



The notion of wholes and parts has fallen out of favour in critical discourses. It seems to belong to a time indebted to classical ideals of beauty, perfection, and harmony. Especially when one thinks of social relations, it conjures up the use of organic metaphors to naturalize contradictions, antagonisms, and vertical hierarchies in stratified orders. While a whole constituted of co-operating parts contains promises from which also the parts can benefit, the accent now seems to lie on how the whole constitutes its parts through domination, subordination, and the threat of exclusion. In other words, the whole is seen as too much more than the sum of its parts.

At the same time, while much critical effort has been spent on deconstructing all claims to wholeness, envisaging more open models of association, and making space for other potentialities, global challenges – be they financial, economic, political, or ecological – have led to renewed efforts to constitute powerful wholes and secure them through control, surveillance, and discipline both inside and outside their borders. Not only do some of these efforts appear remarkably successful, but they also seem to thrive on the weaker forms of association as if these and their elements were, after all, parts of a larger whole that constitutes them.

How are wholes differently constituted and how do they constitute their parts and elements? How can one be attuned to heterogeneities and potentialities without participating in the reparation of existing structures of domination? Conversely, how can one maintain a critical position towards persistent wholes without making them inescapable and foreclosing the possibility of reducing violence and arriving at more benign forms of association? The 2013–14 lecture series will address and debate these and similar questions from a variety of perspectives.

All talks start at 7:30 pm and are in English.

Constituting Wholes II

ICI Lecture
Series

