

*The Theatre of the Multitude***Introduction**

When London's public theatres began to emerge during the 1570s they did so during a period of rapid development and growth for that city and against a backdrop of widely circulating fears and incipient threats to the state over food security, public health, crime and the 'evils' of vagrancy, and the multiple disorders associated with indigence. To understand the scale of the socio-economic problems that confronted London's municipal authority at the time, one need merely remark that between 1520 and 1600 London's population expanded from 60,000 to 250,000,¹ when it accounted for 5 per cent of the entire population of England, and produced a city whose size was 'without parallel in contemporary Europe'.² By 1650, the population had risen further to an estimated 400,000 people. It is in relation to this wider context of demographic crisis provoked by an unprecedented growth and urban concentration of population that this chapter seeks to understand the emergence of the discourse on the theatre in early modern England, and to discover its principal 'object of enunciation'.³ That object was not simply the theatre per se, but the theatre given the nature of its audience and its possible effect upon them. If the theatres were immensely popular among those new inhabitants who swelled the retinue of the city's suburbs, it is also true to say that it was those selfsame inhabitants as much as, if not more so than, the presence of theatres in the city that provoked the wrath of its citizens, its governors, aldermen, Justices and magistrates. What London's first theatres produced was thus far more than a merely religious controversy over the 'morality' of the

¹ D.B. Grigg, *Population Growth and Agrarian Change: An Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 95.

² Robert Allan Houston, *The Population History of Britain and Ireland 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 20–21.

³ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 194.

stage, as is commonly believed: they produced the first articulation of that modern discourse belonging to a newly emergent field of government.

This is to say that the discourse on theatre belongs to a discourse and indeed a practice of government that is very much discovered for the first time during this period. The pervasiveness of the new discourse on governance is reflected not only in the way it was used to condemn the stage; it was also invoked in arguments by those who sought to defend it. In the anonymous pamphlet petitioning for the reopening of the theatres in 1643, a year after their closure, the attempt is made to reassure government that theatres pose no threat to the Commonwealth and precisely because they themselves are already circumscribed by government. For these pamphleteers, the governmental suppression or restraint of the stage is unnecessary and heavy-handed, since the theatres, unlike the bear gardens, which incidentally remained open to ‘rioting companions resorting thither with as much freedom as formerly’, are ‘well reformed’ and the ‘disturbers of the publike peace . . . dare not be seen in our civill and well-governed theatres, where none use to come but the best of the Nobility and Gentry’.⁴ The stage, notwithstanding the specious sanctity of this proclamation, is something that can and ought to be subject to governance – something that both detractors and supporters agreed upon, even if for opposing reasons, with divergent motivations, and with conflicting ends in mind.

It is by no means simply the factual problems associated with population growth that account for the development of the discourse of government, however. The abundance of governmental discourses in the late Renaissance testifies to something else, something discernible only beneath the level of apparent fact: that an epistemic upheaval had occurred that began to transform the very concept of government and the way it was to be practiced. The sudden profusion of discourse about government not only signalled a shift in how government was to be thought; it also pointed to an underlying event that made the very appearance of a modern discourse of government possible at the same time as it invalidated a concept of government that had dominated the West over the previous millennia. The theatre was more than circumstantially connected to this event. During the early modern period, the image of government frequently invoked the metaphor of ‘*theatrum mundi*’ – the idea, as discussed in the introduction, that terrestrial government rested on a divine order

⁴ *The Actor’s Remonstrance, or Complaint: for the Silencing of Their Profession, and Banishment from Their Severall Play-houses* (London, 1643).

where the government of the world was viewed as a vast celestial theatre. *Theatrum mundi* represented the very image of order, fixity and security. It consigned to man both his place and his purpose, so that 'in this most glorious theatre', as Calvin was to put it in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 'he may be a spectator [of the works of God]'.⁵ Order is thus made visible as theatrical spectacle: 'being placed in this most beautiful theatre, let us not decline to take pious delight in the clear and manifest works of God.'⁶ But order is not simply divinely ordained spectacle; it is also to be observed (and reflected) in the social hierarchy. For Thomas Elyot, in *The Book Named the Govenour*,

Forasmuch as Plebs in Latin, and Commoners in English, be words only made for discrepance of degrees, whereof procedeth order: which in things as well natural as supernatural, hath ever had such pre-eminence, that thereby the incomprehensible majesty of God, as it were by a bright beam of a torch or candle, is declared to the blind inhabitants of this world. Moreover, take away order from all things, what should then remain? Certes, nothing finally, except . . . Chaos, which of some is expounded, a confuse mixture.⁷

And yet it is precisely this theatrical image of the government of the world that will be increasingly called into question during the period, just as order will be endlessly invoked and interrogated within the theatre itself. One small remark of Bacon's is perhaps sufficient to demonstrate at this point how easy it was, by the early seventeenth century, to puncture the bloated pretensions that had prolonged and maintained the cosmology underpinning the image of theatre conveyed in the *theatrum* metaphor throughout the medieval period and well into the Renaissance: 'But men must know,' he wrote, 'that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and angels to be the lookers on.'⁸ What is signified here is as radical as it is subtle. In Bacon, it is as though the theatre metaphor has suddenly been stood on its head and with such alacrity that the whole of reality has been carried along with it, as though in a state of dumbfounded stupefaction.

Except it is precisely because it is not reality, but its 'idolium', that Bacon's commonsense locution '[b]ut men must know . . .' is able to seize, with such apparent ease, the world by its roots in order to shake the entire

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1561), p. 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷ Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Govenour* ((London: John Hernaman and Ridgeway and Sons, 1834 [1564]), p. 3.

⁸ Francis Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', book II in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 2 (London, 1740), p. 508.

edifice, in order to strike at its very foundations. 'But men must know . . .' – as if they did not already – that the world in which they had for so long laboured was nothing but a sham, an empty husk from which nothing of any real worth could ever grow. Where does Bacon's 'great instauration' leave the figure of 'man' if not thrown back upon his world and his own finite resources; and where does this leave the theatre if not, through a complete inversion of its meaning, reduced to the hollow of a world that has been abandoned to itself? No longer does the thought of the world answer to those fixed and eternal forms that Bacon calls the 'shadows of resemblance'; one must abolish those misconceptions,

which have crept into men's minds from the various dogmas of peculiar systems of philosophy, and also from the perverted rules of demonstration, and these we denominate idols of the theatre: for we regard all the systems of philosophy hitherto received or imagined, as so many plays brought out and performed, creating fictitious and theatrical worlds.⁹

For this reason, not only does the discourse on theatre emerge during a period of profound epistemic crisis; in many respects it articulates that crisis at its most extreme point of torsion. It is in this sense that the theatre, understood in metaphorical terms, as a paradigm of government, as a 'Platonic theatre', cannot escape the collapse of that regime of knowledge to which it had owed its prestige during the middle ages. At the same time, the period sees the emergence of a new kind of theatre – the public theatres that grew up around the outer fringes of London – that increasingly became the locus of concerns over population that would be central to the new logic of government, which in many respects that epistemic crisis necessitated.

My aim, over the ensuing pages, will be to flesh out some of these wider issues so as to uncover the peculiar discursive shifts that inform the conceptual and historical emergence of the modern discourse on the stage at its point of origin. The chapter is concerned not so much with the practicalities of governing the stage, which I shall consider in later chapters, but with drawing a connection between the development of government (emerging as a specific problem in the modern period) and the impact such a revolution would have on the image of the theatre at the time. What the chapter describes is not just how that image responded to what might be called the new 'logic of government' that began to assert itself over the

⁹ Francis Bacon, 'Novum Organum Scientiarum', in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 4 ([1620] 1815), p. 16.

social and specifically urban sphere during the period – but how and why, at a certain point in its history, a profound transformation occurred in the way the metaphor of the theatre was experienced, a transformation whose meaning I suggest draws the theatre into the orbit of a new ‘mentality’ of government and which produces the first articulation of the modern discourse on the theatre.

Theatrum mundi and the ‘Theatre of the Multitude’

So far, I have suggested that there are two images through which the theatre was thought during the Renaissance, and whose juxtaposition makes visible the principal theme of this study at its point of emergence. The first image is nowhere more explicitly asserted than in what is perhaps the most famous theatre of the age – the Globe Theatre – and relates Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre to the Renaissance commonplace, the ‘theatre of the world’. It is referenced in the poem that provides the preface to Thomas Heywood’s *An Apology for Actors*, written in 1612 – his defence of the English stage in response to the slandering of the theatre by its critics:

[Then] our play’s begun,
 When we are borne, and to the world first enter,
 And all finde *Exits* when their parts are done.
 If then the world a Theatre present,
 As by the roundnesse it appears most fit,
 Built with starre-galleries of hye ascent,
 In which Jehove doth as spectator sit,
 And chiefe determiner to applaud the best,
 And their indevoures crowne with more then merit;
 But by their evill actions doomes the rest,
 To end disgrac’t, whilst others praise inherit.
 He that denies then Theatres should be,
 He may as well deny a world to me.¹⁰

Although Heywood’s poem does not mention the Globe Theatre explicitly, it is easy to draw the connection, as Frances Yates once did, for without doubt the Globe Theatre makes reference to the sacred drama intended by the theatrical *topos* as described here and, by implication at least, is meant to share in its piety. As such, Yates argued that the Globe Theatre must be grasped as a ‘religious and moral emblem’.¹¹ Just as

¹⁰ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Garland, 1973 [1612]).

¹¹ Frances Yates, *Theatre of the World* (Oxon: Routledge, 1987), p. 162.

Heywood 'sees the cosmic theatre as the great moral testing ground on which all men play the parts of their lives in the presence of God',¹² so must the Globe, according to this image, conform to the selfsame moralism with which the metaphor was imbued after two millennia of Christian and stoic thought. With Jacques's melancholic speech on the senselessness of life in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare himself would appear to endorse the basic precepts of the Christian Stoic tradition, with its disdain for common and worldly life. The world is a stage and men and women are merely players upon it. The Globe Theatre itself provides verification of Yates's interpretation. Its motto, which adorned the entrance to the building, was 'Totus mundus agit histrionem'. Moreover, as Ernst Curtius first pointed out, it was borrowed from the *Policraticus*, placing the theatre 'under the banner of the medieval English humanist' John of Salisbury, who it is reckoned was the first to coin the phrase 'theatre of the world'.¹³ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Yates should have arrived at the view that the Globe Theatre epitomised the highest sensibility of the Renaissance, where *theatrum mundi* still 'expressed the world in its groundplan'.¹⁴ In the image of the Globe is a theatre 'the plan of which expressed in simple geometrical symbolism the proportions of the cosmos and of man, the world music and the human music'. It is for this reason that the stage of the Globe is, in her estimation, 'worthy' of Shakespeare's 'genius', for it articulates 'man's destiny in its cosmic setting'.¹⁵

But there is also another image of the Globe Theatre that is diametrically at odds with the presentation of the theatre regarded as the embodiment of the Renaissance and Neo-Platonic vision of the cosmos. It is located in the image of the audiences who attended public theatres such as the Globe Theatre, and which I will designate 'theatre of the multitude'. In fact Yates's image of the theatre already contains this other image with which it is correlated, an image that is conjured up only so that it may be quarantined: it is the image of a theatre 'disturbed by crowds of people'.¹⁶ It is this other theatre, busy, bustling and teeming with life and bodies, where the theatre of the multitude is understood as existing in opposition to that serene image of an eternal and immobile theatre of the world. The theatre of the multitude is theatre viewed from the perspective of the groundling, thus in relation to the milieu of its audience – evoking an

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹³ Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 141.

¹⁴ Yates, *Theatre of the World*, p. 171. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 134–35. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

image of the theatre where performance and actors are autochthonous. I shall return to this second image later on, more thoroughly examining it in using contemporary depictions of those auditors who attended London's public theatres, but in order to do this I would like to first provide a context for the discussion by tarrying a little longer with the idea that the theatre represents 'the world'. First, because one can truly understand an image only once one has grasped what was involved in arriving at its discursive construction, and second, because in order to make way for the second image, in order to understand historically how it resonates more widely with governmental discourses, one must understand the significant transformations in the underlying political rationality of the period. What shall be seen is that the image of the theatre of the multitude, utterly at variance with that transcendent order upon which the first image rests, renders the former meaning of the theatre metaphor increasingly anachronistic and, finally, illegible for the modern age.

It is not just that the image of the theatre is – in this way - deprived of its explicative power, according to which the affairs of men, inserted into the mystical correspondences of macrocosm and microcosm, came to resemble God's providential plan by conforming to preordained notions of hierarchy and order. It also, thereby, signifies the key problem that will be central to the embryonic discourse on the stage as it emerges during the modern period: if, for the modern period, the stage represents a pre-eminently governmental problem, it is not simply because, for the early moderns, it represented the crisis of transcendence, provoked by that vast epistemic rupture that inaugurates modernity. More precisely, it embodies the consequent problem of *immanence* – that is to say, of a world restricted to material and sensuous existence, defined by economy, labour and the market, that will increasingly characterise the conditions of life in the modern epoch. How governmentality slowly emerged as a response to that problem of immanence, and how the stage came to be caught in its web of stratagems, techniques and discursive structures, is the subject of this book. For now, I simply wish to distinguish this new dimension of governance by designating it according to the element within which it moves and where it becomes operative: the logic of government, insofar as it will be conditioned by the field of immanence.

One can quickly understand the significance of this new logic of immanent government by contrasting it with what it is not: the prevailing theory of government during the period in which political power was thought in terms of the exercise of sovereignty. Seventeenth-century political theory was almost exclusively concerned with debating the extent

and limits of the Prince's power, the authority and prerogatives of the sovereign, and the nature of constituent power – that is, the extra-judicial rights of the monarch to change or amend the constitution. The theory of sovereignty reaches its clearest formulation during the century in the doctrine of absolutism. It is succinctly summarised by Jean Bodin in his compressed verdict: 'This power is absolute and sovereign, for it has no other condition than what is commanded by the law of God and of nature.'¹⁷ But insofar as the theory of sovereignty conceives political power through the rubric of the legitimacy of the sovereign, as determined by the personage of the Prince and his relation to the law ('a king cannot be subject to the laws'¹⁸), it is quite incapable of accounting for the discovery of an entirely new object of government, and therefore of that entirely new dimension of governance of concern here. It is an object that, falling 'beneath the sovereign', as Foucault writes, 'eludes him, and this is not the design of Providence or God's Laws but the labyrinths and complexities of the economic field'.¹⁹ What this signifies, in its broadest sense, is that in contrast to transcendent power, configured around the unassailability of the king grasped as the terrestrial representative of the divine, what is announced with the new governmentality, with government by 'means of economy', is the development of *immanent power*. Still, if the discovery of a form of power operative in the field of immanence required a wholesale transformation of the way in which government in the Classical period would need to be exercised, then it is necessary to ask: what exactly constitutes the 'labyrinthine' field of economy? And what, specifically, does that nascent governmentality, which circulates this new and unfamiliar form of immanent power, uncover as the objects of governance?

Theatres of Immanence: The New Logic of Government

Although the immanent turn would eventually come to define the functioning of the modern state, nevertheless, already something like an immanent logic of government had begun to develop during this period that would entirely displace the older cosmological conception of government. To understand the crisis that the immanent turn provoked in the way government was conceived, I would like to briefly turn to the scandal

¹⁷ Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, trans. Julian H. Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics, Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, trans. G. Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 292.

of Machiavellianism that swept through Europe during the late 1500s and 1600s. What lay at the heart of this scandal is succinctly expressed by Machiavelli's opponent, the ex-Jesuit Giovanni Botero, who claimed to have been 'moved to indignation . . . to find that this barbarous mode of government had won such acceptance'. What Botero, and many others like him, found objectionable in Machiavelli's short tract, *The Prince*, was its advocacy of a form of government that was 'brazenly opposed to Divine Law'.²⁰ Although he was opposed to it, Botero did not simply reject the Machiavellian doctrine; on the contrary, in his book *Della ragion di stato*, published in 1589, he sought to improve upon it, remedying what he saw as its immoral and disreputable aspects, at the same time as recognising that in 'reason of state', as he called it, Machiavellianism could be adapted to the new conditions of government that had begun to develop during the late Renaissance. It is likely that Botero's intervention was a belated acknowledgement that the impact of reason of state was irreversible: as he concedes in his dedicatory epistle, it was already 'a constant subject of discussion' in the courts of Europe. Noel Malcolm has suggested that, notwithstanding the prevailing demonisation of Machiavelli, a 'great popular vogue' for reason of state had already swept across Europe, influencing the development of political thought.²¹ If it was a vogue, however, it would have far-reaching consequences – not just on the way it transformed the practices of government, but in terms of what it signified for the way government itself was to be conceived. In order to highlight the wider significance of reason of state, with its bearing on the period's sense of epistemic crisis, it is worth noting Foucault's perceptive observation that reason of state contains no 'reference to a natural order, an order of the world, fundamental laws of nature, or even to a divine order. Nothing of the cosmos, nature, or the divine is present in the definition of *raison d'Etat*.'²²

In other words, what the doctrine of reason of state signifies is the emergence of a logic of government founded not on transcendent 'order' but on immanent or 'worldly' principles. It is a doctrine that is quite unconcerned with questions regarding the legitimacy or otherwise of the sovereign, and which pays little or scant attention to the theological and

²⁰ Giovanni Botero, *Reason of State*, trans. P.J. Waley and D.P. Waley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), p. xiv.

²¹ Noel Malcolm, *Reason of State, Propaganda, and the Thirty Years' War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 92. I am indebted to Malcolm's nuanced reading of reason of state in this section.

²² Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population, Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. G. Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 257.

moral foundations of the political order. Consequently, reason of state must be differentiated from the essentially juristic concept of sovereignty, where the action of government aims at the *summum bonum* or the *bonum commune* of theological thought, and requires that the Prince act on the basis of what is most virtuous ('If advantage is at odds with honesty, it is only reasonable that honor should prevail').²³ In reason of state, by contrast, government is determined not by 'honestum', but by interest: by what is most practicable or useful given the strategic interests of the state. For the first time, politics, as Malcolm expresses it, 'becomes decipherable and legible'.²⁴ In this sense, government founded on the interest of the Prince or the state implies a rather more pragmatic and flexible approach, one adapted to the exigencies of governing, which eschews the pious concern for incontrovertible principles of law: 'in the decisions made by princes interest will always override every other argument.'²⁵

For instance, Justus Lipsius, in a work that would be translated into English in 1594, explicitly rejected the idea that government must be founded upon theoretical precepts. Government, and specifically civil government, requires 'experience' of the world: 'we give best credit to things tryed by experience.'²⁶ Although Lipsius was concerned to develop a concept of practical government that combined *honestum* with a notion of interest, nevertheless, the emphasis placed on experience suggests that it matters little whether one's precepts are good or bad since if they cannot be 'determined by art', that is to say, if they cannot be made practicable, then they are 'without the reach of wisdom'.²⁷ This is not to say that reason of state should be viewed as simply an attempt to communicate the practicalities of government; rather, it signals, in Malcolm's terms, a different evaluative standpoint; one that reflected 'something quasi-normative, a value, a ground for justification – not a moral value, however, but one which operated on a different basis (profit, utility) and became most noticeable precisely when it conflicted with morality'.²⁸ The question asked is not what is right, given the conscience of the Prince, but what is of benefit to states; what is to their advantage – in short, what should fall under the 'interest of the state'?

²³ Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, p. 33. ²⁴ Malcolm, *Reason of State*, p. 96.

²⁵ Botero, *Reason of State*, p. 41; cited in Malcolm, *Reason of State*, p. 94.

²⁶ Justus Lipsius, *Six Books of Politickes or Civil Doctrine*, trans. William Jones (London: William Ponsonby, 1594), p. 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59. ²⁸ Malcolm, *Reason of State*, pp. 93–94.

The answer to these questions is, quite simply, economy. René de Lucinge thus proclaims: ‘we shall therefore concern ourselves only with profit, which we may call “interest”.’²⁹ While Lipsius would argue: ‘Ciuil life consisteth in societie, societie in two things, Traffique and Gouvernement.’³⁰ The early modern notion of economy, or ‘traffic’, should not be understood in terms of the narrow meaning that characterises the activities of contemporary economists, who develop highly speculative mathematical models and rarefied market products. Economy, here, belongs to a different heritage, and should be grasped in relation to something rather more concrete and practical, as signifying ‘a level of reality and a field of intervention for government’.³¹ It is summarised by Guillaume de la Perrière’s axiom: ‘Government is the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end.’³² In short: government will be grasped as economic government, and economy, correlatively, as the government of ‘men and things’.³³

There is not a thing of more importance to increase a state, and to make it both populous of Inhabitants, and rich of all good things; than the Industrie of men, and the multitude of Artes; of which, some are necessary; some commodious for a ciuile life; others some for a Pompe and ornament; and others for delicacy, wantonnes, and entertainment of idle persons by the meanes whereof doth follow, concourse both of mony and of people, that Labour and worke, or trade that is wrought, or minister and supply matter to Laborers and worke-men; or buy, or sell, or transport from one place to another, the artificious and cunning parts of the wit and hand of man.³⁴

It is in relation to this wide-ranging economic rationality that reason of state can be said to initiate a new logic of government in which the monarch will no longer be the primary point of reference or the centre of political gravity. Instead, government will be directed towards a new set of objects that are to be acted upon in the interests of the prudent management of the state’s resources. The ends of government can therefore no longer be seen as external to the principality; as Mitchell Dean writes, they are now wholly ‘immanent to the objects of government’.³⁵ As a consequence of the collapse into immanence, government will find its necessity exclusively in the mundane objects of day-to-day existence with which it is concerned.

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 94. ³⁰ Lipsius, *Six Bookes*, p. 4.

³¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 95. ³² Cited in *ibid.*, p. 96. ³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Giovanni Botero, *A Treatise Concerning the Causes of the Magnificencie and Greatness of Cities*, trans. Robert Peterson (London, 1606), p. 48.

³⁵ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality, Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 2010), p. 104.

Seen in terms of these immanent objects of government, at the heart of reason of state, in fact, one finds, broadly, two interconnected objects of fundamental concern to government, but also, in relation to these two objects, two corresponding *limits* on government. One will be defined broadly by economic activity – the government of ‘things’, which it will be the duty of governments to encourage rather than frustrate, hinder or impede – as is discovered through the influence of mercantilism on early modern government (economic activity must be given the greatest possible latitude and thus be subject to *less* government intervention). The other object might be termed ‘demographic’, the ‘government of men’, where instead there should be rather *more* government. That men require more government has, without a doubt, everything to do with the expansion of the new urban population. In this sense, government becomes, for reason of state theorists, nothing but its own necessity: a necessity founded on the need to preserve order in the face of man’s vicious inclinations – and vices. To comprehend the nature of this second limit on the art of government is to understand in what sense demography defines a unique problematic of government; it is to understand that demography becomes an intramural problem for government, core to its very *raison d’être*. One finds this idea in Hobbes, who writes that since ‘the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions . . . in the wel governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions, in order to their Peace and Concord’.³⁶ What this signifies for the new logic of government, which exercises political power in an increasingly secular sense, is an understanding that the art of government corresponds to a set of knowledges, teachings and practices that will inevitably bring government, perhaps for the first time, into the closest possible proximity to the governed. To govern the people, one must know them. Lipsius offers precisely this advice to Princes: ‘Whosever then thou art, that desirest to attaine to wisdom and dexterity in matter of gouernment, thou oughtest to knowe the nature of the common people, and by what meanes the same may be discreetly gouerned.’³⁷ While the consequences of ignoring such advice is developed in an exemplary way in Bacon’s short essay *On Seditions and Troubles*, which opens with the startling, one might even say ‘Shakespearean’ image: ‘Shepherds of people had need know the calendars of tempests in state.’³⁸

³⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, cited in Malcolm, *Reason of State*, p. 115.

³⁷ Lipsius, *Sixte Bookes*, p. 67.

³⁸ Francis Bacon, ‘On Seditions and Troubles’, in *Essays Moral, Economical and Political* (London: T. Payne 1800), p. 63.

The significance of this issue is dramatically exemplified in the second part of Ulysses's speech in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, where Ulysses, after having expounded on the cosmological foundations of a secure political order, reflects on the principal cause of disorder in states:

... but when the planets,
 In evil mixture, to disorder wander,
 What plagues, and what portents, what mating,
 What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
 Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
 The unity and married calm of states
 Quite from their fixture!

It is not, for all its deployment of cosmological images, the itinerancy of nomadic planets that causes cosmic cataclysm and disorder to befall and corrupt states, according to Ulysses's speech. Quite the opposite: something rather more mundane lies behind the collapse of order, and Ulysses swiftly exchanges the lofty imagery of the cosmos for rather more terrestrial imagery in order to vividly envisage the symptoms and causes of the degeneracy that gnaws away at the very foundations of states. What corrupts both order and degree is something quite unknown to either: a 'democratic' appetite – those vices and inclinations whose energy and dynamic is powerful enough to consume states, and whose evil influence, if left untended, results in the malaise of that theatrocratic *lack* of government which produces the 'government of the ungovernable':

... O! When degree is shak'd,
 Which is the ladder to all high designs,
 The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
 Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
 The primogenitive and due of birth,
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
 But by degree, stand in authentic place?
 Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And, hark, what discord follows! Each thing meets
 In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
 And make a sop of all this solid globe:
 Strengths should be lord of imbecility,
 And the rude son should strike his father dead:
 Force should be right; or, rather, right and wrong
 (Between whose endless jar justice resides)

Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
 Then everything includes itself in power,
 Power into will, will into appetite;
 And appetite, an universal wolf,
 So doubly seconded with will and power,
 Must make perforce an universal prey,
 And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
 This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
 Follows the choking.
 And this neglect of degree it is,
 That by a pace goes backward, in a purpose
 It hath to climb. The general's disdain'd
 By him one step below; he, by the next;
 That next, by him beneath: so every step,
 Exempl'd by the first pace that is sick
 Of his superior, gnaws to an envious fever
 Of pale and bloodless emulation (I.iii)

What is expressed in Ulysses's discourse is not only fearfulness at the prospect of a looming collapse of order, but also an acute recognition that it is a collapse into a state of pure immanence. There is, to be more precise, at the level of its governing statements, a profound sense of epistemic crisis underpinning this speech and that is why one finds such an intense anxiety over the repugnant prospects for the once well-governed state. After all, the condition of immanence is unequivocally equated by Ulysses with the disorders and injustices that arise from the emancipation of earthly (democratic) appetites.

Nevertheless, the question that reason of state will pose, in response to the crisis of immanence that confronts the political order in the late Renaissance, will be entirely practical and realist in orientation: given that the government of modern states obliges us to rethink the art of government around the problem of governing men, how might one nonetheless preserve and secure order in society? How, in short, *should* one 'govern men'? This pre-eminently pragmatic question in no way concerns itself with the problem of whether degree is legitimately founded or not, any more than it will, conversely, attempt to answer the question by proposing the solution of democratic equality through the greater participation of the majority of men (and women) in the affairs of government. For reason of state, order still entails degree. What differentiates it is not that it develops a different concept of order founded on egalitarian principles; order, degree, hierarchy are to remain intact. Rather, what it initiates is a new logic of governance in which order, hierarchy and degree are to be

preserved on immanent grounds, that is, *by means of* the ‘government of men’. It is precisely this necessity of governing men – the common populace – that brings me, at this point, back to the discourse on the theatre and to the task of paying off my earlier debt by now interrogating the second image of the theatre, the ‘theatre of the multitude’.

Formation of the Early Modern Discourse on Theatre

A Discursive Orientation: The Actor’s Scourge, or, ‘Puritan’ Manners of Speaking

There is a tendency in scholarly debates around the developing discourse on the theatre during the English Renaissance to characterise it primarily in terms of Puritan opposition to the stage.³⁹ G. Blakemore Evans nuances this view somewhat by suggesting broadly two kinds of ‘anti-theatrical’ antagonists:

the attacks were limited basically to two groups: those who objected to plays as incitements to vice of all kinds and who found their voice in a number of Puritan extremists (men like John Northbrooke (c. 1579), Stephen Gosson (1579), Philip Stubbes (1583), and William Rankins (1587); and those like the City Fathers (the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London and other towns), who saw plays and playhouses as breeding grounds of civil riots and disease.⁴⁰

It would be wrong, no doubt, to dismiss the claim that a large number of anti-theatrical statements were issued by those whose fulminations against the stage were expressive of sincerely held Puritan convictions. Nevertheless, it is moot how far one can sustain such a sharp distinction between the City fathers and those Puritan ideologues who objected to the stage. The City fathers were staunch Sabbatarians, after all, while it is believed that Stephen Gosson was hired by them to write his *School of Abuse*. Margot Heinemann has persuasively argued that there are innumerable ways of complicating the idea that anti-theatricalism during the period is motivated simply by the Tertullian moralism of a group of religious fanatics. ‘To see all Puritans as automatically hostile in principle to the theatre and the arts generally is,’ she writes, ‘to misunderstand the depth

³⁹ One noteworthy example of this tendency, of course, is Jonas Barish’s chapter ‘Puritans and Proteans’, in *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, pp. 80–131.

⁴⁰ G. Blakemore Evans, ‘Introduction’, in *Attitudes Toward the Drama in Elizabethan-Jacobean England*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (New York: New Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 3–17 (p. 3).

and complexity of the intellectual and social movements that led to the upheavals of the 1640s.⁴¹ Not only were Puritans such as Milton or the Third Earl of Pembroke (Shakespeare's patron) by no means opposed to the existence of the theatre, but equally, anti-theatrical sentiments were just as prevalent in the Catholic world during the period of the Counter-Reformation.⁴²

While I do not have space to examine the intricacies of this controversy here – to gesture towards it will have to suffice – there is nevertheless a substantive point to be made that will help orientate an understanding of the kinds of statements that this discourse produced at the time. It is, certainly, easy to be distracted by the shrill tone adopted in many anti-theatrical tracts; Jonas Barish exemplifies this when he writes of William Prynne's notorious *Histrion-Mastix*: 'It is as though he were himself goaded by a devil, driven to blacken the theatre with lunatic exaggeration and without allowing it the faintest spark of decency or humanity.'⁴³ But what if the specific beliefs and opinions that motivated those individuals to express their views in the way that they did was of rather less importance than is commonly assumed; while of rather more importance was the way in which those statements were organised and structured by the kind of discursive rationality that is of central concern in this study: how might such statements be understood against the emergent rationality of government?

If one takes the example of Prynne, a particularly iconoclastic figure, to be sure, but one frequently held up as the most extreme – and perhaps the most pathological case when it comes to anti-theatrical fundamentalism – several things become quite clear on closer inspection. In the first instance, it is soon obvious that Prynne's objections to the stage are by no means simply expressive of his so-called Puritan beliefs. For Prynne, objections to the stage are not at all reducible to Puritan doctrine, and he argues that both Protestant and Catholic can agree that no Christian state should tolerate the stage.⁴⁴ Theatre is intolerable not only to Protestants and Catholics *alike*, he points out, but also to many others:

Pagan Writers, Emperors, States, and Magistrates; together with the primitive Christians, Fathers, and Christian Writers of Forraigne parts; but even

⁴¹ Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 21–22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 27; see chapter 2, pp. 18–47, of that book for a fuller discussion.

⁴³ Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, p. 87.

⁴⁴ William Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy* (London: Edward Allde, Augustine Mathewes, Thomas Cotes adn William Iones, 1633), p. 483.

our owne domestique Writers, Preachers, Universities, Magistrates, and our whole State it Selfe in open Parliament, both in ancient, moderne, and present times [all] have abandoned, censured, condemned Stage-playes and common Actors, as the very pests, the corruptions of mens mindes and manners; the Seminaries of all vice, all lewdness, wickedness and disorder; and intolerable mischiefs in an civill or well-disciplined Common-weale.⁴⁵

It might be objected that this overlooks the interminable quantity of religious commentary found in Prynne's book; that its rhetorical gestures are a reflection of authorial persuasions that are indeed directed by the dictates of a conscience inspired by faith; that it should be understood, more broadly, in relation to the desperately fractious and apprehensive context of pre-revolutionary English public life. All of this is true; nevertheless, one should take care not to conflate an author's religious and political convictions, or even circumstances, with discursive structures, especially in a period when there was a preponderance of religious discourse (and indeed little else). To adopt an alternative viewpoint: the religious dimension of the discourse (here and elsewhere) might be seen as a kind of skein or surface – a tropology – on which the statements of the discourse on the stage and government were able to make their appearance. Such statements will be located in a space of discourse whose threshold is determined by its historical specificity, and in which religion constitutes both the condition of possibility for their enunciation as well as a limit beyond which that discourse cannot yet reach. The significance, I would suggest, of the *Histrion-Mastix* would not be found by looking to Prynne's religious beliefs any more than its relentlessness should be explained on psychological grounds – as evidence of his putative 'megalomania'.⁴⁶ Instead (as the above quote indicates) it lies in its form of argument, with the way the burden of proof is understood within the anti- (and pro-) theatrical discourse of the period, how its designations are determined by a set of highly localised conceptual codes and apodictic strategies.

What does it mean, after all, to 'prove' the anti-theatrical case, or the pro-theatrical case for that matter? In fact, everything depends on a particular discursive game that requires opponents to trade blows with one another through tit-for-tat citation of traditional authorities.⁴⁷ There are seven authorities enumerated by Prynne at the outset of his book, which would have been utterly familiar to anyone reading it, and unquestionably accepted: (i) scriptural sources – for instance Deuteronomy;

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 497. ⁴⁶ Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, p. 84.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Heywood's reliance on traditional authorities in his *Apology*.

(2) the primitive Church; (3) the Church authorities: its counsels, as well as canonical and papal constitutions; (4) the Church Fathers – authorities such as Augustine; (5) modern Christian writers – the ‘divines’; (6) the ancient ‘heathen’ sources of Greek and Roman philosophy, oratory, history and poetry; and finally (7) the acts of states, irrespective of whether they are Christian or ‘heathen’.⁴⁸ Each of these constitutes a kind of evidentiary space, and – in the order of Prynne’s discourse – an authoritative point of reference that secures and validates it as discourse.

If there is something remarkable and excessive in the way in which Prynne goes about his task, producing a book of 1,000 pages, it owes everything to the *style* of this kind of discourse, with its methodological insistence that the act of demonstration equates to the certified appropriation of reputable sources. To argue, in other words, is to display one’s erudition. What does systematic citation demonstrate if not the qualification of the author to enter into the enunciative space of discourse; that by demonstrating mastery over one’s sources one testifies to the authority of one’s own ‘speech’? If Prynne’s extraordinary text yields a vast and tremendous commentary – a kind of glossomania (if one is to speak in terms of pathology here) – it is because it attempts an impossible feat: to suture the very space of discourse. It is as if the struggle over the stage can be won by the sheer capacity and volume of citation; by the display of an encyclopedic and totalising knowledge of those authorities. This volume of discourse is not the speech of a lunatic or fanatic, then, but a consequence and result of Prynne’s mode of argument, which, resting on the validity of his sources, comes down to one fundamental line of attack: “if all of these great and ‘unanswerable authorities’⁴⁹ – both Christian and Pagan – should deem it prudent to suppress the stage, then must not we (‘lest we prove farre worse then Pagans’⁵⁰) do the same? Should not we, who count ourselves Christians, heed this ‘army-royall of Play-condemning Authorities’?”⁵¹

Moving now beyond the problem of *how* one demonstrates that theatre is unlawful – the style, modality and form of the argument – there is the further question of *what* this discourse seeks to demonstrate, and this is precisely *that* the stage is unlawful; that theatre goes against all the ‘Statutes of our Kingdome’. It is for this reason that Prynne’s entrance into discourse is to be grasped, not simply as a religious diatribe against the stage, but as falling precisely within the compass of the discourse on governance. The stage is a matter of grave concern to government for the simple reason

⁴⁸ Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 719.

that theatre 'endanger(s) Church and State at once'.⁵² What Prynne invokes in the combining of Church and Stage is quite typical of the period and reflects a broadly instrumentalist view of religion. One also finds this approach promoted by theorists of reason of state, as well as political philosophers such as Hobbes; 'religion aids in the proper function of the state', as Katherine Ibbett puts it.⁵³ Religion, in short, provides a pragmatic means of controlling the people. This governmental aspect to Prynne's 'Puritan' discourse is quite explicitly embraced when he announces time and again that plays go against the 'rudiments of civill policy'. Thus, if one asks in what way the theatre poses any kind of threat to the 'well-ordered Christian Republike', or why it should be a matter of concern and urgency, Prynne's answer is that the theatre is a corrupting influence on the *disposition* of the people:

[as] the happinesse; honor; life and safety of every Common-weale consists in the ingenuity, temperance, and true vertuous disposition of the people's mindes and manners; so the distemperature, malady, and confusion of it always issues, from the exorbitant obliquity, the uncontrolled dissoluteness, and degeneracy of their vitious lives, which bring certaine ruine. Whence the most prudent Princes and Republicues in all ages, have constantly suppressed all such pleasures, as might either empoison the younger people's manners, or pervert their minds.⁵⁴

Discursive Imbrications of the Stage and Multitude

Thus, I suggest, understanding this discourse on the theatre as *discourse* is to release such statements from their reduction to historical positivities; it is to say that they cannot be grasped by filtering them through the subjective perspective of speakers engaged in highly sectarian disputes (as valid and interesting as the histories of religious disputes may be on their own terms). Instead they will be grasped here as located within a pre-subjective discursive event, at the heart of which one finds a set of concerns over whether or not the theatre is conducive to a well-governed state – whether or not the theatre can be considered lawful. There is, granted, a sense of urgency within the rhetoric of these statements: but what that rhetorical urgency signifies should not be

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵³ Katherine Ibbett, *The Style of the State in French Theatre 1630–1660: Neoclassicism and Government* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 69.

⁵⁴ Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, p. 448.

thought merely as a kind of moral panic on the part of Christian zealots over the perceived immorality of the stage. In order to reverse the polarity of this perspective, I would say instead that Christian piety, moral panic and concerns over the immorality of the stage are directed by governmental discourses, motivated in turn by the emergence of an ever-expanding urban and suburban population. Behind this discourse, one cannot locate a dim or obscure existential threat, gradually brought into being, by repeated exposure to the stage, but the myriad socio-economic and demographic transformations that give rise to the question of how to govern the population. It is a question that is encapsulated, during this period, in the formation of a specific object, the protean multitude.

But perhaps it will be thought inappropriate to suggest that the discourse on the theatre is *also* a discourse on the problem of multitude; or that the discourse on the stage is *also* – as I have been arguing – a discourse of governance. Am I not in danger of multiplying discourses exorbitantly and needlessly? Quite the reverse – for as I have already said, the discourse on the theatre can be understood only by situating it within a wider discursive field, mapping the network of discursive relations through which its statements are distributed as imbricating sets that cut across one another; that overlay, supplement and extend one kind of knowledge in one field of discourse (for instance, theology), with reference to another found elsewhere (for instance, the knowledge possessed by the judiciary). What this permits is the development of complex objects of discourse in a highly heterogeneous field. Thus in speaking of the theatre of the multitude, already it should be understood that the discourse on the theatre is constituted in the foreign milieu of other discourses, with which it is matrixed. What these matrices make conceivable are precisely objects conjured into being through the equivalences that can be drawn across the discursive field in which they will be articulated.

Above all, during the early modern period, the discourse on the theatre is correlated with the discourse on multitude precisely through a set of shared discursive practices that enumerate common objects of concern. Take, for example, the Queen's edict, issued in 1601, directed against that 'great multitude of base and loose people' 'dispersed within our city of London, and the suburbs thereof', where the series of objects that appear within concerns over the multitude converge seamlessly with concerns to do with the morality of the stage – as is well documented: government statutes against plays and players fell *within* statutes directed against acts of

vagrancy⁵⁵ (the act of 1597, for example, classifies ‘comon Players of Enterludes and Minstrells wandring abroad’ as ‘rogues and vagabonds’). What is a vagrant? It is a person who ‘neither haue any certaine place of abode, nor any good or lawful cause of businesse to attend hereabouts’. The vagrant, like the actor, is without stable vocation and unlocatable within the order of the Commonwealth – a point I shall return to later, but which almost certainly places discourses on vagrancy within the scope of what I have called theatrocratic discourse. Having no fixed employment, the vagabond is immediately to be suspected, becoming an object within the discourse on law and order, since he is likely to ‘enter into any tumult or disorder’. Such a person is also inherently treacherous, ‘spreading false rumours and tales’; they are a likely cause of sedition (invoking a discourse on state security). What is also particularly noteworthy in this proclamation, albeit that it is by no means exceptional, is the way in which it extends the individual figure of the vagabond (a figure to be feared, shunned and finally subject to punitive discipline) as a means of determining the basic characteristics of the new population of the city as a whole (in contrast to its ‘legitimate’ citizens): these are dangerous ‘refuse and vagabond people’ who ‘continually flocke and gather to our City’ and are the principal cause of disorder in London. Thus constituted, this vagabond people present government with a virtual horizon of incipient criminality and degeneracy.

A previous proclamation, issued two years earlier, also aimed at ‘suppressing . . . the multitudes of idle vagabonds, and for staying of all unlawful assemblies, especially in and about the Citie of London’, invoked a further set of discourses that were put into circulation during the Elizabethan period and trained on the growing problem of indigence. Once again, it is the presence of the poor, whose ranks are now swelling the City’s streets, that incites a discourse of multitude, albeit that the specific context in which this proclamation appears seems to be motivated by the rise in beggary among demobilised soldiers – those ‘multitudes of able men, neither impotent nor lame, exacting money continually upon pretence of service in the warres without reliefe’. Particularly worthy of note are the questions that it raises. First, how should the undeserving vagrant, prone to idleness, be distinguished from the genuinely deserving

⁵⁵ See various acts and statutes: 1530/31, 22. Hen. VIII, ch. 12; 1572; 14 Eliz., ch. 5; 1597/98; 39 Eliz. chs. 3, 4, 17; 1601, 43 Eliz. ch. 9; 1603/4 1. Jac. 1. ch. 7; 1609/10 Jac. I, ch. 4; 1662, 14 Car. II, ch. 12; 1698/99 II Wm. III, ch. 18; 1706, 6 Anne, ch. 32; 1714, 12 Anne 2, ch. 23. Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 160–63, appendix A.

poor – those who are in some way incapacitated and unable to work? Second, for those who are able to work but refuse to do so – those distended multitudes of idle vagrants – how can they be compelled to become more productive; to submit to the discipline of work? The proclamation, naturally, attempts to answer these questions: mobilising the city authorities, the officers of the Justices of the Peace, and the watch to clamp down on the multitudes of ‘idle people’; ordering the imprisonment of able-bodied vagabonds; returning the lame, under poor-law statutes, to the ‘countrey’ (to despatch them to places of birth or to last places of residence); while for the more ‘notorious offenders’ – those who refused to be reformed – to confront them with martial law, sending them ‘without delay . . . [to the] Gallows’.

In James’s proclamation of 1603 ‘against inmates and multitudes of dwellers in strait rooms and places in and about the citie of London’, a further discourse is invoked: the discourse of public health, specifically around fears to do with the ‘great confluence and accesse of excessive numbers of idle, indigent, dissolute and dangerous persons’ now living in cramped living conditions (called ‘strait roomes’) in London’s suburbs. It is not simply fear of plague that motivates this particular declarative statement. On the contrary, by speaking of the ‘pestering’ of the multitude and of those places and houses ‘pestered with multitudes of dwellers’, its discursive function is to explicitly associate the multitude with infection, pestilence and disease, while pointing, at the same time, to a primitive epidemiology whose object will be urban deprivation. What this reveals is the chronic nature of the problem posed by the multitude to government, and that, notwithstanding the attempts made to suppress the urban poor, it becomes increasingly intractable as the century proceeds (an act of Parliament on 5 March 1646, for instance, calls upon the Justices, the Lord Mayor, commissars, and Quarter sessions courts to enact the existing laws in preventing ‘the multitude of Beggars, poore, and vagabonds in and about the Cities of London Westminster and in other parts of this Kingdome’ – to punish ‘Beggars, Rogues, and Vagabonds’ and provide ‘reliefe of the poore’).

One might cite many more instances that testify to the growing ‘discourse on multitude’, but these examples suffice in indicating something of the complexity of the discursive field during the period with its multiple discourses on poverty, crime, public health, housing, idleness and the problem of productive employment. Furthermore, they show that within this discourse one finds everywhere that necessity of government of which I spoke earlier. Nowhere is that necessity more acutely felt than in

the discursive construction of the common figure of the vagabond, insofar as he acts as a kind of cipher for an essentially ungovernable commonality. At the same time, if a vagabond people enables a governmental discourse on multitude to emerge, then equally the figure of the *monstrum multorum capitum* finds its *locus classicus* in the emergent discourse on the stage, whose disorders I would now like to turn to through an examination of the discursive figure of the theatre of the multitude.

The Theatre of the Multitude

The theatre of the multitude can be found in a thousand scattered references to the actual experience of the Elizabethan stage – the hundreds of missives, tracts and petitions, eyewitness testimonies, diplomatic reports, poetry, Church sermons, as well as, of course, the countless instances in which it featured within plays written during the period. Stephen Gosson in his *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) offers, however, perhaps the most apposite characterisation of the theatre of the multitude, when he says: ‘The ancient Philosophers . . . called them a monster of many heads . . . The common people which resort to Theatres being but an assemblie of Tailors, Tinkers, Cordwayners, Saylers, Olde Men, young Men, Women, boyes, Girles, and such like.’⁵⁶

Presiding over this multitude (the artisans, ‘country clownes’, misfits, fishwives, old lags, sailors and callow youth, and so on) are the players, who, in Gosson’s words, are to be looked upon as: ‘Lords of misrule or the very schoolmasters of these abuses . . .’, and he goes on to proclaim: ‘were not players the mean to make such assemblies . . . such multitudes would hardly be drawn into so narrow room.’⁵⁷ To swell the ranks of the multitude further, one might also add to this strange inventory: the apprentices, clerks, labourers and serving men, who (or such was the assumption of the discourse on the stage) regularly skipped work to catch a play, flagrantly breaching the ‘Statute of Artificers’ which was meant to strictly regulate their working day, and which, if it had worked as it was intended to, would have altogether prohibited their attendance at public theatres.⁵⁸ These are the ‘youthes’ who go to the theatre to see

⁵⁶ Quoted in Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 249.

⁵⁷ Gosson quoted in Muriel Clara Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player: A Study of Actor and Society in Shakespeare’s England* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p. 100.

⁵⁸ See Alexander Leggatt, *Jacobean Public Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 29–30. Despite the fact that the ‘working classes were regulated by the Statute of Artificers’, which attempted to police

and be seen, who 'carry their eye through every gallery'.⁵⁹ There were also the irreverent gallants – those young men who regularly attended the theatre not because they had a love for poetry but, on the contrary, because they were in pursuit of amorous adventures. The gallant's pastime involved visiting harlots, whores and courtesans; or, if he was actually paying attention to the theatrical proceedings, it was in making a spectacle of himself by sitting on the stage and mocking the actors – something Ben Jonson would complain about in *Every Man Out*. The gallant, he says, 'sits with his armes thus wreath'd, his hat pull'd here, cries meow, and nods, then shakes his empty head'.⁶⁰ Finally, wherever there is a crowd, one will always discover a criminal element: traders of black-market goods such as tobacco, as well as the cutpurses, knaves, 'coseners', 'coney-catchers' and pilferers who circulate through the audience, preying on the unsuspecting victim. All of these types, villainous, licentious, or just plain idle, feature in descriptions of the public playhouse audience and provide a vivid image of what the theatre of the multitude was meant to look like.

But it is equally telling to consider those who were not counted among their rank, as the anonymous author of *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (1615) did in his response to Heywood. According to this vituperative commentator, one would not expect to see 'an ancient citizen, a chaste matron, a modest maid, a grave senator, or a wise Magistrate, a just judge, a godly Preacher, a religious man not blinded in ignorance' attending a theatrical production.⁶¹ If the adjectives chaste, modest, grave, wise, just and godly specified the qualities of the true community, founded on Christian virtue, then membership of the community of the theatre of the multitude was to be defined by a symmetrical lack of quality. The 'vulgar sort' who run 'madding unto playes' are those without 'counsel, reason, or discretion'.⁶²

If, then, these figures provide a vivid image of the regular constituents about which the discourse on the multi-headed monster of the theatre of the multitude was to be composed, the next question is: how did the stage extend that image of multitude by imbuing it with a peculiar

the working day, limiting the amount of available leisure time, if anything in order to favour attendance at church, 'all the evidence that the non-elite should not have attended the playhouses is countered by a substantial body of evidence that they went anyway' (p. 29).

⁵⁹ Gosson in Bradbrook, *Rise of the Common Player*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ Ben Jonson, 'Every Man Out of His Humours', in *The Works of Ben Jonson, in Nine Volumes*, vol. 2, ed. W. Gifford (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1816), pp. 18–19.

⁶¹ Anon., *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (London: W. White, 1615), p. 63. ⁶² *Ibid.*

symptomatology; and how did the emerging discourse on the theatre identify, in the abuses of the stage, the vices of the commonality?

The Disorders of the Stage and the Vices of the Multitude

There are several forms of abuse that are commonly associated with the theatre during the period. Since these appear in numerous statements, dispersed across different contexts and activated at different times (the period ranges from the opening of the theatres in the late 1500s to their closure in the early 1640s) I shall concentrate on organising them, not in terms of the chronological order by which they appeared, but by thematic import. It will be a general assertion of the discourse on the stage, during the period, that theatres encourage ‘all manner of mischeefe’,⁶³ and so the task here is to simply provide some sense of what that assertion meant insofar as the disorders of the stage might be seen to be indicative of the so-called disposition of the people.

To say the stage encourages ‘all manner of mischief’ is to characterise it, according to the language of the period, as ‘seditious’. Seditious will be understood by the early modern discourse on the stage in two senses – one rather more grievous than the other. First, at its most extreme, the act of sedition will refer to a practice of agitation or intriguing – to a ‘conduct of speech’ directed against the authority of the state and church. Second, it denotes acts designed not to stir up rebellion, mutiny or discontent but to breach the public order. The stage will be thought seditious in both senses. Henry Crosse, for example, in *Virtue’s Commonwealth*, was particularly concerned at the prospect of ‘nocturnal and night plays, at unseasonable and undue times [since] more greater evils must necessarily proceed of them, because they not only hide and cover the thief, but also entice servants out of their master’s houses whereby opportunity is offered to loose fellows, to effect many wicked stratagems’.⁶⁴ Lurid accounts of how London’s theatres stoked the incipient flame of rebellion in servants and apprentices indisputably exaggerated and distorted the facts.⁶⁵ Some

⁶³ Petition to the Privy Council from the inhabitants of Blackfriars, 1596, in Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, p. 217.

⁶⁴ Reproduced in Bradbrook, *Rise of the Common Player*, p. 103.

⁶⁵ In fact, the only known case of sedition, involving an actual plot that implicated Shakespeare’s company, occurred in 1601, when conspirators associated with the Earl of Essex commissioned a performance of *Tragedie of King Richard the Second* at the Globe Theatre: if they had hoped to stir a rebellion in the theatre-going crowd, they were disappointed; the plot failed, and several of the conspirators (many of whom had attended the performance) were later executed. See Louis Montrose on the Essex plot, *The Purpose of Playing, Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of*

historians have even rejected the idea that the public theatres catered to anyone but the most privileged playgoers. Ann J. Cook argued, for instance, that 'few apprentices, day labourers, or servants had either time or money to spend on the theatres' (and if that is true they could hardly have had time to engage in seditious activities).⁶⁶ Even so, this is to miss the point: what these reports did was pander to the fear of the authorities and the reading public that theatre involved the misuse and manipulation of the power of public assembly for questionable political ends. If theatre appears abusive, in the sense that it provides an opportunity for people to agitate against the state, it is because it exemplifies, as M.C. Bradbrook once observed, the 'danger of any open assembly'.⁶⁷

No doubt the fact that the theatres were located 'out of the Cities jurisdiction' did not help. Away from the prying eyes of the city's magistracy, theatre provided opportunities for 'vagrant persons, masterless men, thieves, horse-stealers, whoremongers, cozenors, coney-catchers, contrivers of treason, and other idle and dangerous persons to meet together'⁶⁸ where they might hatch 'confederacies & conspiracies, which . . . cannot be prevented nor discovered'.⁶⁹ It is not, however, the point that the theatre of the multitude was factually seditious, but rather that, thought in a state of permanent discord, it constituted for the juridical imaginary of the time both a persistent opportunity for and potential source of rebellion. As is made clear in a remarkable document (a letter from the Lord Mayor of London and the Aldermen to the Privy Council, on 28 July 1597), what should be of particular interest 'for the good government of this [the Queen's] city' is not simply that the stage induces its audience to engage in intolerable behaviours, which it encourages and inspires, but rather, that it can do so only because the audience itself is already *predisposed* to such

Elizabethan Theatre (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 66–70. For an interesting discussion of the political content of plays, such as Samuel Daniel's *Philotas* (1605) and its suppression by the Privy Council following the Essex rebellion, see Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, pp. 18–47. See also Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy, Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶⁶ Anne J. Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 18.

⁶⁷ Bradbrook, *Rise of the Common Player*, p. 102.

⁶⁸ Official Letter from the Lord Mayor of London and Aldermen to the Privy Council, 28 July 1597, reproduced in Evans, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ 1592, February 25, the Lord Mayor to John Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, reproduced in Edmund K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4 (London: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 307. There appears in a petition of the precinct inhabitants of Blackfriars to the Lord Mayor, circa 1619, the same warning of 'danger . . . occasioned by the broils, plots or practices of such an unruly multitude of people' (Document 27, reprinted in Irwin Smith, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 490).

'faults and vices' – those 'evil-disposed and ungodly people that are within and about this City [who] assemble themselves [at the theatre] to make their matches for all their lewd and ungodly practices'.⁷⁰

Who are these people? The letter is adamant – the lower orders – those such as the:

divers apprentices and other servants who have confessed to us that the said stage-plays were the very places of rendez-vous, appointed by them to meet with such other as were to join with them in their designs and mutinous attempts, being also the ordinary places for masterless men to come together and to recreate themselves.⁷¹

Recalling Lipsius's advice to princes, that one must get to know the 'nature of the common people', the question here is: in what way are the common people to be constructed as an object of discourse and knowledge? Lipsius himself provides an answer that is wholly consistent with the prevailing view on the multitude during the period: 'The common people are unstable, and nothing is more unconstant then the rude multitude. They are given to change, and do suddenly alter their determinations like unto tempests.'⁷² Just as in Bacon, who also employed the iconography of the tempest, the multitude is constituted as a quasi-natural phenomenon: capricious, unpredictable and highly intemperate. It must be approached with great care and caution: the sea swells, as Bacon puts it, and imperceptibly a storm gathers. One should be under no illusions, says Lipsius, the multitude is 'desirous of new commotions: light headed; seditious, and quarrelsome, coveting new matters, enemies to peace and quiet. Especially if they have a leader [such as the player] . . . so the people, who of their owne disposition are quiet, are by the persuasions of seditious persons stirred up, like violent tempests.'⁷³

*

If the primary threat of theatre was that it provided the context and occasion for a potentially insurgent multitude, the second form of sedition threatened to menace the state in rather more anarchic and unpredictable ways: the public theatre encourages abuses of public (dis) order. Not only does the theatre of the multitude provide, as Gosson would say, a 'generall market of bawdrie', but for Anthony Munday it

⁷⁰ Lord Mayor of London and Aldermen to the Privy Council, in Evans, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*, p. 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* ⁷² Lipsius, *Sixte Bookes*, p. 68. ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

promised, as a consequence, to bring the 'whole Common-weale into disorder'.⁷⁴ Fear of anarchic disorder during the period would find its correlate in an equally obsessive desire for an order that was nevertheless elusive. What exacerbated the sense of crisis was no doubt prompted by the immense social, political and economic upheavals that had volatised the entire social structure of England since the close of the medieval period, and which, as has been known since Marx, was the result of the massive expropriation of peasant and ecclesiastical property during the Reformation. The theatres appeared to attract many of London's itinerant day labourers, becoming a meeting point for the emergent class of workers who sprang from the evicted rural peasantry and who, descending on the city in their droves, prompted precisely those fears already mentioned over increasing vagrancy and vagabondage. Thus the discourse on the theatre of the multitude, which sees the theatre as one of the 'ordinary places of meeting for all vagrant persons and maisterless men',⁷⁵ provided one of the most acute expressions of the growing alarm felt by the city's burghers and citizens at the increased visibility of the dispossessed and pauperised 'third estate' in London. Theatre's power, as a minute from the Privy Council in 1597 was to warn, lies in its virtually magnetic facility to 'draw a concourse of people out of the country, thereabouts pretending herein the benefit of the towne, which purpose we do utterly mislike, doubting what inconveniences may follow thereon . . . when disordered people of the common sort wilbe [*sic*] apt to misdemeane themselves'.⁷⁶

Of these misdemeanours, there were broadly speaking three kinds. The first were those disorders that might be classified under the general category of social pathogens, with theatres providing a breeding ground for all manner of criminal activity – primarily theft, but also antisocial behaviour, from brawling to rioting. Apprentice riots were not uncommon during the period, and at times threatened even more serious acts of public disturbance – as a letter from William Fleetwood, the 'reader of London', to Lord Burghley makes clear, following an incident that occurred in the vicinity of the Curtain Theatre: 'Upon these troubles the prentices began the next day, being Tuesday, to make mutinies and assemblies, and did conspire to have broken the prisons and to have taken further the prentices

⁷⁴ In Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, p. 209.

⁷⁵ From a letter, dated 3 November 1594, from Lord Mayor to Lord Burghley (in Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, p. 210).

⁷⁶ In Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, p. 321.

that were imprisoned.⁷⁷ Only through a timely piece of intelligence were the authorities able to thwart the plan and arrest the ringleaders of the plot. A second set of misdemeanours might be termed moral disorders and were exemplified by the Puritan preoccupation with sexual degeneracy, vice, prostitution, as well as with theatre's so-called effeminating effects – something I shall return to in the next chapter. It would lead the author of the *Refutation* to paint a sensationalist account of theatre's permissiveness, concluding that it is 'licentiousness . . . which most pleaseth the multitude'.⁷⁸

If theatre's appeal to the multitude, according to this author, had to do with its inherently dissolute and impious nature, there was nevertheless something rather more profound at stake: a different kind of vice, and in fact a different dimension of disorder altogether, one that has long aggravated the authorities wherever theatre has been an object of concern to the governing polity. This third 'abuse' is rather more impalpable: unlike the riot, the theft of a wallet or the trade in prostitution, one cannot simply point to it. Where it arises is in the question of what effect the stage has in terms of disturbing what might be called the 'government of time'. This disordering of the government of time becomes apparent precisely where disquiets arise over the questionable influence of the theatre on work, insofar as theatre-going encourages the vice of sloth. The spectators who attended the theatre, are – it will be said – the rabble who pursue 'vnlawful artificiall Pleasures, whereby they might passe away . . . the most precious time of their life . . . idly and fruitlesse, without any profite to the Church, or Common-wealth wherein they live'.⁷⁹ Underpinning such suppositions was the thought that theatre substitutes one form of time – essentially productive time – for another temporality that is utterly profligate and wasteful. In the *Anatomie of Abuses*, Philip Stubbes was to decry those 'idle lubbers and buzzing dronets [who] suck up and devoure the good honie, whereupon the poor bees should live'. And when Thomas White remarked, 'Looke but upon the common playes in London, and see the multitude that flocketh to them and followeth them: behold the sumptuous Theatre houses, a continual monument of London's prodigalitie and folly',⁸⁰ he had in mind the prodigality that is born of the investment of so many in a passion for idleness inculcated by the theatre.

⁷⁷ William Fleetwood, letter to Lord Burghley (18 June 1584), printed in Evans, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Anon., *Refutation*, p. 27. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. ⁸⁰ In Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, p. 197.

From this it might be surmised that it is not just that theatre leads to ‘the corrupcion of youth’,⁸¹ as the well-known, if jejune objection goes; but, rather, that the corruption of the young harbours a far greater magnitude of corruption within it that should be of grave concern to the guardians of Commonwealth and State. Thomas Nashe would complain: to the extent that they ‘withdrawe Prentises from their worke’, the theatres ‘corrupt the growth of the Citte’.⁸² The prevailing view of the theatres, over this period, is one entirely oriented by these kinds of negative economic effects – theatre acts as a spur to the scourge of indolence that begins to infect the industrious members of the community: they promote a taste for idleness; they embolden the work-shy; they lure people without vocation into the city; and they persuade ‘apprentices and other servants’ to abandon their work, thus depriving their masters of valuable hours of productivity.⁸³ The seriousness with which the problem of the governance of workers and the young was taken becomes clearer when it is recalled that order during this period, as Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson explain, ‘rested on the family and household, on schooling and apprenticeship and on the formal and informal institutions of control in the parish’. In a period when law enforcement was haphazard, to say the least, ‘the maintenance of a well-regulated society’ was very much dependent on intramural relations ‘between husbands and wives, parents and children and heads of households and their dependents and servants’ (rather than exercised through extramural relations with barely existent state agencies, e.g., the poorly paid parish officers who were charged with the enforcement of laws).⁸⁴

*

The question with which the city elders, the churchmen and the apprentices’ masters endlessly taxed themselves was this: Is it not the case that the theatre will substitute for the discipline of work, the ill-discipline of leisure? What it revealed in their eyes, while it may not be the most palpable, could nonetheless be construed as the most pernicious abuse of

⁸¹ 1592, Court of the Guild of Merchant Taylors in *ibid.*, p. 309.

⁸² Thomas Nashe, 1592, in Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, p. 209.

⁸³ Lord Mayor of London and Aldermen to the Privy Council in Evans, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, Introduction, in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 31–32.

them all insofar as ‘time-devouring Stage-playes’ undermined the foundation upon which rested the authority of both Church and State through the corrupting of the government of time.⁸⁵ This anxiety is precisely what lies behind the well-known antipathy of religion to the theatre, insofar as it was seen to substitute play for sermon, player for priest, and playhouse for ministry – hence the vitriolic response to the presumptuous claims found in defences such as Heywood’s that the theatre performed an educative function, traditionally the preserve of the Church. Prynne warns explicitly of the ‘prodigall mispence of much precious time, which Christians should husband and redeeme to better purposes’.⁸⁶ In this ‘profuse mispending of our Masters Stocke of time’, he asks, ‘how many millions of pounds’ have been lost through theatre-going⁸⁷ – ‘where thousands spend the moitie of the day, the weeke, the yeere in Play-houses, at least-wise far more houres then they imploy in holy duties, or in their lawfull callings’.⁸⁸

Accordingly, if one asks in what way the theatre posed a challenge to traditional authorities such as the Church and the State, the answer is not simply that it is thought to encourage open rebellion, or inspires forms of social unrest, or provides the occasion for a disturbance of the peace. More fundamentally, for the discourse on the theatre, what theatre flouts is the temporal basis of government authority. In the end, by challenging the government of time, theatre cannot but challenge the power of the authorities to determine and decide what is just and equitable within the Commonwealth as a whole – and thereby, its capacity to instil order through the regulation of work. What the theatre of the multitude called into question was, quite simply, the very legitimacy of the political and social order; and no doubt, in doing so, it pointed to the glaring inequality which held sway, separating individuals and privileges according to rank, aptitudes and qualities – that is to say, insofar as order rested upon the immutable fixing of social relations predicated on the hierarchical distribution of vocations, rewards and entitlements.⁸⁹ In a society where order derives from the strict regulation and division of the social body, specifically through the allotment of roles, occupations and correlative privileges, the ultimate disorder, which is identified with the subversive power of indolence, must stem from the

⁸⁵ Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, p. 310. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 304. ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁸⁹ For an extended discussion on this point and one that has certainly informed my argument see Jacques Rancière’s *The Philosopher and His Poor*, chapters 1 and 2. See also, the discussion of Plato in Jonas Barish’s *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, chapter 1, pp. 5–37.

squandering of those selfsame aptitudes and abilities upon which the virtuous and just order or Commonwealth is founded – its ‘body politic’:

Whether he bee as a hande, an eye, a finger, or a foote of a Commonwealth: knowing that every Common-wealth is a bodie politique, compared to a bodie natural. And as the head is the cheifest part, the guide and superior governour of the bodie, and all the members are as officers under the same; some of a higher qualitie and authoritie then others, as the heart, the eyes, the hand, and Legges, which are principall members, servants in office to the superiour; so are the fingers and toes, &c. peitie officers unto the former, every one of them being bound to his next superior: and so all by a naturall dutie, are servants to the head, and that for all the preservation and supportation of the entrails and maine bodie; which is so much the more safe from danger, by how much every member hath ablenes, and skill to performe his place, in true dutie, not one part whereof is void of some necessarie function . . . So is our superior Magistrate, the head and governour of us, who being many in member, make up a complete bodie politique.⁹⁰

In the final analysis, it was not just that the playhouses were a ‘great hinderance of traides’;⁹¹ the underlying inconvenience was that the theatre of the multitude came to represent to the conservative city’s magistracy what must have appeared as the growing self-assertion of the labouring classes who sought, through the medium of the theatre, an equality and freedom they could not find beyond its walls. The theatre becomes the means to escape the prison-house of work. If one recalls that under the Statute of Artificers, an act designed to ‘banish idleness’, the terms of employment for apprentices, servants, artificers and labourers amounted to little more than legislation in favour of an oppressive and intolerable condition of bondage or indentured service, then the opening lines of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* suggest not so much a ‘theatrical in-joke’⁹² as a wry acknowledgement of the predicament of the poorest part of the audience:⁹³

⁹⁰ John Norden, *A Christian Familiar Comfort* (London, 1596), pp. 53–54.

⁹¹ Lord Mayor to Privy Council, 1597 in Evans, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*, p. 5.

⁹² Leggatt, *Jacobean Public Theatre*, p. 30.

⁹³ The composition of social classes in Shakespearean England was rigidly defined in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* in 1577, when William Harrison identified four basic classes: the first, comprising the class of nobles and gentry; the second, citizens and burgesses; the third, the yeomanry or rural smallholders; and the fourth, the artisans, labourers and apprentices – beneath the latter, the underclass of vagabonds and beggars – see Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, chapter 3, pp. 49–54, for an extended analysis.

Hence! Home you idle creatures, get you home.
Is this a holiday? What! Know you not,
Being mechanical, you ought not walk,
upon a labouring day, without the sign
Of your profession? – Speak, what trade
art thou? (I.i)

Thus does the tribune, Flavius, admonish the Roman rabble with words whose meaning the Globe's audience – at least those standing in the yard – could hardly have misunderstood since they explicitly referenced them. One can imagine the response of the theatre crowd to Flavius's question: "our trades? We are the 'tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons &c'⁹⁴ – in short, we are the artisans of London; together we comprise the 'great swarmes of idle serving men',⁹⁵ those drones to whom you would deny the pleasures of the theatre!"

In this sense, the discourse on the theatre of the period comes down, perhaps inevitably, to the ancient question posed by the presence of the artisan, the worker, the artificer, the labourer within the political space of the Commonwealth. The question has a long history, originating in Greek political thought, but the scandal of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, with its particular disorders, opened a suppurating wound on the body politic of London that provoked many to ask it once again: what of the multitude? Not only did the theatre provide a highly visible and contentious locus for this question, which had resurfaced with the renaissance of the theatre during the Elizabethan period; but, more significantly, it was the theatre that pre-emptively answered the question in a way that confirmed all the gravest fears of the City's legislators – as though the worst of all Platonic nightmares was about to come to pass. This is not to say that the theatre of the multitude placed any political demands on the legislature; it did not. But what it did do was far more disturbing. Those few workers who took the theatre as the occasion to assert their right to leisure time, without asking anyone for permission to do so, assumed thereby in the eyes of the prevailing order the spectre of a democratic community that could only prove intolerable to it.

Hence the indefatigable hatred of those in authority for the community of the audience: this is what makes the image of the 'theatre disturbed by crowds' so radical; partly, because it was conjured out of a genuine fear of the theatre, and that was sufficient to produce a crisis of reality within the political discourse of the age; partly, because that fear found some

⁹⁴ William Harrison, 1577, in Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, p. 53. ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

confirmation in the audacity of the poorest part of the audience to abandon work in pursuit of a pastime that was in all but name prohibited to them.

Theatre's Two Communities

It is the presence or intrusion of the multitude within the discursive field of the age, then, that locks both the discourse on the theatre and the discourse on government into an intractable dispute over two opposing concepts of community. One will be a community that is founded, in various ways, on a principle of unity and order: a commonweal grounded upon a 'true' principle of sovereignty constituting the authentic body politic; the other is a community that is in truth nothing short of an anti-community made up of the aggregated individuals who comprise the *multus* of the multitude – the many who become, through the sovereignty of sheer numbers, and through the brute and contingent arithmetic of a head count, the illegitimate community of the audience.

Two kinds of political community, each implacably opposed to the other – but what exactly is at stake in the antagonism that fundamentally divides these two communities, such that they must be seen as irreconcilable? To answer this question, I would like to return to the point where the discourse on the theatre founds itself and the point where the good community of the well-governed Commonwealth is instituted at the cost of excluding the community of the audience. It is in Plato's *Republic* that the poet and the theatre are, as everyone knows, expelled from the *polis* – although it is worth recalling that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London the playwrights and players were not so much expelled as denied entrance to the City in the first place. For Plato, if there was a reason to exclude the theatre, it was because it threatened to undermine the only principle capable of securing the foundations of the *polis*: that of justice. One might reasonably wonder what place the theatre has in a philosophical discussion about justice, of course. What is crucial to recollect here is how Plato defines justice as 'keeping what is properly one's own and doing one's own job'⁹⁶ (what Norden, above, referred to as that 'ableness, and skill [each needs] to performe his place, in true dutie'). Platonic justice both founds and is founded upon the order of vocations. It is determined by the scale of social rankings, where each is to find his place according to the just distribution of aptitudes, capabilities and talents: 'we aren't all

⁹⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 433e–434a.

born alike, but each of us differs somewhat in nature from the others, one being suited to one task, another to another.⁹⁷ It is this principle that each is suited to do one thing and one thing only that assures, for each of its citizens, that the *polis* remains ordered – and ordered justly – where each is awarded his due in proportion to his or her contribution.

The society based on the theatre could not be more contrastive: not only do actors blatantly contradict the principle that one should do one thing and one thing only, thus undermining the idea of a hierarchy founded on the fixed divisions and distributions of labour; it also encourages each to forget his place in order to pursue *more* than is his due. What it thereby invokes is the counter-paradigm to the very idea of order and justice that structures and governs the celestial theatre that is the ‘theatre of the world’. What the theatre of the multitude comes to represent, according to the counter-paradigmatic view of the discourse on theatre, is the negative exemplar of the disorderliness of embryonic democratic society. The reason is simple: the principles governing theatre and democratic society are essentially the same for Plato: both ‘[treat] all men as equal, whether they are equal or not’.⁹⁸ What results as a consequence of the example of the theatre of the crowd is precisely the anarchy of teatrocracy. This is the warning Socrates wishes to impart to his interlocutors when he argues: theatre not only ‘destroys the better sort of citizens’; it also ‘strengthens the vicious ones and surrenders the city to them’.⁹⁹ Teatrocracy, in sum, cedes the city to government by the multitude.

It was precisely Plato’s point that if the common and uncultivated man were to get a taste of those ‘unnecessary’ pleasures that exposure to theatre seemed to excite, then the good society based on the discipline of work would soon be imperilled, for such men would be quick to relieve themselves of the shackles of austerity which they had imposed upon themselves. They would rapidly descend from a society premised on collective obedience, duty and restraint into a society of individuals driven solely by the pursuit of private pleasures – as Plato says, if there is any equality in democracy it is only an ‘equality of pleasures’.¹⁰⁰ What results is both ‘disregard for all laws’¹⁰¹ and a ‘general permissiveness [which] eventually enslaves democracy’.¹⁰² It is this idea that democracy promotes lawlessness, permissiveness and a general disrespect towards all authority that allows Plato to associate its disorders with the disorders of the theatre and, more importantly, to equate thereby the dissolute state of a people

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 370a–b. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 558c. ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 655a–c. ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 561a. ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 563d.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 563e.

living within a democratic system with the theatre of the multitude, that is, with the contingent and barbaric community that is represented by the audience. Here Plato's arguments find more than a passing similarity to the objections of early modern opponents to the theatre: in fact, they endorse his critique point for point – although nowhere more so than in his denigration of the theatre crowd and its crown prince, the poet who must inevitably pander to them (or player, as was the case in Elizabethan and Jacobean England):

[The player] doth conjecture somewhat strongly, but dares not commend a playes goodness, till he hath either spoken, or heard the *epilogue*: neither dare he entitle good things *Good*, unless hee be heartened on by the multitude: till then hee saith faintly what hee thinks, with a willing purpose to recant or persist: So howsoever hee pretends to have a royall Master or Mistresse, his wages and dependences prove him to be the servant of the people.¹⁰³

What is specifically at issue here is not just that poets are forced to flatter the people;¹⁰⁴ it is rather what such flattery implies: the questionable legitimacy of the power of popular sovereignty entailed thereby. Under the sovereignty of the audience, as Plato will argue in the *Laws*, each comes to believe he has as much right to pass judgement on the theatre spectacle as any other, regardless of the fact that the multitude who constitute the assembly of spectators are without 'counsel, reason, or discretion'. The lesson is plain and clear: just as the theatre crowd who judge the performance do so in sheer ignorance of its merits, without the least competence, skill or understanding, and only on the basis of an authority that derives from their combined or aggregated power, so in a democracy the power of political decision devolves to the ignorant majority: those who 'take no part in politics and have few possessions', simply because they are the most numerous in the assembly¹⁰⁵ – the vulgar multitude, in short. This confusion of status, rank and persons of quality with those without status, rank or any quality whatsoever is the absurd price of universal suffrage, which theatrocratic egalitarianism demands, and which provides the target for Dekker's satirical remark:

Sithence the place is so free in entertainment, allowing a stool as well to the farmer's son as to the Templar; that your stinkard hath the same liberty to

¹⁰³ J. Cocks (1615), 'Satyrical Essayes Characters and Others', in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, p. 256.

¹⁰⁴ See Bradbrook: 'In the common theatre, the audience gradually realized that the offering was addressed to them all; that each was a Chief Spectator'; thus each felt 'himself entitled to resentment or applause as lord of the show' (Bradbrook, *Rise of the Common Player*, p. 100).

¹⁰⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 565a.

be there in his tobacco-fumes which your sweet courtier hath; and that your car-man and tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage, and sit to give judgement on the play's life and death, as the proudest Momus among the tribe of critic.¹⁰⁶

Notable in this passage are Dekker's choice of words: 'free', 'liberty' and 'suffrage' – signifying that, within the theatre at least, all are considered equal; thus does the theatre provide him with the means to ridicule democratic society. It is for this reason that the discourse on theatre reveals more than a merely Tertullian suspicion of plays, grounded in Christian piety and moralism; it must ultimately be understood beyond its Puritan rhetoric as a *political* phenomenon, that is, in light of the formation of a developing discursive power, driven on by fear of the rudimentary power of the multitude.

It is the latter – the multitude itself – which the discourse on theatre of the period incessantly speculates on and whose character it attempts to deduce through an analysis of its disorders, seditions and immoralities. In this sense, the discourse on the theatre correlates with the discourse on multitude, whose object must ultimately be understood in terms of the discursive function it serves within the development of immanent power, during the period of epistemic crisis that belongs to the formation of modern practices of government. If the discourse on multitude prefigures the notion of population upon which a new art of government would increasingly be imposed – indeed practised – it is because it already signifies, in an inchoative form, this emergent phenomenon, which it indelibly associates with the expansion of the commonality. In other words, and to conclude: the principal object of enunciation for the discourse on the stage will be nothing other than common life itself – its pleasures and its vices.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook, or Fashions to Please All Sorts of Gulls* (London: J.M. Gutch, 1609), p. 46.