11. Governing Security: Including the Molecular into the Molar

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Current governmental policy often hinges on the fallacious assumption that individuals and actions can be steered by ‘outside’ systems (Van Calster 2008). It is assumed that individuals act as an integral part of a system purported to have a pre-determined impact on action. While this may be a successful way of controlling and organizing particular social phenomena characterized by a low level of organization; it is seriously lacking when it comes to higher levels of organisation such as crime and criminal policy. A second problem with criminal policy is that it is often linear in character. Upon being confronted with the disappointing truth that governments (and other institutions) have little or no grip on non-linear interaction and their influence on an individual’s choice, their automatic response is to expand the system of control as extensively as possible (Van Calster 2010a, 2010b). However, policy intervention very often achieves very little of that originally intended. Frequently, the outcome attained will not be particularly effective or efficient, since extensive intervention often leads to extensive unintended complications. A third problem is the emergence of undesirable side effects such as the curtailment of fundamental rights and liberties (Onsea 2002). In fact, current criminal policy often results in inefficiency and perverted outcomes. To make matters worse, these new and unintended outcomes are frequently poorly understood, resulting in precautionary intervention, i.e. interventions before problems even emerge (Pieterman 2008). As a result, it has become very difficult, if not impossible, to manage new problems with ‘old school’ laws, regulations and structures. Policy tends to boil down to a collection of symbolic gestures and manoeuvres aimed at creating the impression that all is under control (Beck 1986).

The aim of this article is to analyse the above phenomenon from a philosophical point of view. It is argued below that the way to do this is to recognize that the traditional approach to understand and combat the lack of security and criminality is merely a derivate of what could be called ‘molar thinking’. We borrow the denomination ‘molar’ from thermodynamics, which studies the interactions between large collections of particles on a macroscopic level. It is precisely this macroscopic approach with its focus on order, stability and control that is the centre of the largest part of social scientific research on governing security and criminality. In this contribution, it is proposed that the research on security and criminality could benefit with the study of ‘the molecular’, a level of description with which the molar is inseparably connected. The level of the molecular, similarly a concept from thermodynamics, consists
in interactions between separate elements that in a sense constitute the molar but are seldom studied or considered in policy strategies.

1. The Molar as Dominant Practice of Research

In his *Problems of Involvement and Detachment* Norbert Elias (1956) makes a distinction between two ways of addressing reality. The first he calls *involvement*. It reflects the way nature was (or is) experienced in a pre-scientific era. Nature here is experienced as a collection of mysterious forces to which one is exposed. People did (or do) not understand nor control these forces, and were afraid of them. They were *involved* in what they experienced and had great difficulties with simple sustenance. The second approach, Elias calls *detachment*. Scientific method enabled man to conquer his fears and to reflect on nature as something that can be controlled, even mastered. By approaching nature in a *detached* way, and by acting as a (supposedly) *objective* observer, man felt less emotionally involved in his experience of nature. His fears disappeared to a large extent and arguably led to a level of mastery of nature. Let us try to elaborate on this.

Social scientists, like all researchers, tend to break down reality into parts in order to focus attention on isolated and controllable matters (Van Calster 2006a). They draw boundaries around that which they research or scrutinize. Doing this they make their object of research discernible from the rest of the world. That which counts as the undisputed research program of a particular discipline is then what determines such boundaries (see also: Foucault 1988; Kuhn 1962). They divide social reality into certain categories, which are presented as largely homogeneous. Simplifying social reality in this way allows scientists to study the relations between the categories. Consequently, scientists try to formulate solutions for emerging problems. As a result, researchers study the parts in terms of what they contribute to ‘the whole’ (Van Calster 2010a). The logic here assumes that the system, the whole, moves towards its final state or a condition, which can be known in advance (Brittan 1978). The parts *function* to form the whole or the end condition. The whole is assumed as a ‘thing’ (Van Calster 2010b). Little or no attention is given to interactions between parts or to the diversity of the parts; they are assumed to be ‘the same’ and being ‘average’.

This dominant view can only explain the origin of newness and fundamental change by pointing, *ex machina*, to the exceptional qualities or visions of particular individuals (leaders, entrepreneurs, brokers, and so on) who happen to appear within the system. Such individuals, it is then believed, initiate and control new projects and are therefore not subjected (and quite enigmatically so) to mechanisms of determination. This means scientists search for those systems that (seem to) determine human interaction. The causes of what people do are then located in a system which is supposed to determine human behaviour, e.g. economic dynamics, culture, values, mentality, and so on. They are supposed to
precede interaction and develop in a knowable and predictable way. In this way
an impression is cultivated that provided these basic systems are optimal, human
action and interaction could be directed in an orderly (and controllable) fashion.

In this perspective many are convinced that it is possible to intervene in
human systems in such a way that aims and goals (e.g. in policies envisaged)
can be achieved in a controlled way. Unfortunately this is simply not so.
Moreover, this misleading concept often leads to the desperate creation of more
and stronger forms of intervention which produces effects but not the best
effects in the best way (Van Calster 2006b). The profiling of risk is one such
model. Profiling assesses specific characteristics of individuals that might
classify them as potential offenders. The fight against security and crime,
therefore, resembles a never-ending cycle in which it becomes necessary to
deploy ever more and stronger strategies and measures. In many western
societies we have now reached a point where everyday behaviour is criminalized
(Presdee 2000) and where penal measures are born from precautionary
prevention of hypothetical problems, which could cause damage in the future
(Romein and Schuilenburg 2008). In addition, such strategies often have side
effects: endangering fundamental rights and liberties for example (Onsea 2002).
It seems that Western societies are prepared to burn down their habitat in their
battle against crime and search for security. Apparently, all means are justified
in the fight to conquer crime. The efficacy of the means, however, remains
unclear.

2. Attention for the Unstable: Matters of the Molecular

Previously, we have argued that in the molar, the focus lies on stability and
control. It is a macroscopic approach, by which the system of control gets
expanded in order to deal with problems of crime and disorder. Currently, new
systems of control are being introduced which try to streamline human
behaviour. However, social reality is much more complex than the molar can or
will research. We argue the molar cannot be properly understood without the
molecular, a concept with which we try to express the unpredictable and the
liquid, constantly in a state of flux, never to be absolute.

The molecular level focuses on the motion and transformation of the parts of
a system or whole (Kubinga 2003: 65). Physicists and chemists speak, therefore,
of interactions between molecules (proteins, lipids, metabolites and so on).
Although scientists consider the molecular as the most fundamental level of
interaction, they recognize that information in this area is still poor and
incomplete. Knowledge as to why interacting molecules group into spontaneous
order is lacking (Sijbesma 2007). The molecular resembles what scientists such as
Stuart Kauffman (1993; 1995) and Gregoire Nicolis and Ilya Prigogine
(1989) call complexity. The latter scientists remark that complexity cannot be
located in one identifiable place in a system (Nicolis & Prigogine, 1989: 5).
Stuart Kauffman (1993; 1995) discovered that com-plexity is the result of
interactions between the different components of a system. It manifests itself on the level of the system itself.

Kauffman (1993; 1995) and Tom Ray (1992) point to the possibilities offered by technology to study non-linear interactions. Technology enables us to study things which we do not fundamentally understand. According to Cilliers (1998) powerful computers are able to simulate the behaviour on the molecular level without understanding the complexity of it. In Kauffman’s and Ray’s computer simulations, each phenomenon consists of a large number of agents, and each agent behaves according to its own interests, intentions, behavioural patterns, and so on. Because the focus lies on an agent-based approach, the object of their research is expressed as a population of agents which interact according their own local ‘if… then’ rules (Mainzer 1996; Lewin 1993). Research on a molecular level does not work with rules, laws or regulations that are deemed valid for the whole population, but, rather, with rules for individual entities that together form a population or system. No agent has ultimate control over the interactions and reactions of others, nor over the behavioural patterns of the system, or the way in which the system develops. This approach makes no appeal to someone or something ‘outside’ the system, imposing their/its will.

Kauffman (1995: 63–64) demonstrates that systems which consist of a large number of randomly interacting agents will develop into connected, autocatalytic networks (see also Mainzer, 1996: 97). In other words, when entities interact with each other randomly, some entities will start to play a part in the constitution of other entities. This is catalysis. Eventually the strings of emerging catalytic interaction will fold back and form autocatalytic networks. This means that entity X will play a part in the construction of entity Y which will play a part in the construction of Z that will play a part in the construction of X. There is no design or blueprint for this network. Interactive cooperation has the intrinsic capacity to produce both transformation and coherence. Both, however, are unpredictable (Mertens 2000: 91–96). According to Kauffman, variation simply emerges in interaction between entities. The amount and strength of the connection(s) between the entities in a network make up the dynamics of the network (Taylor 2001: 188).

Notice the difference with the molar approach. Typical for the molar approach is the process of reification by which one reduces phenomena to ‘things’. Rules of conduct, for example, are supposed to exist outside the system from which they structure and determine the behaviour of the system. Alliez (2009) is right in stating that the molecular level revolves around ‘small complex relations’, rather than ‘huge dialectic structures’ that direct the whole. Consequently, small changes could have huge and unpredictable effects. In terms of the social, it means that attention goes out to interactions that have no reference to a centre, standard or norm. The focus lies on becoming, and not on being.
3. Characteristics of the Molecular

At the risk of simplification, we would like to distinguish three characteristics of the molecular. These characteristics do not present new abstract principles intended to provide a new representation of reality. Rather, they coincide separately with each ‘event’ or each ‘case’.

First, the molecular is about the immediate. It deals with believes and desires that represent the world ‘here and now’ and which transcend actions from a rational-calculating portrayal of mankind, as represented in the classical judicial works of Beccaria (1764/2009) and Hobbes (1651/1985). They assume that people prefer to choose an action (for example obeying rules or the violation of it) of which they think the benefits would be huge. The problem with this approach, is that rationalism ‘expects ideas to stand for something which cannot be constituted within experience or be given in an idea without contradiction: the generality of the idea, the existence of the object, and the content of the terms ‘always,’ ‘universal,’ ‘necessary,’ and ‘true’ (Deleuze 1991: 30). As is well known, one of the other problems is the all too narrow timeframe of rationalism. After all, the effects of such a choice are spread over a long period of time. The immediate instead, deals with interactions (such as pride, frustration, pleasure, anger, shame) which exist in real time, that is here and now. From a molar perspective these interactions are seen as exceptional and are largely kept outside ‘the order of the discourse’, to quote Foucault (1988). In fact, they fall outside the structural frame of uniformity or a knowable goal (Schuilenburg 2008; 2009: 210).

Second, the molecular is characterised by a heterogeneous series that produce differences. Rather than representation by means of ‘identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance’ (Deleuze 1994: 137) a system of series is a differentiating of differences by means of the coupling of heterogeneous series (whose elements are already heterogeneous). This actualization is not a unilateral process, but rather the result of a whole series of mutually reinforcing effects e.g. non-linear relationships, series of events and affairs, or open series of interactions that lead to directions that are not previously agreed or established. As such, molecular relations are never solid. They are in a constant state of flux and permit an infinite number of connections, creating with every connection something new. This means – that against the laws of classic causality – coincidence must be seen as a cause of social change.

Third, the molecular is about perspectivism, i.e. accepting that all truth can only be known in the context of one’s own perspective. Perspectivism, which takes root in Hume’s empiricism and Kant’s idealism and was further developed by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, rejects the idea of a specific interpretation of social reality, which is ‘complete’ or ‘total’. Perspectivism claims that all knowledge is perspectival. Concrete circumstances and behaviour will always been seen from different viewpoints. Or as Nietzsche points out in The Will To Power: ‘In so far as the word “knowledge” has any meaning, (…) it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings – “perspectivism” ’ (1967: section
number 421). Yet perspectivism has nothing to do with relativism. Perspectivism may develop sensitivity for different points of view or interpretations. It compels people to see the conditions and actual circumstances under which a certain view may appear. In short, contrary to the molar, the molecular knows neither univocal definition nor individual boundaries. It is fundamental, ambiguous and paradoxical. Perhaps it is this intangibility that causes suspicion and mistrust with researchers on security and criminality towards the idea of researching the molecular. Researchers in sociology and economy, for instance, tend to categorize interactions in terms of ‘usefulness’ and ‘interest’ for the bigger whole (profit, sales, and so on). By so doing they focus their attention on the molar. Even criminologists who research processes of groups actually focus on the characteristics of a group, such as rivalry, structure and leadership, which underline the static and therefore spotlight the molar.

4. Including the Molecular into the Molar

It would be wrong to see the molar and molecular as two separate levels of social reality. Both levels are intertwined. In fact, they co-exist. They revolve around the interaction between stability and transformation. Change or transformation can therefore emerge out of even the smallest expression or gesture of an arbitrary actor. Such approach, which works intensely in the beta sciences, is underdeveloped in the field of criminology. This is possibly caused by the view that the molecular is seen as a minimal order or – even worse – as chaos and disorder.\(^1\) Perhaps researchers assume the molecular is capable of neutralizing the molar? In that case, the force of the molecular would be more powerful than that of the molar. Clearly, these assumptions are misconceptions. It is not about chaos or revolution, not about the molecular as dogmatic and conservative. Let us therefore clarify three errors about the difference between the molar and the molecular.

The molar and molecular do not refer to collectives on the one side and small unities on the other. That would mean one has to deal with macro and the other with microphysics. In reality, both levels are not distinguishable in terms of size or scale. It would be better to speak of a difference in composition, organization and consistency between the elements on the level of the molar and the molecular. The molar and molecular are not defined by the amount of elements they bring together and therefore not by their multiple characters, but by the nature of the relationships between their elements. In the case of the molecular, it is about characteristics such as nomad, rhizomes, many-voiced, smooth, intensive and indivisible. The molar is connected with features such as

\(^1\) The concept of ‘molecular chaos’ is, for instance, used in thermodynamics for the description of behaviour of independent molecules before they collide (Prigogine and Stengers 1984).
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sedentary, arborescent, unanimous, striated, extensive and divisible (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 33, 505).

The distinction between molar and molecular is not between form and substance. Earlier we suggested that the molar is about the whole and isolated and controllable parts. That means the molar is more visible, because its actions are (on first sight) fixed and framed by univocal and compelling laws and regulations. However, it would be a mistake to reduce the molar to an abstract or judicial form (for example Hobbes’ and Beccaria’s social contract), which may be unrelated to human actions. In that case, the molar would be reassuring, while the molecular would be a matter of disruption. Each segmentation brings into play both forms and substances. Therefore, the molar is not an interaction-free structure or lacking in interactions. Characteristic for the functioning of the molar is the ‘centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization and finalization’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 41) of the molecular by inserting it into larger wholes. Foucault would speak here of ‘disciplinary techniques’ (allocation, classification, consolidation, normalization, etc.), to make visible the insertion of human activities in the institutions of the disciplinarist society, in its schools, prisons, factories, hospitals, army barracks.

The difference between the molar and the molecular is not absolute or a dualist opposition. In fact, both cannot independently exist from each other. Or, as Deleuze and Guattari write in Anti-Oedipus, ‘there is not one molecular formation that is not by itself an investment of a molar formation’ (1983: 340). Both levels are constantly interfering, reacting upon each other, introducing to each other either a current of suppleness or a point of rigidity. As a consequence, everything always functions at the same time (‘and-and’) and in parallel. Although both levels are usually separately studied (as if about two different kinds of social reality), only one process underlies both levels. The two levels are constantly running into each other and are connected in, what we would like to call, a ‘zone of indiscernibility’.

5. A Zone of Indiscernibility

From a criminological perspective, it is important to recognize that the molar is only one way of looking at social reality. At the same time, paying only attention to the issue of functionality and stability leads to a drastic simplification of the same reality. Then, the molar is affirmed as the positive general, without taking into account the pool of spontaneity: the random, unpredictable and heterogeneous. It is striking that the molar level cannot encompass these matters and leaves them out of the research framework. The consequence of this is that the molar only manages to grip of a small part of the mentioned question at hand in social reality. For that reason it needs to put its own position in perspective. Moreover, it should address a more permanent and dynamic system that is difficult or impossible to formalize, i.e. that cannot be interpreted from mandatory categories or abstract principles. This raises the
question of how the relation between the molecular and the molar can be understood.

As mentioned earlier, a whole or totality (police organization, public-private partnership, court and so on) consists of a collection of heterogeneous elements that relate to each other. This implies a certain consistency and coherence. Viewed from a molecular perspective, a whole is always an open set or combination because the different elements are related to specific circumstances and are constantly mediated by the relations between them (Schuilenburg 2009). In a philosophical sense, this means that an element is immanent to specific and local conditions and the relations in which it exists. In fact, essence and unity are replaced by a dynamic ‘middle’ that connects different elements to each other. This ‘middle ground’ is ‘not an average’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 293) or principle that gives reality a new direction and unity, but a process where new relations pop up and connections are made.

In a more general sense, the middle is related to the changing conditions by which something new can appear and with everything that differs. Illustrative for the middle is the verb ‘connect’. This principle can be physical, linguistic or conceptual, and ensures that elements are connected together into a larger whole. Especially important here is that at any time a connection can ensure that a separate element changes and as a consequence therefore the whole. Moreover, the connection makes it possible that new elements are taken up in a whole and old elements disappear or are plugged into a new whole in which its interactions are different. One element may dislodge and go on to function in another assemblage. It can be taken out of one assemblage and be incorporated in another assemblage. It can be taken out of one assemblage and be incorporated in another assemblage. It can be taken out of one assemblage and be incorporated in another assemblage. 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whole, but a molecular series of interactions that produce a difference; movements that differentiate something qualitatively and quantitatively (Barry and Thrift 2007).

It will be obvious by now that we are far removed from the classical way of considering meaning or purpose, in which the human subject is at the centre of attributing meaning and purpose, a logic inspired by Descartes’ magical maxim ‘I think, therefore I am’. In this way of thinking, the actions of a person are the product of a free, autonomous, and immutable actor. This individual is in opposition to his immediate environment without forming part of it. From an external position he can comprehend and grasp social reality in its entirety. However, from the relation between the molar and the molecular we should assume that interactions can not be reduced to the action of the individual, that is: of the substance or subject it refers or is ascribed to. The interaction is an autonomous process; it expresses a ‘becoming’ or ‘movement’, which makes it problematical to discern cause or consequence. Moreover, the relation between cause and effect is ambiguous and difficult to determine. Order and unity are therefore not provided a priori. They emerge immanently ‘from below’, from the interactions on a molecular level, rather than constrained from above by large molar structures.

6. Processes of Interaction

It may be clear by now that, from a molecular perspective, all knowledge (including criminological knowledge) is a social activity that can evoke varied reactions from and within the professional field. Criminologists and policymakers should not, therefore, be placed outside the reality and social dynamics. When, for example, they devise new methods of conflict settlement to be imposed on that reality, they do not do this from ‘outside’ the system. Researchers unavoidably participate in what they research, while policymakers participate in the policies they design. Hence, they contribute considerably to what they attempt to research or reform (Heisenberg 1962: 19). It is more plausible, therefore, to define the criminal justice system as a complex social process of interactions (which includes both linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions), not only between people, but also between objects – including abstract items such as rules, regulations and territories (the court, a police station and so on) (Van Calster 2005). This is because people constantly interact, and it is precisely in and through those series of interactions that all kinds of actions, such as cooperation and conflict, emerge. Those interactions can take many different forms and may include innocent, conformist and deliberate, but also confrontational or unintentional interaction.

A focus on these series of interactions raises the question of how reforms actually occur, and what the impact is of the actions of people commonly considered the source of those reforms (legislators, politicians, practitioners in management positions, policymakers or scientists). These reformers, after all,
design the desired changes. They devise models and plans and draft legislative texts or policy documents. This process takes form through and in the very interactions these actors have with others – actors with different interests, or conflicts; actors that harbour particular rational and emotional considerations. Hence, at the time when these models, action plans or legislative texts are actually being introduced or implemented, reformers have no certainty about their impact.

In criminal justice, for example, the impact of interactions that the many managers have with the lower echelons will undoubtedly be far greater than the impact of interactions within and from the lower echelons since actors in management positions tend to reach a far greater audience and, in addition, may be able to enforce their decisions and measures. But practitioners in management positions, politicians, policymakers, legislators and criminologists cannot determine what the reactions from the professional field to their plans and intentions will be. The value and importance of the measures they take depend, therefore, on how others respond to them. Thus it is in and through series of interactions that the dynamics and developments of the process of criminal justice and its many institutions emerge. No one person will ever be able to determine the dynamics of interactions within an institution or during a collaborative undertaking because those dynamics depend on what others will do. Moreover, the manner in which external organizations and actors respond co-determines these dynamics of transformation. In short, the whole process can better be described as – to borrow a notion from complexity sciences – emergent as it will never be the exact realization of a preceding design.

7. Emergence

The question that immediately arises is how can it be that interactions of thousands of people are able to produce, for example, a particular policy or ‘culture’? The answer to this question relates to the intrinsic self-organizing, emergent properties of interaction itself (Mainzer 1996; Taylor 2001; Kauffman 1993; 1995). Recent scientific complexity research has shown that, under certain conditions (such as diversity), interactions between large numbers of entities that react to one another’s locally-oriented behaviours, customs and principles generate coherent and potentially renewed behavioural patterns. To put it differently: interactions possess the inherent capacity to spontaneously form a coherent pattern in itself. Abstract systems thus have the ability to self-organize and hence produce patterns and behavioural patterns without these having been imposed. This process of interaction between people who are sufficiently different from each other can thus be described as a self-organizing process with an intrinsic capacity to form behavioural patterns. We define this as a complex

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process of interaction. We should add, however, that not only does the pattern of interaction organize itself on a molar level, but also on a molecular level. Since these two levels appear together and concurrently, separating them will be problematic. As the scientists Kauffman and Ray have shown, the molecular level forms the molar level, while at the same time it itself is formed by that molar level. Let us examine these complexity sciences in more depth.

In the computer simulations performed by Stuart Kauffman (1993; 1995) and Tom Ray (1992), every agent is represented as a computer program. Each computer program contains a set of rules and instructions determining its interaction with other computer programs. As the emphasis is on an agent-based approach, the research object is represented as a population of agents that interact according to their own local ‘if-then’ rules (Mainzer 1996; Lewin 1993). So, rules or patterns should not be formulated that apply to entire populations, but rather interaction rules for the individual entities that together make up a population or system. A complex adaptive system consequently comprises a large number of agents, with each agent behaving in accordance with its own local interaction rules. As we argued earlier, no individual agent, or group of agents, determines the behavioural pattern displayed by the system as a whole, or the manner in which this pattern evolves. This approach does not include anything imposing its will from outside the system. As mentioned earlier, there is no blueprint for the organization of the entire system. It emerges and sustains itself in a self-referential manner. The emerging pattern is self-organizing. Here, self-organization is an intrinsic property of interaction, which causes the emergence of patterns (Mertens 2000).

Once again, note how different this line of thought is from thinking in terms of the molar, stability and reification. Reification implies giving a certain content to various concepts, which is then used as a reference to give meaning to social reality (see also Van Calster and Verfaillie 2007). This causes them to become systemic or molar frameworks (feedback mechanisms), where the rules of conduct are seen as being outside the system, and which are referred to in order to correct or streamline behaviour. One consequence of this can be that ‘culture’ is individualized as a collective to which we can then ascribe values and motives. This way of thinking depicts the collective as an acting individual. The behaviour of members of an organization, a society or, for example, the criminal justice system is then driven by the values of that ‘whole’. Hence, norms and values become abstracted from daily life. In short, reification idealizes the collective, which is represented as a personality that can justify the actions of the members. This idealization, however, diverts attention from interactions in everyday life and interactions in the here-and-now. And it is precisely this everyday-life dimension, which continuously affects the formation of stabilities and which he believes deserves research attention.
8. The Control of Criminality as a Process

By taking series of interactions as his point of departure for analyzing life in society, the molecular lays the foundation for 'process thinking'. Process thinking assumes a long concatenation of forms of interaction that have often completely lost their original meaning. The relationship between cause and effect in those concatenations is highly ambiguous and difficult to determine, and it is very difficult to even discern cause and consequence. Take Kauffman’s autocatalytic networks, for example. The problem is aggravated by the many coincidences that look like causes, but are actually relational in nature (Cilliers 1998). This makes it difficult to accurately predict what will happen in a specific place over a specific period of time. To summarize, if we were to research the operation of the penal system (often labelled as a persistent penal culture or obstinate practice), as a pattern of interaction that is not so much the implementation of a preceding design, but rather the result of an ever-emergent process of interactions, the focus of research would be on interaction themes that organize experiences, such as themes that are considered unpleasant and are usually avoided (Van Calster 2005).

It then becomes evident that the criminal justice system is simply a series of temporary 'successful' patterns and themes of interaction, accepted by the participants as 'good enough' to be repeated, and thus becoming organizational customs. The repetition of these patterns and themes creates stability in the collective identity (or organizational culture) and organizes cooperation. These patterns and themes are expressed through a certain organizational language; in other words, in certain ways of doing and saying things. These ways create the collective identity (the criminal justice system, for example), as well as various aspects of their individual identities. The repetition of organizational customs (culture or language) that are ‘good enough’ will increase efficiency as the constant repetition of these customs in a similar way will improve people’s performance. These customs (a certain way of speaking, for instance) are safe themes that organize cooperation. They reflect what has emerged as a standard of conduct, and make prevailing power relations seem natural. Newcomers to ‘the criminal justice system’ then believe that they have to use this particular way of speaking to express involvement in or commitment to the organization. We hasten to add, however, that these patterns are not recorded anywhere and

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3 This, of course, does not alter the fact that there are frequently elements of rational planning and determination through and in the many processes of research and policy. Just as it does not alter the fact that intense negotiations (and thus social networks) will be entered into and result in various agreements that may or may not be observed. In other words, from the perspective of process thinking, the issue of control and the extent to which social change can be brought about by government intervention or policy seem only relative. Attempts to achieve them may produce unintended outcomes over which one has little control. For that reason, objectives, models and good intentions often ‘lose their innocence’ after a ‘confrontation’ with social reality itself.
are not fixed. Precisely because they are repeated constantly, they always have
the potential for transformation and thus for change.

But if the dynamics of the police and the judicial system are emergent and do
not necessarily, therefore, correspond with the predetermined designs and
intentions, how do these institutions change? As the research by Kauffman
(1993; 1995) shows, new patterns, and thus new meanings, arise primarily in
interactions that are characterized by diversity. When there is little diversity
between people and they have developed solid (and often rigid) conceptions and
ways of interacting with each other, their interactions are unlikely to generate
anything new. Their patterns of interaction are more likely to be repetitive.
Conversely, groups with a full range of diversity will have to contend,
incessantly, with dissonance and forms of ‘disobedience’. Successful
transformation, therefore, falls somewhere in between these two extremes, in a
zone Kauffman (1993) calls ‘the edge of chaos.’

As we noted earlier, there is a strong probability that behaviours arising from
these complex processes of interaction become routines and customs, stabilizing
themselves on a molar level. Routines and customs are identifiable by their clear
and delineated meaning. That is what determines the reliability and robustness
of these routines. If such routines are deemed successful, that success will
strengthen them, and this may make them seem rigid to reformers. Routines are
often accompanied by a certain formal use of language (usually excluding other
forms of interaction), within which tasks and roles are clearly defined. As a
result, they exert considerable influence on cooperation. This way, the constant
repetition of customs generates stability of the collective and, for example, a
penal culture. Criminal law and criminal justice, then, should be considered as
stable series of interactions, rather than determining forces. These customs
embody the official standards of conduct and generally make the power
relationships formed in this process seem natural. Over time, actors tend to
abstract, objectify or reify this repetitive behaviour, and consider it to be
something that has always existed and as self-evident. In other words, they
‘forget’ that it has been generated in and through human interactions. People in
organizations become habituated to this stability and feel threatened, or may
even become aggressive, if new ways of interaction are introduced.

We believe that those applying themselves to studying the criminal justice
system must also focus on the smallest deviations or slightest changes in series
of interactions. Research by Elias and Scotson (1994) may provide an interesting
source of inspiration in this respect. Elias and Scotson examined what happened
when a group of workers moved into a new apartment block adjacent to an older
one inhabited by other workers. Even though there were no substantial
differences between the two groups, hostility soon developed. The older
residents started to denigrate the newcomers. Elias and Scotson explained this in
terms of cohesion among the older group of workers. The older residents had
come to think of themselves as ‘we’, a group with common attachments, likes
and dislikes, and interests that had emerged because of their cooperation. They
had developed a sense of identity. The newcomers lacked this cohesive identity.
because they had no history of working together and that, according to Elias and Scotson, made them vulnerable. The more cohesive group, therefore, was quick to label the newcomers and to attribute to them hateful qualities such as ‘dirtiness’, ‘unreliability’ and ‘criminal’, even though there were no obvious differences between the two groups. One group used the fact that the others were newcomers to generate hatred and thus maintain a power difference.

9. Conclusion

The present social scientific perspectives on the governance of security are based on a linear logic and are breaking down reality into parts in order to focus attention on isolated and controllable elements. We have called this ‘the molar’. One of the consequences of this approach is that it deals with problems by expanding the systems of control. The efficiency, however, is unclear. We have argued that the molar cannot be understood without knowledge of the molecular. Attention for the molecular means attention for small variations and transformations that may form the basis of new social-cultural stabilities. Elsewhere we reported on the research we did on assemblages in which police and assurance companies work together to combat transport criminality (Schuilenburg et al. 2009). Personal preferences, frustrations and tensions have a huge impact on the outcome of the agreements between the parties. Exchange of information also occurs through informal interaction. New ways of interaction come into existence, such as new languages (‘camping contacts’, ‘rock & roll’). In other words, the interactions between the actors change continuously. Their cooperation is not a static theme, but rather a dynamic process that requires constant interpretation in terms of relationships, unexpected events, adaptations and coincidences. As a consequence, the partnership is constantly on the move, and therefore a complex and utterly dynamic process, which can only exist in the infinitive mobility of social reality. This poses the task of researching ‘what happens’ without reducing it to a collective structure or a fixed order.
References


GOVERNING SECURITY UNDER THE RULE OF LAW?


INCLUDING THE MOLECULAR INTO THE MOLAR


