

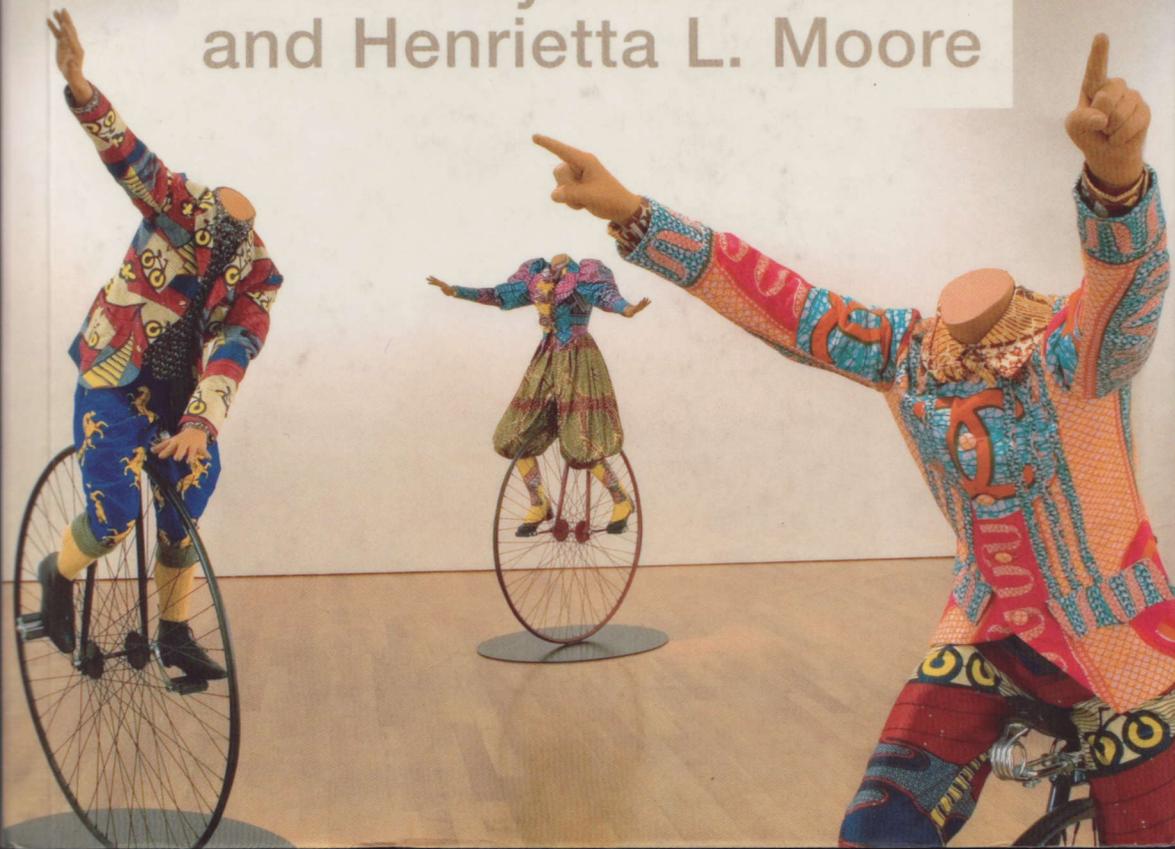
Cultural Politics

in a

Global Age

*Uncertainty, Solidarity,
and Innovation*

Edited by David Held
and Henrietta L. Moore



Chapter 37

Productive Anticipation

Irit Rogoff* and Florian Schneider#

"The subject is the boundary of a continuous movement between an inside and an outside ... If the subject cannot be reduced to an externalized citizenship, can it invest citizenship with force and life?" (Negri to Deleuze)¹

The visible modes of power, those invested in institutions of governance, bureaucracies, multinational corporations, international agencies, military-industrial complexes, media monopolies etc. are relatively easy to locate and characterize. But what of emergent configurations of power? Those not sustained by permanently constituted institutions, and therefore less easily discernible, are more difficult not just to locate and characterize, but also to imagine as being meaningful. What we are attempting is not just a shift away from institutionalized politics but also away from a principle of equation which is the heart of a representational mode of politics, a mode in which a set of realities is paralleled by institutional and other representations to which they are seemingly equal.

Instead of attempting an alternative mapping of forms of power just "coming into vision" we propose a notion of "productive anticipation". This

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constitutes a state which is both reflective and participatory but not one of indications and navigations, not one that tries to didactically point to where one might look and what one might see. This processual mode of observing and narrating a perception of the politics we are all mired in, this mode of political "becomings", is one that we feel exemplifies "contemporaneity" and is exemplary of a politics which is, as Rosi Braidotti might say, "transposed" from one modality to another.² It might also require us to produce and inhabit a series of fictions which serve as a location populated by new modes of politics, given that the so called realities around are not quite able to host, or allow legibility to what we are in search of. So in the first instance we need to see what might be out there, of how it is configured when it takes the form of so called "cultural" activity rather than so called "political" activity. Subsequently we might try our hand at seeing what kind of vocabulary these activities have generated in order to think through a coming politics.

Our inquiry focuses on the ways in which newly configured notions of "activism" and "participation" are providing alternative entry points and strategies of taking part; in politics, in culture, in life in general. To that end we are proposing a series of terms which do not offer an analysis of a given set of conditions, but rather they are "operational", describing an emergent operative mode of "being in the world". These terms include "access", "singularity", "collaboration", "activism" and "participation" and they work to anticipate an active modality and the inhabiting of a series of active positions in public life that cannot be captured by the existing of how we identify ourselves in the public sphere.

We are obviously aware that there is a proliferation of activisms at present – we understand their issues, we understand the relations between the groups and movements. But do we fully understand how this proliferation has changed our notion of access to the political? It is here, in the reflection regarding access that activism and participation become a complex continuum of modes providing a relation to access; to institutions, to world events, to one another. This leads us to ask what is "urgency" and how does it differ from "emergency", to an understanding that "emergency" is always a response to a set of immediate circumstances while "urgency" is a recognition of the systemic shift in relations between the constitutive elements of the world we live in. It is at this point that one can begin to chart relations between older groups such as "Amnesty International", "Greenpeace" and "Doctors without Borders" to more recent alter-globalization movements and many others. Equally this produces a frame to understand why professional groups such as doctors and architects, for example, have begun intervening in the political sphere from the perspective of what they specifically know and understand.

At the heart of our argument is an attempt to “look away” from the centres of power as defining both the questions that are being asked and the means we might have at our disposal to respond to these. Instead we want to focus our attention on the proliferation of “activist” and “participatory” manifestations around the globe. It is becoming clear that these are marking the desire of people to actually articulate their own questions and find ever more inventive modes of taking part in the processes that are determining their lives. Equally, that they are doing so in “minor gestures” that don’t pretend a wholesale change but manifest an engagement and an involvement through series of minute transformations. It equally exemplifies the very significant shift between analysing long lines of developments and acting in the moment.

In addition we have become interested in the exceptionally manifest and performative quality of this new sensibility: The sheer numbers of people marching, demonstrating, writing statements, making their way to the World Social Forum, banding together on the internet, communicating ferociously, figuring out alternative ways of educating themselves for contemporary needs that are unfathomed by institutions. The new uses of cultural spaces such as art institutions, music festivals and international exhibitions as communicative forums – all these have clearly moved these activities away from the traditional model of “ideological protest” and towards an understanding that there are possibilities for insisting that “one is in the world” and “one is heard” without rushing to establish new institutional structures that will replace the old ones.

The blurred boundaries of what it is and what it means to be inside or outside and the resultant instability of the identities involved in making and remaking the world, have led us to shift our attention somewhat from new categories of identity such as global citizenship. Instead the very concept of “investment” moves centre stage making clear that it is not the inhabitation of power but the processes of intermingling subjectivities with it that is at stake. This “investment” does not imply the outlay, expenditure or the expansion of existing structures. Instead it functions in an “anticipatory” mode, which means the translation of a general unease into a series of potentialities. Within this anticipatory mode, procedures are suspended, operating modes are speculative, issues are just on the cusp of articulation, analysis is not yet possible. In this mode the subject does not have a clear-cut position or a stable place from which to think its position and therefore acts in a speculative mode. The visible indicators of change are evolving in less formal and structured ways which are sometimes more difficult to discern since their manifestations are at times ephemeral and contingent. What concerns us here is the drive to appropriate

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the right to make changes, the right to transform the protocols by which subjects take part in the culture of politics both locally and globally. Equally it is to address questions of how people give themselves permission to voice positions when they have not been asked to do so, how they evolve new strategies for taking part in cultural and political events and processes, when these do not yet exist for eliciting their participation.

Instead of an analysis one has to produce a fiction in order to have a framework in which to operate, to grasp an idea of the strength and transformative power that it might have to offer. Political movements such as the so-called anti-globalization movement or even the notorious "movement of 1968", have never properly existed as tangible, experienceable or questionable expressions of power or counter-power. They came to life as a sort of "social fiction" that has produced new subjectivities and therefore has had tremendous performative effects in the world – "as an opening onto the possible" like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it: "What counts amounted to a visionary phenomenon, as if a society suddenly perceived what was intolerable in itself and also saw the possibility of change."³

Contrary to proper functionality and epistemological facts, such social fiction does not only refer to its "constructedness" and very essence of being "made" or "made up" of something, as a concoction by mixing different desires as ingredients for a scheme that might offer new ways of living, working or learning together; it involves us in an imaginary project by considering things before they exist properly in time and by taking up developments that are not yet in place. Social fiction allows us to experiment with the possible and, at the same time, produce narrations that resonate in the present. It is anticipation in the most creative or productive sense and it needs to be discerned from reproductive anticipation as pure pre-emptiveness that works on the basis of a predictable and projected repetitiveness.

From migration to new media, in the last instance the discourse of globalization is driven by imaginative powers which are capable of producing social fiction that shapes the present: the power to anticipate circumstances as if they were already given and hence they obtain their force to actualize what exists as a virtuality. This needs to be linked to the previous point. The ability of illegal bordercrossers to anticipate a world without borders constitutes their real threat to the current border regimes – because it questions the widely propagated idea of migration management – the paradigm of directing, filtering and selecting migratory fluxes in principle and not just on the basis of an individual case or by sheer numbers. Or, the capacity of peer-to-peer or filesharing networks to anticipate free and equal access to the sources of wealth in a knowledge

economy which is the real basis of the superiority of peer-to-peer networking over traditional distribution systems.

Productive anticipation means playing with the unforeseeable, unpredictable, uncalculable. The objective of any activity in this respect is what cannot be forecasted. In so far as it has nothing to do with dreaming about a better world or utopianism, it rejects the quasi-religious connotations of hope; its elementary openness, its experimental character puts forth a certain asynchronicity and strangeness while being entirely focused on the here and now. Productive anticipation marks precisely the unexplicable and unexploitable rest that makes the difference between networking and the "new economy", between wild and immanent forms of collaboration and the predictable, purpose-driven nature of co-operation, between freedom of movement on a global scale and narrow-minded notions of mobility that remain the privilege of a very few or are restricted to only certain aspects.

When addressed through "culture", the implication of this conceptual shift is that this is not a representational field in which the political developments of the material world are reflected. Not founded in analysis or in a set of material conditions, the ability to speculate and anticipate becomes central to its formation and its emergence. Culture then transforms from a set of mirroring effects through which you can read various material and systemic shifts, to the staging ground of irreconcilable paradoxes.

Thus for example the anti-globalization movement has produced an actual notion of the global, that which it seemingly opposes. As such it is producing a far more coherent concept of "global" which in turn gets taken up and worked through the major agencies of global management. It would seem that both a coherent category and its major points of concern, arrived at by an oppositional movement, have in fact become the lynch pins of the official discourse.

We do not see such paradoxes as the "failure" to arrive at an all encompassing insight or at an operational model except as precisely "anticipatory". Rather than creating conditions, dependencies and causalities such notions of speculative anticipation can be characterized by opening up spaces in which new forms of activities can take place even before they are actually grounded or rooted in a situation or context. In his speculation on the ferocity of the Chinese government's response to the protests in Tiananmen Square, Giorgio Agamben has commented:

What was most striking about the demonstrations of the Chinese May was the relative absence of determinate contents in their demands (democracy and freedom are notions too generic and broadly defined to constitute the

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real object of conflict, and the only concrete demand, the rehabilitation of Hu Yao-Bang, was immediately granted). This makes the violence of the State's reaction seem even more inexplicable ... The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle between the state and the non-state (humanity), an insurmountable struggle between whatever singularity and the state organisation ... What the state cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition).⁴

What Agamben is sketching out, even in the midst of a real crisis, is an anticipatory mode, a way of indicating a change in the rules without prescribing an alternative.

Thus productive anticipation is a mode of precipitating what is not explainable by the given context of a situation. It requires operating with a certain variability instead of reflectivity. Instead of drawing conclusions from events after they have taken place, a parallel reality is being set up in which the manifest is what we aspire to rather than what we already have and critically oppose. In a world where everything gets modified and modifiable, what are the ways in which culture becomes an investment of citizenship with life and force? How would we understand this notion of investment? Perhaps this investment signals the increasingly non-representational mode of culture? Culture then might be distanced from a creative mode in which representational forms for the existing and clearly discernible problems of the world are invented.

The terms offered below are an attempt at an alternative language through which to engage with contemporary urgencies. Instead of offering models of governance and social organization, they offer an attempt to signal other ways of characterizing the tasks before us and the ways in which we come together to deal with them. One of the most significant shifts of recent emergent politics is that points of entry into the political are shifting and ways of coming or gathering are becoming actual forms rather than simply a means to an end. As such these terms are poised between a notion of "multitude" politics suggested by Negri and the importance of rethinking public gatherings suggested by Bruno Latour.

Access

The dissemination of contemporary culture, operating through institutions such as funded museums, theatres, festivals etc., is under increasing pressure to be "accessible" since it is seen as having a purpose, and its purpose is to rehearse

in another modality and with greater emphasis on subjectivity, conditions which exist in the world. Since the demise of the mid-twentieth-century model of culture as a source for contemplation and edification, an ever increasing pressure has set in to activate audiences and make them "aware". The discourses of "accessibility" propagated by both the state and the public institutions of culture are aimed at providing "points of entry" that forge an illusion of transparency and inclusion. Inadvertently they also espouse what is deemed as a necessary simplification on behalf of a notion of communicativeness. It is the role of culture, it would seem, to mediate between two levels of reality; objective and subjective and to put forward a model of translation. Like in any other model of translation, clarity and comprehension are its paramount values. The problem with these discourses of "accessibility", aside from the fact that they are deeply condescending, is that they produce a simplification of conditions that people actually experience as extremely complex and we would argue that instead of producing a simplified comprehension people might be searching for access to understanding that complexity which determines their lives.

And so instead we might posit an understanding of cultural practices viewed as inventing points of "access" to engaging urgent issues which are in the process of articulation. "Access" seems to us to be one of the most urgent drivers of contemporary culture. In contemporaneity it is a question of "access" – of how do we get to know things?, how do we get to take part in them?, how do we work out a position?, how do we intervene, not as a response to a demand to participate but as a way of taking over the means of producing the very questions that are circulating?

The state of "productive anticipation" we have broached encompasses the tension between the desire for "access" and the ability to actually inhabit the conditions and issues that shape our lives.

Direction (directed and undirected participation)

The question that dominates this understanding of participation is "what does it mean to take part in culture beyond the roles that culture allots us for this purpose?", beyond being viewers, listeners, visitors, beyond being voters, inmates and fillers of census forms?

As these, we mostly encounter directed participation in which we are allotted both roles and protocols to follow. Even in the art world and even within those practices that have attempted to actually thematize participation as their subject, we find mostly instances of directed participation. Throughout the 1990s we saw many exhibitions that attempted to stage the viewer as an active

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participant in the life of the exhibition. Each one of these exhibitions, more or less successfully dealt with issues of the representation of the marginal and with strategies of participation within the larger map of culture. All put forward an alternative to that model of participation determined by the good intentions and democratic aspirations of curators and organizers. Running the gamut from Hans Ulrich Olbrist's project "Take Me I'm Yours" at London's Serpentine Gallery in 1996, to Christine Hill's far more complex "Thrift Shop" at Documenta X in 1997 – these exemplify the models of participation predicated on a predetermined strategy, its rules set out as if in a game, its audiences treated like mice in some scientific experiment in which they scuttle through mazes and pedal on carousels in order to prove some point.

What is so disappointing about such projects is not the effect of the projects themselves but the curatorial assumptions which sustain them – assumptions about processes of democratizing cultural institutions by giving audiences some mechanical task to carry out and involving the materials of everyday life: old clothes, chewed gum, newspapers, anonymous photographs, etc. In these choreographed games no attention is paid to the power bases of the institutions themselves, to the needs of the audiences, to the possibility that these visitors might have something of value and relevance to say, if only given the space and the possibility and the legitimacy to articulate it. Perhaps most irritating is the use of everyday materials galvanized to act out some fantasy of democracy in action. These materials are familiar and not highly valued and therefore presumably perceived as "popular"; in setting them up a priori as a set of alternative cultural materials not only is nothing new being introduced into the discursive realm of the exhibition but that very possibility of actually encountering either an unknown formulation or the unexpected subversive deployment of them, a Situationist "détournage" of familiar materials, is effectively blocked.

A conjunction of "access" and of "participation" in a contemporary vein would allow audiences and publics to set out the questions and to invent modes of participation, and would allow us to take part also at the level of the unconscious; gathering, muttering, nodding our heads, catching a glimpse from the corner of one's eye and adding all these together to give some mode of a collective and meaningful presence.

Singularities

To unpack "singularity" we are using Giorgio Agamben's argument in *The Coming Community* that asks how we can conceive of a human community that lays no claims to identity; of how a community can be formed of singularities

that refuse any criteria of belonging; a community whose collective basis is neither the shared ideological principles nor the empathies of affinity and similarity. The potential that singularity holds out for the argument presented here is that it opens an alternative beyond dichotomies of "the individual" on the one hand and "the social" on the other. Instead "singularity" posits another model of individuals coming together in a collectivity which eludes a named identity and a familiar mode of operating.

The coming community is whatever being ... The whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example; being red, being French, being Muslim) but only in its being such as it is. Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal ... In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) – and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging but for its being-such, for belonging itself. Thus being-such which remains constantly hidden in the condition of belonging and which is in no way a real predicate, comes to light itself: The singularity exposed as such is whatever you want, that is, lovable.

Thus Agamben has broached a "community without identity" devoid of belonging and driven by desire. Its unique contribution is that its boundaries are not closed through a form of negative differentiation with the other, but produces a completely different relationality.

Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities. Through this relation, as Kant said, singularity borders all possibility and thus receives its *omnimoda determinato* not from its participation in a determinate concept or some actual property (being red, Italian, Communist) but only by means of this bordering.⁵

The potential of "singularity" in relation to issues of "access" and of "participation" is that it proposes another relation between subjects, one of being. As J.-L. Nancy argues, this allows us a transition from a collective of "having (something) in common" to one of "being in common".⁶ Thus "singularity" is another mode of relationality, another possibility of building community, not around a shared set of claims but rather around the sharing of momentary proximities and affiliations.

Collaboration

Facing the challenge of working environments towards these, Collaboration has sensibility that challenges political activism.

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Ownership

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Collaboration and collectivities

Facing the challenges of digital technologies, global communications, and networking environments, as well as the inherent ignorance of traditional systems towards these, exciting new modes of “working together” have emerged. Collaboration has become one of the leading terms of a contemporary political sensibility that characterizes a new generation of practices in the fields of art, political activism, as well as software development.

In contrast to co-operation, collaboration is driven by complex realities rather than romantic notions of common grounds or commonality. It is an ambivalent process constituted by a set of paradoxical relationships between co-producers who affect one another.

Collaboration entails rhizomatic structures where knowledge is not arranged around a centre, but grows exuberantly and proliferates in unforeseeable ways. In contrast to co-operation, which always implies an organic model and a transcendent function, collaboration is a strictly immanent and wild praxis. Every collaborative activity begins and ends within the framework of the collaboration. It has no external goal and cannot be decreed; it is strict intransitivity, it takes place, so to speak, for its own sake.

Collaborations are voracious. Once they are set into motion they can rapidly beset and affect entire modes of production. “Free” or “open source” software development is probably the most prominent example for the transformative power of collaboration to “un-define” the relationships between authors and producers on one side and users and consumers on the other side. It imposes a paradigm that treats every user as a potential collaborator who could effectively join the development of the code regardless of their actual interests and capacities. Participation becomes virtual: It is enough that one could contribute a patch or file an issue, one does not necessarily have to do it in order to enjoy the dynamics, the efficacy and the essential openness of a collaboration.

In the last instance collaborations are driven by the desire to create difference and refuse the absolutistic power of organization. Collaboration entails overcoming scarcity and inequality and struggling for the freedom to produce. It carries an immense social potential, as it is a form of realization and experience of the unlimited creativity of a multiplicity of all productive practices.

Ownership

In the juridical sense ownership means exclusive possession or control of property. With the increasing digitization of knowledge and immaterial as well as

material goods, exclusivity as the determinant aspect of ownership is more and more pressurized. The loss of, and cost-free "copyability" of, digital content and its distribution in networked environments poses the question of radically new models of ownership that do no longer operate on the basis of identity and leave the logics of inclusion and exclusion behind.

The emergence of open licensing models in the free and open source software movement, its expansion as "creative commons license" into the field of cultural production as well as non-legal forms of appropriation usually coined as "piracy" show the tremendous urgency of inventing, trying and evaluating a variety of concepts that facilitate multiplication and widest possible distribution regardless of their compatibility with the legal standards of Western civil law. Against the vision of digital rights management scenarios which are supposed to enable a system of control that operates in real time and is very likely to kill every aspect of further creativity, a notion of syndicated ownership is about to come into being which explicitly embraces asynchronicity, appropriation and further modification.

What Ravi Sundaram calls "pirated modernity"⁷ has indeed become the blueprint of another globalization, one that opens up a notion of the global that runs through places:

Local markets, neighbourhood music/video stores, grayware computer and audio-video assemblers, independent cable operators are usually part of the pirate network of distribution, which also 'bleeds' into other parts of the city. The commodities of the copy are multi-use, recombined/recycled and in near-constant circulation. In Delhi the media copy exists in a symbiotic relationship with all other commodities and industries: clothes, cosmetics, medicine, household goods, and also car and machine parts. As is evident, copy culture pits pirate modernity right into a global social conflict on definitions of property.⁸

The manifolded and unlimited variations which characterize pirate copy cultures and their imaginative strategies in launching ever new modes of redistribution may ironically lead back to an aspect that is constitutive for any kind of ownership: first of all ownership is a matter of imagination, an act of determining space and time, a rule of production. In order to own, one needs not only to construct oneself as a coherent and self-identical subjectivity, but one also has to make others believe in such a construction and be powerful enough to sustain it over a certain period of time and according to a certain territory. The more fluid and evasive contemporary configurations of the self and of ownership become the more unpromising these efforts seem. In order to mobilize imaginary forces to hold up classical constructions of property in the realm of

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immaterial production and stretch the ideology of "possessive individualism" across the globe, conflicting concepts of ownership need to get not only systematically demonized and criminalized, but also effectively marginalized. In the last instance this would require a despotic homogenization of time and space on a global scale which makes the current discourse of globalization look just like a walk in the park.

These five terms may be taken as a basis for creative investigation and experimentation with a series of terminologies and methodologies that might be capable of examining the potential of what it could mean to "invest citizenship with force and life". What needs to be researched are processes of subjectivation and – like Deleuze suggests in his answer to Negri's question that opened up this text – "the extent to which they elude both established forms of knowledge and the dominant forms of power".

Culture which has first re-appeared in the debate on globalization under the banner of a "Cultural exception" cannot be characterized as an area that needs to be protected. Instead of lamenting about the "MacWorld", we have to believe in our powers to make world.