

Molarization and Singularization: Social Movements, Transformation and Hegemony

by

Nicholas Montgomery  
BA, Queen's University, 2007

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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**Abstract**

This thesis presents a critique of counterhegemony, arguing that imperatives of unity and coherence in social movement theory and practice tend to limit potentials for transformation. I use the ‘new social movement theory’ of Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine in order to foreground the problem of intelligibility. Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of articulation is used to develop the problem of intelligibility, and helps to avoid reification. However, I argue that their concept of counterhegemony presents a blackmail where social movements either represent themselves in universal terms, or are cast as merely fragmented and particular. The Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts molarization and molecularization are used to argue that social movements that appear fragmented or vague may in fact be transformative in unexpected ways. The final chapter focuses on a recent guerilla garden at the University of Victoria, and I argue that it is significant in its capacity to foreground problems and suspend commonsense habits, without presenting a coherent and unified programme.

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## Introduction: Social Movements in General and in Particular

It's not easy to see things from the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below... try: you'll see that everything changes.<sup>1</sup>

This project began as an attempt to think about social movements in a way that resonated with my own experiences with radical activism. I hoped to find ways of thinking about transformation, creativity and experimentation while also paying attention to long-standing problems of racism, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and the State. I was also interested in the politics of solidarity, alliances, and connections between social movements. For this reason, I was reluctant to focus on a 'particular movement'; to do this seemed to erase some of the complexities at play from the outset. In fact, one of the problems I hope to investigate is the dichotomy of universal/particular, and the implications this has for social movements.

My second reason for avoiding the focus on a single movement or site was that I hoped to come up with theoretical insights that might be applicable to movements 'in general', or at least the ones that I'm involved in or sympathetic towards. Focusing on a single movement seemed too particularistic and limited to me. However, I quickly came to realize that the hope for universal terms, concepts, or strategies was part of a long-standing historical *problem* of how social movements are represented, and how they represent themselves. The hope to think movements 'in general' rather than 'in their particularity' already betrays an assumption that the level of 'the general' might yield some insights about what social movements have *in common*, and that these commonalities would be more significant than their 'particular' differences. It became

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 23.

increasingly apparent to me that there are real political stakes in how social movements are represented, what one thinks (or assumes) a social movement is, what practices count as political, and so on. In short, the question of how to theorize social movements is a political question. The dichotomy of ‘general/particular’ or ‘universal/particular’ is a persistent problem for thinking about social movements, and its common-sense usage seems to generate real obstacles for thinking creatively. Does it even make sense to speak of ‘social movements’ *in general*? Does a refusal to think about social movements ‘in general’ mean focusing instead on a *particular* movement? Is it possible that the general/particular dichotomy is a form of blackmail that prevents us from thinking otherwise?

My third reason for avoiding the focus on a single social movement was an attempt to think critically about the concept of ‘counterhegemony’ along with the political imperatives produced by this concept. In radical political thought, hegemony has been a common way of thinking about the ways in which liberal States are able to maintain their dominance by manufacturing the consent of their populations. The hope for social movements is often that they will form a ‘counterhegemonic bloc’ capable of effecting a large-scale transformation, usually away from capitalism and towards socialism. However, counterhegemony has been criticized for its homogenizing and universalizing tendencies.<sup>2</sup> This could be understood as part of a broader critique of universal categories and metanarratives. For example, Western feminism has been criticized for its reliance on a universalizing category of ‘woman’ that functions as a

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<sup>2</sup> See Richard J. F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 46-90.

hegemonic norm against which (or within which) to understand 'Third World' women.<sup>3</sup> Recently, some authors have tried to affirm the category of the 'non-hegemonic' as a way of thinking about social movements that did not fall into traps of universalism and unity.<sup>4</sup> The category of the non-hegemonic seemed to provide a useful analytic distinction that focused on a fairly neglected area of thought about social movements. However, I quickly ran into trouble in attempts to think about the non-hegemonic.

Affirming 'non-hegemonic' social movements seemed to relegate movements to the pole of 'particularity' in the universal/particular dichotomy, at least from the perspective of hegemony. If your movement and its aims aren't universal, they must be particular (and therefore local, parochial, insignificant, ineffective, and all the other implicit assumptions about what it means to (not) be universal). If non-hegemonic simply refers to movements that do not (by design or by chance) achieve hegemonic change, is this simply an affirmation of one pole of the universal/particular dichotomy while leaving it in place?

This led me to the terrain of ontology. It became clear that in order to challenge the universal/particular dichotomy, its ontological underpinnings would need to be investigated. What makes it so easy to claim that contemporary struggles seem too fragmented, too disorganized, and too directionless to present a meaningful challenge to global capitalism, for instance? What ontological assumptions need to be made in order to claim that struggles lack unity, efficacy, or strategy? If these ontological assumptions

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<sup>3</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). This is one of the most groundbreaking critiques in this area, in which Mohanty criticizes feminism for its universalizing assumptions about the category of 'woman'.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Richard J. F. Day, "From Hegemony to Affinity," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5 (2004): 716-748.

inscribe *lack* in movements that do not conform to the ideals of unity and strategy, could a different ontology enable a different understanding of these movements? If dominant, common-sensical ontological assumptions enable the perpetuation of sedimented categories, practices, and politics, could a different ontology enable a different politics?

These questions may seem frustratingly abstract to many readers, especially those involved in everyday resistance to gentrification, corporatization, colonialism, environmental destruction, and other processes. In this context, philosophical musings about ontology may seem like an elitist privilege of an Ivory Tower intellectual. Why not use this thesis to discuss something that might be of immediate use to activists? I cannot claim that this thesis will be immediately useful; however, it is worth noting that oppression and domination are often reinforced by ontological assumptions, and undermining these assumptions is a difficult challenge. Private property, state authority, bureaucracy, and capitalism are all made possible—at least in part—by assumptions about the world, how it works, and who has the authority to govern it. These categories are often policed by physical force; however, they are also policed by common-sensical habits of thought. Furthermore, social movements often develop their own forms of common sense, which can end up perpetuating domination, oppression, escapism, or dogmatism. What makes it possible for a tiny group to think that it will be the revolutionary vanguard that ushers in world communism? What makes it possible for white ‘progressive’ activists to claim that colonialism is in the past, and that the real problems are corporations or environmental destruction? What makes it possible for people to dismiss certain political struggles as too vague and fragmented? I would argue

that many of these arguments are made possible by ontological assumptions, some of which are interrogated in this thesis.

As a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class male myself, I benefit from the exploitation of the Third World, Indigenous peoples, and the environment, in addition to the histories of racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression that systematically privilege subjects like myself. I am committed to unlearning the assumptions that enable these forms of oppression, and to finding ways to act collectively to confront them and create alternatives to them. This work is written for (potential) allies in the struggle against capitalism, the modern states system, corporatization, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and other forms of domination and oppression. There is no attempt to convince anyone that these systems are violent or that they are worth demolishing. Nor is there any attempt to articulate a coherent path for how they should be demolished, resisted or replaced by something new. In this project, I have been particularly inspired by anarchism, feminism, Indigenous political thought, and post-structuralism.

My hope is that a different ontology—a different understanding of representation, effectiveness, creativity, experimentation, change, and their interrelationships—might help enable more creative thinking about radical politics. The claim here is not that this ontological reworking is entirely new, or that it could guide an entirely new form of politics. The ontological arguments have been articulated more rigorously by thinkers like Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and Brian Massumi, among others. Many of the critiques of social movement theory have been articulated by Richard Day, Wendy Brown, Peyman Vahabzadeh, Simon Tormey, Warren Magnusson, and RBJ

Walker. I recommend reading as much of their work as possible.<sup>5</sup> However, these works are only a part of a much broader movement in academic writing and political organizing that has challenged the dominance of Marxist and liberal thought in industrialized, Western societies.<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, this thesis might be better conceived as part of a social movement itself, taking ideas, arguments, tactics and practices and recomposing them in a way that (hopefully) has some interesting effects, and destabilizes some of the assumptions that are given by liberalism and Marxism. Even the claim that a text could be part of a social movement, rather than simply a ‘representation’ of it, requires challenging traditional separations between theory and practice, or between philosophy and the ‘real’ world it is

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<sup>5</sup> See especially Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995); Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (New York: Viking Press, 1983); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Felix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes. (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008); Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana trans. David Macey. (New York: Picador, 2003); Warren Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Warren Magnusson, "Globalization, Movements, and the Decentred State," in *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice: Studies in the Politics of Counter-hegemony*, ed. William K. Carroll. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1997); Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, "Horizontal, Verticals, and the Conflicting Logics of Transformative Politics," in *Confronting Globalization: Humanity, Justice and the Renewal of Politics*, eds. Chamsy el-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden. (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2005), 208-226.; Karena Shaw and Warren Magnusson eds., *A Political Space: Reading the Global Through Clayoquot Sound*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Simon Tormey, "'Not in my Name': Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation," *Parliamentary Affairs* 59, no. 1 (2006): 138-154.; Peyman Vahabzadeh, *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); R. B. J. Walker and Warren Magnusson, "Decentering the State: Political Theory and Canadian Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy* 26 (1988): 37-71.; R. B. J. Walker, "Social Movements/World Politics," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 669-700.

<sup>6</sup> This indictment of Marxism and liberalism does not mean that these two traditions are the same. In criticizing them in general terms, I risk erasing their specificities and divergent genealogies. Furthermore, their hegemony is not equivalent, and it often functions in different ways. However, Marxist thought tends to be informed by the same bourgeois ontology as liberalism. This means that despite its more oppositional politics, Marxism follows liberalism in its tendency of focusing on the State as the primary object of political struggle. For a critique of this more general ontology, which informs my own argument, see Walker and Magnusson, "Decentering the State: Political Theory and Canadian Political Economy," 37-71.

supposed to represent. A central problem of this paper is to come to terms with the fact that ideas, representations and ‘theory’ are immanent to ‘the world’, rather than surveying and representing it from an outside.

This suggests that the problem is not simply ‘out there’, with the creativity or radicality of social movements. It’s also ‘in here’ in the concepts deployed to make phenomena intelligible, political, and significant. In this sense, theory is itself a practice, and traditional theoretical concepts are actually the remains of old political struggles.<sup>7</sup> Concepts of social movements, revolution, reform, politics, and resistance have emerged out of historical struggles, and the fact that they often appear natural or fixed is a symptom of their reification. For example, the concept of ‘social movement’ itself carries its own history and intellectual baggage, often married to the concept of revolution and ‘progressive’ social change.<sup>8</sup> My purpose here is not to do a genealogy of the concept of ‘social movement’, however. What I want to suggest is that the concept of social movements is one way of tunneling into a broad set of problems about representation, intelligibility, transformation, politics, universality, and experimentation. From another perspective, these more philosophical debates are one way of tunneling into the problems of rigidification, oppression and transformation with which activists are often concerned.

Working at the intersection of ontological debates and radical political practice has made it very difficult to explain what this thesis is ‘about’ in any simple way. I still haven’t found a way to give a short and consistent account of my thesis when someone asks, in part because it has very different resonances with different audiences. Some

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<sup>7</sup> Magnusson, “Globalization, Movements, and the Decentered State,” 95

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-9

people are most interested in the philosophical dichotomy of universality/particularity, and the alternative ontological arguments about the molar, the molecular and singularity. Others are interested in the critique of counterhegemony and its reductive effects. Others are impatient with these philosophical and historical debates, and focus instead on the case study of the Garden at the University of Victoria. I hope that all of these considerations intersect and resonate in a number of ways.

It is important to note that this thesis is primarily confined to discourses and political struggles in North America and Europe. The weight of Marxism and liberalism has been felt globally; however, most of the authors I engage with are primarily European and European-descended settlers in North America. In many ways, this repeats the problem of Eurocentrism, where one focuses primarily on European, white, male writers. At the same time, many of the thinkers I have mentioned are highly critical of imperialism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and the modern states system. They are plumbing the margins of their own Western philosophical and political traditions in hopes of destabilizing dominant political practices and inventing or experimenting with alternatives. As a white male, I hope to locate myself within this tradition of resistance to my own inheritances through an immanent critique of them, and through the exploration of transformative political practices.

### **Approaching Social Movements**

For many, the anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations of 1999 in Seattle marked a new period of radical militancy, ushering in the ‘anti-globalization movement’ or ‘the movement of movements’. Others have traced this legacy back to 1988, when

thousands converged on Berlin to protest International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings.<sup>9</sup> Others focus on the World Social Forum and the Zapatistas.<sup>10</sup> Others have traced these forms of politics to May '68 in France or the emergence of the 'new social movements' in Europe and North America.<sup>11</sup>

A persistent theme in the literatures that have proliferated on the anti-globalization movement, the World Social Forums, the Zapatistas, and other forms of contemporary activism is that there is something new going on, something that makes these struggles different from those that came before. A number of theorists have argued that anarchism is displacing socialism as a radical political imaginary, pointing to anarchist currents in the anti-globalization movement and other contemporary forms of activism.<sup>12</sup> However, contemporary so-called anarchist movements are influenced by a wide variety of different discourses and traditions, and one won't be able to infer much about them by reading classical anarchists such as Kropotkin, Proudhon, or Bakunin.<sup>13</sup> There has been a proliferation of anarchist-inspired discourses within academia, linking

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<sup>9</sup> Amory Starr and Jason Adams, "Anti-globalization: The Global Fight for Local Autonomy," *New Political Science* 25, no. 1 (2003): 19-42.

<sup>10</sup> Tormey, "Not in my Name: Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation," 138-154.; Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "The World Social Forum: Toward a Counter-hegemonic Globalization," in *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, ed. Jai Sen. (New Delhi: Viveka Foundation, 2004); John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Gavin Grindon, "Carnival Against Capital: A Comparison of Bakhtin, Vaneigem, and Bey," *Anarchist Studies* 12, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>12</sup> See David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13, no. 1 (2002): 61-73., David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008); Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*; Robinson and Tormey, "Horizontals, Verticals, and the Conflicting Logics of Transformative Politics"; Simon Tormey, *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner's Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004); Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> See Graeber, "The New Anarchists," 61-73. David Graeber argues that anarchism is being revitalized and draws on a number of disparate traditions of thinking and action that reach far beyond classical anarchism, although its practices are often subsumed in what is typically called the 'anti-globalization movement'.

anarchism with post-structuralism and Indigenous political thought, among others.<sup>14</sup>

However, I would suggest that the most interesting arguments in these discourses are not their expositions of what a renewed anarchism looks like, but rather in their critiques of the dominance of liberalism and Marxism. In this context, anarchism is only one of many political traditions that has been crushed under the weight of categories and practices that inform politics.

My interest in these new movements was stimulated by the notion that they could be ‘non-hegemonic’, creating alternatives to the hegemonic order rather than attempting to impose a new hegemony. This might involve experiments with alternative economies, subjectivities, or communities that refuse incorporation or absorption into the hegemonic order. What interested me most about non-hegemonic practices was the possibility that they could be open-ended and experimental, in the sense of creating and embodying real, lived alternatives to capitalism and the state-form. In focusing on non-hegemonic movements, a central problem is that of *intelligibility*. Very broadly, I would suggest that social movements tend to be made intelligible in two ways, both of which create serious difficulties for thinking about non-hegemonic social movements.

The first is the notion that social movements can be made intelligible as *struggling for* something. Here, one encounters some of the most common-sensical statements about movements: who are you, what is your aim, what are your objectives, and how do you propose to get there? In short: what are you *struggling for*? In this way

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<sup>14</sup> For post-structuralist anarchism, see Robinson and Tormey, “Horizontal, Verticals, and the Conflicting Logics of Transformative Politics,” 208-226.; Lewis Call, *Postmodern Anarchism*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002); Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001); Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); For anarcho-indigenism, see Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005); Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2007).

of making social movements intelligible, an ‘inside’ is carved out, which is coherent and unified: that is, coherent and unified *enough* to discover or deduce the aims, objectives, and subjects of a social movement. The women’s movement might be made intelligible as a struggle for equality and recognition and the civil rights movement as a struggle for universal suffrage and equal rights. There are two problems here in terms of thinking about the non-hegemonic creation of alternatives. The first is that ‘struggle for’ often ends up creating, assuming, or imposing a unified perspective and shoving difference and multiplicity to the side. What’s deduced, produced, or imposed is the intelligibility of *a single group, a single (set of) objectives, a single strategy*, and so on. The second problem helps to emphasize that this is not simply a question of emphasizing diversity over sameness. The heart of the matter cannot be addressed by discovering a plurality of aims and objectives at work. It’s not just that ‘struggle for’ presupposes a *single set of objectives and aims*, but *that it presupposes objectives and aims in the first place*. It assumes that a movement can be *represented as a whole*, either by its participants or by the theorist. If objectives are the condition of possibility of intelligibility, where is the place of creativity, open-endedness, and experimentation? When a struggle is made intelligible as a *struggle for* something, questions of experimentation tend to become instrumentalized, if they are intelligible at all: *creativity for an objective*. Do strategy, coherence, and unity force out questions of creativity and open-endedness?

A different and related way of making social movements intelligible is by understanding them as a ‘struggle against’ something. This formulation is often inscribed in the everyday language used to name movements: the anti-racist movement, the anti-war movement, the anti-nuclear movement are made intelligible not by what they’re *for*,

but by what they're *against*. In a similar way, an interior is carved out, except this time, it's the thing being opposed: the U.S. military apparatus, the nuclear industry, or racism, for example. Indeed, I made use of this mode of intelligibility in the preface, when I situated this work *against* racism, colonialism and capitalism. The thing that's being opposed is given internal consistency; its operations, effects, and assumptions are described. Social movements are intelligible, in this formulation, by the way in which they disrupt, resist, contest, or transform the object that they oppose: the way in which they *struggle against it*. This formulation may avoid the assumption or imposition of any internal unity on a social movement or struggle, but places different limits on the intelligibility of social movements. A struggle is intelligible by the way in which it disrupts, resists, or transforms the structure in question. This means that it falls out of intelligibility when it's not disrupting or resisting. Attempts to give these struggles some continuity or to move beyond subversion or resistance tend to flip back into *struggle for* by specifying objectives, aims or giving the movement an internal consistency.

This broad contextualization is not meant to imply that social movements must not be made intelligible in terms of their objectives or the problems they confront. Furthermore, the formulation of 'struggle for' and 'struggle against' does not refer to a specific discourse on social movements. I chose this formulation because it seems to capture an extremely broad tendency in thinking about social movements.<sup>15</sup> The problem with these formulations is that they tend to be reductive, simplifying the messiness, open-endedness, and experimental aspects of social movements.

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<sup>15</sup> These tendencies are pervasive from theoretical traditions as diverse as resource mobilization theory, new social movement theory and neo-Gramscian theories of hegemony.

Furthermore, the simplistic formulations of ‘struggle for’ and ‘struggle against’ also pervade academic writings. Academics often make a name for themselves by launching a scathing critique *against* their opponents, or they chart out a clear path and explain, in no uncertain terms, what they are *for*. If this work is set against something, it is against these simplistic formulations themselves, which tend towards sectarian debates and simplistic solutions to complex problems. I could easily be accused of obscurantism, depoliticization, or even conservatism: why make politics complex and difficult when it can be distilled in simpler terms? Why question unity and strategy? Why refuse to articulate a way forward? My argument is that politics is always already complex and difficult, and simplifying things is costly. It comes at the cost of creativity and newness. When something is problematized, it often becomes apparent that practices have ossified, or that theories have been simplified. Through this process, experimentation and invention become possible. Simple solutions usually reproduce problems in a different way. Finding ways to suspend common sense and habits, in turn, requires experimentation. With ‘experimentation,’ I am not referring to experiments conducted according to the scientific method, or experiments that would be reproducible and verifiable. On the contrary, experimentation takes place in a field of radical contingency and singularity. A major argument of this thesis is that traditional social movement theory is ill-equipped to think experimentation and newness. The concept of ‘experimentation’ remains necessarily vague at this point, because it requires an understanding of the concepts of singularization and molarization, elaborated later in the thesis.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, this thesis should be read as experimental and tentative. My aim is to intensify complex problems and make them palpable, rather than providing solutions.

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<sup>16</sup> Experimentation is explicitly elaborated in Part 5.

One of the major obstacles to experimentation, I will argue, is counter-hegemony and universalism, along with the imperatives of unity, strategy, and coherence that flow from it. The unitary subject of history—if it ever existed—is dead. Or perhaps more accurately, the subject of history is a zombie, perpetually resurrected under the signs of ‘the people’, ‘the public’, ‘the majority’, ‘the oppressed’, ‘the working class’ or even ‘all humanity’. Representing struggles in these terms remains highly seductive to both activists and intellectuals, because it seems to lend legitimacy and force to movements. The argument here is not that such resurrections are impossible, but that they stymie movement, creativity and newness. Defining movements in terms of what they *are* gets in the way of their open-ended becoming what they are not (yet).

In discourses of social movements, the subject of history tends to be built on the model of the working class. If only the workers of the world could see that they are part of the same struggle, that they are all exploited by capitalism, that they all share a *fundamental sameness*, then it would only be a matter of time before they rose up against their oppressors. Since at least the 1970s, however, many social movements have explicitly challenged the notion of a single, fundamental axis of oppression.<sup>17</sup> The working class, if it can be said to exist at all, is shot through with antagonisms and complexities of racism, patriarchy, colonialism and heteronormativity. It has become increasingly clear that different forms of oppression overlap and intersect in complex ways, and contemporary social movements confront them in ways that may be equally complex.

This recognition of complexity has not resulted in the end of aspirations for a universal subject and many are still searching for a basis of sameness that could finally

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<sup>17</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 69.

unite political struggles. Without this unity, it is thought, these struggles are particularistic, fragmented, and disparate. The argument here is that the dichotomies of unity/diversity or universality/particularity reinforce one another, so that struggles or movements have no basis of sameness or commonality, they seem to be thrown into an abyss of difference. This has important implications for political practice and representation. If unity is a prerequisite to politics, we must articulate who ‘we’ are before we’ve done anything else, so that our unity and identity tends to precede and determine our practices and tactics. This often produces the need to map out ‘our’ linear strategy, and to police and discipline practices that don’t conform to this strategy.<sup>18</sup>

The argument here is *not* that all recourse to unity, identity, strategy and linearity are wrong or bad, but that they are often the basis on which social movements are made intelligible, and this basis is worth questioning. There are alternatives, but they remain marginalized, cast as particularism and fragmentation: the opposite of unity and coherence. Sameness, unity, difference and transformation must be thought in a more complex way, without reducing them to diametrical opposites. This argument is not particularly new, and it is possible to locate alternative currents that refuse the dichotomies of unity/difference and open up new possibilities for collective action.<sup>19</sup>

What does it mean to make experimentation and open-ended transformation intelligible? What does it mean to make a claim that a movement is transformative but

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<sup>18</sup> The pronoun ‘we’ is emphasized here to foreground the way in which assumptions about a common ‘we’ tend to inform theory and practice of social movements, leading to the subsumption of complex differences under a common signifier. As will be shown later, this subsumption is part of the process of hegemonic articulation. I have tried to avoid using ‘we’ and to avoid assuming a homogenous readership for this reason; however, avoiding these grammatical problems often proves difficult, and sometimes the pronouns ‘we’, ‘our’, or ‘us’ are used for the sake of simplicity or to avoid awkward sentence structures.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Richard Day’s genealogy of ‘affinity’ that attempts to make intelligible a non-universalizing political practice that is immanent to modern Western theory, in Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 91-128.

not (counter)hegemonic? Is it possible to speak of transformation without presupposing an object that is transformed or subverted (struggle *against*) or an ‘inside’ that gives a predetermined objective and trajectory (struggle *for*)? What theoretical concepts could enable claims like these? I will suggest that one possible response to this problem is to rethink the concept of politics as a dynamic mix of processes. One aim of this thesis is to think the political through a dynamic dualism of the molar and the molecular. Whereas hegemony provides us with a way to think about molarizing political processes, I suggest that it obscures processes of open-ended, experimental politics.

I hope to tackle this problem in two interrelated ways in Part 1, which will lay the groundwork for my inquiry. The following critique unfolds through a reading of ‘new social movement’ theory, and the struggles that emerged over how to make these ostensibly new movements intelligible. When I first engaged with this literature, I expected to find fairly uncritical attempts to subsume these movements under the banner of counter-hegemony, or attempts to insist that these movements needed to engage with the state, or broader attempts to subsume social movements as ‘struggles for’ and ‘struggles against’. Counter-hegemony, Statism, and the for/against dichotomy are certainly prevalent in accounts of new social movements; however, it’s also possible to locate the appearance of very different problems. In a political climate dominated by Marxism, it was apparent that new movements weren’t following the norms of the Marxist parties and intelligentsia, but it wasn’t clear exactly what was ‘new’, or how to think about it. With Alberto Melucci in particular, I found a sustained attempt to articulate representation, intelligibility and experimentation as *problems* for social movement theory. I will trace out the way in which these problems are covered over by

counter-hegemony and statism; however, my main objective is to *recover* these problems and consider them in a more sustained way.

Is it possible to find and deploy concepts that affirm creativity, experimentation, and open-ended transformation in social movements? Where and how does one look for it? Is it possible to avoid falling into the dichotomy of ‘struggle for’ and ‘struggle against’? Is it possible to speak of transformations and movements that do not operate hegemonically but are nonetheless politically significant and transformative? What would it mean to make these transformations intelligible theoretically? What does it mean to represent social movements, and how does representation fold into and out of intelligibility?

Part 2 focuses on Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of hegemony and attempts to problematize its ontological assumptions. There are a number of reasons for this reading. Laclau and Mouffe’s rereading of hegemony has been very influential on social movement theory, so focusing on their theory gives us a way into contemporary debates.<sup>20</sup> Laclau and Mouffe give us half of the puzzle: their concept of ‘articulation’ looks a lot like ‘molarization’: it is the process through which movements come to be coherent, forming clear insides and outsides, and creating a basis of unity. What’s missing are the processes of molecularization: these are banished to the negative, as momentary subversions or disruptions that pave the way for a different unity. The privileging of molarization leads to a seductive blackmail: *either* movements represent

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<sup>20</sup> The debates I am referring to are often concerned, implicitly or explicitly, with two divergent ontologies. One runs through Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida, while the other runs through Spinoza, Leibniz, Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead and Deleuze. A third interlocutor is often a traditional version of Marxism. These debates are played out in a number of ways, including the status of the subject, the limits of discourse (and what lies beyond), and the status of negativity. For my purposes, the most important debates are those that focus on representation, hegemony and their implications for politics. I will say more about this later, with reference to specific authors and debates.

themselves as the embodiment of universal values, ideas, and goals, *or* they consign themselves to the merely particular. Either you find a basis of unity, or you play in your own little garden. The concept of the molecular helps to break the dichotomy of universal/particular. In between, squeezed out by this blackmail, is the singular. Singularity orients us to open-ended transformation, normally rendered unthinkable by our philosophical inheritances.

Part 3 focuses on the ways in which processes of singularization and open-ended transformation are co-opted by molarizing forces, steered into predictable, linear paths and reformist resolutions. I will argue that this co-optation is built into the commonsensical grammar of social movements, which attempts to plot them in terms of a linear direction or a dichotomous opposition. These problems are not simply theoretical. I argue that they have been translated into practices, procedures and categories that fold into social movements, reproducing the assumption that the State is the locus of politics. I call this molarizing process ‘Statism’: social movements are led to see that the State is the site of resolution to their political problems: State reform is what they wanted all along.

Part 4 argues that social movements are not simply passive victims in the process of molarization. I argue that counterhegemony tends to cast experimental social movements in terms of what they lack: coherence, strategy, and a clear direction that would allow them to move forward. I argue that social movements that refuse the universalizing narratives of counterhegemony are not merely condemned to particularity, but actively ward off strategy, coherence, and unification in ways that allow them to orient themselves to newness and experimentation.

Part 5 attempts to bring the conceptual vocabulary of molarization and molecularization together by orienting us to a particular site of political struggle at the University of Victoria. It considers a set of events where people dug a garden in the middle of the university, without the permission of the administration. The challenge is not to explain the reason behind these tactics, but to problematize the assumption that tactics like these are reducible to a coherent reason or a linear objective. This site allows us to foreground the ways in which political experimentation is continually co-opted by molarizing processes that make events intelligible in reductive terms, sapping the potentials of events, covering over the problems they raise with common sense and recognition. My aim is to foreground the political force of vagueness, uncertainty and open-ended change through what I call processes of singularization. The point is not to get rid of strategy, representation and demands of social movements, but to understand them as one process among others in political struggle.

## Part 1: Newness, Reification, Intelligibility

Early attempts to theorize ‘new social movements’ are interesting because problems of intelligibility, representation, and transformation are particularly acute. I will argue that some of the most important questions raised by new social movement theory about intelligibility and transformation have been buried by the ontological assumptions of hegemony and Statism. For now, I want to provide a brief review of the emergence of ‘new social movements’ and the problems they posed.

The term ‘new social movements’ emerged out of the attempt to account for an explosion of political struggles in the 1960s and 70s in Europe and North America, which transformed assumptions about what radical political struggles could be. According to Peyman Vahabzadeh:

The term *new social movements* emerged to designate a wide range of contemporary movements: ecological and environmentalist movements, feminist and women’s movements, AIDS, peace, gay and lesbian, Indigenous or aboriginal rights movements, antipoverty campaigns, various solidarity groups, antinuclear protest networks, adequate housing pressure groups, mentally- or physically-challenged support networks, support action groups for illegal immigrants or refugee rights associations, self-help groups of mothers, villagers, farmers, and neighbourhood residents.<sup>21</sup>

The term ‘new social movements’ encompasses many things, and there are a number of different attempts to explain exactly what makes these movements ‘new’.<sup>22</sup> However, there is also a broadly shared tendency to think of the ‘newness’ of NSMs in relation to the ‘old’ social movements of Marxism. Sometimes, new social movements are

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<sup>21</sup> Vahabzadeh, *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> For a sustained attempt to think about the ‘newness’ of new social movements in a nuanced way, see Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, eds. John Keane and Paul Mier (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).

differentiated based on their (new) class composition;<sup>23</sup> based on their (new) forms of organization;<sup>24</sup> or based on their (new) focus on identity and everyday life.<sup>25</sup> It has been pointed out, however, that this way of making NSMs intelligible—by defining them against OSMs—often results in the reification of both NSMs and OSMs.<sup>26</sup> Marxism has creative tendencies and operates in everyday life like the so-called ‘new social movements’, so a simple either/or distinction doesn’t seem to hold. What was decisive in the new social movements was a rejection of *hegemonic* Marxism, which had routinized, centralized and confined politics to the space of political parties and mechanistic models of social change.

The most complex accounts of NSMs often take in a number of these differences, registering the fact that social movements are not simply ‘different’ from Marxist social movements, but problematize the very categories used to analyze them, many of which have been inherited from Marxism and political economy.<sup>27</sup> In post-war Europe, Marxism dominated the intellectual and political landscape of radical politics, producing a rationalized, predetermined framework for social change, which was supposed to

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<sup>23</sup> For Klaus Eder, new social movements are understood as ‘middle class movements’ and thus differentiated from the working class composition of Marxism. See Klaus Eder, *The New Politics of Class: Social Movements and Cultural Dynamics in Advanced Societies*, (London: Sage Publications, 1993)

<sup>24</sup> Alan Scott, *Ideology and the New Social Movements*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), esp. 32-5

<sup>25</sup> This is a central theme running through Melucci’s work. See Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> This can be seen, for example, in Melucci’s questioning of the applicability of Marxist dualisms of base/superstructure in *Ibid.*, 41. See also Peyman Vahabzadeh’s treatment of new social movements. He undertakes a project similar to my own, attempting to foreground possibilities for non-hegemonic political practice; however, he does so through a phenomenological approach informed by Derrida, Heidegger and Laclau. In contrast, this thesis attempts to bring Deleuze’s immanentist ontology into conversation with Laclau’s deconstructive approach, using singularization to foreground the positivity and ontological primacy of difference. See Vahabzadeh, *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements*.

culminate in revolution.<sup>28</sup> This orthodoxy also extended into the academy and political parties, where Marxism became professionalized and institutionalized.<sup>29</sup> This trend was not limited to Europe. William Carroll argues that Canadian political economy “recognized movements as forces for social change, but it explained their existence and imputed their historical meaning directly from the master narrative of political economy itself.”<sup>30</sup> This meant that social movements tended to be explained and understood through references to contradictions or transformations effected by capitalism.

New social movement theory (NSM theory) is often marked by an attempt to escape the limitations of Marxist analyses that seemed more and more evident with the rise of NSMs. For NSM theorists Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine, social movements have to be understood as more than reactions to structural contradictions. For too long, social movements had been relegated to the ‘superstructural’ level of politics, understood as simply reactions to ‘deeper’ and more fundamental developments at the ‘base’ of society. According to Melucci, Marxist analyses were tailored to ‘industrial society’ in which the universal, primary struggle was that of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, over the means of production. For Melucci and Touraine, industrial society has been superseded by ‘postindustrial society’. Postindustrial society, (used interchangeably with programmed society) is no longer characterized by the class domination of industrial society. Instead, programmed society is dominated by a technocratic management apparatus, and struggles are defined “by their resistance to

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<sup>28</sup> Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> William K. Carroll, "Social Movements and Counterhegemony: Canadian Contexts and Social Theories," in *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice: Studies in the Politics of Counter-hegemony*, ed. William K. Carroll. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1997), 6.

domination by the apparatus.”<sup>31</sup> Political action is no longer confined to struggles against the state or capitalism, because forms of domination and control have become more diffuse, and so too has resistance to it.<sup>32</sup>

Melucci’s explanation of NSMs is very similar to Touraine’s, suggesting that the era of industrial worker-capitalist conflict is over, and has been replaced by “new forms of collective action in areas previously untouched by social conflicts.”<sup>33</sup> Melucci questions the applicability of Marxist ontological assumptions to NSMs, asking whether it is still possible to understand society in terms of a fundamental conflict, or to deploy the dualisms of base/superstructure, centre/periphery characteristic of industrial society.<sup>34</sup> His attempt to get away from Marxist economism is also premised on a historical argument, similar to Touraine’s, that industrial society has been replaced by ‘complex societies’, characterized by the intensification of control. He affirms Foucault’s work in his description of complex societies, arguing that they are characterized by “diffuse and less visible forms of system integration.”<sup>35</sup> NSMs, by contrast, are forms of collective action that challenge and overturn the dominant codes produced in complex societies.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, new social movement collective action is that which disrupts the forms of control and integration of complex societies.

This disruption is not reducible to transgression, but instead “renders power visible” by “exaggerating or pushing to the limit the dominant discourse of power.”<sup>37</sup>

The function of these conflicts, for Melucci, is “to render visible the power that hides

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<sup>31</sup> Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

behind the rationality of administrative or organizational procedures or the show-business aspects of politics.”<sup>38</sup> For Melucci and Touraine, power is understood as increasingly diffuse and networked, and a significant aspect of new social movements seems to be the capacity to render these subtle forms of power visible, so that they may be contested and eventually transformed. What is represented here by struggles is not an internal demand, need, or unity, but rather the ‘system’ (or systems) of power, dispersed throughout society, which reproduces itself through specific rationalities and legitimations. In this sense, Touraine and Melucci tend to understand NSMs in terms of a *struggle against* the dominant codes and discourses of society.

Similarly, Peyman Vahabzadeh positions ‘new social movements’ against the hegemonic discourse of Marxism. For Vahabzadeh, Marxism produces a grid of intelligibility that makes NSMs invisible: “for a long time, the Revolution imposed on all social movements certain practices that conformed to its *teleological norms of activity*.”<sup>39</sup> Practices of ‘old social movements’ such as strikes could be represented as the workers’ movement and its interests, whereas NSMs could not: NSMs did not reproduce the revolutionary discourse of Marxism, and their practices could not be assimilated into the struggle against capitalism.

Like Melucci and Touraine, Vahabzadeh argues that NSMs “indicate the extension of social conflictuality onto various terrains of social life which have no necessary socialist (or class) character.”<sup>40</sup> Insofar as Marxism is hegemonic, practices that do not fall within the boundaries of the Marxist discourse are unintelligible.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Vahabzadeh, *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements*, 156.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

Vahabzadeh shows that it was not simply that these movements displayed new orientations and practices that differed from Marxism, but that these differences were unintelligible because they did not fit the model of revolutionary social change.<sup>41</sup> In other words, because new social movements could not be understood in terms of a ‘struggle against capitalism’, they tended to be dismissed as mere side-shows in the real fundamental conflict of workers and capitalists.

Reading social movements within or against stable ‘structures’ or ‘fixtures’ is a dominant tendency not limited to Marxist theory.<sup>42</sup> For example, feminist authors have argued that patriarchy is the fundamental structure that needs overthrowing, and that other forms of oppression can be understood as bi-products or side effects of the domination of men over women.<sup>43</sup> Patriarchy replaces capitalism as the root or base of all oppression: everything else is just a side-effect. Others have argued that this tendency is one of the primary obstacles to thinking creatively about social movements.<sup>44</sup> Social movements—if they are ‘progressive’—have located and are struggling against *the* central fixture or structure that reproduces oppression in all its forms. Similarly, the assumption of a central structure enables the dismissal of various social movements as reactionary or reformist on the basis that they fail to challenge the fundamental structure.<sup>45</sup> This is one of the simplest ways of understanding social movements as *struggles against* a form of oppression. If a social movement can be positioned against

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-72.

<sup>42</sup> Warren Magnusson has argued that this tendency is made possible by a statist conception of politics, reproduced through the disciplinary division of labour between political science and sociology. See Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space*, 32-40.

<sup>43</sup> This assumption runs through a number of feminist arguments; however, it is probably most obvious in the work of Shulamith Firestone, who replaces the Marxist dialectic of class with a dialectic of sex. See Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, (New York: Morrow, 1970).

<sup>44</sup> This is the central argument in Magnusson, “Globalization, Movements, and the Decentred State”.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-7.

the central axis of oppression, it must be progressive, and if it reinforces or ignores that axis, it must be reactionary. In this sense, readings of social movements as *struggles against oppression* are able to produce judgments about them, sorting out the good from the bad, the effective from the ineffective, and identifying the primary obstacles to real, meaningful transformation.

New social movements were interesting because they didn't seem to be doing anything 'political' because they were working in areas outside the terrain of traditional politics. Struggles around prisons, nuclear power, or sexuality seemed to be peripheral distractions compared to the well-trodden path of struggles against capitalism and the State. Institutions and practices that were thought to be natural, or reduced to symptoms of more important problems, were being politicized and transformed by new social movements. In this sense, social movements were not merely struggling against these institutions 'on the ground' but also against the modes of thought that made them intelligible as merely peripheral, reactionary or reformist. By foregrounding the notion of intelligibility, it is possible to see that concepts and categories are not merely tools to 'understand' social movements; they are also the condition of possibility of their intelligibility. In the context of 1970s Europe, Marxism formed a regime of intelligibility through which movements became thinkable and intelligible. Melucci and Touraine saw that this regime of intelligibility was being stretched and disrupted by the new movements. What do you do when movements break the categories designed to contain them?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This question is foregrounded by Walker in his analysis of social movements. See Walker, "Social Movements/World Politics," 669-700.

In this context, it was difficult to make sense of the explosion of movements that did not identify themselves with proletarian struggle or the goal of revolution, but nonetheless seemed to present the possibility of radical transformation. So far, I have suggested that NSMs have been understood as *struggles against* postindustrial society and its more diffuse relations of power. However, new social movement theory is often marked by the attempt to articulate a *positive* basis of struggle, to give an internal consistency to these movements. The transformational potential of NSMs was one of the major stakes in NSM theory: how could social movements be thought differently, in a way that is not overdetermined by the Marxist privileging of revolutionary class discourse? How to think about the novelty or ‘newness’ of new social movements presented a significant problem for theorists. It was not simply that social movements had different objectives in mind, but also that clear objectives and strategies were being displaced by more experimental practices. How can these struggles be made intelligible without having access to what they’re *struggling for*?

NSM theorists like Melucci and Touraine were thus attempting to analyze movements and struggles that are (or were) *on the edge of intelligibility*. It was clear that these movements represented a departure from Marxist practices, and there were no ready-made categories that seemed to account for them. Touraine suggests that new social movements are not reducible to a struggle for revolution *or* reform, making the direction of these movements unclear.<sup>47</sup> For Touraine, “fresh upsurges are being felt, new thrusts forward, which have not yet been defined or which refuse to be defined by social relations: these include the rejection of an industrial society grown

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<sup>47</sup> Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, 10-11.

overwhelmingly crushing.”<sup>48</sup> Melucci attempts to get away from the idea, inherited from Marxism, that social movements are the embodiment of the universal subjects of history, or that they are expressions of a central, structural contradiction. His analyses lead him to ask whether conflicts of a universal nature could even be said to exist.<sup>49</sup> He criticizes theories that “continue to speak of the workers’ movement, the women’s movement, the youth movement, the ecology movement or the peace movement as if they are living subjects who act as homogenous entities, expressing the deepest contradictions of society or its values.”<sup>50</sup>

While he wants to avoid subsuming social movements in narratives about a universal *subject* of history, he also wants to avoid reifying the movements as a “unified empirical datum”, or *object*, which would understand movements as homogenous entities.<sup>51</sup> The theoretical traditions of resource mobilization and political opportunity structure tended to understand social movements as coherent objects, reducible to groups of people, which could be understood in terms of rational actors working collectively to pursue objectives that would maximize their self-interest.<sup>52</sup> Of central concern here is the question of representation and its relationship to social movements. Melucci attempts to avoid reducing a movement to the way it is represented by its participants, without discounting these representations. A significant problem for Melucci is that a movement does not act in a concerted way. People are often involved in a wide variety of activities,

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 61.

<sup>50</sup> See in particular Melucci’s set of guiding questions and his analysis of the problem of theory. *Ibid.*, 20, 25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> I have chosen to exclude resource mobilization theory from my analysis because of its rationalistic and objectifying assumptions. For a summary, critique and debate about resource mobilization theory and its relationship to new social movement theory, see Dieter Rucht ed., *Research on Social Movements: The State of the Art in Western Europe and the USA*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 323-391.

struggles and issues that might be subsumed under the nominal category of a single movement. In this sense, homogeneity needs to be inferred by what the movement says about itself.<sup>53</sup> In other words, a movement might make claims about where it's going or what it is struggling for that would present clear objectives and aims; however, Melucci is reluctant to take these claims as constitutive of movements. The notion that a 'group' can embody a historical movement always seems to rely on what the group says about itself, so how could this ever account for the group's formation? His central problem in *Nomads of the Present* could be characterized as an attempt to think about social movements as the outcome of multiple processes, which construct the apparent unity and homogeneity of a movement.<sup>54</sup>

For Touraine, new social movements are subsumed as symptoms of nascent conflicts in society. The task of theory is to separate out the different directions in struggles—what they are struggling for—in order to discover “the central form of conflict” that was previously occupied by the workers' movement against capitalism.<sup>55</sup> Although he wants to avoid a reduction of social movements to structural shifts or contradictions in capitalism, Touraine's analysis slides back into an understanding of social movements that repeats the same structural moves: if the central conflict isn't between workers and capitalists, it must be somewhere else, and social movements point the way towards this conflict.

Melucci is often caught between two imperatives. On the one hand, he wants a clear definition of a social movement that differentiates it from other forms of collective action. On the other hand, he is aware of the fact that definitions like these often erase

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<sup>53</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, 9.

the complexities he is interested in, resulting in reification of social movements as empirical ‘objects’ or as subjects of history. While he avoids the claim that social movements are reducible to a *single* conflict, Melucci sometimes falls into reductive traps, defining a social movement as a conflict that produces a homogenous inside, formed by “actors’ mutual recognition that they are part of a single social movement” and an outside, understood as “opposition to an adversary who lays claim to the same goods or values” as the actors in question.<sup>56</sup> Social movements are thus intelligible as conflict between two adversaries laying claim to the same thing, creating a neat separation between two sides and their common goal of control over a given resource.

The dichotomy of inside/outside exists in perpetual tension with some of Melucci’s claims about the complexity and multiplicity of new movements, and the sense that they do not fit comfortably in categories that produce distinct insides and outsides. He argues that it is inadequate to reduce a movement to its objectives or its goals (what it is struggling for), suggesting that collective actors have “no programme, no future”, resembling “nomads who dwell within the present.”<sup>57</sup> Here, instrumental goals and objectives are less important than the way movements organize themselves, and the subtle alterations they make to everyday life.<sup>58</sup> Rather than unified movements with clear objectives and trajectories, Melucci often speaks of fragmented and dispersed networks invested in experimentation and the development of alternative perceptions and meanings.<sup>59</sup> For Melucci, new struggles and networks are not reducible to representable objectives, goals, or directions; it becomes difficult to explain these movements as

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<sup>56</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present : Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 60.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-1.

struggles *for* something. For example, Melucci argues that the women's movement involves demands for new rights and equality; however, he warns that the movement is not reducible to these objectives, and that it also raises the question of difference and the need for "alternative codes".<sup>60</sup> Social movements are not reducible to mobilizations or the issuing of demands; new movements live in another 'molecular' dimension: "in the everyday network of social relations, in the capacity to reappropriate space and time, and in the attempt to practice alternative lifestyles."<sup>61</sup>

The way in which these changes become intelligible is an open-ended problem for Melucci, and he routinely criticizes theories that dismiss this molecular dimension as "uninteresting or unmeasurable, as expressive or as folkloristic."<sup>62</sup> He insists that what is needed is another way of seeing, preoccupied with the exploration of unfamiliar territory.<sup>63</sup> These concerns elude any attempt to articulate a social movement as a *struggle for* a unified objective or as a *struggle against* a unified outside. If social movements are open-ended and experimental, how could they ever be represented as moving towards a unified objective? If relations of power have become increasingly diffuse, how could a unified opponent or adversary ever be specified?

Melucci sometimes subsumes social movements in a simple inside/outside dichotomy, or assumes prepolitical 'individuals' as the building blocks of social movements. However, his slippages into reductionism are not unique; on the contrary, much of the theoretical literature proceeds by reducing social movements to empirical, measurable characteristics. His attempt to understand social movements as the outcome

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

of processes helps to avoid reification, orienting us to the processes that make movements appear as coherent wholes (or as incoherent messiness). Melucci is distinguished by his hesitations, questions, problematization of reductionist approaches, and his open-ended questioning of social movements.

He dwells on a number of important problems that are often ignored. How can one think about the ways in which social movements represent themselves, without reducing them to those representations? How can one avoid reifying social movements by assuming that they are unified empirical objects? What processes produce the formation of a (seemingly) coherent social movement? Perhaps even more pressingly, what processes produce other formations, without coherent insides and outsides, in what Melucci called the ‘molecular’ dimension of movements? Finally, how can one think the relationships between these processes of coherence and incoherence? If social movements have no programme, and the claims made on their behalf cannot be taken as constitutive of them, how can one think about the practices of social movements and the transformations they effect? How can one think about creativity and experimentation in social movements? If social movements are not reducible to what Melucci called their ‘political dimension’ (the ways they engage with states and their representative institutions), then how can one think about the forms of change they effect without recourse to state institutions? Melucci also saw that social movement theory was plagued by a ‘myopia of the visible,’ any change that was not measurable or overt is ignored.<sup>64</sup> What conceptual tools are available to think about the imperceptible transformations of everyday life effected by social movements? How can we orient ourselves to movements

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

that are *on the edge of intelligibility*, sensitizing ourselves to newness and open-ended change?

### **Subsuming Social Movements**

For other theorists of social movements, these intangible, unintelligible aspects are problems that need solving, so that more serious concerns can be discussed. Creative or experimental aspects of social movements are often understood only in negative terms, as a *lack* of engagement with institutions, or a lack of effectiveness in achieving real and meaningful social and political change (whatever that is). Although Touraine often orients himself towards movements that do not fit neatly within Marxist categories, he tends to subsume creativity and vagueness in a stagist conception of movements, in which these ephemeral aspects of social movements are merely part of the beginning stages of a social movement, before it has become political, before it has become involved in institutions and representational agents, and before it becomes aware of the more “general problems of society.”<sup>65</sup> The rift between governments and social movements shows the necessity of reconstructing ‘political life’ and thus of locating the links between representative, political institutions and nascent social movements.<sup>66</sup> In this reading, the experimental, open-ended, and creative tendencies are subsumed by a stagist view of the ‘development’ of social movements: these characteristics are merely the beginning stages of something more concrete, more ‘political’, where politics is limited to practices oriented towards the State. The creation of alternative spaces becomes an instrument in enabling claims and providing strength to the movements when they finally do engage with institutions. Melucci falls into a similar trap in his arguments

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

about political representation. Although he recognizes that collective action is never reducible to the way it is represented to the State, Melucci fails to think about the political implications of channeling movements through reformist channels, conceiving it as a benign process of accommodation.<sup>67</sup>

Below, I will consider a particularly sophisticated tradition that tends towards a dismissal of the vague and ephemeral aspects of social movements. This strain of thought revolves around the concepts of hegemony and counterhegemony. Hegemony does not point to a single, fundamental axis of oppression, such as patriarchy, domination of nature, colonialism, or capitalism. Instead, hegemony points to *the way in which various forms of oppression are held in place* and the way in which forms of domination or oppression are legitimized and made to seem necessary or natural. For many theorists of hegemony, this raises the possibility (and sometimes the necessity) of a counterhegemonic opposition: a movement or coalition of movements that are capable of challenging the hegemonic structure.

### **The Problem of Counterhegemony**

Contemporary readings of hegemony and counterhegemony tend to rely on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, in which dominant groups maintain their dominance less by overt repression than by subtle forms of control that manufacture the consent of dominated groups. For Gramsci, hegemony was an attempt to understand the ways in which the bourgeoisie was able to present itself (and its interests) as universal, "capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 72, 167-73.

level.”<sup>68</sup> Gramsci showed how the State was not simply a ‘night watchman’, whose functions are limited to safeguarding public order and respect for the laws; the State also has a hegemonic function, in its “production of the will to conform.”<sup>69</sup> Gramsci is not always consistent on the precise meaning of hegemony;<sup>70</sup> however, I am more interested in the way hegemony has been taken up and deployed in analyses of social movements. There are significant differences in the ways in which hegemony has been taken up as a form of analysis, but there are also shared tendencies.<sup>71</sup> As Stuart Hall suggests, hegemony tends to be intertwined with the question of “what strategies and forms of political action/organization could unite concretely different kinds of struggle?”<sup>72</sup> In this sense, *counterhegemony* opens the possibility of a more systematic transformation of hegemonic structures. The apparent need for counterhegemony follows from the ontological assumptions of the hegemonic analytic. Hegemonic practices remain in place until they are displaced by new practices, which become hegemonic. Movements must become unified into a counterhegemonic bloc so that they can challenge and displace currently dominant practices and institutions.

In its contemporary formulations, ontology of hegemony and counterhegemony is often combined with much older and common-sensical notions of scale, suggesting that local resistance is too small and too weak to challenge massive hegemonic regimes such

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<sup>68</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 260.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>70</sup> For a reading of the ambivalence of hegemony in *The Prison Notebooks*, see Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 62-5. For a more sustained reading of Gramsci in historical context, see Adam David Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 15-110.

<sup>71</sup> For an attempt to distinguish between Leninist, neo-Gramscian, and pluralist deployments of hegemony, see William K. Carroll and R. S. Ratner, "Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and the New Social Movements," *Critical Sociology* 20, no. 3 (1994): 3-26.

<sup>72</sup> David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural studies*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 417.

as transnational capital.<sup>73</sup> From this perspective, social movements are made intelligible through their (potential) effects on these hegemonic structures. This has led some neo-Gramscians to insist that only a unified bloc would be capable of challenging the immense powers of transnational capital.<sup>74</sup> This undergirds Stephen Gill's claim that Foucault's account of "localized, capillary forms of power/knowledge" lacks a connection to "macro-structures" of power.<sup>75</sup> What's needed is a coalition between currently dispersed movements, such as workers and environmentalists. For others, this requires articulating common interests across progressive movements, rather than emphasizing differences.<sup>76</sup>

Neo-Gramscian readings of new social movements also tend to argue that "in their most mature expression", these movements constitute counterhegemonic struggles, capable of overturning the status quo.<sup>77</sup> For Carl Boggs, the central obstacle "concerns the capacity of these mobilizations to achieve a generalized (and effective) political impact."<sup>78</sup> The new struggles have failed to effect meaningful political change because they lack political strategy in their connections (or lack thereof) with state, party systems, interest groups, and other institutions.<sup>79</sup> Boggs criticizes what he calls a "prefigurative impotence" of new movements (and some of their theorists) who fail to see the necessity for engagement with institutions. The amorphous organization and hostility to

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<sup>73</sup> For instance, these ontological assumptions underpin Stephen Gill's arguments about the need for counterhegemony, as well as his claims about the ineffectiveness of "localized, capillary forms of power/knowledge". Stephen Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 24, no. 3 (1995): 399-423., 403.

<sup>74</sup> Carroll and Ratner, "Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and the New Social Movements", 21.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism", 403.

<sup>76</sup> Carroll and Ratner, "Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and the New Social Movements," 19-20.

<sup>77</sup> Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West*, 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

established authorities represents a lack of strategic cohesion, and an impediment to broad social change.<sup>80</sup> What needs to be taken up is the struggle for control over political institutions, because radical goals cannot be achieved on a broad scale without restructuring the state institution itself.<sup>81</sup> From this perspective, the heterogeneity and fragmentation of social movements is an impediment to the formation of “a coherent political strategy that could lend shape to the myriad of rather loosely defined grassroots, regional, and national struggles.”<sup>82</sup>

The primary problem for the neo-Gramscian perspective is to delineate a common, unifying ground on which a programme or strategy can be constructed. For some, social movements must combine into a “new bloc of social forces that realizes its interests by gaining control over and transforming the state.”<sup>83</sup> Implicit in these arguments are assumptions about what it means to be effective, successful, and significant. In this sense, social movements must not be limited to local subversions, exposures, or contestations of relations of power; counterhegemony suggests the need for a more systematic transformation of hegemonic structures, which often involves casting the state as a vehicle for this transformation.

The ontology of hegemony and counterhegemony produces a particular grid of intelligibility that places hegemonic structures at the forefront, assessing social movements by their capacity to constitute a counterhegemonic alternative and challenge hegemonic structures. Counterhegemony enables judgements about the significance and importance of social movements, based on their (in)capacity to transform hegemonic

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Carroll and Ratner, “Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflections on Counter-Hegemony and the New Social Movements”, 21.

structures. From this perspective, social movements will only be effective if they can articulate a basis of unity, creating broad-based alliances and translating their struggles into a mass movement, capable of effecting changes in the State and other institutions.

In this context, Richard Day criticizes what he calls “the hegemony of hegemony” which, he argues, produces the commonsensical assumption that meaningful social change can only be achieved through alterations to the nation-state and other institutions.<sup>84</sup> Hegemony produces a certain conception of what meaningful social change must be: that which is intelligible as an alteration of (or alternative to) a hegemonic structure.

Day also argues that the ontology of hegemony is also normative: “the claim being made is not only that mass representation is necessary, but that it is *desirable*, because it is through processes of representation that... hegemonic blocs are formed, and social transformations are achieved.”<sup>85</sup> Day politicizes the operations of representation that are required by hegemony as a *contingent* part of struggle, rather than as a necessary condition of possibility of social change. Similarly, Warren Magnusson has argued that hegemonizing moves of social movements “had a stultifying effect on other critical social movements.”<sup>86</sup> Magnusson emphasizes the forms of exclusion that are necessary in order for a movement to be hegemonic (and universal), constituting itself against an outside that is articulated as foreign, alien, and dangerous.<sup>87</sup> For both Day and Magnusson, what

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<sup>84</sup> See Day, "From Hegemony to Affinity."

<sup>85</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 75.

<sup>86</sup> Warren Magnusson, "Decentering the State, or Looking for Politics," in *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice: Studies in the Politics of Counter-hegemony*, ed. William K. Carroll. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>87</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 103.

needs to be overcome is the perceived necessity of counterhegemony, especially when it is conducted through representing one's interest to the State.

Perhaps the clearest example of the hegemony of hegemony is demonstrated by the ease with which theorists of hegemony are able to subsume and instrumentalize non-hegemonic social movements through the concept of counter-hegemony:

Clearly, non-branded tactics such as the impedance of institutions through blockades and the construction of temporary autonomous zones can be valuable in the conduct of a war of maneuver, just as development of activist networks and of communities based on mutual aid contributes to a war of position by building capacity for another world. But I doubt that these tactics, and the broader practice of structural renewal (rendering the system redundant by withdrawing energy from its structures)... add up to a viable alternative to counter-hegemony.<sup>88</sup>

Practices, concepts and tactics can easily be assimilated to the counterhegemonic project, as parts of Gramsci's wars of position and maneuver; however, the important point here is how the dismissal of Day's argument is made possible by repeating the structure of hegemony/counterhegemony. The reason that these tactics are inadequate is because they don't add up to *a viable alternative to counterhegemony*. The structure of hegemon-counterhegemon is repeated in the dismissal of any alternative to counterhegemony: any challenge to the assumptions of counterhegemony must be sufficiently coherent and unified to present a (counterhegemonic) alternative. Attempts to articulate alternative logics of social change can be either subsumed or dismissed on the grounds that they lack what counterhegemony promises: a unified, coherent alternative. Counterhegemony produces its own tautological commonsense: defined as the only viable challenge to hegemony, any other form of change or transformation is necessarily inadequate compared to the dream of a unified, coherent, broad-based social movement.

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<sup>88</sup> William K. Carroll, "Hegemony, Counter-hegemony, Anti-hegemony," *Socialist Studies: The Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 9-43, quoted on 31.

These arguments are extremely seductive. What could be more effective than a counterhegemonic bloc? If movements aren't going to form alliances and articulate a basis of unity, aren't they just going to be confined to their own particularity? Why resist the formation of a coherent strategy if this can help effect a lasting transformation of hegemonic structures?

Melucci's concerns about the experimental, ephemeral aspects of social movements seem naïve in this context. Experimentation might give us some interesting insights, but it might also distract us from confronting hegemonic structures. Worse, valorizing vagueness or fragmentation of social movements seems to run against the formation of a coherent strategy and a basis of unity. Aren't these problems of intelligibility, experimentation and vagueness simply secondary concerns compared to the primary problem of counterhegemony? Understanding the processes through which social movements become coherent or vague might help us, but only insofar as it allows us to privilege coherence and ward off vagueness and fragmentation.

### **Thinking Alternatives: Problems and Paradoxes**

I will suggest that hegemony—and the political imperatives it generates—gets it backwards. Privileging hegemony and understanding movements based on their capacity to confront this hegemony leads into a trap. Hegemony is about the production of common sense, and the ways in which dominant institutions use this common sense to maintain their hold on us. So isn't counterhegemony just a different common sense? Is it possible that the imperative of counterhegemony reproduces the problems of discipline and homogenization that the new social movements seemed to be disrupting? If one assumes a need for unity, is one asking social movements to reify themselves?

I will argue that representation isn't simply the way social movements advance their aims by explaining themselves, but also a dangerous trap that makes them amenable to judgment, containment, and absorption. It naturalizes a particular way of conceiving social movements where 'aims' either exist from the outset or are formed as the social movement 'matures'. But is it possible to orient ourselves to social movements without reifying representations of them? Without representing them ourselves? How else would it be possible to think about them? From the perspective of hegemony and the state, social movements that do not represent themselves may be simply unintelligible. Or, they maybe intelligible only in negative terms, as an amorphous 'outside' that disrupts, subverts and resists but has no positive content. Can one think about their positivity in ways that don't reify them? Are there practices that are not geared towards representation and intelligibility, and can they be thought without resorting to merely negative terms (the *non*-representative, the *unintelligible*)? Are representation and coherence coextensive with intelligibility? What would it mean to think about social movements that aren't advancing any claims or demands at all?

How can change, transformation, and politics be thought differently, in ways that do not rely on and reproduce the necessities and imperatives of counterhegemony? What does it mean to think about a politics that is non-universal, and does a non-universal politics relegate itself to the (merely) particular? If the ontology of hegemony and counterhegemony produces a totalizing understanding of social change, can a different ontology produce different effects? These problems are not new, and I have already suggested that they've been submerged under the ontological assumptions of hegemony.

Can alternative ontological concepts help to make intelligible the more creative, experimental, and open-ended forms of social change that were nascent in the new social movements analyzed by Melucci? Can these creative elements be affirmed without romanticizing them, and without discounting subtle forms of power and control at play? How can ontological concepts be deployed to rethink the relationships between creative political struggles and violence, isolation, and domination?

A central problem here is the question of politics. In the discipline of political science, politics is generally conceived as the science of the State and its practices of government. If entities like social movements are to be considered ‘political’, it is because they are able to influence the State or find ways to enter its decision-making apparatus, through lobbying or party systems, for example. Accepting this definition of politics entails assuming a reified concept of the political. Obscured is an ongoing historical struggle, through which the State has attempted to constitute itself as the center of political life, inventing procedures, practices and concepts that cement this centrality. Historically, related disciplines like sociology have largely accepted this reductive definition of politics: sociology studies ‘the social’ or ‘society’ rather than ‘the political’ and ‘the State’.<sup>89</sup> Despite their innovative orientations to social movements, theorists like Melucci and Touraine leave this dichotomous separation of ‘politics’ and ‘society’ intact. The effect is to reproduce a reified dichotomy of ‘society’ and ‘politics’ where everyday political practices and struggles cannot be thought. The argument here is that a different conception of politics is needed, which decenters the State and foregrounds its centralizing processes as a site of struggle. I follow Magnusson in defining political

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<sup>89</sup> See Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 32-40.

spaces as those where people no longer agree on who should govern, where established routines, procedures and practices are put into question. Politics, on this reading, is not topographical: there is no ‘interiority’ where politics happens, with an ‘outside’ social life. Social movements highlight the ways in which practices, procedures and problems are continually being *made* political by challenging accepted behaviours and practices. Detached from its Statist presuppositions, the notion of politics helps to foreground Melucci’s problem of the ways in which social movements come to appear as unified entities and the ways in which this unity is called into question. ‘Challenging codes’, in this sense, is always a political process, whereby taken-for-granted practices are *politicized*: called into question and made problematic.

With all of this in mind, perhaps the term ‘social movement’ should be rejected, due to all of its conceptual baggage. Why a ‘social movement’ and not a ‘political movement’? What is meant by ‘movement’, and why not speak of political struggles? These are all important questions, and I do not use the term ‘social movement’ because it enables analytical precision. On the contrary, ‘social movement’ is a contested concept and it remains somewhat vague and imprecise in the way it is used here. However, part of the argument that I am making is that ‘vagueness’ may not be reducible to a lack of precision: vagueness also implies uncertain contours and boundaries, which is one of the problems I am trying to foreground. Is it possible that vagueness is connected to dynamism, uncertainty and experimentation? In any event, the precise definition of social movements matters less than the problems in and through which it is deployed. In what follows, I hope to extract the term from some of its more common-sensical contexts

and make it more problematic, using it to foreground questions of processes and their relationship to intelligibility.

### **What Follows**

My aim in what follows is to use Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the 'molar' and 'molecular' to dig deeper into some of the puzzles raised above. I will use these concepts to affirm Melucci's problem of how to think social movements in terms of *processes*. I suggest that social movements can be understood in terms of processes of molarization and molecularization. The concept of molecularization is what's really new in this duo: in fact, it is the process through which newness emerges. Focusing on newness and open-ended transformation politicizes the ways in which this transformation is regularized, routinized, and disciplined, sometimes by the imperatives of counterhegemony. Part of the argument is that thought needs to be transformative itself, if transformative social movements are to be made intelligible. If theory is part of the world it thinks, then the concepts one invents and deploys have immediate political significance. Deleuze and Guattari offer an arsenal of concepts geared to the task of creative thought: desiring-machines, bodies without organs, plane of consistency, active and passive syntheses, haecceity, rhizomes, deterritorializations, lines of flight, apparatuses of capture, war machines, and so on. I will do my best to avoid this jargon.<sup>90</sup> Rather than attempt to lay out their ontology in detail, I will focus on the molar and the molecular, reading it into specific sites of social movement theory and practice.

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<sup>90</sup> I am not suggesting that the conceptual vocabulary offered up by Deleuze and Guattari is useless or unnecessarily complex. However, I think there is perhaps too much loyalty to the specific conceptual vocabulary they develop, which has led to close readings of their texts rather than the wide-ranging and creative writing that they practiced. Their concepts are not eternal truths but provisional and contingent ways of responding to philosophical and political problems. In order to function—to shake up the sedimented habits of thought—they need to be constantly taken up in new ways, reworked, and deployed in different fields. This essay, then, is one such reworking.

## **Part 2: Hegemony/Negativity, Molar/Molecular**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the analytic of hegemony as it is developed in Laclau and Mouffe, in order to locate its innovations and limitations. I will argue that their ontological reworking of hegemony helps to locate the imperialist tendencies of counterhegemony, which have been folded into many of the practices of social movements.

Laclau and Mouffe's ontological assumptions produce a specific configuration of politics, which replaces the necessities of Leninist Marxism with its own. I argue that Laclau and Mouffe's conception of hegemony is too limited, forcing politics into a choice between hegemonic fixation or periodic subversion. These limits can be broken by introducing the concept of 'the molecular' into the hegemonic analytic, along with its counterpart, 'the molar'. Hegemony can be understood as a process of molarization that relegates molecular processes to the negative. However, conceptualizing molecular processes isn't a simple process of 'adding' to hegemony: the molar and the molecular are instead relational concepts, in reciprocal presupposition, constantly contaminating and leaking into one another. Put most simply, processes of molarization establish practices and concepts that minimize variation, regulating connections, movements, and change so that it is predictable and stable. Processes of molecularization (used interchangeably with singularization) are processes where the boundaries, habits, routines and concepts that keep things stable are destabilized, allowing open-ended unpredictable change to occur.

The molecular makes it possible to decenter representational politics, which falls easily into reformism. As always, decentering is a delicate operation that cannot mean

forgetting or ignoring hegemony or molarity. Molecularity makes it possible to challenge the political imperatives that are generated by the hegemonic analytic. In the struggle for hegemony, you're either universal, representing a coherent group, or you're merely particular and parochial. Indeed, hegemony is precisely the (always partial) achievement of universality, where particular interests, desires, or political agendas come to stand in for everyone's. At the core of the hegemonic analytic is the insistence that this struggle for hegemony is always going on, so the progressive, democratic Left had better take up this struggle. If 'we' don't work on carving out a coherent political position for ourselves, and articulate an alternative to hegemonic neoliberalism, progressive politics is doomed to marginality, doomed to minor resistance and subversion.

This argument is not limited to Laclau and Mouffe; on the contrary, the analytic of hegemony folds easily into common sense notions of politics and social movements. Laclau and Mouffe's analysis is in this sense a radicalized rereading of a political perspective that is reproduced in the practices of social movements. Their theoretical contribution is to show how knowledge, strategy, and coherence are always contingent and contestable, but nonetheless necessary. They show how representation is a *political* terrain, but they also contain politics within this terrain. I will argue that there has always been another politics of social movements, which is perpetually obscured by the hegemonic analytic and its imperatives of coherence and strategy. The molecular opens a way into this other politics, not as a hermetic 'outside' of molar politics, but as one that is 'in' the molar without being 'of' it.<sup>91</sup> Before saying more about the molar and the molecular, I will explain the hegemonic analytic as it's developed by Laclau and Mouffe.

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<sup>91</sup> I will say more about this dynamic dualism later, but for now it is important to insist that the molar and molecular are in an immanent relationship to each other, rather than a dichotomous opposition.

## Laclau, Mouffe and the Politicization of the Political

Whereas Touraine commits himself to a search for the central conflict of society that has displaced the struggle of the proletariat, Laclau and Mouffe call this centrality into question. However, the radicality of hegemony does not lie in its refutation of centrality, but in showing that assumptions like centrality are always *contingent* and linked to representation. Rather than questioning centrality as such, the hegemonic analytic asks what *processes* are required for the construction of a particular class, group, or struggle to become central. Rather than asking what makes a certain class dominant, they ask how something called a ‘class’ comes to be formed in discourse, and through what processes it hegemonizes itself. In pointing to these processes of the struggle for hegemony, they are politicized and shown to be contingent: they could be otherwise. Because hegemony always needs to be constructed, this construction is always open to contestation, which defines the field of political struggle. As I will argue in further detail below, hegemony politicizes processes that are normally assumed to be prepolitical, processes where necessities, classes and social movements are articulated and made coherent, rather than emerging fully-formed onto political terrain. Before explaining these points further, I will outline some of the key concepts that underpin Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of hegemony. Understanding these concepts will be essential for any attempt to think hegemony alongside Deleuze and Guattari’s molar/molecular distinction.

In the context of social movements, hegemony politicizes processes of representation that lend coherence, trajectories, aims and identities to groups. This process of meaning-making is called *articulation*. Articulation does not apply only to social movements; this idea can be generalized to the level of all meaning: the political

meaning of an event, a practice or a group depends on its hegemonic articulation.<sup>92</sup>

Meaning can never be finally fixed or identical to itself, but depends instead on the discourse in which it is articulated. A discourse is never a closed system, but can achieve relative closure through processes of articulation and fixation.<sup>93</sup> Although a discourse can never be fully closed or ‘sutured’, this partial closing and fixing is how meaning gets created. In other words, this partial closure (partial because it is always a failure) is the condition of possibility of all meaning for Laclau and Mouffe.

Because all meaning is produced by discourse, there are no objects outside of discourse; discourse is required in order for an object to be intelligible (thinkable, say-able) at all. Discourse is the condition of possibility of intelligibility. That said, there are outsides to *particular* discourses: objects can be outside of certain discursive regimes, but they can’t be non-discursive.<sup>94</sup> This helps us understand how objects can have different meanings. Throughout various discourses, the meaning of an object will differ.

The important thing to understand here is how articulation helps to avoid and uncover reifications, and the political struggles behind them. Rather than understanding subjects and objects as fully-formed (reified) entities to be examined as coherent wholes, articulation asks about the representational processes that *constitute* these entities: what discursive practices give them the coherence and unity required to appear as a fully-

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<sup>92</sup> For an explanation of articulation through a critique of the essentialist subject, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (London: Verso, 1985), 114-122. Laclau and Mouffe argue that the subject is better understood as a ‘subject position’ within a discursive structure (see 115).

<sup>93</sup> Discourse is not *essentially* a structural totality because this would fall into the structuralist trap of disavowing the position of the author. In other words, it would constitute a failure to recognize that by *naming* the discourse as a structural system of differences, we thereby introduce a new difference and modify the system. So it is not *essentially* a totality for Laclau and Mouffe, but it can be signified as one, and when this happens, all the elements in the discourse are reduced to moments of that totality. This is the way all universals are treated by Laclau and Mouffe: universality is always occupied by a particular element, which is able to signify itself as universal. For Laclau and Mouffe’s discussion of discourse and its relation to Foucault, see *Ibid.*, 105-6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

formed object? Melucci's problems are not far off. Articulation names the processes through which social movements are represented and become coherent, politicizing these processes as the outcome of struggles and strategies. This concept avoids reification by orienting us towards the discursive processes that *produce* coherent insides and outsides.<sup>95</sup>

These processes of fixity are never permanent. On the contrary, Laclau and Mouffe insist that the range of articulations is in principle infinite.<sup>96</sup> Objects can always be taken up and rearticulated in a different way; they can be inserted into different discourses; and their coherence can be dissolved.

For Laclau and Mouffe, all social relations are 'overdetermined', which means they're filled with an excess of meaning because they're a product of multiple, overlapping discourses. In a way, this overdetermination always precedes discourse; it is this polyvocality that a discourse has to erase in order to constitute itself.<sup>97</sup> It is this same surplus of meaning that always prevents discourses from closing themselves up completely.

So how do discourses domesticate this surplus of meaning? Articulation is this process of domestication. Articulations establish a relation among elements, and it is this relation that determines their meaning. These are not necessarily relations of alliance or

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<sup>95</sup> Articulation also gets beyond Melucci's constructivist assumptions, which tend to assume that social movement 'actors' (its inside) are the authors of their own movement, constructing themselves and their action. For Laclau and Mouffe, articulation is the very process through which these 'insides' and 'outsides' are constructed through discourse, which might be articulated by participants, observers, or anyone else. By decentering the privileged subject positions of 'actors', the hegemonic analytic shows that these positions are also constructed through discourse, and are never made from scratch, but always rely on and rework existing discourses.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>97</sup> This priority is made paradoxical by the fact that the condition of possibility of overdetermination is a web of intersecting, overlapping discourses. It's thus impossible to say that overdetermination arises before or after discourse.

sameness; they can be any relationship at all. For example, ‘solidarity’ between groups won’t just be determined by whether those groups see themselves as similar, but also by what is articulated as ‘the outside’ or ‘the enemy’ of those groups. So the function of articulation is to fix these meanings by constructing ‘nodal points’—privileged discursive points of partial fixation—in order to create intelligible, coherent relations between things. Points get fixed, excess gets erased, and coherent meanings are created. The concept of articulating nodal points helps Laclau and Mouffe explain how a part—a particular party, identity, or practice—can come to stand in for a totality: that which is ‘universal’ from the perspective of the discourse.

This helps uncover an important reification that is reproduced by Touraine and Melucci. For them, ‘politics’ tends to be confined to practices involving States. This conception fails to understand the meaning of ‘politics’ as the outcome of a struggle: in this case, the Statist attempt to fix politics within a particular terrain, with the State at the center. Although he recognizes that new social movements were contesting practices and terrains that had been articulated as natural and necessary and divorced from politics, Melucci fails to challenge the separation of ‘politics’ from ‘society’. As I will argue later on, this Statist reification of politics is pervasive, and failure to challenge it reproduces the State as the center of political life. The hegemonic analytic radicalizes the concept of politics by showing that all objects, concepts and subjects are the contingent outcome of political struggles.<sup>98</sup> Politics, in this sense, encompasses not only struggles between pre-

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<sup>98</sup> Peyman Vahabzadeh suggests that Touraine and Melucci fail to make this connection because of the ‘ultimacy’ of their theories, which assumes that ‘society’ can form the ultimate ground through which to understand social movements. See Vahabzadeh, *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements*, 34-5, 44-5.

established interests, groups, or states, but also the processes through which these entities become coherent and stable in the first place.

To take class as an example, it is not that ‘the working class’ is somehow essentially connected to revolution or freedom (whether structurally, or teleologically, or ideologically) but rather that this connection is contingent; it is the outcome of a political struggle that resulted in the articulation of ‘the worker’ as the necessary subject of revolution. Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe show how Leninism assumed that an elite vanguard was necessary for the success of class struggle, and this subsumed more populist movements in a stagist conception of hegemony, placing broad-based social struggle in an early ‘primitive’ stage.<sup>99</sup>

In contrast, their aim is to show that this necessity was only possible because of the (contingent and hegemonic) distinction between ‘leaders’ and ‘led’ within the Leninist discourse. This hegemonic articulation, they argue, is precisely what Lenin’s assumptions made unthinkable: the possibility that discourses of truth—and ontological assumptions more generally—played a role in structuring social relations. More simply, they show how representation is always political. Representing the world and deducing strategic necessities from this knowledge is *immediately political*, insofar as it intervenes in and restructures discourse, rather than simply providing a detached representation of the world that could serve as a foundation for a political program.

### **Equivalence and Difference**

There are two logics of articulation: equivalence and difference. The logic of equivalence creates a chain of elements that are substitutable for one another, defined

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<sup>99</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 56-8.

against an enemy or Other. By contrast, the logic of difference expands the number of elements that can be brought into relation to one another, producing distinctions and complexities. Whereas equivalence tends towards simplification and polarization, difference tends towards complexity, articulating elements as different from each other.

The logic of equivalence divides the social into two sides, but Laclau and Mouffe argue that absolute equivalence is increasingly rare in industrialized societies where antagonisms tend to proliferate and are partially absorbed. In terms of absolute equivalence, one can think of the classical Marxist hypothesis of ‘class war’, which posits a fundamental conflict between two classes, and obfuscates or marginalizes struggles against patriarchy, racism and colonialism, for instance. It was thought that a revolutionary subjectivity was needed which divided society along class lines. This privileging of a particular antagonism does not need to coincide with class; one can think of Shulamith Firestone’s privileging of a feminist revolution or Fanon’s anti-colonial revolution.<sup>100</sup> In each case, a particular antagonism is thought to be ‘more fundamental’ than all the others: a necessary revolution by a necessary set of subjects. It’s these necessities that Laclau and Mouffe’s theory challenges, not simply by refuting them, but by revealing the contingent processes of articulation that bring them into being and by politicizing the marginalizations or obfuscations they effect.

In liberal democratic and industrialized societies, the absorption of differential demands has displaced antagonisms to the periphery of the social. The establishment of the Welfare State and Fordist production helped to create a situation where workers could consume more of the products of capitalist production, fragmenting the working class

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<sup>100</sup> See Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

that had been articulated against capitalist exploitation. Strikes, sabotage, slow-downs and other forms of resistance continued, but it became more and more difficult to organize workers in a unified opposition to capitalism on the basis of their exploitation, because the establishment of a middle class diffused the polarization of worker-capitalist. By absorbing some demands and institutionalizing unions, the more antagonistic elements of the worker's movement were displaced to the periphery of political life.<sup>101</sup> With the increasing displacement of antagonisms, one moves away from a clear-cut frontier that separates dominant groups from the rest of society, and conflict becomes less and less evident and given. All frontiers become ambiguous and unstable, and the field of articulatory practices is widened.<sup>102</sup> There are more and more overdetermined elements that can be articulated into moments of a discursive chain. Articulation works here by combining subject-positions within various discursive formations with overdetermined elements that don't have a precise articulation.

## **Hegemony**

We are now in a position to understand hegemonic articulation. Hegemony implies a combination of the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence. If the antagonism is totalizing and immediately divides society into two camps, then there is no hegemony. Hegemony is particular to modern democratic societies because of what I discussed above: it's in these spaces where there's the presence of antagonistic forces and the frontiers that separate them are multiple and unstable. Put another way, there are a vast array of floating elements (equality, freedom, oppression, racism, etc) and these elements are open to articulation into different, antagonistic camps. For example, the

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<sup>101</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 130.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

notion of ‘freedom’ can be articulated and made to signify in racist neo-Nazi discourses, individualist liberal discourses, and utopian socialist discourses; freedom as such has no essential meaning.

This framework allows Laclau and Mouffe to speak of a multiplicity of social movements that have become part of the ‘democratic revolution’: the expansion and deepening of equality and liberty into new terrains where subordination reproduces itself. However, the democratic imaginary isn’t *inherently* progressive: it has opened the way for right-wing populism and neoliberalism (the neoliberal equal right to consume, for example). This war of articulation is politics for Laclau and Mouffe.<sup>103</sup> This is because there is no way to establish a general theory of politics topographically (separating the political from the non-political), because new spaces continue to be politicized and there’s no way to fix these spaces with reference to an outside.<sup>104</sup>

This leads Laclau and Mouffe to outline a theory of what they call ‘radical democracy’, where social movements rearticulate and radicalize the Enlightenment concepts of liberty and equality. Central to the task of radical democracy is the articulation of chains of equivalence between progressive struggles. Thus anti-racism, feminism and anti-capitalism can be constructed hegemonically, resulting in the consolidation of these struggles through the logic of equivalence: a basis of sameness is articulated that links them together. Laclau and Mouffe insist that this does not necessarily mean they all become subordinated to one of these struggles (this was the case of the reduction of all these movements to ‘class’, for example). Radical democratic struggles will need to balance a logic of equivalence with a logic of difference. Complete

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-1.

equivalence would erase the differences between groups completely, while difference would keep the groups completely separated and autonomous from each other. Thus the construction of chains of equivalence between movements is indispensable in the struggle for hegemony of the Left against neoliberal/neoconservative offensives; however, the danger is that this space of equivalence would become too totalizing, subordinating and organizing all other spaces.<sup>105</sup> The problem here is that articulations have been imposed in an immutable manner.

However, Laclau and Mouffe insist that complete autonomy is also undesirable: this would mean the “implosion of the social and an absence of any common point of reference.”<sup>106</sup> In this case there are no common meanings to articulate different social subjects together. Thus the middle ground: an always-partial articulation that is constantly renegotiated. There is thus space for the articulation of equivalence between struggles on the left (anti-capitalism, feminism, anti-racism) but not at the expense of their partial autonomy. What’s missing from contemporary radical politics is a coherent Leftist alternative proposal for the organization of the social.

Laclau and Mouffe insist that without this alternative, the Left loses its capacity to act hegemonically. If demands are presented *only* as negative or subversive of the given order, they will be condemned to marginality. In other words, the Left needs a set of different nodal points “from which a process of different and positive reconstruction of the social fabric could be instituted.”<sup>107</sup> Without the direction provided by these nodal points, the Left will be directionless.

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<sup>105</sup> This would amount to totalitarianism: the attempt to institute a center that eliminates autonomy and “reconstitutes around itself the totality of the social body.” *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

For Laclau and Mouffe, then, the State is decentered through the hegemonic analytic, but hegemony and counterhegemony are always constituting partial centers. This is a politics that is not very far from the hegemonizing politics that were seen in the last chapter, where new social movements are lamented as lacking the strategy, coherence, and direction to achieve meaningful change. At the end of the day, the radical democratic struggle for hegemony does not look much different than the political imperatives generated by other theorizations of hegemony: the task of the Left is still to become dominant, and to eventually hegemonize its own common sense, marginalizing neoliberalism. The Left *must* take up universality, albeit with the awareness that any claim to universality is contingent and contestable: strategically necessary but ontologically contingent. Without the construction of chains of equivalence, and the universalizing politics this enables, the Left will be condemned to the merely particular. This is the blackmail that always reappears in the hegemonic analytic: either you claim to represent everyone, the polis, the people, and humanity; or you represent only yourself, a particular group, or a marginal interest. Either you formulate a coherent alternative to the hegemonic order, or you're left without clear direction. Universal and hegemonic, or particular and marginal.

Is there an escape from this blackmail? Are social movements faced with a choice between hegemonic articulation or irrelevance? I will suggest that this binary needs to be *complicated*, so that coherence, articulation, strategy and hegemony do not appear as irreducible strategic necessities. This complication can be undertaken by crossing the binaries of particular/universal, coherent/incoherent with a dualism that operates differently: *the molar and the molecular*. Below, I will introduce the

molar/molecular distinction into Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic analytic in order to create a more dynamic conception of politics and transformation. This dynamism stems from an orientation to open-ended processes of transformation, processes that I will suggest *are* intelligible, thinkable, and sensible without being *coherent*.<sup>108</sup> This is because the hegemonic analytic makes the molar intelligible at the expense of the molecular. In other words, hegemony is an account of processes of representation, which are those of *molarization*, without thinking the molecular.

### **Universal/Particular, Molar/Molecular**

The concept of the molecular is much more difficult to conceptualize than the molar, in part because it corresponds to a process that is perpetually reduced to the molar in the history of Western thought. In other words, molecularity is what's really new in the molar/molecular distinction, and it is often assumed that the molar is all there is. The molecular level can be easily misunderstood to mean 'chaos', or 'spontaneity'.<sup>109</sup> In other words, the molecular level is often assimilated into either side of the binary of order/chaos, or differentiated/undifferentiated. It is either molar, or it is molar's outside, conceived as negativity or pure indeterminacy: lack, incoherence, directionlessness. From the perspective of the molar categories, molecular processes can be nothing but chaos or lack of coherence. It is precisely this binary that molecularity disrupts and troubles.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The distinction between intelligibility and coherence is taken from Daley Laing, in unpublished conversations and correspondence.

<sup>109</sup> Guattari makes it clear that the molecular is not about spontaneity and chaos, but is meant to disrupt this binary. See Guattari and Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, 226, 245.

<sup>110</sup> Guattari specifically positions himself *against* spontaneity, and insists that capitalist subjectivity participates in the Manichean oppositions between desire/reality, order/chaos. See *Ibid.*, 317-19.

The molar/molecular distinction is useful because it helps us to escape the blackmail of universal/particular, and the (apparent) need for coherence, strategy, and institutionalization, which appear to be necessary from a molar perspective. Molar processes stabilize and divide, creating coherence at the expense of movement and open-ended transformation. This is precisely what is at stake in molecularity: the capacity to think movement, transformation and open-ended change *politically*. However, it's not about choosing the molecular over the molar; they cannot be placed in an either/or category where one could *choose* one or the other.<sup>111</sup> Instead, the molar and molecular distinction is a dynamic and relational dualism. Rather than dividing the world into two sides, the molar/molecular distinction asks us to think the world in terms of processes which are immanent to one another.

Rather than thinking of molar and molecular as stable categories, or elements of the world that need to be represented with precision, it's better to think of them as tactical devices that enable new modes of thought. These categories are developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*; however, I will not undertake a detailed exegetical analysis of the way these concepts are deployed in their texts.<sup>112</sup> This

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<sup>111</sup> Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly insist that the molar and molecular must be conceived as two concepts in reciprocal presupposition, rather than dichotomous categories of opposition. The molar and molecular are variously described in terms of levels, dimensions, perspectives and processes. I take the latter formulation because levels, dimensions and perspectives can be very misleading. Deleuze and Guattari are not implying two perspectives corresponding to different positions, or two separate levels. Processes of molarization and molecularization go on everywhere, so all social formations are both molar and molecular: "...everywhere there exist the molecular *and* the molar: their disjunction... varies only according to the two directions of subordination, according to which molecular phenomena are subordinated to the large aggregates, or on the contrary subordinate them to themselves." Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 340-1.

<sup>112</sup> Readers of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* may assume that the concept of 'molecular singularization' is a neologism, because it is largely absent from these works. However, Guattari develops this concept in numerous lectures, texts and interviews, and uses it interchangeably with 'molecular revolution'. I have chosen to use singularization, molecularization and molarization to foreground the notion of *processes* rather than stable states or self-contained entities. See Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, (New York: Penguin, 1984); Guattari and Rolnik, *Molecular*

has been the dominant approach in what has become “Deleuze studies”, where Deleuze’s texts (and his collaborations with Guattari) are subjected to endless interpretations and reinterpretations, resulting in debates about what Deleuze and Guattari ‘really meant’ with their concepts, as if there were an essential truth to be recovered from their work. There are good reasons for avoiding this approach. For one, a systematic analysis of the ways in which molar/molecular are deployed by Deleuze and Guattari would be a long project of its own. Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari are infamously inconsistent with these concepts, deploying them in various fields, with different emphases and effects.<sup>113</sup> Most importantly, a hermeneutic approach like the one I am describing above is fundamentally misguided insofar as it hopes to articulate and fix a particular meaning of the molar/molecular distinction. To take this approach is to miss the whole point: the molar/molecular distinction is dynamic because the specific meaning and function of the concepts vary depending on the way they’re deployed.<sup>114</sup> It’s not a question of creating a

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*Revolution in Brazil*; Felix Guattari, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Las Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 275-281.

<sup>113</sup> In most of *Anti-Oedipus*, the molar and molecular are cast in the psychoanalytic language of the paranoiac and the schizophrenic, and sometimes in terms of Guattari’s earlier distinction between subjugated/subject groups. Deleuze and Guattari explain that paranoiac processes are associated with the perspective of “large molar aggregates, the statistical formations or gregariousness, the phenomena of organized crowds” and that “the molecular direction... on the contrary penetrates into singularities.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 279-280. By side-stepping the psychoanalytic register, I hope to avoid the specialized jargon of Lacanian psychoanalysis (combined with the jargon added by Deleuze and Guattari). This jargon can be misleading because the paranoia/schizophrenia distinction is often confused with the diagnostic concept of schizophrenia, so that schizophrenic processes are thought to reside ‘in’ a subject. On the contrary, the challenge is to think the ways in which schizophrenic/molecular process *and* paranoiac/molar process are immediately political, investing historico-social fields rather than individuals. See *Ibid.*, 340-1. For the distinction between the figure of the schizo and the schizophrenic patient, see Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 179, f76.

<sup>114</sup> It helps to remember that Deleuze and Guattari pilfered the molar/molecular discussion from scientific and mathematical debates, relaying it into psychoanalysis and other discourses. My use of these terms pilfers them in turn, and relays them into discourses on social movements. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they cite Raymond Ruyer’s discussion of the molecular in atomic theory, as the level at which functioning is indistinguishable from formation, and Allan and Wallace’s discussion of the law of large numbers as the inverse correlation between sample size and variation in samples. They link the molecular to desiring-

fixed distinction that can then be ‘applied’ to various fields, such as social movements. Instead, it’s a question of deploying these concepts (or others) in a particular milieu in order to produce something new, or to think that which remains unthought, in between the sedimented categories that are taken for granted.<sup>115</sup> The meaning of molar and molecular will be modified in turn.

The argument here is not that Deleuze and Guattari hand us an eternal truth, embodied in the molar/molecular distinction, that can be used to solve the problems I’ve outlined above. Instead, the hope is that these concepts can be deployed in a way that makes thought about social movements more dynamic, creative, and attentive to problems. In this sense, the molar/molecular distinction does not ‘solve’ the problem of intelligibility that I have been outlining; on the contrary, I hope that it will intensify this problem, and encourage new orientations to social movements, the problems they raise, and the problems raised in making them intelligible. When difficult problems are palpable, common-sensical responses become more difficult, and suspending these common-sensical responses is precisely what opens the way to the emergence of something new. Laclau and Mouffe call this situation contingency, but it remains undertheorized and subordinated to articulation in the hegemonic analytic, conceived only as the negative or the unassimilable outside.

This does not mean that the molar and the molecular can mean anything at all, or that there is no continuity to the way that they’re used by Deleuze, Guattari and others. Instead, it means that the discontinuities and transformations in the molar/molecular

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machines and the unconscious, in contrast to molar social machines. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 283-96, esp. 286.

<sup>115</sup> As I will argue below, it is precisely ‘in between’ binaries that molecular processes of singularization operate, transforming relations and creating new connections rather than new (molar) categories.

distinction are just as important as any continuity. The context in which the molar and molecular are deployed will be modified by this deployment, and the concepts themselves will be modified in turn. In the way that I deploy the molar/molecular distinction, I hope to produce an orientation to open-ended transformation and experimentation, because it is often ignored or marginalized in analyses of social movements, with politically stultifying effects. The question of change and coherence is a good place to start in elucidating the molar and the molecular.

Laclau and Mouffe are almost exclusively theorists of molar processes of social movements. I have chosen to highlight their approach because it is a particularly nuanced version of this molar preoccupation, and because they share a critique of the modern subject, and their theories converge on an attempt to think the modern subject as a product of discourse.<sup>116</sup> In the hegemonic analytic, politics is about articulation, and articulation is about producing coherence and fixity. This is a process of *molarization*: a process of making coherent, stable, and fixed.<sup>117</sup> Laclau and Mouffe's innovation is to

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<sup>116</sup> Debates on the ontological status of the subject bring up many of the same concerns that I am trying to address (the questions of lack and positivity, for example); however I will not be engaging directly in these debates because social movements, I would argue, are always already a question of groups, collectives and multiplicities. In this sense, I will use the molar and molecular to emphasize the ways in which groups (rather than subjects) undergo molar and molecular processes. Deleuze and Guattari's decentering of the modern subject might be said to be more 'radical' than the decentering that occurs in the hegemonic analytic. In *Anti-Oedipus*, for example, they insist that the subject is merely a 'residuum' that is produced alongside desiring machines and social machines, which are ontologically primary. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 16-20; 286. In contrast, Laclau brings hegemony into conversation with a Lacanian notion of the subject—made coherent by a constitutive lack at the heart of the subject—in his conversations with Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek. See Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Ernesto Laclau, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, (London: Verso, 2000), 58-59; 64-73. In the context of social movements, Saul Newman has attempted to valorize this Lacanian conception of the subject over and against Deleuze and Guattari's machines. See Saul Newman, *Unstable Universalities: Poststructuralism and Radical Politics*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 86-96.

<sup>117</sup> In what follows, I equate Laclau and Mouffe's concept of articulation with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of molarization. In articulating this equivalence, I risk eliding the specificity of these concepts, as well as their divergent genealogies. However, a metatheoretical discussion of theories with divergent genealogies and ontologies necessitates certain simplifications. For a more sustained analysis of Laclau and Mouffe's neo-Gramscian approach alongside Deleuzian vitalism, see Lars Tonder and Lasse

show that molarization is a political process that is never complete: there is always a constitutive outside, which for them is the boundary of all meaning and sociality. There can be no 'outside' or 'beyond' to this boundary because any attempt to specify a beyond simply marks a new inside, enlarging the totality of the social and creating a new boundary. The outside is pure negativity. For analyses of social movements, this means that they can be represented in many different ways, and their meaning and politics may vary widely depending on discursive contexts, but there is no way to insist on the existence of social movements 'outside' or 'beyond' discourse and representation.<sup>118</sup>

Molarization is never completely set in stone: old categories can be disrupted and new ones can be invented, but from the perspective of the hegemonic analytic, it is always a question of which hegemonic articulations swoop in to rearticulate. Molarizing articulations do not have to produce categories in twos: taxonomies can proliferate, and the number of categories is in principle infinite. What defines a process of molarization is not the number or type of categories, but their *function*. Categorization molarizes by producing fixity, coherence, and stability. Difference can only be understood in terms of difference *from* another coherent category.

We've begun with the molar because it's more straightforward in terms of comprehension corresponding to organization, classification and fixity. Relations become molarized when they are 'articulated' in Laclau's sense: their meanings are

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Thomassen, *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack*, (Manchester, UK ; New York : Vancouver: Manchester University Press ; Distributed in Canada by UBC Press, 2005).

<sup>118</sup> The question of the limits of discourse and representation has been a subject of debate between Deleuzian and Derridean theorists. See Tormey, '*Not in my Name*': *Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation*, 138-154.; Lasse Thomassen, "Beyond Representation?" *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 1 (2007): 111-126.; Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, "Beyond Representation? A Rejoinder," *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 1 (2007): 127-137.; Lasse Thomassen, "'A Basic Closure of Perspective'?" Reply to Robinson and Tormey," *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 1 (2007): 138-142. For a less polemical account of the differences between Deleuzian and Derridean ontologies, see Paul Patton and John Protevi eds., *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, (London: Continuum, 2003).

linked together and a coherent inside and outside are produced. In Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, this fixity can occur through the logic of equivalence or the logic of difference (usually a combination of both). The logic of difference fixes elements in a differential relation to each other, and in this sense racism/sexism/homophobia could be understood by specifying their internal differences *from each other*, rather than rendering them equivalent. Each case involves the fixation of meaning and the specification of particular relations between elements: molar categories.

A focus on molarity leads to two conceptions of transformation: as an articulation that alters the hegemonic structure, or as a negative, disruptive outside that subverts molar categories. Either take the reins of hegemony, or resist and subvert from the margins. What's missing is molecularity, orienting us to change, movement, and transformation as *emergent, open-ended, superlinear and experimental*. The molecular allows us to foreground significant political problems of social movements, problems which are invisible from a molar perspective. When the molecular is injected into these problematics, it becomes possible to think the dynamism of movement, transformation, and molecular politics.

The molecular doesn't follow the rules of representation, and it can't be thought as a 'structure' like the molar. Instead, the molecular is better thought as a process of transformation that is always being structured and captured by the molar.<sup>119</sup> However,

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<sup>119</sup> The notion of 'space of transformation' will be misleading if it is equated with a Euclidean conception of space as uniform and measurable. On the contrary, singularity exceeds any particular time and space; it is "nonlocalizable." See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 286. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they develop the notion of 'smooth space,' which is contrasted to the 'striated space' of Euclidean geometry. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 369-73. As I have emphasized, the singular and nonlocalizable can always be *made* into the particular and local, through a process of molarization. For a reading of the way in which the particular is abstracted from the singular, and then made a universal unit of measurement that functions to striate and molarize, see Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 163-70.

just as the change is always being captured and fixed (molarized), there are always molecular escapes, transformations, and movements taking place in molar structures. Molecular transformations are ontologically primary: molarizations can only *react* to change and transformation. Categories, typologies and containments can only *follow* the emergent processes that they contain. In what follows, I will use the concept of singularity to chart a way out of the blackmail between universal and particular. Whereas Laclau and Mouffe argue that movements that forsake universalizing representation are condemned to particularity, I will suggest that these movements may open themselves to processes of singularization: engendering open-ended transformations and unpredictable connections. A complex ontological concept like the molecular is useful because the blackmail stems from a complex ontological assumption: equivalence and difference are constitutive of the social, and beyond it is pure negativity. This means that vagueness and indeterminacy are defined by their *lack* of clarity, rather than their molecular potentials.

For Laclau and Mouffe, and the molar perspective, the motors of change are understood in terms of negativity, as the constitutive outside of the molar structure. Disarticulation is the other of articulation, intelligible when partially-fixed elements are disrupted, subverted and destabilized. Similarly, antagonism is that which stands beyond the elements of a hegemonic structure, as the necessary exclusions it requires in order to function.

These instances are as close as Laclau and Mouffe get to approaching the molecular. Antagonism is that which is external to the discourse structuring relations, constantly subverting and resisting closure. In this sense, it is that which is beyond

representation, and thus for Laclau and Mouffe, it is pure negativity. Laclau and Mouffe are very clear on this point:

If the subject is constructed through language, as a partial and metaphorical incorporation into a symbolic order, any putting into question of that order must necessarily constitute an identity crisis. But, on the other hand, this experience of failure is not an access to a diverse ontological order, to a something beyond differences, simply because... there is no beyond. The limit of the social cannot be traced as a frontier separating two territories – for the perception of a frontier supposes the perception of something beyond that would have to be objective and positive – that is, a new difference.<sup>120</sup>

Above, the argument is that one cannot point to anything outside or beyond the social that constitutes a positivity of its limit. If one tries to think the limit as a positivity outside the social, one falls into the trap of thinking a territory that is somehow outside or transcendental, which would simply be a new difference within the system. This is the law of the excluded middle: inside/outside, subject/object, and other dichotomies always necessitate the exclusions of their counterpart. Any new meaning presupposes an outside that it's *not*.

In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe show that the limit of the social must be immanent to it: it is the thing that always frustrates the social's attempt to constitute itself as full presence. The molecular isn't strictly at odds with the insistence that there are no objects outside of discourse, but it allows us to think of this subversion beyond pure negativity as it's thought with the concept of antagonism. The molecular isn't a discrete territory or object that exists 'outside' the molar; it is the connective and transformative potential that's always being dammed up and channeled into predictable circuits through processes of molarization. Molecular processes aren't 'outside' or 'beside' society as transcendent or separate entities. They are *immanent* to the social, traversing all these

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<sup>120</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 126.

relations, but they don't obey the law of the excluded middle. These processes *are* the excluded middle, conceived as dynamic and positive potentials that need to be locked away through processes of molarization. Whereas Laclau and Mouffe insist that the limit is purely negative, Deleuze and Guattari open the possibility of thinking of these limits as proper to molarity. Molarity and molecularity are not mutually distinct, but are continually passing over into each other. The molecular always seeps from the molar, troubling and transforming it. These seepages and transformations are always crystallizing, forming centers of rigidification. I deploy this distinction in terms of processes (of molarization and molecularization) because it allows me to pick up on Melucci's foregrounding of the processes that constitute social movements. Whereas Laclau and Mouffe can only think the processes of molarization (conceived as fixation through articulation), molecularity orients us to processes of open-ended change.

Molecularity helps us confront the blackmail of universal/particular in the hegemonic analytic. Either social movements represent themselves by constructing chains of equivalence, so that a particular element can come to stand in for all of the others (universality) *or* social movements fail to articulate this common ground and they remain particular, marginalized, and insignificant. Rather than operating through the logics of difference or equivalence, molecular singularization operates through a continual process of *differentiation*. This should not be confused with the logic of difference in the hegemonic analytic, which creates molar differences that are separable and self-contained.<sup>121</sup> The emergent differences of singularization are dynamically

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<sup>121</sup> This self-containment is never total, because the logics of equivalence and difference are always partial, requiring a constitutive outside. However, the point here is that singularity has no constitutive outside (*or* inside) because it is a process that disrupts the coherence of insides and outsides.

*vague*, on the edge of intelligibility, because they have escaped the molar circuits that normally contain them in clear, bounded insides and outsides.

It's molecular processes that 'subvert the social' in Laclau and Mouffe's language, but this subversion doesn't necessarily lead to an immediate rearticulation of coherence. Or rather, this isn't all that happens. Rearticulations and stabilizations will always occur: a name can always be found for the strange, the monstrous, and the Other. Ways to recognize, represent, identify and classify transformations can always be invented, either by fitting it into old categories or creating new ones. Either way, these molarizing processes fail to grasp the molecular as anything but disruption or the appearance of a new element to be included in a system of differences. But on the molecular level, there are always new leaks, frictions and mutations. Furthermore, there's a possibility of deepening disturbances: these processes can link up with others and intensify a process of molecular singularization. It is this thought or sense of deepening and connectivity that the concept of molecular makes possible: the excluded 'outside'—or what is perceived as an outside from the molar perspective—is actually positive, *overflow* with potential rather than merely negative. Furthermore, this ostensible outside is *immanent* to molar structures. Molecular singularization makes use of the molar categories and elements for its own differential movement, scrambling binaries and producing new combinations and permutations.

Molecular transformations, then, are not universal *or* merely particular: they are singular. Singularity is the process through which the 'movement', normally contained as a bounded entity through articulation, becomes problematic, vague, and indistinct. Movements that refuse to articulate a counterhegemonic alternative are not 'merely

particular’, on this reading; they may be warding off molarization in a way that allows for exploration of potentials and transformation. Side-stepping the clarity of counterhegemonic articulation doesn’t necessarily doom movements to the merely particular; it enables experimentation and open-ended change. Laclau and Mouffe are right, in a way, when they say that without a clear alternative, movements will be left ‘directionless’. However, singularity doesn’t *lack* direction, its dynamic movement exceeds the capacity to plot a direction in advance.

It’s important to insist here that processes of singularity aren’t revolutions where everything is overthrown, or utopian processes ‘outside’ the molar social world of representations described by the hegemonic analytic. Instead, singularity is immanent to molar forms, drawing on them as its raw materials, and producing new connections and capacities in the process. This is why molecular processes are always *immanent* to the molar, without being *of it*. It is always a question of the dynamic mix of molar and molecular processes that are folded into the situation. In this sense, molecularity investigates potentials at the extreme: what movements might do, their permutations and potentials, rather than their typical tendencies or intrinsic qualities.<sup>122</sup>

It is important to note that the molar and molecular is not a distinction between *bad* molarizing processes and *good* molecular ones, or between imprisonment and freedom. Both processes are dangerous, but in different ways. Molecular processes fluidify and break down boundaries, but there is no guarantee that these transformations will not end in disaster. They can end up imploding on themselves, especially if they fail to connect to political problems. Nor is it a distinction of molecular social movements

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<sup>122</sup> Massumi usefully contrasts what he calls ‘thought-in-becoming’ (here understood as molecular transformation) to ‘analogical thought’. See *Ibid.*, 97-100.

and molar institutions: all of social and political life is a dynamic mix of the two. Institutions tend to involve more rigid and stable processes of molarization, which enable them to produce clear procedures, objectives, divisions of labour, and so on. However, even the most rigid institutions have molecular potentials: subtle forms of resistance and variation. Later, I will suggest that social movements sometimes operate through supple molecular codes, which allow them to constitute themselves and their practices while warding off rigidification and routinization.

By decentering the focus on processes of molarization (what Laclau and Mouffe call hegemonic articulation), a different form of politics can be made intelligible, a politics absent from the hegemonic point of view.<sup>123</sup> Vague, unclear, experimental movements have to be rescued from their containment within ‘particularity’, so that their molecular processes of singularization and open-ended change can be made intelligible. I will argue that these movements can connect through an intensification of the problems they raise, rather than a molar connection on the basis of sameness. This connection is not one between two movements, conceived as bounded wholes. Instead, it’s more a process of resonance, where two processes of resonation amplify each other through a recursive loop. In this sense, social movements connect through their mutual *complexification or involution*, through processes that problematize routines, concepts and practices that had been unproblematic and depoliticized.

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<sup>123</sup> Strictly speaking, it would be difficult to say that Laclau and Mouffe ‘fail to see’ the molecular, as this level is always invisible from the perspective of the molar, except as negative disruption. Furthermore, the molecular can be understood as a concept that *invents the form of perception it describes*, which means that this way of thinking about difference is immanent to the concept itself. Rather than thinking of ‘the molecular’ as an objective fact that Laclau and Mouffe miss, the point is rather to ask what forms of politics are made possible through attention to both molar and molecular processes, and how this differs from limiting one’s analysis to the discursive. On Deleuze and Guattari’s creation of concepts and their function, see Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 2-3, 10-14, 133-7.

At stake here is the question of erasing difference and complexity in politics. Laclau and Mouffe are not saying that a *particular* difference needs to be erased (that feminists should shut up and join the socialist revolution, for example) but rather that these erasures are built into the success of any political movement: a common position will be created by erasing differences, or at least finding a way for these differences to co-exist with some common ground. Erasure is irreducible: an inevitable fact of politics. The best one can do is to ensure that hegemonic positions are occupied by a broad base of progressive, Leftist causes rather than an elitist vanguard, or the capitalist status quo.

For Laclau and Mouffe, connections between movements are always *necessarily* in tension with their autonomy, and how could it be otherwise? Either struggles like feminism, anti-racism, and anti-capitalism are autonomous and different from each other, or they form alliances and the differences are (partially) erased. The important point here for us is that the erasure of difference is the condition of possibility of all connections, which exists in tension with autonomy. Without this erasure, there can be no (molar) connection between movements. The molar perspective always comes back to a search for commonality or sameness.

The molecular allows us to think about connections differently. Rather than requiring the erasure of difference, molecular connections are formed as processes of singularization deepen. In other words, at the molecular level, *problematic vagueness becomes the condition of possibility of connection, rather than its antithesis.*

How is this possible? How can it be that a process of differentiation results in a connection? Part of the answer lies in the way “connection” is understood. This is not a connection that could be articulated between molar wholes, which would presuppose

exclusive difference or exclusive sameness. Molecular connections, between processes of singularization, are constitutively different than molar connections.

Rather than communicating and connecting through the logics of equivalence and difference, processes of singularization envelop and intensify each other, potentializing the future without determining it. They work by transmitting creative processes of differentiation, with no basis of sameness. Massumi likens this process to a virus: “it hijacks and scrambles life codes, rather than replicating them wholesale.”<sup>124</sup> In the process of singularization, the boundaries that function to separate groups, institutions and other molar aggregates become indistinct. The groups enveloped in this process do not become ‘the same’. They are enveloped by a process of open-ended transformation, where habituated responses and routines are displaced by new practices (‘new’ because there’s no molar category under which they can be contained (yet)). There is no principle of unity through which groups are drawn into a process of singularization. Because of this fuzziness, this vagueness, molecular processes and the social formations enveloped by them are always more difficult to locate than molar ones.

In Part 4, I will argue that this process of connective complexification took place with the garden at UVic. Problems of bureaucracy, colonialism, private property, food insecurity, proceduralism and other established practices were called into question in a process that deepened uncertainty and opened up new potentials. These struggles were not simply articulated together in a chain of equivalence with a common denominator, or against a common enemy: they were conjugated and intensified through a singularizing process.

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<sup>124</sup> Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 119.

An orientation to molecular processes reveals as *contingent* that which hegemony assumes as *necessary*: forms of connection do not necessarily operate discursively, nor do they necessitate articulation and its erasure of polyvocal difference. In the hegemonic analytic, the logics of difference and equivalence are the condition of possibility of political change. Molecularity opens up a different politics. Unlike the hegemonic analytic, singularities don't operate through the closure and fixity of identities and societies. In fact, it is through the continual disruption of these logics of inside/outside, us/them, that processes of singularization subsist, deepen and connect with one another. There is no guarantee that molecular processes will connect and intensify each other. Most of the time, they are steered back to molar binaries through processes of molarization. This is why processes of singularization seem so ephemeral, transitory, and insignificant. In what follows, I will focus on the processes where singularity is steered back to molarizing circuits of normality and stability.

### Part 3: Cooptation of Singularization in Theory and Practice

There are two ways of rejecting the revolution. The first is to refuse to see where it exists; the second is to see where it manifestly will not occur. These are, in a nutshell, the reformist and dogmatic pathways.<sup>125</sup>

- Felix Guattari

In this section I want to foreground processes of molarization that are immanent to social movements and their political struggles. I argue that common-sensical notions of social movements presuppose linear trajectories, coherent aims, and instrumentalist strategies through which social movements become intelligible. These assumptions facilitate the linearization and unification of social movements, so that it becomes difficult to think about them as *anything but* unified and linear. To insist that they are anything else usually means defining them *against* unity, as fragmentary and lacking direction. Evading these dichotomies is difficult, in part because molarizing processes are not limited to abstract theoretical or ontological assumptions. On the contrary, the most insidious processes are those that fold into social movements themselves, co-opting molecular processes by steering them back to predictable circuits of Statist politics. I suggest ‘Statism’ as a concept that orients us to the processes through which social movements are channeled into molarizing circuits of State politics, fixing their relationship to the State and translating their political problems into terms that can be resolved or reformed by the State.

The invention of the category ‘new social movements’ altered social movement analyses, leading to debates how to categorize social movements (or their practices) as

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<sup>125</sup> Guattari, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977*, 276.

old or new. The coherent category of ‘social movement’, which had been hegemonically rendered equivalent to proletarian struggle, was altered through the logic of difference, creating a division between new and old social movements. Like the totalizing equation of social movements with Marxist revolution, the new/old molar binary still requires a constitutive outside (of those things that are not social movements) but the inside is differentiated between new and old. However, Melucci saw that the way in which the category of social movements was operationalized resulted in a reifying molarization: rather than understanding social movements as the outcome—and motor—of processes, the category of ‘new social movements’ began to function as a catch-all classification for anything that didn’t resemble the ‘old’ social movements of Marxism. Difference articulated in relation to the Same: in this case, the model of Marxist mass movements.

From the perspective of hegemonic Marxism, these new movements were on the outside of revolutionary politics, and they had to be dismissed as merely cultural, reformist, or fleeting. Others saw this emergence as a creative and significant event, but this was accompanied by an attempt to specify (articulate) exactly what these new movements were, and how they differed from ‘older’ class-based movements.<sup>126</sup> A name was found for these emergent phenomena: the new social movements. Melucci struggled with this process of articulation, arguing that the binary of old and new social movements led to reification.<sup>127</sup> It seemed that there was a dynamism that was lost in the process of articulation; social movements could be recognized as particular instances of a general category, but only at the expense of eliding the processes that constituted them.

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<sup>126</sup> Alberto Melucci, "A Strange Kind of Newness: What's 'New' in New Social Movements?" in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, eds. Enrique Larana, Hank Johnston and Joseph Gusfield. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 101-129.

<sup>127</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 43.

With the category of NSMs, new practices could be lumped into this general category. Practices that seemed inventive and dynamic could therefore be contrasted to previous ones, showing how NSMs were different from OSMs. Melucci saw that this led to the sedimentation of the NSM/OSM binary, which paradoxically functioned to distract from an orientation to newness and difference. Inventive and experimental practices were snatched from the edge of intelligibility, made fully intelligible by articulating their ‘newness’ in relation to the ‘old’. The invention of general categories to contain newness and difference is an operation of molarization. If difference cannot be completely ignored, a new general category can be found for it; it can be domesticated as a particular instance of a general type.

Discourses and categories can always be subverted, challenged, and changed, but from the molar perspective of hegemony, this is just a prelude to rearticulation: new fixities and coherent categories. The concept of molecularity makes these processes of change intelligible without reducing them to the disruption of molar categories. The molecular speaks to a different mode of thought, irreducible to a ‘perspective’. Change, movement and transformation can be understood on their own terms. The molecular is the site of emergence of the *new in itself*. Newness, in this sense, cannot simply be defined against an older model, but must be understood as a process of mutation and emergence. Something is ‘new’ precisely because it is *emergent*, on the edge of intelligibility, in a process of becoming what it is not (yet).

### **The Molarization of Movement**

In everyday life, newness can always be contained through recognition. One can be struck by something strange or new, but it can always be contained by inventing a

category for it. “So that’s what it was,” we say to ourselves: a particular instance of a general type. Just a bunch of hippies doing their particular hippie thing, or anarchists being destructive, or artists making art. As soon as an entity is recognized for what it ‘is’, it stops becoming what it could be, and the possibility of transformation is amputated. In other words, once ‘we’ understand something and finally recognize it for ‘what it is’, we fix our relationship to it. A particular molar ‘inside’ understood from the perspective of an ‘outside’ observer. Molecular processes speak to the possibility of a transformation that occurs in the in-between, generating vectors of transformation in the relation: inside/outside are carried away in a dynamic process that modifies them both.

Social movement theory, no matter how apparently ‘objective’ and disinterested in normative prescriptions, is always political. This is because objectifications of social movements are always already normative, cutting off the possibility of movement and change, or containing this movement in molar categories. They are normative because they naturalize an orientation towards coherent objects, statistical aggregates, and linear movements: molarities.

In contrast, molecular processes work in the in-between of subjects and objects. Unforeseen transformations and connections take place. If ‘observer’ and ‘group’ are normally kept separate through the fixity of their relation, molecularization is the process of unfixity and unforeseen connection. This does not mean that the outside gets ‘in’ or vice-versa. Instead, something happens that blurs the boundaries between inside/outside, observer/group. The habits of thought and action that maintain clear distinctions fail, even for a moment, and molecular movement rushes in, engendering new actions that aren’t habitual or predictable.

It is important to insist that the molar/molecular distinction is not a simple opposition between movement and fixity. Molarization *can* end up freezing movement through reification, as I have suggested above, but it can also work to make movement predictable, linear, and directional. In this sense, molecular movement can be understood as non-directional and superlinear.<sup>128</sup>

Movement can be molarized by establishing a structure across, against, or towards which social movements are thought to move. Warren Magnusson describes this problem:

“Movement,” as we usually understand it, presupposes a fixed point, surface, or object in relation to which the movement occurs... When we talk of “social” movements, we are apparently assuming that they occur in relation to a comparatively stable frame, environment, or structure, and that the movements move in relation to this object of stability.<sup>129</sup>

Social movements are thought to move *from* one place *to* another, using the metaphor of space as a way to track movement as something that is linear.<sup>130</sup> Or, social movements are thought to move *against* a stable fixture or structure, as Magnusson emphasizes above. I have highlighted this problem in terms of ‘struggle against’: social movements become intelligible as movements that disrupt or oppose the State or some other entity that is thought to be stable and unchanging. In the hegemonic analytic, this movement is understood as antagonism and disarticulation.

Similarly, ‘struggle for’ orients us towards goals, objectives, and strategies, which give us a linear understanding of movements moving *towards* these objectives (and

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<sup>128</sup> The term ‘superlinear’ is borrowed from Brian Massumi’s reinterpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s molar and molecular, in his attempt to affirm a molecular perspective of open-ended transformation. See Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 118-122.

<sup>129</sup> Magnusson, *Globalization, Movements, and the Decentred State*, 95.

<sup>130</sup> For an analysis of the ways in which politics escape their containment (assumed) bounded spaces, see Shaw and Magnusson, *A Political Space: Reading the Global Through Clayoquot Sound*.

succeeding) or not, and failing. Despite the fact that these ways of representing social movements are supposed to portray movement, it is a molarizing movement because it linearizes (in terms of struggle for) or negativizes (in terms of disruptive struggle against). The net effect of these tropes of movement is molarization, plotting social movements in terms of predictable and stable circuits or relations of movement: across, through, against, towards. Brian Massumi has argued that these problems of movement are reproduced even in many currents of poststructuralist theory, because it privileges the molarizing forces of discourse and interpellation:

The idea of positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture... when positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement becomes a problematic second. After all is signified and sited [articulated], there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture. But adding movement to stasis is about as easy as multiplying a number by zero and getting a positive product. Of course, a body occupying one position on the grid might succeed in making a move to occupy another position. In fact, certain normative progressions, such as that from child to adult, are coded in. But this doesn't change the fact that what defines the body is not the movement itself, only its beginning and endpoints. Movement is entirely subordinated to the positions it connects.

How can movement be made *primary*, and not simply movement *from* one category to another, or movement which merely 'subverts' these categories momentarily? Can movement be thought without presupposing an a priori structure?

The molecular provides a means of responding to these problems of movement. Again, it is by no means a *solution*, but a means to open the problem of movement to thought, in an attempt to think the ways in which movement is linearized, binarized and controlled through molarizations, but also the ways in which it escapes and travels in new unexpected directions. Even the notion of 'direction' can be misleading here, because it tends to presuppose a grid or space that operates as a backdrop, linearizing movement.

Trajectories and directions *can* be plotted retrospectively, and this plotting often confirms the common-sense assumptions that enable them. Social movements can be understood as moving *towards* an objective, and if they achieve this objective, they are thought to have arrived at their destination. These are molar perspectives. Molecularity not a point of view, but a dynamic amidst of change *in the making*, which never conforms to any model or type.<sup>131</sup>

Molar perspectives can always attempt to locate or plot a direction, but by then, molecular movements are already elsewhere; not just in a different position on a grid, but undergoing a process that can't be gridded. This isn't a shift from one direction to another, because there was never a single direction to begin with: molecular movements are open-ended and superlinear, which means their direction can never be determined in advance. Superlinear is nowhere in particular, precisely because any 'particular' place is already a molar category that contains molecular movement. This does not mean that social movements are 'everywhere' or that they are universal, because that is simply the other side of particularity.

### **Statism as Co-optation of Singularity**

Below I will focus on one of the central forms of the co-optation of singularity, which I call "Statism". Statism, in the way it is used here, describes the molarizing process through which social movements are drawn towards the State as a central and naturalized space of politics. Statism is not simply a process carried out by governments, bureaucracies or officials 'on' social movements. Activists participate in this process

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<sup>131</sup> In coming to understand what I am calling the molecular perspective and its irreducibility to general models, I have found Brian Massumi's chapter on "The Political Economy of Belonging" particularly helpful, and much of my explanation is drawn from these insights and his conceptual vocabulary, albeit adapted to the specific problems of social movements. See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 68-88.

when they assume that the State is the central site of politics, orienting themselves to the State uncritically and accepting the boundaries and distinctions articulated through Statism. Movements are part of the process of Statist articulation. This is not a question of sorting out movements that engage with the State from movements that ignore it. Social movements may take on the State as a site of struggle without lapsing into Statism. Instead, Statism is the process through which the State is naturalized as *the central or primary* site of politics, resulting in routinization, rigidification and reformism.

In foregrounding the molarizing processes of Statism affecting social movements, the stakes are modified. It's not simply a question of the ways in which social movements are reified in theory or frozen in thought, but of the ways in which these processes are part of the practices of social movements. At stake are the ways in which theoretical and ontological questions become part of the everyday practices of social movements. How do molar articulations and molecular processes fold into the everyday practices of social movements? Can the concept of the molecular help to think about the political implications of processes that have been relegated to the negative? What is the political import of apparent fragmentation and the lack of a coherent strategy in social movements, and can this 'lack' be thought in positive terms?

We have already seen how a molarizing mode of abstraction leads to a search for generality, continuity, and sameness, tending towards reduction, objectification and reification. In fact, social movement theory *participates* in processes of molarization and fixation through a search for sameness or commonalities (the logic of equivalence), and by fixing differences as difference *from* (the logic of difference). The challenge now is to begin to think the ways in which social movements participate in these processes, as well

as molecular processes, in what is normally understand as ‘ground level’: in the practices, tactics, strategies and spaces of social movements. I am not suggesting that the space of social movement theory is somehow separate from social movements themselves; on the contrary, both are involved in processes of molarization and molecularization, and theory is part of social movements.<sup>132</sup>

There is no reason, therefore, to insist on a distinction between theory and practice, because theory itself is a practice, which becomes part of the world it thinks, and representations fold into the practices of social movements. It’s this process of *folding in* that must be considered. How do representations fold into the social movements they represent? Can articulations be understood in terms of the way they modify, structure, form and change the movements themselves, without reducing movements to these articulations?

This section begins by foregrounding the problem of the State and the molarizing processes of liberal democracies. Rather than focusing on the repressive force of the State, I will suggest that the more insidious tendency is its capacity to absorb social movements through processes that slightly modify State policies, laws or institutions (sometimes) while fixing, stabilizing or absorbing movement. Social movements are not simply passive recipients of this process, but often participate in it by orienting themselves to the State as the proper space of politics.

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<sup>132</sup> In Deleuze and Guattari’s language, a text forms an assemblage with its apparent ‘outside’. Rather than seeing a molar division between a representation (a book), a field of reality (the world) and subject (the author), a molecular perspective sees the book as an assemblage, “establishing connections between certain multiplicities drawn from these orders, so that the book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject... it’s not easy to see things from the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below... try: you’ll see that everything changes.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 23.

This process is often reproduced in what Richard Day calls ‘the politics of demand’, where social movements press demands on the State, reproducing its legitimacy and centrality, in addition to their own subordination. I will discuss his alternative, which he calls ‘the politics of the act’ by reading it together with the tactic of ‘Food Not Bombs’.

Next, I will show how Statism can be decentered by the hegemonic analytic, but often elides political spaces through its insistence on the need for counterhegemony. Counterhegemony foregrounds a search for sameness and commonality, often crystallized in the need for a ‘coherent alternative’ to the current hegemony. Like Statism, this search for commonality and coherence often takes social movements out of political spaces through a molarizing process of strategy. I will argue that the apparent necessities of strategy and coherence obfuscate the molecular processes of political spaces, which open the possibility of *connecting and deepening political problems*, without any basis of sameness or commonality. Examining the political spaces of social movements offers the possibility of thinking the ways in which problems are connected and intensified through practices, which are always in tension with molarizing processes of counterhegemony.

The modern states system takes molarizing processes to the extreme. As Warren Magnusson argues, State politics can be understood as a massive effort to fix politics in a particular form, and center it on the institutions of the State.<sup>133</sup> Those ‘inside’ these institutions are thought to be conducting the highest forms of politics, whereas those ‘outside’ tend to be seen as significant only insofar as they can press claims on the State

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<sup>133</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 42.

and achieve institutional change or recognition. These fixations of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are two of the most powerful, common-sensical (hegemonic) binaries that reproduce politics as a bounded space associated with the State. Furthermore, the notion of homogenous space and linear movement that I have discussed above has been invented through the process of the formation of modern states. Walker and Magnusson argue that this reified, Statist ontology—which they trace to Galileo—often traps thought and practice in a reified conception of reality before the State is even engaged as a problem:

Time is simply a measure for the movement of objects in space. Objects themselves—atoms, molecules, rocks, people, states—are essentially self-contained. They may collide with other objects, and be destroyed, but, given consciousness, they can learn to steer safely through space and maintain their own integrity. That integrity bespeaks an internal order that can secure values the subject/object—an individual or a state—gives to itself. Security is thus a key order and value. It works because what is within is unrelated to what is without... This essentially static conception of the universe and this atomistic conception of the objects within it are at the heart of the bourgeois understanding of politics.<sup>134</sup>

It is no mere coincidence, then, that analyses of social movements tend to fall back on tropes of linear movement and molar binaries that end up reinforcing dominant institutions and common sense. This ontology was developed within and through the formation of the States system and its concomitant attempts to eliminate and marginalize other conceptions of politics. This ontology does not reproduce itself automatically or in abstraction; it is constantly reinforced through Statist articulations and everyday practices.

Magnusson explains that the political space of the State “creates its own vortex, which pulls the media, the movements, the parties, the pressure groups and the political

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<sup>134</sup> Walker and Magnusson, “Decentering the State: Political Theory and Canadian Political Economy,” 52.

scientists towards it.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, the hegemony of Statist politics is not maintained simply by a formal decree that the State is the center of politics. Statism also maintains itself by reproducing specific routines, procedures, and cycles. The practices of courts, elections, lobbying, legislation, and other State discourses invite social movements to articulate themselves in a way that is intelligible within these discourses. As social movements enter these Statist spaces, they tend to become detached from their molecular processes, attempting to articulate themselves in terms that are more universal, or more amenable to particular reforms. As Magnusson explains, “everyone is led to see that politics and the law—the inputs and outputs of public life—come out of a common existence that can only be changed by action within the system.”<sup>136</sup>

Contemporary states hegemonize themselves by articulating their own origins, along with a totalizing conception of the political. In this sense, Peyman Vahabzadeh argues that liberalism articulates its origins in the French Revolution, whereas state socialism points back to the October Revolution of 1917.<sup>137</sup> Liberal democracy uses this origin story to fix politics to the ontology of the State and the modern states system: the foundation of the State is also the foundation of politics. ‘Domestic’ politics is articulated as the practices of autonomous states ‘inside’, and ‘international’ politics is articulated as practices of diplomacy ‘between’ states.<sup>138</sup> Everything else fades from intelligibility as political, exorcised to the margins and understood as local, parochial or particularistic. Liberal democracies—globally hegemonic after the fall of the USSR—

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<sup>135</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 10.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>137</sup> Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Technological Liberalism and the Anarchic Actor," in *Anarcho-modernism: Toward a New Critical Theory, in Honour of Jerry Zaslove*, ed. Ian Angus. (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2001), 341-350.

<sup>138</sup> R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

operate through a process of molarizing categorization and incorporation. This is what gives liberal democracy its staying power: it is capable of increasingly internalizing and institutionalizing dissent, articulating movements in ways that rigidify them and destroy processes of singularity. Statism perceives and selects the qualities or properties of movements that are amenable to absorption and institutional reform. The linearization and simplification of movement helps to make movements intelligible in terms of their orientations towards the State. Liberalism articulates this as a benign and even emancipatory process through which governments correct historical wrongs. For example, I will argue that multiculturalism rearticulates its origins against an earlier ‘difference-blind’ form of liberalism in order to institute a new politics of absorption and recognition.

### **Molarization in Liberalism and Multiculturalism**

Statism points us towards a process of molarization that is never accomplished entirely by social movements or the State exclusively. Instead, Statism is what enables the State to be conceived as something separated from movements in the first place. Through Statism, social movements are articulated as ‘outside’ the State (often thought to be in a separate sphere called civil society) or as ‘inside’ the State, incorporated through a process of institutionalization. Warren Magnusson argues that this is the fate of the socialist movement, for instance. As it became increasingly oriented towards the State as an object of political struggle, it succumbed to increasingly rationalized procedures and institutions, centering its action on political parties and institutionalizing unions:

Once these parties came to monopolize the movement, the time and space of the state—defined by elections, legislative sessions, and bureaucratic procedures—became predominant. In this alien environment, the movement atrophied and the parties it generated became vulnerable to displacement. What is more, socialism

came to be identified with particular statist projects, such as the nationalization of industry, economic planning, and extended social services. Whatever their socialist origins, these projects were modified in terms of the requirements of specific states... These requirements had little to do with socialism but much to do with the internal and external security of the states concerned. Thus, the aspirations of socialism—originally understood not only in terms of the transcendence of capitalism, but also in terms of the dissolution of the state system—were increasingly identified with the violence and oppression of state bureaucracies.

Statism can thus be understood as the process through which the socialist movement was detached from its own political spaces—its invention of creative political practices and its problematization of hegemonic global capital and the modern states system—to the political space of the State and the rationalization and incorporation of the movement. This narrative of rationalization and incorporation is not meant to suggest that socialism is dead, or that it's a corrupted or co-opted movement. Instead, it might be possible to foreground the problem of how to reinvigorate a socialist movement that is experimental and open-ended, one that side-steps the imperatives of Statism and inaugurates new, creative political struggles. A number of theorists have recently argued that autonomist Marxism contains the elements for a renewed and radicalized socialism.<sup>139</sup>

New social movements tend to be differentiated from the (old) socialist movement on the basis that they did not articulate themselves in terms of Statist aspirations of political parties and gaining control of the State. For example, Alain Touraine often argues that new social movements are concomitant with the decline of a

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<sup>139</sup> Hardt and Negri's *Empire* is only the most famous reappropriation of autonomist Marxism: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000). See also Stevphen Shukaitis, *Imaginal Machines: Autonomy Self-organization in the Revolutions of Everyday Life*, (New York: Autonomedia, 2009); Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson. (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2004); Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of Post-Alpha Generation*, (London: Minor Compositions, 2009). It is no coincidence that many of these works are informed by the ontological innovations that are normally attributed to Deleuze and Guattari. Guattari worked with Berardi on pirate radio stations, and he also collaborated with Negri, among others.

mediating political party.<sup>140</sup> Vahabzadeh argues that new social movements avoid the universalizing (hegemonic) articulations of the socialist movement, rejecting the totalizing models of universality in favour of preserving their singular problems.<sup>141</sup> In this sense, there is no chain of equivalence that hegemonizes and organizes these movements under a central concept.

However, even social movements that refuse the hegemonizing logics of equivalence have tended to fall prey to a different form of Statism. Rather than institutionalizing themselves in the State by articulating universalizing aspirations in Statist terms (in the form of a political party representing ‘all workers’, for example), new social movements have often become molarized through a Statist recognition of particularity, in the demand for rights or recognition.

Rights are often framed as a limitation on sovereign authority, and thus as a space of freedom from the coercive power of the state. However, what seems like a limitation on state power ends up producing more subtle forms of domination and control. As Wendy Brown explains, those who have been excluded become included through a discourse of rights that “reinstalls the humanist ideal—and a specific white, middle-class, masculinist expression of this ideal—insofar as it premises itself upon exclusion from it.”<sup>142</sup> In other words, the problem of difference raised by social movements is overcoded as a difference *from* an implicit norm of the white, male, rational political subject. Brown generalizes this problem as one of the particular form that *desire* of politicized identity takes within liberal-bureaucratic regimes: “its foreclosure of its own freedom, its impulse

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<sup>140</sup> Touraine, *Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society*, 118.

<sup>141</sup> According to Vahabzadeh, the rejection of overarching, universalizing horizons is the common denominator of the new social movements. Vahabzadeh, *Articulated Experiences: Toward a Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements*, 345.

<sup>142</sup> Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, 65.

to inscribe in the law and in other political registers its historical and present pain.”<sup>143</sup>

Liberal absorption thus molarizes social movements by comparing them to the normal, rational subject of liberalism, and finding ways to accommodate this difference.

The recent development of liberal multiculturalism in Canada and elsewhere tends to find ways to accommodate its historically excluded ‘Others’—Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and Quebecois—by ‘recognizing’ (and thereby fixing) their particularity. Below, I will briefly outline the way this molarizing multiculturalism works to assimilate and regulate Indigenous peoples, through a seemingly benign process of recognition. This process helps to politicize the ways in which Statism can reproduce colonialism while simultaneously presenting itself as a process of decolonization. Multiculturalism articulates itself as a reversal of assimilationist and exclusionary policies concerning ‘minority groups’.

Perhaps the most prominent articulation of this reversal comes from Charles Taylor, who elaborated the “politics of recognition” to describe the way in which previously excluded minority groups demand recognition from the state. Taylor’s central problem is what he calls a “failure of recognition”. For Taylor, minority groups “have been induced to adopt a depreciatory image of themselves.”<sup>144</sup> Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and other ‘minorities’ are thus articulated in a chain of equivalence, defined by what they lack: recognition, or an affirmation of their uniqueness. The remedy for this lack, of course, is recognition, which involves affirming (and thereby molarizing) the Other’s identity. In the discourse of state multiculturalism, the state is the agent that

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 66

<sup>144</sup> Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining The Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 24.

recognizes (and regulates) identity by conferring various rights, privileges and entitlements on ‘minority groups’.

The discourse of liberal multiculturalism is articulated against previous projects of liberalism, in a way that positions multiculturalism not just as a departure from colonialism, but as a reversal of previous policies of assimilation and exclusion. Moreover, liberal multiculturalism is articulated as a product of struggle; Indigenous political movements are made intelligible in terms of a struggle against exclusionary, difference-erasing forms of liberalism, culminating in their recognition. It is this reversal—whereby the State articulates its multicultural policies against its history of colonialism—that allows state-based production of identity to be signified as indispensable and emancipatory.

Multiculturalism is thus articulated as a reaction to assimilationist nation-building policies, wherein a dominant group has imposed its institutions, values, language and culture.<sup>145</sup> It opposes itself to ‘difference-blind’ theories of liberalism because they fail to realize that universal, undifferentiated rights can function as subtle forms of oppression. The discourse of multiculturalism is thus able to assume an obligation for itself: it becomes the agent for “recognition and accommodation to the history, language, and culture of non-dominant groups” over and against the assimilationist attempts of previous government.<sup>146</sup>

Multiculturalism thus operates by inducing previously excluded Others to produce their own identity for the State, in a way that shows how special entitlements, rights or privileges are necessary in order for the representative identity to be included or

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<sup>145</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 62-3.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

respected. According to Will Kymlicka, previous policies towards Indigenous peoples were assimilationist or colonizing, and multiculturalist policies of self-government rights and recognition of traditional customs represent “a dramatic reversal in these policies” which leads to “a gradual but real process of decolonization taking place.”<sup>147</sup> Whereas old State policy attempted to erase and control different ethnic groups, multiculturalism accords special rights and privileges to these groups.

### **Intensifying Problems**

The Statist processes of multiculturalism and recognition have not been entirely successful, resisted in a number of ways by Indigenous peoples. For instance, Taiaiake Alfred argues that “self government and economic development are being offered precisely *because* they are useless to us in the struggle to survive as peoples and so are no threat to the Settlers... this is assimilation’s end-game.”<sup>148</sup> In this sense, multiculturalism has been increasingly politicized as a process of consolidation of Canadian colonialism, rather than its antithesis. The opposition between multiculturalism and colonialism is disarticulated by Alfred, so that its processes of recognition can be understood as molarizing processes of Statism, and opened to contestation.

Others have politicized the strategies of Indigenous political movements, pointing to the ways in which they reproduce their own subordination through Statist practices. For example, some have argued that the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) has focused primarily on articulating the practices of First Nations governments as discriminatory, making recourse to the Canadian constitution, and that this Statist legal

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>148</sup> Alfred, *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, 37.

strategy has reinforced the logic of colonial and patriarchal rule in communities.<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, these scholars have pointed out the complicity of liberal theorists in naturalizing liberal multiculturalism, facilitating the articulation of Indigenous struggles in Statist terms and rendering them intelligible as demands for inclusion into Settler society and its institutions.<sup>150</sup>

In this sense, multiculturalism inaugurates a new form of Statist molarization, displacing overtly repressive, assimilationist policies. In fact, the reversal that seems to limit State power actually *expands* the power of the State in a different way:

The state now has both the right to sanction "harmful" social practices and identities—that is, to sanction cultural difference—and the right to discern when a social or cultural difference has ceased to function as a difference as such. The state, in other words, has expanded its discriminatory powers, not restricted them. It is now empowered to prohibit and to (de)certify cultural difference as a rights- and resource-bearing identity.<sup>151</sup>

This reading of multiculturalism as a new form of Statism confounds the notion of Indigenous people as ‘outside’ the State struggling to be included. These claims are part of the same molarizing machine as state multiculturalism, enabling the reversal that founds multiculturalism as a discourse, and expanding the power of the State to police the boundaries of ‘aboriginal’.

Through this process, Indigenous people, their lawyers, and anthropologists find themselves drawn into the Statist vortex, constructing the narratives required of them by the State.<sup>152</sup> Land claims proceedings help to define the ‘essence’ of ‘Indigenous’

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<sup>149</sup> Glen Coulthard, “Nuu-chah-nulth Struggles Against Sexual Violence: Interview with Chiinuuk (Ruth Ogilvie) and Na’cha’uaht (Cliff Atleo, Jr.)” *New Socialist*, (Special Issue on Indigenous Resurgence) 58 (2006): 28-31.

<sup>150</sup> Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (2007): 437-460.

<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crisis of Indigenous Citizenship," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 575-610, quoted on 579.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 590.

through a rationalized framework, in which claims must be articulated in terms that elicit a particular decision from courts. Indigeneity becomes hypostatized, articulated in terms of an essential, molar culture that existed in stasis before contact. I am not suggesting that Indigenous communities who take this path are naive or that they are committing an error. Instead, I am attempting to point to a molarizing logic of Statism that molarizes Indigenous movements. As they are articulated through Statist practices and institutions, Indigenous movements are subjected to molarizing practices that fix Indigenous peoples within Statist categories.

Insofar as Statism is successful, political problems are separated from everyday life. Politics is the prerogative of the State, and (sometimes) of those struggling to be heard by the State. Colonialism becomes detached from practices of everyday life, made intelligible in terms of Indigenous people and the claims they press on the State. In the process, the relationship of Settlers to colonialism becomes depoliticized; the problem of colonialism is confined to a molarizing relationship between the Canadian State and its 'aboriginal' peoples. If 'regular' Canadians are involved in this process at all, it is through Taylorian recognition of difference, which leaves our own practices, assumptions and society unproblematic: Canadians have already become fully-free subjects with acceptable identities. The hegemonic conception of colonialism is articulated as a problem to be resolved by the State, not something that concerns Canadians. In this sense, movements that challenge colonialism tend to be made intelligible in Statist terms, so that recognition and integration appear as the only possible responses to the problems of colonialism.

Recent efforts of scholars and activists have worked to destabilize this process of Statism, charting out different possibilities.<sup>153</sup> The political force of these movements, I would suggest, lies less in their capacity to articulate a coherent alternative, than in its capacity to foreground the *problem* of colonialism, in ways that destabilize its hegemonic articulation as an ‘Indian problem’. Indeed, colonialism is characterized by perpetual attempts to ‘solve’ what tends to be understood as an ‘Indian problem’, initially through outright violence, genocide, and religious conversion; subsequently through residential schools; and now through multicultural recognition and economic development. Colonialism is a clear example of a problem in which ‘solutions’ tend to reproduce the problem. In contrast, counter-colonial movements have begun to break this cycle, creating responses that *deepen and intensify* the problem of colonialism, rather than ‘solving’ it. The problem of colonialism (and the need to deepen it) helps to demonstrate the inadequacy of counterhegemony, which presupposes a totalizing alternative to colonialism, rather than an open-ended process of contestation. Below, I will draw on Richard Day’s distinction between the politics of demand and the politics of the act in order to highlight this process of contestation.

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<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism," *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4 (2005); Jeff Corntassel, "Toward Sustainable Self-Determination: Rethinking the Contemporary Indigenous-Rights Discourse," *Alternatives* 33, no. 1 (2008): 105-132.; Alfred, *Wasá'se: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*,; Richard J. F. Day, "Who is This We That Gives the Gift? Native American Political Theory and The Western Tradition," *Critical Horizons* 2, no. 2 (2001): 173-201; Leanne Simpson, *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2008); Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada," 437-460; Paulette Regan, "Unsettling the Settler Within: Canada’s Peacemaker Myth, Reconciliation, and Transformative Pathways to Decolonization" (Ph.D. diss., University of Victoria, 2006).

## Part 4: Politics of Demand, Politics of the Act

One of the most powerful critiques of Statist molarization is Richard Day's concept of "the politics of demand".<sup>154</sup> The politics of demand establishes a molarizing circuit between a social movement and a site of authority. The social movement articulates a demand of an authority, and the authority responds (or not). This circuit becomes naturalized and hegemonized as a central way in which social movements are made intelligible: what do you want, and who do you want it from? In order for the circuit to be established and continually re-established, social movements must be made intelligible in terms of coherent wholes, with stable desires or interests. My aim here is to show that things could be otherwise: that the molarizing circuit of the politics of demand is a hegemonic but contingent way in which social movements are made intelligible, rather than a necessary one. I will situate Day's alternative—which he calls 'the politics of the act'—in terms of its molecular potential; its capacity to break the molar circuits established by the politics of demand, and open spaces for creative resistance.

The concept of the politics of demand is useful because it orients us towards processes of molarization that operate beyond Statism. It shows how social movements are often made intelligible through demands, which perpetuate a feeling of lack and the desire for emancipation through an appeal to an outside: to 'the people' or 'the State' or any other molar entity (a corporation, the public, the Left, and so on). Through the politics of demand, social movements tend to be made intelligible by what they want, and

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<sup>154</sup> For a shorter summary of the arguments concerning hegemony found in *Gramsci is Dead*, see Day, "From Hegemony to Affinity."

who they want it from. Claims, demands, and other coherent articulations come to stand in for the movement itself, in a process of molarization that reduces the movement to its claims. Indeed, for Laclau and Mouffe, demands are the central unit of analysis.<sup>155</sup> The effect of foregrounding demands is the naturalization of molarizing tendencies, reproducing a molar relation between two totalities (the movement representing itself as a unified whole, and the molar institution to which it presents its demands). The politics of demand reproduces its dependence on corporations, governments, and other molar aggregates and this dependence is naturalized and depoliticized.

Whether advanced angrily, through reasoned public debate, or through lobbying, demands reproduce the authorities they engage with, placing activists in an infantilized relationship to them.<sup>156</sup> Through Statism and the politics of demand, these institutions are reproduced as the sites of authority through which political problems are solved. Political problems are articulated in terms of a particular group pressing its demands on the State, an institution, ‘the public’, ‘society’, or any other molar aggregate, conceived as a coherent whole.

When political problems are translated into the politics of demand, the molarizing processes at work tend to be depoliticized; they come to seem normal, natural or inevitable. When it is articulated in Statist terms, this molarizing process often occurs by translating problems into the dichotomy of universal/particular: the State is positioned as the universal arbiter of justice, and the space of resolution of political problems. Social movements, in turn, are translated into the particular, cast as interest groups, coalitions, or groups with stable interests and objectives. This has often been the case with ‘new social

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<sup>155</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2005), 73.

<sup>156</sup> For Day’s analysis of the politics of demand, see Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 80-84; Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity”.

movements’, which avoided the Statist politics of parties, but often lapsed into the politics of demand, made intelligible as interest groups ‘outside’ the State, struggling for state reforms.<sup>157</sup> The politics of demand thus operates through representation: groups must be articulated as coherent wholes, capable of being ‘represented’ by those who articulate a demand. In this sense, even the most particularistic demands require the logic of equivalence: a demand must come to stand in for the group (or movement) ‘as a whole’. The group must have a coherent ‘inside’ which can be represented by a demand.

The politics of demand often folds together with other molarizing processes of bureaucratization and proceduralism. For instance, the politics of demand can be actualized by ‘social movement organizations’ (SMOs) that are the bureaucratic outgrowths of the movements they (claim to) represent. SMOs arrogate for themselves the capacity to define the interests of the movement ‘as a whole’ and to lobby or make demands ‘on their behalf’. Furthermore, they tend to develop their own specialized bureaucracies and procedures, rigidifying practices that had once been fluid and creative.<sup>158</sup> As Magnusson argues, “any attempt to privilege a given centre—be it an agency, a party, or an SMO—is likely to be a sign of antidemocratic [hegemonizing] efforts to inhibit change.”<sup>159</sup> It is *molecular change* that is inhibited: creativity, flexibility, and open-ended change are channeled into procedures and practices of representation and centralization that *can* achieve molar change in the way of reforms or

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<sup>157</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 89-90.

<sup>158</sup> Today, ‘non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs) are more prevalent than SMOs, and they tend to reproduce the same problems of molarization and bureaucratization. Furthermore, activism has become increasingly dependent on the ‘NGO-industrial-complex’, which provides funding for activism and steers movements towards reformist, single-issue campaigns. See Incite! Women of Colour Against Violence ed., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond The Non-profit Industrial Complex*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007).

<sup>159</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 70.

hegemonic campaigns. Indeed, SMOs are often far more effective at achieving Statist change than social movements, because they are able to flatten out differences and represent themselves—and ‘their’ movements—as coherent wholes with reasonable demands:

The ‘representation’ of social movements can be part of an operation to secure externality. Social movements are identified with SMOs; the SMOs are asked to send representatives to meetings or to put them on commissions of inquiry or administrative boards; these representatives are then designated as the legitimate spokespeople for movements that exist legitimately only *outside* the state. This expulsion of the movements is never fully successful, but it serves to encourage public servants to treat movements as objects outside themselves upon which they have the authority to act in the name of the state.<sup>160</sup>

What does it mean to challenge these naturalized processes of molarization? This cannot simply mean foregrounding spaces where the ‘representativeness’ of groups is questioned, as if they do not ‘truly’ speak on behalf of movements, for this implies that there could be a true representation. To search for a form of articulation that is ‘truly representative’ of a movement is to depoliticize the processes of molarization—the smoothing over of differences, and the stoppages of movement and transformation—that are *built in* to any process of representing a movement or group as a whole. Furthermore, there are no ‘solutions’ to the problem of representation; politicizing these molarizing processes entails deepening the problem, rendering it palpable, and engendering hesitations. If, as I have suggested, there are molecular escapes from these molarizing processes, how can they be made intelligible? Where are the spaces in which the politics of demand—and its molarizing processes of representation—are thrown into question, where movements act differently?

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

## Politics of the Act and Short-circuiting

I will draw on Richard Day's concept of 'the politics of the act' as an alternative to the molarizing processes of the politics of demand. This concept foregrounds spaces where groups are not demanding anything at all, focusing on movements that are *non-hegemonic*, because they do not articulate a hegemonizing logic of equivalence. However, Day often valorizes these movements without politicizing the tendencies of molarization that inhere in them. Practices that escape the politics of demand are always vulnerable to other forms of molarization, especially through sectarianism, isolation and a totalizing conception of the State and capitalism. If the logic of equivalence is simply displaced by the logic of difference, social movements isolate themselves. I am suggesting that the concept of molecular processes might avoid isolation, but not by articulating a basis of sameness or universality.

Day foregrounds what he calls the 'politics of the act' as an alternative to the politics of demand, tracing a genealogy through currents of anarchism, autonomist Marxism, feminism and Indigenous political theory that side-steps the politics of demand, creating alternatives to State-capitalist forms directly, rather than attempting to mediate change through the State.

The politics of the act results from "getting over the hope that the state and corporate forms, as structures of domination, exploitation and division, are somehow capable of producing effects of emancipation."<sup>161</sup> In this sense, Day argues that many contemporary social movements are often not demanding anything at all, but this does not mean they are unintelligible. Rather than presenting demands that can be incorporated into liberal capitalism, these movements "challenge, disrupt and disorient

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<sup>161</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 15.

the processes of global hegemony, to *refuse, rather than rearticulate* those forces that are tending towards the universalization of the liberal capitalist ecumene.”<sup>162</sup> The anarchist tradition of direct action figures prominently in Day’s account of the politics of the act, and a number of scholars have pointed to the increasing interest in anarchism (both in academic theory and activist practice) as a mode of practice that avoids the dichotomy of liberal reformism and Marxist revolution.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, the molarizing function of representation and demands has increasingly been criticized with an ensuing attempt to make alternative social movement practices intelligible.<sup>164</sup> These practices avoid incorporation into hegemonic structures by refusing to engage in the politics of demand, foregrounding disruption rather than reformism. Is this simply an endorsement of what I have called ‘struggle against’? Is Day’s alternative simply a valorization of disruptive action over negotiation? I will argue that the politics of the act should not be understood in terms of a simple opposition between speaking and action, or as a simple opposition to the State and capitalism. Instead, what needs to be appreciated in the politics of the act is its molecular processes, which can actively ward off processes of molarization, rather than simply opposing hegemonic molar structures.

In the politics of demand, social movements articulate themselves by producing a demand that (it is hoped) will be heard and responded to by a molar entity (the State, the public, and so on). A demand is presented, the State (hopefully) responds, and demands recur. In this sense, the politics of demand reproduces a molarizing circuit, reproducing

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<sup>162</sup> Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity”, 730.

<sup>163</sup> Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” 61-73; Robinson and Tormey, “Horizontals, Verticals, and the Conflicting Logics of Transformative Politics,” 208-226.

<sup>164</sup> Simon Tormey argues that the Zapatista uprising can be understood as a rejection of representational politics. See Tormey, “Not in my Name’: Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation,” 138-154. For an excellent activist-based critique of the molarizing functions of Statism and the politics of demand with respect to social housing in Vancouver, see Anonymous, “Demand Nothing,” *Moment of Insurrection*, <http://momentofinsurrection.wordpress.com/demand-nothing/>.

the conditions of its own emergence.<sup>165</sup> In contrast, the politics of the act invents responses that break this loop, directly creating alternatives that render the molar circuit redundant.<sup>166</sup> Rather than the necessary center or receiver of demands, the status of established authorities is thrown into question. Not simply ‘rejected’, or ‘opposed’, but decentered and politicized. In this sense, there is no opposition between the politics of the act and the politics of demand. The politics of the act should not be misunderstood as ‘anything-other-than-demands’. This way of understanding the politics of the act steers it towards a molar binary of negotiation/destruction, assimilating the politics of the act to the pole of transgression and destruction. This understanding facilitates the perpetual dismissal of anarchist movements (and others) as ideologies of pure refusal which advocate destructive transgression or pure separation and autonomy.

Instead, the politics of the act is defined by its break from a molar circuit that is perpetuated through the politics of demand. This break opens up a space of contingency where the State and other molar aggregates—as the naturalized sites of politics—is displaced so that other politics can emerge. If molarizing processes of containment fail and processes of singularization threaten established practices and norms, the State often responds by repressing the politics of the act through violence and criminalization, often with absurd results. For example, in March 2010, students and community members constructed a garden at the University of Victoria, in broad daylight, without the permission of the UVic administration. In response, the administration called the police, and bulldozed the garden that night, in an attempt to restore its authority. To many, this

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<sup>165</sup> Day argues that the politics of demand reproduces what he calls—following Žižek—an ‘ethics of desire’, which defines what I am calling a molar circuit of demand-response. Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity,” 734.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 734.

response seemed absurd and draconian, but from the perspective of the bureaucratic administration, it was absolutely necessary and legitimate: the administration has authority over how its lands are used, and any challenge to this authority is seen as an external threat. Worst of all, these gardeners didn't seem to be asking for anything at all, so their actions were completely unintelligible as political: at best, they were articulated as naïve protest tactics. The garden was classified as vandalism and was destroyed that night. Molar normalcy restored (or so it was hoped).

This particular example is short-lived and from a molar perspective, entirely ineffective. However, 'effectiveness' here is based on the assumption of a stable goal or objective, which does not necessarily exist in this case. I will discuss the UVic garden in the final chapter, expanding on this analysis and focusing on its molar and molecular processes. Molecular transformations are not only molarized by a return to normalcy, but by the retroactive articulation of (presupposed) objectives, goals or positions that make the movement intelligible as a stable position or linear movement. From the perspective of the politics of demand, the garden was incoherent; there was no clear demand articulated, so the movement failed to articulate a coherent objective, let alone achieve anything worthwhile. If it's not clear what movements are *struggling for* in terms that can be articulated as a coherent strategy, they are often dismissed. As I have suggested above, molecular processes are attacked, covered over, or steered back into molar circuits in manifold ways. This does not mean they should be dismissed as ineffective, because this dismissal is only possible from a molar perspective, which understands 'effectiveness' in molar terms, as the alteration of molar forms such as the State,

corporations or other institutions, or in terms of the molar objectives imputed onto movements themselves.

### **Warding Off Lack: Food Not Bombs**

The molecular processes of social movements are often dismissed as vague and incoherent: lacking clear goals, strategies, or capacities for counterhegemonic articulation. For proponents of counterhegemony, what's missing in the politics of the act is the capacity to articulate a coherent alternative to neoliberal capitalism, capable of building consensus and unity across various groups, communities and movements. William Carroll criticizes Day's conception of a politics of the act for its incompleteness. It refuses "strategy, leadership, [and] organization" and its insights about the value of direct action "need to be integrated into a strategically coherent form."<sup>167</sup> In this sense, Day's focus on the non-hegemonic (at the expense of the counterhegemonic) is a regression into a "profound pessimism" and a politics of escape, rather than a sustained attempt to deal with the problem of hegemonic globalizing capital and the modern system of states.<sup>168</sup>

In the terms of Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic analytic, that which is missing from the politics of the act is a chain of equivalence that articulates commonalities between movements, fixing them together and arraying them against their common enemy: neoliberal state capitalism (or some other hegemonic articulation of an enemy). It is important to note that although Laclau and Mouffe tend to reduce social movements to their Statist articulations by positioning demands as the basic unit of analysis, this is not a logical conclusion from the hegemonic analytic. Indeed, it is conceivable that

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<sup>167</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 33.

<sup>168</sup> Carroll, "Hegemony, Counter-hegemony, Anti-hegemony," 32.

movements could form chains of equivalence and create a hegemonic bloc without reproducing a Statist orientation. What is necessary from the perspective of the hegemonic analytic is the creation—through articulation—of a coherent alternative to the currently-hegemonic order.

The hegemonic analytic is so convincing (hegemonic perhaps) to those that even anarchist authors have assumed the need for a counterhegemonic alternative to neoliberalism. Saul Newman argues that the anti-globalization movement is producing a counterhegemonic struggle, where feminist, anti-racist, ecological, anarchist and ethnic minority struggles have been increasingly articulated against capitalism as “a common enemy and a common problem.”<sup>169</sup> In this sense, global capital functions as a common enemy, providing these movements with “a common frontier through which they become intelligible.”<sup>170</sup> Although these developments are promising, what’s needed most of all is a “common political imaginary, a common vision of what the world should be.”<sup>171</sup> Finally, he insists that the anti-globalization movement “still lacks a sense of a coherent, unified purpose.”<sup>172</sup> Again, *lack* is reinscribed at the center of contemporary social movements, made intelligible in terms of their failure to approximate the ideal of a coherent, unified mass movement.

By drawing out the assumptions of the hegemonic analytic, my aim is not to claim that strategy and unity are inherently corrupting or evil. Instead, the hope is to politicize these practices—and the ways in which they fold into movements—as part of these struggles but never constitutive of them. The problem is not that molar objectives exist,

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<sup>169</sup> Newman, *Unstable Universalities: Poststructuralism and Radical Politics*, 178.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

but that they molarize other practices and forms of politics, instrumentalizing them in terms of their strategic effectiveness. Strategy always comes first, with questions of experimentation, creativity and open-ended change reduced to a problematic second. In this sense, molarization is always political, and it operates through the erasure of molecular difference. Questions of intelligibility must be politicized. The hegemonic analytic tends to make movements intelligible through their articulations, and this exclusive focus depoliticizes the function of molarizing articulation.

A crucial question, therefore, is how movements might be made intelligible in terms of their molar *and* molecular politics. In this sense, there are two forms of political change, whose interrelationship is a difficult puzzle. Molar politics is about the struggle to achieve institutional changes, create reforms, influence public opinion, and so on: it focuses its attention on molar entities, conceived as bounded wholes, statistical aggregates, or dominant tendencies. On this terrain, linear strategies and coherent demands often are the most effective means of achieving molar objectives. Molar change is intelligible as clear modifications to molar entities: a State repeals a repressive law, a mining company withdraws due to political pressure, a corporation is forced to change its hiring policies, social movements build alliances and articulate common ground. The argument here is not that these modes of politics should be abandoned. The problem is that these struggles tend to hegemonize the field of politics, so that molecular politics is either instrumentalized or ignored completely. When they are acknowledged at all, molecular processes tend to be evaluated in terms of their capacity to effect molar change, and they are found ineffective on this basis. As a result, open-ended transformations and experiments are instrumentalized and molarized, converted into

linear strategies, and these processes of conversion—what I have called molarization—is depoliticized, articulated as a necessity. What needs to be thought is the complex *relation* between molar politics and molecular politics. Can molar political struggles avoid instrumentalizing molecular singularizations? How might molecular movements avoid molarization?

In what follows, I will suggest that molecular movements do not simply ‘lack’ coherence, but often *actively ward off* the molarizing processes that produce coherence, strategy and unity. This warding off is not simply a naïve particularism that shuts movements off from connections. Instead, these processes allow for multiple connections and articulations that are normally foreclosed through rigid articulations.

I will make these processes intelligible by examining the tactic of ‘Food not Bombs’. Day cites Food not Bombs (FNB)—a practice in which people recover food (often from dumpsters), cook it, and serve it—as a politics of the act.<sup>173</sup> Although its title suggests that the tactic is based on an opposition to war, this articulation often has little relation to the actual practices of FNB.<sup>174</sup> Day calls this a ‘non-branded tactic’ because it has been taken up in a number of different contexts globally, serving homeless people in parks or deployed in demonstrations. In general, FNB is fundamentally vague, and its political implications always depend on the way it is deployed in particular contexts. For my purposes, what is interesting about FNB is its irreducibility to a ‘struggle against’ a hegemonic structure, or a ‘struggle for’ a particular goal. Against which hegemonic practices is FNB positioned? Against the capitalist commodification of food production?

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<sup>173</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 35-45.

<sup>174</sup> See C.T. Lawrence Butler and Keith McHenry, *Food Not Bombs*, (Tucson, See Sharp Press, 2000). This work contains an authoritative account of the history, practice, and politics of Food Not Bombs, written by activists who have been doing FNB for over 20 years.

Against the society of control that marginalizes and subjugates ‘homeless’ people?  
 Against liberal individualism which produces subjects who are rational and self-interested? Against the securitization of urban spaces? Against militarization, imperialism, and ‘bombs’ suggested by the name? What makes alternatives like Food not Bombs interesting and significant is partly the fact that it can intervene in a whole set of discourses (and their concomitant relations of power) at once. Any attempt here to name the enemy *against* which these alternatives are positioned seems to perform the same reduction that inheres in the ‘struggle for’ formulation: there is no single objective or position of FNB.

This apparent ‘lack’ of clarity belongs to the molecular dimension of FNB. In this sense, it is defined by a *supple molecular code*: it’s not lacking coherence; its vagueness allows it to be articulated into different contexts, not fixed once-and-for-all, but rather kept ‘fuzzy’ enough so that it can be continually experimented with in different contexts, with different effects, but also ‘coded’ in a way that contains its variation within limits.<sup>175</sup> This allows us to foreground the molecular dimension of the politics of the act. The ‘vagueness’ of these movements is not simply a lack of coherence. Instead, the suppleness of these practices allows them to shift and change continually, according to the varying contexts in which they’re embedded. In this sense, these movements can actually *ward off* processes of molarization: “they consciously defy the logic of hegemony by warding off the appearance of overarching centres of power/signification

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<sup>175</sup> This point is taken from Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of “Micropolitics and Segmentarity”. There, they argue that so-called ‘primitive’ societies are not simply ‘lacking’ the rigid segmentations of modern societies. Rather, they argue that primitive societies are characterized by a “supple segmentarity” where distinctions exist, but are always segmentations-in-process, with more flexibility than modern segments. In what follows, I relay this distinction into social movements, distinguishing between molecular codes—processes partial constitution—from the molarizing force of articulation. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 208-231, esp. 208-213.

that would place themselves above the constituent groups.”<sup>176</sup> FNB helps to break the reductive dichotomies of ‘leadership’ vs. ‘leaderless’, for example. FNB groups often recognize the importance of leadership roles, but they work to avoid the entrenchment of leaders by encouraging leadership skills in all its members, and rotating roles.<sup>177</sup> In terms of the hegemonic analytic, there is no logic of equivalence—no common position, objective, or singular enemy—to unite these movements or tactics. However, this does not mean that they are simply contained through the logic of difference, remaining isolated from one another, because their constituent vagueness means that they always exceed molar containment as ‘merely particular’ groups. Instead, these movements are modular enough to be deployed with pragmatic flexibility, enabling experimentation and creativity. FNB is often deployed at demonstrations, sit-ins, and other convergences. Furthermore, FNB is often conceptualized as a form of street theatre, and regularly combined with political satire and propaganda, dramatizing the practice of recovering and serving free food as a radical political act in the context of a society where food is (almost) universally commodified.<sup>178</sup> In this sense, FNB is not simply a ‘general’ tactic deployed in ‘particular’ contexts: its open-endedness allows it to be deployed in ways that invent alternative subjectivities, processes and practices that have no ‘general’ equivalent: they are singular bubblings-up from molecular potentials that are normally policed and contained through molarizing processes. Butler and McHenry privilege this potentiality, noting that one of the goals “is to bring people with different economic backgrounds directly into contact with one another.”<sup>179</sup> Bodies that are normally kept

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<sup>176</sup> Day, “From Hegemony to Affinity,” 732.

<sup>177</sup> Butler and McHenry, 12.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-6.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

separate through the molar aggregation of classes are brought into contact, without any basis of sameness or common identity.

However, the politics of the act is not without its own dangers. Rather than being absorbed through Statism, the politics of the act is perpetually plagued by the danger of devolving into a logic of transgression through an articulation of a totalizing enemy, or developing its own rigidities and destroying itself. Both are isolating articulations, the first of which can be understood through ‘struggle against’, and the second through ‘struggle for’. The politics of the act side-steps the politics of demand; however, avoiding Statism can easily end up rearticulating the State as a totalizing molar entity, this time in terms of a contaminated and corrupt ‘outside’. Rather than reifying the State as the center of all politics—as with Statism—the isolating politics of ‘struggle against’ rearticulates the State or ‘society’ as a corrupt territory that is unworthy of engagement. This is Magnusson’s critique of anarchism, as the flip-side of Statism, offering an abstract solution to the problem of the State by articulating a horizon of perfect freedom ‘outside’ the State.<sup>180</sup> In this sense, anarchist movements are always in danger of articulating themselves ‘outside’ molar politics, or positing an abstract space of pure freedom and creativity outside the State. This is a politics of purity, which articulates a separation between the everyday realities of here-and-now and a horizon of perfect freedom and equality elsewhere. Alternatively, these articulations can crystallize in a discourse of transgression, where all sites of politics are corrupt so that the only options are sabotage, destruction and violence.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 101.

<sup>181</sup> It should be noted that I am not questioning sabotage and destruction *as such*, but the ways in which they become part of a logic of pure transgression, to the exclusion of other practices and tactics.

The other, often interrelated danger is that groups will molarize themselves through rigid procedures or dogmas, reproducing routines and stifling creativity and experimentation. This often involves a discourse of self-definition, in what can be understood as a search for a logic of equivalence amongst the members of a group. Last year at the University of Victoria, for example, a group was formed under the heading of ‘post-capitalist politics’. The first meeting was dynamic and contentious, with a number of potential directions, practices, and ideas brought forward. However, the group eventually articulated the necessity of ‘points of unity’ that would define the group (what it represented, what it was struggling for). This was a fairly benign process of molarization, where the group agreed to adopt a broad set of principles; however, this practice consumed the group’s activities. After a few meetings concentrating on this process of self-articulation, the group dwindled and dissolved. Slow death by molarization. This is not to say that any attempts to invent points of unity will result in stifling molarization. The point here is to situate these problems as dangerous *tendencies* that plague social movements, rather than inevitabilities. It is not only the specific practices that I am trying to make intelligible, but the processes in which these practices are implicated. Because anarchist-inspired movements often articulate themselves *against* the State and capitalism, they are especially prone to these dangers, rather than the dangers of Statism and the politics of demand. There is no guarantee that these dangers can be warded off, and in fact, the desire to produce guarantees, constitutions, or points of unity is often part of this process of molarization.

However, I am suggesting that the apparent ‘lack’ of coherence of some movements can be understood as a *capacity* to ward off the dangers of molarization

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through Statism, struggle for, and struggle against. This is a molecular intelligibility that lacks coherence, but isn't reducible to this lack. Rather than being outside of these molarizing processes, they have the capacity to maintain fluid and supple distinctions. The politics of the act is not, therefore, simply opposed to the politics of demand; it is immanent to it, short-circuiting the hegemonic circuits of Statism that perpetuate coherent articulations, demands, and reforms.

This short-circuiting opens up a space of contingency where the normalized relation between two molar totalities—the activist 'group' and its 'outside'—can be negotiated and opened to creative experimentation. When groups are no longer caught up with the naturalized imperative to create a clear, coherent message or demand, other potentials can be explored. When groups lack coherent insides and outsides, the relation between its 'members' and its outside 'observers' is also rendered contingent, thrown into question. When 'objectives' are decentered and unclear, the question of movement escapes containment within molarized categories. This vagueness should not be thought in terms of a lack (of demands, objectives, insides and outsides) but as *molecular singularizations* that overflow the molar categories of established common sense. A lack of definition does not guarantee processes of singularization. Singularizations are never intelligible by examining molar articulations (or lack thereof) at the molar level. Instead, singularizing processes can be understood in terms of a shared sensibility or orientation towards transforming the relationships of everyday life.<sup>182</sup> What's 'shared' here is

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<sup>182</sup> The notion of sensibility here is taken from Guattari's discussion of free radio stations, in which he argues that there is nothing essentially interesting about pirate radio. Instead, he suggests that a pirate radio project "is only interesting if it is linked to a group of people who want to change their relation with daily life, who want to change the kind of relations that exist among them in the very team that is producing the free radio broadcasts, a group of people who develop a sensibility; people who have an active outlook on the level of those assemblages and, at the same time, do not shut themselves up into ghettos on that level" Guattari and Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, 171.

paradoxically irreducible to a sameness or commonality: this sensibility is an orientation towards potential and open-ended change.

### **Molecular Codes and Flexibility**

Like all practices, the meaning of a particular deployment of Food Not Bombs will be determined, in part, by the way in which it is articulated, and it is often articulated against corporate agribusiness, private property, the military-industrial complex. However, to reduce Food Not Bombs to its articulations—the processes through which it becomes at least partially fixed—misses molecular processes at work.

If I encounter Food Not Bombs ‘from the outside’ and I begin to eat their food, am I ‘inside’ the group? How does one decide who is inside? Is the practice reducible to those who dumpstered the food? To those who cooked and served it? To those who ate it? To those who saw it unfold? To those who write about it? If Food Not Bombs serves food taken from the dumpsters of corporate grocery stores, is it articulated ‘against’ corporate agribusiness, or is it parasitic on it, since it often relies on corporate dumpsters? If Food Not Bombs is not ‘demanding’ anything at all, is it unintelligible as a political practice?

Food Not Bombs offers an interesting puzzle in terms of politics. In what way is Food Not Bombs political? If it is not explicitly articulated against corporate agribusiness, does FNB challenge corporate hegemony? If it is not articulated against the politics of demand, does it politicize Statism? Rather than positioning itself ‘against’ these forms, I would suggest that Food Not Bombs embodies an alternative to them. Food Not Bombs creates spaces where the routines and relations established and

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normalized (hegemonized) by capitalist food production are reconfigured. Food enters new and different circuits of production and distribution that are less rationalized, rigid and commodified than normal. The relation between cooks and consumers is renegotiated. It is in this sense that Day suggests the politics of the act achieves change immediately, rather than seeking it through corporate or State engagement and the politics of demand. The politics of the act can help us understand reified, molar entities (such as corporate agribusiness) as sets of interpersonal relationships and material processes, as processes of molarization, perpetually reproduced, rather than simple totalities with clear insides and outsides.

Does this mean there is no articulation in Food Not Bombs? This would be an impossibility, if articulation is understood in the strict sense of meaning-making and signification. Warren Magnusson explains this problem in the language of ‘constitution’, which is roughly equivalent to articulation:

Every constitution is a fixing, a reification, a stoppage of the flows of social life. Yet we cannot do anything at all without fixing, objectifying, or ‘constituting’ our activities at least temporarily. Not only hockey and baseball, but schools and hospitals, families and movements, have to be constituted to make them effective in our lives. The question is whether we can constitute our activities without reifying them; give them form and presence while ensuring that they don’t become things that dominate our lives; open possibilities without foreclosing our means to reconstitute our activities in accordance with our changing needs and desires.<sup>183</sup>

In this sense, Food Not Bombs certainly constitutes itself; indeed, this meaning-making is the condition of possibility of a general called ‘Food Not Bombs’ that is deployed in different contexts. However, there is no central authority to police the polyvalent

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<sup>183</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 103.

deployments of FNB.<sup>184</sup> Food Not Bombs can be understood as a molecular code, allowing regularities to persist across time and space, giving people a sense of what they are doing, but avoiding molar articulations that produce rigid coherence. To continue Magnusson's sports analogy,<sup>185</sup> it is easy to see that there is a distinction between pick-up hockey (as a supple molecular articulation) and the National Hockey League. NHL hockey is articulated to a central apparatus that produces a set of rigid rules that are policed by a trained professional (the referee). It is articulated to a massive capitalist apparatus of ticket sales, advertising, training and broadcasting. In contrast, the rules of pick-up hockey can be negotiated and modified by the players according to their own needs. In molecular codes, there is still room for unplanned movement, variation, and difference. If someone shows up from the 'outside'; s/he is often invited 'in'. If players do not want to hurt each other, they decide on rules of non-contact. These supple articulations often mean that boundaries are fuzzy from the start. The insides and outsides of molecular articulations are more porous and negotiable than rigid molar ones, and this capacity is irreducible to a 'lack' of coherence.

The distinction between molar articulation and molecular coding can be understood as one of degrees, rather than an either/or opposition. However, I am suggesting that sustaining a 'lesser degree' of fixity is not simply a 'lack' of coherence. Molar articulations are actively warded off, just as hockey players might not want to play

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<sup>184</sup> FNB actively wards off centralization, and Butler and McHenry emphasize that each group is autonomous (Butler and McHenry, 72). However, it would be a mistake to conceive this autonomy in terms of separation. Instead, they explain that autonomy allows each group to choose its own values and politics, altering its practices pragmatically, rather than being subjected to a molarizing central apparatus.

<sup>185</sup> Brian Massumi offers a helpful distinction between a supple code that allows for regularity and a molarizing code that increases regulation and fixity using the example of a soccer game. See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 71-88.

by rigid rules. This suppleness allows different capacities to be exercised, and new codings are able to emerge, keeping FNB open to experimentation.<sup>186</sup>

In this sense, Food Not Bombs does not operate by reforming *or* merely opposing molar totalities like agribusiness corporations. It works at the level of the flows, processes and practices that traverse these totalities, creating new practices that do not fit neatly within any of the molar categories. Rather than attempting to reform or destroy corporate agribusiness (the twin dreams of liberalism and revolutionary Marxism), molecular politics locates a flow—in this case, a flow of food waste—draws off part of that flow, and produces something new (Food Not Bombs). It is ‘new’ because it invents a new perceptual apparatus that recodes material ‘waste’ as food that can be circulated in non-capitalist circuits of consumption. Other flows are also implicated in this process. FNB’s theatrical nature often interrupts the smooth flows of urban life, drawing people out of their regularized routines and into singularizing processes. FNB thus enables different relations between people, their food, and each other. This newness is not simply different *from* corporate food production, but new in the sense that the relations at stake are supple, capable of being continually renegotiated. Keeping this process up for negotiation is often an explicit goal, which paradoxically tends to mean warding off hegemonic goals that would instrumentalize Food Not Bombs or subordinate it to an overarching strategy. This helps to foreground the significance of creating non-hegemonic alternatives. Alternatives can always be molarized by constituting themselves as oppositional alternatives *to* hegemonic practices and institutions. This is the

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<sup>186</sup> It is in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari suggest that supple molecular codes inhibit the organization of resonance, inhibiting molarization or overcoding. Whereas it is normally assumed that supple organizational forms simply ‘lack’ centralization or complexity, the argument here is that they actually ward off these molarizing processes. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 212-14.

imperative of counterhegemony, which insists that the Left lacks a *coherent alternative* that could challenge and displace hegemony, eventually becoming hegemonic. FNB, in contrast, foregrounds the possibility of a *proliferation of alternatives*, none of which fit neatly into hegemonic state-capitalist institutions and practices. This proliferation should not be conceived as an aggregate of particular alternatives, but rather as a multiplicity of practices of connection, conjunction, and politicization, while warding off processes of centralization, hierarchy and fixity.

This warding off is always a difficult practice to maintain, for molarizing processes are always ‘in’ molecular ones and vice-versa. Warding off molarizing processes can easily crystallize into warding off a totalizing enemy. In other words, Food Not Bombs *can* always be articulated to clear objectives, its insides and outsides can be rigidly policed, or it can be articulated as a pure space against a totalizing and corrupted outside. The boundary between inside and outside can be rigidified, for example, by ensuring that only those who identify as ‘anarchists’ can be ‘in’ the group, so that it remains ‘truly radical’. The ‘outside’ also becomes fixed, through a molarizing perception that FNB is just a few anarchists cooking food for themselves. Dynamic political processes can become fixed, and regularized molar circuits established, albeit without being absorbed by the hegemonic circuits of corporate food production. Where Food Not Bombs once opened up spaces of contingency and potential, it can become recognizable, normalized and routinized.<sup>187</sup> This is the loss of singular, dynamic

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<sup>187</sup> Guattari offers a similar account of his experiences at La Borde clinic, where he developed the approach that he called schizoanalysis that was a centerpiece of *Anti-Oedipus*. In his reflection on La Borde, Guattari laments that experimentation and microprocesses that were developed didn’t lead to a general process of transformation: “they went on revolving in a vacuum, as it were, working upon themselves.” Whereas these experiments once contained a huge amount of possibilities, he suggests that the project is “now coopted and not at all threatening to state power.” Guattari and Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, 136-7.

movement to mere particularity, when practices become regularized. Non-branded tactics often ward off institutionalization or incorporation into structures of the State and capitalism; however, they can molarize through rigidification of their own practices, routines and distinctions. Movement becomes predictable: slow death by the perpetuation of sameness.

Because it refuses incorporation into molar politics through Statism, Food Not Bombs—and the politics of the act in general—can always be dismissed or criticized from a molar perspective for failing to alter the molar structures of corporate capitalism. Monsanto, Safeway and other corporate agribusiness firms will not come crashing down from the work Food Not Bombs. They may not even take notice, and this often used as evidence that the politics of the act is not really effective or even political. From a molar perspective, Food Not Bombs is largely unintelligible as political, because ‘politics’ tends to be conceived as the capacity to effect lasting change in molar institutions like the State. No laws are changed, nothing is institutionalized, capitalism remains firmly in place. Moreover, Food Not Bombs often refuses to articulate a coherent strategy. If you’re against corporate agribusiness, what are you for? If you want real change, why not signal a clear alternative and work towards it? These molarizing processes fold into social movements and their political spaces, often generating imperatives for linear strategy or molar objectives and instrumentalizing molecular politics.

Day suggests a molecular politics in relation to the State through a reading of Gustav Landauer. Challenging the State does not mean pressing demands (through reform) or overthrowing (through revolution) but rather conceiving of the State as a heterogeneous assemblage of movements, processes and practices, which could be

displaced by nurturing different practices. As Day explains, Landauer “argued that the social revolution should be carried out here and now, for its own sake, by and for those who wished to establish new relationships not mediated by the state and corporate forms.”<sup>188</sup> In this sense, Landauer saw the State as a mode of organizing interpersonal relationships. ‘Confronting’ the State, on this reading, means creating alternative relationships rather than attacking or reforming the State as a molar entity. Day’s reading of Landauer foregrounds creativity and experimentation, because it insists on the need for a *proliferation of alternatives* rather than a unified, counterhegemonic one. However, this reading is also hampered by spatial metaphors of inside/outside. He writes about the possibility of establishing alternatives “*alongside*, rather than inside, existing modes of organization.”<sup>189</sup> A more relational conception is put forward later: “because capitalism, the state—and of course socialism as well—are all modes of human coexistence, changing these macrostructures is very much a matter of changing microrelations.”<sup>190</sup> This non-topographical, relational perspective makes it possible to see that even the most rigid, hierarchical institutions can be modulated, and their microrelations can be rearranged.

In contrast, the unifying imperatives generated by counterhegemony are part of the same molarizing function as Statism: they encourage a search for unity and structure as the basis of politics. From this perspective, the molecular vagueness of movements impedes the formation of a common programme, which seems to be necessary to effect a major transformation.

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<sup>188</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 123.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

What makes the hegemonic analytic so convincing, and what is it that allows counterhegemony to appear as an irreducible necessity? I will suggest that counterhegemony is so seductive because it achieves an ontological monopoly on connection. Attempting to move beyond ‘particular’ groups (towards their connections and alliances) tends to mean conceiving of connections between molar totalities. These are the connections made intelligible through the logics of equivalence and difference, allowing them to form a counterhegemonic bloc, conceived as a new, never-fully-sutured totality. Chains of equivalence always connect molar totalities. The feminist movement ‘as a whole’ can be articulated in a chain with anti-racist and socialist movements ‘as wholes’ as well, forming a chain of equivalence in which feminism=anti-racism=socialism). Or, these chains can be thought in terms of particular groups, in which a particular union is articulated together with a women’s shelter, for example. In both cases, these groups (or movements) are already conceived as bounded totalities, with insides and outsides, which are then open to rearticulation as totalities in a chain of equivalence, often united by a common goal, interest, or aim.

### **Political Spaces**

Food not Bombs expresses forms of connection that are made possible not through articulation, but through the singular disruptions. The ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of FNB is fundamentally unclear, allowing for open-ended connections. These connections are not ‘between’ members and ‘consumers’; they are molecular insofar as this ‘between’—and the molar totalities it is supposed to connect—is potentialized, so that the inside and outside become fuzzy, thrown into question. They overflow the molar boundaries designed to contain them as ‘particular’ movements. This does not mean that

they become universal. Instead, these spaces are singular, because they open spaces of contingency and transformation.

How can these spaces of transformation be made intelligible? Can the dynamic interplay between molar and molecular processes be subject to analysis? I will suggest that these questions can be approached by focusing on a particular site where multiple political processes fold together. For Magnusson, the contemporary situation is characterized by a search for political space, which is irreducible to strategy, government, or particular objectives.<sup>191</sup> Movements produce political spaces, he suggests, in formulating their problems and situating themselves in a particular time and place. However, these movements continually “point beyond themselves”; they are never reducible to their particularity. In this sense, the concept of singularity fits well with Magnusson’s concept of political space. The politics of these spaces is defined by the contingencies they express, creating situations where “people no longer agree about who or what should govern.”<sup>192</sup> This is not simply a question of determining who should govern and resolving the problems raised; there is also the possibility that these problems will be deepened, implicating other habits, practices and governmentalities in the problem. In terms of the molar and molecular, political spaces emerge when molar processes of stabilization, linearization, and binarization fail, at least for a moment: contingency displaces necessity, opening onto the new. This emergence, and its constitutive vagueness or ‘fuzziness’ is the ingress of the singular. Political spaces, on this reading, are pregnant with potential, rather than simply ‘lacking’ coherence and articulation. However, it is important to consider the relation between molar and

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<sup>191</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 47.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

molecular processes, because molarization always swoops back in to contain molecular potentials.

The concept of political space introduces a number of important complexities into the discussion of social movements. It allows for the conception of molar articulations without reducing these spaces to their articulations. It is easy to see how non-representational aspects of the world fold into political spaces in addition to representations: the heat of the sun, the din of a crowd, the intensity of not knowing what's coming next: these can always be articulated retrospectively, explained with exhaustive detail, and carefully dissected as independent 'variables'; however, this form of articulation is always *retrospective and reflective*, not oriented towards potentials and open-ended change. Retrospective articulations like this often function to sap intensity of political spaces, subsuming them as particular instances of general types, explaining away their dynamic vagueness. This is the function of molarization: when social movements are exhaustively explained, their problematic singularity is exhausted. Recognition is enabled: "so that's what it was," we say to ourselves. Problem solved. This can be expressed as the blackmail of universal/particular, and the ways in which political spaces tend to be reduced to their universality (representing a class, a people, humanity, or any other molar totality), *or* as representing only themselves, merely the particular group 'in' the political space 'at' the time. I want to insist, on the contrary, that political spaces are irreducibly *singular*, that they cannot be reduced to universality/particularity, or struggle for/against, and that an orientation towards the singular expresses a different form of political change.

In political spaces, the naturalized imperative of counterhegemony often crystallizes in a prescription for a coherent alternative to the hegemonic order. Social movements are seen as too fragmented, disorganized, and vague, lacking a coherent strategy that could challenge neoliberalism. Singular problems are often translated into claims or demands for a *solution*; to explain what movements want, where they're going, what they're struggling for. This process of articulation is always a reduction of the complexity of political spaces. There is no escape from articulation and coding; we always need to be able to make sense of our lives and our practices in order to accomplish even the most basic tasks. The problem lies in privileging articulation, so that the intersections of molarization and singularization are unintelligible and depoliticized.

Can the concept of political space help to focus on these problems of intelligibility? Political spaces always involve articulation, conceived in the strict sense of meaning-making or signification, but they are never reducible to that process. The other processes at work in political spaces are molecular processes of singularity, which can deepen and connect political problems, suspending their common-sensical containment in molar categories and procedures. These processes tend to make signification more difficult, because the deepest problems tend to be the hardest to articulate within molar dichotomies and established categories of signification.

This is why I have spent so much time attempting to disassemble the ease with which social movements are made intelligible as 'struggle for' or 'struggle against'. These ways of making social movements intelligible tend towards a reduction of their complexity, positioning them in simple movement towards (or against) a stable molar

category. As soon as it is known what movements are for or against, they cease being problematic. They are understood in terms of what they are, what they want, and where they're going: problem solved. With the concept of singularity—and its expression through political spaces—social movements can be made intelligible in more imaginative ways. The hope is that political spaces will allow for an analysis of the ways in which molarizing and molecularizing processes fold together. Can political spaces work to respond to problems without solving them, deepening their intensity, and making contingency more palpable, rather than articulating it away?

I suggest that this is what happened with the garden at UVic.

## Part 5: Molecular Fertilizer

On March 24<sup>th</sup> 2010, a garden was constructed at the center of the University of Victoria, outside MacPherson Library, in the university quad. It was constructed without the permission of the university administration, without informing them. The gardening occurred at the end of a teach-in, which included free food, music, and speakers who talked about the problems of colonialism, food insecurity, corporate agribusiness, and bureaucracy. The event was a strange spectacle, because it did not fit with the routines of protest and other forms of activism that normally take place at the university. Rather than brandishing placards and chanting, the tactics invented were totally different, opening up a set of problems that no group or institution could resolve, including the gardeners themselves.

Late that night, Campus Security officials and police officers accompanied grounds management workers, who destroyed the garden using small bulldozers. The plants, fencing, and other materials were disposed of. Gardeners returned the next day to find the garden demolished. It was decided that the garden would be rebuilt, the following week, at the same time: Wednesday at noon. Gardeners began writing press releases, doing class talks, and developed a website documenting the events. The website now has an archive with the press releases, a zine, links to news articles, photos and video of the garden.<sup>193</sup>

The following week, on March 31<sup>st</sup> at noon, it started again. This time, police were already on hand. Reporters representing local, provincial and national newspapers

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<sup>193</sup> Food Not Lawns!, "Community Garden Destroyed Again," Food Not Lawns!, <http://vfnl.wordpress.com/>.

and television were also in attendance, along with hundreds of students, faculty and community members. Once again, speakers talked about problems of food insecurity, colonialism, and corporate capitalism, situating the garden as a response to these problems. Then the digging began again. In the same place, gardeners turned over soil, constructed raised beds with fencing, and planted vegetables and native plants. Police stayed back, watching the events and recording it with video cameras.

This time, some of the gardeners stayed at the university overnight: gardening. This continued for over a week, with students and community members taking shifts to watch the garden, maintain it, and protect it. It was not clear to anyone what this ‘protection’ would involve, but it succeeded in warding off drunk and destructive students who passed by the garden from the campus bar. The garden remained intact until April 9<sup>th</sup>. Early that morning, grounds management workers arrived again and dismantled the garden, except this time, they dug up many of plants, put them in pots, and kept them at Campus Security, along with shovels, signs, and other materials that had been left at the site. A fence was erected around the perimeter of the former garden (now a flattened patch of dirt) that read: AREA UNDER RESTORATION: DO NOT ENTER.

By this time, most students were in the middle of exams, and many were leaving for the summer. No new garden has been constructed (yet). Grass has been seeded and grown where the garden once was, and one can see faint outlines of garden beds. If you learned about the garden through media reports and press releases, it appears to have been a protest, albeit an atypical one. According to a number of articles, students wanted more gardens on campus, so they built one in the middle of the campus as a symbolic

demand for more gardens.<sup>194</sup> From this perspective, the ‘protest’ was entirely ineffective: the garden was destroyed, and UVic did not agree to construct any new gardens.

I will suggest that this perspective entirely misses the politics of the garden. I will argue that the garden was articulated as a protest retroactively, and that the political questions it raised point far beyond protest. The argument here is that attempts to reveal the truth about what the garden ‘really was’ are misguided. There is no way to represent or account for the event in its totality, ‘as a whole’. Or rather: there are all kinds of ways to do so, and all of them molarize the garden as a particular thing. The challenge here is to invent some ways to make the garden intelligible in a way that gestures towards its transformative processes, as an intensification of political problems.

### **The Molar and Molecular of the Garden**

A molar perspective conceives change in terms that can be measured, observed, or represented with clarity. What do you hope to achieve, and how will you get there? Explain yourself! From this perspective, the garden accomplished next to nothing. It was built and destroyed twice, and the university reports that it spent over \$10,000 in the process of restoring its lawns.<sup>195</sup> An investigation by UVic and the Saanich Police is ongoing, and police have threatened 10 individuals with criminal charges.<sup>196</sup> Nothing has been institutionalized, the university has not altered its policies, nor did it agree to expand

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<sup>194</sup> Brennan Clarke, "Students Dig In to Secure Future of Communal Garden," *The Globe and Mail*, (April 1, 2010), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/students-dig-in-to-secure-future-of-communal-garden/article1519598/>; Joanne Hatherly, "Protesting gardeners return to dig up UVic lawns," *Times Colonist*, (April 1, 2010).

<sup>195</sup> "Protesters Set to Strike Again at UVic ‘Garden’," *Victoria News* (April 6, 2010), [http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver\\_island\\_south/victorianews/news/89517392.html](http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_south/victorianews/news/89517392.html).

<sup>196</sup> Police have forwarded the names of 10 individuals to the John Howard Society, seeking to pursue restorative justice rather than criminal charges. "Restorative Justice Recommended for UVic Students Caught Digging Up Campus Lawns to Plant Garden," *Oak Bay News* (May 5, 2010), [http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver\\_island\\_south/oakbaynews/news/94263979.html](http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_south/oakbaynews/news/94263979.html).

garden space on campus. Indeed, university officials complained that they were not even sure what the gardeners wanted.<sup>197</sup> Molar politics, in the way it is used here, orients us towards practices geared to groups and representation: pressing demands on institutions, generating coherent programmes for change, and representing bounded groups. What makes these practices ‘molarizing’ is that they presuppose the bounded groups, institutions, and linear strategies they articulate. Relations come after, occurring ‘between’ these groups, demands, and positions.

Coherent demands are part of these molarizing processes, which get back-projected as the force ‘behind’ the garden, so that it can be thought in a simple and linear way: students wanted more gardens on campus, so they built one, hoping to draw attention to their cause and win some concessions from the UVic administration. Sometimes, these perspectives result in extreme frustration, because the events seem incoherent, without leaders, platforms, or clear objectives. This incoherence, I will suggest, is the ingress of singularizing processes of open-ended change. From the molarizing perspective of the UVic bureaucracy, this singularity was unintelligible; the incoherence was understood in terms of a *lack* of serious political commitment. This was just a bunch of anarchists rebelling. At other times, demands and claims were discovered, and they came to be articulated as the central basis on which the group could be assessed. They formed the basis of a dismissal of the garden by the university: these demands were entirely unrealistic, and provided evidence that these people were just utopian dreamers.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> "UVic Says Pro-food Activists' Garden Demands are 'Nuts'," *BCLocalNews.com* (April 6, 2010), <http://www.bclocalnews.com/news/90000907.html>.

<sup>198</sup> When some students presented a list of demands to the administration, these demands were taken to represent the gardeners as a coherent whole, despite students' insistence that they didn't represent the

I will suggest that the garden was significant for its singularizing political processes. What needs to be appreciated is that singularity is lost as soon as it is abstracted from its situational mix, from its process of becoming what it's not (yet). Singularity produces inventions immanent to a specific situation. There is nothing 'essentially' molecular about a practice or an event. On the contrary, singularizing processes make it difficult to assume essences, totalities, or relations 'between' wholes. The whole's capacity for transformation—its capacity to affect and be affected by the world in unpredictable ways—are opened. The molarizing processes that keep things what they are no longer hold. This is why singularity cannot be discussed 'in general': that which is normal and natural in one context can be inserted to another context in a way that politicizes the space, packing it with potential.

However, singularity is not only lost through the process of conscious abstraction and generalization. Most of the time, its emergence is quickly washed over by routines, habits, and repetitions that are part of everyday life. Of course, generalizations are part of everyday life as well, and they work together with habit, folding into it to produce habits of thought, perception and practice that prevent the emergence of the new. Molarizing processes are defined by the reproduction of the same, minimizing deviation and transformation. Insofar as molarization works, everyday life is *depoliticized*: we are guided through life by routine, habit, and common sense, and these regularities inhibit thinking and acting *politically, responding to singular situations*, rather than merely acting according to pre-ordained procedures or strategies. Again, what makes something

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gardeners as a whole. This molarizing process was reinforced by media reports, which quoted UVic spokesperson Bruce Kilpatrick's dismissal of the demands as 'nuts'. See *Ibid.*

political in this sense is that people no longer agree on what to do and how to do it.<sup>199</sup>

However, this should not be taken to suggest that there is always agreement or consent on the molar routines, concepts, and habits that have been pre-established. Habits of thought and action can remain common-sensical, habitual, and regularized without anyone ever having consented to them: we are often not even conscious of our habits.

Molarization as the perpetuation of habits and regularities is a better concept than hegemony, for my purposes here, because it foregrounds the problem of the perpetuation of sameness, rather than limiting analysis to a critique of ‘dominant’ habits. Activist groups can be explicitly feminist, and all-around ‘progressive’ or ‘radical’ in their programmes or mission statements, for example, while perpetuating patriarchy through unconscious assumptions, the objectification of women’s bodies, and chauvinistic practices. Radical political programmes can crystallize in desire for purity that turns movements in on themselves, in a cyclical process of rigidification that saps all possibilities for creativity. Activist groups can molarize themselves by reproducing routines that inhibit anything new from emerging. No one ‘consents’ to these subtle molarizing processes, and members of a group may not even be conscious of them. In this sense, molarizations can function without consent, installing themselves in practices and habits of daily life.

Molarity is not defined by the perpetuation of forms of oppression, but rather the perpetuation of the same: the same routines, practices, habits of thought and action. Everybody arrives on time, stays on topic, follows Robert’s Rules, and the group gets through the agenda quickly. Molarity reproduces canned stimulus-response circuits (or

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<sup>199</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 91.

invents new ones), so that everyday life becomes unproblematic, normal, and natural.<sup>200</sup> As we move through the world, we develop a repertory of stimulus-response circuits. These are material processes of molarization, where our bodies are inscribed in the regularity of normalized situations, leading to the development of autonomic (non-conscious) reactions to stimuli: “same stimulus, same response. On schedule. The circularity of the everyday. Training. ‘Growing up.’ Reactivity.”<sup>201</sup> Training and discipline ensures that the appropriate response will be matched to the stimulus, requiring common sense: we need to be able to categorize and recognize the world in order to move through it appropriately. This is the same mode of thought as the ‘objective’ thought that searches for continuities and sameness, proceeding by analogy: that group looks a lot like this other one, so they must be part of the same broad social movement: particular instance of a general type.<sup>202</sup>

Singularity happens when these autonomic circuits are disrupted. When we select a response that deviates from the molarized circuit, singularity is glimpsed in the space between stimulus and response. This gap can be widened, filling it with more and more potential responses, by introducing contingency into the mix: showing that things could be otherwise.<sup>203</sup> Molecularity consists in suspending established stimulus-response circuits (in so-called ‘abstract’ theory and ‘concrete’ practice), so that chance and change can intervene. This change is what I am calling singularity. The emergence of

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<sup>200</sup> The language of ‘stimulus-response circuits’ is particularly useful for understanding the ways in which molar representations function to reproduce habits. This analysis is developed by Massumi, and my own explanation borrows heavily from his argument. See Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 93-141.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>202</sup> Massumi makes the link between ‘common sense’ and scientific/philosophical ‘good sense’: both share the tendency towards the typical and the general, understanding individuals as particular instances of general types, which then facilitates comparison between these molar wholes. See *Ibid.*, 93-103, esp 97.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-101.

singularity is not about revolution, where everything is different after a totalizing event. Response selection is always informed by the particularities of the shared environment, which is why singularity can never be understood as a general model. Environments molarize by ensuring that everyone can move through them unproblematically, according to naturalized habits of thought and action: habitats. When singularizing processes suspend these habits, molarizations can always creep in, steering singularities towards general categories, or towards the reproduction of the same: “I’ve seen that before...” “it seems a lot like...” “that was interesting, let’s do it again (and again...)” The fact that a *particular* response can always be articulated retrospectively is also a way of molarizing the singular process that was opened up; however, these spaces are packed with molecular potential, where a growing number of futures are present, none of which can be predicted.<sup>204</sup> The aim here is to make this potential intelligible with the garden. Read the media reports (or my summary of it at the beginning) and the garden seems relatively straightforward, a particular instance of a general type: protest.

### **Political Experimentation**

Processes of molarization—and their suspension in and through processes of singularization—help to foreground the unique importance of *experimentation*. There can be no general principles that help to suspend commonsense habits. Finding ways to intensify singularizing processes is *necessarily* experimental, because there is no way to know in advance whether anything interesting will happen. The call-out for the garden teach-in could have failed to inspire anyone to come, for example. Experimenting with

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<sup>204</sup> “It envelops a growing number of bifurcating futures in a each of its presents, but none is preordained... Increasing complication. A fractal abyss has reopened where there was only a hyphen between stimulus and response.” *Ibid.*, 100.

processes of singularization is always informed by the particularities of the habits, discourses, environments and other contexts of the situation. Furthermore, tactics and practices that intensified processes of singularization may themselves come to be habitual, commonsensical, and easily recognizable. These molecular processes require a sensitivity to the capacities of movements: what they might do; their range of variability and potential, rather than their intrinsic properties, goals, or programmes.

Furthermore, molecular experimentation requires a sensitivity to the arsenal of molarizing processes that facilitate the judgement and dismissal of movements from the ‘outside’. These processes are the arsenal of weapons used to contain and regularize singularity, making it possible to recognize, dismiss, judge, and articulate singular events as something else: molar particularities corresponding to general forms. Just another protest, another interest group, or another bunch of vandals who refuse to engage in reasonable politics. However, just as molecular processes can be dampened and molarized, they can also be *intensified* through continual politicization, attacking molar common sense.

As Warren Magnusson explains, “the politics appropriate to a particular [singular] situation always has to be invented.”<sup>205</sup> Attempts to impose a general model for politics fall prey to molarization from the beginning. Indeed, this is the common-sensical understanding of politics: routines of bargaining, persuasion, and agreement between pre-established (molar) interests, with pre-established (molar) ends in mind. In contrast, a singularizing political process has no end, precisely because it is *open-ended*. This does not mean that singularities somehow emerge completely ‘spontaneously’, or that there is

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<sup>205</sup> Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience*, 91.

an opposition between singularity and objectives. This would be to assimilate singularity to the binary of organization/spontaneity. The arsenal of molarizing processes is extensive, and disrupting it often takes concerted, coordinated, collective action. At the same time, this action is necessarily experimental, because no group can pilot singularity, and there is no guarantee that tactics designed to suspend common sense will work. In this sense, singularity is always relational; it emerges in the in-between of established groups, individuals and objectives, modulating their relations. If objectives are geared towards producing spaces of contingency, with an orientation towards experimentation, they stand a better chance of potentializing political spaces.

Orienting ourselves to molecular, open-ended change does not mean rejecting any recourse to objectives, strategies, or plans of action. As I have tried to emphasize, the molar and molecular are always seeping into one another, and the challenge is to think these complicated relations, rather than reducing the world to one or the other. In the context of social movements, this means attending to the ways in which goals, strategies, and identities (molarities) can end up attacking molecular transformations through violence, or working towards slow death by institutionalization and recognition, and the perpetuation of sameness. Furthermore, social movements often don't need the State or an institution to amputate molecular transformations: they often do it to themselves. Social movements may end up molarizing themselves by inventing rigid procedures, strategies and goals that fix their movement into new regularized circuits. Goals can be fixed so that trajectory is linearized, replacing contingency with necessities. Routines can be established so that what was once innovative and creative becomes repetitive, existing

in an unproblematic relationship with its environment: movements returned to their habitat.

### **Protest, Bureaucracy, Resolution**

Before orienting ourselves to the molecular processes of these events, I will consider the molarizing processes that normally govern everyday life at UVic. By suspending the established modes of molar intelligibility, political spaces were created that were more difficult to molarize, intensifying the problems raised by the gardens. The garden achieved this suspension in a number of ways. Before thinking through these tactics, it is important to consider the molarizing circuits that were suspended by them. I will suggest three interlocking forces of molarization: protest, bureaucracy, and resolution. The separation of these forces is artificial; they connect and reinforce each other in manifold ways.

Protest, I suggest, is a hegemonic form through which activists tend to become trapped, reproducing the same practices, demands, and processes. The problem not that demands tend to be similar, but that protest produces a space where demands become central. In this sense, it reproduces a molarizing mode of intelligibility, forming a coherent inside where demands and claims are presented to an ‘outside’.

Bureaucracy tends to molarize politics through procedures and routines. It reproduces established circuits of decision-making and rigid procedures: committee meetings, review boards, petitions and other processes flatten out politics so that it is

reduced to a set of practices developed to influence or participate in institutional decision-making.<sup>206</sup>

Resolution reproduces the politics of demand by foregrounding the assumption that any political problem raised by social movements seeks a resolution, usually by an authority. Problems are translated into terms that are amenable to resolution, so that they can be ‘solved’. I will discuss these molarizing processes—protest, proceduralism, and resolution—in turn, along with the tactics that helped to suspend their functioning.

Protest is a form of politics that is recognizable to everyone involved, with clearly defined roles, rituals, insides and outsides, demands and objectives. Everyone knows what to expect, so nothing ever happens, except on the molar level. The relationships between a protest and its outside is immediately coherent: protestors want something (or want something to be stopped) and they are communicating it to the authorities, the State, or the general public. The molar articulations of protest that make them recognizable are effective not merely on the level of formal representation, but because they insinuate themselves into bodies and practices, creating regularized circuits of stimulus-response. Observers are immediately interpellated as observers, and they understand what protestors are doing, even if they do not immediately know what the particular protest is about: protest reproduces particular instances of a general type (the people marching around, chanting slogans and holding placards: it’s just another protest).

Protestors present a demand, the State or another authority responds (or doesn’t).<sup>207</sup> Protestors need to discipline themselves and each other so that their actions

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<sup>206</sup> Deleuze and Guattari call this form of molarity ‘rigid segmentary’. This form of segmentary functions not merely by reproducing a hierarchical structure and centralized decision-making apparatus, but also by overcoding other groups in relation to the central authority, so they are rendered as interest groups that can be involved in a process of consultation. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 208-231.

are intelligible as a protest, and their message is coherent and unified. Deviations from the message need to be policed. Observers immediately respond to the stimulus as well, recognizing that they are observers, on the ‘outside’ of protests, and that there is a bounded ‘inside’ of protestors. If these molar processes were all that existed, there could be nothing new: only repetitions of the same, general models of protest.

Bureaucracy and its procedures assume and reproduce stable interests and objectives. At the University of Victoria, like any large bureaucratic institution, rigid procedures are developed and reproduced everywhere. For example, the university had already established a consultation process to consider the expansion of community garden beds.<sup>208</sup> Other groups have been lobbying the administration for over a decade to dedicate some of its 30 acres of unused, former farmland to food production.<sup>209</sup> The concept of “sustainable development” features prominently in UVic’s Campus Plan which, in practice, tends to mean the creation and perpetuation of new formalized practices that conserve energy, increase efficiency, and conserve the ‘natural environment’ while minimizing costs associated with these initiatives.<sup>210</sup> Land use policies and procedures at UVic are supposed to be controlled by department of Facilities Management.<sup>211</sup> It is responsible for the upkeep of UVic, attempting to ensure that everything remains the same, or changes according to the normative guidelines of the

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<sup>207</sup> Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 94.

<sup>208</sup> According to an article in the Times Colonist, University of Victoria spokesperson Bruce Kilpatrick was frustrated because “protesters insist on vandalizing university property instead of participating in the existing consultation process, which is looking at expanding community garden beds with the installation of a new garden in the family residence area.” See “Protesting Gardeners Return to Dig Up UVic Lawns.”

<sup>209</sup> These negotiations date back to 1994 with the proposal for a sustainable farm on these lands, called Cedar Hill Corner or the CJVI lands. A petition circulated during the guerilla gardening events at UVic documents this history of proposals. See Garden Campus Collective, “Sustainability Initiative for UVic: UVic as a Garden Campus,” <http://vfnl.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/gardencampus.pdf>.

<sup>210</sup> UVic follows the Bruntland definition of sustainability, defining it as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” University of Victoria, “Campus Plan 2003,” <http://web.uvic.ca/vpfin/campusplan/pdfs/campusplan2003.pdf>, 57.

<sup>211</sup> University of Victoria, “Facilities Management,” <http://web.uvic.ca/fimgt/>.

University's Campus Plan. Procedures have also been developed for consulting with other molar entities, such as neighbourhood associations, municipalities, and other "interested parties".<sup>212</sup>

Through these processes, UVic creates a vortex, drawing in and molarizing other groups, so that politics is channeled into reformist circuits and rigid procedures that reproduce UVic's administration at the center. UVic's sovereignty over 'its' land is continually established and re-established through these procedures and others like them. If groups want to influence the decision-making process of UVic, they need to molarize themselves, producing representatives and articulating themselves as interest groups in these consultation processes. For my purposes here, many of the relevant decisions are those regarding land use, and Facilities Management is the formal bureaucratic entity authorized to carry out these decisions on a day-to-day basis. However, the garden also provoked reactions from other bureaucratic institutions at UVic, including Campus Security and the Communications department.<sup>213</sup>

One of the major frustrations around the garden was that it was fundamentally unclear how it could be *resolved*. What did these students want from the UVic administration? How could they have ever responded to the problems raised in a way that addressed the gardeners' concerns? The short answer is that they couldn't: it was impossible for the administration to 'resolve' the problems raised by the garden. The hegemonic molarizing processes folding into the event tended to reduce the garden to a politics of demand, whether or not there were any demands to be found. This meant that the garden was perceived as a 'protest', albeit a very confusing and ineffective one, since

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<sup>212</sup> University of Victoria, "Campus Plan 2003," 45.

<sup>213</sup> UVic was largely represented through Bruce Kilpatrick, head of communications.

the protestors failed to articulate a problem in a way that was amenable to resolution through institutional channels.

It is clear that the separation of these concepts—protest, bureaucracy, resolution—is artificial. Resolution and protest converge in their reproduction of a politics of demand, creating a search for a coherent and linear objective on the part of the gardeners, back-projecting demands as the purpose of the garden. Resolution naturalizes the notion that problems exist to be solved by established authorities, through reforms and institutional adjustments. In fact, the university officials repeatedly insisted that they condoned protest and civic engagement; they *wanted* students to protest policies or issues they were passionate about. What was intolerable was a practice that displaced the vortex of the politics of demand, taking action directly in an area that was supposed to be governed and administered by the University bureaucracy. From this perspective, the garden was simply a misguided protest tactic: a costly and ineffective way of drawing attention to an issue. The politics of protest was coupled with a classificatory framework that perceived the guerilla garden as an infringement on the University of Victoria's authority over land use. The garden was planted on university property, by individuals who were not authorized to do so. It was classified as vandalism, a destructive practice that necessitated 'repair': getting rid of the garden and returning it to grass. It was nice that students were passionate about something, but regrettable that they used 'destructive' rather than 'constructive' tactics.

In a press release issued by UVic communications, the UVic administration positioned itself as the universal representative of "the university community," whereas gardeners were positioned as a particularistic group:

This activity was conducted by a group of individuals, comprising both student and off-campus members, which decided to damage university property and impose its views about the use of land on the entire 24,000-member university community. The university communicated that it is a violation of university policy and also a legal offence to dig up and damage university grounds.<sup>214</sup>

In this sense, bureaucratic processes of consultation allow the university to form molar chains of equivalence that articulate groups involved in legitimate processes of decision-making and consultation in a homogenous 'inside' (the 24,000-member university community), positioned against a particularistic group, imposing its will on this community.<sup>215</sup>

In a similar way, the University administration issued letters to students it designated as prominent figures within the 'group' of gardeners, instructing them to stay away from the garden, not to stay overnight, and not to bring any gardening tools to campus.<sup>216</sup>

### **Fuzziness: The Ingress of Singularization**

This raises an interesting set of questions. Who is part of 'the group' articulated by the university? What makes someone a prominent figure? Who participated in the event, and what does it mean to participate? Those who put shovels in the ground? Those who watched? Those who spoke on a megaphone? Those who watched? The university and Campus Security officials who looked on? The police who arrived and

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<sup>214</sup> University of Victoria, "Restoration of Library Quad," <http://communications.uvic.ca/uvicino/announcement.php?id=401>.

<sup>215</sup> Massumi explains this type of process (using terms developed in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*) as an exclusive conjunctive synthesis: reacting to an event in a way that reduces it to a particular, bounded set of individuals, whose actions could be responded to in a predictable way. In contrast, the garden brought together problems, practices and bodies that are normally kept separate, producing unpredictable effects. This was an inclusive conjunctive synthesis. For the distinction between these syntheses, see Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 54-58.

<sup>216</sup> For a press release on this incident, see Food Not Lawns!, "Students Relate, Bureaucrats Intimidate!" Food Not Lawns! <http://vfnl.wordpress.com/2010/04/09/students-relate-bureaucrats-intimidate/>. For a copy of the letter with recipients' names redacted, see University of Victoria, "uvicletter.jpg," <http://vfnl.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/uvicletter.jpg>.

threatened to arrest the gardeners? The reporters who relayed photos, video, and text to newspapers, television and the internet? The readers and viewers who read stories about the garden or watched videos?

Similar problems arise with any attempt to draw a clear temporal line. When was the event ‘over’? When planting stopped on the first day? When the university destroyed the garden (the first, or the second time)? It seems impossible to draw a clear line separating the inside from the outside, the participants from the observers, and the event from its end.

The shovels in the ground, the speech on the megaphone, the threats of arrest, the reporters taking pictures, the hundreds of people looking on (and joining in)—all of these processes fold into the event, in a volatile relational mix. This mix consists of material elements normally understood as a simple ‘background’: wouldn’t the event have been different if instead of a sunny day, it had poured rain? Wouldn’t the event have been different if it took place somewhere else at UVic, or at another university? The event eludes classification as a particular instance of a general type. Attempts to understand ‘it’ in its totality necessarily fail: the event always overflows attempts to contain it as a bounded ‘it’. The event was volatile because it was not entirely clear to anyone what would happen: would the police arrest everyone? Would the garden be destroyed? Would onlookers join in planting, or try to stop it, or both?

What is particularly apparent about this event, in this sense, is its *singularity*. It was dynamically vague, without clear insides and outsides, linear trajectories, or a clear destination. This vagueness was not a simple lack of coherence; its indeterminacy was really felt, ontologically primary: an open-ended process of transformation, without a

preconceived end. This dynamic unfolding always precedes our accounts of what happened. The event was a dynamic transformation packed with the potential of open-ended futures. Multiple futures were really present, but only one ‘happened’: no one was arrested, and the garden was destroyed that night. The particular outcome—selected from the singular mess of potential happenings—can always be back-projected onto the event, articulating it in linear terms that sap its singular indeterminacy. My own summary of the events at the beginning of this essay partakes of this reduction. When the garden is thought in linear terms—built on March 24<sup>th</sup>, destroyed that night, built again on the 31<sup>st</sup> and destroyed a week later—the singular indeterminacy is washed away through linearizing processes. “So that’s what happened,” we say to ourselves. The garden becomes molarized: a particular action, in a particular place, with a clear time-frames and outcomes. Sitting at a computer screen months later, it sometimes seems obvious that ‘the garden’, whatever it was, is over. It was fun while it lasted, but now everything is back to normal.

Or is it? If the problems and potentials of the garden cannot be contained in linear time, is it possible to say that the movement is ‘over’? Where’s the beginning and ending? Define the beginning as the first day of planting and the end as the day of dismantling, and all kinds of connections are amputated: what about the preparations leading up the planting and the pending criminal charges afterwards? These are only the most obvious ones. If this paper is successful, the singular indeterminacy of the garden will have been relayed into theory, with new connections and potentials.

## **The Suspension of Molarizing Processes**

The gardeners invented tactics that helped to suspend the reproduction of these common-sensical reactions. During the planting, there was a man with a megaphone, a normal and predictable feature of protests; however, the megaphone-man was deployed in a way that destabilized the molarizing circuits of protest, disrupting them rather than reproducing them. The man did not claim to represent the gardeners. He did not explain why the garden was being constructed. Instead, he claimed to represent the University of Victoria, whiteness, masculinity, colonial common-sense, and authority in general. Dressed in a suit with a paper top-hat emblazoned with the University of Victoria logo, he insisted that the garden was illegitimate, evil, wrong, and continually ordered gardeners and onlookers to disperse.

When Campus Security officials arrived, they assumed that he was the leader, and as they approached, he welcomed them and ordered them to arrest and disperse the gardeners. He did the same with the police. He repeatedly emphasized that the garden was being constructed on private property illegally, and that this was reason enough to dismiss the actions of the gardeners. If we didn't all obey the law, chaos would erupt: we'd all start killing each other. He commanded people approaching, who wondered what was going on, to get as far away from the event as possible. He encouraged onlookers to remain passive, and under no circumstances to participate in the gardening. He insisted that there were perfectly respectable extra-curricular activities that students could be engaged in, urging the gardeners to find a hobby, join a club, or volunteer somewhere. He castigated the garden for failing to follow procedures, and urged the gardeners to stop digging and form an ad-hoc committee and draft a report. He

encouraged everyone to cherish their apathy: none of this stuff really mattered, and apathy was the best protection against infection from this gardening disease. Go buy a latte, he suggested.

The megaphone-man's parody folded into the event along with other practices, perceptions and actions. It made people laugh, modulating an atmosphere that could easily become a confrontation between gardeners and police. More importantly, I will suggest that it short-circuited common sense. It didn't do this by articulating a basis of sameness that everyone could identify with. It didn't establish a way for the garden to be understood or recognized. Instead, it called into question normalized and naturalized forms of perception and habits of everyday life at UVic. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the megaphone man was a fascist-paranoiac: obsessed with control, procedures, and the maintenance of normalcy and morality. But rather than actualizing molarizing processes by reproducing their assumptions, they were counter-actualized by taking them to their absurd limit.<sup>217</sup> By pushing common-sensical reactions to absurdity, they were politicized: called into question and made contingent, rather than necessary.

Rather than making the garden intelligible, the dominant modes of representation-intelligibility were made explicit: the garden was perceived as illegal destruction of private property, and this was entirely as it should be. The megaphone man politicized normalcy and habit, and the practices and perceptions that continually re-establish them. Everything should go back to normal, as quickly as possible. In this sense, it helped to

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<sup>217</sup> The concept of counter-actualization is similar to what I have called 'breaking the circuit' of molarized repetitions or the 'suspension' of molar habits. See Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 23-28, esp. 28. Deleuze and Guattari often use the distinguish between a figure of schizophrenia and a figure of fascism-paranoia, throughout *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Massumi usefully describes this distinction as a spectrum (rather than a dichotomy) with poles of schizophrenia and fascism-paranoia, which are limits that can be approached but never reached. See Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 116-120.

suspend habituated stimulus-response circuits that tend to persist in ‘normal’ activist practices. Most of the time, activism reproduces established stimulus-response circuits. Observers immediately understand that they are observers on the ‘outside’, and that the activists on the ‘inside’ have a goal or a strategy towards which they are moving. Find out what the activists want, and how they propose to get it, and the observer can judge whether the activists are likely to be effective, and whether their actions are justified.

If habit can be suspended, transformation can occur. Sedimented habits are the reproduction of the same: modulating the world with a minimum of deviation from a norm. If habits are suspended, deviations can occur, not ‘against’ the norm or ‘away’ from it in a particular direction, but in directions that can’t be plotted in advance. If insides and outsides become indistinct, or disappear entirely, the ‘observers’ are no longer just passively observing: they are participating in something, and their relationship to the garden is negotiable beyond the habituated perceptions of molar-moral judgement. If no demands are being presented, but something political is at stake, politics must be thought in more complex terms than demands and reforms.

### **Gardening Political Spaces, Growing Problems**

The garden wasn’t a totalizing revolution, where molarizing constraints were overthrown once and for all. What is significant about the garden, for my purposes, is that it enabled a *sensitivity* to the molar constraints of habit, bureaucracy, protest and proceduralism.<sup>218</sup> It did not simply ‘oppose’ or ‘react to’ these constraints; it politicized them by inventing practices that broke the molar circuits that continually re-establish them.

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<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

One thing that helped to foreground the experimental politics of the garden was that molarizing processes were politicized not merely as something ‘out there’ perpetuated by the university administration, but as something that pervaded practices of protest and social movements themselves. There were two names that emerged during the events—‘Resistance is Fertile’ and ‘Food Not Lawns’—but it was not clear that either was a bounded ‘group’ in the normal sense. People had meetings to discuss tactics and plans, they exchanged emails, they drafted press releases and created a zine, but this was a networked and diffuse form of organization:

Who were the people who decided to build a garden in front of the library at the University of Victoria on March 24<sup>th</sup>? What did they want? What was their strategy? In the case of Resistance is Fertile, these questions are impossible to answer. RIF is a network of individuals, collectives and communities with no central organizing structure, no leaders, no hierarchy, and no political programme.<sup>219</sup>

The zine points out that there was no central strategy or program—no chain of equivalence or hegemonic articulation—that could stand in for the gardeners ‘as a whole’. In part, this is simply because many of those who helped with the planting hadn’t been part of any prior group related to the garden: they just showed up and joined in. Another reason is that representation had been problematized through the meetings, conceived as a set of processes that tend to presuppose (and subsequently police) unity, coherence, objectives and a linear strategy. Refusing these imperatives proved difficult: if you’ve agreed not to represent the group as a whole, what do you say to someone who asks you why the garden is being planted? The sensitivity to the problem of molarizing representation is interesting because it encouraged people to find other ways to make

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<sup>219</sup> The zine created and distributed by ‘Food Not Lawns!’ and ‘Resistance is Fertile’ is included below in Appendix 1. See Resistance is Fertile, *Food Not Lawns: New Experiments in Foodways for our Colonial, State-Capitalist Context*, (Victoria: Food Not Lawns!, 2010), 1.

sense of what was going on, for themselves and others. It encouraged the construction of political spaces, foregrounding the need for collective action on political problems, and pointing to the ways in which creative collective action often seems impossible at the university (and beyond it).

If a 'political space' is understood in terms of the way in which a movement situates itself within its own specific time and space, there were multiple and intersecting political spaces within which the garden was situated. I will suggest that this is part of this event's vitality: it contracted multiple political spaces, connecting itself to various struggles and space-times, so that it meant very different things, none of which could easily hegemonize the others.

Some gardeners emphasized the space-time of food insecurity, pointing to the growing dominance of corporate agribusiness and our reliance on it. Others emphasized the ongoing colonial occupation of Indigenous territories in British Columbia, and the ways in which these territories were being progressively exploited for natural resources. Some pointed to the problem of bureaucracy, and the ways in which it stultifies creativity with proceduralism. Some emphasized the depoliticized nature of academic study, in which students often have the opportunity to learn about global political problems, but never seem to get a chance to connect these problems to everyday life. Some emphasized the monotony and repetitiveness of university life, situating the garden as a creative experiment that modifies our relationship to space. Others emphasized creativity and direct action as ends in themselves, and as practices of direct democracy. Some pointed to the pervasiveness and naturalization of lawns as archaic land use practices inherited from Europe. Others suggested the need for more gardens on campus, pointing out that

the Campus Community Gardens had recently been told that they would need to move, with no guarantee of a new location. Others framed the event in the context of campus groups had been lobbying the administration to dedicate a portion of its unused land, a few kilometers from campus, as a working farm.

After the garden was constructed for the second time, the gardeners began organizing workshops, creating new political spaces and using the space in a different way. An experienced activist presented a workshop on consensus-based decision-making that he had learned after visiting the Zapatistas, and another local activist shared her experience in anti-poverty activism. Three faculty members had agreed to hold workshops by the time the garden was destroyed for the second time. Another group organized an open forum on the gardens, with small facilitated discussions on specific issues that had been raised, including vandalism, private property, food security, direct action and media.<sup>220</sup>

The gardeners were not the only ones constructing political spaces. The university administration attempted to construct a political space in which the garden was an undemocratic infringement on a large ‘university community’, legitimately represented by the administration. It would be a mistake to understand this as a conflict between ‘the administration’ and ‘the gardeners’, not only because it reifies these groups as coherent wholes, but also because it excludes other groups and processes that were always-already involved in this event. Some students were outraged at the events, questioning what right students and community members had to construct a garden on property that should be controlled and administered through the university bureaucracy. Others wanted to know what the garden was *for*, who had committed to maintaining it,

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<sup>220</sup> Food Not Lawns!, “Students Relate, Bureaucrats Intimidate!”

and who would get to eat the food. Some even organized a Facebook group in opposition to the gardens, entitled “Yes to Gardens, No to Vandalism at UVic.”<sup>221</sup> In this sense, the ‘means’ were conceived as separate from the ‘ends’. The means (planting a garden) was not justified or appropriate for the end (struggle for more gardens on campus). This separation retroactively articulated the garden in a linear way. The objective of “more gardens” was back-projected as the reason that the garden was built, conceiving the garden as the instrumentalized means towards achieving the ends of more gardens.

In many ways, these latter political spaces were a recapitulation of common-sense, along with the molarizing processes that simplify the garden as a poorly orchestrated protest. Many students simply refused to question private property, basing their rejection of the garden on the fact that it was planted on land owned and administered by the university, by people who were not authorized by the institution. Others reproduced the classification of the garden as vandalism. Others saw the event as misguided and poorly organized, lacking careful planning, a coherent message, and clear spokespeople.

However, these common-sensical political spaces were continually disrupted by situating the garden in the context of *political problems*. The gardeners produced multiple and interconnected political spaces, situating the garden in the context of colonialism, corporate agribusiness, bureaucracy, private property, and so on. Understand the event in terms of these processes—or as resistance to them—and the event is part of much older struggles and histories. These political problems intersected with one another in numerous different ways. For example, an articulation that linked the garden to the Diggers and the reclaiming of the commons. However, this articulation was

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<sup>221</sup> The Facebook group is now defunct; however, it was reported in an article in the *Times Colonist*. See Joanne Hatherly, "Garden Protesters' Demands Costly," *Times Colonist* (April 10, 2010).

later called into question by an Indigenous activist who suggested that importing a history of resistance from Europe may generate its own sense of entitlement and reinscribe a sense of ownership of colonized land. He argued that the Lekwungen and other Coast Salish landholding traditions are diverse, and could easily be subordinated to a homogenizing claim on ‘the commons’. These lent force to the uncertainty of colonialism: there is no group or institution ‘at the center’, capable of resolving these problems. This mode of problematic intelligibility is amputated in the molarizing processes of articulation, such as the attempt by the administration to articulate itself as the legitimate representative of the 24,000-member university community.

Attempts to explain, categorize, and understand the garden tend towards this reduction. However, this should not be understood as an opposition between a prelinguistic dynamism and the reductions of language. I am suggesting that a sensitivity to problems, and their connection to everyday life, can help to intensify processes of singularization, connecting problems in ways that make common-sensical resolutions difficult.

A press release written by ‘Food Not Lawns’ is interesting in this respect. Rather than countering the universalizing response of the university with its own claim to universality, representing ‘the students’ or ‘the true interests of the university community’, it did something else. It situated the university administration as a particular group (composed of only a few individuals), and recapitulated the *problems* raised by the garden, implicating the administration and its authority. It politicized the processes of molarization through which the administration maintains its authority,

situating these processes as part of a set of political problems, and situating the garden as a response:

When UVic asserts that gardeners “impose [their] views about the use of land on the entire 24,000-member university community” they hope that no one will recognize the status quo: that land use on campus is administered and controlled by a tiny group of university officials.

Of course, the bureaucracy is not tiny, and there are consultations. There are proposals, meetings, committees, groups, petitions, and reports by all kinds of people. People work tirelessly within this system and sometimes achieve meaningful changes. For example, there is a petition circulating that advocates for dedicated agricultural land at UVic, as well as other important commitments to food security. But at the end of the day, after ‘consultations’ have ended, these decisions are not made collectively. They are made by a tiny group at the top of UVic’s bureaucratic hierarchy.

What would it mean for the university community to make collective decisions about how we—as members of the UVic community—relate to the campus, and how its spaces are used? What would it mean to think about UVic as a colonized space, founded on the dispossession of Indigenous land, and how might we begin to change the way it operates? What would it mean to grow our own food and reduce our reliance on transnational corporations?

These are only some of the problems that are raised by Resistance is Fertile. For many of us at UVic, the notion of collective decision-making is unthinkable: bureaucratic, hierarchical processes seem natural, as if there have never been other ways of deciding how to live and learn together. Similarly, thinking about colonialism as a present reality—rather than a part of history—makes us uncomfortable and throws our ways of life into question. It’s becoming increasingly apparent that we need to be growing our own food locally and sustainably, but corporate control of the foodchain continues to intensify. The UVic administration is not capable of solving these problems, and no one is asking them to. Resistance is Fertile offers no catch-all solutions either; only responses, which may deepen these problems further, connect them, and tease out the implications they have for our everyday lives. These problems are anything but marginal: they concern us all, and they won’t go away. They need to be fertilized, and if they get bulldozed, they’ll only grow back...<sup>222</sup>

The account above produces a political space in which ‘the university community’ is affirmed as a site of political struggle. Politicizing the practices of consultation and decision-making through which the administration maintains its legitimacy and authority helped to foreground the question of land use as an open-ended *problem*, made

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<sup>222</sup> Food Not Lawns!, “Growing Problems at UVic,” <http://vfnl.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/growing-problems/>.

intelligible by the garden, but not resolved by it. Instead, it suggests that the garden *intensifies* these problems, making them palpable, and making it more difficult to perpetuate sedimented routines and processes.

The language of problems helps to avoid the molarizing reductions discussed earlier, warding off resolution and simplification, and gesturing towards the complexity of the situation. Objectives, strategies, and trajectories are decentered to make way for political spaces that foreground problems that cannot be resolved by any of the molar entities involved: who could resolve a problem like colonialism? Rather than seeking resolutions to political problems, the garden helped to connect problems to each other and to everyday life at the university. Colonialism, bureaucracy, food insecurity, lawn maintenance, commodification, and other processes are connected through a process that politicizes (throws into question) the practices that subtend these problems, suspending the habituated routines and common sense that pervade university life. I have already suggested that part of the ways in which these routines maintain themselves is through molarizing articulations: movements are made into interest groups attempting to influence the university administration or communicating their message to ‘the public’.

These molarizing processes were reproduced through media reports and UVic press releases. The media coverage of the garden was often ‘sympathetic’, and reporters even insisted that they fully ‘supported’ the garden, but these reports—however celebratory—tended to articulate the garden as a form of protest, or as a reaction to a decision made by the university. From the multiplicity of explanations articulated by the gardeners, the simplest ones were selected: the garden was a protest to raise awareness about food security (in general) or to get more community gardens on campus (in

particular).<sup>223</sup> Another selection positioned the garden as a protest in reaction to the Community Gardens: a particular response to a local problem, with a clear possibility of resolution.<sup>224</sup> This was all very perplexing to the Campus Community Garden executive, a small bureaucratic entity who had not even been involved in the guerilla garden. When interviewed, Campus Community Garden representatives noted that the community gardens needed volunteers, suggesting that the gardeners' time could be better spent tending gardens that already existed.<sup>225</sup> From this perspective, the gardeners appeared as a naïve and utopian bunch, who just wanted to cause problems, and shirked the long, patient work of maintaining gardens. Once the event was articulated as a struggle for more gardens, it could be easily dismissed on the basis that the existing campus gardens were in disrepair. If these gardens weren't being properly maintained by students, what made the gardeners think there should be more on campus?

I have argued that these molarizing articulations work by selecting particular, linear understandings of the garden, and back-projecting them so that they stand in as its 'cause' or 'purpose'. I have tried to argue, on the contrary, that linear notions of causality and the assumptions of clear objectives work to obfuscate the singularizing processes at work in the garden. This is not a question of sinister manipulations orchestrated by the UVic administration, in an attempt to obscure the 'truth' of the garden. On the contrary, molarizing processes are part of everyday common sense, and they were reproduced by the administration, observers, campus groups, and the gardeners themselves.

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<sup>223</sup> Slavin, "Protesters Set to Strike Again at UVic 'Garden.'"

<sup>224</sup> Clarke, "Students Dig In to Secure Future of Communal Garden."

<sup>225</sup> Hatherly, "Garden Protesters' Demands Costly."

What is significant about the garden, however, is that it succeeded in disrupting these habituated circuits of molarity and opening up processes of singularization. It did this in three interconnected and resonating ways: (1) by pushing molarizing perceptions to absurdity, exposing them as contingent reactions to singularity and newness; (2) by inventing a political practice (guerilla gardening in broad daylight) that broke the molarizing loop of the politics of demand, side-stepping the processes of consultation and proceduralism through which the university administration maintains its authority over land use; (3) by pointing beyond itself, situating the garden as a response that deepened (rather than resolving) the interconnected problems of food insecurity, bureaucracy, colonialism, capitalism, and politicizing the ways in which these problems are reproduced through everyday, common-sensical practices. By inventing ways to suspend common sense, the garden expresses open-ended transformation that is (normally) kept in check by molarizing processes.

Other, related struggles have begun to surface at UVic. However, there is no clear basis of sameness to connect these problems to the garden. A new group called “Automated?” now holds monthly forums on centralization and corporatization at UVic. Staff, faculty, students, and community members have been part of a process of collectively connecting everyday life at UVic with the problems of centralized decision-making, commodification of knowledge, professionalization, precarity, and so on. This movement was not ‘caused’ by the garden. The practices of this event look very different, and they aren’t breaking any laws. The problems in play are also different, with a focus on work life and the ways in which corporatization and centralization are shaping everyday practices at UVic. However, this group resonates with the garden in its

focus on the collective formulation of problems, and its connection to everyday practices. The practices and problems are not the same, but they are certainly connected, and “Automated?” helps to develop a sensitivity to these problems through different processes, in a way that involves different people. Both events are experimental because the outcome is not determined in advance, subjugated to a molar objective.

Is it possible to develop practices and movements that resonate with each other, rather than assuming the need for a basis of sameness or identification? If the arsenal of molarizing processes is complex and interconnected, could there be an arsenal of practices that suspend these processes, generating processes that operate through creativity and experimentation? Can they be abandoned or modified when they fail to produce interesting effects, or when their repetition becomes predictable? Does this notion of a molecular or experimental ‘arsenal’ participate in the classification and molarization of molecularity? Can theory help to think the ways in which movements suspend molar circuits, and the ingress of singularity?

## Conclusion

It seems that the garden will not be convincing if there is no way to think about it in more general terms. As I noted in the introduction, a focus on particular movements seems too parochial, limited and specific. What general insights is it possible to glean from this example? How can the arguments about the garden be extrapolated onto a more general field? Is it possible to locate other sites where processes of singularization and molarization fold together?

Alain Touraine discusses a similar process that took place during the events of May '68 in France. He describes a protest on May 13<sup>th</sup>, conceived as a traditional labour protest. According to Touraine, the student revolt was being hegemonized by Left political parties and unions, channeled into the dominant institutions and practices of the traditional Left. This was a process of molarization, through which the parties and unions were increasingly articulated as the representatives of the movement. However, as the protest was drawing to a close, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the leaders of the student rebellion, called on demonstrators “not to roll up their signs and go home, but to gather on the Champ de Mars where a vast sit-in took place.”<sup>226</sup> He argues that this event marked the passage from a primarily instrumental action, with clear goals and representatives, to “a movement that is mainly exemplary and expressive.”<sup>227</sup>

Decentering the hegemonic practices and aims of the unions led to a process of singularization where new practices took shape that could not be subsumed by goals or representatives. They were ‘new’ in the sense that we have been attempting to make

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<sup>226</sup> Touraine, *Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society*, 135.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

thinkable through the molecular: not simply ‘different from’ old practices, but made possible by a break from molarized routines, opening onto a creative process of transformation. We can understand this as a politics of the act that breaks the normalized circuits of protest and party-union hegemony of a politics of demand, through which the State is perpetually reaffirmed as the primary object of struggle. Although Touraine often subsumes the May movement within the categories of class struggle, searching for a dialectical struggle between two actors or classes, he is also forced to abandon this simplicity at times. He often warns *against* the adoption of a “homogenous social category” (such as the working class) and argues that “we must start from the existence of social relationships made visible by the action and protest of those engaged most actively and directly.”<sup>228</sup> In this sense, the most significant insight of Touraine and Melucci is their insistence that social movements may be intelligible not merely through their demands, plans or programs, but by the politicizations they effect, and the problems they make palpable. The term ‘politicization’ is not used by Melucci or Touraine because, as I argued in Part 1, they fail to challenge the reified separation of the ‘social’ and the ‘political’. At the same time, however, they both recognize that part of what is ‘new’ about new social movements is that they can no longer be contained within the same categories. Developing new categories will not help if they reproduce the same binary oppositions or if they reify movements through simple classification. This was the danger that Melucci saw with the category of ‘new social movements’, which were being increasingly molarized (reified) as ‘new’. In contrast, he saw that what was ‘new’ was precisely the fact that they could no longer be represented in such totalizing terms.

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<sup>228</sup> Alain Touraine, *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform: May 1968--The Student Rebellion and Workers' Strikes--The Birth of a Social Movement*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 40.

These insights help to foreground the problem of using the UVic garden as an ‘example’ or ‘case’. If the garden is ‘exemplary’ for its capacity to break molarized repetitions, common sense, and the politics of demand, is there a danger in inventing a more ‘general’ category in which it would be included? As we suggested in the introduction, focusing on a particular case or movement tends to seem too parochial and insignificant, and it is easy to be drawn to a search for ways in which these movements can be conceptualized in general terms. If the aim is to make open-ended transformation thinkable, is it possible to discuss these processes ‘in general’? Will this lead to a search for sameness and commonality that derails an orientation to open-ended variation? Does this tension between particular examples and general insights imply that it is impossible to think about molecular change ‘in general’?

This is difficult territory. For instance, searching for movements that seem to disrupt molar circuits in a spectacular way—such as the UVic garden or the sit-in of May ’68—may result in the exclusion of transformative practices that do not clash directly with laws or authorities, or that are not publicized and reported on. This problem is related to what Melucci calls the ‘myopia of the visible’. He criticizes analyses that focus on measurable aspects of collective action, such as the effects on policies, organizations, or institutions.<sup>229</sup> Searching for practices that effect institutional changes or achieve clear objectives reproduces a focus on ‘struggle for’, reifying objectives and representations rather than apprehending them as processes. Furthermore, focusing on visible events like the garden may serve to obscure important practices that were irreducibly connected to it. Part of what made the garden possible, for example, as a strong community network that

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<sup>229</sup> Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 42-9.

was fostered and created through potlucks, informal gatherings, and past activism, such as the mobilization against the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver and Victoria.<sup>230</sup>

Melucci insists that collective action itself needs to be understood as a process—or a multiplicity of processes—rather than taken as a given. This insistence has led me to use the concepts of the molar and the molecular in hopes of attending to these problems in a way that makes them more palpable. The molar and molecular helps to avoid the dichotomous representation of transformative groups on the one hand and static institutions or structures on the other. All social formations are a dynamic mix of processes of molar and molecular processes. The molarizing process of Statism is not something conducted ‘by’ the State ‘on’ movements; it is a process of molarization that occurs at the intersection, structuring and rigidifying a *relation* between these groups. Similarly, singularization is what makes these relations indistinct, blurring boundaries and breaking categories that work to contain and separate. Molecular processes of singularization are what make it impossible for governments and institutions to conceive of movements as something ‘outside’ themselves, as a particular group of individuals.

### **General/Particular, Molar/Molecular**

If the UVic garden is conceived as a case study or a particular ‘instance’ of singularization, does this lead back to the binary of the universal and the particular? Is singularization captured as a universal category that ‘applies’ to specific places and times, with shared qualities or properties? This can easily lead to a search for cases that

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<sup>230</sup> I have written about these movements elsewhere, foregrounding similar questions of intelligibility. I have avoided discussing these networks and connections in detail partly for ethical reasons, because a police investigation of the guerilla gardening is ongoing, and police have made numerous attempts to infiltrate anarchist groups in Victoria and Vancouver. See Nick Montgomery, "Beyond Civil Disobedience and Counter-hegemony: Legitimacy, Strategy, and Tactics in the 2010 Anti-Olympics Movement," in *Prevent and Tame: Protest Under (Self-)Control*, eds. Florian Heßdörfer, Peter Ullrich and Adrea Pabst. (Berlin: Karl-Dietz Verlag, forthcoming).

seem to resemble the garden, where representation is repudiated, or where politics seems creative, for example. However, I have argued that singularization is not a general category with specific instances that can be represented with precision; on the contrary, singularization blurs boundaries, habits, routines and concepts that keep things stable, destabilizing them in a movement of unpredictable change. Brian Massumi suggests that social formations ‘like’ May ’68 are those that approach the supermolecular extreme; however, it is no coincidence that they are harder to locate than those with a higher degree of molarity, precisely because they “slip through existing categories of political organization.”<sup>231</sup> However, there are instances of longer-lived movements:

examples from the sixties include the Situationists in France, the Provos and Kabouters of the Netherlands, the Yippies and their allies in the U.S.; in the seventies, the Italian autonomists; in the eighties, the convergence of squatters, associated marginals, and extraparliamentary Greens in Northern Europe; and in general, the ‘radical’ wings of feminist and other minority movements.<sup>232</sup>

He adds that most actual social formations “fall midrange between the extremes [of molecularity and molarity] and display complex tendencies moving in both directions simultaneously.”<sup>233</sup> The notion of ‘direction’ is misleading here because molecularity is that which escapes linear directionality. In my discussion of ‘movement’, molecular singularization was conceived as movement before it is indexed, placed or plotted. It is not movement against the backdrop of a surface, and so cannot be understood as linear. On the contrary, it is superlinear and so its ‘direction’ can only be plotted retrospectively. This retrospective plotting is a process of molarization, which can represent the movement in simplistic, linear terms. This is the way in which ‘objectives’ are deduced

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<sup>231</sup> Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 121.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

imputed onto movements even when no such objectives are articulated. If a garden was planted, it must have been a protest for more gardens.

Singularization was also used to chart a way out of the blackmail of the hegemonic analytic, in which social movements are either universal and (counter)hegemonic, or particular and parochial. Laclau and Mouffe insist that there can be nothing outside discourse except negativity; however, I have argued that this apparent ‘outside’ can be understood as positive and ontologically primary. This claim is made possible by the mutual immanence of molarization and singularization. Singularity is not ‘outside’ discourse; it is *in it* without being *of it*. It is that which troubles, transforms and destabilizes articulation and meaning. Food Not Bombs was used as an example of a non-branded tactic that actively wards off molarization, and thus holds open possibilities for continual modification of its practices and relations. It is not entirely molecular; the molar and molecular are constantly interpenetrating one another. However, FNB’s active warding off of rigid structure or incorporation keeps it relatively open to molecular processes. In this sense, singularization is not a ‘tactic’ or a ‘choice’ but a process that cannot be chosen: it is ontologically primary, arising before it is ever apprehended as an ‘it’.

If singularization cannot be controlled, what is the political import of it, and what significance does it have for politics? If processes of singularization cannot be piloted or made to move in a particular direction, what use does it have? Do the ontological arguments about the molar and molecular imply a different politics? The politics of the act was read together with singularization as an attempt to get at the political force behind practices that short-circuit habits of common sense and hegemonic political practices.

These practices tend to be dismissed as simply disruptive, if they are intelligible at all. Whereas the politics of demand continually reaffirms the authorities it engages with, reproducing the hegemony of Statism, the politics of the act breaks this loop, allowing for the emergence of new political practices. Insofar as these practices are new, they are always on the edge of intelligibility; no one is quite sure what to make of them. Movements enveloped by singularizing processes can easily become destructive, fascistic, or sectarian, especially if when movements perceive themselves as being ‘outside’ a totalizing structure. This was a tendency of many of the movements mentioned by Massumi, above. For example, the Situationist International has been criticized for its individualism and ideological Puritanism.<sup>234</sup>

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that molarizing repetitions will be broken, or that commonsensical responses will not subsume singularizing processes immediately. This is why a politics sensitized to molecularity is always experimental, and often requires careful strategy and planning. Some interventions may simply fail to generate anything interesting or new. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that practices that were once transformative will continue to be so. Actions and practices that were once implicated in a process of singularization can be repeated. Interventions that were once inventive—such as the sit-in of May ’68—may eventually become part of a predictable repertoire of protest tactics, which are deployed for purely instrumentalist ends. This has important implications for the analysis of political struggles. Processes of singularization cannot be ‘observed’ because observers are already ‘outside’, in a fixed molar relation to their supposed ‘object’. It follows that the best analysts of social movements will not be

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<sup>234</sup> See Vincent Kaufmann, "Angels of Purity," *October* 79, no. Winter (1997): 49-68; Richard J. F. Day, "Setting up Shop in Nullity: Protest Aesthetics and the New "Situationism"," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 29, no. 2 (2007): 239-260.

detached observers, but those involved in social movements and political struggles. This does not mean that intellectuals or theorists are irrelevant or should keep their mouths shut. On the contrary, it means recognizing that intellectuals and theorists are always in an immanent relationship with social movements, and the way they make social movements intelligible has political effects. Intellectuals are always ‘involved’—albeit in different ways and to different degrees—whether they recognize it or not.

This was a central argument of Part 2: theory folds into practice, and is never separate, detached, or transcendent, whether or not it thinks so. Intellectuals may reify social movements as empirical objects, or issue normative proclamations, or attempt to destabilize the categories that contain social movements; however, the point is that these arguments have effects, if only minor ones. Theory can work to do more than simply ‘represent’ struggles. I have argued that theory intervenes and restructures discourse. Insofar as it is able to foreground problems that cannot be contained by existing categories, intellectuals can affirm processes of singularization by working to suspend the commonsensical habits of their discipline. In terms of social movements, I have suggested that this means working to destabilize the categories that make movements into coherent ‘objects’ or ‘subjects’, or that simplify them in terms of ‘struggle for’ and ‘struggle against’.

Laclau and Mouffe take steps in this direction by showing that all apparent unities, groups, positions and concepts are the contingent outcome of past political struggles; however, they depoliticize the effects of hegemonic articulation by insisting that it is an irreducible necessity. I have tried to open this problem further by insisting that articulation is always following, capturing and reifying singularizing processes, and that

singularizing processes can be conceived in positive terms, beyond mere disruption or subversion. Singularization orients us towards the ontological primacy of difference and change: molecular transformation is always prior to its representation.

Groups, individuals and institutions are always at the intersection of a complex array of processes of molarization and singularization: we are always simultaneously intervening in—and being constituted by—molar and molecular processes. Politics, then, is a question of modulations, interventions, intensifications, sedimentations, and articulations. Singularizing processes can never be controlled, but they can be encouraged, affirmed and intensified by breaking the molar circuits that contain them, and warding off molarizing representations and repetitions. Attempts to make process of singularization intelligible, then, do not aim at representing them. Rather than focusing on a movement's present state, analysis oriented to singularization must focus on “the vectors of potential transformation it [the process of singularization] envelops.”<sup>235</sup> The aim is not to determine a movement's present or its future, but to chart “a superlinear framework of possible futures.”<sup>236</sup> Politics is not simply about determining what the future should be; it also consists in potentializing the future, so that new practices become thinkable.

In criticizing the dominance of molar politics and counterhegemony, one of the biggest risks is a slippage from a critique of its dominance towards a totalizing dismissal of molar politics. I have attempted to show how counterhegemony is presupposed as a *necessity*, and easily facilitates the dismissal of other modes of political struggle as fragmentary and particularistic. What the molar/molecular distinction makes possible is a

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<sup>235</sup> Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 120.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

more complex approach to politics, which makes it more difficult to evaluate struggles in any simple way. Evaluations in terms of success and failure, I have suggested, tend to reduce movements to their molar articulations of objectives. I have argued that molarization is depoliticized because it appears inevitable. This inevitability is made possible by ontological assumptions that reduce politics to a struggle for hegemony, foreclosing any possibility of thinking movement, change, and difference except in terms of articulation/disarticulation. Complete rejection of counterhegemony and molar politics merely inverts the problem, and works to obfuscate the importance of molar politics. Decisions made by governments and institutions tend to be immersed in rigid procedures; however, finding ways to intervene in these processes effectively is important. How can institutional decisions be influenced without reproducing the politics of demand, where the authority and centrality of these institutions is reaffirmed and depoliticized? How might counterhegemonic representations be deployed tactically, in ways that do not destroy singularizing processes?

### **Extensive and Intensive Capitalism in Brief**

An analysis of capitalism is missing from this work, and it requires a careful and detailed treatment that cannot be undertaken here. However, I would argue that the concepts of the molar and molecular may help understand the specificity of capitalism as a form of oppression and a way of life, as well as some possibilities for resistance and change. Contemporary capitalism continues to colonize new spaces for markets and commodification, and the recent global crisis has not undermined its global dominance. Part of what makes capitalism insidious is that it does not operate primarily as a process of molarization. Instead, capitalism operates through a unique logic of equivalence

which *decodes*, ripping away meaning and indexing everything to money, rather than overcoding and fixing relations through discourse. Deleuze and Guattari call this process ‘axiomatization.’<sup>237</sup> This is not a hegemonic chain of qualitative equivalence such as those described by Laclau and Mouffe, but rather a uniquely capitalist network of *quantitative* equivalences.<sup>238</sup> Commodification is disinterested in a qualities or properties, except in terms of their exchange value. Bodies, products, land, ideas, and money all become equivalent and substitutable, without the necessity of any underpinning rationality.

Capitalist expansion accomplishes this commodification in two ways.<sup>239</sup> The first, and most widely recognized and criticized mode is through capitalist extension, through neocolonial exploitation of the ‘Third World’ and deregulation of markets and barriers to multinational trade. These processes are consolidated through institutions like the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the G8, the G20 and NATO. In recent decades, these international institutions and their exploitative processes have been politicized through massive demonstrations like those in Seattle in 1999, or the more recent G20 demonstrations in Toronto. Some have hailed this as a world historical moment of transnational solidarity,<sup>240</sup> while others have questioned the efficacy of the

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<sup>237</sup> Decoding occurs by way of capital, which is able to translate all forms of production into quantifiable elements, making them interchangeable and exchangeable. Deleuze and Guattari argue that decoding occurs in capitalism “by substituting for the codes a quantifying axiomatic that is even more oppressive.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 176.

<sup>238</sup> Of course, capitalism is not separate from hegemony and articulation; however, it does not follow the rules of signification and articulation. Like singularization, it is in discourse without being of it. See Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 126-141.

<sup>239</sup> The short analysis of capitalism that follows is taken from *Ibid.*, 126-141; Felix Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>240</sup> See, for example, Vandana Shiva, "The Historic Significance of Seattle."

anti-WTO protest tactics.<sup>241</sup> However, analyses of economic restructuring, deregulation, privatization and resistance through large-scale demonstrations often ignore capitalism's other mode of expansion. In addition to extending itself into new markets across the globe, capitalism also expands through *intensive expansion*, through which it penetrates into subjectivity, ensuring that affects and habits are channeled into circuits of capitalist production and consumption. Bodies are no longer confined to molar identities, and capitalism offers all kinds of possibilities that would be unimaginable a generation ago. However, these possibilities tend to be restricted to consumption and production: "you can go anywhere your fancy takes you and be anyone you want to be—as long as your credit is good and you show for work the next day."<sup>242</sup>

The garden at UVic helped to address this intensive colonization through a politicization of the everyday routines, habits and consumption patterns that rely on multinational networks of corporate trade and exploitation, but also on capitalism's intensive colonization of our habits, routines and common sense. The UVic garden was connected to—and made possible by—a network of practices that resist intensive capitalism in interesting ways. Practices of growing, farming, and eating can politicize aspects of everyday life that seem natural or unproblematic: lawns may be politicized, conceived as archaic residues of European enclosures, requiring a constant regimen of fertilizers, pesticides and maintenance, and constituting active obstacles to the creation of community gardens, permaculture, or rewilding. Dumpster diving politicizes the classification of food as 'waste' and the capitalist processes that result in the disposal of millions of pounds of food each day.

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<sup>241</sup> Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, 3.

<sup>242</sup> Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 136.

These processes are not reducible to mobilizations, protests or demonstrations that are typically subsumed under the category of ‘social movements’. Many of these practices may be quite mundane. Planting crops, harvesting seeds, and preserving the harvest are not particularly exciting activities; however, they are potentially political in the current context of corporate agribusiness. These practices can engender new perceptions of seasons, cycles, weather, animals, insects, plants and other relationships that are typically annexed to ‘nature’. They may help to reveal the contingency of a corporate food system that increasingly hegemonizes itself as inevitable and necessary. These mundane practices, then, may be part of singularizing processes, helping to destabilize the intensive and extensive expansion of capitalism, continually creating spaces and processes that cannot be commodified or subjected to market rationalities.

Once again, it is always a question of which processes and discourses in which these practices are implicated. Local food and gardens can be commodified as a market alternative to grocery stores that is primarily available to upper-middle class people, and marketed as part of a healthy lifestyle. This co-optation effects a depoliticization, where growing food locally tends to be conceived as a hobby or interest rather than a political practice. This was part of what took place in reaction to the gardens at UVic, where the administration noted that there were already a few plots for community gardens, some of which were underused. If students were interested in gardening, they should have been helping with those gardens. There was already a space for their hobby. Furthermore, community gardens have even recently been articulated as part of a gentrification in Victoria. The City of Victoria has recently created plans to ‘beautify’ Pandora Green—a large boulevard lawn space where homeless people camp—with gardens, landscaping,

paths and streetlights. In this context, community gardens have been articulated as part of a project of social cleansing, in order to create spaces that are more conducive to capitalist consumption.

These developments help to foreground the problem of co-optation, and the reminder that no practices are ‘inherently’ liberatory or transformative. Instead, I have argued that these practices should be conceptualized at the intersection of the molar and the molecular. Capitalist expansion cannot be confronted by molar politics alone, because it has penetrated into our subjectivities and our desires. As Guattari insists, it is not enough to oppose capitalism’s extensive expansion:

It is equally imperative to confront capitalism’s effects in the domain of mental ecology in everyday life: individual, domestic, material, neighbourly, creative or one’s personal ethics. Rather than looking for a stupefying and infantilizing consensus, it will be a question in the future of cultivating a *dissensus* in the singular production of existence.<sup>243</sup>

Destabilizing this intensive capitalist colonization requires a politics that is sensitized to molecularity, without disregarding the possibilities of molar goals, alliances and programmes. No struggle or movement is ever completely molar or molecular: it is always a dynamic mix of both. The garden politicized global networks of corporate capitalist exploitation; however, it also problematized the habits and routines of the intensive capitalism of everyday life. It did not present a coherent alternative to colonialism, factory farming, bureaucratic management or corporate capitalism. Rather than advancing a hegemonic consensus, the garden cultivated a radical *dissensus*, engendering new connections, practices and processes.

Social movements can be conceptualized as responses to and generators of *problems and complexities*, rather than sovereign bodies with a set trajectory, direction,

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<sup>243</sup> Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 33.

or plan. Magnusson's concept of political space is useful here. Political spaces are never entirely general or particular, and can never be represented completely; indeed, I have argued that aspirations to represent political spaces 'completely' tend to render them unproblematic. The ways in which we orient ourselves to processes of singularization is itself a complex problem, and there are always risks of reifying, fetishizing or dismissing the molecular. Open-ended transformation is always risky and it may well end in disaster. In any case, it is never a question of 'choosing' molecularity or molarity; politics consists in their dynamic interplay. Perhaps the most radical and potentially transformative processes of social movements are the most difficult to locate, because they do not coincide with dominant categories, concepts or modes of thought. Indeed, the spatial metaphor of 'locating' implies that processes of singularization could be reduced to a particular place or time. On the contrary, I have argued that singularizing movements are precisely what troubles and transforms molar distinctions, locations, boundaries, perceptions and habits.

In foregrounding the transformative potentials of political spaces and their processes of singularization, I have pointed to the possibility of a *proliferation of alternatives* to hegemonic state-capitalism, rather the necessity of a unified, counterhegemonic alternative. Counterhegemony and its imperatives of unity tend to discipline this proliferation; however, non-branded tactics like Food Not Bombs also ward off centralization and hegemonic articulation. In so doing, non-hegemonic alternatives keep themselves open to modulation, experimentation and processes of singularization. The complex relationships between molarizing and molecularizing processes is complex, and I have tried to orient political analysis to this complexity. I

have argued that non-hegemonic political spaces are not merely particular; this is not a case of activists playing in their own little garden. In fact, political spaces are most significant when they short-circuit the molarizing processes of perception and practice that contain them as particularistic, isolated, or simplistic. Molarizing processes always swoop back in to crystallize, contain or absorb this newness; however, these processes may be warded off and problems might be deepened in new ways. Attempts to short-circuit molarity are necessarily experimental, because no one can pilot or determine the outcome of singularization. There are no guarantees that molar processes will be suspended or disrupted, or that the 'end' of an open-ended process will be desirable. Molar and molecular processes are both dangerous. We need more tools to hold open political spaces and intensify problems, rather than merely solving, linearizing or simplifying. We need to experiment.

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## Appendix

The authors have given permission to produce this work in its entirety. See notice on final page, (204).

# FOOD NOT LAWN

## New Experiments in Foodways for our Colonial, State-Capitalist Context



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# The Events of March 2010...

**March 24<sup>th</sup>:** A call-out had circulated, inviting people to the Petch Fountain in front of MacPherson Library to participate in a Teach-out and a workshop on direct action. No one could have predicted the events that followed...

**12:00h:** The Resistance is Fertile convergence began, with free food, music, and speakers about the issues of colonialism, corporate control, space reclamation, and alienation from our food at UVic.

**12:30h:** Participants began digging up the soil and planting a garden, erecting raised beds with fencing above and below ground to keep away rabbits. **Over 500 people participated in and attended the event.**

**14:00h:** Police arrived and warned participants that they could arrest anyone who continued gardening and 'destroying private property'. Participants formed a circle to protect the gardeners, and construction continued. The police took photos and video footage, gathering intelligence on the identities of the rogue gardeners. Eventually the police left.

**14:30h:** A group of elementary school children arrived and began working on the garden with other participants, building gardens, planting, and sharing knowledge about food production.

**17:00h:** After five hours of gardening, several raised beds had been constructed, with mulch to insulate from frost, and rabbit-proof fencing. Other beds featured rock borders and intricate designs, reflecting the hard work and creativity of participants. Most people left for the day, but some stayed to keep watch and protect the garden.

**March 25<sup>th</sup> 01:00h:** In the middle of the night, UVic administration arrived with Grounds Management, Campus Security, Saanich Police, and three bulldozers to destroy the garden. One person stood in front

of the bulldozers in an attempt to protect the garden, and was arrested for “assault by trespass”.

**02:00h:** It took University officials approximately an hour to destroy, dismantle, and dispose of the vegetables, native plants, soil, fences, stones and other materials that were used to construct the garden. Word spread quickly about the destruction and people began organizing immediately.

**08:00h:** As students and faculty passed by the garden, many were confused about why it had been destroyed, and students and faculty made signs and crosses that would explain what had happen to passersby. A number of people stopped to lay flowers where the garden had been, and the space began resemble a graveyard, with fresh graves of soil, level with the surrounding grass, where the beds of vegetables had been.

**13:00h:** People met in front of the garden, formed a circle and spoke to each other about the destruction of the garden. They joined arms and sang songs while. Students decided instead to go to the administration building and meet with the administration immediately.

**13:20h:** By the time students arrived at the administration building, all entrances were locked and members of Campus Security and Saanich Police were standing at the ready nearby. Officers assured students that the police presence was for their safety, and that they were ‘keeping everyone safe’.

**14:30h:** A number of students came together to discuss Wednesdays convergence and plan the next steps. Although many students had never met each other, students built trust with one another, created an agenda, and began to form affinity groups around different activities. **It was decided that there would be another convergence on Wednesday March 31.**

**March 25-30<sup>th</sup>:** Students and community members worked to spread the word about the March 31<sup>st</sup> convergence, writing press releases,

doing interviews, holding class talks, and developing a website documenting the events. (see [vfnl.wordpress.com](http://vfnl.wordpress.com)). It was agreed that the ideas, people, and discourses that made the garden possible were too diverse to represent: none of us could speak for all the gardeners, but we could all speak about the garden.

**March 31<sup>st</sup>, noon: The gardening started again.** This time, police were already on hand. Reporters representing local, provincial and national newspapers and television were also in attendance, along with hundreds of students, faculty and community members. Once again, speakers talked about problems of food insecurity, colonialism, and corporate capitalism, situating the garden as a response to these problems. Then the digging began. In the same place, gardeners turned over soil, constructed raised beds with fencing, and planted vegetables and native plants. Police stayed back, watching the events and recording it with video cameras.

**March 31<sup>st</sup>-April 8<sup>th</sup>:** Some of the gardeners stayed at the university overnight: guarding. This continued for over a week, with students and community members taking shifts to watch the garden, maintain it, and protect it. It was not clear to anyone what this 'protection' would involve, but it succeeded in warding off drunk and destructive students who passed by the garden on the way home from the campus bar.

**Workshops:** The gardeners began organizing workshops at the garden. An experienced activist presented a workshop on **consensus-based decision-making** that he had learned after visiting the Zapatistas, and another local activist shared her experience in **anti-poverty activism**. Three faculty members had agreed to hold workshops by the time the garden was destroyed for the second time. Another group organized an **open forum on the gardens**, with small, facilitated discussions on specific issues that had been raised, including vandalism, private property, food security, and direct action.

April 9<sup>th</sup>, early morning: Grounds management workers arrived again and dismantled the garden, except this time, they dug up many of plants, put them in pots, and kept them at Campus Security, along with shovels, signs, and other materials that had been left at the site. A fence was erected around the perimeter of the former garden (now a flattened patch of dirt) that read: **AREA UNDER RESTORATION: DO NOT ENTER.**

By this time, most students were in the middle of exams, and many were leaving for the summer. No new garden has been constructed (yet). Grass has been seeded and grown where the garden once was, and one can see faint outlines of the former garden beds. If you learned about the garden through media reports and press releases, it appears to have been a protest, albeit an atypical one. According to a number of articles, students wanted more gardens on campus, so they built one in the middle of the campus as a symbolic demand for more gardens. From this perspective, the 'protest' was entirely ineffective: the garden was destroyed, and UVic did not agree to construct any new gardens.

**What was the garden 'for?':** More interesting than any single reason behind the garden is the diversity of reasons, problems, and issues that the garden raised and responded to. Some gardeners emphasized the problem of **food insecurity**, pointing to the growing dominance of corporate agribusiness our reliance on it. Others emphasized the **ongoing colonial occupation of Indigenous territories** in British Columbia, and the ways in which these territories were being progressively exploited for natural resources. Some pointed to the **problem of bureaucracy**, and the ways in which it stultifies creativity with proceduralism.

Some emphasized the **depoliticized nature of academic study**, in which students often have the opportunity to learn about global political problems, but never seem to get a chance to **connect these problems to everyday life.**

Some emphasized the **monotony and repetitiveness of university life**, situating the garden as a creative experiment that modifies our relationship to space. Others emphasized **creativity and direct action as ends in themselves**, and as practices of direct democracy. Some pointed to the pervasiveness and naturalization of lawns as archaic land use practices inherited from Europe. Others suggested the need for **more gardens on campus**. Others framed the event in the context of campus groups had been lobbying the administration to dedicate the **CJVI lands, a 30-acre plot of former farmland** a few kilometers from campus, as a working farm. **Many of these problems are expanded upon in this publication.**

Some students were outraged at the events, questioning what right students and community members had to construct a garden that was owned by the university. Others demanded to know who would maintain the garden, and who would get to eat the food. Some even organized a Facebook group in opposition to the gardens, entitled "Yes to Gardens, NO to Vandalism at UVic." They recapitulated one of the main reactions to the event: the aim of more gardens was admirable, but the gardeners went about it in the wrong way...

Of all of these perspectives, experiences, and happenings, the simplest ones were selected as the 'reason' behind the garden by mainstream media and many others. Even sympathetic coverage of the garden portrayed it as **a simple protest for more gardens on campus**, or as an abstract demand for 'food security'. Other connections and problems (such as colonialism, land use, private property, and corporate capitalism) were made invisible. This simplification is not coincidental: these demands are the ones that can be most easily incorporated into the current structure of corporate capitalism: we could all be a little 'greener', a little more 'food secure', and have a few more gardens. If the garden can be represented as a protest, **it can be dismissed as naïve, poorly planned, and ineffective**. Questioning private property, bureaucratic decision-making, or colonial relations were quietly swept off the table, at least temporarily...

# The University Exposed

The University is situated in and sustains a fucked up system: **neoliberal state capitalism**. Universities have been criticized as hierarchical institutions, digital diploma mills, factories for corporate capitalist ideologies, and bureaucratic monsters that discourage meaningful political change. These forces come together to produce violent capitalist, colonial, unsustainable foodways.

**A foodway** is the amalgamation of the ways that people produce or gather food, interact with the land, and treat other living beings; it is underlain by all-encompassing belief systems that inform every day attitudes which serve to organize society. The dominant University foodway is about alienation, pollution, and greed.

The food purchased by UVIC is imported from off-island, and the large majority is produced using **industrial agriculture**. Industrial agriculture bears heavy responsibility for the loss of biodiversity through conversion of ecosystems into massive monocrops. It also bears a huge responsibility for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to the inputs of fertilizer and pesticides, which poison the environment and require large amounts of (fossil fuel-produced) energy to manufacture.

The problem goes beyond the simple equation of 'food = destruction and pollution'. Industrial agriculture is a major part of agribusiness, in which food is largely grown for export profit. Vandana Shiva explains that "since agricultural trade is based on land, water and biodiversity, and supply of land and water is

limited, export oriented agriculture policies divert land and water from production of staple foods for local consumption.”

She calls the intensifying export-oriented agriculture as “**export domination**”. It shifts the land base use from local subsistence to produce export products in poor countries at cheap cost for rich consumers in rich countries. It shifts control over resources from local peoples to agribusiness corporations, destroys the natural resource base through unsustainable use, and in the process destroys livelihoods of the small producers. These processes have led to over 200,000 suicides by Indian peasant farmers. We in the rich countries are eating the world's poor alive.

By buying the products of this system, whatever its rhetoric, the University is complicit in this picture. By not providing crucial information about the real costs of industrial agriculture, it also alienates people from the social and ecological consequences of their actions.

How do we confront these problems? We need many politics, many interventions, many attempts, all manner of experiments. Reforming the Universities, corporations and governments is one avenue, but it has serious limitations, and the channels for participation and decision-making are built to ward off radical changes that would undermine colonialism, capital accumulation, and the authority of these institutions.

**One response: TEAR UP THE LAWNS. Plant gardens.** Let the capitalists, administrators and politicians quake at the sight of our defiant flowers. Join with others in your community and help each other reclaim our present and our future.

## **POLITICS: BUREAUCRATIC, GREEN, EXPERIMENTAL**

**BUREAUCRACY:** the collective organizational structure, procedures, protocols, and set of regulations in place to manage activity, usually in large organizations and government.

We're told that politics is too big, and we're too small: leave it to the experts, the bureaucrats, and the technicians to deal with our problems. Take the issue of the environment, or 'climate change', which has become an issue for the experts: scientists tell us what we can expect, and politicians go to summits. Should it surprise us that nothing changed after Copenhagen? Those who aren't surprised are often cynical: nothing is going to change; we're fucked. Might as well give up, and go back to your job. *Have a latte*. Of course, this is only possible for those of us with the privilege to ignore environmental destruction, those of us who depend on corporations and governments to extract, exploit and destroy plants, animals, people, and cultures. Most people in this situation would rather not think about the fact that our everyday lives—how we eat, work, and move around—are sustained by these destructive forces.

**GREEN ETHICS:** individual action that a person can consciously take to curb harmful effects on the environment through consumer habits.

Corporate capitalism has started to capitalize on the recognition that we're headed off a cliff. Worried about the environment? Go Green! (read: buy more stuff labelled 'green'). *Have a latte, but make sure the cup is made of recycled paper*. An ethics of simplicity and a lower 'carbon footprint' also fail to address the problem.

As Derrick Jensen explains:

Consumer culture and the capitalist mindset have taught us to substitute acts of personal consumption (or enlightenment) for organized political resistance. *An Inconvenient Truth* helped raise consciousness about global warming. But did you notice that all of the solutions presented had to do with personal consumption—changing light bulbs, inflating tires, driving half as much—and had nothing to do with shifting power away from corporations, or stopping the growth economy that is destroying the planet? Even if every person in the United States did everything the movie suggested, U.S. carbon emissions would fall by only 22 percent. Scientific consensus is that emissions must be reduced by at least 75 percent worldwide.

Or let's talk water. We so often hear that the world is running out of water. People are dying from lack of water... Because of this we need to take shorter showers. See the disconnect? *Because I take showers, I'm responsible for drawing down aquifers?* Well, no. More than 90 percent of the water used by humans is used by agriculture and industry. The remaining 10 percent is split between municipalities and actual living breathing individual humans... People (both human people and fish people) aren't dying because the world is running out of water. They're dying because the water is being stolen.

(<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/4801/>)

University of Victoria is part of this absurdity. UVic is a corporation, driven by the same imperatives of efficiency, control, and management that makes agribusiness possible. More concretely, UVic uses massive sprinkler systems to water grass, shrubs, and other aesthetic plants. The food at UVic—in its cafeterias, its shops, and its catered conferences and meetings—is produced through destructive agricultural

techniques and exploitative working conditions (see other writings in this volume for details). So what can we do?

**POLITICS:** purposive social action directed at the conditions of collective life

Conventional forms of politics are boring as fuck. Find out who is in charge and ask them for permission. Drift through bureaucracy: exchange emails, form committees, sit in beige rooms and record your own decisions. If you want to get really 'grass roots' about things, you write slogans on placards and stand somewhere, or pace back and forth. Passers-by barely take notice: another protest, another issue, another set of demands. Maybe the bureaucratic machine churns out a response, maybe it doesn't. Reform is always possible, but it has built-in limitations.

Squeezed out by this is the possibility of taking action ourselves, in our own communities, by finding forms of intervention that don't need the approval of a committee or a bureaucratic authority.

*Can politics be more creative?* If 'politics' is about changing the conditions of our everyday lives, why does it always seem so fucking boring? Could it be that bureaucracy and protests aren't just shitty forms of politics, but forms that drain off our creativity and our ability to envision alternatives? Can we find new ways of doing politics here and now, where we live, work, and eat? Can UVic become a laboratory for political experimentation?

**EXPERIMENT:** a venture at something new or different

Experiment. Experiments are 'new' because the results are unknown. We aren't talking about experiments in the scientific sense, where variables need to be carefully controlled. Nobody, including the experimenters, can predict how things will turn out.

Variables will vary, uncontrolled. The garden(s) was an experiment, much to the horror of those who would like to see everything (including activism) managed, planned, and structured.

This makes experiments more dangerous, and much more exciting, than a political campaign that achieves its aim (or doesn't), withers, and dies. Maybe our experiments will inspire others to do the same (or different, and better). Maybe they will fail and die, but enrich the soil for new experiments to germinate. Maybe they will blow up in our faces, and the explosion will illuminate new possibilities.

When it comes to food and land, we need experiments. Desperately. The corporate capitalist monoculture is increasingly displacing all other foodways. Mega-corporations infest every link of the foodchain, from seeds to fertilizers to grocery stores and restaurants. Squeezed out is everything and everyone else: other ways of producing food, relating to the land, and relating to each other through our food. This process of corporate take-over is so slow that many of us have never known anything else: we were born into corporate capitalism.

Capitalism and colonialism are even older: most of us (and our parents, maybe our grandparents) were born into these systems as the only way to get food and relate to land. UVic is a potential site for experiments with alternatives: other ways of growing, eating, and sharing food. Other ways of doing politics that aren't strangled by bureaucracy. Other forms of creating social and political change that are open-ended and experimental. Other ways of relating to land. Perhaps with each experiment, the corporate capitalist food machine will seem less necessary, and alternatives will be increasingly possible...

## Migrant Farmworker Facts

***'The food that overflows our market shelves and fills our tables is harvested by men, women, and children who often cannot satisfy their own hunger' - Cesar Chavez***

Farm work is one of the most hazardous occupations in the United States. The death rate among agricultural workers nationwide was an estimated 20.9 per 100,000 workers in 1996; compared to the average for all industries of 3.9 per 100,000 workers.

Many farm workers are paid by the amount of the crop they harvest. For example, cucumber pickers in North Carolina receive approximately 65 cents for each 33 pound bucket they harvest. This averages out to around \$3.90 per hour.

The United Farm Workers Union estimates that there are 800,000 migrant farmworkers between the ages of fifteen to seventeen year olds within the United States. These children often work 12 to 14 hours a day or more, seven days a week. One-third of those interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported earning significantly less than the minimum wage, sometimes as little as \$2.00 an hour. An estimated 100,000 children suffer agriculture-related injuries annually in the United States.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 300,000 farm workers suffer pesticide poisoning each year. Pesticide exposure can cause a variety of health problems, such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness, rashes and burns. Long-term effects of pesticide exposure can include cancer, sterility, birth defects, and damage to the nervous system.

Farmworker women routinely earn less money than men for doing the same work and face frequent sexual harassment. Prolonged standing and bending, overexertion, dehydration, poor nutrition, and pesticide and chemical exposures contribute to an increased risk of spontaneous abortion, premature delivery, and fetal abnormalities.

The *New York Times* reported that: "The housing shortage (for farm workers) is so severe that in harvest time visits to farming communities up and down both coasts...workers were found packed 10-12 into trailers, and sleeping in garages, tool sheds, caves, fields and parking lots. ([www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org))

# Garden the Colony!

## Settler Reflections on Colonialism and Guerrilla Gardening

Colonialism is a part of everyday life in Victoria, so it's worth thinking about for a guerilla gardening project. People often speak of 'colonialism' as something from a history book, as something that happened a long time ago. The colonization of what's now called "British Columbia"

began over 150 years ago, but it's not so common to talk about colonialism as something that's *still happening today*.

*What would it mean to think about colonialism as a present reality, an ongoing process?*

What would it mean to think about colonialism as a present reality, and an ongoing process, rather than something that happened long ago? What would it mean to think of ourselves as settlers (as most of us are at UVic) who continue to benefit from the ongoing process of colonialism?

Some aspects of colonialism are overt, such as the recent destruction of Bear Mountain: 'In November 2006, a sacred First Nations cave on SPAET was bulldozed over... part of an orchestrated land grab by greedy real estate developers and their political cronies.' ([http://www.firstnations.de/development/coast\\_salish-spaet.htm](http://www.firstnations.de/development/coast_salish-spaet.htm)).

These actions were resisted by indigenous peoples and their allies, and SPAET continues to be a site of struggle against colonialism. This event is an especially overt aspect of continuing colonialism, where Settler ways of thinking (private property, economic interests and corporate greed) take precedence over indigenous relationships to the land.

Colonialism isn't just about corporations destroying indigenous lands. Colonialism is a continuing reality of exploitation and oppression in 'Canada', but this realization often makes us uncomfortable, and we tend to seek easy answers: isn't colonialism a reality we have to accept? The common idea that we should 'move on' from colonialism shows how deep colonial thinking is ingrained in us: the myth of colonialism as something that happened 'back then' helps to obscure the fact that it's happening 'right now', and that we are all caught up in it. But isn't it the government's job to resolve this issue?

The Canadian government has certainly be trying to 'fix' the 'Indian problem' for over a century, at first through treaties and wars, later

*When Settlers start to recognize  
the reality of colonialism, we're  
often struck by paralyzing guilt*

through genocidal policies like the residential schools, and now through 'multiculturalism' and 'land claims', where indigenous

people are given the chance to ask for (some of) their land back. So far, no luck for the government: indigenous peoples and their allies continue to resist colonialism and the government's 'solutions' to the problem.

When Settlers start to recognize the reality of colonialism, that we (not just our ancestors) are colonizers, we're often struck by paralyzing guilt. We need to move past this guilt and start asking questions: What would it mean to respond to colonialism as a Settler? What would it mean to shake off the colonial mentality that tells us 'colonialism' is something far back in time, or a far-away problem for governments and administrators to deal with? What would it mean to think about the way our everyday lives are part of the colonial process? What would it mean to do things differently, to short-circuit some of the processes colonialism needs in order to function?

There are no easy answers here: only partial responses, experimental gestures. Maybe one gesture is guerrilla gardening. One way colonialism perpetuates itself is by imposing a specific relationship to the land: property. Maybe we can use guerrilla gardening to start thinking about relationships to land other than private property. Maybe guerrilla gardening can be used to help us think critically about colonialism, and the way the University of Victoria is part of the colonial process (a monument to the highest colonial authority, built on colonized Lekwungen land?).

Maybe colonial processes will seem a little less natural, a little less necessary. Maybe guerrilla gardening will make us wonder how it is that we only think of land as 'public' (property of the colonial authority) or 'private' (mine, not yours). Maybe. Guerrilla gardening is not a solution to colonialism; it's an experiment, and we won't know what it has to do with colonialism until we've tried it. Again and again.

There are dangers here. If Settlers plant gardens and we think this means the land is ours, we're forgetting that we're squatters here. This danger was expressed by a banner raised on March 31<sup>st</sup>, which read "RECLAIM THE COMMONS." Later, an indigenous activist pointed out that 'the commons,' in the way Settlers imagined it, never existed here, and the slogan reproduces Settler sentiments of entitlement: 'our' Commons. 'The Commons' is an idea imported from European histories of resistance to enclosures in Britain and elsewhere. White European Settlers need to find ways to engage with our own histories of resistance and struggle, while also reshaping these practices in the context of colonialism here and now.

Settlers 'resisting' colonialism are always in danger of reproducing messianism, entitlement, and oppression. Dangerous, yes, but everything is dangerous, especially doing nothing. We're always Settlers here, but we can also be guerrillas.

## The Garry Oak Ecosystem and 'Conservation'

*"Prior to European settlement, much of southeastern Vancouver Island was dominated by Garry oak ecosystems, playing an important role in the rich and complex culture of the First Nations of this region. In the past, some First Nations deliberately burned selected woodlands and meadows to maintain open conditions and promote the growth of berries, nuts and root vegetables such as camas..."*

*To early settlers, the openness of the rolling landscape offered a bright contrast against the conifer-dominated woods. In the year of Victoria's founding as "Fort Camosun" by the Hudson's Bay Company, Chief Factor James Douglas described the natural setting as "a perfect 'Eden' in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North"...*

*Over the past 150 years, waves of settlers have been attracted to Vancouver Island's southeastern coast. Less than 5% [of Garry Oak ecosystems] now remains in a near-natural condition, and that too is threatened."* (<http://www.goert.ca>)

Although the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT) acknowledges that Indigenous peoples lived in harmony with the Garry Oak ecosystem, the dominant approach to ecological destruction is one of 'conservation.' This is an increasingly prevalent discourse: once Settlers realize they have separated themselves from nature and destroyed it, we attempt to 'preserve' it. Although it is important to recognize ecological destruction and take steps to confront it, the discourse of 'conservation' often reproduces the colonial mentality in subtle ways. When Settlers become conservationists, it becomes easy to forget that we are on colonized land and that 'nature' is being destroyed not because of 'humans' in general, but because of 150 years of colonialism by a white supremacist society here on Vancouver Island.

There are practical and conceptual obstacles to this task in Victoria. We currently depend on introduced foods for our food supply, and we lack the knowledge and expertise to establish foodways with Indigenous plants. How can we think about the relationship between Indigenous foodways and plants, and those that have been introduced by Settlers? What does it mean to grow food in a colonial context, where natural ecosystems are colonized? As with other issues of colonialism, there are no easy answers here.

## Making Things Grow

We don't have a complete guide on how and when to plant, transplant, water, weed, harvest, and seed-save. However, there are a number of excellent resources available.

Visit the site below for more information:

<http://vfnl.wordpress.com/gardening-resources/>

It's also important to **avoid all invasive species**:

[http://www.goert.ca/about\\_invasive\\_species.php](http://www.goert.ca/about_invasive_species.php)

That said, we've compiled some information below, so read on!

## The Rabbit Problem

The rabbit infestation is a significant obstacle to the creation of gardens and alternative foodways at UVic. Rabbit-proofing a garden is a significant challenge; however, there are a number of plants that rabbits (probably) won't eat:

*There are many plants that rabbits (probably) won't eat*

**Anise, Hyssop, Basil, Catmint, Chamomile, Chives, Dill, Fennel, Garlic, Lamb's ears, Lavender, Lemon balm, Mint, Mullein, Oregano, Onions, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Thyme.**

This means that **these plants can be planted immediately**, without any fencing, netting, or other schemes to protect them from hungry bunnies. Included below are instructions for transplanting seedlings that have been grown indoors or in a greenhouse.

**Transplanting:** so you've started your seeds in containers and now it's time to transplant them, what do you do?

A good rule is plant the seed in a depth of 3 times its length.

- Be gentle. Dig a hole in your garden/container the same size as the pot you grew your seedling in. Water the hole thoroughly.
- Take the container with the seedling and put two fingers on either side of the seedling, now tip it over directly over the hole you dug.
- Gently tap the container until the seedling and it's dirt fall out into your hand. You might also need to press on the sides of the seedling to loosen it a bit.
- Remove the container and gently turn right side up as you place it in the hole.
- Press the plant down gently in place.
- Water generously; you're done!

# The 10-step Garden

Lasagna gardening is by far the easiest, fastest, and most fertile way to start your garden. Unlike raised beds, or double digging methods there is no digging and no construction necessary, you simply build your garden directly on top of your lawn. Sounds pretty amazing doesn't it? Basically you layer green and brown materials on top of your lawn and plant directly into them. Since the layers are constantly breaking down, there is a continual supply of nutrients. With such high levels of fertility you can plant more in a smaller area. The layering holds in moisture, so you water less. If weeds appear, pull them or cover them up! Best of all, you can get everything you need for free! It's as simple as that.

## **Step 1. Choose your location.**

Choosing where to put your garden is very important, and what is most important in the location you chose is sunlight. 11 hours or more of sunlight is fantastic, 10-8 hours is great. 7-6 hours is possible for cool weather plants and some plants that like partial shade, or to be shaded during the hottest parts of the day, but less than 4 hours of sunlight is impossible. This isn't really something you can mess around with.

## **Step 2. Manure**

Put down a 2" layer of manure. Level it out with a rake. Manure provides a nitrogen kick to plants later in the season, and introduces earthworms that till soil. Fresh manure on the bottom of the pile will be broken down by microbes before roots can access it so this is the one time I will advocate using fresh manure over aged. The fresh stuff has more living microbes in it, and therefore the lawn even faster.

## **Step 3. Cardboard**

Cover over the manure with sections of plain cardboard, edges overlapping (make sure there is no grass showing in between, grass is sneaky and will invade your garden). Wet down. (no coloured cardboard)

**Step 4. Manure**

Cover with a 2" layer of manure (aged this time), or a layer of garden soil. Level with rake.

**Step 5. Leaves or straw**

Add a 2" layer of leaf mulch (the leaves you raked up in the fall and have been storing all winter) or straw. You can buy straw easily enough, but make sure you are not buying hay. Straw is more expensive than hay, but hay will have weed seeds in it and will introduce weeds to your brand-new weed free garden. Level it with a rake.

**Step 6. Manure**

Add another 2" layer of manure, rake level

**Step 7. Lime**

Cover with a good dusting of dolomite lime. Lime neutralizes pH, breaks down clay and adds calcium and magnesium to soil. If your

plants are growing slowly or reach about 2" high and stop it might be due to pH levels and lime will resolve this problem.

**Step 8. Leaves, straw or coco peat**

Add a 2" layer of coco peat (coir), straw or leaf mulch. Rake level. Coconut fibre (coir) is a waste product from coconut husks used as an alternative to peatmoss, which is a non-renewable resource.

**Step 9. Compost or topsoil**

Finish with a 2" layer of screened compost or topsoil. Water well.

**Step 10.**

Plant. VOILA! You are now ready to plant! Ideally the finished bed should be about 12 inches in height, it will be quite light and easy to plant into and will absorb water easily and drain well. You can direct seed if the weather is obliging, or transplant directly into the top layer of the bed. The high fertility of the growing medium means it's possible to plant in close rows or blocks so that overlapping leaves keep weeds at bay and lock moisture in around the roots.

# Resilience poem

a stone is thrown  
 a stolen rock  
 a non-feature  
 pain for those who would control

ground breaks,  
 and a swarm of hands  
 is frantic with festivity

this power  
 is a stir inside of me  
 open palm and seed  
 raised fist  
 and burning love

as a wave strikes and rolls  
 the stones become enlivened, raucous  
 the crest subsuming and receding  
 surge of nutrients and energy  
 an orchestra, a chorus,  
 a whole of parts.

i am building this power to counteract  
 counterbalance  
 the dimming candle of diversity

we are building this power  
 communities of creatures  
 people of places  
 lovers of life

my love is resilient

it is wild  
 it is for every one of our children

# UVic as a Garden Campus

*When the second garden was planted on March 31<sup>st</sup>, a number of students circulated a petition aimed at garnering support for a proposal for "UVic as a Garden Campus." Below is the text of the petition. It also documents the history of struggles and proposals for a more sustainable campus, which have been largely ignored by the administration. For example, UVic administration eventually read this proposal, and spokesperson Bruce Kilpatrick quickly dismissed it as 'nuts.'*

*The proposal below speaks to the efforts and dedication of people who have worked within the frameworks and procedures that have been created by the University. They also speak to the limitations of these channels. This doesn't mean that lobbying for reform is pointless; it means that it's not enough on its own...*

Imagine a campus where students, staff, and faculty come to learn how to connect with the land and our community. A living laboratory where we can demonstrate innovations in integrating sustainability into teaching, learning, research, and community partnerships. A place to further advance our commitment to sustainability on the ground, in the classroom, in research and in the region. There is a history within the UVic community around this vision, with past proposals focusing on this kind of garden campus initiative. Yet no action:

**in 1994**, there was the Trilium project, a proposal for a learning center and sustainable farm on the Cedar hill corner

**in 1997**, there was the Camassia center for sustainable living, another proposal for the Cedar Hill corner property to be a place dedicated to sustainability and food production

**in 2005**, the Mystic Vail Farmlands and the Urban Village idea were proposed as a means to support the Uvic community and further our commitment to sustainability

**in 2008**, the Common Energy food group proposed a community supported agriculture box program on a small  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre farm, also proposed for the Cedar Hill corner

In light of recent events and past inactions, we seek to open dialogue. We propose that the University commit to:

- Creating a garden in the center of the campus that would be a visual hub, and a demonstration of an active commitment to food sustainability.
- Dedicating 15 acres of the Cedar hill corner lands to become an educational farm.
- Creating 10 acres of ethnobotanical gardens spread across campus managed in accordance with the First Peoples House where the community can develop the skills and knowledge to cultivate and celebrate traditional indigenous foods.
- Planting of 500 fruit and nut trees around campus over the next 5 years.
- Matching these commitments with the creation of a new Urban Agriculture School with 6 dedicated faculty.
- Building a small LEED certified building with innovations of natural building technologies on the Cedar Hill corner as a learning center to manage the various agricultural projects around campus.
- Celebrating these achievements with an annual UVIC Harvest feast which would cultivate community while shining the spotlight on UVIC's sustainability initiatives.

The creation of such a facility will enhance the public profile of UVIC as a leader in sustainability by taking concrete steps towards sustainable food systems. Students, faculty and staff from around the world will be clamoring to get into to the two-year program, attracting new and vibrant faculty, students and staff to the already outstanding UVIC community. UVIC will be a world leader.

*The farm, gardens and trees  
will supply the revitalized  
Grad Lounge, University Club  
and Student Union Building*

Over the next five years, our vision sees the creation of five 2 acre farms on the Cedar Hill corner with a small center to facilitate learning and

support the management of sustainable food production. All the gardens will be tended by the students in the program. All new ornamental trees and shrubs will be fruit producing. The farm, gardens and trees, will supply the revitalized Grad lounge, University Club and food outlets in the Student Union Building.

We need a public commitment from UVIC to take meaningful and substantial action towards implementing these proposals over the next 3 years, starting now. Students and community support this plan, and the actions of the past week will continue to grow unless there is a commitment from the University now. We seek to cooperate with UVIC to make this happen, but we will not cease negotiations and action until these demands are met.

Please sign this letter to show your support for this vision.

The Office of Community-Based Research has been working to connect and strengthen some of the food-related groups, research, and initiatives on campus at UVic. What is the relationship between these groups and other practices geared towards direct action and more radical political agendas? This question is a difficult puzzle, but **one thing is certain: nothing will be gained by dismissing these practices as ‘merely reformist’ or by dismissing direct action as ‘naïve’ or ‘illegitimate’.**

All too often, direct action is measured by its capacity to initiate reforms, force policy changes, or convince ‘the public’ about the need for change. Direct action may have these effects, but it may also be ‘effective’ in more subtle ways: it can challenge common sense, unsettle our habits, and open new possibilities for thought and action. The relationships between direct action, lobbying, and reform are complex, and doing one doesn’t mean abandoning the other.

### ***Some Current Food and Agriculture Initiatives on Campus:***

#### **\* Campus Community Garden**

The Campus Community Garden is located next to Parking Lot 7 and operates year round through campus and community volunteers. Plans are underway to relocate the gardens to a larger space on campus in 2011.

#### **\* Family Student Housing Complex Demonstration Garden**

Plans are underway to create a community garden for the residents of the Family Student Housing Complex.

**\* The Pathways Forward: Community Campus Partnerships for Food, Health, and Sustainability Report (Coming Soon!)** This report will provide an overview of the work of the OCBR in the past two years to unearth what is happening on campus and in communities around research and action to promote more sustainable food systems. As well as outline the Priority Areas for Research that have been identified, Key Strategies and Tools, Ideas for Partnership Initiatives, explore UVic as a community, a model, and knowledge and learning resource. The report will also outline directions for the OCBR over the next three years.

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# Ready Your Shovels...

Before we start, there are two things that you should know.

**First:** your gardens (and your politics) aren't going to be perfect. But that's fine – the pursuit of perfection often sacrifices experiments for some sort of unattainable ideal. Don't expect perfection.

**Second:** guerrilla gardening can get you into trouble. The University administration and the Saanich Police have tried to intimidate, threaten, vilify and persecute those who were involved in the guerrilla gardens.

Struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, capitalism, colonialism, and other injustices have taken many forms, sometimes open and organized, or clandestine and loosely networked. When people fear those in power, and cling to obedience even in the face of dire threats to places and people that they love, then we find ourselves in a dire situation. This is the situation we are in today.

As University students, many of us are living highly privileged lives. We need to start using our positions of privilege to aid in the struggle against domination in all its various forms. For those of you who say, "Well, I need to wait until I graduate, then I'll have more time to do all this kind of stuff!" or "Well, I think we should organize a little more before taking action," we say: you can analyze something forever – that's what we're taught to do in University. Analysis, complexity, and academic critique aren't wrong, or bad, or ineffective: far from it. However, they can easily become excuses that we use to convince ourselves not to experiment with other practices, tactics, or actions.

Experiment! If you want to wait until you graduate until you start challenging power in meaningful ways, so be it. But don't be surprised if you look back on your life in forty years and see that you've put it off for four decades.

## If these words and ideas inspire you...

- Organize your own meetings and collectives to take autonomous action against destructive foodways and the practices, procedures, and ideas that support and reinforce them.
- Find ways to support local small-scale farmers, indigenous struggles, and other land-based, non-corporate foodways
- Experiment with different forms of politics! Policy, bureaucracy, and reform are not 'bad'; they are severely limited.
- Visit the 'Food not Lawns' website: [www.vfnl.wordpress.com](http://www.vfnl.wordpress.com)

What would it mean for the university community to make collective decisions about how we—as members of the UVic community—relate to the campus, and how its spaces are used? What would it mean to invent political practices that unsettle sedimented practices and routines?

These are only some of the problems that are raised by the guerrilla gardens. For many of us at UVic, the notion of collective decision-making is unthinkable: bureaucratic, hierarchical processes seem natural, as if there have never been other ways of deciding how to live and learn together. Similarly, thinking about colonialism as a present reality—rather than a part of history—makes us uncomfortable and throws our ways of life into question. It's becoming increasingly apparent that we need to be growing our own food locally and sustainably, but corporate control of the foodchain continues to intensify.

The UVic administration is not capable of solving these problems, and no one is asking them to. The guerrilla gardens offered no catch-all solutions either; only responses, which may deepen these problems further, connect them, and tease out the implications they have for our everyday lives. These problems are anything but marginal: they concern us all, and they won't go away. They need to be fertilized, and if they get bulldozed, they'll only grow back...

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Resistance is Fertile. *Food Not Lawns: New Experiments in Foodways for our Colonial, State-Capitalist Context*. Victoria: Food Not Lawns!, 2010. Available: [www.vfnl.wordpress.com](http://www.vfnl.wordpress.com)