Dividual Subjectivations in the Society of Control

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Today, new insights into the voluntary and involuntary participation of individual persons in biotic masses, ecological ensembles, and technological practices all create a need to redefine human subjectivations. Today, we presume that we, humans, stand and have always stood in relationships of interpenetration – generally unconscious, unreflected relationships with languages, images, sensory technologies, social and ecological surroundings – that question the traditional understanding of human identity and the assumption of the indivisibility and autonomy of the person/subject. They also question the epistemological differentiation of biological species, the demarcation of nations and cultures, and, ultimately, the defining of artworks as self-contained entities. Since we are ineluctably linked with bio- and socio(techno)logical processes insofar as they cannot be separated from us without endangering our further existence and our psychophysical consistency, we find ourselves faced with the task of considering, affirming, and moderating our (often contradictory) participations. The increased insight into qualitatively different forms of participation that produce new subjectivations force us to rethink our self-understanding in terms of ‘the individual.’ The fact that we today recognise that our existence is based on varied, material and immaterial, types of participation, demanding a multidirectional orientation of our attention and the development of mental and affective competencies that empower us to be what is known as ‘human persons,’ is something that we may judge either as a gain or an excessive burden. We recognise that our self-identity as ‘individual,’ as undivided entity, expresses a misleading negation of necessary, life-constituting participation and that, as a Latin translation of the Greek ‘atom,’ it is as untenable as the now discredited assumption that the atom is indivisible. Instead, we should learn to acknowledge that undividedness – and subdividedness – is a question of the scale of our modes of observation, and that everything our eyes perceive as complete and undivided only reflects a mode of human perception, with limited validity.

Not least, we have to understand that the term ‘individual’ – once used in the search for the universe’s smallest physical building blocks – did not come to mean the single human person until the late seventeenth century, and thus is coupled with certain historical circumstances. From that point on, it was used for the theoretical-political development and promotion of the bourgeois single person, who increasingly had to repre-
sent the definitive model of humanity – as a socio-political actor, as owner of property and land, of one’s own abilities, and as an independent business manager. Due to the central position of the human individual in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the liberal self-ruler who orders the world according to his abilities and desires is even praised as that genius that prescribes laws for nature. Since today we can recognise that promoting this theoretical-political operator was in the interests not only of bourgeois emancipation, but also of the emergence of the nation state (including its identitarian culture and imperialistic expansion) it appears urgently necessary to examine it under contemporary epistemic-political conditions. Not only from a (post)colonial perspective, this understanding of the individual is criticised today for its universalising as well as restrictive epistemic force; in response to the codification of human rights in the UN charter, even regional declarations of human rights refer to different, more community-related understandings of the person.

The interwovenness of the human existence with countless (and often non-human) others increases the difficulty of deciding where the boundary lies between single persons and others, between causation by others and by oneself. It also makes clear that it is not only human subjectivations for which the designation ‘individual’ is inappropriate. Thanks to ever-improving observational data on interdependencies between bio- and socio(techno)logical processes, and thanks to the perception of their inseparability, we also recognise that single organisms in general can only be investigated alone and ‘in themselves’ through artificial isolation, and that the epistemological detaching of social ensembles and specific cultures serves specific epistemic power interests. Singling out, isolation, individuation always reveal themselves to be part of strategies of privileging and hierarchisation, which, because they reduce complexity, prove to be invalid for diagnosing contemporary human subjectivations and changing relationships in globalised societies.

The ‘dividual’ in Deleuze’s philosophy

In his brief “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” Deleuze draws attention to the flexibilisation of human and non-human single entities under the post-analogue regime of visibility and control, the compulsion to engage in lifelong learning, the substitution of the human signature by machine codes, the way in which previously self-enclosed ensembles now adjust to one another in real time, and the targeted modulation of such adjustment. To a greater extent than Deleuze could have foreseen, single persons are today finding themselves subject to a continuous movement of liquefaction and ‘dividuation,’ as I would like to call it. The fact that single persons are placed in a relationship to abstract and non-personal powers of control and computing systems, that they are registered, directed, and intricately lent enhanced value by them, causes Deleuze to speak of
new modes of subjectivation: “We’re no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals become ‘dividuals’ and masses become samples, data, markets, or ‘banks.’” (1992: 5) In this late text, he adopts a gloomy outlook, sketching the process of becoming-dividual as resulting from the registering of single persons and whole populations by privatised and economicised regimes of recording and allocation, and by the compulsion to become fluid, following the model of stock prices and currency devaluations. Single persons appear dividuated due to their reduction to statistical values, the compulsion to participate at all times, and the modularising of their abilities and performances according to a given set of requirements, in a process of ‘distortion’ of what an individual was previously supposed to be.

By contrast, in his cinema books, Deleuze outlines a positive understanding of the dividual. Speaking of what determines filmic framing, in particular of the ‘affection image’ (2001: 102), he argues that the width and mobility of framings modify the captured and framed aesthetic ‘ensemble’ and thus, always, the expression of the image; the autonomous soundtrack also changes the atmosphere and affect value of single shots and the whole film, and they continually divide aesthetically in different ways. In its analogue form, it is characterised as an audiovisual interchange between virtual and actual conditions and, all in all, as dividual articulation: “Here, it is by degrees of mixing that the parts become distinct or confused in a continual transformation of values. The set cannot divide into parts without qualitatively changing each time.” (Deleuze 2001: 14) Like human subjectivation, it is held together by immanent repetition and affection, through their narrative symbolism and reflexion. As with human subjectivation, the dividual aspect in the artwork places the accent on inner variability, elasticity, and continual reorganisation of the aesthetic elements, on the necessary readjustment of participation, on time-dependent aesthetic re-divisions, on differences in intensity and light and sound divergences, which elude any simple registration: “parts which do not have the same denominator of distance, relief or light. In all these senses the frame ensures a deterritorialisation of the image.” (2001: 15) The filmic ensemble manifests itself as a dividual and particular assemblage of becoming, lending itself a special affective expression depending upon the affirmed and selected actualisation of the virtual.

Deleuze calls ‘dividual’ the expression of contemporary aesthetic heterogeneses, particularly in cinematic and musical artworks. He denies that their temporally determined multiplication of visual and auditory signs, sounds or voices (a multiplication that occurs within temporally shifting frameworks) displays a definable individuality: they represent nothing measurable or clearly determinate, are not “divisible or indivisible, but ‘dividual.’” (2001: 14) Filmic unfolding in time – its constantly changing image and sound composition – cannot be called individual, as it never crystallises lastingly into an expression that can be established and characterised unambiguously, especially in its digital computation process. Deleuze nevertheless sees the semiotic ensembles as con-
gleaning into a particular, even singular expression: “The affect is impersonal and is distinct from every individuated state of things; it is nonetheless singular and can enter into singular combinations or conjunctions with other affects.” (2001: 98) It seems important to him to emphasise that in spite of emerging from a variety of aesthetic factors, the expression of affect is indivisible; the new qualities it constitutes are affectively indivisible and at the same time aesthetically divided; therefore Deleuze calls them dividual. He conceptualises the dividual as an aesthetic differentiality, or, as it were, an undivided dividedness. This undivided dividedness, which is distinct from a notion of individual indivisibility by virtue of its immanent variability and interwovenness with others, is also attributed, by Deleuze and Guattari, to certain musical compositions, such as those of Luciano Berio, where tones are made to resound in a “multiple cry, a cry of the population, in the dividual of the One-Crowd.” (Deleuze/Guattari 2008: 377)

The concept of the dividual developed by Deleuze in an ambivalent sense serves here as an impulse for further reflections on actual human subjectivations, but also on all sorts of organic and symbolic entities which up to today have been considered undivided and indivisible. Taking Deleuze’s expositions and evaluations further, I intend to emphasise that the term dividuation today exhibits its contrariness and contradictoriness even more strongly. After all, it must be conceived as a highly ambivalent processuality, resulting, on the one hand, from the participatory affirmations of the present and the multidirectional interweaving of single persons into new collective formations with a precarious coherence, and, on the other hand, from involuntary co-optations and assignments through statistical recording strategies and other participation constraints. By extending the concept of the dividual and using the term ‘dividuation’ I want to accentuate (more strongly than Deleuze did) that persons have never been individuals or individuations; because of our increasing insight into the erroneous character of this self-description, I propose a change of terminology. We should conceive of ourselves no longer as individuals, but as intersections of different modes of voluntary and involuntary participation, as a metastable coherence in accordance with our rhythmic and psychophysical capabilities. Isn’t the corona crisis an illustrative example of (in)voluntary participation on different levels? Humans have to realise that they are de-individuated by a universalised danger and all equally exposed to a life-threatening viral infection. They become dividuated not only by similar psychological reactions, but by enforced political control and security measures, health prescriptions, shut-down regulations, or even digital surveillance, but also by increased internet activities, the need to rely on each other, and so forth.

The insight into human intersectionality is of course not limited to human subjectivations, but concerns all temporally (un)determined entities. Only if we learn to understand that each single entity which up to now has been classified as an individual should be considered as a specific and necessary dividuation will we gain a deeper insight into
the complexity of bio- and socio(techno)logical processes. Thanks to improved micro-insights, we can today recognize our microstructural dividuatedness, our dependence on nonhuman others – such as bacteria and viruses – but also the lengthy genesis we share with them. The same is true of our embeddedness in the socio-technological field.

Due to these insights, the position of those designated as ‘other’ is called into question as well. What is conventionally classified as different now appears not to be different in every respect: for instance, we share a large percentage of our genetic information with nonhuman organisms, and nonhuman agents are active in the decoding of our genome. Technologically supported language and image communications co-model our self-image and language behaviour, our imaginations, and our psychophysical consistency. They take on research functions previously considered integral to humans, respond to interests by offering products to purchase, stimulate perception with semiotic information, and aid orientation in space and time in the lived world. From digital communication, they extract risks represented by the person; they assign humans to certain problem groups, forestall vulnerabilities by offering preventative measures, and thus may influence longevity. Glad to be rid of the challenges of self-management, we allow ourselves to be helped, outsourcing our capacities, becoming more similar in the minimal activity of clicks, reducing our communicative competence to exchanging short messages, and integrating ourselves into virtual social assemblies. These practices alone should convince us to understand ourselves as participation-obsessed and as virtuosos of self-division, as divided by – and partaking in – countless others, being necessarily co-embedded in unknown assemblages.

Philosophies of (de-)individualisation

In a related sense, Michel Foucault, in his preface to the US edition of Anti-Oedipus, outlines desirable group formations that he calls a “generator of de-individualization.” (Deleuze/Guattari 2004: xvi) This demand imposed on human subjectivations and social formations alike – that of being not individual and at the same time particular, both open and delimitable – constitutes the ultimate challenge today, both for single humans and their symbolic practices, and for cultures and societies. For how is one to lastingly succeed in uniting the modes of decentred pluri-participation into a structure that is both mobile and coherent, and which, moreover, achieves for itself as singular an expression as possible? It seems to me that since modes of participation are shared with many others, it would make more sense to consider that which articulates itself not as a singular and unique, but as a different expression, one with its own special profile and tone (for instance, a particular quantity rather than a unique identity).
Alfred North Whitehead attempts to conceptualise such relations of participation when he insists on situating ‘atomic’ single beings within a ‘divisibility’ (1929: 321) whose actual division they can bring about, and which guarantees them undividedness and divisibility at one and the same time. Both “one” and “definitely complex” (321), they are “united by the various allied relationships of whole to part, and of overlapping so as to possess common parts” (91). As complex units, they then provide each of their components with “a real diversity of status,” that is, with a reality that is “peculiar” (322) to them. Prior to the reflections outlined here, Whitehead assumes different participations and subdivisions proper to single entities; this is why he attributes to them “subjective unity,” “objective identity” and “objective diversity” (321), all at once. Because of their objective diversity, referring to them as ‘atomic’ seems to me to be inappropriate, all the more so as Whitehead emphasises that “[t]here are always entities beyond entities, because nonentity is no boundary” (91-92). It would seem more consistent to conceptualise them as processes of variously rhythmatised and qualitatively diverse participation that are nevertheless “more than a mere collective disjunction of component elements” (323). Their psychophysical coherence, autopoeietic dynamic, and vital expression fuse them into a specifically complex unity with a particular aesthetic profile.

The concept of dividuation is also to be understood as the continuation and becoming-more-acute of that which Gilbert Simondon understood to be human ‘individuation’ (1964). He shifted the accent from focusing on autonomous individuals to focusing on complex and problematic individuation processes of the single person and the associated necessary and precarious integration. Previously, Spinoza, in his *Ethics* (1999), thought of the human body as “composed of a great number of complex individual parts” (II, LS15), composed of solid, fluid, and gaseous individuals, and as furthermore affected by external bodies. The human body appears here as a dynamic composite of multiply affected individuals which “stands in need for his preservation of a number of other bodies, by which it is continually, so to speak, regenerated.” (II, Postulate 4) Similarly, Simondon criticises the ‘conclusive’ and reductive concept of the individual as resting on false ontological premises, such as atomistic substantialism or Aristotelian hylo-morphism. He views atomism as a conception unsuited to describing vital temporal processes and ontogeneses because it concerns itself only with fundamental physical units and their connection, and ties cohesive forces to elementary particles. Simondon, on the other hand, understands human individuation as the result of qualitatively diverse, overlapping, awkwardly spliced, and high-tension processes, which, critical for the purpose of this article, can only be synthesised into a single entity through elastic cohesion forces and permeable immunisations. This synthesising brings with it a merely ‘metastable’ state, in which the partial individuations progressively shift; they must balance their ‘incompatibility’ relative to each other and recombine.
In order to be able to develop in the first place, the single entity must bring together within itself qualitatively different operations and, to join them, must have in reserve the ‘addition operation’ of the psyche. Simondon defines individuation as a multilayered and non-concluding process, where physical and vital individuation provides a ‘pedestal’ for psychic individuation. Through elastic binding and regeneration and reproduction forces, individual entities are lent a certain cohesion, duration, and possibility of self-reflection, creating autopoietic capacities such as impulsiveness, affectability, and intellection. In their oblique and phase-dependent interconnection, these are said to take the single persons beyond themselves and into real associations with others. Every succeeding individuation is said to depend upon the successful integration of new individuations: in view of this, why did Simondon not use the concept of dividuation? After all, his further definitions also imply time-dependent dividual relationships. In fact, he explicitly mentions the dangers of conclusion connected with the individual. Since the different individuations actualise themselves non-simultaneously, the single entity is never completely realised. Instead, it must continually battle to balance out its affective polarities and to harmonise its contrary needs for differentiation and integration. Simondon sees this conflictual constitution as the defining expression of viability, since an individual that responds exclusively to itself and is closed to external forces cannot reach beyond the boundaries of its fear – a statement possibly intended to distance himself from Freud's and Heidegger's definition of fear as a basic affect or as a mood that is fundamental to existentialist essentialising.

Simondon sees individuations that can shift in relation to each other as founded in processes he calls ‘pre-individual.’ These ontogenetically co-constitute the single person and are co-responsible for the person’s inner unrest and mobility – perhaps analogous to Freud’s understanding of the unconscious. Owing to their genesis in these pre-individual multiplicities, single persons are forced to affirmatively repeat this originary differentiality, for the purpose of which they must acquire a psychic dimension. Since others also participate in these pre-individual realities, they inevitably harmonise with others in a ‘trans-individual’ problematics: “Entrance into psychic reality signifies entrance into a transitional stage, as solving the intra-individual psychic problematics [...] takes one to the trans-individual level.” (Simondon 1964: 154)\(^1\) Human individuations find themselves bound to others in pre-individual participation, compelling intra-individual problem solutions and enabling their trans-individual orientation: just as psychic individuation stands in a ‘reciprocal’ relationship to the collective, so do the ‘inner’ individuations to the ‘external’ ones. Simondon accords single persons, who transfer their transindividual orientation into real group formations, an “individuation in collective unity.” (Simondon 1964: 154) Individuation is thus an event multiply shared with others, from a virtual starting point in the pre-individual to a potential transindividual

\(^1\) All translations by Alice Kirkland.
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actualisation as sociality. For this reason, they tend to orient themselves multidirectionally, engaging in diverse or even incompatible participations and coming together in collectives and condividuations. Thus, in my opinion, these mobile individuations would be better described as dividuals, since their problematics are greater than their own ‘being,’ causing lateral connection with others. Today, these individuations are transforming themselves into inherently mobile and still more precarious dividuals in the effort to join together their vital, physical, and psychic individuations as distinguished by Simondon.

In Du mode d’existence des objets techniques (Simondon 1969), the ‘trans-individual’ world proceeds from the technological connectivity aspect of individuations, from their invention and construction operations, and the use, regulation, and improvement of machines. Trans-individuality “produces a connection between the invention and organisation capacities of multiple subjects. There is a reciprocal causality and occasioning relationship between the existence of the separated, non-alienated technical objects, which are deployed in a non-alienated mode, and the constitution of such a trans-individual relation.” (Simondon 1969: 253) Under the heading of the trans-individual, he now sketches couplings of single entities via divided technical capacities and cultural techniques or – particularly apt in today’s context – via technological communication that interconnects them. They lean upon one another, and, in the best case, come together in a higher capacity for the exchange of information, for generalised affect and intellect. Since single persons are diverse in their participations and, being co-constituted as diverse entities, never operate as undivided, I conceptualise them as dividuals. Thus, I would say that they do not participate merely in a single trans-(in)dividual, but are variously transdividually passivised and activated, and come together to form diverse condividuations that are, in the best case, self-reflexive and resilient.

The technological dispositifs, however, set up their own trans-dividual group profiles, insofar as they filter out and compile specified types from the recorded data that are of interest because of their expressive or interconnective behaviour, their consumer habits, or their communicated fears. Simondon reiterates that, because they must overcome their fears, single persons must resolve, as a tumultuous conflict within them, their inborn collective. Is this one of the reasons why so many today come together in ‘social’ networks, thus turning their innermost emotions outward?

Contemporary biologists likewise see themselves obliged, from a biodiversity perspective, to argue less in terms of single organisms than from vital interdependence-contexts and diversity-fostering courses of development, and thus to expand the field of investigation. In view of environmental problems, there is an urgent need for an increased co-incorporation of nonhuman agents and for granting them a not merely functional right to exist in human contexts. Additionally, science theorists say we should take
into account the epistemological consequences of technological changes in observation processes by acknowledging that different results are produced depending on optical focus, timeframe, and the agents taken into account. Likewise, different ‘natural-cultural’ interrelationships are opened up, causing Bruno Latour (2010) to call for a ‘physical sociology.’

In the biological realm, dividuation means the participation of different species in one another – viruses in human beings for example; these species are biologically divided according to conventional taxonomy, nonetheless they constitute a ‘self and same’ being which cannot be practically divided by risk of life. In the socio(techno)logical realm, it delineates culturally composite packs, culturally transversal commonalities, and new media co-operations, but, additionally, problematises fragmented and forced dividual identity formations. Dividuation, it can be stated at this point, simultaneously emphasises the epistemological and ethical gains resulting from the insight into global interdependencies and the necessity of sacrificing outdated self-identities, but also the dangers resulting from political or economic participation compulsions or identity-oriented forced assignments.

In light of this, the epistemological motif of ‘undivided dividedness’ needs to be emphasised once more: single beings physically and psychically constitute themselves within a ‘continuum of division’ before they participate actively in that continuum and model themselves further through conjunction and disjunction of participations, through potentiation or disruption. Depending on the extent to which they succeed in joining their various modalities of participation, but also in retaining the openness of their mobility, rhythms, and further affections, they describe themselves as connected or isolated, or both at once. ‘Both at once’ is presumably the basic feeling most characteristic of today’s human modes of existence: in spite of being connected to various 24-hour hotlines and through all kinds of ‘social media,’ and in spite of sharing with millions of other people the same place of residence, the same life practices and pieces of information, not to mention sharing a physique and genetic code with an even greater number of others, even non-human ones, these modes of existence may experience themselves not just as spatially but also as affectively isolated, and as harshly separated from the social whole.

At the same time, it is precisely today that new possibilities are opening up for single persons to connect and form transdividual socialities and affective condividuations: modes of communicative, action-oriented, multidirectional association. In themselves, these variously extensive socialities replicate the dividual structure, insofar as they result from different modes of participation, from the release of colligative wishes and fantasies, on the one hand, and from polyphonic, consensus-oriented negotiations, on the other: negotiations that open up a problem area and are not necessarily liable to pro-
duce decisions and actions. They can nevertheless merge, like a human megaphone, into a specific expression of affect that testifies to a particular tone, a new aesthetic quality, a recently invented form of cooperation, thereby assuming an epistemological and political quality. The term used to refer to such affective-cognitive multiplicities, ‘condividuation,’ is inspired by Gerald Raunig’s (2011) term ‘condivision.’ Raunig coined this term to refer to politically motivated, non-identitarian associations of particular multiplicities. The perspective of condividuation is also intended to draw attention to economic inequalities of distribution and denied participation, serving as a reminder that the age of imposed participation and of the imperative to participate calls for the invention of new modes of dissident redistribution.

Processes of dividuation are also increasingly evident in the aesthetic and artistic realm, due both to technology-based practices and to the globalisation of the art scene, as well as to the close spatio-temporal cross-referencing of artistic positings, their quasi-simultaneity of presentation and reception, their simultaneous presence at various exhibition sites, and in different cultural contexts. As is well known, the uniqueness and authenticity of the artwork have, for some time, already been called into question due to the possibility of its mechanical reproduction, even if photographs and films attempt to newly auratise themselves by means of magnitude and spectacle. Self-reflexive artistic practices that are aware of their own historical and media-determined prestructuredness therefore increasingly rely on processes of dividuation, on procedures of repetition, appropriation, and modification, employing tactics of reframing and recontextualising in a manner ranging from the ironic to the provocative. Their specific engagement with their necessarily dividual constitution results from today’s mediatic processes of production and distribution, but also from the simultaneous presentation of artworks in different exhibition contexts and the reciprocal reflection of those contexts.

In summary, my choice of the term dividuation (inspired by Deleuze’s use of the term ‘dividual’) amounts to a value judgement insofar as I emphasise certain features of single entities more than others: I stress their passive-active constitution over their autonomous power, their ongoing division into diverse practices over the self-posting they perform through expressive acts, their division of capabilities over their specialisation, their interculturally diverse affections and mediatic interpassivities over their active interaction. The concept of dividuation is intended to foreground unconceptualised relations of interpenetration between taxonomically and discursively distinct magnitudes, between human beings, microorganisms and non-human entities, social structures and their constitutive practices.

Dividuation describes a relationship to the self that is expanded to include passive dimensions. This perspective results from increased insight into the co-determinate nature of human subjectivation in terms of greatly differing others, which imposes a new
task: not just that of being aware of participation, compulsions, and lures, but also of selecting, coordinating, and interrupting them. The multidirectional orientations and embeddings can be experienced as an increase in capabilities or a psychological strain and excessive distraction of attention; one must be aware of the challenges implicit in participation and moderate them ever more precisely. For dividual consciousness ultimately demands that we understand the lateral ties as an opportunity for as yet unthought of (eco)policies, and that we resist unwanted appropriations through affirmed solidarisation with others. Comings-together of persons and groups may emerge in condividualisations: resistant ensembles that set themselves against the economic condividualisations of major enterprises and databanks through various interruptions of appropriation or other conindividual attitudes. It suggests the putting together of participation potentials in condividual ensembles that, as associations of divided intentions, abilities, and ideas, endeavour to combat techno-strategic appropriations by control forces as well as by epistemological curtailments, political exclusions, and eco(techno)logical over-exploitation. With the term condividuation, lateral alliances, transversal capacity connections, subversive knowledge communications, and new strategies of interrupting participation become thinkable.

Dividuation in this sense is not a normative term, but one coined to more adequately define contemporary participation processes – and intended to contribute to more complex political understandings of the relationship between self and world. Against the associated, not unjustified fear of the loss of difference, it seems to me that one can still assert that every dividuation is different from every other one, owing to its own peculiar mode of participation, and always represents a peculiar virtual cohesion. I certainly would reserve the term ‘singularity’ for exceptional phenomena, as what this term really denotes is otherwise denied. It seems to me that all the various peculiar dividual cohesions can be recorded in a sufficiently differential way in the term ‘particular.’ Epistemologically, politically, and aesthetically, it remains desirable to accentuate differences between the dividuations, to work on differentiations, and to note from which perspective, with what framing, under consideration of which participation, according to which omission, and through which evaluation of single persons or groups any given structure or artwork can be recognised and acknowledged as specifically dividual and thus different. Thus, one must pay attention to degrees, shadings, indeterminate affections, and peculiar participation mixes, and reveal those that are suited to a multifaceted, inclusive, and also significant form of participation in the process of world-becoming.

Works cited


