

## Why is The Foundry Theatre hosting this teach-in?

In January of this year, I (I being me, Melanie Joseph) attended the 5<sup>th</sup> World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. I'd been wanting to go for three years but time and finances had prevented it. But when I saw that this year, for the first time, the Forum actually provided Arts and Culture its own thematic terrain, I made it my business to get there. My work with The Foundry Theatre is very much centered on seeking ways to bring artists into the conversations that are attempting to define the future. Artists are often invited in, but usually as decoration for the rallies, benefits etc. – i.e. after the language and ideas have already been formulated. I hope part of what we do at the Foundry is an attempt to redress this misalignment. And so to see that the largest progressive movement in the world had finally made space for the collegial participation of artists and cultural workers was enormously encouraging.

I wrote a longer article for American Theatre Magazine reporting on the 5<sup>th</sup> WSF (if you'd like a copy, email [sunder@thefoundrytheatre.org](mailto:sunder@thefoundrytheatre.org)). Suffice it to say, being a one of 155,000 people from 151 different countries sharing strategies in dozens of languages connected me to a future I had no idea was underway. And every minute I was there, I was aware of how many artists from the States and abroad weren't. In fact, I may have been one of the only U.S. based artists there (believe me I looked). Furthermore, there were not nearly as many events organized under the Arts and Creativity terrain as I thought there might be. That's because the outreach to artists is new. Hence this event.

So, we hope this teach-in, coupled with other such events hosted by other theaters and arts communities around the country (teach-ins are currently in the planning stages in Atlanta, San Francisco, Austin and Minneapolis) will constellate a national initiative that would form a delegation of U.S. artists to attend the WSF in Nairobi in 2007.

If you are interested in being part of a planning committee for this initiative, please let us know. And always feel free to call or email me or Sunder Ganglani (my primary colleague in this endeavor) if you have any questions or comments. We very much look forward to your ongoing input in this project.

I'm glad you came. Tell you friends and neighbors...

## THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM A QUICK CHEAT SHEET FROM THE WEBSITE

**<http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>**

(The site loads in Portuguese, but English is an option at the top of the home page)

### What is it?

The World Social Forum is the largest grassroots global movement in the world. For four days every January the forum brings together progressives, grass roots organizations, activists and socially engaged citizens from all over the world to exchange ideas; present ongoing experiments in economic, social, ecological and political practices; and to network widely towards more effective actions. The only common denominator is an opposition to global market-liberalism or "neoliberalism," in other words, an opposition to the corporate (and military) model in which capital, instead of people, is the organizing principle of public and private institutions.

The WSF provides the public, open space for big ideas and proposals to be imagined and even better, to be organized. The intention is to make it possible for people to think together on a globalized basis about the connection between local and international issues, and to make room - in greater depth each year - for the search for alternatives to the dominant (sputtering) world model.

### A Little WSF History

There have been five World Social Forums so far. The first one (January 2001) was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil as were: WSF 2002, 2003 and 2005. In 2004, it was held in Mumbai, India.

The upcoming 6<sup>th</sup> WSF (for the first time) will be polycentric – held simultaneously in Caracas (Venezuela) [fsa@forosocialamericas.org](mailto:fsa@forosocialamericas.org), in Karachi (Pakistan) email: [mail@wsf2006karachi.org](mailto:mail@wsf2006karachi.org) and Bamako (Mali) [espaceforum@afribone.net.ml](mailto:espaceforum@afribone.net.ml) in an attempt to reach more people in each of these regions. In January 2007 it reconvene altogether in Nairobi, Kenya.

In addition, there have been over 200 smaller forums organized throughout the world – regional, local, thematic, national events -- organized under the principles and methodology of the WSF. (There even one held annually by the 1<sup>st</sup> Arrondissement in Paris.) For a complete list of other forums:

**[http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/quadro\\_frc.php?cd\\_forum=9](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/quadro_frc.php?cd_forum=9)**

## How/why did it get started?

In 1998, the proposal for a Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) was made public. It was to be signed by the world's wealthiest countries, then "proposed" to the rest of the countries in the world. The intention to create a kind of World Constitution for Capital, which would give capital all the rights and almost no duties, especially in Third World countries where the "investments" would be made.

The French newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique* published the first exposé of the Agreement (prepared in the United States by the "Public Citizens" movement led by Ralph Nader) in an article by Lori Wallach, a lawyer with the movement. The outcry at the absurdities contained in the agreement led to the emergence of a social protest movement, causing France to withdraw preventing the agreement from being signed.

The interactions of these events helped to trigger, among those who refuse to accept the scenario of a world wholly controlled by the interests of capital, a number of different forms of opposition to this type of globalization. Those that gained most fame were the protests in Seattle against the WTO and those in Mexico, Washington and Prague against the IMF and the World Bank.

Meanwhile, for a good twenty years the owners of the world have been meeting at the World Economic Forum in Davos, a small, luxury ski resort in Switzerland. Once a year, in addition to the regional meetings that the WEF has begun to organize, this group currently gathers together all those able to pay \$25,000 to hear and talk to the leading thinkers in the service of capital, as well as to hear guest critics of globalization, invited along to lend legitimacy to the Forum. Davos, which attracts correspondents from all the worlds' major newspapers, is where the theory of a world dominated by capital, within the parameters of neo-liberalism, is constructed, articulated and steadily put into practice.

So in light of all the above, a few Brazilians decided to launch a new stage of resistance to this school of thought, beyond demonstrations and mass protests. It seemed possible to also offer specific proposals and seek concrete responses to the challenges of building "another world," one where an economy would serve people, not the other way round. Economists and other academics opposed to neo-liberalism were already holding what they called Anti-Davos meetings in Europe. But now, the intention was to go further than that. The idea was, with the participation of all the organizations already networking in the mass protests, to arrange another kind of meeting on a world scale – the World Social Forum – directed to social concerns. To give it a symbolic dimension, the convening of the World Social Forum would take place on the same days as the powerful of the world were to meet in Davos.

## Who organizes it?

There is an International Committee. Who's on the IC?

[www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=3\\_2&cd\\_language=2](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=3_2&cd_language=2)

And there is a Secretariat in Sao Paulo, Brasil: Eight organizations are part of the Secretariat, whose office is in São Paulo and is in charge of the Forum process coordination. The eight entities that launched the first WSF – Abong, Attac, CBJP, Cives, CUT, Ibase, MST and Social Network for Justice and Human Rights (all can be googled) – form this secretariat. [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=3\\_1&cd\\_language=2](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=3_1&cd_language=2)

## Ongoing Organizing Practices

The most salient feature of this global movement is that the events at the Forum itself (workshops, panels, roundtables, etc.) are proposed, designed, organized and hosted collaboratively by the participants themselves. And though each Forum is organized differently (depending on where, who, etc.), there are certain strongly suggested organizing principles that are followed. I believe one such principle states that in order for an event to be included, it must be organized by more than one group. There are varying degrees of curation for each event. For example, the 2005 WSF was entirely self-generated – i.e. there were no gatekeepers. This Forum had 2500 events over four days organized under eleven 'thematic terrains.' Below is a sampling of some of them:

- A:** Autonomous thought, reappropriation and socialization of knowledge and technologies
- B:** Defending diversity, plurality and identities
- C:** Arts and Creation: weaving and building people's resistance culture
- D:** Communication: counter-hegemonic practices, rights and alternatives
- E:** Assuring and defending Earth and people's common goods – as an alternative to commodification and transnational control
- F:** Social struggles and democratic alternatives- against neo-liberal capitalism
- G:** Peace, demilitarization and struggle against war, free trade and debt
- H:** Towards construction of international democratic order and people's integration
- I:** Sovereign economies for and of people – against neo-liberal capitalism
- J:** Human rights and dignity for a just and egalitarian world
- K:** Ethics and spiritualism – resistances and challenges for a new world