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8 Insurgent Time

Richard II and the Periodization of Sovereignty

Mark Netzloff

it is the sorting out that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting
(Latour 1993: 76)

Here's fine revolution, and we had the trick to see't.
(*Hamlet*, 5.1.85)

The concept of transition has often provided a heuristic device for historicizing Shakespeare's *Richard II*. In this theoretical framework, the play is situated in relation to two overarching historical contexts: an economic transition from feudalism to nascent capitalism, and a political shift from feudal social relations to the court-centered environment of early modern absolutism. As this chapter explores the interconnectedness of histories of capitalism and sovereignty, it also intends to trouble some longstanding assumptions about the trajectories of emergent capitalist economies and absolutist models of sovereignty. In particular, drawing on the recent work of Kathleen Davis (2008), it will critique the alignment of both capitalism and absolutism with modernity in order to question the assumption that these frameworks provide the most readily available means for imagining the onset of modernity. Modes of analysis that insist on strict demarcations of historical periodization, and consequently emphasize the distinctiveness of the early modern period from medieval precedents, ignore the abiding influence that seemingly "feudal" models of economic relations and political rule continued to hold throughout the early modern period. An economy based on customary rights and protections is therefore assumed to have ceded authority to the increasing dominance of protocapitalist forms of maximized production and extracted surplus. And the versions of absolutism that were in fact unique to the early modern period are not only granted a much longer history but also seen as the rule rather than the exception of political life. In giving priority to histories of sovereignty, what is often overlooked are the more decentralized politics associated with a feudal era, including a contractual model of rights that could be negotiated and even rescinded if sovereigns failed to maintain their obligations to their subjects.

Discussions of *Richard II* that contextualize the play in terms of a historical transition from feudalism to capitalism present these two social formations not only as stable and coherent entities but also as objects of study that relate to one another solely in terms of a sequence of succession and replacement. Although readings of the play conventionally associate the attributes of the feudal age with the character of Richard II, this insistence on periodization elides key aspects of the era that preceded Shakespeare's time. We neglect to study not only the underlying continuities between what is marked as feudal or capitalist, particularly in terms of the political and economic underpinnings of power relations, but also the alternative histories that do not conform to a linear, transitional historical narrative. As Bruce Holsinger has argued (2007), the designation of particular cultural formations and beliefs as "medieval" serves an important ideological function in marking the boundaries and limits of intelligibility of the "modern," which must always conjure its antithesis as a vaguely defined set of forces placed beyond its geographical and chronological pale. Yet despite the centrality of periodization to our understanding the past, the divide imposed between a medieval past and an incipient modernity arose well after the early modern period, and it is only in later historical work that the early modern period began to be figured as the "Early-Now," to draw on Margreta de Grazia's memorable phrasing (1996: 21; cf. 2007: 463).

By contrast, as Shakespeare's text looked back to the reign of Richard II, it did not presume that this period was a distant time separated by epochal change. The past represented in the play is not designated as *past*, as a distinct feudal or medieval age, but rather as a period of crisis whose implications continued to resonate in the historical present of the early modern period. Phyllis Rackin has noted the extent to which the play lacks clear temporal boundaries and juxtaposes the concerns of the late fourteenth and late sixteenth centuries (1990: 119). The play depicts its central event—Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard II—not as a historical moment located in a linear sequence of transition and succession but instead as an example of the singular energy of the historical present. Historical time is therefore understood not as emergent or transitional but rather as a force of insurgency.¹ Insurgent time represents the arrival of unanticipated futures, the turns of events and reversals of political fortune; it marks an intensified awareness of an estrangement from the past as well as the distinctive and disjunctive singularity of the present (cf. Negri 1999). "Time doesn't flow," Michel Serres remarks, "it percolates" (Serres and Latour 1995: 58). Instead of following the logic of historical periodization and mapping out abstract processes like sovereignty or capitalism over a linear, chronological grid, this chapter will analyze the historical events represented in the play as polychromic and multitemporal. Time, to draw on Serres's model, is "gathered together, with multiple pleats," and moves at variable speeds and flows, a pattern allowing for disruptions, turbulences, and reorganization (Serres and Latour 1995: 57, 58, 60; Serres 1982: xxvii and 115).

As an alternative to the narratives of transition that are central to the logic of periodization, this chapter will emphasize the extent to which the features conventionally assigned to historical periods are overlapping, synchronous, and non-sequential. Our keywords and objects of study—sovereignty, feudalism, capitalism—are more productively seen as material processes that are constantly in motion. Although we inevitably have to capture these objects within a historically-defined frame of analysis, our reliance on narrative frameworks of transition or emergence lends an imaginary solidity and stasis to social processes such as sovereignty or capitalism. By conferring an intrinsic substance to these historical processes, and tracing their development over a chronological sequence, we efface their intrinsically differential and coercive preconditions: the extent to which capital accumulation, for instance, presumes intensified modes of exclusion, or the ways that sovereignty necessarily precludes competing political institutions and affiliations.

To quote Hamlet, commenting on the excavating work of the gravediggers, “Here’s fine revolution, and we had the trick to see’t” (5.1.85). The position of readers in relation to the play, as well as of the play itself to its historical material, is necessarily perspectival. But the methodological approach of modern readers is a perspective that is profoundly distinct from that of the text and the early modern period. Christopher Hill has argued that the early modern period lacked the modern, more abstract sense of revolution as entailing radical political change and an epochal break from the past (1990: 82–101). Early moderns imagined revolution primarily in reference to processes found in nature: the “revolution” of the gravediggers, for instance, seen in the corporeal terms of their labor, or the “revolutions” of diurnal and annual cycles. As Reinhart Koselleck has argued, the relation to time distinctive of modernity (or “new time”) is that the present is experienced “as a rupture, as a period of transition in which the new and unexpected continually happened” (1985: 257). This modern consciousness is predicated on a narrative of linear progress, a forward motion which also means, as Bruno Latour has argued, that “one must break with the past” (1993: 69). Latour provocatively questions the premises of modernity as a mode of historical consciousness and draws attention to the extent to which the project of modernity is far from complete or homogeneous. He therefore looks at the time of the modern as merely “a provisional result of the connection among entities” (1993: 74).² Taken in these terms, the modernity of a text like *Richard II* lies in the perspectival manner in which it approaches its material, a form that accentuates the provisional, incomplete nature of any representation of the effects of historical processes. Contrary to modernity’s characteristic narratives of revolutionary breaks and transitional movements away from the past, “the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled” (Latour 1993: 75). To return to Latour’s quote prefacing this chapter, “*It is the sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting.*” One of the tasks of criticism is therefore to reclaim the freedom of sorting promised of modernity (Latour 1993: 76),

and question the premises on which distinctions of historical periodization are founded.

If early moderns conceptualized “revolution” more in terms of the nature and physics of matter, it is especially pertinent to turn to an older intellectual tradition of materialism, one that dates back to Aristotle as a way of describing the material states of objects, in order to draw out the political implications of an alternative apprehension of time and material processes. In his analysis of motion in his *Physics*, Aristotle conceptualized motion as change, and, in particular, as the transformation from potentiality to actuality that occurs in the movement of an object from one state to another. Being, for Aristotle, was not a static attribute, but rather a process, “an inner principle of change,” that was constantly underway (qtd. in Fletcher 2007: 24). His term for actuality, *energeia*, emphasizes this sense of “being-at-work”: actuality, what comes to exist, is not predetermined but instead constituted through the process of motion or activity itself (Aristotle 1993: 1–3). For medieval readers of Aristotle such as Aquinas, the potentiality intrinsic to bodies in motion destabilized a linear sense of time. This model not only acknowledged the inevitability of change, something intrinsic to the object itself, but also the latent, coexistent presence of an object’s potential future states at any present moment (Aquinas 1963: 136–37).

Aristotle’s version of materialism provides a productive framework for thinking about the extension of bodies in space on the early modern stage (cf. Fletcher 2007). And it is especially relevant for the mapping of bodies in space over time that is distinctive of the staging of historical events in the genre of the history play. However, Aristotle’s analysis of motion, despite its emphasis on the protean qualities of potentiality, is ultimately predicated on a search for underlying causes. It is in this regard that *Richard II* offers a complex engagement with a materialist physics of the workings of time, power, and economic processes. Shakespeare’s play shows the difficulties of reworking historical causes into the form of dramatic representation. At several key moments, Shakespeare’s play depicts what could be described at the intentional level as the outcomes of political action, or, more broadly, as the effects of historical necessity. But these moments of decision or crisis are actualized without inquiry into either the intentions or causes directing them to occur. What prompts Richard to intervene in Bolingbroke and Mowbray’s trial by arms, for instance, is left to be inferred. Similarly, the forces precipitating the sudden collapse of Richard’s power upon his return from Ireland remain outside the frame of the play’s staging of history, an absent cause that can be traced only in terms of its effects. An absence of causation is similarly evident in terms of the opacity of Bolingbroke’s motives in returning from exile. Unlike its sources—which cast the popular grievances against Richard as the motor of subsequent events—Shakespeare’s text depicts Bolingbroke as motivated by a conservative defense of property and constitutional stability (Patterson 1994: 114; Hexter 1980: 4). But it is perhaps the central process depicted in the play—the transfer of power from Richard to

Bolingbroke—that remains the most imprecisely located. The formal gaps in the text demonstrate an inability to represent the transformational potential of this event, and thereby counter the oppositional logic and transitional narratives that undergird many traditional approaches to the play.

This chapter's reading of *Richard II* will consider the historical processes that evade analysis because they do not conform to a transitional narrative. My focus is therefore not the extra-textual historical relations that precede or succeed the events of the play but instead the social energies of the moments of political crisis themselves. Shakespeare's text illustrates the conceptual impasses that stem from historical change. Leaving political action offstage, the play concerns itself primarily with the affective responses to its effects. A prime example is provided in the text's most famous scene of interpretation, the Queen's conversation with Bushy regarding the possible ways of responding to Richard's departure for Ireland. Although superficially offering consolation, Bushy's response effectively changes the topic: whereas the Queen is mulling over the prospect of a possible future, which is "more than with parting from my lord the king" (2.2.13), Bushy instead focuses on the effects of the king's departure alone. Rather than examining causation or historical process, his preoccupation is with substance and the realm of the sensible: "more's not seen" (2.2.25), he concludes. Yet the seeming materialism of Bushy's metaphors, drawn from the optics of perspective, is undercut by the immateriality of the object that these analogies describe: it is, after all, not the substance but the refracting "shadows" of grief which he attempts to analyze (2.2.14–15). As Christopher Pye has noted (1990: 90), Bushy's recommended mode of analysis is amorphous: the oblique glance, "eyed awry," enables one to "Distinguish form" (2.2.19–20). Yet this frame of analysis is itself in motion and undergoing mutation; far from establishing an objective position, his metaphors are caught up in the very processes they attempt to describe. Bushy's cure becomes the same as the Queen's disease: if she has been "Looking awry" and producing perspectival tricks of seemingly multiplied grief, he recommends a comparably oblique view in order to render grief in contained and manageable form (2.2.20–23). The Queen's affective and imperceptible imagination of the future troubles the distinction of what counts as the substance of history—her grief is both "some thing" and "nothing" in terms of its affective power (2.2.12). Offsetting the formal pattern of absent causation that recurs throughout the play, the Queen insists that her "conceit" must still derive from some cause of grief. Even if nothing has caused it, its affective traces still remain: "'tis nameless woe" (2.2.34–40). Drawing on an economic metaphor that links this passage with the play's pervasive use of property as the basis of identity, she receives her grief only "in reversion," as an inheritance that follows loss (2.2.38).

Analysis of this scene generally focuses on Bushy's speech alone, overlooking not only the Queen's response but also the subsequent message that arrives to report Bolingbroke's return to England and the growing support for his cause. The perspectival analogy of Bushy's speech stands in for what is not

represented on stage: the reversal of political fortunes in the shifting of power from Richard II to Bolingbroke. In the play's tragic focus on the affective impact of history, the moving ebb and flow of political events remain outside the frame of dramatic representation. For Pye, this scene is not merely expository but also "reflects a more fundamental drama concerning the origins of the political subject" (1990: 89). The political subject is constituted at one level through acts of agency, including processes of political action—such as the popular will prompting Bolingbroke's return—that are unstaged and left to be inferred by their effects. On a more elusive register, the political subject is represented through the affective response of the Queen, who provides a model of the ethical casuistry left to individual subjects, the determination of how to respond to the unpredictable motion of political events.

The history play provides the appropriate formal framework for representing a physics of power in which abstractions such as apprehensions of time, models of sovereign authority, and economic relations of production are rendered in material form and mapped out over time and space. As seen in the Queen's scene with Bushy, this dramatic physics of bodies in motion renders historical phenomena in the material form of affective processes. Through its emphasis on the embodied nature of emotion, the concept of affect enables us to recognize the stakes involved in the Queen's response. Affect also offers an alternative model of historical agency that takes into account its intersubjective and distributed workings. One of the most influential of early modern approaches to affect is Spinoza's model of "conative bodies," which, by looking at power in its fluid, material workings, posits that the field of power is never delimited but rather open to all bodies to "strive to enhance their power of activity by making alliances with other bodies."³ *Richard II* is distinct from Shakespeare's other history plays in the comparatively depopulated political terrain that it depicts. There are relatively few conative bodies, it would seem, that are able to influence the course of historical events. Affect therefore becomes a more passive register for the characters in the play; as with the Queen in her scene with Bushy, the emphasis is placed much more on the perspectival response to absent historical causes.

The chief absence in the play is that of sovereignty itself. In the conflict between Mowbray and Bolingbroke that opens the play, both figures claim to defend sovereign authority: the former as a loyal agent of Richard, the latter acting on behalf of his sovereign against the usurped authority of his officers. Sovereignty remains an absent presence, a mercurial force that defies localization as it courses through the body politic. It is a force, moreover, that is only diminished the more it becomes figured in the person of Richard himself. If the play stages the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies, as Kantorowicz argued in his classic analysis of the text (1957: 26), the separation of the political body from the natural body of the monarch occurs far in advance of the play's shift to tragedy upon Richard's return from Ireland. The gaps in the play's staging of history signal the inherent failure of monarchical authority to embody the claims of sovereign authority. The basis of

sovereignty lies, instead, in the affective bonds it elicits from its subjects. Richard's power derives from the steadfast adherence of both Mowbray and Bolingbroke to the idea of his authority. Their rival claims to defend the monarch and his interests are, of course, mutually exclusive, and the conflict between them threatens to expose sovereignty's intrinsic contradictions and lack of substance.

Richard II is, as Tillyard observed, "the most formal and ceremonial" of Shakespeare's history plays (1946: 245). The ceremonial aspects of the trial by combat—the only depiction of such a process in early modern drama (Rackin 1990: 52)—attempt to give form to sovereign authority. Anticipating the play's movement toward a focus on Richard as tragic subject in its second half, there is an effort to locate sovereignty by finding a metaphorical register in which it can be staged. But the question of responsibility for the Duke of Gloucester's murder, the absent cause prompting the entire process, implicitly places Richard and his authority on trial as well. Since this cause must remain unrepresented, the trial prompts a search for other registers through which sovereign authority may be indirectly indicted. As a result, there is a proliferation of alternative affective bonds that stand in for yet never fully congeal with the evasive, mercurial matter of sovereign authority.

Bolingbroke addresses Richard not only as his "sovereign" but also as his "liege" (1.1.21), terms that offer competing models of the political bonds between monarchs and subjects. Whereas the former term aligns with an early modern absolutist definition emphasizing a subject's exclusive and overriding political allegiance to his monarch, the latter concept represents an alternative model that retains the feudal politics associated with an earlier era. A liege's status is not intrinsic but rather stems from a contractual set of mutual obligations binding political leaders and their subjects (Holderness 1985: 55). Bolingbroke's allegiance to his "liege" is therefore conditional and based on his monarch's protection of his interests, including property rights, in return for his services. Bolingbroke's position ultimately undermines the foundational premises of sovereignty: in putting forward what he takes to be an unmitigated defense of his loyalty as a subject, he attests to how much Richard has transformed the monarchy. Sovereignty, in other words, no longer exists in the form that Bolingbroke defends.

Although Richard's staging of the trial by combat attempts to pit two potentially dangerous subjects against one another, the process inadvertently weakens sovereign authority even further as it prompts the expression of rival definitions of political identity. As the traces of sovereign authority are erased, what fills the void are competing bonds: familial loyalty, state service, chivalry, knighthood, honor. Because these terms are overlapping yet not fully synonymous, the political subject is placed uncertainly among fluid circuits of competing authority. This process also confers onto subjects the ability to navigate among these definitions and reconstitute their political identities. There is an unintended appropriateness to Gaunt's consolation to

Bolingbroke after the latter's sentence of exile: "Think not the king did banish thee, / But thou the king" (1.3.279–80). In attempting to absent himself from representation and pit his rivals against one another, Richard has created the conceptual space for imagining alternative political models, social relations that define themselves not in terms of their modernity but rather in connection to the protections and obligations associated with a feudal social formation.

In the opening scenes, sovereignty does not reside in the body of the sovereign but instead circulates as a representative fiction, an absent cause known solely through the affective bonds that it generates. Sovereignty retains coherence only so long as it is invisible and unanalyzable, with its key decision—the murder of Gloucester—remaining unstated throughout. But Richard's own arbitrariness and efforts to centralize power threaten to undermine this tenuous equilibrium. Whereas the fiction of Richard's sovereignty is preserved by ensuring that the trial is never resolved, suspending its narrative time and preventing the movement toward action, this inquiry also threatens to expose his own complicity in Gloucester's murder. His intervention in the trial—interrupting the combat and subsequently exiling both Mowbray and Gloucester—intends to keep his subjects constantly in motion, preserving the conspiracy of silence around sovereignty's absence and retaining the illusion of the sovereign as the unmoving mover of political action.

The play does not depict a transitional narrative, whether in terms of charting a transition from the reign of Richard to that of Bolingbroke or glancing toward a more general epochal shift from "the medieval" to "the (early) modern." The formal difficulties in locating specific moments of transformation speak to the conceptual impasses in imagining a linear narrative line of historical development in the play. When, in other words, does power shift from Richard to Bolingbroke? It is appropriate that Richard is referred to as "sometimes" king at several moments throughout the play (4.1.169, 5.1.37, 5.5.32). As these references indicate, no figure in the play embodies sovereignty; rather, power flows uncertainly through and against individual subjects. The matter of sovereignty is a product of turbulence, of accelerations, intensifications, and changes in movement: "it is turbulence," Michel Serres remarks, "that secures the transition" (2000: 27).

Ironically, the temporal moment in which an absolutist model of sovereignty first takes shape—with Richard pronouncing the irreversible foundations of his power as secured through his coronation and divine right (3.2.54–57)—coincides with the effective loss of the material foundations of his authority. This shift derives, in part, from the untimeliness of his return from Ireland, a moment which renders him in many ways as a figure out of time. Literally, he arrives a moment too late, shortly after his army has dispersed: "But now the blood of twenty thousand men / Did triumph in my face" (3.2.76–77). Sovereignty is seen as the effect of subjects' obedience, not its cause, and Richard's authority expires along with the term of his subjects' service. The blood of the body politic is figured in the circulating bodies of its subjects,

and it is the expiry of this loaned authority which renders his sovereignty null and void as well. Sovereignty is similarly rendered in material form through Richard's reference to having "a glorious angel" in his "heavenly pay" (3.2.60): it is no longer divine right that lends form to sovereign authority, but instead the material resources of the coins ("angels") that fund his state. Richard becomes a figure out of time more generally, pleading for a reversal of the forward movement of time: "call back yesterday, bid time return" (3.2.69). This lack of temporal location is also attributable to the contradictions inherent in his earlier representation of his power. His belated conjuration of divine right attempts to present his power as an immutable substance and thereby preserve it from temporal location. But such efforts ultimately curtail his ability to act as a historical agent. Stepping out of time, he is unable to create a narrative of future action, and can only resign himself to the role of a tragic figure mourning the loss of his power (3.2.178–79).

The text's generic transition from history play to tragedy—particularly following Richard's return from Ireland in 3.2—introduces an alternative template that limits the physics of matter and motion. I want to contextualize the formal distinctions within the play in relation to a more overarching conceptual disjunction between a premodern Aristotelian physics and a competing model of motion that vied for legitimacy in the early modern period. The extent to which Aristotelian and atomist traditions are transformed in the period is reflected in a comment from Descartes, writing half a century after Shakespeare, which limits the radical implications of Aristotle's model of motion. For Descartes, "motion ... is nothing more than the action by which any body passes from one place to another."⁴ The scientific ground of Descartes's model is articulated through the creation of an abstract sense of space: motion, in other words, is made to conform to the order of geometry. What is especially pertinent for a discussion of motion in the context of literary genre is the fact that Descartes imagines motion within a literary template. Motion is seen in a narrative framework, a plot through which to chart movement from point A to point B. Motion is merely a means to an end, a transition in which the substance of the object is *not* transformed through its travels. It is, moreover, a process that always presumes that future states are inevitable. Descartes's model is indeed profoundly Aristotelian, but it is not the Aristotle of the *Physics*, outlining the intrinsic change and potentiality of matter, but the Aristotle of the *Poetics*, creating rule-based structures of reversal and character. Aristotle's analysis of drama presents a far more ordered definition of matter: a plot delimits the range of the possible according to "the laws of probability or necessity," offering a narrative trajectory that is "complete"—not "episodic" or subject to "chance" (Aristotle 1968: 18). The tragic plot is especially well-suited for a linear apprehension of time, a sense of history as founded on transitions between distinct periods.

Descartes additionally assimilates the physics of motion to a literary frame as he lends form to motion by having its activity attributed to the "action" of a character. Movement is linked with action, a force implicitly brought into

being through the intervention of rational human agents. Catherine Belsey first linked the emergence of the Cartesian subject with the formal means of representing the "subject of tragedy" on the early modern stage (1985: 13–54). This model not only embodied action, motion, and potentiality in the human subject, but also limited agency to a particular class of subjects. Michel de Certeau has noted that a modern apprehension of time casts the sovereign prince in the role of the "subject of action," conferring onto him a monopoly over the power to "make history" (1988: 7).

What separates the conceptual world of Aristotle from that of Descartes is the advent of innovative literary frameworks for imagining social processes and historical change. Offsetting an atomistic model drawn from the motion and intrinsically unstable substances of objects in the natural world, the early modern stage offers a mode of representation that delimits the insurgent motion of social process by embodying agency in the corporeal form of the figure of the sovereign as tragic subject. Richard II's fall from power, and the play's subsequent transition to the genre of tragedy in its second half, provides the formal means to embody the effects of political action. Sovereignty becomes visible, tangible, and analyzable only in the aftermath of its loss. It is after Richard has effectively lost power that he may retroactively construct an absolutist model of sovereignty, an act of imagination that nonetheless also reveals the constructedness of those salient features of self-origin, unity, and decisionism that ground fictions of sovereignty from Bodin to Hobbes.

Contrary to Franco Moretti's classic, resonant analysis of Shakespearean tragedy as effecting a deconsecration of sovereignty, the scenes of Richard's tragic fall in fact give form to sovereign authority and reinforce the Bodinian concept of sovereignty by locating it firmly in the tragic subject and not in competing social forces. Moretti himself acknowledges that despite the seemingly radical effects of tragedy's deconsecrating potential, it also "pays the monarch an ambiguous homage" (1983: 43). At one level, scenes of rebellion and deposition render monarchs as "subjects," making them liable to legal judgment within the play as well as to the imaginative judgments of spectators, as David Scott Kastan has argued (1999: 109–27). Yet this same process nonetheless elides competing spheres of political action, thereby reinforcing the absolutist illusion of power as residing solely within the body of the sovereign. It is "on stage, and only on the stage, [that] the king is 'above the law,'" to draw on Anselm Haverkamp's insightful analysis of the play (2004: 317). In aligning tragedy with the history of absolutism, I am not conferring onto dramatic representation the status of historical proof, but instead foregrounding the ideological work intrinsic to dramatic form. The historical process in which the monarchy defined itself at the expense of rival spheres of power shares some characteristics with a generic process in which tragedy distinguished itself from dramatic forbearers such as the history play.⁵ As a result, tragedy, standing alone like the sovereign, becomes the only generic form deemed "truly modern, truly rigorous" (Moretti 1983: 49).

The extent to which tragedy offers a generic template for recuperating sovereignty is reflected in how Richard II takes on the attributes of absolutist monarchy only after the effective loss of his power. Yet the seeming modernity of his characterization emerges out of premodern representational frameworks such as the symbolic ritual of coronation. As has often been noted about the deposition scene (4.1), Richard regains a sense of agency and power over his self-definition by performing a reversal of his coronation, stripping himself of the ceremonial trappings as well as material foundations of his authority (Holderness 1985: 59). His theatrical power to “undo” his sovereignty allows him to create an illusion of agency, that he is the one effecting the transition of power: “With mine own hands I give away my crown” (4.1.208). Even though the tragic figure emerging from this moment is characterized in terms of his modernity, the representation of Richard as an interiorized subject takes shape through a decidedly premodern metaphorical register, that of the coronation. The modern subject is constituted through the language of the archaic: the “medieval” is therefore not only a belated construction, but also a template for representing the innovativeness of the modern.

It is not only that Richard represents the modernity of his tragic model of sovereignty in the arcane language of the coronation; he also succeeds in rewriting the conditions of the coronation itself. As Perry Anderson has remarked, early modern absolutism functioned as a “redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination” (1979: 18). Medieval legal theorists such as Fortescue had emphasized the legal foundation of the coronation, which confirmed that the sovereign would be bound by the laws of the realm (Hamilton 1983: 13). Richard’s symbolic inversion of the coronation, by contrast, fulfills the fantasies of the early modern absolutist monarchy, enabling him to assert his own sovereignty outside all legal restraints or competing spheres of authority.

Richard’s final soliloquy best represents the ways that he is able to construct an interiorized, psychological mode of absolutism that was denied him in the political sphere. His prison world, populated by his thoughts alone, epitomizes the self-generating mythology of absolutism, with the monarch’s brain and soul, in phrasing evocative of the patriarchal matrix of early modern absolutism, reproducing “a generation of still-breeding thoughts” (5.5.8). Richard’s role as subject of tragedy allows him to generalize his psychological state and establish a solipsistic parallel between his affective condition and the physical and political worlds beyond him. But this final speech also attests to the impossibility of this model of self, and diagnoses the extent to which sovereignty has been irrevocably transformed over the course of events in the play. As he extends his analogy, it is clear that his thoughts are no longer his own but are “like the people of this world” (5.5.10). Despite the striking absence of rival political spheres throughout the play, the subjects comprising the political body take metaphorical shape and imprint themselves on Richard’s logic. These absent forces—the commons, the

people—gain insurgent power precisely through their abstraction, and as concepts they gain an affective potential denied them in terms of more direct forms of political agency.

The clock, as Walter Benjamin commented in his analysis of the early modern *Trauerspiel*, or mourning play, establishes psychological and physical worlds as analogous to one another (1998: 96). And this metaphor attests to the ways that the tragic monarchical subject is shaped by an emergent, more modern apprehension of time, one that irrevocably transforms the matter of sovereignty. Richard’s elaborate emblem decenters himself as subject, replacing a unitary self with disjointed affective functions of sighs, tears, and groans (5.5.57). But in correlating these affective states with the mechanical workings of a clock—minutes, times, and hours (5.5.58)—he also attempts to make his subjective state, like the political state now outside of his power, run like clockwork and conform to the narrative logic of a “regular and harmonious sequence” that is also “spatially measurable” (Benjamin 1998: 97). Richard’s numbering clock is an apprehension of time as empty and homogeneous, a linear, even movement mapped as if on a geometric plane. It is an appropriate metaphor for representing the logic of modernity. As Philip Lorenz comments, “the king is no longer like God; he is now reduced instead to a mere measure of the passing time” (2006: 113). What is elided in this emergent conceptual framework, however, is a sense of the intensity of the present, the potential for transformation that follows from an earlier, Aristotelian sense of the potentiality of matter. In Bolingbroke’s new world order, time flows, but in an even, calculated measure, no longer filled “by the presence of the now,” and immune to the insurgent energies of political transformation (Benjamin 1968: 261). Yet this formation, following Richard’s metaphor, is also recognized to be a process of deformation, one in which “time is broke” (5.5.43) through the imposition of a temporal order based on linearity, succession, and periodization.

An interpretive order is often imposed on the play through an allegorical reading that analyzes Bolingbroke’s deposition of Richard as a modern, depersonalized, functionalist view of power succeeding the divine right of the absolute monarchy (cf. Grady 2002). But this approach assumes a line of demarcation between the modern and the medieval that is not so clear either in the play or in the early modern period more generally. As Graham Holderness has argued, the play does not represent the displacement of the attributes of a medieval age by modern, Machiavellian forces, but rather shows Richard II as an innovator who attempts to impose an absolutist framework on a feudal political landscape (Holderness 1985: 64). Moreover, in historicizing the play in relation to the 1590s, one must also recognize that political absolutism was far from a ubiquitous or generally accepted political doctrine (Burgess 1996). David Norbrook has commented that “the theory of the king’s two bodies has arguably gained more widespread currency in recent decades than it ever enjoyed in the 1590s” (1996: 350). Such models of sovereignty—variously termed political absolutism, the divine right of kings,

or the king's two bodies—are retrospective constructions, invented traditions that are then projected back in time to earlier periods.

In the play, it is Gaunt's refusal to act against Richard II that provokes the first mention of the concept of divine right. Even while acknowledging Richard's complicity in Gloucester's murder, Gaunt consigns his own role to that of prophetic onlooker rather than political agent, concluding that "God's is the quarrel" (1.2.37). Divine right, foundational to early modern absolutism as well as to the medieval paradigm of the king's two bodies, does not exist in a stable or universally acknowledged form at the beginning of the play. Rather, it arises in response to political necessity, and is an effect of the refusal to imagine the possibility of subjects' resistance. It is therefore appropriate that Richard himself first invokes the language of divine right in reaction to the news of rebellion that reaches him upon his return from Ireland: the shocked realization—"Revolt our subjects?" (3.2.100)—quickly produces a belated, compensatory claim, "They break their faith to God as well as us" (101). With political questions displaced onto a theological frame, the possibility of contestation is thereby infinitely deferred. Contrary to Carl Schmitt's claim that modern politics takes form as religious questions are reworked in secular terms (1985: 36), in the play the language of politics precedes that of religion, and political theology enters solely at the point beyond which politics fears to tread, providing a means for sidestepping irreconcilable political differences.

Political theology is not the residue of medieval belief, but rather an innovation produced in response to historical change. These religious discourses are neither monopolized by sovereign authority nor aligned with the body of the sovereign. In the deposition scene, for instance, political theology offers the sole means to critique the terms of the unrepresented transition of sovereign authority from Richard to Bolingbroke, enabling the Bishop of Carlisle to openly oppose the events unfolding around him. Carlisle's speech is additionally significant because it is among the few references to the subsequent effects of historical events, as he imagines a time when "future ages groan for this foul act" (4.1.138).⁶ Offsetting the correlation of modernity with secularization, the theological registers of prophecy and eschatology are used to represent futurity, the defining characteristic of modernity that Koselleck describes as "new time."⁷ Gaunt's critique of the historical present in his "royal throne of kings" speech similarly takes form by appropriating the potentially subversive speech of prophecy: "Methinks I am a prophet new inspir'd" (2.1.31). Gaunt's speech is, of course, only talk, a counsel that recognizes its marginal position in the present and nostalgically conjures a time already lost. A far different mode of political theology arises in response to Bolingbroke's accession: the rebellion engineered by the Abbot of Westminster not only draws its constituency from clergymen like the Abbot and Carlisle but is also ceremoniously inaugurated with a mutual taking of the sacrament (4.1.328; 5.2.97). Richard, by contrast, is unique in consigning religious discourse to the past. As he ruminates on losing power and the

"name of king" (3.3.146), he figures his resignation in the terms of the "medieval," and exchanges the trappings of sovereign authority for such items as "a set of beads" (147), "a hermitage" (148), "an almsman's gown" (149), "a palmer's walking staff" (151), and "a pair of carved saints" (152). Medievalism represents a past with no future, and is associated with stereotypical features of asceticism, blind devotion, itinerancy, and poverty.

Political theology elsewhere buttresses Richard's power by providing a metaphysical foundation to offset the shifting matter of sovereignty. It is appropriate that Kantorowicz, in his analysis of *Richard II* in terms of the concept of the king's two bodies, begins his reading of the play with Richard's return from Ireland in 3.2 (1957: 26). Tragedy offers a fitting generic framework for representing absolutism because of the ways that this model of power is a belated conjuration that follows the effective loss of sovereignty. In situating the play in relation to a tradition of medieval political theology, Kantorowicz's analysis of the king's two bodies resembles Richard II's theatrical reconstitution of the coronation ceremony in that it similarly invents historical precedents for early modern absolutism. What is often overlooked, however, is the extent to which Kantorowicz also emphasizes the abiding influence of medieval traditions of constitutionalism on early modern political debates, a point that has been expanded in subsequent analyses of *Richard II* by Donna Hamilton, Graham Holderness, David Norbrook, and Richard Halpern. For medieval political theorists such as Bracton and Fortescue, the monarch's power was never absolute but always circumscribed by legal restraints (Hamilton 1983). At the same time, however, these theorists expressed a fear of rebellion shared by early modern successors like Bodin and Hobbes, and still insisted on sovereign authority's monopoly over force: although subject to the law, the sovereign was not liable to his subjects.

There is nothing intrinsically oppositional or "modern" about this medieval constitutionalist tradition. The fact that such arguments were later harnessed by Parliamentary opponents to the Stuart monarchy demonstrates how political forces that could be described in some respects as emergent nonetheless defined themselves through invocations of tradition. The residual and emergent, or medieval and modern, always coexist and are mutually constitutive.⁸ Moreover, constitutionalism possesses an internal tension between what Antonio Negri has termed "constituent" and "constituted" power (1999: 1–34). Constituent power, the radical potential of constitutionalism to reshape definitions of power, is offset by constituted power, the inherent bent within constitutionalist traditions toward restoring stability and political equilibrium. Bolingbroke's constitutionalism is more accurately seen as a defense of constituted power: it is ultimately based on an appeal to tradition and modes of stability, most especially in terms of a concerted defense of property rights. Far from advocating political innovation or a break from the past, Bolingbroke and his supporters are motivated to restore traditional limits. In contrast to the insurgent potential of constituent power, they ultimately have no

ideological program of their own but are instead united through their opposition to Richard's absolutist, arbitrary exercise of power.

In his new guise as Henry IV, Bolingbroke becomes a cipher, taking on the attributes of a Hobbesian model of depersonalized authority. Appropriately described as a "silent king" during the proceedings of Richard's deposition (4.1.289), Bolingbroke casts himself less as an oppositional force than a mere instrumental process of conveyance. His own authority is conferred to Northumberland, who stands in for him to present the charges against Richard. And this process of delegation is extended even further as Bolingbroke's own interests are displaced onto the Commons' "suit," the articles of impeachment justifying Richard's deposition. Even though the Commons are placed as the historical agents responsible for Richard's deposition, and presented as demanding "satisfaction" through a public reading of the document in front of Richard (4.1.154, 272), this political body tellingly remains absent from representation, an omission that further limits the historical forces impacting the moment of transition.

Whereas Bolingbroke and his allies emphasize the entropy of Richard's "tired sovereignty" passively collapsing and leading to his "resignation" (4.1.178–79), Richard counters with a metaphorical register that embodies and makes visible the transfer of power. Richard's insulting reference to Bolingbroke and his allies as "Conveyors" (4.1.317) aptly draws attention to the material, coercive workings of power effecting the transition from one reign to the next. His metaphor of the two buckets, which figures the transition of sovereignty as a zero-sum game, similarly offers a physics of power based on the confrontation of opposing forces. The opposition of Richard and Bolingbroke is constructed through competing stage properties: the paper, listing the articles of impeachment, and the mirror—a documentary, bureaucratic mode of power versus a spectacular, theatrical mode of sovereign representation. It is Richard's theatrical coups—the ceremonial reversal of the coronation, as well as his smashing of the mirror — that ironically lend an elusive "substance" (4.1.299) to sovereign authority. Sovereignty, in this sense, can be embodied, imagined, and realized only as an effect of its absence and loss.

Capitalism and sovereignty—often attributed as the innovations of the early modern age and chief markers of a transition from medieval feudalism—are constructed as substances and historical objects through an underlying abstraction. These spheres can be conjured in mechanical terms, and represented as autonomous, stable entities, only by effacing the historical processes and social relations that serve as the preconditions of their formation. The key metaphors of the play, by contrast, offset the mechanized abstractions through which the early modern constitutes itself as the modern. The text offers a serial chain of metaphors that embody the abstractions of sovereignty and capital: the blank charters, the farming of the realm, the two buckets, the commonwealth as garden, the undecking and reverse coronation, the dashed mirror, the clock. Metaphor, Michel Serres has argued, is a process of

"transport" (Serres and Latour 1995: 66). The conversion of abstract models of sovereign authority and economic relations of production into metaphor creates a physics of power, rendering these abstractions in material form as bodies in motion. Thereby represented as processes rather than substances, the forces typically separated into the distinct realms of economics and politics are not only mutually constitutive but also undergo constant mutation.

A number of readings of *Richard II* have productively analyzed the economic foundations of sovereign authority in the play. "Principles of landholding," as William O. Scott observed, "shape the language of the arguments over the fiscal prerogatives of kingship" (2002: 275). It is Richard who is associated with the economic innovations typically consigned to the early modern period, particularly in his leasing of crown lands, which casts him as "Landlord of England ... not king" (2.1.113). One of the radical implications of this practice is that it reduces sovereign authority to its material base, rendering the king as merely one landlord among many. Sovereign authority is not only converted into an equivalent value with competing spheres of economic power; it is also reduced to its economic base and depicted in brute terms as a means for extracting surplus wealth. This materialization of power undermines traditional models of sovereignty. As Richard Halpern has recently argued, one of the distinctive features undergirding the medieval model of the king's two bodies was the resistance of the political body to economic laws. In this sense, sovereignty's fiscal basis constituted it as a force that necessarily transcended economic interests. Because the king was imagined as the temporary custodian of lands left in his care, his royal prerogative and economic liberty to alienate crown lands were sharply circumscribed (Halpern 2009: 70; cf. Kantorowicz 1957: 186, 191).

Richard's innovations have disturbingly rendered sovereignty and capital as equivalent material forms. In transforming the basis of rule into "quantitative terms," H.R. Coursen notes, Richard's leasing of the land undermines legal as well as sacramental grounds of kingship (1982: 19). To a certain extent, one could say that the play illustrates a traditional, feudal model of sovereignty threatened by economic innovations that would become commonplace by Shakespeare's own time. It is then only appropriate that the main opponent of Richard's economic policies is John of Gaunt, and that it is his critique of these practices that prompts his "royal throne of kings" speech, a passage which concludes, after all, with the postlapsarian comparison of England to "a tenement or a pelting farm" (2.1.60).

But Gaunt's rhetorical showpiece of nostalgic nationalism also transforms the very feudal qualities he is attempting to preserve. His vision of the monarchy and hereditary succession as the driving engines of national history is profoundly at odds with the more complex, interwoven loyalties of family and political alliance that are reflected in earlier scenes such as his exchange with the Duchess of Gloucester (1.2). Gaunt's image of the nation leaves little space for the "counsel" he had promised (2.1.2), and the only role left for him

in this image of martial national unity is as a crusader fighting abroad, as exiled from domestic centers of power as his son. Despite his stated critique of Richard's centralization of power, Gaunt's opposition to Richard's leasing of crown lands ultimately stems from his realization that these policies make the monarchy subject to the law. Becoming "Landlord ... not king" (2.1.113) sets a dangerous precedent because it makes sovereignty more directly material in its coercive effects, and thereby renders it more susceptible to contestation: tenants are not only more likely to protest than subjects, they also have greater protections under the law.

It is appropriate that Gaunt's likening of the nation to a "pelting farm" is one of the play's most direct references to its theatrical predecessor, the anonymous history play *Thomas of Woodstock* (see 2.1.113), a prequel that foregrounds the conflict between Richard and his uncles and culminates with the murder of the Duke of Gloucester.⁹ In contrast to Shakespeare's text, this earlier play centers its action not on Richard as sovereign but on his uncles as feudal magnates who actively contest the centralization of sovereign authority. *Woodstock* depicts the reign of Richard II as a time of insurgency: power, as depicted in that play, is a mercurial force coursing across social classes and political alliances, linking sovereigns, feudal magnates, upstart bureaucrats, and even disgruntled commoners. Power not only flows in more diffuse and erratic networks, it is also depicted much more candidly as a principle of coercion. This process is seen most vividly in the play's staging of Richard's efforts to collect revenue through his innovative use of "blank charters," unsigned checks forced on the population to fund the coffers of the monarchy. In *Woodstock*, the blank charters provide the basis of the play's comic subplot, which traces their circulation from the cynical creation of this innovation by the King's advisors to the delegation of authority to the state's incompetent provincial officers. Power flows like money in the play, working down the social ladder and across the nation, and the text chronicles the extraction of surplus with remarkably candid precision, from Richard's Lear-like division of the kingdom among his favorites to the calculation of profits among these officers (4.1). As sovereignty is materialized through its parceling and distribution, it also becomes more directly contestable, which prompts an insurgency of resistance to the obvious, inept exactions attempted through the blank charter scheme.

Given that *Richard II* often provokes analyses based on a binary logic—Richard versus Bolingbroke, medieval versus (early) modern—it is appropriate to end this alternative mode of reading with a scene that does not feature either character: the Garden scene of 3.4. In formal terms this moment in the text intrudes into the sequence of scenes that charts Richard's fall from power and eventual deposition, upsetting the seeming linearity and inevitability of this political transition. In a play that increasingly delimits the political actors able to exercise agency and shape the narrative of historical events, the scene provides an example of what Haverkamp has insightfully described as the play's "subterranean" political contexts (2004: 318). It

therefore offers a different model for apprehending time and political action; a companion piece to the Queen's earlier scene with Bushy, its focus is on the affective response to events left unstaged. In a play whose key transitional moment—the transfer of power from Richard to Bolingbroke—is never rendered as a discrete moment in time, it is the Queen's exchange with the Gardener that significantly stands in for this absent historical cause.

Exempted from the course of political events and relegated to the ostensibly private domestic space of the garden, the Queen associates her political fortunes with the erratic course, or "bias," of a ball in a game of bowls (3.4.5). Its matter, too, is "full of rubs" (3.4.4) that produce an irregular, unpredictable course. In language evocative of the Aristotelian definition of matter, nothing retains its substance as it moves through space over time. And it is the effort to impose order on the turbulent fluctuations of time that leads to the intrusion of the Gardeners, figures representing a public whose discourse impinges on present events: "They'll talk of state, for everyone doth so / Against a change" (3.4.27–28). The movement of political events has destabilized the political order, and allowed for the participation of a public whose presence is otherwise invoked solely as an abstraction. Inverting the hierarchies of representation, it is the Gardeners who first report the unstaged transfer of power from Richard to Bolingbroke (3.4.77), news conferred through their instrumental role as transmitters of letters within broader networks of information exchange (3.4.69–71). This public discourse provides an innovative mode for anticipating the future, replacing the earlier political-theological registers of prophecy and eschatology articulated by Gaunt and Carlisle. Yet their reflection "against" a change signals not only how the insurgent time of social change radically alters the possibilities of the present, but also the extent to which the Gardeners are shaped by the newly ascendant homogeneous time of Bolingbroke, whose effective mode of power shares their desire to ensure that "All must be even in our government" (3.4.36). Reflecting like Hamlet on the "fine revolution" unfolding around them, the Gardeners ultimately "lack the trick to see't," the oblique glance that marks the bias of time's movement, the erratic course of potentiality that necessarily decenters all subjects and circumscribes their possibilities of agency. In the sorting out of their times, they plot a course of order and stewardship, leaving as a token the "rue" (3.4.105) that reminds them not only of the Queen but also glances toward the times necessarily forgotten to ensure the seeming forward progress of their age.

Notes

- 1 My analysis is influenced by Foucault 1984: 83, 85. Foucault's model of emergence is often simplistically applied in efforts to pinpoint historical transitions in the study of early modern texts.
- 2 For an application of Latour's theoretical model to early modern texts, see J.G. Harris 2008.

- 3 Spinoza, *Ethics*, esp. Part III, "On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions" (1955: 128 and ff.); for analysis, see Bennett 2010: x and 2. I am drawing on Spinoza's model of conatus rather than Hobbes's more mechanistic approach, in which affective endeavors are seen solely as responses to external forces. Hobbes, like Descartes, also charts motion through a linear time-space continuum, or "the length of a point, and in an instant or point of time" (Hobbes 1839: 206).
- 4 Descartes, *Principia Philosophiae* (1644), Part II, section 24 (1879: 245).
- 5 Richard Helgerson offers a related analysis of the decline of the populist energies of the history play genre (1992: 195–245).
- 6 The only other reference that draws on religion to imagine futurity comes from Richard himself when he threatens Bolingbroke and his followers that God "shall strike / Your children yet unborn" (3.3.87–88). In this context, the theological serves merely to condemn political acts of treason.
- 7 Cf. the comments of the Welsh Captain regarding portents of Richard's fall, "And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change" (2.4.11).
- 8 I am drawing, of course, on Raymond Williams's distinction of residual and emergent cultures (1980: 31–49). Harris (2008) provides an illuminating complication of Williams's model in his analysis of the material impact of residual objects and social practices.
- 9 For a discussion of the relationship between *Woodstock* and *Richard II*, see Roslyn Knutson's chapter in this volume.

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9 "But, what euer you do, Buy" *Richard II* as Popular Commodity

Holger Schott Syme

I

On 6 February 1601, on the eve of the Earl of Essex's rebellion, some members of his circle asked the Lord Chamberlain's Men to stage a special performance of a play about "the deposyng and kylling of Kyng Rychard the second." When told that the play was "so old & so long out of vse as that they shold have small or no Company at yt," they offered a top-up payment of 40 shillings, finally persuading the players to revive the dusty and unpopular show the next day (Chambers 1930: 2:325). Most scholars assume that Essex's friends were asking for Shakespeare's *Richard II*. The anecdote is well known, likely the most famous historical reference to a play about Richard II. It has occasioned much debate on the relationship between early modern theater and politics, the relative subversiveness or conservatism of the Chamberlain's Men (and Shakespeare as their leading playwright), and the power or failure of censorship. But to my mind, what is most telling and remarkable about the episode is not what it says about the political impact or powerlessness of the theater, but what it can tell us about early modern notions of popularity.

It is by no means clear that the 1601 play was Shakespeare's. We have only a very limited and fragmentary picture of the Chamberlain's Men's repertory, after all, and it is not inconceivable that they owned other works dramatizing the king's deposition and death.¹ But as E. K. Chambers argued (1930: 1:354), Shakespeare's play fits the description "from the theatrical point of view," in which a five or six year-old text would have to be considered "stale" and likely in need of revision. Then again, if *Richard II* was "long out of vse" by February 1601, why would Essex's fellows request it? If their objective was to stir up revolutionary sentiments among Londoners, why choose a long-forgotten play? The answer may be that from perspectives other than that of the theater, *Richard II* was anything but a distant memory. As a printed playbook, it was outselling almost all of Shakespeare's other works by 1601, having reached its third edition a few years earlier in 1598. The only play of his that could keep pace was *I Henry IV*, whose third quarto had appeared in 1599. In fact, most booksellers in February 1601 would likely have identified