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## ANOTHER IDEOLOGY? NOVELTY AND FAMILIARITY IN THE BELIEF STRUCTURES OF SOCIAL FORUM PARTICIPANTS.

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*“a new democratic imaginary – post-liberal and post-Marxist – is taking shape  
and, with it, other possible futures are coming into view.”<sup>1</sup>*

Social forums emerged from the alternative globalisation movement in an attempt to imagine new alternatives to the current global political economy. One slogan of the World Social Forum (WSF) translates as “no to singular/hegemonic thinking” (*pensée unique*),<sup>2</sup> highlighting a prominent value on ideational diversity. Having successfully drawn in political activists from very different struggles and diverse social and political backgrounds, the meaning and organisation of the social forum itself has become subject to intense political contestation. This paper examines the hypothesis that out of that process is emerging a distinct political belief structure – tentatively labelled participatory pluralism – that offers a new justificatory worldview utilised by a significant strand of social forum participants. It is around the notion of the ‘open space’ that participants’ claims to novelty in the SF movement are most often heard, and which I will shortly outline.

This study utilises a theoretical framework developed from the interpretive frames approach. I will offer a hermeneutic conception of ‘orientational frames’ that has a number of advantages over the more usual, largely positivist, application of the approach. This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork within the Sheffield Social Forum (SSF) from the inception of the group, through its involvement in a UK network of local social forums, to the attendance of members of the SSF at the 2004 edition of the European Social Forum. As such, it relates to processes at a number of levels: the creation of a local organisation; the networking of local organisations nationally; and their involvement in an international event. Data will be drawn from each of these levels in order to argue that despite important ideational continuities the SF movement contains substantially shifted emphases, and the development of novel connections between familiar ideas that signal a new politics of the social forums.

### ***The ‘Open Space’ – From the Global to the Local***

By 2002 there emerged, within the alternative globalisation movement, a broad preference for focus on the creation of positive solutions to the problems that more confrontational activities had highlighted.<sup>3</sup> WSF self-consciously provided a focus for a greater diversity of participation in which there was no intention to form a wide consensus on analyses, alternatives or modes of action but rather to increase the interrelations between diverse alternatives.<sup>4</sup> The key characteristic of WSF became the notion of an ‘open space’, as enshrined in the *WSF Charter of Principles*. The WSF is:

“an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society

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<sup>1</sup> Conway, J., 2005, “Social Forums, Social Movements and Social Change: A Response to Peter Marcuse on the Subject of the World Social Forum” in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(2), p. 427.

<sup>2</sup> Keraghel, C. & Sen, J., 2004, “Explorations in Open Space. The World Social Forum and Cultures Of Politics.” in *International Journal of Social Science* 56(4), pp. 483.

<sup>3</sup> Cock, J., 2003, “A Better or Worse World? The Third World Social Forum, Porto Alegre 2003” in *Centre for Civil Society, Research Report* 5.

<sup>4</sup> Olivers, D., 2004, “Counter Hegemonic Dispersions: The World Social Forum Model” in *Antipode* 36(2), p. 175.

directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind and between it and the Earth.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the WSF bars itself from making proclamations as a body, and forbids anyone to represent the forum as a whole. As such, WSF

“does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it... [it] is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.”<sup>6</sup>

The influence of these short texts should not be underestimated. They are very widely cited by organisations creating regional or local social forums, by commentators both inside and outside the social forum movement and by participants in debate around the actions and meaning of the social forum. They loosely define the political analyses and the ambition of the WSF and, to that degree, restrict participation.

The idea of the ‘open space’ found wide resonance. From 2002 multiple social forum events occurred on different scales: some were defined by supranational regions; others by thematic areas; and national level events in over twenty countries. In taking both the name ‘social forum’ and the slogan ‘Another World is Possible’ such events apparently aimed to recreate both the structure and the experience of the WSF events.<sup>7</sup> For Chomsky, “What’s interesting about the WSF, more than the annual events, is that it has spawned lots of regional social forums. Regional, local and small towns have their own social forums and they adapt the general concerns into their own life interests... then it feeds back into the general system.”<sup>8</sup> Local social forums number in their hundreds in Europe alone and smaller numbers have appeared in North America, Canada, Australia, South Africa and across South America.

The WSF has served as an inspiration to many local social forums. Often groups define themselves citing the ‘open space’ principle quoted above. In the European context at least, the location of a regional social forum event has a noticeable effect on local organising. Italy and France are the only countries boasting local social forums in triple figures and their emergence was partly related to hosting the first and second ESFs. In the preparation for ESF III in the UK the emergence of local social forums was also notable, albeit in smaller numbers than seen elsewhere. International organisers have demonstrated awareness of the local effect of hosting regional events. In justifying the London ‘bid’ to host ESF III, one argued that “it will give us - the social forum movement, independent and libertarian left - an opportunity to build the local social forums.”<sup>9</sup> However, this is by no means the primary concern in the organisation of supranational events. For instance, among the sixty-eight English language articles discussing the various editions of the World Social Forum, stored as the *WSF Memorial*, I can only find two brief references to local social forums.<sup>10</sup> More tellingly, participants of French local social forums reported feeling sidelined at ESF II events<sup>11</sup> and, as I will indicate, there were serious conflicts between the central organisers of ESF III and the burgeoning UK local social forum movement. The development of global and local social forums, therefore, have a degree of independence.

### **Mapping Belief-Structures: The Concept of Orientational Frames**

I have previously introduced the concept of orientational frames as a valuable analytical construct that helps the researcher to make sense of the multiple currents of thought present within any social movement.<sup>12</sup> The basis of the framing approach is an understanding that meaning is the product of a set

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<sup>5</sup> WSF, 2001, *Charter of Principles*, principle 1.

<sup>6</sup> WSF, *Charter...*, principles 6 and 8.

<sup>7</sup> For a typical report: Klein, N., 2001, “A Fete for the End of the End of History” in *World Social Forum: Memorial*.

<sup>8</sup> Chomsky, N., 2004, “On The Strength of Movements” at a meeting of the *Another World is Possible! Network*, April 2004, Budapest.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hodgkinson, cited approvingly by ‘Darell’, email to SSF list, October 2003.

<sup>10</sup> WSF, 2005, *WSF Memorial*.

<sup>11</sup> Levidow, L., 2004, “Making Another World Possible? The European Social Forum” in *Radical Philosophy* 128.

<sup>12</sup> Gillan, K., 2005, “Relational Frame Analysis: Finding People and Politics in Interpretive Frame Theory”, paper presented to the *Tenth International Conference on Alternative Futures and Popular Protest*; pp. 8-15.

of ideas combined in certain ways.<sup>13</sup> These belief-structures may vary in stability or extensity. More familiar frame concepts (e.g. collective action frames) tend to articulate a position on some particular, relatively well-defined issue. Empirical work often focuses on the processes of framing by which social movement organisations (SMOs) seek to increase their number of supporters. Here SMOs are portrayed as relatively skilful in manipulating their arguments in order to align their frames with the intended audience. By describing the various processes through which this work is done, insight into the dynamics of particular kinds of social movements have been portrayed.

There are, however, a number of drawbacks in this approach. Three are relevant here. First, this view implies an uneven recognition of the power of political ideas to motivate action. Many SMOs are, in reality, quite strongly constrained in their ability to represent their views in different lights since their beliefs are often laden with moral force and may represent a source of identity for their current supporters. To the extent that such beliefs are durable, they can be seen to have a strong influence on the concrete behaviours that stem from SMO activity. Second, the process-orientation of much scholarship on frames means that while signification work has been emphasised, the signified itself has been sidelined. But, the political contents of social movements are both interesting in and of themselves and partially determine outcomes that the theory highlights. Third, the focus on frames covering narrow issue-areas suggests an unlikely level of homogeneity within SMOs. In fact, it is very difficult to infer the beliefs of the individual activists from the statements of their organisations. Because the claims to novelty within the SF movement rests largely on embracing ideational diversity, sensitivity to that feature demands a slightly different approach.

Oriental frames are conceived to be connected to the individual, rather than the SMO. Furthermore, their contents are considered to be closer to ideologies, in that they contain a number of propositions that may be applied to a wide range of issues. These propositions may offer broad understandings of the world, more specific problem definitions, and preferences for certain modes of social action. Oriental frames are, therefore, concrete descriptions of particular worldviews. Because their contents are broadly applicable they appear to be relatively durable, and through tracing the historical routes of particular combinations of ideas, one may attain a valuable perspective on longer-term social movement dynamics. It is noteworthy that orientational frames ought to be understood as distinct from ideologies. The way that ideology is understood in much social movement literature is not conducive to dynamic theories that accept the agency of individuals vis-a-vis their belief set. Oriental frames are always constructions that offer some guidance to individuals but may be reinterpreted in the face of new facts, values or aspirations. Rather than contradicting the notion of the moral force of political ideas, this point highlights the need to take a middle road between the rigid understanding of ideologies and the excessive flexibility of collective action frames.

### ***Three Oriental Frames in the Sheffield Social Forum***

The social forums, wherever they have emerged, have consciously sought to connect pre-existing struggles. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that participants hold political ideas formed in other contexts. My ethnographic research in Sheffield covered anti-corporate and alternative globalisation activities and the anti-war movement as well as the Sheffield Social Forum (SSF). In investigating this strip of activity (2001-2005) I identified three orientational frames that offer justificatory worldviews commonly utilised by significant sections of the local protest milieu: the revolutionary socialist (RS) frame; the direct action (DA) frame; and the radical liberal (RL) frame. Because much of the political context - including mainstream and alternative political organisation, alternative political culture, well-known movement histories and so on - will be similar across the UK, these frames are likely to be visible in other locations. This section first offers a brief overview of the context in which these frames developed, detailing the core beliefs contained within them. The descriptions below do not adhere to particular individuals, rather they exist as an abstraction from multiple individual frames. Neither do they offer a fully extensive, or mutually exclusive set of beliefs. However, activist discourse has shown a distinct tendency to cluster around these particular constructions. The presence of these frames within the Sheffield movement milieu has been described at much greater length elsewhere, and in the interests of brevity I do not include empirical material here.<sup>14</sup> I will then detail empirically the influence of these frames on the process

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<sup>13</sup> For a recent review, see: Johnston & Noakes, eds, 2005, *Frames of Protest. Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*, (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Gillan, K., 2006, *Meaning in Movement. An Ideational Analysis of Sheffield-Based Protest Networks*

of constructing the SSF, demonstrating the value of the frames as analytical constructs.

### **An Outline of the Three Frames**

The revolutionary socialist (RS) frame is largely associated with the organised revolutionary left and is, therefore, shaped largely by Trotskyist organisations, particularly the Socialist Workers' Party. It draws on particular interpretations of Marxist doctrine. Nevertheless, the core components of Marxism have been retained and reproduced, such that the central elements of the RS frame are quite familiar. They include: the binary class division, with the associated notion of exploitation; the critique of both political and economic inequality remains based on a fundamental notion of human equality residing in the physical basis for human life (rather than on rights, as in liberalism); the necessity of revolution (characterised as sudden and violent); and the centrality of the vanguard party to that project. These tenets are taken as objective truths, and the continuing respect for Marxist thought, above all, gives a very strong theoretical continuity to the RS frame. Nevertheless, the present structure of thought bears the marks of ideational shifts responding to particular events and trends. Examples include the mid-1950s reinterpretation of the USSR as state capitalist, the 1970s encounters with 'new social movements' and later debates with post-Marxism that have only strengthened the position of class struggle within revolutionary socialism.<sup>15</sup> On these and many other matters, tensions within the RS frame are visible – as would be expected given the present level of generality. In the continuing mission to distance Trotskyism and Stalinism there has been an increased discussion of democracy as a 'bottom up' force, despite the continued insistence on centralism and authority within the primary Trotskyist organisations.

Direct action (DA) is often considered as a tactical approach to protest, utilised by a variety of movements and has been present in a huge range of periods of contentious politics in the UK since the early 1950s. However, through engagement with radical ecology (particularly in the anti-roads movements of the early 1990s) and the continuing influence of anarchism it has become closely associated with a number of normative claims, implied wherever DA is practised. Adherents have found a strong anti-authoritarian position flowing from the centring of individual freedom within the positive values of the frame. They have reinvented an attitude to decentralised, direct forms of decision making that offer a particular understanding of democracy. And they have developed new understandings of political space as a collective construction, free from systems of power domination. The understanding of current political economy within the DA frame may often appear similar to the RS frame, criticising the exploitation of workers and environment by ruling elites. However, theory is relegated below practice and the validity of one's own moral judgement and individual action are strongly affirmed. Within the frame we therefore find a notion of effective social change that is starkly different from that within the RS frame. The revolutionary rhetoric sometimes associated with the frame results from a similar claim that "power and privilege have never been known to abdicate" that is found within the RS frame.<sup>16</sup> Rather than overthrow, however, the prefigurative construction of preferred worlds, build in the interstices of capitalism in the present, is generally more prevalent.

The radical liberal (RL) frame is often portrayed as 'reformist' from within the RS and DA frames because it does not contain the same revolutionary belief in relation to power elites. Nevertheless, it does contain a strong moral position against the abuse of power. Since the critiques within the frame repeatedly find power abused, there is a position against power accumulation in general. Programmes for social change often include a strong element of power dispersal through the management of political and economic structures as,<sup>17</sup> for instance, in the building of cooperatives or the promotion of fair trade. More than either the DA or RS frames the RL frame contains an affirmation of the empowering properties of knowledge, and is strongly critical of any form of dogmatism - a critique that is directed at neoliberalism and revolutionary socialism alike. These critiques may be understood as a result of the progressive involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in international governance focused on issues such as development, environment and trade. In a number of institutional spheres NGOs have

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*Contesting Globalisation and War*, thesis submitted for the degree of PhD, University of Sheffield, Department of Politics. (Earlier drafts of this work are available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/kevingillan/papers.php>)

<sup>15</sup> Callinicos, A., 1990, *Trotskyism*, (Open University Press), p.79; Callaghan, J., 1987, *The Far Left in British Politics*, (Blackwell, Oxford), pp. 123-139; Carver, T., 2001, "Did Ideology Fall with 'The Wall'?" in Freedman, M., ed, *Reassessing Political Ideologies. The Durability of Dissent*, (Routledge, London), p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Ward, C., 1982, *Anarchy in Action*, (Freedom Press), p.142.

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, J., 1992, *Empowerment. The Politics of Alternative Development*, (Blackwell, Oxford), pp.12-3.

found inclusion through claims to expert knowledge, but often been frustrated in the face of entrenched dogma and power. Since the early 1990s there has been an increased involvement of UK NGOs in social movement activities, pressing for political change while carrying out charitable work to ameliorate the effects of injustice. For instance, the website of the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development still boasts of the involvement of their supporters in the G8 protests in Genoa, which became the most notoriously violent of the series of ‘anti-globalisation’ confrontations.<sup>18</sup> There has been a marked radicalisation in the belief-structures of this strand of political activity (taking the form of an increased scepticism about liberal democratic institutions) that has brought it to the centre of the ‘movement of movements’.

### **Frames in Action: Convergence and Division in the Sheffield Social Forum**

The first public meeting around the notion of a social forum in Sheffield, billed as ‘Towards a Sheffield Social Forum’, was attended by around 40 local activists and campaigners. Most were familiar with the phrase ‘social forum’ and the related slogan ‘Another World is Possible’ but few had attended the international events and less were intimate with the particular principles embodied by them. Nevertheless, two areas of broad agreement were found early on. First, in the early meetings very little consideration was given to attempting to repeat the form of the WSF on a local scale. Over time, individual participants did begin to focus more on the detail of the WSF, yet the grounding assumption was always that SSF would be free to decide its own mode of operation, and its own issue areas on which to act: “none of us know what this Social Forum is going to be. That's what's so exciting - its an idea whose time has obviously come... but what the bloody hell is it?”<sup>19</sup> The SSF was, from most perspectives, valued as something whose fate would be decided by its participants, and which would therefore be largely independent of other political organisations. Second, the SSF would be self-consciously inclusive. The desire for diversity in terms of both participants’ backgrounds and their political perspectives, so central to the international social forums, clearly emerged as important in the local context too. Thus the first sub-group that formed within SSF took on the role of ‘outreach’ through finding and developing contacts and inviting participation. This combination of participative and inclusive ambitions is practically demanding, resulting in a number of decisions being seemingly put off until a fully inclusive group could make a participative decision. Even the choice of name for the group became influenced by this, and so the group continued to use the title ‘Towards a Sheffield Social Forum’ for some months. Nevertheless, at this early stage, these areas of agreement demonstrated a convergence between the various frames being utilised within participants’ discourse. The DA frame is, in any case, quite centrally aligned with notions of participative (and usually consensus based) decision-making as empowering and as producing better decisions. The liberalism of the RL frame encourages pluralism which may be understood as the dispersal of power and as making use of different forms of knowledge and pluralism demands inclusivity. Increasing dissatisfaction with representative forms of democracy within the RL frame also points to participative decision making as a potential alternative. And despite the democratic centralism that governs most revolutionary vanguard organisations, the renewed vision of bottom-up democracy within the RS frame seeks to include ‘ordinary people’ in creating organs of class struggle, thus demanding inclusive participation.

Consensus on the independent, participative nature of the SSF was not complete, however. Attending the earliest SSF meetings, SWP members took a position that the only, or at least primary, purpose of the SSF should be to mobilise participation for ESF events.<sup>20</sup> This was clearly in opposition to the general tendency for participants with visions for a locally autonomous organisation, some of whom stressed the need for the development of local solutions to local problems. This educed a more fundamental point that SSF was not connected with a deep, working class struggle:

“Some people in Sheffield have taken it upon themselves to declare themselves the Sheffield Social Forum! Whilst the Social Forums that have sprung up in Italy are an absolute inspiration they came from a much...higher level of struggle and are an organic part of the movement. Forty

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<sup>18</sup> CAFOD, undated, *The Story of CAFOD*.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Edgar’, email to SSF discussion list, July 2003.

<sup>20</sup> At this point, arguments referred to ESFII in Paris. However, given that it was the SWP that first presented the ‘bid’ for London to host ESF III the following year, it is quite likely that such plans were already known within the SWP.

people in a room is not representative of the movement in Sheffield.”<sup>21</sup>

These points clearly connect with the notion of class consciousness within the RS frame. The level of consciousness in the Sheffield context was evaluated as insufficient for a genuine attempt at creating a new organ of working class struggle. However, such arguments did not pass muster in the social forum meetings. Few participants understood the world in primarily class terms, and so the idea that the local social forum must emerge organically from a broad base of working class people simply did not make sense.

On this reading, the only participants who could potentially be convinced by the SWP position would be those from Workers’ Power. The latter’s involvement in setting up local social forums<sup>22</sup> was understood by the SWP (with large influence in the various Stop the War Coalitions) as “attempts by the sectarian left to supplant the Stop the War Coalition by social forums”. These endeavors, “have failed and deserve to fail.”<sup>23</sup> The long-run, intense rivalry between the two organisations therefore briefly occurred within the SSF. Interestingly, both the SWP and Workers’ Power positions can be understood from within the RS frame. It is quite possible that both Workers’ Power and the SWP were engaged in united front strategies: Workers’ Power in the social forums and SWP in the anti-war groups. They are both, therefore, in competition to attract participation in their relevant organisations, understood as spaces in which politically active people could become increasingly conscious of class struggle, and ultimately recruited to the vanguard. However, because the vanguard party is understood as the protector of truths concerning revolutionary action, and because of a perceived need for efficient central control, it is inconceivable that more than one vanguard organisation could be operational. The result is that conflict appears as a product of the similarities, rather than the differences in the sets of ideas used by the rival groups. Whereas we might expect that a shared analyses and targets ought to lead to unity in action, here the contents of the worldview promotes competition with others on the basis of their ideational similarity.

Having lost the argument the SWP stopped participating in SSF meetings. To a degree the SSF had found a political identity in the affirmation of inclusivity and participation, limited only by a very broad notion of ‘progressive’ or ‘left’ politics. These notions, however, were too broad to offer specific direction for what the nominal Sheffield Social Forum could be, or should do. The terrain of debate on this question, once the SWP’s position was discounted, polarised along a number of dimensions familiar to anyone involved in contestatory politics such as whether to focus on local or global issues or whether goals would be aimed at revolution or reform. Two, interlinked, issues excited most debate. First, was a concern to avoid becoming a ‘talking shop’ by maintaining an action-orientation. Here, the DA and RS frames were seen in concert, while some more aligned with ideas within the RL frame were more willing to affirm the value of discussion that do not have an immediate action focus:

“‘Talking shops’ and political action are not exclusive. History shows the reverse: a prime example would be the suffragettes, who started out in bloody reading groups... don't knock talking, and don't knock actions or groups you might consider non-radical. In my (woolly liberal) view of things, all local/political engagement and discussion is good; and a talking shop could lead to anything, given time.”<sup>24</sup>

The second, and more profound debate concerned whether the SSF would be a ‘body’ or a ‘space’. The first option was promoted within the RS frame. For the Workers’ Power activists present, ought to be a democratic organisation making decisions on campaign priorities. Inclusivity and democracy were valued because of the notion that SSF might represent the views of ‘ordinary people’. The long-term vision saw SSF forming a centre of power to rival local councils. This can best be understood in relation to the view of liberal representative democracy within the RS frame: the various institutions of government in a capitalist state are understood as indelibly marred by association with economic elites. Instead, “the left believes we can one day live in a world where the community will gather together locally

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<sup>21</sup> Sheffield SWP Newsletter, July 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Sheffield was not the only city with influential Workers’ Power representation in the building of local social forums; Manchester, Leeds and Cardiff, at least, have all had strong Workers’ Power representation within local social forums, as emerged in networking meetings of the UK local social forums; field notes, Network Meeting of the UK Local Social Forums, Manchester, June 2004.

<sup>23</sup> SWP, 2004, “Socialist Workers’ Party. Post-Conference Bulletin, December 2004” in *SWP Resources*.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Edgar’, email to SSF discussion list, July 2003.

and debate and decide on the issues that affect them... Why not start experimenting now with that?"<sup>25</sup> This is a structure strongly reminiscent of the soviets that developed in the early stages of the Russian revolution and, when pressed, 'Gareth' explained, "the word 'soviet' has got bad connotations for people, but yes, there is a model there of people taking control for themselves, a model of democracy that we can use... you've got to change it for the present, but its a pretty good place to start."<sup>26</sup> The Workers' Power position therefore reflects a number of ideational elements associated with the RS frame: it is based on the need to put the working class in control of political power; it rejects the use of liberal representative democratic institutions in order to do so; and it has a vision of an alternative mode of acquiring power that is strongly inspired by the Russian revolution. This basic argument was one taken more broadly. 'Darell', for instance, who describes himself as a 'libertarian socialist', argued that "the idea of the social forum ... is to create a kind of local 'dual power' structure, where we contest council decisions, ... initiate our own innovative projects and respond to injustices/abuses, corruption etc, with measured, highly visible direct critiques and action."<sup>27</sup> Thus, for some the SSF would be a corporate body with procedures for collective will-formation to decide on priorities and strategies for action. It would be following the 'open space' model to the degree that it emphasised making links with groups already active around issues, an openness to newcomers, and an apparent willingness to consider novel analyses and strategies.

The alternative position was partially associated with those working within the direct action (DA) frame. A number of activists argued that SSF need not agree on any particular campaign positions in order to be effective. Rather, the social forum was conceptualised as a space for networking, deliberation and proposals for action. Even where most participants in SSF found particular ideas inspiring, detailed development and planning would occur away from SSF itself. Initially, this argument was connected to affirmation of the strongly anti-authoritarian principles of the *Hallmarks* of People's Global Action. However, these were perceived as giving too much definition to the politics of the space. 'Isadore' cited *WSF Charter* principle six (quoted above) to argue,

"I'm more in favour of the SSF being organised along the lines of the WSF... This would mean the only role and decisions for us would be to organize the time and space for the forums. It would also mean we could avoid making any statements about what we are (like say the PGA guidelines) and the forum would be open to the widest number of people."<sup>28</sup>

The attraction of the WSF thus became precisely the notion of an 'open space' free from the requirement to decide among competing analyses and strategies and therefore available to a diversity of participants. In its most positive incarnations the DA frame contains a belief in the transformatory power of the creation of spaces for political engagement seen, for instance, at protest camps and social centres. Such spaces are valuable if they are potential areas of empowerment for participants and if they are prefigurative of a better future society. The social forum may be empowering in its concrete goal: that of linking up individuals and collectives for effective actions. It may also be empowering in its acceptance of diversity; because there are few prescribed opinions participants should, in principle, feel safe to develop their own understandings and thus realise the benefits of individual freedom. At this point, there is a connection with the RL frame, since it particularly values individual development in the field of knowledge and understanding.

Containing many areas of diversity, and without a formal decision making procedure, the SSF never reached a definitive position on these debates. Rather, the SSF must be understood as a process of exploration. Despite an inability to resolve a wide range of debates the SSF group did come to agree on the notion of creating a WSF-styled event. After wrangling over the use of the name 'Sheffield Social Forum' it was decided that this event would represent the launch of the social forum. SSF was thereby conceived to have a more permanent existence than the WSF. Rather, the big networking event that it would hold would form the beginning of a continuous form of organisation. The character of the launch event reflected a number of criticisms of the ESF as seen from the local perspective. For instance, emphasis on 'star' speakers in huge conferences with little interaction was criticised as not giving sufficient focus on the smaller workshops that were organised in a relatively decentralised and autonomous fashion. A further general critique of ESF was the degree of control coming from the centre

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<sup>25</sup> 'Hamilton', email to SSF discussion list, July 2003.

<sup>26</sup> 'Gareth', field notes, September 2003.

<sup>27</sup> 'Darell', email, July 2003.

<sup>28</sup> 'Isadore', email to SSF discussion list, August 2003.

in terms of decisions over the agenda for events, choice of speakers, location of and times of workshops and so on were seen to be taken in a top-down manner. At the SSF launch, therefore, there would just be two platform speakers considered necessary to attract participants and to provide a starting point for discussions throughout the day with an agenda of workshops determined by a long process of outreach work. Rather than ‘workshop leaders’, ‘key participants’ would be sought with specialist knowledge in the fields for which there appeared to be demand. The most novel features of the launch event resulted from an attempt to overcome the tendency to centralise control for the event. The final session of the day were left open for topics to be decided by the full range of attendees – thus adhering to the principles of inclusivity and participation that emerged from the first meetings. Suggestions were taken in a variety of forms throughout the day, and by mid-afternoon a list of about a dozen potential topics was compiled. These were read out to the group as a whole and any topics that had several interested parties would be discussed. In the event, among the 60-80 people present at the time (approximately 150 had passed through during the day) six topics were chosen and the final session given over to their discussion. The groups were intended to bridge the gap between talk and action, as the groups that met in this final session were encouraged to discuss plans for action and to sow the seeds for more continuous work. Additionally, as this process was explained as an experiment in democracy it demonstrates clearly the most solid point of convergence within the SSF organising group. Whatever position the SSF would take on the overarching debates over the concept of the social forum, its process would seek participatory democracy through novel forms of organisation.

### ***Participatory Pluralism at ESF III: A New Orientational Frame?***

Local SFs from across the UK came together at a gathering hosted by Manchester Social Forum in early June 2004. Three themes emerged: sharing experiences, constructing a durable network, and intervening in the London ESF process.<sup>29</sup> In sharing experiences it became obvious that many of the debates seen within SSF occurred elsewhere with the body-space question appearing as absolutely central. Rather than seeking immediate solution to this question, those involved in the debate were prepared to accept this as an important dynamic within the SF movement that would be solved through reflective practice. Network-building as the second theme demonstrated the importance that many participants saw in creating horizontal channels of communication, thus affirming their autonomy in working together. This stress also shaped the chosen approach to the third theme – intervening in the process for ESF III. During the Manchester meeting a proposal was worked out that:

“for the whole duration of the European Social Forum events there be one dedicated space for the use of the local social forums of Europe. We believe that the interlinking of local social forums holds huge potential for positive social change... It is essential that those networks are created to be durable and independent of the spectacular moments of gathering represented by ESF.”<sup>30</sup>

The form of meeting being requested was notably different to that usually seen within the ESF. Participants envisioned a permanent site in which local social forums could organise their own workshops and cultural events. While particular themes within ESF would often be continued through a large number of different meetings the disconnection between them was perceived to mitigate against carrying out work for social change. All activist meetings provide opportunities for both the discussion of issues and the creation of network connections. However, where the seminar or workshop prioritised discussion, leaving networking as a beneficial epiphenomenon, the local social forums aimed to reverse those priorities. This particular approach is central to the new vision for the ESF being developed among the ‘horizontals’, to which I now turn.

### **Horizontals Versus Verticals at ESF III**

By October 2003, a month before ESF II took place in Paris, a small group of activists had put forward a proposal that London host ESF III in 2004. In an inauspicious start, given the social forum movements’ focus on participation and inclusivity, some complained that “the 2004 bid has been made without any consultation across the UK movements, has never been discussed in a general ESF meeting

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<sup>29</sup> Field notes, June 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Field notes, June 2004.

and thus has no mandate.”<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the bid was additionally backed by a number of influential NGOs (including Greenpeace and War on Want) and several trade unions (including UNISON, and the National Union of Journalists). When the London ESF took place in mid-October 2004, attracting 20-25,000 participants from across Europe the events were celebrated for their depth of discussion, range of political issues and diversity of participation.<sup>32</sup> However, the tensions within the organising process had led to a direct action by some of those centrally involved in the ESF process against one of the plenary sessions of the ESF itself. The protesters made two claims: first, the organisational process of the ESF had been unacceptable; second, the London Mayor should not be allowed to give a platform speech at the occasion. While some strongly criticised the protesters’ actions,<sup>33</sup> a group of individuals and organisations argued that the protesters “were not alone in the belief that the London ESF dramatically parted company from the democratic, transparent, non-party and consensual principles upon which the World Social Forum movement was established.”<sup>34</sup> This protest was merely the most visible evidence of a conflict between the ‘verticals’ and ‘horizontalts’. The verticals encompassed parts of the Trotskyist and communist left, together with a number of major trade unions and employees of the Greater London Authority (GLA) in addition to some of the larger NGOs, most actively, CND. The horizontalts included a large number of individuals and smaller activist group, a significant section of the local social forum movement and a variety of NGOs including the World Development Movement (WDM) and Friends of the Earth (FoE). It is among the horizontalts that we find the clearest evidence for a developing ideational construction, distinct from the orientational frames identified thus far.

The scale of the ESF clearly demands continuous work, detailed planning and financial resources. More obviously political decisions needed to be made about sources of funding, the choice of thematic areas and the method by which to choose plenary speakers. The process involved weekly meetings of the ESF Organising Committee (OC) and monthly, peripatetic ‘European Preparatory Assembly’ meetings. Decision-making was nominally by consensus although the method by which consensus would be achieved or measured was never formalised, leaving enormous scope for the personal judgement of the chair. At every stage there were vociferous complaints about the process of decision making with one central participants claiming that “The modus operandi was that all organisational matters ... were presented as *faits accomplis* to the Committee and objections were thwarted as being petty, time-wasting or even malicious obstructions by people ‘obsessed with process’ or ... ‘wanting to wreck the ESF’.”<sup>35</sup>

Even the less obviously contentious decisions became, at times, highly charged political issues. For instance, the decision on venues was to be made at a European Preparatory Assembly making. However, only one detailed proposal was put forward by the OC. Oscar Reyes, whose work with *Red Pepper* magazine gave him the opportunity to regularly attend OC meetings, was keen for people to know about the rival proposals. However, speaking from the floor rather than the platform he had just two or three minutes to read out as many details, from his own notes, as possible. While the alternative of an ESF distributed around the Bloomsbury area of London sounded promising to many attendees, there was clearly not enough information to make a sensible comparison; time pressures required confirmation of one proposal, so in the event there was simply no decision to be made.<sup>36</sup> Accessibility of meetings, flow of information, and the domination of meetings through the blunt instruments of invented procedural rules, accusations and slurs, and threats that finances would be withdrawn were the most common complaints in the process.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Email from London-based social forum activist, forwarded to SSF discussion list, October 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Anon., 2004, “New Politics Takes a Bow” in *The Guardian*, 18/10/2004.

<sup>33</sup> Jasper, L., et al., 2004, “Unwelcome Anarchy at the European Social Forum” in *The Guardian*, 19/10/2004.

<sup>34</sup> Rehman, A., et al., 2004, “Consensus Breaks Down at the Social Forum” in *The Guardian*, 21/10/2004. Also, Piara Power, et al., 2004, “ESF Protest was Not Racist” in *The Guardian*, 19/10/2004.

<sup>35</sup> Dowling, E., 2005, “The Ethics of Engagement Revisited” in *Ephemera. Theory and Politics in Organization* 5(2), p. 210.

<sup>36</sup> Field notes, European Preparatory Assembly, London, January 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Documentation of further complaints can be found in contributions to the *Ephemera* special issue, particularly: Dowling, “The Ethics of Engagement ...”; Böhm, S., 2005, “Ground Zero of the Forum: Notes on a Personal Journey” in *Ephemera. Theory and Politics in Organization* 5(2), pp. 134-145; Sullivan, L.L., 2005, “Activism, Affect and Abuse: Emotional Contexts and the Consequences of the ESF 2004 Organising Process” in *Ephemera. Theory and Politics in Organization* 5(2), pp. 344-369. In addition, many criticisms were documented on the website *ESFnet* which was heavily used by the horizontalts.

To increase the chance of influencing the process a disparate range of actors organised among themselves. In so doing they were required to embrace the challenge of coordinating diversity:

“[There is] a bunch of anarchists, reformist NGOs, local social forum types and even some of the far left parties and we’re all trying to get our voices heard so we’ve got to coordinate. Its like trying to herd cats ... The verticals have this single idea of huge conferences where the great and the good can make big speeches and the SWP can flog papers, but we’ve got ... all sorts of ideas.”<sup>38</sup>

This broad cooperation was clearly an unintended but novel result of the ESF process, “Who would have thought only 10 months ago, that members of the CPGB, Indymedia, Attac UK, the London Social Forum and the Green Party would work out joint tactics on the way to a meeting in Birmingham?”<sup>39</sup> These quotations demonstrate the positive evaluation of an ability for a diverse set of actors to work together, and this clearly reflects the notion of the ‘open space’ described above. Some of the larger NGOs were less inclined to intervene frequently within in the process. However, evidence of occasional interventions demonstrates at least some affinity with the cause of the ‘horizontalists’.<sup>40</sup>

### ‘Another ESF is Possible’

The specificity of many of the most heated debates between the verticals and the horizontalists, and the horizontalists’ focus on process, obscures the alternative vision of the ESF that motivated the latter. However, one particular text, widely circulated by email and reproduced on several websites since December 2003, offers a particularly detailed vision. While praising some aspects of ESF II, Phil McLeish suggested two failings: first “to maximise – from the point of view of the participant – relevant productive and potentially enduring political exchanges”, and second, “to integrate individuals into the Forum as deliberating and creative collective agents.”<sup>41</sup> McLeish’s criticisms, and the alternative vision he portrays, match neatly with the view discussed above in relation to the local SFs. The purpose of the ESF becomes a space for productive work to take place through active networking: “the organisation we need to run the Social Forum only needs to do one thing... It needs to foster, nurture and encourage the emergence of a new Europe as a ‘network of networks’.”<sup>42</sup> Because the alternative vision for the ESF is connected to a range of idea elements about the structure of the political world and the nature of social change it is here, I suggest, that we can identify a ‘participatory pluralist’ (PP) orientational frame.

Briefly, McLeish proposes a radically decentred structure for the ESF. Rather than fitting key speakers and ‘self-organised’ workshops into broad thematic areas chosen by an Organising Committee, work streams would be calculated from a database of information given by participants before the events. Matching would be used to bring people together with the aim of creating ‘multiple solidarities’. That is, solidarity resulting from some relevant similarity (e.g. targets of action) between participants would increase the chances of connections along other dimensions (e.g. identities). By emphasising the network form McLeish argues that the flows of information and interaction between groups and individuals are more important than the points of convergence. Node may exist at key moments during a movement’s history but have a tendency to create ossified traditions, incapable of reacting to changing political opportunities. “Organisers thrown up by events, who find themselves serving or surfing these waves of history narcissistically imagine themselves their authors. Last year’s bright creative movement becomes a fossilized bureaucracy or an inert ritualistic subculture.”<sup>43</sup>

Similar comments from Massimo De Angelis explain the elevation of the network form of organising:

“we must abandon linear [historical] thinking, since social transformation emerges out of our actions, subjectivities, desires, organizational capability, ingenuity and struggles in unpredictable

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Hazel’, field notes, first Network Meeting of the UK Local Social Forums, Manchester, June 2004.

<sup>39</sup> CPGB, 2004, “European Social Forum – Control and ‘Consensus’” in *Weekly Worker* 521, 01/04/2004.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance: Hodkinson, S., et al., “For a Participatory ESF 2004: a Process Proposal”, circulated widely through email discussion lists, April 2004; Reclaim Our Forum, 2004, “Major UK NGO’s Criticise ESF Organising Process + SWP/SA” on *Indymedia UK*, 01/09/2004.

<sup>41</sup> McLeish, P., 2003, “Listen Up! Act Up! Serve the Needs of the Hive Mind! Towards an Effective and Participatory European Social Forum” in *The Commoner*.

<sup>42</sup> McLeish, “Listen Up!...”, section 2.

<sup>43</sup> McLeish, “Listen Up!...”, section 2.

ways. Indeed, we must be very wary of thinking that the achievement of a victory, of *any* victory, is a move towards the promised land. And this is because what we call victories (or defeats for that matter) represent turning points for *both* us and our opponents.”<sup>44</sup>

De Angelis does not deny that it is possible to learn from history, but rather claims, “we do not know how, whether and to what extent our victory will bring about a re-alignment of social forces that helps to redefine a new era of capital accumulation, with its inevitable injustices, exclusions, stupidity, and madness.”<sup>45</sup> Flexibility and the distribution of knowledge production are, therefore, two of the key advantageous features of the network structure and it is from these bases that diversity and participation gain their value.

After significant failure to influence the ESF process it was on the ‘autonomous spaces’ outside of the ‘official’ ESF events that many of the horizontals focused. A brief examination of the autonomous events helps to fill out the details of the political discourse of the horizontals. The horizontals followed proposal to locate ESF in Bloomsbury, an area containing many university buildings which could be used for smaller events. The autonomous events were distributed, allowing different spaces having different identities, while still being close enough to encourage people to move between them. The events included the Solidarity Village (cooperative organising, alternative economics), Beyond ESF (anti-authoritarian ideas and direct action), The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (carnival and creative direct action), and The European Forum on Communication Rights (alternative media, copyright and copyleft). Each of these demonstrates, at least, concerns with self-organisation and the direct creation of alternatives that are familiar from the DA frame. The Local Social Forum Space and Life Despite Capitalism both demonstrate more obvious connections with the ideas presented as participatory pluralism in this section. The latter is evidenced through its aims:

“to articulate the different values and practices we adhere to in our diverse struggles and therefore to develop and weave together new political discourses ... grounded in the belief that if other worlds are possible, it is people themselves who create them and not some transcendent power with a "correct" line such as parties, states, or gods ... We call this stream ‘life despite capitalism’ instead of ‘life after capitalism’, in order to problematise alternatives as something in the here and now ... This means reclaiming the exercise of our many powers to do and to produce things, affects and relations; it means to relate and learn from each other in ways rooted in dignity, respect and common access to resources.”<sup>46</sup>

This quotation connects many of the elements of the horizontals’ critique of the verticals throughout the ESF process: it juxtaposes the creation of new understandings with the dogma of the organised left; insists on a plurality of other worlds that must be created from the bottom-up; it rejects the linearity of the RS frame that finds justice only after the revolution; it thereby implies a notion of prefiguration that is repeated in the expressed need to base social relations on dignity and respect; it includes a notion of empowerment; and finally, it includes an implication of equality through ‘common access to resources’. Many of these aspects are recognisable from the frames outlined in section two above. In the next section I will summarise the development of these ideas through activists’ statements in the local, regional and global contexts in order to suggest that the particular combination of these elements transcends some of the divisions commonly found between the frames.

### **Novelty and Continuity in Participatory Pluralism**

It is the ‘highly original’ notion of the ‘open space’ that has received the greatest amount of attention within both movement-produced commentary and scholarly analysis.<sup>47</sup> The structure devised for organising the first WSF was a result of “the underlying assumption ... that the World Social Forum

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<sup>44</sup> De Angelis, M., 2005, “PR Like Process! Strategy from the Bottom-Up” in *Ephemera. Theory and Politics in Organization* 5(2), p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> De Angelis, “PR Like Process!...”, p. 201.

<sup>46</sup> Publicity information for ‘Life Despite Capitalism’ at ESF III, distributed widely, September 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Wallerstein, “The dilemmas of the open space...”. This is evidenced throughout the special issue of the *International Journal of Social Science* in which Chloé Keraghel and Jai Sen note that despite offering a wide remit to contributors, the majority focused on “interrogating the WSF’s self-defined culture of politics, the concept of ‘open space’.” Keraghel, C. & Sen, J., 2004, “Explorations in open space. The World Social Forum and cultures of politics.” in *International Journal of Social Science* 56(4), pp. 492.

is not a deliberative body or actor that would take political stands and thereby need rigorous decision-making procedures.”<sup>48</sup> Much the same argument was used locally when the vision of SSF as networking space was justified because “the only decisions we’d have to make would be on providing a regular space and facilitation, and publicising SSF... since they’re practical rather than political in nature I think getting consensus would be pretty easy.”<sup>49</sup> At every level it has become clear that there are rival visions for the social forum and that, in any case, the provision of such a space does involve intensely political decisions. Among proponents of the ‘open space’ this is often understood as a battle of new against old. Conway, citing Francisco Whitaker, warns “against the ‘old world’ present like an octopus in the ‘new world’ of the Social Forum. The old world is an old kind of power politics on the left that seeks to control, that distrusts plurality, and that effectively shuts down space for diversity and for debate in the name of urgency, unity and strategy”<sup>50</sup>. The perceived novelty of the ‘open space’ is, therefore, its emphasis on diversity.

Of itself, however, acceptance of diversity hardly seems particularly novel. It is notable that the RS frame, with its notion of the united front, also positively values working with those with a different political outlook. However, the united front is merely one stage to a politically homogenous vanguard and unity is expected to overcome diversity. The libertarianism inherent within the DA frame is tolerant of difference, while its ecologically derived elements create a negative understanding of monoculture in the natural world, and by extension, the valorisation of diversity within the social. However, within efforts for social change there is also a continuing value on finding consensus, which clearly implies unity. Indeed, in the context of affinity group decision making, “If one person continually finds him/herself at odds with the rest of the group... Is this really the right group to be in? A group may ask a member to leave.”<sup>51</sup> The RL frame, while seeking to find consensus on some basic moral claims (exemplified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), seeks to defend diversity within these broad bounds. However, social change is often understood as the result of increasing the scope of agreements on fundamental moral points of view, hence the appreciation of the potential efficacy of protest that makes moral claims on public figures. What appears as new within participatory pluralism is not, therefore, the acceptance of diversity of participation, but the belief in the protection and even production of diversity as a motor of social change.

The debate of unity against diversity thereby takes on a deeper significance. At the beginning of organising for SSF ‘Edgar’ asked, “Is the Sheffield Social Forum going to be open enough to accommodate a large array of differing opinion?”<sup>52</sup> The following response can be considered a reasonable summary of the views of many of the group: “I think this has to be the underlying principle of any social forum ... [it] must be something we are constantly striving for, and if we get it right will make us a very powerful force.”<sup>53</sup> To a similar end, Conway describes the debate over the ‘social forum’ as signalling:

“(1) a power struggle over its future; (2) profound disagreement over the *character* of its power, which is itself based in conflicting understandings and visions of power and change in the contemporary period more generally; (3) at the heart of this last conflict is a yet more basic one about the status of multiplicity and diversity – in understanding power(s), in building resistance(s), in creating alternatives, in crafting solidarities, in imagining other possible worlds as *les raisons d’être* of the Social Forum.”<sup>54</sup>

Both quotations demonstrate a link between diversity and power that is not immediately recognisable from either the DA or RL frames. Conway’s argument takes this further, demonstrating a conception of social change as requiring a multiplicity of alternative worlds, and this is understood as both the power of the ‘movement of movements’ and the purpose of the social forum. Exploring the connections within this argument, i.e. how exactly diversity creates power, points to several significant convergences between proponents of the DA and RL frames.

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<sup>48</sup> Teivanen, “The World Social Forum ...”, p. 626.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Isadore’, email to SSF discussion list, August 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Conway, J., 2005, “Social Forums, Social Movements and Social Change...”, pp. 425.

<sup>51</sup> Seeds for Change, undated, “Consensus Decision Making”, p. 5; available on *Seeds for Change Website*.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Edgar’, email to SSF discussion list, July 2003.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Gareth’, email to SSF discussion list, July 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Conway, “Social Forums, Social Movements ...”, p. 425.

The power of networked diversity can be understood, with reference to a conception of knowledge that is familiar from the RL frame. De Angelis, for instance, presents an understanding of the traditional far left as presenting a unified vision of the future to which ‘there is no alternative’, thus mobilising the same critique used widely against the knowledge structure of neoliberalism. He argues rather that the ‘open space’ of the social forum must institute a political culture in which ‘there are many alternatives’. The critique of dogma that is, I have argued, central to the RL frame is presented in a new form: “the key problem of capitalist markets is not so much the creation of ‘losers’, but a mode of articulation of productive ‘nodes’ across the social body that constantly creates ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the effect of top-down institutions of global governance which embody dogmatic knowledge in order to act on the world necessarily produce a range of inequalities and injustices. It is not any one or other of these institutions that is a primary enemy, but rather the top-down nature of governance solutions. Further, the communicative, networked production of knowledge is required in order to build alternatives to capitalism in the present, rather than to defer them to a period after a mass confrontation of powers.<sup>56</sup> Participatory pluralism thereby articulates the anti-dogma position central to the RL frame with the strong notion of prefiguration within the DA frame. Prefiguration appears in an extended form, however, as the enclaves of resistance that are acceptable to the DA frame must be constantly connected with other struggles. By doing so it offers to temper the emphasis on momentary confrontations with power that can lie within DA understandings of the objective of action; increasing the value of positive engagement on the basis of its increased efficacy.

Understanding the network as an effective and just mode of social organisation offers two elements of particular benefit to proponents of the RL frame. The first relates to democracy. The network conception of the social forum, as described here, is strongly opposed to representative politics which “generates pyramidal bodies in which information flows up and decisions flow down.”<sup>57</sup> Clearly, democracy is conceived as essentially participatory and consensual. Those working within the RL frame have increasingly gained a scepticism concerning representative democracy. Indeed, the latter appears as a check on the power of elites that is valued because it is presently available. In its more idealistic guise, the RL frame seeks alternative forms of participation through the creation of structures that mitigate against the accumulation of power. Participatory pluralism, through its conception of the dispersal of power through the network, which itself increases, rather than dissipates efficacy, may be conceived as offering one solution to this dilemma.

The second benefit for RL frame proponents relates to the mass movement. Conceptually, the praise for diversity offers a way out of the ambivalence over mass movements sensed within the RL frame. McLeish argues that “a mass is not a certain quantity of people, it is a certain quality of social relationship in which the constituent individuals are powerless and behave as an amorphous, undifferentiated amoeba *vis-à-vis* the whole... The whole needs to be experienced by each person not as a huge summation of individuals but as a richly textured ensemble of overlapping levels and scales of organisation across space, time and content.”<sup>58</sup> Of itself, this argument does not answer the strategic problems of the mass movement, concerning, for instance, mainstream media images of social movements oversimplifying messages. However, the critique of the mass movement from within the RL frame is at least as focussed on the direct transformative potential for participants as it is on the image the mass portrays. Among my interviewees, for instance, emerged criticisms of the mass demonstration as being “about as brain-switched-off as you can get”<sup>59</sup> and hopes for future work that “is more about opening people’s eyes, getting people to question things”.<sup>60</sup> That is, the RL frame is concerned with mass participation in knowledge production as a remedy to dogma; the network conception of the social forum offers the promise of a thought-provoking environment in which questions are opened rather than closed.

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<sup>55</sup> De Angelis, M., 2005, “Opposing Fetishism by Reclaiming Our Powers” on *The Open Space Forum*.

<sup>56</sup> De Angelis, “Opposing Fetishism ...”, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> McLeish, “Listen Up!...”, section 2.

<sup>58</sup> McLeish, “Listen Up!...”, section 2.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Kenneth’, interview, January 2005.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Orson’, interview, December 2004.

## **Conclusions**

It is clear that we should consider the emergence of social forums on every level as a continuation of the contest over globalisation. It is, therefore, possible to understand the dynamics of the social forum movement through an examination of its relation to the orientational frames already being utilised within the current cycle of contention. At the local level it is clear that these orientational frames do offer activists a way of interpreting the 'social forum'. Because activists perceived the nature of the social forum as open to contestation, pre-existing worldviews impacted on aspirations for what the social forum should be or could do. In the interrelation of local social forums a number of notable common themes emerged. First, the forums all embraced diversity through stressing inclusivity and participation. Second, each contained continuing debates over the nature of the social forum, especially over the body-space dimension. Third, each felt the need to relate to each other, and to the process for the ESF, but only the grounds of retained autonomy.

The larger scale of the process to create ESF III sharpened debate. The local SF activists generally fitted more closely with the horizontals than the verticals in the contest over the ESF. Division within the ESF process clearly relates to the ideational backgrounds that participants bring with them. One interpretation would be to understand the development of the ESF process as a result of a clash between individuals utilising elements of the RS frame against a temporary alliance between those informed by the DA and RL frames. However, I have argued that we should rather understand the horizontals' collective action as premised on a number of different elements drawn together from those two frames. It is apparent that articulating these ideas in a novel structure modifies the precise meaning of the component parts and it is for this reason that I refer to participatory pluralism as a new orientational frame. The clear emphasis on the network form requires some realignment of ideas such that neither the DA nor the RL frames can remain unaffected by this encounter. In other words, the contest of horizontals and verticals went hand-in-hand with the development of a new belief-structure out of ingredients of the old.

The primary distinguishing features of participatory pluralism are the valorisation of diversity on the grounds of an opposition to dogma and a preference for many alternatives promoted by autonomous but intensely networked actors. The latter is valued for being both inherently more democratic and more efficacious. The structure of orientational frames gives them distinct hues. So, while the RS frame is centred around a theoretical assessment of capitalism, the DA frame is built on understandings of a particular practice and the RL frame is centred on a particular morality. Participatory pluralism emphasises, rather, a particular approach to the creation of large-scale social change. Participatory pluralism has developed in a particular context, and the extent to which it can transcend that context may be limited. This belief structure is particularly directed against the perceived failings associated with the RS frame in order to win an argument about the future of a movement-focused discursive forum. It appears, therefore, somewhat inward-looking. Frames must be tested in application. It is to the extent that participatory pluralism helps activists understand their lives and their agency outside of the 'open space' of the social forum that it will prove its value.

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