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**The Gardiner Garden of the Multitude:  
Visions of provision**

Toronto is famous for its diversity, but, more and more, people are realizing that while the whole world may be here, we're not here together. The human realm is often characterized by mistrust, suspicion and a dampening of possibilities in the face of unlikeness – and multicultural Toronto is no exception. It's a city of more than a few solitudes: communities that work around each other, sometimes crossing paths in a cab or on a summer weekend down at Harbourfront, but, for the most part, living separately. But maybe we can take a cue from the plant world. While competition does happen between plant species, there is also co-operation; various species can enable and fortify coexistence in a way that illustrates the practical potential of difference. And so, symbolically yet practically, we propose to turn the controversial Gardiner Expressway into an elevated plant-based landscape, a Gardiner Garden if you will, where plants act as a model for Toronto's diversity.

First, let's consider vocabulary. Is it accurate to refer to 'the people of Toronto' when there is no single, unified group? Paulo Virno, in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, tells us that the idea of the People came to be popularized in the seventeenth century in opposition to the negative idea of the Multitude. The People found meaning in their unity under the State, whereas the Multitude was thought to be a motley disunity, 'a regurgitation of the "state of nature" in civil society.'<sup>1</sup> But the People is no longer a convincing analytical category – something we've always seen clearly in Canada, with our incessant moaning about Canadian identity. It is becoming obvious that the State is deployed for purely economic purposes and

<sup>1</sup> Paulo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 23.

has nothing to do with any shared set of values, sensibilities or national dances. For some political philosophers, particularly Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose work on the subject has set the tone for the debate, we, as Multitude, are characterized by a 'multiplicity of singular forms of life and at the same time share a common global existence.'<sup>2</sup> This fact provides these two with a lot of hope and enthusiasm, which has raised many alarm bells – optimism is not cool amongst lefty nerds. And why should it be? The world is a collapsing shit factory, and unwarranted optimism in the potential of concepts like the Multitude leads only to depression, frustration and cynicism. We need some workable ideas, but ideas that are grounded in a realistic assessment of our collective potential.

Virno offers a more pragmatic and plausible way of thinking of the Multitude by pointing out that if we think of ourselves as the People, we find a unity in the State; this 'substantial community collaborates in order to sedate the fears which spring from circumscribed dangers.' The Multitude, on the other hand, is united by the discomfort that derives from 'not feeling at home, from being exposed omnilaterally to the world.'<sup>3</sup> Because Canada was formed by settlement and immigration, many – if not most – citizens of Toronto associate with multiple places. Check it: the mayor is an American! So the whole city is composed of one of the primary attributes of Virno's Multitude: few of us feel like this place is truly our home. In a place like Toronto, Peoplehood is not possible. But the potential of navigating our role as the Multitude of Toronto is strong. And it's here that we can get some guidance from the plant world, which is an emblematic Multitude.

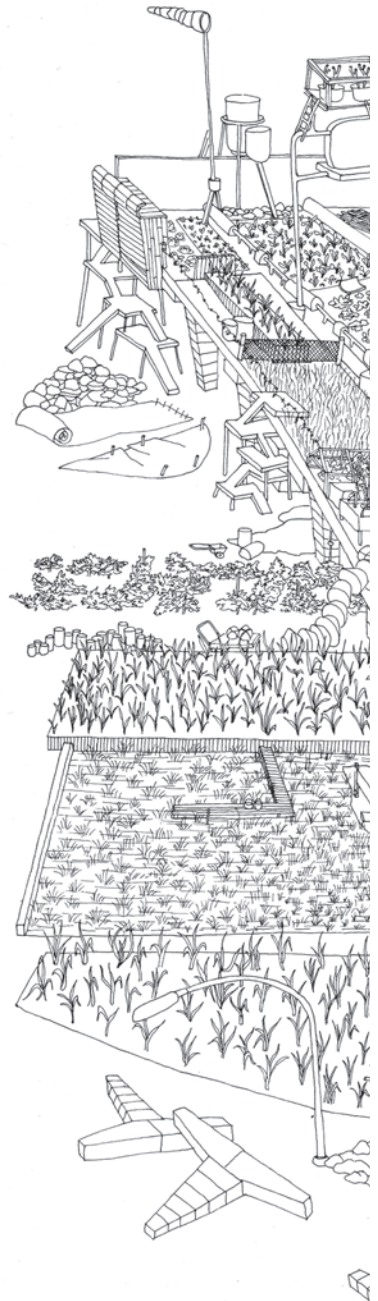
<sup>2</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 126–127.

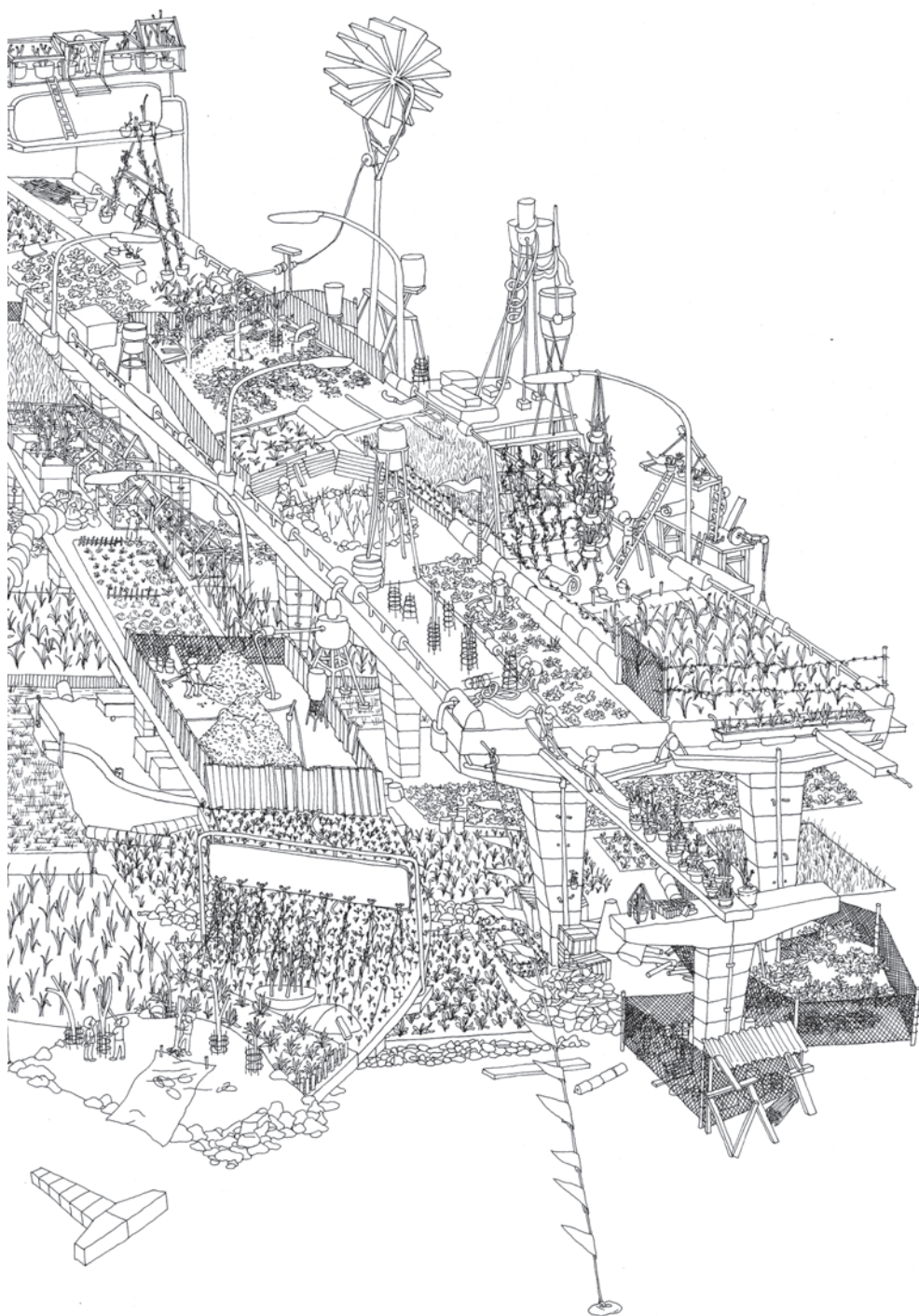
<sup>3</sup> Virno, 34.

The Gardiner Garden of the Multitude will function as a metaphor, a living example of the potential of the Multitude: individual plants in unison creating something greater, something synergistic. Already in place is the structural integrity to support this proposed transformation, with a few minor alterations: retrofit the drainage, transport soils and reinforce road walls. The garden will be designed with agroecology principles in mind, where species are selected for complementarity and compatibility. The science of agroecology applies ecological principles to the design and management of sustainable crop production.<sup>4</sup> By tapping into natural, beneficial interactions, an agroecologically planned garden can remain healthy and require minimal intervention, such as fertilizers or pesticides. And carefully placing species that vary in characteristics and needs together encourages them to be complementary, allowing both to use previously limited resources. One example is the cycling of nutrients between individual plants: deep in the soil, tree roots capture nutrients, transport them up through the tree into leaves that fall and rot at the soil surface, thus releasing nutrients for the crops. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.

In the Gardiner Garden, species will be introduced based on their particular attributes: we'll favour those that provide both serviceable roles (e.g., shade) and products. Structurally, a multi-strata canopy, incorporating trees above and crops below, will maximize available space. Functionally, plants that complement their neighbours, such as nitrogen fixers (species, like alfalfa, that convert nitrogen in the air into nitrogen for plants) and shade-tolerant species

4 M. A. Altieri, *Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).





(those that grow well under other trees) will strengthen the system. For a healthy system, we'll plant companion crops that will mutually ward off pests and disease: garlic, for example, keeps aphids away, marigolds discourage Colorado potato beetle infestation in neighbouring potatoes, and planting tomatoes near basil tastes good and also does good.

Not only will the net effect of increasing plant diversity result in a healthy ecosystem, but it will also serve as an example of the fundamentals of the Multitude. But these principles are simply guidelines; it's important that the specifics remain in the hands of Toronto citizens.

Ecologically, implementation, while a lot of work, is still mostly straightforward. Socially, however, questions arise as to who makes decisions and how those decisions are implemented. As an expression of a potential Multitude, the garden needs representative participation from a reasonable cross-section of the population. It's here that we can turn to the potential of children as an expression of the Multitude. Children – who, it turns out, are not People, because they aren't active members in the State (Virno's key attribute of a People) – exemplify a more specific idea of the Multitude. Children aren't granted full rights; their right to civic engagement is curtailed at that most fundamental locus: the right to vote. So, if children are not People, not fully formed as civic actors under the rubric of the State, then perhaps they're better understood as the Multitude, the chaotic 'state of nature regurgitated in civil society'; anyone who has an honest familiarity with the school system can see how children are constantly and enthusiastically subjected to the brutal cultivating and civilizing forces of boredom, routine, punishment and repression. Becoming People is an ugly, antagonistic and labour-intensive process. While a *Lord of the Flies* result might emerge – because children, like adults, may respond to difference with open hostility, abandoning social niceties for forms of bullying – this is arguably a situation generated by the shift in self-understanding from Multitude to People: a Multitude recognizes difference as fundamentally constitutive, whereas a People banishes difference to the outside, thus generating the kinds of bullying that are now so widespread.

In a place like Toronto, where differences are the norm, we have the opportunity to acknowledge the possibility of manifesting the Multitude by foisting the responsibility onto the children. In our rush to protect the innocence of childhood, we've completely obscured the possibilities children possess as autonomous agents – we don't even know anymore what they're capable of. To what degree children can and should be offered adult responsibility is not clear, but assigning them symbolic tasks where



they function as emissaries from particular Peoples to explore the possibilities of Multitude seems viable. Let's throw the little brats into the garden and see what happens.

The logistics are straightforward: the Gardiner, from Jameson to the Don Valley Parkway, is 5 kilometres or 5,000 metres, which, divided by the city's forty-four municipal wards, is a length of 113 metres, which, multiplied by the 22 metres of the Gardiner's width, yields 2,500 square metres of land – a quarter hectare – per ward: enough space to build an ecological and sociological experiment.

The planning, implementation and cultivation of the garden would be incorporated into the school curriculum, offering the opportunity for both science and social-studies classes to participate in a very clear demonstration of interdisciplinarity. The particulars would need tweaking, but as a rough outline, each class could elect a couple of representatives to serve on the school's Garden Council, which would, in turn, elect a couple of representatives to serve at the ward level and interact with representatives of other schools over the logistics of tending to the plot. Responsibilities could be divided either by duties, space or time, with schools taking care of different aspects of tending particular areas of the plot or for certain periods of time.

The Gardiner Garden of the Multitude would afford the opportunity to learn about ecological and social complementarity. The children would have to study, discuss and debate, form consensus, elect representatives to voice their decisions at the ward level and decide on what to plant and ways to cultivate. That's not to say they will do this any better than adults, but in the messiness of this work, plenty of pedagogical opportunities exist. Each quarter hectare would probably be planted with different species and according to different principles, with basic agroecology as the ground upon which the various strategies would be built. Harvesting and distribution of the fruits of the labour would also be determined by the kids, with the possibility of demonstrating distribution according to need: children in richer wards would be taught the virtues of sharing. Offering the kids full power over something so substantial yet still largely symbolic would seed the possibility for wider and more meaningful civic engagement.

The High Line in New York City is a similar project. An overgrown rail line running through Manhattan's west side, this almost-century-old line acts as a corridor that links various neighbourhoods. Here, however, the plans propose to develop this area from an unruly and accidentally formed meadow into pristine, highly controlled parkland, preliminary

designs showing very orderly walkways and vegetation held back behind glass walls. The High Line will be a sterile, ecological mall, in line with the rest of gentrified Manhattan. The Gardiner Garden, on the other hand, will be functional. It will embrace the actualities of nature, including pests, rotting fruit and decomposing leaf litter. It will not increase property values but decrease them. It will represent the realities of nature in its most multitudinous expression.

You may ask an obvious question: why not raze the fucking eyesore and put the garden on the ground?

First, past mistakes should not be forgotten, lest we repeat them. It's important to remember just how stupid our political leaders can be. How could any person in his or her right mind think of cutting the city off from the lake, our main source of sustenance and natural beauty? Consider the Gardiner Garden of the Multitude a reminder that huge mistakes will always be made.

Second, in the rush of development that is creating such density downtown, the postwar inner suburbs are filling with recent immigrants, and a painful economic and racial divide is occurring. Harbourfront, with its concerts, the Toronto Island and Ontario Place – particularly during fireworks displays – becomes a place for those who don't have Georgian Bay cottages and secluded pristine lakes to dip their toes into. With the Gardiner Garden of the Multitude, we better delineate this lakefront space: the garden will be an elevated, disruptive structure that manages to assert a degree of profile not possible if it were elegantly incorporated into the surrounding landscape.

Finally, we want to exacerbate and intensify the sense of alienation, of not-at-homeness, by creating a very strange spot in the heart of the city, a bizarrely rural environment where no one truly belongs, where we recognize in the other that we are all others in this space. The Gardiner Garden of the Multitude, with its bizarre location, fenced in on all sides by concrete buildings and under the constant gaze of the privileged people who inhabit the waterfront condominiums, provides an active and living metaphor for our current global condition. This 'state of nature regurgitated in civil society,' thrown up into the heart of Toronto, will be a wild zone of friendly interactivity, peopled by us, the folks who spend our summers at Centre Island, check out the free concerts at Harbourfront and gaze in delight at the fireworks.

The complementary nature of this system will result in the Gardiner Garden of the Multitude being not a refuge from the city, but a more integrated part of it. Instead of separating green space from the city, the goal

is to incorporate it into the overall horizon of the city. We're confident that the Gardiner Garden of the Multitude will subvert that most ugly of urban mistakes, giving the inhabitants of the city an incredible place, an environment so unique that, for once, we will all be so delighted and amazed that the phrase *world-class* won't even occur to us. It will provide a place to catch some breeze on an August night, a place to stretch our understanding of sustainability and a magical destination for the drunk and the horny.

This proposed landscape alteration will involve active participation from individuals, communities and cultures. It is a place to recreate the horizon – and here we're using the word *horizon* to mean both the meeting of the sky and the earth but also the limit of our understanding and, thus, a place of immanent possibility as yet only glimpsed and still undiscovered.