zone largely isolated from the WSF, the ex-Communist world. At least one such node, in Brazil, publishes not only in Portuguese but also in English, Spanish and Esperanto (once favoured in the international labour movement as an internationalist language). IMC was actually a creation of the GJ&SM, having been born during the Battle of Seattle, 1999. This suggests a greater intimacy with the more general movement than that of the WSF.

Indymedia has been written about journalistically and also researched (Notes from Nowhere 2003b, Coyer 2005, Morris 2004). It also researches itself (Indymedia Documentation Project 2005)! And here describes itself as a movement. Finally, it encourages independent academic research on itself, whilst urging or requiring researchers to themselves act and publish in a manner consistent with Indymedia principles. Such principles are presented in summary by Morris (see **Appendix 4**). They seem to me of interest in so far as they touch on issues of structure, coordination and democracy that arose at the WSF IC in Utrecht.

Things are still changing within IMC. Discussion on the principles and practices of Indymedia continue unabated <http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Global/PrinciplesOfUnity>. Indymedia demonstrates a complex, sophisticated and technically advanced model of not only international/ist communication but emancipatory culture. It should be considered by the Communications Committee of the WSF and others concerned with WSF communication and cultural practice. And it should be surely also systematically involved in the development of a WSF model. Amongst other interesting and relevant features of Indymedia functioning are that its international decision-making, in so far as this exists, itself takes place in virtual space rather than in the kind of repeated, frequent, expensive *and therefore inevitably selective* meeting places of the WSF IC. A good majority of WSF IC members were, fortunately perhaps, unable or unwilling to attend at Utrecht.

In so far as digital radio broadcasting over the internet is becoming an increasingly interesting medium for international/ist communication (Lee 2005), a recent model, appropriate for events-cum-processes like the WSF would seem to be offered by the *Women's Media Pool* at the Beijing +10 Conference held in New York, 2005, <http://www.womensmediapool.org/>. Whilst the pool included radio it covered

alternative international women's media more generally. That particular exercise has been evaluated by Maria Suarez Toro, a veteran of the feminist Radio Fire, based in Costa Rica, who has been previously active within the WSF and also written on autonomous international women's encounters (Suarez Toro 2002, 2004, 2005). Once again, the purpose of mentioning this project is to suggest the range of resources, experience and expertise available to those concerned with developing WSF communications. It would appear that there is little reason why there should not be a permanent international WSF radio or - on the model of Indymedia and the Media Pool - a network of such.

## Conclusions

I am aware of having here written an unstructured paper, shifting between impression, reflection, intervention and even conceptualisation. This, as my opening words might suggest, was not my intention. The unsystematic form has to do with writing in the middle of this WSF IC *tsunami*, trying to both keep afloat and to find bearings. My major concern has been to negotiate between the devastating initial quotation from Vallery, the ironic realism of Wright, the new emancipatory thinking on culture and communication...and my own title. If I attended Utrecht, and started this paper, from a position of considerable scepticism with respect to the IC, and with few expectations of its CC, I feel obliged to conclude, at least provisionally, that *this* road is made by walking.

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