CHAPTER 1

Jack Cade in a Time of Protest

At the height of the 2019 protests that shook the city, a colleague of mine at the University of Hong Kong excitedly recounted a taxi ride in which the driver spoke sympathetically about the causes of the protests. But now, with petrol bombs in the air and the streets aflame, his attitude had changed – at least toward the more radical "frontline" protestors. His surprising clincher: "They're like Jack Cade!" The taxi driver did not mean this as a compliment. It's easy to see why. Cade not only runs amok; he runs his bloody sword through society *tout court*. Of course, there's always a question of how "seriously" to take the play's giddy, spiralling violence. The Cade scenes are zany, topsy-turvy, and sometimes downright funny. But while their riotous, festive energy enlivens the historical drama, Shakespeare slowly but remorselessly withdraws our sympathies from the rebels. By the time they start making severed heads kiss, the comedy, such as it is, has descended into the macabre. It is little wonder, then, that the play has elicited much discussion of Shakespeare's anti-mob sentiments.

But, then again, who is *pro* "mob"? Who wants an anarchic breakdown of all reason and restraint? The term "mob" prejudges the issue. It conflates the often conflicting modalities of a popular movement into one chaotic mass and thereby *forecloses political thinking*. As Chris Fitter has shown, there was a long tradition of interpreting Shakespeare's so-called mob scenes as signs of his disdain for popular uprisings or the common multitude generally.[1] Indeed, according to Annabel Patterson, critics of all political persuasions long "converged in believing that Shakespeare accepted without question contemporary social hierarchy and its self-justifications".[2] Shakespeare was said to conform to the Elizabethan consensus that, to quote Christopher Hill, "democracy was a bad thing . . . [and] '[t]he people' were fickle, unstable, incapable of rational thought: the headless multitude, the many-headed monster".[3] By calling attention to a long-standing culture of popular protest in early modern (and medieval) England, Patterson began a scholarly re-evaluation of *2 Henry VI* and

Shakespeare's supposed anti-popular biases.[4] Crucially, critics started to make the vital interpretative distinction between the popular voice and the outrageous Cade.

And yet critics still struggle to articulate the positive potential of the Cade scenes. To see this, we must distinguish three escalating stages of the play's popular uprising. The basic situation is that Duke Humphrey, the Lord Protector, stands between the rapacious self-interest of the scheming nobility (Suffolk, York, Queen Margaret, Cardinal Beaufort, Somerset, et al.), on the one hand, and the naïve King Henry VI, on the other. Slowly but surely, Humphrey's power and influence are diminished by the cynical *realpolitik* of Suffolk's and York's factions. The first stage of the popular uprising occurs in Act 3, following the news that the people's champion, Humphrey, "traitorously is murdered" (3.2.123). The "rude multitude" here awake and loudly demand "revenge" (3.2.127, 135), which leads to Suffolk's banishment. Second, there is a change from court to elemental wilderness in Act 4, scene 1, in which the pirate-mariners take bloody revenge on the courageously insufferable Suffolk. Third, there is the entrance of Cade and the rebels (there is a distinction between the two). The first of these stages – the commons' protest at Humphrey's murder – has attracted the most praise from popularly minded critics. The fact that we, the audience, are likewise outraged by the palpable injustice of Humphrey's fate helps to establish "the commons as an audience capable of judging".[5] As noted in the Introduction, Lorna Hutson thus sees the people as the play's true bearers of "the ideal of Justice",[6] and connects the noisy intervention of the people in Act 3, scene 2, "with the 'common-wealth' understood as the public interest".[7] She joins Patterson in arguing that this shows Shakespeare's (conditional) "approval" of "popular protest".[8] Even Fitter, who offers the most sustained and sympathetic treatment of the Cade scenes, ends up endorsing the commons' "orderly, contained" intervention in Act 3, scene 2, over the "aimlessly anarchic" rebellion of Cade: "It is this latter form of insurrection, a directionless eruption of the unorganised poor, indiscriminately violent, and still addled by sentimental medieval monarchism, that radical Shakespeare would appear to indict."[9]

There are two problems with the critical approval of the Act 3 protest, one factual and one conceptual. First, it rests on an oversight. Patterson relies on a sharp distinction between the "people's sincere advocate", Salisbury, and the insincere Cade, who "fails every test for the proper popular spokesman".[10] The trouble is that the supposedly "sincere" and sympathetic advocates of the people, Salisbury and Warwick, are, just like

Cade, *using* the commons. In Act 2, scene 2, York pulls them into his cynical plot, asking them to:

> Wink at the Duke of Suffolk's insolence
> . . .
> Till they have snared the shepherd of the flock,
> That virtuous prince, the good Duke Humphrey.
> (2.2.70–4)

Far from "sincere", Salisbury and Warwick are complicit in the very thing that the commons protest against – the murder of Humphrey. They "wink" at his downfall because it clears the path for York's ascent. As we shall see, this sort of self-interested scheming is the "baseline" of the play's political situation in which the commons are manipulated or silenced.

This ties into a more fundamental problem with the terms of judgement that Patterson employs. All accounts of the play come up against an impasse: How do we resolve the tension between the egregiously violent, pie-in-the-sky absurdity of the popular uprising, on the one hand (its mob-like modality), and its thoughtful, myth-busting, political idealism, on the other (its popular thought modality)? Far from requiring "resolution", I suggest that this dramatic tension is the very locus, indeed engine, of creative political thought. Critics have hamstrung themselves by unwittingly accepting the terms of the debate established by the conservative critics and, ultimately, the State itself. Fitter agrees with Patterson's assessment that the contrast between the Act 3 intervention and the Cade scenes provides "an opportunity for discrimination . . . between socially useful or abusive styles" of popular protest.[11] But what do the critics' discriminations actually suggest? In brief, that popular protest is acceptable ("useful") when it pledges allegiance to existing hierarchies, when the protestors voices are "ventriloquis[ed]"[12] through the "sympathetic" nobility (who still label them the "rude multitude" (3.2.135)), and when it calls for the death of a noble (Suffolk) who is effectively a traitor. The king, the "good" nobles, and the critics can all support the commons' intervention for the simple reason that it is *contained within the existing system* and thus does not prompt any serious or challenging political thought.

The key problem rests in the criterion of whether popular protest is "socially *useful* or abusive" (emphasis mine). For who defines usefulness? Ultimately, it is the existing orders of property, class, and status (we shall say "the State", for short). Usefulness is not a neutral term. Whereas Patterson sees an "effective"[13] form of protest in Act 3 – and implicitly dismisses the radical utopianism of Act 4 as ridiculous, useless, or worse –

one may ask, "effective" for what? The protest may be effective in removing Suffolk but, ironically, he is then replaced as chief villain by the more effectively deceitful York. The commons' position is hardly improved. Indeed, they remain offstage and invisible and their voice is appropriated by the paternalistic hierarchy (and York's plot). The truly radical aspect of Shakespeare's play, I argue, is that it reveals that the existing order is aligned against the commons and makes the "in-common" impossible. We see this not in the limited protest of Act 3 but in the messiness and ambivalence of Act 4.

This chapter offers an alternative means of discriminating between the conflicting modalities of the popular uprising. My starting premise is this: because the existing power structures and social order define what is useful, the rise of a popular movement that challenges those structures cannot but seem useless, indeed downright destructive. I here draw on Adrian Johnston's idea that the State generally attempts to "control the speeds of transformation, to manage and regulate the cadence of change" within society.[14] It attempts to define what sort of change is possible and what impossible. In Elizabethan England, the Church of England helped control the cadence of change through the Homilies, which were read in church regularly. "Take away Kings Princes, Rulers, Magistrates, Iudges", the "Homily on Obedience" declares, and "no Commonwealth can continue and endure".[15] If we accept the State's terms, anything that threatens its order (the "goodly order of GOD"[16]) cannot be legitimate (useful) change but only (abusive) chaos. "[T]hat which they falsely call reformation, is indeede", according to the Homily Against Disobedience, "an vtter destruction of all common wealth".[17] Hence the inherent ambivalence of popular movements. What may appear, to those within it, to be a serious protest against injustice, from the State's perspective appears as "vtter destruction".

The classic conservative reading of Shakespeare's "mob scenes", as summarised by Brents Stirling,[18] envisages Shakespeare as a sort of State operative, controlling the cadence of change by (to quote Johnston) denying change-making status to "potentially explosive evental upheavals".[19] According to this reading, both Shakespeare and the Elizabethan state undermine the transformative power of the people by, first, dismissing the multitude as an unthinking, bestial force of destruction and chaos (see the later Cade scenes); second, blaming the waywardness of the commons on outside agitators (York); and third, deflating the underlying political arguments of the rebels as at best fanciful utopianism and at worst a cover for envious greed (see Cade's absurd promises and self-contradictions). Part of the difficulty is that, in objective terms, the State

is "right" – and Shakespeare shows it. It *is* ludicrous (and seditious) to think that a poor, uneducated, and inadequately armed rabble could overthrow the kingdom, or even mount a serious rhetorical threat to the pieties of hegemony and hierarchy. To take a stand against an overwhelmingly powerful system from a position of weakness requires both a violent cut in the ordinary way of things and an absurd leap of faith: that by making this cut we may change what "realistically" cannot be altered. "Only a radical gesture that appears 'impossible' within the existing coordinates will realistically do the job."[20] This "impossibility" is why a popular uprising is typically defined by a Janus-faced split in its reception. From one perspective (that of the Homilies), the genuine popular movement *doesn't exist*, only wanton destruction or ludicrous fantasy. From another perspective, such an attempt will still appear destructive and absurd, but it will also appear as the only hope of a more just world.

Insofar as it exists, this hope exists in the imagination. We might turn, here, to Patterson's important observation that popular "inversion rituals ... and egalitarian fantasies prove that subordinate classes can *imagine* how things might be absolutely different".[21] *Imagination*, not "usefulness", is key to thinking Shakespeare's popular politics. Recognising this can help us temper our expectations of how political ideas are present in Shakespeare's theatre. If our expectations are sometimes misleadingly naïve, it is not in their imaginativeness but in their positivity and literal mindedness. Given the historical rarity of a successful movement for justice, given what we know about the "cadence of change" in the historical moments of representation (1450s) and production (1590s), given this is a historical drama and we know the "result", and given Elizabethan censorship, it would hardly be possible for a just or objectively successful political outcome to be realised in the two hours' traffic of the commercial stage.

We could return, here, to Lear's recognition of the "poor naked wretches" as an illustration. Lear's recognition is a powerful political moment, but it is not "socially useful" within the play-world. Lear can hardly reform the kingdom at this point. The political takes the form, rather, of a flash of recognition. It is intensely personal and affective; it conjures an imaginative vision of a Lear that *might have been*: a Lear open to others, burdened by others, willing to relinquish his mastery over others; a Lear that *took care* of this. For us, the audience sitting outside the play-world, perhaps this is all the political *can* be: a spark of recognition, the lightning strike of an idea. Such flashes should not be dismissed lightly. They are examples of the way that Shakespeare works, in Fernie's words, as

an imaginative "historian of counter-memory" who looks "within history for promising alternative histories".[22] In what follows, I argue that the bloody chaos of Cade's failed popular uprising contains within it an important flash – or counter-memory – for the political imagination. First, the popular movement creates a break with the oppressive social order by revealing something about the underlying political structures that the State would rather obscure or repress: the systematic silencing and oppression of the commons. Second, the mass movement makes a positive demand for justice that introduces a point of difference between the people and State. The movement is held together by an idea, here an idea of "Edenic egalitarianism".[23] This idea, or "reference in thought", may be implicit and inconsistent, but it nonetheless grounds the movement as something other than "merely blind fury".[24] Finally, I will trace how the ultimate carrier, receptor, and agent of the political imagination is the audience. The force of the "people" is not located in *one figure*, be it Cade or Salisbury, but dispersed in the drama as a whole. It is only the many-headed audience that can see its diffused power and think through the seeming deadlock between oppressive order and destructive chaos.

1.1 The Political Situation

1.1.1 *The Shadow of the King*

The state of England in *Henry VI* is, at first glance, a happy one. "Such is the fullness of [his] heart's content" with his new bride, that the king "from wond'ring fall[s] to weeping joys" (1.1.34–5). Henry's absolute fullness, or Othello-like contentedness, is shadowed by its opposite, however. God has given him a "world of earthly blessings" in Margaret's "beauteous face ... If sympathy of love unite our thoughts" (1.1.21–3). Much riding on an "if"! The manifold blessings supposedly arranged by Providence are contingent on the ghostly and ungraspable inner worlds of the king's subjects (their thoughts, sympathies, and schemes). The joyous royal surface – the king's initial speeches are loaded with terms of royal love, service, thankfulness, wisdom, grace – is also shadowed by another power, apparent in Suffolk's announcement that he shall now

> Deliver up my title in the Queen
> To your most gracious hands, that are the substance
> Of that great shadow I did represent.
>
> (1.1.12–14)

The king's agent delivers the new queen into the king's hands. All well and good. In wooing the queen, however, the agent represented not the substantial king – the king with body and hands – but the "great shadow" behind the substance. As Ernst Kantorowicz's classic study notes, Tudor legal theory married the mortal body of the king ("Body natural") with the "mystical body" of the king's royal dignity and divinely sanctioned authority ("Body politic").[25] This marriage led to a ghostly excess, for the "Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People".[26] The king's "shadow" overspills the king himself and shades into the broader "polity", which was "endowed with [its own] 'mystical' character . . . [and] which itself could claim to be the Law".[27] The agent's service also overspills, blurring into possibly contradictory ideas of stewardship and power politics. Despite the religiously sanctioned strictures against separating the monarch's person from the realm, *2 Henry VI*'s nobility largely ignore the king (and the Homilies) and serve either the more abstract notion of the realm or commonwealth – or else power itself.

The overt mystification of power in early modern political theory conforms to Foucault's idea that "sovereign power affirms itself by claiming that what it enacts is outside itself and transcendent".[28] The idea is central to Jonathan Goldberg's study of James I: "To adopt the voice of power is, in Foucault's definition, to speak beyond oneself, ascribing one's powers elsewhere, saying one thing and meaning another."[29] The king both performs on a stage and withdraws from sight, the possessor of "another body, his invisible body, the body of his power".[30] His power is not his own, but always lies elsewhere. Most mundanely, it lies in the subjects, agents, proclamations, and writings that radiate beyond the kingly body, but it also haloes into (and from) the transcendental sources of kingly power (God, the People), as well as the abstract, semi-divine concepts that carry those sources (the Commonwealth, Providence; or freedom, democracy, and socialism in our world). This is why State power is *excessive* or overdetermined. The State possesses a superpower that makes it "impossible" or "absurd" to imagine an egalitarian alternative.[31]

Whereas New Historicist criticism tended to see Shakespeare's play-worlds through the lens of State power, I turn the focus to the multi-pronged, dispersed, multi-voiced nature of Shakespeare's drama. More specifically, I show that the people, this many-headed hydra, also possess *a negative power that speaks beyond itself*. Like Caesar, there "is more to [the people] than can be observed".[32] But whereas the State attempts to

channel its negative, invisible power into a positive authority that is everywhere ever-present, the people's power is more resolutely negative. The masses' indeterminate size and unseen numbers give them what Ian Munro calls a certain "*illegibility*".[33] Their amorphous anonymity gives them an unfathomable and unlocatable quality that resembles the obscure multiform divinity of negative theology and its process of "unsaying". So, while the people mirror the power of authority – including (as we shall see) through a rival set of "timeless" abstract ideas – their force is of a very different nature. "The people" in its various forms (body politic, commons, crowd, mass movement, mob) is unstable and precarious. They shift like spirits, disappearing or "*steal[ing] away*" (*Coriolanus* 1.1.241), only to reappear again.

This chapter argues that even their temporary flashing appearance can aid political thought by helping to pin down, make visible, and thereby interrupt the seemingly divine excess or superpower of the State. Here I draw on thinkers, such as Badiou and Žižek, who conceptualise politics not from the perspective of State power but from the perspective of its (momentary) interruption or disorientation. As Žižek notes, Foucault's "notion of productive power" has no room for "Badiou's notion of 'the point of inconsistency . . . of a situation'". That point is what Badiou calls a situation's "void": the hidden truth that "has to remain invisible so that the visible is visible".[34] The void is the foundational inconsistency that the State obscures, or, in Collin Wright's words, "the lack that founds the situation's absolutism".[35] The commons were the invisible "void" of the early modern State. They "have no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth", Thomas Smith wrote in *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), "and no account is made of them but onelie to be ruled".[36] Nonetheless, it was on the backs of this invisible and voiceless majority – comprising "[a]t least ninety-five per cent of the population"[37] – that the system rode in all its mystical pomp. The half-disavowed awareness of this reliance produces the State's underlying inconsistency. Brents Stirling points to James's 1607 "royal proclamation that declared, 'It is a thing notorious that many of the meanest sort of our people . . . have presumed lately to assemble themselves riotously in multitudes.' This proclamation asserted further that 'the glory and strength of all kings consisteth in the multitude of subjects.'"[38] The people are both the basis of, and greatest threat to, State power. The importance of the popular uprising in *2 Henry VI* is that it ruptures the existing order's supposedly providential harmony by briefly making the commons' invisibility visible. It reveals the central truth that the official history repressed.

1.1.2 *State of Emergency*

For the "bad" nobles, like the Cardinal (1.1.153–61) or Margaret (3.1.28–30), the people are imaginable only as a hidden danger to be manipulated by others. The "good" nobles, in contrast, distinguish themselves with reference to the commons and the realm:

> SALISBURY While these do labor for their own preferment
> Behooves it us to labor for the realm.
>
> (1.1.178–9)

Yet this distinction is undercut by the fact that Warwick and Salisbury are complicit in York's plot to remove Humphrey and cynically mobilise the commons against Suffolk. York is the figurehead of the play's political scheming. York gets the play's first aside (1.1.204) and soliloquy (1.1.211–56). He there addresses us directly as a self-regarding Machiavel ("I'll make him yield the crown" (1.1.255)) and draws us into a play-world of self-serving political intrigue. Shakespeare quite deliberately establishes self-interested (but unreflective) scheming as the base reality of the play. Indeed, the quick mirroring of one ambitious, power-hungry character with another suggests that it is a national compulsion. Eleanor gets the play's second soliloquy:

> I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks
> And smooth my way upon their headless necks.
>
> (1.2.64–5)

Eleanor is then replaced by the third scheming soliloquiser to emerge in the space of 150 lines. Hume is not only another self-seeking plotter; he is also working as the agent of yet more plotters (the Cardinal and Suffolk). We have a pyramid scheme of ambitious conspiracy in which power-mad double-dealing stretches from Church and State down to the common man. Outside the fatally naïve and ineffectual figures of Henry and Gloucester, the "state of play" is entirely one of conniving self-advancement. The ship of state is manned by opportunistic pirates. Insofar as "politics" exists, it is a zero-sum Machiavellian game of snakes and ladders in which one player rises and another falls, but the rules remain the same. The perpetual crisis of noble scheming resembles Benjamin's idea of the perpetual "state of emergency", which "is not the exception but the rule" that expresses the world's underlying structure.[39]

The situation reflects the fears and analyses of Classical and early modern political theorists. Aristotle's observation that "the rich, if the constitution gives them power, are apt to be insolent and avaricious" (*Politics* 1307a19–20) is taken up by the likes of Thomas More, Thomas Smith, and George Buchanan.[40] It is not the commoners who pose the chief threat to the commonwealth but its supposed rulers, with their compulsive "desire to outdo others and get more and more" (*Republic* 359c).[41] Indeed, according to Smith, the Starre Chamber was established to control "riots" that were started not by "meane men" but by "the insolencie of the noble men and gentlemen of the North partes of Englande".[42] Hence why, for Buchanan, the key to "[m]an's civic capacities ... [is] the ability above all to subordinate private interest to the public good", whether that interest be wealth, ambition, or honour.[43] While the specifics change, every society, and every politics, is caught up in this battle. *2 Henry VI* represents the utter failure to subordinate private interest to the public good and thus the breakdown of a just civil society. Or, as Smith puts it, when the laws of England "shallbe misused, dissembled with, or be contemned ... it will be the present ruine ... of the common wealth".[44] Instead of following that "sacrosanct and inviolable ... Ciceronian maxim: 'Let the welfare of the people be the supreme law'", the nobility "act like robbers who, by making a suitable division of their ill-gotten gains, seek the praise of justice for their injustice".[45] Justice is, as for Thrasymachus, whatever the strong declare it to be.

1.1.3 The Shadow of Justice

The common people enter on the back of this entrenched corruption – or, indeed, treason. They raise the question of justice, they crave it, and they petition for it, outlining specific instances of wrongful appropriation by Church and State. They are also fatally out of their depth. The First Petitioner confuses Suffolk for the Lord Protector so that Suffolk reads the petition against his own enclosure of the commons at Melford, a petition that Margaret (Suffolk in the Quarto) literally tears to pieces (1.3.20–38). We get a striking dramatization of how, through enforced enclosures and legal manipulation, "the unreasonable covetousness of a few hath ... [led] to the utter undoing of your island" (to quote More's Hytholoday).[46] The commons do not possess the knowledge or tools to fight for justice, but petition the very people who have wronged them. Meanwhile, those in power – the pirates of state – pronounce upon the legality of their own piracy and appropriation. Margaret's class-baiting

intervention – "Away, base cullions!" (1.3.39) – reveals the system's inherent stumbling block: justice relies on finding the ear of a socially responsible aristocratic mediator in a world of self-serving rivalry and backstabbing.

The opening three acts relentlessly question the justice of the legal system in Henry's England. A prime example is the suit between the apprentice armourer (Peter) and his master (Horner), which pits one man's word against another so there is no way of knowing the truth. "Uncle, what shall we say to this in law?" (1.3.202), the king asks. Gloucester's solution to this evidentiary problem is a law of providence, or chance: "a day appointed . . . For single combat . . . This is the law and this Duke Humphrey's doom" (1.3.206–9). Humphrey's legal "doom" is met with the frightened incomprehension of the commoners. The response of the petrified apprentice, Peter, is simply to beg for "pity" and "mercy" (1.3.212–14). Gloucester's reply – "Sirrah, or you must fight or else be hanged" (1.3.216) – is telling. Coming from the champion of the people, this is the very best the system can offer the commoners.

The trial by combat reveals the fundamental barbarity of the political system and its elaborate political theology: to the victor go the (mystified) spoils. As Thomas Cranmer explained on the coronation of King Edward VI, kings "be God's Anointed, not in respect of the oil which the bishop, useth, but in consideration of their power which is ordained".[47] Power is no sooner attained as anointed in the mystical oil of the Church. "The powers that bee, be ordained of GOD."[48] Blessed are the winners. Shakespeare's play stretches this providentialist understanding of law and justice close to breaking point. God oversees the trial by combat ("God defend the right!" (2.3.55)) and, on the surface level, "right" wins out. Horner confesses his treason and Peter is vindicated. As Roland Knowles notes, however, one significant detail undercuts the ascription of right to God's Providence: Horner loses the combat because he was *drunk*.[49] The detail, hardly necessary, seems designed to reveal the capricious and backward logic of power:

KING HENRY For by his death we do perceive his guilt,
And God in justice hath revealed to us
The truth and innocence of this poor fellow.
(2.3.94–6)

Henry's (somewhat cruel) faith is undercut by the "many corrupt or dubious trials and judgments [that] have passed for truth and justice"[50]

in the opening acts – as well as by the wine. The unscrupulous York gets the best line: "Fellow, thank God and the good wine in thy master's way" (2.3.90–1). The conjoining of God with "good wine" may be comically delicious but it hardly elevates the case for divine Providence or supports Gloucester's steadfast faith that innocence and law will protect him (2.4.60). Hutson describes this as Gloucester's (and Henry's) "culpable blindness" to the overwhelming fact that the law has become "an elastic medium of aristocratic power" and self-interest.[51] His innocent belief in the law will, as it turns out, lead to Humphrey's "doom".

The grubby murder of Gloucester strips the brutal "to the victor go the spoils" logic of its mystifying noble robes. After elucidating why their case against Gloucester will struggle ("trivial argument" plus no support from king or commons (3.1.239–42)), Suffolk declares that Gloucester should die anyway. He concludes:

SUFFOLK And do not stand on quillets how to slay him;
Be it by gins, by snares, by subtlety,
Sleeping or waking, 'tis no matter how,
So he be dead; . . .
QUEEN MARGARET Thrice-noble Suffolk, 'tis resolutely spoke.

(3.1.261–6)

The reason for the "thrice" may be obscure but the caustic effect is clear: nobility is murder. Or, as Machiavelli puts it, the nobility are driven by "a strong desire to dominate".[52] Suffolk, Margaret, and York express no qualms about this; rather, York openly declares the nobility's power to define law and truth: "And now we three have spoke it, / It skills not greatly who impugns our doom" (3.1.80–1). This frees up York, who now more fully and energetically enters the Vice mode, embracing an ambitious becoming – "Be that thou hop'st to be" (3.1.333) – that has a certain seductive power. It prompts one of the play's first great speeches of motion, indeed, of thought as transformative motion. This quintessentially Shakespearean sense of rapidly multiplying thought – "Faster than springtime showers comes thought on thought" (3.1.337) – has been largely missing from the play to this point. Now, with the breakdown of legal authority, this spirit is unleashed. York is its originator, but Cade is its minister:

And, for a minister of my intent,
I have seduced a headstrong Kentishman,
John Cade of Ashford.

(3.1.355–7)

York introduces Cade as a figure of festive energy and whirring motion:

> [He] fought so long till that his thighs with darts
> Were almost like a sharp-quilled porcupine;
> And in the end, being rescued, I have seen
> Him caper upright like a wild Morisco,
> Shaking the bloody darts as he his bells.
> (3.1.362–6)

Opposing, fighting, capering, shaking, Cade's introduction rings a bell whose sound reverberates throughout the play, convulsing the staid, inward-looking world of court intrigue. Of course, at one level, Cade is simply a puppet. His position as York's seduced "minister" echoes the Homily's declaration that "a few ambitious and malitious [men] are the authours and heads, and multituds of ignorant men are the ministers and furtherers of rebellion" (the ambitious are in turn "ministers of the deuill").[53] But Cade's entry is cued by York's uprising spirit of misrule as much as his cynical plotting. At another level, then, Cade enters as an irrepressible force of nature, shaking off enemy darts like bells, ringing in changes in dramatic representation, and blurring the strict division between the ministers of good and evil.

1.2 The Popular Event

Rather than the entrenched and repetitive "state of emergency" in which one noble rises and another falls but nothing really changes, Act 4 marks a "real state of emergency"[54] that ruptures the mythological unity of the State. The uprising prompts political thought by forcing us to confront the people's separateness from, and inconsistency with, the State's supposedly harmonious order. I here draw on Žižek's (Hegelian) idea that philosophical thought begins with a "moment of foreignness that emerges through displacement".[55] It begins with the negative. Because "[w]hat is 'familiarly known' is not properly known", any "[a]nalysis of an idea [must]", writes Hegel, "do[] away with its character of familiarity" by dismembering its immediacy and unity.[56] Thought requires a certain violence. In political terms, the rupture of the popular event "distances" the State's superpower and thereby allows thought to escape from its seemingly enveloping terms.[57] Hence Badiou's fondness for Mao's dictum, "Unrest is an excellent thing."[58] Unrest unsettles the State's mastery over the terms of the situation and the cadence of change.

1.2.1 A Sea-Change

The second of the three escalating stages of the popular uprising occurs in Act 4, scene 1, which distances the State by moving us from court to wilderness, day to night, land to sea:

LIEUTENANT The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day
Is crept into the bosom of the sea,
And now loud-howling wolves arouse the jades
That drag the tragic melancholy night,
Who, with their drowsy, slow, and flagging wings,
Clip dead men's graves . . .

(4.1.1–6)

The poetic Lieutenant conjures the sort of night in which the prophetic soul speaks, churchyards yawn, or Weird Sisters meet. We have one of those Shakespearean sea-changes, or storm blasts, in which the claustrophobic, cloying court is swept aside by darker elemental forces. Suffolk, so serenely confident in his conniving "nobility", has now entered the dark embryonic realm of poetry and prophecy, of the nightmare and its nine foal, and is well and truly out of his depth. The "howling" sea here has a political resonance: "The link between the crowd and forces of nature is an ancient one . . . both the sea and the forest are old symbols for the crowd."[59] The sea-change cues the fusillade of the popular voice into the play. The pirate ship of state is boarded by real pirates. Their Lieutenant shares something of the rough and tumble, authority-defying verve of *The Tempest*'s Boatswain. What care these howlers for the name of King, much less the names of Suffolk or William de la Pole?

The exchanges between the gentlemen and pirates are purely economic until the enigmatic Walter Whitmore demands revenge rather than ransom. Suffolk, thus far something of a villainous cipher, or stock type, suddenly experiences fear at the name "Walter" (pronounced "water" in the early modern period[60]):

SUFFOLK Thy name affrights me, in whose sound is death.
A cunning man did calculate my birth,
And told me that by "water" I should die.

(4.1.33–5)

For the first time, Suffolk seems human. He is now, suddenly, susceptible to the power of others. Rationally, one might expect a man in a position of such overwhelming physical (he is outnumbered) and psychological

(he has met his prophesised nemesis) vulnerability to rein it in a bit, to sue for grace. The First Gentleman almost begs him: "My gracious lord, entreat him; speak him fair" (4.1.121). Suffolk does no such thing. His self-defeating escalation speaks to an important psychological, but also political, pathology in Shakespeare's more masculine and martial heroes: the swift and self-destructive movement from male vulnerability to violent rage that we see in figures such as Lear, Leontes, or Coriolanus. Suffolk explodes at the Lieutenant:

> Obscure and lousy swain! King Henry's blood,
> The honorable blood of Lancaster,
> Must not be shed by such a jaded groom.
> (4.1.50–2)

The sudden and unexpected experience of vulnerability upends Suffolk's worldview: "It is impossible that I should die / By such a lowly vassal as thyself" (4.1.110–11). His almost hysterical response to self-loss contrasts with Eleanor's transformation in Act 2, scene 4. Stripped of her finery, her name, her standing, her husband, her whole world, she gains a sort of sombre wisdom in which she sees her own wrongs and farewells "[a]ll comfort" (2.4.88). In affliction, Eleanor accepts that she *should* feel "shame" (2.4.108), that she has valued wrongly, that she traded "eternity" (2.4.91) for vanity. Shame briefly raises her to a dramatic life above the lowlands of noble conniving.[61] Suffolk admits no shame. Rather, his personal fear is hysterically universalised into class relations. Without explanation, Suffolk demands of the Lieutenant:

> Hast thou not kissed thy hand and held my stirrup?
> Bareheaded, plodded by my footcloth mule,
> And thought thee happy when I shook my head?
> How often hast thou waited at my cup,
> Fed from my trencher, kneeled down at the board,
> When I have feasted with Queen Margaret?
> Remember it, and let it make thee crestfall'n.
> (4.1.53–9)

One editor offers, as a rational explanation for Suffolk's sudden questions, the suggestion that the Lieutenant was once in Suffolk's service.[62] The play gives no support for this, however. Suffolk simply launches into these claims mid-speech, at the very moment he loses control and explodes in rage. Meanwhile, the man who has supposedly served Suffolk in such improbably various ways – stable boy, butler, waiting man, petitioner, scraps-eater (see 4.1.53–64 for the full account) – offers no suggestion he

has served Suffolk in his long, cutting reply (4.1.70–103). There is, however, another explanation: Suffolk projects a fantasy that relieves him of his fear and vulnerability. The exchange is framed by fear. It begins with Suffolk's fear at Whitmore's name (4.1.33) and concludes with Suffolk's:

> *Paene gelidus timor occupat artus.*
> It is thee I fear.
> (4.1.117–18)

His outburst is a temporary deferral, a keeping at bay, of the radical and terrifying vulnerability of death. It enables him to rediscover his voice of command. He can explode in Lear-like rage at ingratitude because these are the *type* of "[b]ase slave[s]" (4.1.67) who serve him, eat from his table, sue for favour. By universally conflating all commoners into vassals at his feet he frees himself from his subjection to these particular commoners.

This is a classic political move. We need only look at contemporary politics to see how authorities explode at protestors who dare challenge them. One of the great unifiers of governments of various persuasions, times, and cultures is their attempt to reduce protestors to a *type*. Terms of *in*distinction, like "mob" or "rioters", have the dual benefits of avoiding the substantive claims of the protests and managing the fear of those in power. They allow authority to avoid self-reflective thought about its relation to the hurt and enraged other. If the protestors are merely "lousy swains" (Suffolk), "damnable" and "wicked impes of the deuvill" (Homily), or "terrorists", "thugs", and "cockroaches" (contemporary governments), then they have no legitimate claim to demand (or even think) political change. Fear is key to this conflation. As Hill notes, the "contemptuous attitude" to the poor "thinly concealed the fears of the propertied class."[63] And fear is a powerful and creative force. Fear *produces* that "great ruling class nightmare in the Renaissance: the marauding horde, the many-headed multitude, the insatiate, giddy, and murderous crowd".[64] We begin to see why Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* "proclaims an 'essential sickness' of power". "Startlingly", Kai Wiegandt writes, "the powerful individual 'produces the crowd as vermin *from out of his own head* and transfers the idea to a real human group'".[65] The State's fearful reaction to popular uprising is a pathological conflation of serving men and lieutenants, grooms and sailors, that *is constitutive of class identity*.

Fear thus obscures the true relation between power and people. It turns the people into vassals or vermin, and it obscures authority's own baseness, fear, and brutality. Fear not only creates the "mob"; it also creates the "nobility". Whereas Suffolk claims that "True nobility is exempt from

fear" (4.1.130), the scene reveals that "nobility" is *an invention of fear* designed to differentiate the rulers and cow the masses into submission: "let it make thee crestfall'n". There is something of the posturing of the animal world to all this. The puffer fish deceiving its predators. The moth with giant eyes on its wings. I am bigger than you think. You are in trouble. Flee. In revealing these mechanisms, Shakespeare inspires a deeper questioning of political power. What seemed impervious, imperial, even in some sense "natural", is revealed to be a *confidence trick*, an attempt to puff up the power of authority (the straight-backed nobility, glinting with steel) and deflate the power of its potential opponents (the stooping grooms, eyes averted, grateful for scraps).

What the State fears is not just the explosive power of the masses; it is also the limitation of its own mastery and self-definition. The State typically attempts to define the entirety of the situation, to count what counts, and negate all inconsistency. There is no outside the State. Hence why, "when an emblem of their void wanders about – generally, an inconsistent or rioting crowd – [governments] prohibit 'gatherings of more than three people', which is to say they explicitly declare their non-tolerance" of these inconsistent elements.[66] The hysterical attempt to discredit anything outside the official count is the State's way of maintaining its mastery over the cadence of change.[67] "[T]hat which they falsely call reformation, is ... an vtter destruction of all common wealth."[68] All inconsistency, all potential opposition, is lumped into one indistinct, violent mass (anarchic chaos) and opposed to the harmonious order of the State (useful, peaceful, "GODS order"[69]).

The State's attempt to cow its subjects risks provoking a violent backlash, however. The Lieutenant's long reply exacts a luxuriant rhetorical revenge on Suffolk:

> Thy lips that kissed the Queen shall sweep the ground,
> And thou that smiled'st at good Duke Humphrey's death
> Against the senseless winds shall grin in vain,
> Who in contempt shall hiss at thee again.
>
> (4.1.75–8)

As the might of the nobility deflates, the sails of the commons are filled with tempestuous power. The "winds" are a force of nature and they are free: "senseless" of, free from, fear of noble abuse and manipulation. But the term also carries the suggestion that this force is unconscious or unthinking, a power that hisses and tears down without reason. The "senseless" wind does not petition; it blows, cracks, rages, and spouts

indiscriminately. The power of the commons is split from the outset. On the one hand, it is a "barbarous and bloody spectacle!" (4.2.145), as the First Gentleman declares, pointing ahead to the Cade scenes. On the other, a rational enumeration of injustices underpins the rising wind: the Lieutenant points to the corruption of England's "silver spring" (4.1.72) through the nobility's fraud, theft, adultery, murder, poor policy, self-enrichment, incompetence, and lack of support (4.1.70–103). The force of the language might suggest that the Lieutenant is channelling Shakespeare's own sensitivity to the mismanagement and oppressiveness of the ruling classes, which are portrayed as a sort of anarchic mob that tears the kingdom apart.

In fact, the Lieutenant offers just the sort of critique of tyrannical rule that was made by George Buchanan, who characterises such rulers as either "robbers" and "plunder[ers]", or else as "wolves or some other type of dangerous beasts". Either way he "adjudge[s] the[m] [the] most deadly enemies of God and man".[70] Here, it is the lowly Whitmore who executes Suffolk, recently the king's foremost agent, for his crimes against the realm. One might be reminded of Buchanan's claim, following Luther, that "God frequently stirs up from the lowest ranks of the people humble and obscure men as avengers of the pride and violence of tyrants".[71] This lowly avenger is represented as coming from the sea and wilderness, which have long been associated with crowds and the multitude. Waves and wind are also associated with the audience. Fitter notes that "the tropology of air, wind, and breath function frequently in Shakespeare . . . as markers of audience reference".[72] We are brought in, on the wind, to judge and approve of the execution of a noble ruler by a base commoner – a radical move in the late Elizabethan context.

Before we come to the Cade scenes, then, the pretentions and power of the nobility have been deflated. Suffolk, the embodiment of aristocratic masculine vigour, is reduced to a soft, wafting entreaty: "I charge thee waft me safely 'cross the Channel" (4.1.114). The mariners have punctured the myth of "true nobility". They cower not, but return the gaze of power: "Come, Suffolk, I must waft thee to thy death" (4.1.116). Once the category of nobility is revealed as a confidence trick, once the swelling frog has deflated, the predators move in. *Enter CADE* . . .

1.2.2 *(A Prelude to) A Rebel Yell*

Shakespeare does not give us Cade immediately, however, and this choice is crucial. The rebel scenes begin with a little prelude, the exchanges

between the First Rebel and Second Rebel (4.2.1–29), in which the First Rebel instructs his compatriot to "get thee a sword, though made of a lath" (4.2.1–2). Fitter notes, "Since real, not prop, swords were normally used for the fight scenes, the dramaturgic 'subcoding' inherent in the switch to wood here would for a contemporary audience have instantly transformed the nature of the sequence's 'violence'."[73] Transporting us into a different representational order, Shakespeare uses festive, theatrical means to distance the State and disrupt the staid progression of chronicle history.

The key criterion I employ to discriminate between the positive potential and destructive violence of the popular scenes is not "usefulness" but thought. The festive energy of these scenes is not just a "bloody spectacle" of Saturnalian violence, but allows for further, and increasingly explicit, conceptual separations (people v. State, justice v. law, in-common v. power). To begin with, the rebels dismiss the legitimacy and "ideology" of gentlemen, albeit in amusing, clownish fashion:

FIRST REBEL I tell thee, Jack Cade the clothier means to
dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap
upon it.
SECOND REBEL So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say
it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came
up.

(4.2.4–9)

The rebels evoke a carnivalesque dressing up, the clothier as king for a day, that redresses the "threadbare" (4.2.7) and oppressive commonwealth in merry garb. Over the first three acts the "commonwealth" is seen from above, and it is seen as something to be commanded and fought over. This is precisely why it is "threadbare". The rebels, in contrast, take the "commonwealth" from below. They turn it over, strip it back, show its rags, but make it "merry". In this festive shift, the commonwealth is seen and felt differently – not through a political vision of mastery but as commonality, brotherhood, fellow-feeling. Cheerfully, ridiculously, the rebels raise the idea of the commonwealth as in-common.

The Homilies make clear the threat of such ideas to monarchical providentialism, warning that although "the redresse of the common wealth hath of old bene the vsuall fained pretence of rebels", rebellion is in fact "the greatest ruine and destruction of all common wealths that may bee possible".[74] It was with good reason that the Homilies were fearful, for the rebels' reference to the "commonwealth" suggests two dangerous

ancient ideas that were central to early modern debates about political power. The first was Classical. By mobilising the term "commonwealth" in opposition to noble malfeasance, the rebels inadvertently brought into play ancient notions of the public good. Aristotle, for instance, develops "the political science of which the good is justice, in other words, the common interest" (*Politics*, III, 1282b1).[75] We have seen that radical thinkers such as Buchanan used these Classical texts to argue in favour of rebellion against tyrants and making the king subject to the law (and ultimately the people). This, of course, is precisely what the Tudor authorities wanted to avoid. Andrew Hadfield, meanwhile, has shown that the translation of the Latin *res publica* into "commonwealth" meant that "'republicanism' was either directly or indirectly a ghostly presence in English political life from the early sixteenth century onwards, as many examples demonstrate."[76] Jonathan Bate further suggests that the Tudor reliance on "the Roman example in its vocabulary of state building . . . open[ed] the way for the *civitas* to turn against the monarchy" and ultimately to civil war.[77] Cade, Bate observes, is himself linked to the "*Libertas*" of Roman republicanism when he appeals to "ancient freedom" (4.8.25).[78]

The second idea was Christian. The term "commonwealth" suggests St Ambrose's ancient doctrine that "God ordained . . . that the earth would be, as it were, the common possession of us all . . . [whereas] it is greed that has established private rights".[79] The rebels thus raise the "explosive idea" of "Christian socialism", whose "spectre . . . was haunting Shakespeare's England".[80] This was not merely a populist phenomenon. The most famous political work of the period, More's *Utopia*, is arguably a displaced, semi-secularised imagining of a society organised according to the Sermon on the Mount. The upshot of these two ideas was that the term "commonwealth" had the potential to upend the positive political theology, and strict hierarchies, put forward by early modern authorities. It could conjure, subversively, a collectivity that stretched all the way back to Adam, and outwards to the entire populace, thereby escaping official control.

However much they are mashed and mangled, the ideas that the rebels raise constitute a competing form of political thought – what Patterson calls a "peasant ideology".[81] They paint the nobility as thieves and usurpers, a painting upheld by the play as a whole. Although an "Edenic egalitarianism" might seem like mere wishfulness, the focus on "the criterion of labor" as the basis of common humanity and shared value gives it a certain groundedness or embodiedness.[82] The rebels use the value of labour to twist the meanings of contemporary political theology:

SECOND REBEL The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons.
FIRST REBEL Nay, more: the King's Council are no good workmen.
SECOND REBEL True; and yet it is said, "Labor in thy vocation," which is as much to say as, "Let the magistrates be laboring men" – and therefore should we be magistrates.

(4.2.12–17)

It was the "wretched and miserable" lot of just these sort of workers ("poor labourers, carters, ironsmiths, carpenters, and ploughmen") that led More's Hythloday to declare that among all the nations he could find no "sign or token of equity and justice".[83] Shakespeare's rebellious peasants may seem "ignorant and foolish", but Hill notes that they were also highly "class-conscious", and many of the phrases they use, including those about labour and against lawyers, "were to be considered seriously by legal reformers in the sixteen-forties".[84] And yet, although critics now recognise that there are "serious" political ideas at play, the trouble is that these ideas are so inextricably tied to fantastical logic that they are hard to *take* seriously. The rebels' speeches are certainly addled with magical thinking. The entrance of "Dick the butcher" prompts the First Rebel's jubilant cry:

> Then is sin struck down like an ox, and iniquity's throat cut like a calf.
>
> (4.2.24–6)

Given that sin and inequity were considered ever present in sublunary nature, what the rebels propose is the height of foolishness. Dick the butcher as sin's nemesis! But the tone suggests that the rebels know it. Shakespeare certainly does. He is having fun. A fresh air blows through the play as it escapes the squabbles of the court. The absurdity carries it. And it carries us into a different sort of play, into a merry interlude that temporarily pauses chronicle history and the stifling, recursive quality of noble scheming. It calls forth a more inclusive mode of community and audience engagement. The interim is brief. The great men will soon reclaim the stage and we will rejoin chronicle time and its remorseless, Breughelian piling of corpses. In the meantime, however, the absurd interlude supports Patterson's crucial point that such festive "inversion rituals" and popular "egalitarian fantasies prove that subordinate classes can *imagine* how things might be absolutely different".[85]

The process of inversion, in fact, begins earlier. We saw that Eleanor's shame brought about a transvaluation of values that prefigures the likes of

Lear and Leontes. Her experience of negativity – the loss or symbolic death of self – allows a different form of wisdom to emerge:

> My joy is death –
> Death, at whose name I oft have been afeared
> Because I wished this world's eternity.
> (2.4.89–91)

There is a tragic gain in her loss. As in *Hamlet*, the contemplation of loss and death seems to give rise to a new set of values – an eternal perspective – that destabilises the existing order and hints at a more just and humane politics. Her husband experiences something similar before his death. In Act 3 he finally sees the noble conspiracy that Eleanor warned would ensnare him: "all of you have laid your heads together" (3.1.165), he berates them. The exposure of the conspiracy is a revelation to Gloucester, one that prompts a reversal of his previous faith that God ordains the good will triumph. Gloucester now reverses the "blessed are the winners" mentality of Tudor orthodoxy. He does not abandon theology but adopts the gospels' theology of weakness and reversal in order to sit in judgement of the positivist political theology that sacralises power. He turns the radical inversions of the Sermon on the Mount into a curse: "I lose indeed – / Beshrew the winners, for they played me false" (3.1.183–4). Gloucester now sees himself, and the realm, to be in the midst of a "commonwealth tragedy".[86] His response is a negative political theology that locates value in loss, in failure, in the losers.

The rebels take up that theology but turn it into a comic force of creative inversion. There is a dream, in the rebel scenes, that festivity's transfiguring power might brush aside the contingent social orders – nobility, king, interlopers all – that have lately sprung up to despoil England's merry garden. It is an absurd dream. The height of fantasy. And yet, it is *only in imagining the absurd that judgement is possible*; that the illiterate, downtrodden, forgotten majority can sit in judgement over the exploitative rulers. Recognising the necessity of absurdity allows us to move beyond the confines of statist common sense, which dismisses the rebel yell as "farcical Utopianism . . . the kind of preposterous sharing of the wealth which is so traditional in conservative satire".[87] The absurd dream estranges the existing order, providing the "moment of foreignness" that generates genuine thought.

This is where the dramaturgy plays its role. Most basically, theatre relies upon alienation for its very existence. Its fundamental technology of role-playing entails a double dislocation, the actor's becoming other from their

self, and our transportation from our world into another. Hence Badiou's argument that "[t]he ethics of play is that of an *escape*", that theatre disrupts "what we believe to be the most evidently *given*".[88] The swaggering, self-conscious absurdity of these scenes heightens the audience's awareness of the theatrical alienation, establishing that we are in the midst of an escape caper from the State. The sin-striking, iniquity-slicing, sacrificial power of Dick the butcher shifts us from the "given" historical world and irreverently puts the State's mastery, its enclosing mythology, at a distance. In dreams, writes Adorno, "[t]he absurd is presented as if it were self-evident, in order to strip the self-evident of its power".[89] The absurd can open up thought by puncturing society's mythical cohesion.

The long-noted vigour and dramatic life of these scenes tie into the key political question of the people's *capacity* to reflect and judge. The Homilies rigorously denied their capacity of judgement: "what a perilous thing were it to commit vnto the Subiects the iudgement which Prince is wise and godly . . . and which is otherwise: as though the foot must iudge of the head: an enterprise very heinous, and must needs breed rebellion".[90] The popular tradition, in contrast, rests upon "the egalitarian principle of a capacity to discern the just, or the good".[91] Shakespeare both mocks this capacity and registers flashes of its power to cut through the "threadbare" commonwealth and imagine a "merry world". The location of the "political" is thus not necessarily where we think. It is not in Cade doing X or Y, conducting this outrage, killing this figure; it is when the *people* (the two rebels, the Butcher or Weaver, at times even Cade himself) engage in the *thinking* of the situation.

The popular uprising is political because, however buffoonish it may be, it raises to prominence what was ignored, excluded, or rendered invisible: the people. In doing so, the uprising engages these people, these masses, in egalitarian political thought. In their wonderfully mangled fashion, the rebels "subtract"[92] (or separate) their values – labour, the in-common – from the State. Above all, they separate their claims to justice from the current law of the realm, confirming Aristotle's statement in the *Politics* that "[e]verywhere inequality is a cause of revolution . . . and always it is the desire for equality which rises in rebellion" (1302a.28–9).[93] Their search for justice opens up a broader political ideal: that (to adapt Badiou's terms) no one should be "enslaved, whether in thought or in deed", because of the place and role in which they were born.[94] "No enslavement by context!" is the heroically absurd political cry of "Edenic egalitarianism". Absurd because we know there *is* enslavement by context. Heroic because the idea prescribes and fights for an alternative to what is.

There is a magnetism to this heroism. The idea pulls together the scattered people. And it does so across time. It is no respecter of historical differences; rather, it *universalises*. "All men", writes Aristotle, "think justice to be a sort of equality" (*Politics* 1282b16–17).[95]

The universalising, anachronistic quality of the political idea(l) is visible in the backward-looking nature of the rebels. First, as has long been noted, Shakespeare infuses the 1450 Cade rebellion with the language and spirit of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. This is significant because the 1381 rebels sought to overturn the existing political order on the basis of universal equality before God. It is this idealism that rebuts the old view that Shakespeare's rebels are simply a mob: "the mass not dominated by a great idea."[96] For what drags them out of their destitution and gathers them together is the powerful idea of an egalitarian community, albeit one that is only ever half believed. The idea might not be consistent or fully formed, its spokespeople might be far from fully convincing, but this is to be expected given their oppression and lack of education. Second, the 1381 rebels famously looked back to Eden, and to our universal parents, through John Ball's catch cry, "When Adam delved and Eve span, who then was the gentleman?" Cade refers to this cry explicitly ("And Adam was a gardener" (4.2.123)) and perhaps implicitly in his comment about the commons' "ancient freedom" (4.8.25). Third, Shakespeare's conflation of the rebellions reflects how both popular rebels and nervous authority figures in early modern England conflated rebels such as Jack Straw, Jack Cade, and Robert Kett, thereby forming a continuous "popular *culture* of protest".[97]

The rebel scenes thus suggest a different imaginary of time – a mode of historical imagination that deliberately blurs history. As in Benjamin's messianic materialism, looking back to the ghosts of noble failures past becomes the only means of thinking a more just future. "Dreams become the *repositories of the utopian visions of mankind*; they serve as the refuge of the aspirations and desires that are denied to humanity in the sphere of material life."[98] One must learn from what is not, from negativity – as does theatre itself. One must, in Derrida's terms, learn to live with ghosts, must "find again", in the words of Marx, "the *spirit* of revolution".[99] The rebels themselves can thus be seen as "historian[s] of counter-memory", tapping into a (seemingly) timeless social and political imaginary that perishes only to return. Their Edenic, egalitarian dreams have a latency, a weak, indeed clownish, messianic force. To twist Žižek's words in defence of lost causes and "catastrophic failure[s]": "the eternal Idea of the [in-common] survives its defeat in sociohistorical reality, it continues to lead the underground

spectral life of the ghosts of failed utopias which haunt future generations, patiently awaiting its next resurrection".[100] Not only do the rebels – like Foucaldian power – speak beyond themselves; the ultimate "truth" of the in-common is "eternal". In this it mirrors the divinity of kings. Edward Coke, Kantorowicz notes, "made the striking observation that the mortal king was God-made, but the immortal King, man-made".[101] Immortality was the creation of human thought, policy, relations, and myth-making. In the recurring idea of the Edenic in-common the people set up their own, rival eternity. It is not a transcendental absolute but a man-made constellation, reanimated and augmented each time the idea is actively pulled into the present by a rebel tradition that stretches down through the centuries.

1.2.3 Enter Cade

> *Drum. Enter* CADE, *Dick* [*the*] BUTCHER, *Smith the* WEAVER, *and a* SAWYER, *with infinite numbers*.
> (4.2.30)

The comically impossible stage direction upon Cade's entry is brilliantly appropriate. The ballooning absurdity of the rebels' "*infinite numbers*" reflects the bursting excess of Cade and his joyously self-contradictory language. Their limitless *energeia* seems to channel and advance the elemental forces of wind and sea that arose in Act 4, scene 1. The dark waters have become the people, who no longer murmur in the wings but flood the stage, sweeping aside the staid business of chronicle history and, handy-dandy, "Converting all [those] sounds of woe, / Into hey nonny nonny" (*Much Ado about Nothing*, 2.3.63–4).

In structural terms, the drumbeating entrance of Cade's "infinite numbers" represents the sudden intrusion of the State's invisible void – the commons. With Cade, the shadow materialises. Indeed, it struts, in its ragtag buffoonery, right to the centre of the play-world. For Badiou, this is itself political. "Politics exists (in the sense of an occurrence of equality)", when a particular group that the State "counts . . . as nothing" comes to declare its existence and "express itself".[102] What was "nothing" begins to cohere, to appear en masse. An unruly, inconsistent excess intrudes into the State's rigid unity. And this fluid and amorphous infinite, the commons, cannot be pinned down, least of all to Cade. Beholden to York, Shakespeare's Cade is never a credible representative of the people. Indeed, Shakespeare consistently renders Cade more outrageously self-contradictory,

dissolute, and compromised than the Cade of the chronicles. Fitter's point is crucial: "Modern literary critics who deny Shakespeare's populism, for associating the commons with such a Cade, miss this *dissociation* of Cade."[103] The dissociation allows the scene, and the heterogenous popular rebellion, to signify more than their risible leader might seem to allow.

We see this dissociation in the speeches of the Butcher and Weaver. They are given all the asides and use them joyfully to undercut the pontificating would-be pontiff of the people. They see through Cade's protestations of nobility and exhibit a linguistic glee in misconstruing his meanings (Cade's father is no Mortimer but a *mortarer*, "a good bricklayer" (4.2.37–8)). This indicates three things. First, that Cade's claims to legitimacy, derived from York's own dubious claims to the throne, *are not the reason the people follow him*. Second, the fact that Cade's assertions are so easily mocked by his onstage audience is part of his appeal – it is fun and liberating to take down such grandiose claims. Their merry ridicule of Cade operates as a means of ridiculing the play's more serious modes of "legitimacy". Third, the commoners' scepticism gives us an outlet for our own disbelief in Cade by making disbelief internal to the uprising. The rebels are self-reflexive in a way the nobles are not.

Above all, the rebels are fun. Shakespeare has primed us for Cade. Against a background of tired verse, flat characters, and cynical and cyclical politics, Cade flames to life – flames fanned by the mocking energy of his followers. Cade's rambunctious and ridiculous dynamism would have been all the more rousing if, as Knowles suggests, he was played by the famed comic and jigger Will Kemp.[104] What might have been terrible violence in a "realist mode turns here into festal stage knockabout, the killings into Punch-and-Judy slapstick, [so that] the very medium . . . becomes an accomplice of Cade".[105] Aided and abetted by Shakespeare, Cade steals the show from the moribund repetitiveness of noble scheming. Enthroned as a Lord of Misrule, the *common*wealth he promises is one of overspilling superabundance:

> There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves
> sold for a penny, the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops,
> and I will make it felony to drink small beer.
> . . .
> there shall be no money; all
> shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all
> in one livery that they may agree like brothers and worship
> me their lord.
>
> (4.2.61–70)

Numbers don't remain still but dance and multiply. There is something generative, expansive about Cade's feast of words, an imaginative freedom from restraint. Numbers explode in its ecstatic superabundance: seven for one, threes into tens, a limitless score. And with them explode all the calculations of the social order. But even Cade's gastronomic profuseness of swelling loaves, pots, and beer is a mirror to royal authority's love of feasting. Cade imaginatively produces the sort of superflux – overflowing to the servants – that Suffolk described in his speech about the servingman feeding from his trencher as he "feasted with Queen Margaret" (4.1.58). Of course, this is a ridiculous fantasy of plenty – of cheap food, strong beer, high days, brotherhood, and limitless freedom – and one that forgets its egalitarian beginning when Cade asks to be "worshiped" as "lord" or "king" (4.2.65, 69–70). Nonetheless, the speech not only expresses a real yearning in the hearts of his half-mocking congregation; it works in opposition to the sneering feasts of Suffolk. It opposes its cheerful absurdity to the tireless, cheerless, inhumane oppression of the nobles. It creates the impression, however brief, that this is common *life* surging from below the layers of jagged hierarchical sediment.

Marked by the shift to prose, the popular scenes briefly enact a more inclusive form of community. The scenes clearly express the "desire not to be dominated" that Machiavelli sees in the "common people", and, when compared to the clear "desire to dominate" in Shakespeare's nobility, might even hint at Machiavelli's view the people are therefore the best "guardians of . . . liberty".[106] The rebels' impossible commonwealth allows a certain type of thinking to take place. What might a society without noble oppression or hierarchy look like? And what makes the in-common impossible in the current world? The Butcher knows. The *law* makes it impossible:

BUTCHER The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.
CADE Nay, that I mean to do. Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment; that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man?

(4.2.71–5)

There is something at once lovely and terrifying about Cade's concern for the skin of the "innocent lamb" as he promises to kill poor, defenceless scholars. The duality reflects the way the collective idea(l) of the in-

common turns violent in the Cade scenes by coming to focus on an *enemy*. On the one hand, this epitomises the crowd's propensity for magical thinking. Crowd theory suggests that collective behaviour works in a compressed, "short-circuited" fashion. "The mentality is always one of 'if only': if only writing were forbidden [or we killed all the lawyers] ... milk and honey would flow."[107] On the other hand, however, any "[g]enuine politics [must] identif[y] its real enemy".[108] The rebels are lethally oversimplified, but they accurately identify a real cause of the underlying inequality. The law *does* oppose the in-common. The rich, as More puts it, operate "not only by private fraud but also by common laws ... [to] every day pluck and snatch away from the poor some part of their daily living", with the result that "they have to this their wrong and unjust dealing ... given the name of justice, yea, and that by force of a law".[109] The power of gentlemen spiders outward, entering the hands of clerks and imprinting the skins of innocent animals with the scribbled characters that magically change relations of ownership and obligation and thereby "undo a man". James I, too, knew of the ghostly power of writing: "Here I sit and gouerne it with my Pen, I write and it is done, and by a Clearke of the Councell I gouerne Scotland now, which others could not doe by the sword."[110] The first half of the play established the law as a tool for corrupt noble power; now, in Act 4 we see how it appears to the commons themselves – as a form of *conjuring*:

WEAVER He's a book in his pocket with red letters in't.
CADE Nay, then he is a conjurer.

(4.2.83–4)

For Cade and the Weaver, law and writing merge to create a magic web that imposes itself upon reality, taking from the many and conveying special, initiated status upon the few who know how to read the spells. Incomprehensible to the uninitiated, it not only makes them poor; it takes their freedom: "I did but seal once to a thing, and I was never mine own man since" (4.2.76–7). This gives their madcap exchange with the Clerk of Chartham some unexpected political ballast:

WEAVER The clerk of Chartham: he can write and read and cast account.
CADE Oh, monstrous!

(4.2.78–80)

The "conspiracy" of writing is not merely a figment of the peasant imagination; it captures the disavowed "truth" of the system. "So obvious was the connection between law and property", Hill observes, "that there were those, from Sir Thomas More onwards, who saw every government as 'nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth'."[111] Machiavelli reaches a similar conclusion:

> [Y]ou can't in good faith give the nobles what they want without doing harm to others; but you can with the people. Because the people's aspirations are more honourable than those of the nobles: the nobles want to oppress the people, while the people want to be free from oppression.[112]

Perhaps Cade's most notorious moment is his trial of Lord Saye, with its comic gold-mine of puns and malapropisms. "Well, he shall be beheaded for it ten times" (4.7.21), Cade begins his wonderfully crude arraignment. The absurdity swells almost to bursting point: "It will be proved to thy face that thou hast men about thee that usually talk of a noun and a verb and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear" (4.7.33–6). And then Cade hits Saye with something real: "Thou hast appointed justices of peace to call poor men before them about matters they were not able to answer. Moreover, thou hast put them in prison and, because they could not read, thou hast hanged them" (4.7.36–40). This "hits home", Hill notes, because it "is in fact an accurate description of the way in which 'benefit of clergy' worked. Education, which only the rich could afford, gave them class privileges which enabled Oxford and Cambridge graduates literally to get away with murder if they could stumble through the 'neck-verse'."[113] Saving Cade's "thou hast hanged" for last is a masterstroke, for it allows us to have our cake and eat it. We can laugh at Cade's mangled arraignment through fifteen lines, but then, like a flash, this element of (garbled) justice enters and transforms the speech.

Hanging was a key manifestation of the grossly unequal justice system of the time. Hill writes of the "wholesale massacres of the law courts", in which commoners were hung by the hundreds, including "for being without visible means of livelihood".[114] Whereas the wealthy could escape the noose, poor thieves were, according to the gloating English lawyer character in More's *Utopia*, "for the most part twenty hanged together upon one gallows".[115] We see in this play that the aristocratic Eleanor is merely banished while Hume and the conjurers are executed after their "trial". Over and over, the play confirms, to again quote More,

"that there be two justices: the one meet for the inferior sort of the people, going afoot and creeping low by the ground, and bound down on every side with many bands . . . the other a princely virtue . . . as to the which nothing is unlawful that it lusteth after".[116] Again, the "mob" violence is not mere anarchy but mirrors and counterpunches the abuses of the legal-political system. In Ryan's terms, Cade both acts as a "scourge" to noble abuses ("I am the besom that must sweep the court clean of such filth as thou art" (4.7.27–8)) and is ultimately "scapegoated" for them, "*as if* . . . [he were an] exceptional abomination" rather than a product of the system.[117]

The rebels' perspective on the law also reveals a fundamental incomprehension between the (separated) strata of the social (dis)order. Despite Cade's warning that "honest plain-dealing" men do not write, the Clerk proudly vaunts his ability and ascribes it to God's providence: "Sir, I thank God I have been so well brought up that I can write my name"(4.2.93–5). He simply cannot understand that this sign bears a radically different meaning to this audience. The exchange reveals the fundamental obliviousness of the ruling classes to the disenfranchisement of the commons. We see this incomprehension – signs of a failed commonwealth – in a number of exchanges, including Cade's reference to Ball's classic popular rallying cry:

CADE And Adam was a gardener.
BROTHER And what of that?

(4.2.123)

The incomprehension returns in the notorious Saye scene:

CADE Thou dost ride in a footcloth, dost thou not?
SAYE What of that?
CADE Marry, thou oughtst not to let thy horse wear a cloak
when honester men than thou go in their hose and doublets.

(4.7.41–5)

Saye's echo of Stafford's Brother's "And what of that?" is no coincidence. Both fail to understand a basic point about equality – the lack of it, the dream of it, the resentment about it – that drives the rebels. The underlying ambivalence of Cade's politics can be seen in two observations about this exchange. First, Cade's comment about the "footcloth" makes the same point about extravagant inequality that Lear makes in the storm. Second, all three of Cade's uncomprehending interlocutors lose their lives.

The ultimate outcome of the popular uprising in Act 4, scene 2, is that it renders visible – and opposable – the State's shadowy and excessive power. Stafford is here the State's representative:

STAFFORD Proclaim them traitors that are up with Cade,
That those which fly before the battle ends
May even in their wives' and children's sight
Be hanged up for example at their doors.

(4.2.162–5)

According to Badiou, "Politics has its origin in th[e] visible event of the State's being given a final notice for proving its legitimacy once more."[118] In other words, the popular event forces the State to "show itself". Stafford's brutal threat, which echoes the Homilies' threats of "shamefull deathes", gruesome tortures, and eternal damnation,[119] reveals the underlying truth of the State. For all the high-minded talk of a "commonweal", its assertion of legitimacy relies on the threat of a better fed, armed, and organised force enforcing the subservience and poverty of the commons. Know your place – silence. The representative of the State here sounds like Suffolk in his hysterical fear:

STAFFORD Rebellious hinds, the filth and scum of Kent,
Marked for the gallows, lay your weapons down!
Home to your cottages; forsake this groom.

(4.2.111–13)

Noble fear again leads to the abusive reduction of the commoners to nothing, to filth and scum. Against this scorn, Cade appeals directly to the people and by extension to the members of the theatre audience: "It is to you, good people, that I speak" (4.2.118). The basis for Cade's counter-narrative and its counter-punch is *class consciousness*. Cade's appeal effectively enlists the commons to go along with his story like cheeky schoolchildren . . . to *this* audience:

BUTCHER Nay, 'tis too true; therefore he shall be king.
WEAVER Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the
bricks are alive at this day to testify it; therefore deny it not.

(4.2.135–7)

To the clear-sighted Butcher and the Weaver, it may be that Cade's fabrications are no less fanciful than the claims of the nobility (indeed, York's claim to the throne is played for laughs in 3.1). "You have your

fanciful tales of lineage, your myths legitimating power", they seem to say; "well, we have some comically impossible tales of our own" (living bricks!). The point is not "truth", that is plain to see, but to create a counter-narrative that burlesques the legitimacy of the dominant narrative, and perhaps even legitimacy itself.

Positive political theology treats the State as omnipresent, inevitable, eternal. It is thus impossible to see, or think, the State's excessive power. Change seems impossible. In its response to popular protest, however, State "power's unknown, phantom-like virtuality is forced to transform itself . . . into a concretely expressed counter-exertion. In so doing, it loses something in the eyes of those subjected to it." "In Lacanian terms", Johnston continues, the "political event reduces the state apparatus from a Symbolic authority to an Imaginary rival, from a quasi-omnipotent mediating medium to a less-than-omnipotent external adversary".[120] Cade's disordered number face off with, and measure up to, Stafford's ordered numbers:

BUTCHER They are all in order, and march toward us.
CADE But then are we in order when we are most out of order. Come, march forward!

(4.2.173–5)

The scene ends with Cade in the ascendancy, carrying the day (and the audience) in all his zany, topsy-turvy fun. The noble pufferfish deflated, the disordered masses swell into a sort of alternative order: "march forward!" The fact that marching is a form of organised collective action suggests that Cade's rebels are not reducible to an anarchic "mob". Indeed, that order and disorder both "march" towards the other enacts something of a symbiosis or blurring between the two. Each side is far closer to its opposite than the vitriolic class abuse might imply.

1.3 From Crowd to Mob, Mob to Audience

1.3.1 *From Mass to Mob . . .*

For all its swerving energy and State-shaking power, the mass movement of people is constitutionally unstable, always about to disappear. What it offers is less an alternative structure than an opportunity to think outside the frame of the existing structures. The rebel scenes are important for thinking popular protest because they show the fragility and *impurity* of

the popular movement. One evident division, or contradiction, is the split between the rebels' very human desire to be free and their (also very human) desire to lord it over others. There is a joy and imaginative freedom in the revelry of misrule, but there is something terrible about imagining it turning itself into an inverted order. Indeed, the ultimate degeneration of the rebellion involves their attempt to become feudal overlords as they promise to behead the peers (or else take a tribute of their wealth) and possess all maidenheads (4.7.109–11).

This ambivalence is itself an important political thought. Whereas, for Badiou, the "truth" often seems "luminously clear",[121] Shakespeare shows the mixed, often mixed-up, half-serious but half-parroted, half-profound but half-ridiculous, nature of the political idea(l). Put simply, Shakespeare shows that an entity can exist simultaneously in conflicting modes. Cade can at once be a ludicrous monstrosity *and* reveal fundamental social injustices. The rebels can at once be tools for noble conspiracies, ridiculous comic relief, *and* thinkers of enduring political ideas who express something more deeply true than the pious homilies of obedience. The rebels can be simultaneously driven by a thirst for justice, a thirst for sadistic payback, the blind ecstasy of violent rage, and a Falstaffian thirst for plentiful beer and broth. It is, perhaps, just the sort of mixture of motives that one might expect in a popular uprising.

The mixture does not remain constant, however. The cruel violence escalates as the rebels progress through London. Here Cade at once commands plentiful commonality ("the Pissing Conduit run nothing but claret wine" (4.6.3)) and a crazed violent tyranny:

> And now henceforward it shall be
> treason for any that calls me other than Lord Mortimer.
> *Enter a SOLDIER, running.*
> SOLDIER Jack Cade! Jack Cade!
> CADE Knock him down there.
> *They kill him.*
>
> (4.6.4–7)

There is still a zany fun to this, but it is utterly out of control. As individuation and discrimination begin to break down, the emphasis on the communal remains – "And henceforward all things shall be in common" (4.7.16) – but it is now a sparagmos of frenzied destruction, the fountains running with claret wine, the streets covered in claret blood. The mob has truly arrived, dancing its dance of death through the streets of

London. Not that the violence is altogether thoughtless. The targets of destruction remain politically motivated: grand aristocratic residences, the centre of the legal system, "the records of the realm" (4.7.1–2, 12). Moreover, the brutal violence is hardly essential to the people. We have seen that Cade's bloody "legal carnival"[122] burlesques the bloody spectacles of official justice, in which "criminals", even those incited *by the nobles* (Hume), are killed with barely a thought. The "effect of [noble] injustice is", to quote Plato's *Republic*, "to produce hatred" (351d) and make the "harmed ... more unjust" (335c).[123] In a distorted system, Shakespeare seems to suggest, the reaction against it will be distorted too.

Nonetheless, Shakespeare manages our sympathies carefully, and despite the continued mirroring, they ebb relentlessly from the rebels. There is a brutal comedy to Cade having the severed heads of Saye and his son-in-law "kiss one another" (4.7.119), but there is only so much of this one can take. We are ready for the festive fun to end. It finally does so in Act 4, scene 8, by which point Cade's crew has entered full mob mode: "Kill and knock down!" (4.8.1–2). Finally, Buckingham and Clifford arrive as "ambassadors from the King / Unto the commons" (4.8.6–7), and, in what follows, the commons swing violently between Cade and Clifford, convinced by the last speech they hear. Up until this point, the people have not been particularly fickle. The Butcher and Weaver have been consistent both in their disparagement of Cade's claims to nobility and in their desire to cast down the actual nobility, but here these clear-sighted, sceptical class warriors are notably absent. There is only Cade and "All". The loss of individual voices and sceptical thought might be interpreted in various ways: the people fully becoming a mob, a revelation of the true nature of the people, an effect of the direct address of the people from kingly authority (which melts individuation and scepticism), a crisis of confidence and resolve in which the people realise what they've done and the risk of the gallows, a dramatic necessity required to get us back to the history of kings, and so forth. Structurally, though, it is worth noting that whereas Salisbury spoke for them, the commons are here physically present onstage, addressed directly by agents of the Crown, and thus recognised as a (dangerously) important element of the commonwealth. This raises a "what if" question that no one onstage thinks to ask. What if the aristocrats attended to the commons *all the time*? What if it didn't take an uprising for the commons' role in the commonwealth to be addressed rather than abused and knocked down? As it is, the play's answer is hardly positive:

CADE I thought
ye would never have given out these arms till you had recovered your ancient freedom. But you are all recreants and dastards and delight to live in slavery to the nobility.
(4.8.23–6)

Clifford crudely but effectively mobilises the carrot and the stick to prevail in the contest of demagoguery with Cade. The primary stick is the gallows but it is combined with the imagined threat of invasion through the improbable image of the French soon "lording it in London streets" (4.8.43). Here Clifford seems to follow Aristotle's advice that a ruler "should invent terrors, and bring distant dangers near" (*Politics* 1308a28).[124] The carrot is the impossible promise of dukedoms for all: Clifford's fanciful claims that the king will follow in his legendary father's footsteps and "conduct [them] through the heart of France / And make the meanest of [them] earls and dukes" (4.8.34–5). Tellingly, Clifford's outlandish promises mirror Cade's outrageous promises of endless abundance. Authority, in its moment of restoration, *becomes Cade-like*.

This is part of an important, but largely unnoticed, reversal in which the people become truly fickle and thoughtless not in their rebellion but in their return to the State. Given their salty scepticism about Cade's claims, it is difficult to imagine the Butcher and the Weaver falling for Clifford's brazen attempts to "hale" the people through repeated references to the glorious "Henry the Fifth" (4.8.16, 32). One might be reminded of the opening of *1 Henry VI*, in which Bedford declares: "Henry the Fifth, thy ghost I invocate" (1.1.52). By this point, true monarchy, if it ever existed, is an impossible phantom, useful only to conjure a temporary, nostalgia-based imaginative accord. The loss of the people's voices in that accord speaks to the fact that the people's reinscription in the State's mythology entails a descent into thoughtlessness. In an ironic reversal, Cade is now the only one capable of sceptical insight:

Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as
this multitude? The name of Henry the Fifth hales them to an hundred mischiefs and makes them leave me desolate.
(4.8.53–5)

Ultimately, the commons' capitulation reveals why the disruption of the uprising was necessary for Shakespeare to allow us to *think* the political situation. It again shows why "Unrest is an excellent thing." For the

people, their return to the fold involves a return to blind acceptance of State mythology. The invisible body of authority is reanimated through the ghostly power of Henry V. For the State, it is as if no political event took place. The commons' radical claims to equality and justice never happened; there were only some "temporary, correctible glitches" in the system.[125] They have been "misled" by Cade (4.8.7) and will now be "reconcile[d] . . . unto the King" (4.8.66). Authority regains control of the cadence of change, exorcizing the disruptive spirit of misrule and returning the commons to the spectral unity of the State. The void of the political situation, the commons and the in-common, becomes invisible once more. They once more count for nothing. And without their popular energy Cade loses his swaggering immensity and elemental strength. Indeed, he is soon rhetorically shrivelled by his nemesis, the gloating private landowner Alexander Iden: "Set limb to limb, and thou art far the lesser; / Thy hand is but a finger to my fist" (4.10.44–5). Meanwhile, Iden is enriched and knighted for doing precisely the opposite of what he claims: "I seek not to wax great by others' waning" (4.10.18). The bourgeois follows the nobles in enriching himself at the expense of the commons.

The audience's thought is not stupefied, but sparked, by seeing the extinguishment of thought in the crowd onstage. For the audience, the restoration of unthinking acceptance is itself a *revelation of the State*. It reveals to us, if not to the commons, the true nature of the State's power: its mythological resources, which are used to marshal popular consent to the obscuration of power. Shakespeare goes out of his way to reveal power's hollow rhetorical strategies. Not only did the concrete threat of force (Stafford) diminish the State; even its *success* in making power phantom-like once more, through the combination of threats and ideological interpellation (Henry V and earldoms for all), seems paltry. One can't help wondering, is this the best they can do? Hence Fitter's argument that Shakespeare was here "educat[ing] his audiences *against* manipulation by official political rhetorics".[126] Clifford's farcical, Cade-like success ends up distancing the State for the audience, thereby providing us room to discriminate and judge. Indeed, towards the end of the play, York almost explicitly conflates the mystical underpinnings of power with a form of corrupt and violent acquisition: "Ah, *sancta maiestas*! Who would not *buy* thee dear?" (5.1.5, emphasis mine).

1.3.2 Mob to Audience

The "popular voice" in this play is not a solid, tablet-like declaration but a precarious and impermanent happening that rises in fleeting moments

only to vanish once more. A "popular politics" is a haunting idea, never quite realised onstage. Cade's dismissal of the onstage crowd as lightly blown feathers seems to call for a future revolutionary audience that is yet to exist. There is thus a sort of latency about "the people" or "the commons". They await a moment that does not arrive within the play-world. Indeed, both conservative and progressive critics have long recognised that the rebellious commons have no past model or present leadership to instruct them in a successful popular revolution.[127] There is no way out for Cade and his followers, no "socially useful" outcome that can result from questioning the State's legitimacy. Popular energies and political ideas remain trapped in a moment of structural impasse. It may be that this aligns with aspects of our own current moment, in which we feel on the cusp of something, some uprising, revolution, or profound disaster, but no alternative system quite reveals itself. Waiting need not be hopeless, however, but may be directed towards a change on the horizon. Hill notes the latency of early modern theatre itself, which, "[d]espite the censorship . . . managed to open up for discussion many issues which were to come to the surface after 1640".[128] The stage's relentless questioning of the State's mythical underpinnings, calling attention to its structural inconsistencies and silences, asking questions that the State didn't want to be asked, undermined the legitimacy of the State and opened up new horizons for thought. It introduced a foreignness into the political situation that helped prepare the ground for the English Revolution.[129]

What is challenging about Shakespeare, however, is that he registers how this foreignness *does not necessarily lead anywhere*. The idea of latency is nothing if not precarious. It relies on an imaginative faith that does not sit easily with the objective, historicist bent of criticism. So much of the attention on both Cade and real-life protests is on questions such as "Have they gone too far?," "Is this of practical benefit?," "Is it *useful*?" The implication is that if freedom is not achieved or settled, it is nothing; it is crushed or "contained" by the patriarchal State. Hence Benjamin's claim that "historicism", like Elizabethan political theology, "sympathize[s] . . . with the victor".[130] In its modern academic form, sometimes apparent in New Historicism's State-focused respect for Power, the historian may *regret* the victory, and mourn the loss it entails, but nonetheless reinscribes it.

Shakespeare's rebel scenes show that this is not the *dramatic* truth, or at least not all of it. Early modern theatre's political power resides not in its often conservative endings but in its ambivalent and powerful ability to evoke and inspire alternative modes of thinking: to conjure what is not; "to brush history against the grain" and thereby alienate the history of the

victor.[131] Such alienations and conjurings tie into Badiou's idea that genuine political thought does not simply name "*what exists*" but entails "an overbalancing [*bascule*] of what exists into what *can* exist, or from the known towards the unknown".[132] Shakespeare's play doesn't posit the existence of a more just society; it conjures it imaginatively and half-seriously within the tragic march of history. The term "overbalancing" suggests both the potentially absurd overreach of this exercise – overdone, too far, unrealistic, useless – and its potential tipping power: that it might tip the "real world" from its axis and into another mode.

Temporal failure need not negate the intellectual force of these conjurings or the imaginative potential of the egalitarian ideal. The idea of the in-common remains a political thought that traverses history from Adam to Augustine to Ball, from 1381 to 1450, 1594, and beyond. It designates a possibility – a "what could be" – that remains thinkable, graspable, down through the centuries, waiting to be reactivated or resurrected in a new present. Or, to quote André Breton: "Rebellion is its own justification, completely independent of the chance it has to modify the state of affairs that gives rise to it. It's a spark in the wind, but a spark in search of a powder keg."[133]

If a political or theatrical event remains accessible after its flash recedes, it can only be to the amorphous mass of its audience. Žižek is fond of making reference to Kant's suggestion that the French Revolution's "true significance does not reside in what actually went on in Paris – much of which was terrifying and included outbursts of murderous passion – but ... in how this reality appeared to observers and in the hopes thus awakened in them". The Revolution, Kant writes, "arouses in the heart of all spectators ... a taking of sides according to desires". The empirical sequence of events fades into history, but the idea, the spirit, and the enthusiasm it generates "belongs to eternity".[134] The recursive, almost pathological, return in Elizabethan England to rebels like Cade signals a fearful awareness that what mattered was not what actually happened, but how it could inspire the hopes and imaginings of future "crowds". Do we not see this with the almost hysterical responses of governments to protesting crowds in our own day? The fear is palpable. Not the fear that this particular one-day protest did anything particularly damaging, but that the sight of the crowd moving, pushing against the existing structures, standing up against the threat of oppressive countermeasures, will *inspire* the potential crowds still at home. What matters is less this – this mass of people moving down the street – than *that*, the even greater mass watching as spectators: the potential mass movement of the movement's *audience*. We are the ghostly third term, the many-headed powder keg.

In the theatre, too, political thought does not simply lie in situ (in the play-world); it also arises as a metatheatrical (or indeed metapolitical) result of the whole theatrical imaginary process. It emerges, if it emerges, at the ghostly cross-roads between two worlds. It forms, if it forms, in another shadowy mass. The many-headed audience. This faceless crowd, of unknown composition and persuasion, is both the condition of the theatre, its raison d'être, and an outsider, unstaged and voiceless. It is the "void" from which theatre draws its power. The theatre, like the king, like the people, speaks beyond itself. The mystical body to which it speaks – stretching across time and ever-changing – possesses its own obscure, conjuring power. The audience(s) can conjure other worlds by mediating between the play-world and their own. The audience thereby gives reality to the utopian dreams that might seem to be "contained" by State power. It gives the popular movement a reference in thought that is outside its own political impasse. It evokes another plane of reality: our world, but also the worlds we may imagine when we see possible worlds (or dreams) crushed within the play-world. The gap between worlds means we do not quite share the "common sense" of the play's authority figures. It makes the inevitability of failure less authoritative, less of a clincher. There may be no hope for the uprising in *their* world, but Shakespeare is not writing for them. In the theatre, there is always "another world" – ours. But also "theirs": the unborn worlds of audiences to come.

Perhaps the greatest compliment one can give Shakespeare's so-called mob scenes in this play is that they force thinking. They ask us to think the dialectical tensions between power and its void, mob and order, the ambivalent split between outrageous violence and the call for justice. The State, on the other hand, demands our laziness, our passive and unquestioning acceptance of "authority", unity, belonging – the mythic coalescence of State and People. The State asks us to rush to classify inconsistency as pure chaos or unthinking violence, to categorise the crowd as a mob, and thus to avoid thought. It asks us to forget that our now sacrosanct political order arose from violent rebellion. By introducing a violent and risible foreignness into the situation, Cade and his rebellious crew form that rare part of the play that prompts us to think the relation between mythic authority and the material mass of people.