

EXPLORING 'RADICAL MISCHIEF' AT THE OTHER PLACE, ROYAL
SHAKESPEARE COMPANY, 2016-2020

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the intentions behind the 2016 re-opening of the new The Other Place (TOP), the studio theatre of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon. Erica Whyman, Artistic Director of the new TOP, summarises the spirit of the new building as 'Radical Mischief'. Using interviews, observational notes and publicity material, this thesis examines what 'Radical Mischief' means to the RSC and analyses whether such aims are visible in the work of the theatre through three case-study chapters — *Mischief Festivals* (annual or biannual showcases of new work), Research and Development projects, and the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference, co-convened with the University of Birmingham. This research is the first to document the new TOP at length and sits within the body of literature already written about earlier incarnations of TOP: Alycia Smith-Howard's *Studio Shakespeare* (2006) and Colin Chambers' *Other Spaces* (1980). This thesis concludes that elements of 'Radical Mischief' have been visible in the work, but it has not been a consistent theme. The extent to which 'Radical Mischief' can impact the wider RSC and the University is questioned, and with the closure of the building in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is uncertain when TOP will re-open and if 'Radical Mischief' is still a key incentive.

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List of Abbreviations

ADP = Actors Development Programme

BSL = British Sign Language

LAMDA = London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

NT = National Theatre

OED = Oxford English Dictionary

Q&A = Question and Answer

R&D = Research and Development

REF = Research Excellence Framework

RSC = Royal Shakespeare Company

RST = Royal Shakespeare Theatre

TOP = The Other Place

TGR = Theatreground

Introduction: The New The Other Place

The Other Place was the Royal Shakespeare Company's most consistently successful theater [...] a potent reminder of the theatrical force of Shakespeare's drama and the capacity for creating spectacular events out of the bare essentials of theater: the actor, the empty space, and the text.¹

It was like stepping into a carpentry shop and being privileged to watch the craftsman seriously at work. Things were made here. Creativity, not comfort, mattered.²

On the 10th April 1974, a crowd gathered in a tin shed in Stratford-upon-Avon to sit on hard wooden benches and watch a performance of Shakespeare's *King Lear* presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), directed by a young female director, Mary Ann 'Buzz' Goodbody.³ Unlike productions at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST), productions in the Company's new studio space were produced on 'a shoe string budget', using minimal props and scenic items in a 'simple, rough and uncluttered' style.⁴ Audiences entered and exited from the same doors used by the actors, and the close proximity between actor and spectator enabled 'a community of shared experience'.⁵ The theatre was called The Other Place (TOP), its name providing a nod to The Place, the studio theatre in London where the RSC staged a series of new work in 1971 and 1973, and it is also a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ('seek

¹ Alycia Smith-Howard, 'Knowing her Place: Buzz Goodbody and The Other Place', *Early Modern Studies Journal*, 5 (2013) 77-93 (p. 91).

² Benedict Nightingale, 'New Clothes for a Scruffy Old Friend', *The Times*, 30 July 1991, p. 7.

³ Future references to 'Stratford-upon-Avon' will now be condensed to 'Stratford' unless otherwise stated.

⁴ Buzz Goodbody, 'Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974', 1973, p. 1. Accessed in the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 2019; Smith-Howard, 'Knowing Her Place', p. 82.

⁵ Smith-Howard, 'Knowing Her Place', p. 83.

him i'th' other place', Act IV.3.34).⁶ These intimate conditions provided RSC audiences with powerful and memorable performances, notably Goodbody's 1975 production of *Hamlet*, and Trevor Nunn's 1976 production of *Macbeth*, starring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench. Important new plays also premiered at TOP, such as David Edgar's *Destiny* (1976), Christopher Hampton's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1985) and Pam Gems' *Piaf* (1978).

The Other Place theatre, in its various incarnations, has been the studio theatre of the RSC for the past forty-seven years. The original TOP building, situated two hundred yards along the road from the RST, closed in 1989 as it no longer met fire and safety regulations and was re-built and re-opened in 1991. The second TOP building continued producing a mixed repertoire of classical and new work until it officially closed in 2005 to make way for the Courtyard Theatre, which served as a temporary auditorium while the RST and Swan Theatres underwent refurbishment. This thesis concentrates on the third incarnation, which officially re-opened in 2016. The new TOP is led by Erica Whyman, who serves as its Artistic Director and also as Deputy Artistic Director of the RSC. Whyman was invited by Gregory Doran, the RSC's current Artistic Director, to join the Company in 2012, and was tasked with maintaining the legacy of TOP as 'a place of playful and serious experiment'.⁷ However, the operation of the new TOP is very different from its former manifestations.

⁶ Shakespeare references are, unless otherwise indicated, from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edn., ed. by John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The RSC also returned to The Place in the autumn of 1974, presenting *Comrades* by August Strindberg, adapted by Jeremy Brooks and directed by Barry Kyle, *The Can Opener* by Victor Lanoux (English version by Charles Wood), directed by Walter Donohue, and Goodbody's TOP production of *King Lear*. The list of RSC productions can be found by visiting the following website: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 'Search' and 'RSC Performances' <<http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/rsc-performances>> [accessed 27 August 2021].

⁷ Erica Whyman, 'Welcome to the First Edition of our Newspaper', *Radical Mischief*, 1 (November 2013) p. 3.

TOP has re-emerged as a home exclusively for new work, with the RST as the main venue for Shakespeare and the Swan Theatre staging other plays from the Elizabethan/Jacobean repertoire and Restoration plays, along with its own new work programme. The term 'new work' will be used throughout this thesis to denote new writing and commissions that are not writer-led (devised pieces, for example), and can also include musicals. The new TOP does not programme productions throughout the year. Instead, it showcases original work annually or biannually, under the banner of *Mischief Festivals*.⁸ In addition to these *Festivals*, the new TOP is primarily used as a rehearsal space for RST and Swan shows, and for Research and Development (R&D) projects throughout the year. The University of Birmingham is a founding partner of the new TOP, and a five-year collaboration was announced in May 2015 between the RSC and the University to develop TOP 'as a unique hub for rehearsal, training, learning and creativity'.⁹ Each of these important events — *Mischief Festivals*, R&D, and activities that sit within the collaboration — all contribute to this perception of TOP as a creative hub. To summarise the spirit of the work at the new TOP, Whyman coined the phrase 'Radical Mischief' to represent her ideal vision for the building.¹⁰

This thesis investigates what 'Radical Mischief' means to the RSC, and whether these aims for being radically mischievous are visible within the activities of the new TOP. An examination of this phrase is crucial in order to understand the intentions behind re-opening the new building and its overall significance to the RSC from 2016 onwards. Not only this, but

⁸ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Mischief Festivals at the Other Place' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/mischief-festivals-past/about-the-festival>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

⁹ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'University of Birmingham' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/education/about-rsc-education/how-your-school-can-work-with-us/university-of-birmingham-collaboration>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

¹⁰ Whyman, 'Welcome to the First Edition of our Newspaper', p. 3.

an investigation of 'Radical Mischief' will demonstrate how the RSC is promoting the new TOP, and what type of original work the Company are hoping to conduct within this new studio theatre. Both the words 'radical' and 'mischief' are elusive, loaded terms and the thesis investigates the implications behind this phrase and the challenges involved in producing and creating work under this banner. Whilst the phrase will be unpacked within the first chapter of this thesis, it is worth summarising briefly that 'Radical Mischief' seeks to celebrate the legacies of Shakespeare and Goodbody, building on Goodbody's achievements in the original TOP, by provoking artists, scholars, and students to be bold, daring, and playful in their experiments. With this in mind, each case-study chapter of this thesis explores different projects that have taken place in TOP to investigate how the theatre's activities contribute to the spirit of 'Radical Mischief'.

In addition to the phrase, 'Radical Mischief', the Company has also used other key phrases to describe the new TOP. Significantly, various members of staff at the RSC such as Whyman and Pippa Hill, Head of Literary, have referred to the new building as the 'engine room' or the 'creative engine' of the Company.¹¹ The thesis makes reference to the concept of the 'engine room' in order to discuss the extent to which the activities taking place in the new TOP and its aims for 'Radical Mischief' have an impact on the wider organisation. Whilst certain RST and Swan productions are mentioned, the main focus of the thesis remains on the work in TOP and discussions of impact on the other stages will be kept brief. The phrase 'Radical Mischief' was selected as a focus for this thesis as opposed to other phrases such as

¹¹ Whyman, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company website, 'University of Birmingham'; Pippa Hill, 'Research and Development: The Creative Engine', *Radical Mischief*, 3 (November 2014), p. 6.

the 'engine room' in order to concentrate the thesis on the activities emerging within the new TOP.

Another key concept in relation to TOP is otherness. Interestingly, the description of TOP as an 'engine room' appears to be at odds with the idea of TOP being a space of otherness. In fact, it could be argued that otherness appears to be less of a relevant idea in the new TOP than it was when TOP originally first opened in 1974. Having a new studio theatre in Stratford felt innovative during the early seventies, whereas today, several leading arts venues and regional theatres in the UK have a studio theatre in addition to their larger auditoriums. The otherness of the original TOP connected with the wider theatrical context of the rise of fringe and alternative theatres in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and, whilst several fringe theatres still exist today, the boundaries between fringe and mainstream theatres have become increasingly blurred. It is 'Radical Mischief', rather than otherness that appears to be the more popular and prominent phrase in marketing and promoting the building.¹²

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the origins of the phrase 'Radical Mischief' and its various definitions. Examining publicity material, namely press releases and announcements, has been crucial in order to analyse how the new TOP has been framed and depicted by RSC staff and practitioners. Particularly, the *RSC Newspaper*, and the *Radical Mischief* newspapers, launched in 2013, which focus specifically on new work at the RSC, have also been invaluable. In addition, I have conducted interviews with various members of RSC

¹² I am aware that 'other' and 'otherness' are very loaded terms and while this thesis does not have the scope to fully address the implications behind these concepts, there is a brief section in the thesis which provides examples of how certain members of staff think about otherness in relation to the new TOP. Whyman and Birch use the term 'other' to describe the way in which work is produced differently in the new TOP in terms of its form and structure, and I also question whether they use the term to distinguish between the content of works in TOP compared to the Swan/RST. See pp. 86-87.

staff and artists, many of whom have been directly involved with productions at TOP, to discern what 'Radical Mischief' means to them individually. In utilising these resources, the first chapter explores various perceptions of the terms 'radical' and 'mischief' separately, before considering the implications of combining these words. Where relevant, I have contextualised how the words 'radical' and 'mischief' have been perceived in a wider theatrical context. The chapter draws upon Baz Kershaw's *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (1999), and Caridad Svich's and Sarah Ruhl's edited collection, *Popular Forms for a Radical Theatre* (2011), in order to ascertain what radical performance has meant to prominent critics and artists.¹³ This chapter also interrogates Whyman's claim that 'Radical Mischief' is a phrase that seems 'to sum up a spirit shared by Buzz [Goodbody], by Shakespeare and by the most exciting theatre-makers working today'.¹⁴ I explore the ways in which Shakespeare and Goodbody are perceived by those in the RSC as both radical and mischievous, before considering the challenges of being either radical and/or mischievous in both the theatre and the academy.

The second chapter focuses on the ways in which 'Radical Mischief' is present in the *Mischief Festivals*, the annual or biannual festivals of original work showcased in TOP. This chapter focuses on the 2018 Spring and Autumn *Mischief Festivals* as case-study examples. The 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival* featured *#WeAreArrested* by Can Dündar, adapted by Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts, and *Day of the Living* by Amy Draper, Darren Clark and Juliet Gilkes Romero. The 2018 Autumn *Mischief Festival* presented *Maydays* by David Edgar, directed by

¹³ See Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999); Caridad Svich and Sarah Ruhl, eds, *Popular Forms for a Radical Theatre* (South Gate, CA: NoPassport Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Whyman, 'Welcome to the First Edition of our Newspaper', p. 3.

Owen Horsley. *Maydays* was originally performed in 1983 by the RSC but Edgar was commissioned to re-write the play for 2018. I observed the rehearsal process for these productions to investigate the extent to which the works related to ‘Radical Mischief’. In addition to my own observation notes and documentation of the process, I interviewed actors and the creative teams to fully understand the aims behind the productions in question. The chapter also includes a discussion of the accompanying events organised around these two specific *Festivals* — *Trying It On*, a one-man/one-woman show by David Edgar (2018 Autumn *Mischief Festival*), *Three Letters*, a one-woman performance by Nell Leyshon, and an R&D showing of *Redefining Juliet* directed by Storme Toolis and Alice Knight (both 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*).¹⁵

Chapter Three concentrates on R&D projects organised by the RSC at the new TOP. The chapter discusses the aims for R&D at TOP before exploring three case-study examples — *Strange News from Whitehall* by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard in July 2019, Deafinitely Theatre’s *Macbeth* R&D in February 2017, and *Democracy* Project led by Erica Whyman in December 2017. These three examples have been selected because each project represents different aims for R&D at the RSC. Brockis and Hubbard are artists that have previously been commissioned by the RSC for TOP (*Kingdom Come*, Autumn *Mischief Festival* 2017), Deafinitely Theatre provided a new encounter by a visiting company, and Whyman’s project was a staff-led research project as part of the collaboration between the RSC and the University of Birmingham. These R&D projects also demonstrate the open-ended nature of

¹⁵ An R&D showing or presentation usually occurs at the end of a session of R&D where artists open the room to audiences (sometimes private or invited guests only), but in some examples of previous *Mischief Festivals*, artists have extended the invitation to members of the general public. A sharing of new ideas and discoveries normally ensues, which may consist of a short performance or a reading, or it may be more open-ended and consist of a discussion and a question and answer (Q&A) session.

R&D at the new TOP, as each project witnessed different outcomes. I observed both *Strange News from Whitehall* and the *Democracy Project*, and I interviewed Paula Garfield, Artistic Director of Deafinitely Theatre, in order to investigate the *Macbeth* R&D. The chapter focuses on the ways in which each case-study relates to the aims of 'Radical Mischief' before interrogating the overall significance of R&D at the new TOP.

The fourth chapter explores the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference which took place in TOP in July 2018 and was co-convened by the University of Birmingham and the RSC. The conference was a prominent event as part of the collaboration between the two institutions, and this chapter interrogates the ways in which the conference fulfilled its title by being radical and/or mischievous. This chapter also analyses the aims for the conference which sought to bring academics and artists together in new ways in order to reinvigorate the relationship between theatre and academia. Thus, the form of the conference will be examined in addition to the content that was unearthed from the discussions that took place. Significantly, the University of Birmingham has signed up to the banner of 'Radical Mischief' and the thesis will unpack the implications of this phrase in relation to academia. Overall, this chapter questions the extent to which either organisation can be radical and/or mischievous and will also investigate any possible impact this conference achieved, individually and collectively.

The thesis ultimately analyses significant experiments that took place in the new TOP between 2016 and 2020 and assesses whether the RSC have fulfilled their aims of being radically mischievous. The thesis hopes to make an original contribution to knowledge in being the first literature to document activity at the new TOP at length. The thesis sits within the body of knowledge already written about TOP; Alycia Smith-Howard's *Studio Shakespeare*

(2006), and Colin Chambers' *Other Spaces* (1980).¹⁶ Whilst these sources provide great detail about the original TOP, and Smith-Howard also writes about the second incarnation of TOP during the 1990s, this thesis is focused on the third TOP building. Smith-Howard's book is also focused on detailed discussions of productions of Shakespeare in TOP, whereas this thesis is concentrated on new work exclusively. In this vein, the thesis also sits within the wider field of contemporary theatre and performance studies as I discuss the aims for new work at TOP. Specifically, this thesis relates to other literature dedicated to radical performance, such as Kershaw's *The Radical in Performance* and Svich and Ruhl's *Popular Forms for a Radical Theatre*.

Before launching into an analysis of the phrase 'Radical Mischief', it is important to highlight that the idea of producing radical, experimental work at the RSC is not new. This next section will trace encounters with new writing and experimental and radical ideas at the RSC over the Company's history.

Influences

It is important to discuss the founding and formation of the RSC in the early 1960s because it was during this decade that a 'radical RSC identity' became apparent.¹⁷ Sir Peter Hall was just twenty-nine years old when, in 1960, he was officially appointed as Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (as it was called at the time, before its renaming in 1961 when

¹⁶ Alycia Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* (Aldershot; Ashgate, 2006); Colin Chambers, *Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC* (London: Methuen, 1980).

¹⁷ Alan Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and the Making of Ideology', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2nd edn, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) pp. 182-205 (p. 183).

the original Royal Charter was replaced with a New Charter).¹⁸ Alan Sinfield notes that ‘Hall’s innovations signalled a new direction’ for the Company away from previous preconceptions of Stratford being ‘a theatrical backwater’, steeped in ‘deadly sentimentality’, and ‘a *laissez faire* policy of artistic standard’.¹⁹ Chambers writes that the RSC ‘offered a new prototype of what a Shakespearean company could be — a large-scale ensemble presenting in repertoire a classical and contemporary programme relevant to its society’.²⁰ Hall was committed to staging Shakespeare productions that spoke directly to a modern audience and to programming experimental seasons alongside which, in his words, could ‘enable us to take soundings in the time we live in’.²¹ Hall secured a lease for the Aldwych Theatre in London and wanted the Company to present new plays alongside Shakespeare and classical productions. He argued that it was vital for the RSC to present a mixed repertoire and claimed that ‘cross-fertilization’ would occur; the new plays would inspire and enhance the performing of Shakespeare, and vice-versa.²² Hall asserted that, ‘[a]n experiment of modern writing is essential to the classical actor, keeping his sensibilities sharp and accurate so that he can then apply these attributes to his Shakespearean work’.²³ Thus, Hall justified his programming of contemporary plays alongside Shakespeare by stating that these experiments would be

¹⁸ Sinfield, ‘Royal Shakespeare’, p. 182; Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company: Creativity and the Institution* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004) p. 8; Lyn Darnley, ‘Artist Development and Training in the Royal Shakespeare Company: A Vision for Change in British Theatre Culture’, vol. II Appendices (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2013) p. 8.

¹⁹ Sinfield, ‘Royal Shakespeare’, p. 183; Richard Findlater, *The Unholy Trade* (London: Gollancz, 1952) p. 57; Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968) p. 51; Charles Landstone, *Off-Stage: A Personal Record of the First Twelve Years of State Sponsored Drama in Great Britain* (London: Elek, 1953) p. 180. Italics as printed in the original text.

²⁰ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. ix.

²¹ Peter Hall, ‘Shakespeare and the Modern Director’, in *Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company 1960-63 in Stratford-upon-Avon and London*, ed. by John Goodwin (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1964) pp. 41-48 (p. 47).

²² Chambers, *Other Spaces*, p. 20.

²³ Peter Hall, ‘Shakespeare and the Modern Director’, p. 41.

beneficial to the actors, in addition to offering audiences a broad repertoire of work showcased in London.

As reflected in the above quote, Hall was interested in the idea of 'experiment' in relation to new writing, but he was also eager to develop new forms of performance. In his 1963 essay, 'Avoiding a Method', he summarised his aims for finding 'an approach' to performing Shakespeare for a modern audience.²⁴ Hall explained the importance of continuing experimental work in order to appear relevant: '[w]e are searching, and whatever we find today, a new search will be necessary tomorrow'.²⁵ In 1962 he invited directors Peter Brook and Michel Saint-Denis to join him at the RSC and the three men were dedicated to developing an ensemble of actors who would train and experiment with new practices. In addition, Hall became interested in presenting works in smaller theatres such as the Arts Theatre, where the RSC hosted a 1962 experimental season.²⁶ Roger Gellert writes that '[t]he most stimulating Royal Shakespeare development of 1962 was undoubtedly their six-month season at the Arts Theatre' and claimed that the season 'was a rare treat' to see work 'which for economic or artistic reasons wouldn't have been feasible at the Aldwych'.²⁷ Seven plays were mounted from March 1962, including Anthony Page's production of Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* and Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. New plays included David Rudkin's *Afore Night Come*, and Fred Watson's *Infanticide in the House of Fred Ginger*, and Chambers notes that these two works 'could only be played in a club theatre because of the

²⁴ Peter Hall, 'Avoiding a Method', in *Crucial Years*, Royal Shakespeare Company booklet (Stratford-upon-Avon: Reinhardt, 1963) pp. 14-19 (p. 14).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶ Peter Hall, 'Avoiding a Method', p. 15; Peter Hall, 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', p. 43, 46.

²⁷ Roger Gellert, 'The Plays: An Impression', in *Crucial Years*, Royal Shakespeare Company Booklet, pp. 8-11 (p.10).

‘censor’.²⁸ Particularly, Gellert described Rudkin’s play as ‘a rich, pullulating *tour de force*’; the play features an ‘elderly Irish vagrant’ who, as a result of prejudice, is brutally murdered ‘in one of the most appalling scenes witnessed in the modern theatre’.²⁹ Despite the achievements of the season, with *Afore Night Come* being described as ‘easily the year’s best new play’ by Gellert, the RSC had to abandon its plans to host an annual experimental season at the Arts due to financial constraints.³⁰

While the plan for an annual experimental season at the Arts Theatre was short-lived, the RSC continued to experiment elsewhere. Hall allowed Brook to conduct experiments publicly and privately, a famous example being the 1964 Theatre of Cruelty season held at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) Studios with Charles Marowitz and actors from the company. The first public presentation began on 12th January 1964 and performances lasted for a month.³¹ Inspired by Antonin Artaud, Marowitz and Brook aimed to find ‘a certain kind of rigour in expression’ which, when connected to ‘a certain kind of experience, produces a result which is *more true* than conventional ways of expressing’.³² The programme of events presented to the public included excerpts of Artaud (‘A Spurt of Blood’, ‘Artaud Scene’), Paul Ableman (‘Typewriter’, ‘By Jove’, ‘Heathcliff’), Brook (‘Public Bath’ and ‘Guillotine’), Jean Genet (excerpt from his play *The Screens*) and a letter from the Lord Chamberlain outlining sections of dialogue from *The Screens* that were not permitted for

²⁸ Chambers, *Other Spaces*, p. 21.

²⁹ Gellert, p. 10. Italics as presented in the original text.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10; Chambers, *Other Spaces*, p. 21.

³¹ Royal Shakespeare Experimental Group, Theatre of Cruelty programme 1964, n. pg. Accessed in the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 2019.

³² Charles Marowitz, quoted in Simon Trussler, ‘Private Experiment — In Public’, in *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, compiled by David Williams (London: Methuen, 1988) pp. 29-33 (p. 29). Italics as presented in the original text.

public performance.³³ This letter was ‘mockingly read out’ including the sections of prohibited text — a clear ‘gibe’ at the censor.³⁴ While many audience members ‘found the evening generally unsatisfying’ and the programme ‘incoherent’, Sally Beauman comments that the RSC for the first time was creating a ‘radical identity’ for itself and being ‘consistently provocative’ both ‘*theatrically*’ and ‘*politically*’.³⁵ The RSC was ‘consistently provocative’ by producing a stream of new plays that were challenging the status quo (plays that were offering critiques of political events and social issues) and plays that demonstrated new ideas of formal innovation. Steven Adler writes that the RSC ‘undertook the production of new works that were radical in both politics and performance style’, citing Peter Weiss’ *Marat/Sade* which ‘exemplified’ a ‘shift towards experimentation and forever shattered the image of the RSC as a “Shakespeare museum”’.³⁶ The Theatre of Cruelty season fed into the 1964 production of *Marat/Sade*, directed by Brook and presented at the Aldwych, and, amidst growing concerns about the content of RSC productions, the ‘Dirty Plays’ scandal erupted. Emile Littler, a Board Member of the RSC at the time, was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* on 24th August 1964, complaining of the ‘dirt plays’ presented on stage by the RSC at the time.³⁷ Many members of the public followed suit, writing to the RSC to support the complaints Littler had made. For example, one letter commented that the ‘filth currently masquerading as entertainment at

³³ Royal Shakespeare Company, Theatre of Cruelty promptbook, n. pg. Accessed in the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 2019. This list is not exclusive; the programme to the Theatre of Cruelty season states that the programme ‘will undergo a constant process of change, both in content and casting’. See Royal Shakespeare Experimental Group, n. pg.

³⁴ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 43; Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 275.

³⁵ David Richard Jones, *Great Directors at Work: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Kazan, Brook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) p. 221; Beauman, p. 273. Italics as presented in the original text.

³⁶ Steven Adler, *Rough Magic: Making Theatre at the Royal Shakespeare Company* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001) p. 56.

³⁷ Emile Littler, quoted in *Daily Telegraph* Theatre Reporter, ‘Emile Littler Attacks Aldwych Season’, *Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 1964, n. pg.

the Aldwych Theatre is a betrayal of all that the Theatre stands for'.³⁸ Despite the numerous complaints, Sir Fordham Flower, then chairman of the RSC, other directors, and the company stood in support of Brook and Hall.³⁹ Eventually the storm blew over, with Littler claiming he had been misquoted in the press, and the RSC continued its operations, but the scandal is significant in demonstrating how the experimental work caused fractures not only in terms of public opinion but visibly in its own boardroom.⁴⁰

Whether one approved of the work or not, the 1960s was an exciting time for the RSC, and this excitement surrounding experimentation and new plays fed into their Shakespeare productions. The seminal 1963 production of *The Wars of the Roses* by Hall and John Barton was informed by the experimental season at the Arts Theatre in 1962, as Hall asserts that the discoveries of that season helped him comprehend 'the ritual and violence of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays'.⁴¹ Similarly, Brook was informed by Samuel Beckett for his 1962 production of *King Lear*, as Marowitz, the assistant director, explains: 'our frame of reference was always Beckettian. The world of this *Lear*, like Beckett's world, is in a constant state of decomposition'.⁴² Hall was equally influenced by Beckett in terms of form and rhythm, and he also credited the work of Harold Pinter in helping him to understand links between classical and modern drama. He reflected on directing Pinter's *The Homecoming* (1965): 'rehearsing it

³⁸ W. Geere, 'Letter to Sir Fordham Flower', 9 September 1964. Accessed in the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, September 2018.

³⁹ For letters in support of Hall, please see Patrick Donnell, David Jones, Maurice Daniels, and others, 'Letter to Sir Fordham Flower on Behalf of the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford', 28 August 1964, p. 2. Accessed in the Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, September 2018.

⁴⁰ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Executive Council Held on 29th September 1964', p. 2. Accessed in Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, September 2018.

⁴¹ Peter Hall, 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', p. 46.

⁴² Charles Marowitz, 'Lear Log', in *Peter Brook*, compiled by Williams, pp. 6-22 (pp. 6-7). Jan Kott also has an influential chapter titled "'King Lear," or Endgame' which draws out parallels between the two plays. See Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. by Boleslaw Taborski, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1967) pp. 100-133.

was a joy; the rhythmic certainties which I found in Shakespeare and Beckett I found in quite a different way in Pinter'. Further, Hall concluded the following:

The Homecoming proved my belief that the textual discipline of the classics could and should be applied to modern drama. Ian Holm's superb Lenny was all the better for playing Richard Crookback throughout *The Wars of the Roses*.⁴³

The symbiotic relationship between Shakespeare and modern drama demonstrated the importance of new work and experimentation to the RSC during the 1960s in order to make new discoveries, promote new writing and to present Shakespeare in relevant and innovative ways.

TOP emerged as a natural consequence for the RSC as the Company continued to work in smaller spaces. Prior to its opening under Trevor Nunn in 1973, the RSC had increasingly been experimenting with studio spaces at the Arts Theatre, the Roundhouse in London in 1970, and in 1971 and 1973 the Company hired The Place in London to present new work.⁴⁴ In the wider context, studio theatres sprang up in various locations during the 1960s and the 1970s. Catherine Itzin describes how in 1968 there were around a dozen 'fringe' theatres; by 1978 there were over a hundred 'alternative' theatre companies, plus another fifty young people's theatre companies.⁴⁵ Following years of rejection to groups such as Theatre Workshop and Unity Theatre, the Arts Council in 1971 established a Fringe and Experimental Drama Committee and by 1976 a total of almost half a million pounds was being awarded to

⁴³ Peter Hall, *The Autobiography of Peter Hall: Making an Exhibition of Myself* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1993) pp. 189-190.

⁴⁴ Chambers, *Other Spaces*, pp. 23-25.

⁴⁵ Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980) p. xiv.

eighteen 'alternative' theatre groups.⁴⁶ Another significant influence on the rise of fringe theatre was the growing prominence of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which began in 1947 when eight theatre groups 'turned up uninvited and unheralded' to present performances outside of the inaugural Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama.⁴⁷ Theatre groups performing at the Fringe, such as Glasgow Unity, sought to create new work that was dedicated to 'socialist theatre *and* Scottish theatre', and encouraged new writers 'to find the raw material for original plays in their immediate working-class and urban contexts'.⁴⁸ The Fringe became associated with new, indigenous writing that was made by and for local people to represent them. This commitment to working with local communities and setting up performance spaces informally percolated into the work of the RSC.

An important precursor to TOP was Theatregoround (TGR), a group of actors in the RSC who took theatre to communities during the late 1960s and presented excerpts of classical and new work to people who did not necessarily have access to theatre.⁴⁹ The political consciousness of TGR fed into the development of TOP, in terms of seeking to make theatre inclusive to local audiences. Beauman states that Nunn 'was anxious that the discoveries the company had made by investigating classic texts for TGR should not be abandoned'.⁵⁰ In an interview with the author, Nunn described the 1970 TGR Festival at the Roundhouse: 'the experience that gave me the greatest pleasure of the whole year, forgetting

⁴⁶ Andrew Davies, *Other Theatres: The Development of Alternative and Experimental Theatre in Britain* (London: Macmillan Education, 1987) p. 168.

⁴⁷ Angela Bartie, *The Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-War Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) p. 52.

⁴⁸ Adrienne Scullion, 'Glasgow Unity Theatre: The Necessary Contradictions of Scottish Political Theatre', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13, 3 (2002) 215-252 (p. 219). Italics as presented in the original text.

⁴⁹ Peter Kemp, Theatregoround Report, p. 1. Accessed in Theatregoround Archive, Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 2019.

⁵⁰ Beauman, p. 319.

about design and presentation altogether. The *Hamlet* was free; it was thrilling.⁵¹ In 1973 the RSC announced that the tin hut formerly used by Saint-Denis to train actors, which then became the base for TGR, would be converted into a studio theatre (first entitled the Studio Theatre, before it was re-named and re-opened as TOP). The space could seat one hundred and thirty audience members and was called an 'experimental off-shot' enabling the Company to continue presenting new work with less financial risk and to produce work in smaller spaces.⁵² The first season at the new Studio Theatre was a success with sold-out performances (the opening programme included *Three Women*, a biographical sketch of Sylvia Plath, and a double-bill of Michel de Ghelderode's *Christopher Columbus* and *Escorial*).⁵³

Five months later Nunn appointed Goodbody as the Artistic Director of the new Studio Theatre, which was re-named TOP. Having joined the Company in 1967 as an assistant to Barton, Goodbody was, at the time, the youngest and only female director at the RSC.⁵⁴ Goodbody drew up a manifesto for TOP and aimed to make the tin shed a local theatre where she wanted to attract school students.⁵⁵ Goodbody spoke to teachers, asking what would benefit students and what texts they were studying, and she cut the plays significantly, reducing the running time in order for the students to catch buses home.⁵⁶ She aimed to make theatre accessible to wider audiences through practical changes such as the introduction of cheaper tickets, closer proximity between actors and audience (non-hierarchical seating), and

⁵¹ Trevor Nunn, quoted in Beauman, p. 308.

⁵² No Author, 'Stratford Opens a Second Theatre', *Stratford*, 29 June 1973, n. pg.

⁵³ Beauman, p. 320.

⁵⁴ Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare*, p. 1, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Goodbody, 'Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974', p. 1.

⁵⁶ Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare*, p. 36; Irving Wardle, "'Buzz-saw Bard'", review of "Lear" at The Place', *Times*, 1 November 1974.

a focus on the text and storytelling in performance.⁵⁷ TOP stood in contrast to theatres like the RST that utilised large sets and bourgeois designs; the aesthetic of the building was founded on stripped-back conditions and ‘shoe string’ budgets as mentioned earlier.⁵⁸ The ways in which Goodbody and her work in the original TOP relates to ‘Radical Mischief’ will be fully unpacked in the first chapter, as Goodbody was a key influence behind the phrase itself.⁵⁹

During the 1980s and 1990s TOP started to slowly lose its aims for experimentation. David Edgar, who was asked to be on a new play committee in the 1980s, stated that it was ‘not an entirely happy experience’ and that he felt they ‘succeeded in getting second-rank plays out of first-rank writers’ such as *Soft Cops* (1984) by Caryl Churchill and *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker, but not *Top Girls* (1982) or *Our Country’s Good* (1988).⁶⁰ Under Adrian Noble, who took over from Terry Hands as Artistic Director of the RSC in 1990, new work did not completely disappear, but Chambers implies that the strand of experimental, politically conscious, new work did begin to dwindle. There were moments during the 1990s that veered towards experimental work, such as Katie Mitchell’s time as Artistic Director of TOP (1996-1998).⁶¹ Gregory Doran claimed that the work Mitchell was doing in TOP was ‘radical’ and Claire Birch, former Assistant Producer for the RSC, recalled watching *The Mysteries*, directed by Mitchell in 1997: ‘I had not seen theatre like that before’.⁶² Interestingly, Mitchell’s work at the RSC focused mainly on classical and nineteenth

⁵⁷ Tickets were 70p for adults and 35p for children. See Buzz Goodbody, ‘The Other Place’, *The RSC Newspaper*, No. 2 (1975) p. 9.

⁵⁸ Goodbody, ‘Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974’, p. 1.

⁵⁹ See pp. 69-76.

⁶⁰ David Edgar, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, October 2018.

⁶¹ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, pp. 103-105.

⁶² Gregory Doran, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 2019; Claire Birch, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, August 2018. Birch left the RSC in 2021 and is now a Producer for the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

century drama. The exception to this was 'Beckett Shorts', a selection of shorter plays and monologues by Beckett, directed by Mitchell at TOP in 1997.⁶³ With the exception of certain productions such as Edgar's *Pentecost* (1994), and the RSC Fringe Festivals, which will be explained in Chapter Two, the activity in TOP in the 1990s seemed to be less focused on programming contemporary writers.

When Noble took over as Artistic Director in 1991, he delegated the task of finding new works to Executive Producer Michael Attenborough, which was perceived as a 'distancing' move by playwrights who did not see the decision as 'a consolidation for the importance of new writing'.⁶⁴ The slow demise of new work at the RSC resulted in the 'primacy of the company's classical work and new plays had to "earn their keep" as a commodity'.⁶⁵ Chambers states that this method 'tends to downgrade or exclude the innovative of the "other"'.⁶⁶ Chambers suggests that new work which had commercial promise was favoured over plays which were more experimental or political. The political aftermath of Thatcherism could have influenced this and how theatres operated from the 1980s onwards. One of the largest effects of Thatcherism was 'the redefinition of cultural status' in British theatres.⁶⁷ D. Keith Peacock argues, 'the Thatcher government's unwillingness to continue to increase funding' was underpinned by the assumption 'that theatre was not an agency of cultural [...] welfare, but an entertainment industry that was otherwise irrelevant' to the functions of society (p. 215). Funding was being awarded to groups or companies who focused more on

⁶³ Prior to her work in TOP, Mitchell also worked with two contemporary playwrights (Alexander Galin and Michele Celeste) in 1989 as part of the RSC season at the Almeida Theatre. See Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website (Note 6).

⁶⁴ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 96, p. 137.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁶ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 138.

⁶⁷ D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999) p. 215. Future references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

entertainment values, as opposed to political (especially left-wing) themes. For example, figures such as Andrew Lloyd Webber were admired by Margaret Thatcher for being a ‘successful exporter’ of shows, which demonstrated that praise was given to artists who could make money and produce sell-out productions (p. 28). New plays had to have the potential to be popular, and fewer opportunities were given to new writers in theatres such as the National Theatre or the RSC because of financial risk, according to Peacock (p. 187). On the other side of new work at the RSC, in contradistinction to experimental, radical writing, popular new shows such as *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1980, 1986) and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* flourished during the 1980s and the 1990s at the RSC (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* ran for four years from 1998-2002 in Stratford and London).

While the aftermath of the Thatcher period seemed dismal for new writing, there rose a particular group of writers in the mid-1990s whose writing has been dubbed by Aleks Sierz — ‘in-yer-face’ theatre. Sierz rightly points out that a ‘revolution’ in new writing took place during this period that produced daring new work as a reaction ‘against the attitudes symbolized by the Thatcherite dictum that “there is no such thing as society”’.⁶⁸ While major theatre companies in the 1980s were trying to reduce financial risk by staging new work from popular playwrights, ten years later a new generation of writers rose to prominence that wanted to rebel against the right-wing politics of the previous government. Playwright Anders Lustgarten suggested that the last ‘genuinely radical British theatre institution’ was the Royal Court in the 1990s.⁶⁹ The RSC however did not seem to embrace this new wave of playwriting from writers such as Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, and Jez Butterworth. An exception to this of

⁶⁸ Aleks Sierz, ‘Still In-Yer-Face? Towards a Critique and a Summation’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18, 1 (2002) 17-24 <DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X0200012X>> (p. 17, 20).

⁶⁹ Anders Lustgarten, interview with author, London, March 2019.

course was the 2001 production of Martin McDonough's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, which premiered in TOP and subsequently received both West End (2002) and Broadway (2006) transfers.⁷⁰ *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was described as 'a brutal satire on terrorism and undoubtedly the best and most talked about new play of 2001' and was rejected by other theatres such as the National Theatre and the Royal Court because of its controversial content.⁷¹ McDonough's play was clearly a success for TOP at a time of wider concerns around the future of the building.

In 2001 it was announced that TOP would be closed as a performance space and would be turned into an academy to train new actors.⁷² In a local newspaper an image presented a group of white-haired women dressed in mourning holding 'R.I.P TOP' posters and a spokeswoman stated that they were 'upset at the loss of the intimate performance space which was the theatre's main appeal'.⁷³ Not only were people concerned about the loss of their most treasured performance space, but others also became concerned for the role of new writing. A document sent to the Governors of the RSC, written by Cordula Kempe, Artistic Director of the Rudolf Kempe Society, stated that the 'commitment' to new writing demanded **'the readiness to tackle subjects that are "hot iron" — not always apt to please The Sponsors'** and she suspected that this 'increasing lack of readiness', 'reflected occasionally also in classical RSC productions, ha[d] been growing'.⁷⁴ Kempe warned that the closure of

⁷⁰ The play also received a West End revival in 2018.

⁷¹ Fiachra Gibbons, 'Playwright Savages "Gutless" Theatres', *Guardian*, 21 December 2001 <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/dec/21/arts.highereducation>> [accessed 20 September 2021].

⁷² Adrian Noble, 'Theatres Are Not Museums, which is Why the RSC is Now Focusing on Performances. We Need a Stage, Not a Home', *The Times*, 1 June 2001, p. 7.

⁷³ Lucy Newsam, quoted in Jenny Dormer, 'RSC's Revamp Launch is Marked by "R.I.P" Demo', *Stratford Standard*, 14 December 2001, n. pg.

⁷⁴ Cordula Kempe, 'The Royal Shakespeare Company and its Future: A Submission', October 2001, p. 9. Accessed in the Shakespeare Institute Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, February 2018. Bold writing as observed in the original document.

TOP and the loss of a permanent home in London ‘are the biggest mistakes made in the history of the RSC’ and that the ‘consequences are incalculable’.⁷⁵ Whilst the language is hyperbolic, the sentiment expressed is pertinent; did the diminution of this experimental strand of new work at the RSC have fatal consequences for the Company? Not so dramatically, perhaps. The RSC clearly survived during periods where radical, political work was not being staged, and in the interim period between the closure of TOP and its official re-opening in 2016 significantly successful productions were staged in the Courtyard Theatre, such as the 2006-7 Complete Works Festival (which also took place across several other venues), *Hamlet* (2008) starring David Tennant, and of course, *Matilda, A Musical* (2010) by Tim Minchin and Dennis Kelly.⁷⁶ This section has highlighted significant moments of radical and experimental work which have impacted the RSC and fed into memorable seasons in Stratford and London. Whilst the experimental strand of new work has not always been present in the RSC’s history, the re-emergence of TOP in the twenty-first century, under the banner of ‘Radical Mischief’, provides a clear revisioning of important aims for experimentation.

Conclusion

Overall, this thesis interrogates the bold ambitions made by the RSC in relation to the intentions behind re-opening TOP in 2016. ‘Radical Mischief’ is an enticing slogan to brand the new building, and this thesis unearths the aims and implications for new work at TOP. By exploring different aspects of new work and ideas — *Mischief Festivals*, R&D projects, and the *Radical Mischief* conference — this thesis seeks to illuminate the ways in which this phrase

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷⁶ Minchin and Kelly’s hit show has since been renamed *Matilda, The Musical*.

and its underlying provocations have informed the activities in the new TOP. Ultimately, this thesis explores how and whether 'Radical Mischief' is visible in the work taking place in the new building. In doing so, the thesis highlights the challenges, tensions, and possibilities of creating radically mischievous work at the RSC in the twenty-first century.

The new TOP has resurfaced at a time of increasing political divide, in the backdrop of the 2015 global refugee crisis, the Black Lives Matter movement founded in 2013, #MeToo movement, Brexit, Trump, the rise of far-right extremism, and increased warnings of a global environmental crisis.⁷⁷ How can the new TOP respond to the world outside its walls? Can 'Radical Mischief' provide a clear enough brief for artists working in the building? Is 'Radical Mischief' sufficient to tackle the social injustices facing society today? In some ways, an initial pondering of 'Radical Mischief' raises more questions than answers. What does it mean to be radically mischievous in the twenty-first century? Is it possible to be radically mischievous in a 'Royal' institution? Such questions will be explored within the first chapter of this thesis, as I unpack the term 'Radical Mischief' in greater detail.

⁷⁷ See Black Lives Matter, 'About' <<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>> [accessed 9 December 2020].

Chapter One: 'Radical Mischief'

November 2013, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Eleven months into Erica Whyman's appointment as Deputy Artistic Director of the RSC, the first edition of a new newspaper emerges.⁷⁸ As the front headline suggests ('Exploring the Creation of New Work at the RSC and Beyond'), it is an exclusive series intended to update audiences with the latest information about original work being created and developed at the RSC.⁷⁹ The final part of the headline ('and Beyond'), implies that such explorations have a far-reaching impact, and perhaps suggests that the legacies of such projects and their afterlives will be demonstrated within. The newspaper announces that the RSC find themselves at the beginning of a new epoch with the re-opening of The Other Place (TOP), a laboratory and creative hub for collaboration, playfulness, and experimentation. This newspaper is significant as it not only promotes upcoming productions at the RSC, but it is a clear indication that the Company want to provide readers with a glimpse of how and why they create new work. The title of the newspaper is '*Radical Mischief*'.⁸⁰

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, 'Radical Mischief' is a phrase coined by Whyman to summarise the spirit of the new TOP. Whyman explained her ideas for the new building:

I'm hoping that it will bring people here, excited by contemporary theatre, theatre that talks about their own lives, talks about the issues that concern them, and in that sense I think it's very important that

⁷⁸ Whyman joined the RSC in January 2013. See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Erica Whyman to Join RSC as Deputy Artistic Director', *RSC Members' News*, September 2012, n. pg.

⁷⁹ Royal Shakespeare Company, *Radical Mischief*, 1 (November 2013) front page.

⁸⁰ Royal Shakespeare Company, *Radical Mischief*, 1, front page.

the work of The Other Place is radical and is prepared to say what it thinks.⁸¹

The phrase is linked to contemporary performance that engages with relevant themes, yet it is not fully revealed what specific 'issues' are being explored. Further, the manner in which these ideas will be presented is asserted by Whyman:

It feels like it's got to be mischievous here, it's got to be possible to do something naughty, but also somewhere where we can tackle those big issues, big themes, big ideas.⁸²

There may appear to be a tension between creating work that is playful and work that is serious in engaging with urgent, contemporary subjects. Can 'mischief' be 'radical', and if so, in what ways? Equally, is an act of radicalism softened or undermined if it is combined with 'mischief'? And what kind of 'big issues, big themes, big ideas' is Whyman referring to in the above quote?

In order to find answers to the above questions, an exploration into what 'Radical Mischief' really means to and for the RSC is necessary. An analysis of this key phrase can inform readers about the intentions behind creating new work in the Company's 'engine room'.⁸³ By examining publicity material such as the *Radical Mischief* newspapers and interviewing key staff at the RSC, this chapter firstly explores the various definitions of 'radical' as expressed by the Company. Such definitions are contextualised with wider research around what 'radical' means to other prominent critics and artists, along with how the term is used in

⁸¹ Erica Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company', Youtube, 23 May 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWoSomxMP_o> [accessed 04 August 2018].

⁸² Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company'.

⁸³ Whyman, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company website, 'University of Birmingham'.

the media. This chapter then investigates the various definitions of ‘mischief’ and its application to other theatre companies, before considering the ways in which the RSC use the term. An analysis of the phrase in its entirety (‘Radical Mischief’) follows this discussion, and the reasoning behind the pairing of these words is explained. I then focus on the origins of the phrase ‘Radical Mischief’ and Whyman’s claim that ‘those two words [‘Radical Mischief’] seem to sum up a spirit shared by Buzz [Goodbody], by Shakespeare and by the most exciting theatre-makers working today’.⁸⁴ An exploration of the ways in which Shakespeare and Goodbody relate to ‘Radical Mischief’ then takes place in order to understand how both figures inspire new work development at TOP.

Overall, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the challenges, tensions, and creative possibilities that can be unearthed through a discussion of what ‘Radical Mischief’ might mean in the twenty-first century. The ideas present within this chapter will inform the subsequent analysis of the ways in which ‘Radical Mischief’ may be present in various case-study projects that took place in the new TOP. Ultimately, this exploration will gain a sense of how and whether the RSC have achieved their aims for the new TOP as a site of creativity and experiment with new work.

‘Radical’

May 2014 saw the second edition of the *Radical Mischief* newspaper. The front page depicted four images: a neon halo above the head of a blonde-haired figure; a setting moon disappearing over a dark hillside by water, with the same neon light of the halo outlining the fringe of the landscape; the bottom half of a face illuminated in red with the lips highlighted

⁸⁴ Whyman, ‘Welcome to the First Edition of our Newspaper’, p. 3.

with the same neon lighting; and, to the right of this image, a pair of hands bound with the neon lighting representing handcuffs. This edition publicised the upcoming *Midsummer Mischief Festival* which took place in the summer of 2014, a precursor event to the re-opening of TOP. The *Festival* presented four new plays written by female playwrights in response to the provocation, 'Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History'.⁸⁵ More boldly than the previous paper, the headline read 'A Festival of Radical New Work'.⁸⁶ These images, like the word 'radical', seem quite enticing yet also slightly mysterious. One needs to do a bit more digging to actually discern the content of these plays and the ways in which they are potentially 'radical'. This example raises questions about how one perceives and visualises radicalism and radical theatre, and the challenges of promoting and advertising such work.

The term 'radical' is frequently used in the media to describe or promote a theatre production, but like the above example, there is often not much information about why a certain piece of theatre is deemed radical. For instance, Michael Billington used the word to describe the 2019 Sherman Theatre adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* in his review of the RSC production of the same title.⁸⁷ He did not explain why the Sherman Theatre production is 'radical' or the implication that the RSC production is, by comparison, not. In many instances, the word 'radical' is used to describe a bold new interpretation of a classic work: 'it's been a wonderful year for radical reinventions of classic plays', wrote Lyn Gardner in 2014; 'A Radical Restating of a Minor Modern Classic' wrote Ben Lawrence of *Aristocrats* at

⁸⁵ The provocation is a famous quote by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735', *American Quarterly*, 28, 1 (Spring 1976) 20-40 (p. 20). The list of shows and writers can be found on pp. 82-83.

⁸⁶ Royal Shakespeare Company, *Radical Mischief*, 2 (May 2014) front page.

⁸⁷ Michael Billington, 'The Taming of the Shrew Review: RSC's Battle of Reversed Sexes', *Guardian*, 19 March 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/mar/19/the-taming-of-the-shrew-review-rsc-royal-shakespeare-theatre-stratford-upon-avon>> [accessed 2 September 2021].

the Donmar Warehouse in 2018. In reviews and blogs such as these, one can discern that the word ‘radical’ is being used to describe the action of reinventing these classic texts for a twenty-first century audience, yet statements such as ‘[t]hese decisions feel radical’ by Lawrence are still left without much explanation.⁸⁸ Examples of when ‘radical’ has been used in relation to new plays include Dominic Cavendish writing about *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth in 2010: ‘Jerusalem: Why No Fuss About This Radical Play?’. Again, there is no clear explanation as to why this play is ‘radical’, but Cavendish suggested that the play can be deemed thus due to it being ‘the most controversial Royal Court play that never was’.⁸⁹ Here, ‘radical’, it seems, is related to creating controversy. As these few examples demonstrate, it is a widely used term to describe many forms of theatre and there is no clear consensus over the definition of ‘radical’ amongst critics. Unpacking what ‘radical’ means to the RSC may provide a better indication of the aims behind ‘Radical Mischief’ and new work at TOP.

A key aspect to ‘radical’ for staff at the RSC is explained by former Assistant Producer Claire Birch, who produced the *Mischief Festivals* from 2014-2018. Birch explained, “‘radical’ I guess for us is the way the work is challenging form and what the work is giving the audience — they never know what they are going to get’.⁹⁰ This relates to the following *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* definition of ‘radical’ as ‘[c]haracterized by independence of or departure from what is usual or traditional; progressive, unorthodox, or innovative in outlook,

⁸⁸ Lyn Gardner, ‘Daring Directors are Shaking up the Classics – And Making Great Theatre’, *Guardian*, 29 October 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2014/oct/29/ibsen-chekhov-miller-directors-radical-reinvention-classics>> [accessed 18 June 2019]; Ben Lawrence, ‘Aristocrats at Donmar Warehouse, Review: A Radical Restaging of a Minor Modern Classic’, *Telegraph*, 14 August 2018 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/aristocrats-donmar-warehouse-review-a-radical-restaging-minor/>> [accessed 18 June 2019].

⁸⁹ Dominic Cavendish, ‘Jerusalem: Why No Fuss About This Radical Play?’, *Telegraph*, 23 February 2010 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/7265867/Jerusalem-why-no-fuss-about-this-radical-play.html>> [accessed 18 June 2019].

⁹⁰ Birch, interview with author.

conception, design'.⁹¹ In this sense, 'radical' might refer to subverting expectations of what new work at TOP might be. Similarly, Whyman defined 'radical' as 'being experimental, playful, changing form'.⁹² These definitions suggest that the RSC intended each *Festival* to feel entirely different in terms of form, and that audiences should not have been able to predict what the Company were going to do next. The main question to consider then is what would be genuinely experimental or challenging in the context of programming new work in Stratford.

Of course, the idea of 'changing' or 'challenging' form, along with the notion of being 'playful' or 'experimental', is subjective and dependent upon the previous theatrical experiences of each spectator. Billington writes, '[e]xperimental theatre is a hard concept to get one's head around, since everyone defines it differently' and Mark Fisher argues that the term has 'become a glib brand label that doesn't mean anything apart from a suggestion that isn't mainstream'.⁹³ RSC Director Amy Draper, who directed *Day of the Living* at TOP in 2018, described her views on 'radical' and 'experimental' as follows:

[t]his whole concept of theatre being experimental, risky, or radical depends on who you speak to. Some of the loyal, local, Stratford-upon-Avon audiences who come and see the Shakespeare productions would say our show [*Day of the Living*] is quite out there, particularly because of the style but I may be wrong. With Darren [Clark, co-creator of *Day of the Living*] and I the work is just normal, new theatre for us.

⁹¹ 'radical, *adj.* and *n.*,' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, 2021

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157251?rskey=XrU1qc&result=1#eid>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁹² Erica Whyman, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, September 2018.

⁹³ Michael Billington, 'E is for Experiment', *Guardian*, 10 January 2012

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jan/10/e-for-experiment-modern-drama>> [accessed 25 January 2021]; Mark Fisher, 'Putting Experimental Theatre to the Test', *Guardian*, 20 February 2008

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/feb/20/puttingexperimentaltheatret>> [accessed 2 November 2020].

Other people who dabble in live art or even more weird or wonderful stuff may see us as very conventional.⁹⁴

Draper highlights some of the key issues of assessing radical theatre in terms of experimenting with form, as there are no consistent rules to govern what constitutes experimental or radical form. Draper infers a certain perception of Stratford audiences — that many may have felt challenged by her show — but the extra clause ‘I may be wrong’ demonstrates the difficulties in making any assumptions about what might be seen as experimental theatre in Stratford.

In the wider UK context, experimental theatre and what it means has been discussed by various critics and professionals working in the industry. Theatre critic Lyn Gardner cites female writers such as Debbie Tucker Green, Sarah Kane, Abi Morgan, Bryony Lavery, Laura Wade, Judith Adams, Rona Munro, Georgia Fitch, and Caryl Churchill as examples of experimental writers. Gardner explains that such writers ‘often put realism, surrealism and poetry in the blender and come up with something refreshingly new in which the internal and the unconscious is unexpectedly exposed’.⁹⁵ For Gardner then, experimental performance might constitute a combination of different forms to create a new hybrid of performance style that surprises audiences. More recently, dramaturg Myah Jeffers shares her definition of experimental theatre as ‘work that challenges the traditional form of theatre, new work that is authentic and raw and tells a story of those who don’t necessarily have a voice’.⁹⁶ Similarly to Gardner, Jeffers also states that experimental theatre interrogates and disrupts

⁹⁴ Amy Draper, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

⁹⁵ Lyn Gardner, ‘Why are Experiments in Form a Female Trait?’, *Guardian*, 15 March 2007 <theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2007/mar/15/whyareexperimentsinformafemaletrait> [accessed 25 January 2021].

⁹⁶ Myah Jeffers, interview in Digital Theatre + in partnership with Russell Lucas, ‘Theatre Makers: Myah Jeffers on Dramaturgy’, 2019 <<https://www.digitaltheatreplus-com.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/education/collections/digital-theatre/theatremakers-myah-jeffers-on-dramaturgy>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

conventional methods of performance but additionally implies that her definition includes new voices and perspectives. In a 2012 blog post titled 'On Experiment and the Avant Garde', Aleks Sierz mentions the 'innovative playwriting of Martin Crimp and Sarah Kane' and references Philip Ridley and Caryl Churchill as experimental writers. Sierz also raises his concern that 'most new writing theatres are generally more conservative in their programming' and that 'the market favours linear narrative and naturalistic writing'.⁹⁷ In some ways then, it seems that the theatre is still challenging naturalism, something which many writers and artists have been working against for the past century. Armando Iannucci asks, '[h]aven't they been doing experimental theatre for about 100 years? If so, when are they going to publish the results of their experiments?'.⁹⁸ Sierz implies that many new work venues in the UK are still reluctant to programme plays that may challenge formal conventions, and that certain venues are driven by commercialism as opposed to genuine experiment and creativity. Whether this is true of the RSC, and particularly the new TOP, will be assessed within subsequent chapters as certain examples of experiments and their relation to form will be discussed.

While this section has so far focused on 'experimental', one might consider what 'challenging form', or 'changing form' could mean. A helpful example could be Caridad Svich's arguments on radical theatre where she observes that:

⁹⁷ Aleks Sierz, 'On Experiment and the Avant Garde' blog, 5 March 2012

<<https://www.sierz.co.uk/blog/experiment-and-the-avant-garde/>> [accessed 25 January 2021].

⁹⁸ Armando Iannucci, 'Impose Arts on the Young and They'll Miss the Magic', *Guardian*, 17 February 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/feb/17/6>> [accessed 25 January 2021].

theatre artists are pulling apart and/or resurrecting old forms of popular entertainment to tell stories anew in a provocative manner, and thus reawaken the radical impulse in performance.⁹⁹

Svich provides examples of 'challenging form' and 'changing form' by deconstructing and rebuilding 'old forms' in innovative ways, using vaudeville, cabaret, or street performances as examples of 'popular entertainment' (pp. 11-12). This definition provided by Svich relates to the first definition of the *OED* for 'radical' which defines the term as follows: '[o]f, belonging to, or from a root or roots; fundamental to or inherent in the natural processes of life, vital'.¹⁰⁰ Rejecting avant-garde ideas such as 'perceived "contempt" of the audience', Svich notices practitioners 'expressing a desire to re-connect with the audience in a populist manner' (p. 8). The final clause of the above quote ('and thus reawaken the radical impulse in performance') implies that contemporary theatre according to Svich has lost such an 'impulse'. Thus, one way of creating radical theatre, in Svich's view, is to explore the 'roots' of popular entertainment and to re-discover the connection with audiences. These definitions can be applied to some of the new work at the RSC and will be explored in subsequent chapters as certain theatre-makers in TOP attempt to re-discover radical impulses using elements of popular performance.

As Birch mentioned, 'radical' for her means surprising the audience and creating a sense of anticipation ahead of each *Festival*. The question is how to surprise audiences who are expecting to be provoked by radically mischievous new work. Audience responses gathered from the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival* demonstrated that 78% of the people

⁹⁹ Caridad Svich, 'Popular Forms for a Radical Theatre', in *Popular Forms for a Radical Theatre*, ed. by Svich and Ruhl, pp. 8-21 (p. 8). Future references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁰⁰ 'radical, *adj.* and *n.*', *OED Online*.

surveyed stated that they came to watch the performances to be intellectually motivated, and 66% came to be entertained. The figures are the opposite from those for the RST where more people express a motivation to be entertained rather than intellectually motivated.¹⁰¹ These figures support the idea that people are specifically drawn to the new TOP to be provoked or stimulated by new work. A challenge that exists in theatre more broadly is that audiences who tend to see new work may share similar political and social views to those depicted on stage, thus creating an 'echo chamber'. Gardner, in a 2019 article titled 'Theatre's Still an Echo Chamber', presents her view that theatres have failed to respond adequately enough to the British population who voted Leave in the 2016 Referendum. She states that 'half the country feels that they have no voice'.¹⁰² Tiffany Jenkins presents a similar concern of theatres in a 2011 *Independent* article, saying, '[f]or all the talk of experimentation, not one presents a different perspective to the mainstream consensus, and never a right-wing view'.¹⁰³ These points are important to consider in a discussion about challenging audiences in TOP, as one could question whether a diverse range of perspectives are addressed in the new Studio Theatre.

TOP seems to be a left-leaning studio theatre intent on creating radically mischievous work in a largely conservative area.¹⁰⁴ Its location may pose different challenges and

¹⁰¹ I am grateful to Becky Loftus, former Head of Audience Insight at the Royal Shakespeare Company, for providing me with these figures in October 2018. Loftus left the Company in April 2021.

¹⁰² Lyn Gardner, 'Theatre's Still an Echo Chamber – It's Time to Listen to Outside Voices', *Stage*, 29 April 2019 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/lyn-gardner-theatres-still-an-echo-chamber--its-time-to-listen-to-outside-voices>> [accessed 29 January 2021].

¹⁰³ Tiffany Jenkins, 'Political Theatre's Final Curtain', *Independent*, 28 December 2011 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/political-theatres-final-curtain-6281993.html>> [accessed 20 October 2020].

¹⁰⁴ Nadhim Zahawi, Conservative MP for Stratford-upon-Avon, has comfortably won the past four general elections (2019, 2017, 2015, and 2010) with at least a 10,000-vote majority each time. See UK Parliament, 'Election History of Stratford-upon-Avon', 2021 <<https://members.parliament.uk/constituency/3783/election-history>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

possibilities to presenting new work than in other venues such as the Soho Theatre or the Bush Theatre in London, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, or the Manchester Royal Exchange, for instance. Does the political representation of Stratford limit the extent to which the RSC can be radically mischievous? Alternatively, does the work feel potentially more radical or mischievous to audiences in Stratford than if it was presented in London or another metropolitan city? Of course, one cannot assume that conservative voters in Stratford would be resistant or disinterested in new work that may appear liberal or left leaning, or that they might be significantly challenged by such work. It is important however to try and gain a sense of what groups of people are drawn to the new work and whether the Studio Theatre audiences reflect the demographic of voters in the area. Generally speaking, the largest proportion of audiences that attend plays by the RSC in Stratford are within a one-hour drive of the theatres.¹⁰⁵ This radius includes many wards that are represented by the Conservative Party (Sutton Coldfield, West Worcestershire, Kenilworth and Southam, for example), but also, wards that are held by the Labour Party (Warwick & Leamington, Birmingham Ladywood, and Birmingham Hall Green to name but a few).¹⁰⁶ The audience feedback survey gathered by the RSC does not ask audiences about their political leanings, but perhaps the new TOP may be attracting liberal audiences with its programming. In this way, TOP may still relate to the idea of the 'echo chamber', despite its location in a conservative town. While TOP could resemble an important oppositional voice in the middle of a conservative area, one could

¹⁰⁵ I am grateful to Becky Loftus for confirming this information via email correspondence, 9 April 2021.

¹⁰⁶ See BBC News, 'Election Results 2019: Analysis in Maps and Charts', 13 December 2019 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50770798>> [accessed 30 April 2021]; House of Commons Library, 'General Election 2015', 28 July 2015 <<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7186/>> [accessed 30 April 2021].

question how much it is challenging audiences if the audiences that attend the venue are generally in support of the ideas presented on stage.

Gardner and Jenkins' comments are helpful in relation to the idea of challenging audiences as they consider what political views are represented on stage and in what ways audiences are challenged if their own opinions are reflected back at them. Again, it would be a mistake to assume that all audiences attending new work agree with the political views depicted onstage, yet it is important to assess the ways in which new work can challenge. The efficacy of new political plays is questioned by Jenkins: '[t]hese "about" plays script the evils of the present in an entirely uncritical way. Long gone is any complexity', and she further calls theatre 'therapy for the middle classes'.¹⁰⁷ Jenkins implies a perception of audiences that want to see political plays, but as playwright Anders Lustgarten suggested, 'without actually doing the work of being stressed, or being pushed, disconcerted' and '[w]ithout going through the work of actual political change'.¹⁰⁸ Both Jenkins and Lustgarten are potentially suggesting a sense of complacency amongst spectators. Jenkins hints that audiences may want to see new work in order to feel a sense of affirmation about their own values, while Gardner argues that 'theatre is not there to confirm what we already think but to challenge'.¹⁰⁹ It may be worth considering whether new work at TOP seeks to disturb any sense of comfort or complacency in its audiences.

Practitioners working in TOP have a clear aim to surprise audiences and to commission work with the capacity to challenge people's views. This thesis seeks to demonstrate the extent to which the RSC have been able to do this in the new Studio Theatre. The second

¹⁰⁷ Jenkins, 'Political Theatre's Final Curtain'.

¹⁰⁸ Lustgarten, interview with author.

¹⁰⁹ Gardner, 'Theatre's Still an Echo Chamber'.

chapter of this thesis demonstrates a couple of examples of shows which were challenging to spectators, either by disrupting form or by presenting urgent topics which invited people to interrogate their own lives. For example, *Kingdom Come* by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard (2017 Autumn *Mischief Festival*) surprised audiences by asking them to leave their seats and follow the actors around the building in the middle of the performance. During the 2016 *Making Mischief Festival*, Somalia Seaton's *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier* scrutinised white privilege by exposing the 'ignorance of middle-class tolerance' towards racism.¹¹⁰ Alice Birch's play, *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* presented during the 2014 *Midsummer Mischief Festival* shocked certain members with its explicit language and frank discussion of sex. These examples highlight that there are numerous ways to challenge audiences in Stratford, even those who are anticipating provocative work. The second chapter will also highlight the importance of context; what might appear radical in the new TOP may not be radical if performed elsewhere, and that views of what radical theatre might be also change over time.

The examples above of previous *Mischief Festival* plays give a brief indication of the content of works that are programmed in the new TOP. The RSC are looking for radicalism not only in terms of shows that are formally experimental. 'Radical' according to Whyman, is also about 'being bold or courageous or honest about content, calling something out, saying it how it is, not being afraid of being on the nose'.¹¹¹ It is striking that Whyman claimed 'being [...] honest' was a radical act to her. This idea raises questions about the state of the world in the twenty-first century where the concept of truthfulness has been challenged significantly in

¹¹⁰ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Fall of the Kingdom: Rise of the Foot Soldier' blurb, in *Making Mischief: Two Radical New Plays* (London: Oberon, 2016) back matter.

¹¹¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

global politics. Perhaps Whyman is referring to acts of honesty that involve risk and bravery, yet one can acknowledge the level of subjectivity in this assessment i.e. what one person would constitute as a 'bold', and hence, 'radical', performance, may not feel courageous to others. One recent RSC production that was described as 'brave' was *The Whip* by Juliet Gilkes Romero (Swan Theatre, 2020), which won the Alfred Fagon award for Best New Play that same year.¹¹² *The Whip* explored the 1833 British government's decision to abolish slavery and compensate slaveowners, and Gilkes Romero stated the following:

I am absolutely convinced that a lot of theatres would have read *The Whip* and told me that it was really radical and challenging but, may have balked at staging such work because of the risk of having a mid-career, black, female writer seeking an audience for such politically provocative theatre. [...] [W]hat I like about the RSC is that they saw how compelling and well researched it was, how I was dealing with inconvenient truths, and they were not afraid of that. It's about not being afraid to speak truth to power, [...] to challenge the status quo.¹¹³

Gilkes Romero considered *The Whip* as a radical play in a way that corresponds with Whyman's definition above — the play deliberately called out the British Government and its compensation of slaveowners (today's equivalent of twenty billion pounds) and the fact that taxpayers were still paying off the debt owed until 2015.¹¹⁴ The programming of *The Whip*, whilst being staged at the Swan Theatre, reflected the aims for 'Radical Mischief' in producing work that is bold and challenging by highlighting 'inconvenient truths' as Gilkes Romero reflected.

¹¹² Mimi Findlay, statement in Alfred Fagon Award, '2020 Award', 2020 <<https://www.alfredfagonaward.co.uk/awards/2020-award/>> [accessed 4 March 2021].

¹¹³ Juliet Gilkes Romero, interview with author via Zoom, July 2020.

¹¹⁴ Juliet Gilkes Romero, *The Whip* (London: Oberon, 2020) p. 132.

From this, one can gather that the RSC are interested in programming new work that is bold, challenging, and/or courageous in terms of its content. That said, this provides more of an indication about the style and tone of a piece as opposed to its actual subject matter in some ways. Whyman suggests that the work of TOP needs to contain 'new and radical thinking with a political consciousness'.¹¹⁵ This is not the only reference to 'political' in relation to new work at TOP, as Pippa Hill, Head of Literary at the RSC, claims that '[p]olitics and the urgent cares of the world' are part of the 'DNA' of the RSC. In the context of this quotation, Hill discusses '[d]efining moments' at the RSC, namely, Peter Brook's *US* (1966) and Geoffrey Robertson's *The Oz Trial* (1971).¹¹⁶ Hill's comments were made as part of the promotion for the upcoming production of *Maydays* by David Edgar in Autumn 2018, where she sought to forge a connection between new work at the RSC and a critique of contemporary events. *US* criticised the role of the American forces in the Vietnam War, and *The Oz Trial* was written from court papers which dramatized the infamous trial of *Oz* magazine, an underground 'anti-establishment' collection that was 'the longest-running obscenity trial in British history'.¹¹⁷ By featuring these examples of productions that directly critique contemporary political affairs, it seems that the RSC are seeking to develop and programme new work in TOP that debates topical issues and key moments in twenty-first century society. The extent to which the new work is explicitly political and the ways in which politics is engaged and represented in each

¹¹⁵ Erica Whyman, 'The Other Place', *RSC Members' News* (February 2014) n. pg.

¹¹⁶ Pippa Hill, 'Defining Moments', *Radical Mischief*, 10 (July 2018) n. pg.

¹¹⁷ See Mick Brown, 'Sex-Crazed Rupert the Bear and Other Stories... The Obscenity Trial that Brought Down Oz Magazine', *Telegraph*, 28 July 2017 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/sex-crazed-rupert-bear-stories-obscenity-trial-brought-oz-magazine/>> [accessed 22 October 2020].

commission can be questioned, but it's clear that the RSC are seeking to promote themselves as 'relevant and resonant' by demonstrating their interest in contemporary events.¹¹⁸

Whilst the RSC aim to programme new work that contains political themes in the spirit of 'Radical Mischief', other critics are in disagreement that an established institution can create radical theatre. In *The Radical in Performance*, Baz Kershaw criticises certain theatre institutions and their staging of 'political' work as follows:

[t]hese plays *appear* to be attacking the injustices produced by late capitalist hierarchy and exploitation in modern democracies, but in the process of being staged in theatre buildings, in submitting to contemporary theatre as a disciplinary machine, they succumb to what they attack.¹¹⁹

For Kershaw, the politics of production and the political themes represented on stage do not align. Kershaw looks away from the institution as he describes the theatre estate as 'a victim of its own general success' due to its embracing of the 'disciplines of new consumerism' which leads to theatre succumbing 'to a commodification that stifles radicalism in the moment of its birth' (p. 23). According to Kershaw, theatre that accepts the capitalist system by being a commodified product is a threat to any source of radical potential. This argument implies that radical performance operates outside the bounds of regulation and monetary exchange, and so Kershaw looks to performances such as prison theatre, community theatre and protests as sources for radicalism (pp. 19-23). There is a question about how radical a company like the

¹¹⁸ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Report and Consolidated Financial Statements' <https://cdn2.rsc.org.uk/sitefinity/corporate/rsc-accounts-18-19.pdf?sfvrsn=c51beb21_2> [accessed 18 August 2021] (p. 3).

¹¹⁹ Kershaw, p. 54. Italics as presented in the original text. Future references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

RSC can be when it is state-funded and a commercial venture. The RSC clearly does not conform to the same ideas of radicalism described in Kershaw's book, and thus the extent to which the RSC can be truly radical is ultimately questioned. What this thesis seeks to discover, however, is whether there is a degree to which the RSC can be radically mischievous in the new TOP.

A theatre company that is seeking radicalism like Kershaw is Collective Encounters, a professional arts organisation based in Liverpool. Collective Encounters specialise in 'theatre for social change through collaborative practice' and use theatre 'to engage those on the margins of society, telling untold stories and tackling the local, national and international concerns of our time'.¹²⁰ Sarah Thornton, the founding Artistic Director of Collective Encounters, states that a professional theatre company for social change 'is not simply radical in the content of its drama, but in its politics of production, its engagement with audience and space, and in its aesthetic'. Thornton explains that Collective Encounters 'are radical in refusing to charge for tickets' as they believe 'that art should be available to everyone'.¹²¹ Further, Thornton utilises Jan Cohen-Cruz's distinction between 'liberal' and 'radical' artists — according to Cohen-Cruz, the 'liberal' practitioner 'believes "the system" can be reformed' which:

can lead to blaming the victim, not recognizing that racism and sexism are institutionalized and must be dismantled politically and socially;

¹²⁰ Collective Encounters, 'Home' <<https://collective-encounters.org.uk/>> [accessed 6 January 2021].

¹²¹ Sarah Thornton, 'What is Theatre for Social Change?' An Extract from *From the Personal to the Political: Theatre for Social Change in the 21st Century with Particular Referenced [sic] to the Work of Collective Encounters: A Review of Relevant Literature*, Collective Encounters' Research Lab, Liverpool 2012, p. 19. Available from Collective Encounters, 'Positions, Papers, Research, Presentations' <<https://collective-encounters.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/What-is-Theatre-for-Social-Change.pdf>> [accessed 11 January 2021].

that reaching out to struggling people by doing art with them without a larger social agenda will most likely end with that project.¹²²

This explanation describes how, generally speaking, a 'liberal' practitioner is limited in terms of the social change they can offer in their work. In contrast, Thornton explains that the 'radical practitioner' has an understanding of 'the wider and deeper political context of the work and seeks ways of working with communities to challenge and change the systems that govern us'.¹²³ A radical theatre-maker in this sense examines the framework and mechanisms underneath a social issue (i.e. poverty, homelessness) and seeks to address the roots of the problem. Collective Encounters, like Kershaw, are seeking radicalism in a different way to the RSC, yet their example provides significant considerations around how political and social change can take place.

Whilst critics like Kershaw disagree that institutions can be radical, and companies like Collective Encounters seek to operate in a radical way by not selling tickets, other artists share different views on whether one can be radical in an institution like the RSC. Lustgarten suggested that 'you can be more radical in an institution' as opposed to working outside of one 'if you don't care about the consequences and if you have brave people behind you'.¹²⁴ This suggestion may relate to the reason why a number of political playwrights (Caryl Churchill, David Hare, Howard Brenton) in the 1970s and 1980s agreed to be commissioned by large organisations such as the National Theatre, the RSC, and the Royal Court. This included David Edgar, who described 'the realisation that socialist playwrights cannot

¹²² Sarah Thornton, 'Can the Arts Change Things and Should They Try?' An Extract from *From the Personal to the Political*, p. 6; Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005) p. 91.

¹²³ Thornton, 'Can the Arts Change Things and Should They Try?', p. 6.

¹²⁴ Lustgarten, interview with author.

themselves change the world' but may 'discover ways of contributing, and in no small measure, to the work of those who can'.¹²⁵ Whilst Kershaw's argument suggests that theatres like the RSC will struggle to create radical work because of their contribution to capitalism, the previous example of Gilkes Romero's *The Whip* demonstrates the possibilities the RSC offers to new writers who have urgent stories to tell. The RSC has the wealth and the infrastructure to support political new work, as Birch explained, 'I really think we have a responsibility to cover as many sides to theatre as possible because we have the resources to do so.'¹²⁶ Birch argued in favour of the RSC's aim to produce new work that is politically daring and challenging to audiences in order to continue pushing boundaries in the theatre. This section highlights the tension that artists face in terms of either abandoning the institution and finding alternative ways of making theatre or seeking to reform the institution from within. 'Radical Mischief' is a deliberate provocation set by Whyman to consider how subversive the RSC can be and whether activities in the new TOP can inspire progressive changes for the whole of the organisation.

Of course, whilst not attempting to refute Kershaw's important points about the theatre industry and its involvement in capitalist practices, perhaps 'Radical Mischief' could present an opportunity to consider how institutions like the RSC could be radical from the inside. Justin Audibert, Artistic Director of Unicorn Theatre in London, acknowledged the challenges of being truly radical in an institution. Audibert reflected on the importance of having a clear set of goals and 'values', yet he acknowledged the 'frustrating' sense that, ultimately, 'you will not achieve your mission'. Despite this realisation, Audibert suggested

¹²⁵ Edgar, quoted in Itzin, p. 339.

¹²⁶ Birch, interview with author.

that ‘if you use your values’ which contain ‘a sense of radicalness’, staff working in an institution may make significant progress towards achieving their ‘mission’.¹²⁷ Audibert’s suggestions are pertinent to the RSC; it may not be possible to be completely radical in an institution, yet the values and aims behind ‘Radical Mischief’ may succeed in creating some significant moments of mischievousness and radicalism in the new TOP.

Despite the varying definitions of ‘radical’ offered in this section, it is clear that the RSC are seeking to make new work that is bold and courageous in terms of content, and work that is innovative and playful with form. However, ‘radical’ is not the only word that is used to describe the aims for new work at TOP. This chapter will now consider the term ‘mischief’ and its common definitions, before exploring what this word means to various practitioners at the RSC.

‘Mischief’

‘Sometimes you have to be a little bit naughty’ sang Matilda in the recent RSC musical first staged in the Courtyard Theatre in Stratford in 2010.¹²⁸ At this point in the story, which is adapted from Roald Dahl’s classic children’s novel of the same title, Matilda decides that enough is enough and she needs to fight back against her uncaring parents and horrible headteacher in order to stand up for herself. She decides to add hydrogen peroxide into her father’s hair oil which will result in him having green hair as she sings this song of playful resistance. To many, the word ‘mischief’ carries childlike connotations of playfulness as witnessed in this musical example.

¹²⁷ Justin Audibert, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, May 2019.

¹²⁸ Tim Minchin, ‘Naughty’, *Matilda the Musical* Original London Cast Recording (2011).

In contemporary theatre criticism, the term ‘mischief’ appears to be frequently used as a term that infers liveliness or humour. ‘Mischief’ has appeared in theatre reviews, often used to describe a comedic atmosphere; ‘a mischievous night of small gags’, writes Brian Logan in his review of Mo Amer and Guz Khan’s show in 2019.¹²⁹ In some examples, there is not much indication about the meaning of ‘mischief’ when it is applied to describing an aspect of performance. Jessie Thompson, in a review of *Overflow* by Travis Alabanza, a solo show presented at the Bush Theatre in 2020, writes that Rosie, the central character, is ‘mischievous and vulnerable by turns’.¹³⁰ One can perhaps guess that Thompson uses ‘mischievous’ to describe the humour or the playfulness of the performance, as another review attests that Rosie ‘is funny, chatty’.¹³¹ Elsewhere, Henry Hitchings describes *Oil* by Ella Hickson (Almeida Theatre, 2016) as a new play which ‘mixes prickly humour with a mischievous intelligence’.¹³² In this review, ‘mischief’ is paired with ‘intelligence’, possibly suggesting that the piece craftily communicates its points in a powerful or unsuspecting way. This description could allude to the form of the piece as well as its content, perhaps. ‘Mischief’ also appears in reviews of family shows. Chris Bennion comments on *Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear* (National Theatre, 2019) as ‘[i]nventive, mischievous and thrilling’, and Hitchings describes that *Saint George and*

¹²⁹ Brian Logan, ‘Mo Amer and Guz Khan Review — Hip-Hop and Hummus in a Double Dose of Funny’, *Guardian*, 29 March 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/mar/29/mo-amer-and-guz-khan-review-man-like-mobeen-leicester-square-theatre>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

¹³⁰ Jessie Thompson, ‘*Overflow* at Bush Theatre, Review: Fiercely Relevant — And a Fun Night Out’, *Evening Standard*, 10 December 2020 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/overflow-bush-theatre-review-b242624.html>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

¹³¹ Rosemary Waugh, ‘*Overflow* Review’, *Stage*, 10 December 2020, accessed in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XXXX, 23 (2020) p. 55.

¹³² Henry Hitchings, ‘*Oil*, Theatre Review: Ella Hickson’s Audacious New Play is Full of Mischievous Intelligence’, *Evening Standard*, 17 October 2016 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/oil-almeida-theatre-anne-marie-duff-ella-hickson-a3370641.html>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

the Dragon (National Theatre, 2017) contains ‘moments of enjoyable mischief’.¹³³ Bennion’s comments combine a sense of ‘mischief’ with ‘inventive’, alluding that ‘mischief’ can be created by surprising audiences with new innovations or ways of staging. This is also seen in a 2020 review of *The Tempest* by Creation Theatre, which was presented online via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Miriam Gillinson writes: ‘overall this is a confident production lit up by a great sense of mischief’. She cites moments of creativity such as characters falling in love ‘during a clever split-screen trick’, and Prospero controlling and changing the backdrop of the scenes.¹³⁴

Two contemporary theatre companies that relate to the term ‘mischief’ are Wise Children, a Bristol-based touring company formed by Emma Rice, and more obviously, Mischief Theatre. Formed by a group of LAMDA students in 2008, Mischief Theatre are famous for *The Play That Goes Wrong* (2012, West End 2014, Broadway 2017), *Peter Pan Goes Wrong* (2013, West End 2015), and *The Comedy About a Bank Robbery* (West End 2016). The company ‘are serious about silliness’ and ‘believe that everyone should have the opportunity to break free from the shackles of everyday life’, calling their work ‘ridiculous escapism’.¹³⁵ Whilst the aims for joy and humour are shared by Mischief Theatre and ‘Radical Mischief’, their political

¹³³ Chris Bennion, ‘Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear Review — Inventive, Mischievous and Thrilling’, *The Times*, 1 August 2019 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mr-gum-and-the-dancing-bear-review-inventive-mischievous-and-thrilling-rq58l7d2b>> [accessed 9 February 2021]; Henry Hitchings, ‘Saint George and the Dragon, Theatre Review: Mischievous but Aimless Take on National Tale’, *Evening Standard*, 12 October 2017 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/saint-george-and-the-dragon-theatre-review-mischievous-but-aimless-take-on-national-tale-a3683331.html>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

¹³⁴ Miriam Gillinson, ‘The Tempest Review — Interactive Online Production Goes Down a Storm’, *Guardian*, 12 April 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/apr/12/the-tempest-review-interactive-online-zoom>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

¹³⁵ Mischief Theatre, ‘What We Do’ <<https://mischiefcomedy.com/about-us/what-we-do>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

aims are very different. In an interview, Henry Shields, a long-standing member and co-writer of the above Mischief shows, stated the following:

I like to think that it's very beneficial to not have a political outlook in our shows. We obviously have our own individual views, but we've always tried to keep those out of our work for the reason that everybody needs an escape. That's what our shows provide [...] an opportunity for people, no matter their political leanings, to come together and laugh together.¹³⁶

Mischief Theatre's aim is purely entertainment driven, appealing to wider audiences and remaining seemingly apolitical. In some ways, such aims for entertaining audiences and providing popular entertainment connect with Rice's newly formed company, Wise Children. Their production of Angela Carter's novel of the same title, *Wise Children* (Old Vic, 2018), was described as 'a big, bawdy celebration of show business', a 'mischievous piece of theatrical storytelling' and their company website told audiences to '[e]xpect show girls and Shakespeare, sex and scandal, music, mischief and mistaken identity'.¹³⁷ Perhaps 'mischievous' here is used to describe the form of the production which feels unconventional, playful, and utilises many different types of narrative devices. Yet, the listing of 'mischief' alongside 'sex and scandal' may allude to something more than just light-hearted storytelling. Rice is 'renowned for her playful, innovative and "exuberantly impish" approach' to theatre-

¹³⁶ Henry Shields, quoted in an interview with Luke Prowse Baldwin, 'An Interview with Henry Shields (Mischief Theatre)', *730 Review*, 1 October 2019 <<https://www.the730review.co.uk/2019/10/01/an-interview-with-henry-shields-mischief-theatre/>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

¹³⁷ James Rodger, 'Belgrade Theatre Announces New 2019 Shows — Including Noughts and Crosses, Octopus Soup! And Emma Rice's Wise Children', *Coventry Telegraph*, 15 July 2018 <<https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/whats-on/whats-on-news/belgrade-theatre-2019-productions-14883679>> [accessed 10 February 2021]; Sarah Hemming, 'Rice's Mischievous, Playful Children', *Financial Times*, 22 October 2018, p. 6; Wise Children, 'Wise Children' <<https://www.wisechildrendigital.com/wise-children>> [accessed 10 February 2021].

making, and in an essay titled 'On Directing' she states that 'misbehaviour is not only allowed, but is essential' in her rehearsal room.¹³⁸ Her process as a director and her thoughts on 'mischief' are explored further in Chapter Four where her opening provocation to the *Radical Mischief* conference is considered in more detail.¹³⁹

The discussion of 'mischief' in relation to theatre criticism thus far has focused on playfulness and comedy. However, the definition of the term 'mischief' carries more troubling roots than simply light playfulness. The *OED* defines 'mischief' as 'misfortune, bad luck' but also as '[e]vil plight or condition; ill-fortune, trouble, distress'.¹⁴⁰ It appears that 'mischief' operates on many levels as there is a great difference between 'bad luck' and 'evil'. '[B]ad luck' can be incidental or unpredictable, but 'evil' implies greater malicious intent. 'Mischief' appears less frequently than 'radical' in relation to theatre criticism but is arguably an equally loaded term that can be quite problematic in terms of its application.

The ways in which Shakespeare used the term 'mischief' were anything but joyful or playful. Upon discovering the news of the death of Juliet, Romeo soliloquizes, 'O mischief, thou art swift / To enter in the thoughts of desperate men' (*Romeo & Juliet*, V.1.35-36). This line is delivered at a point when Romeo is contemplating suicide, and 'mischief' here is personified as a force of evil. Similarly, in Act III scene two of *Julius Caesar*, Antony says, 'Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot:/ Take thou what course thou wilt' and the footnote cites 'mischief' as 'discord, harm, evil (OED 2a, 2c)'.¹⁴¹ In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Helena

¹³⁸ Emma Rice, 'On Directing', *The Essay*, BBC Sounds, 14 February 2012
<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b01bw8hv>> [accessed 3 September 2021].

¹³⁹ See pp. 213-214.

¹⁴⁰ 'mischief, n.', *OED Online*, 2018

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/119293?rskey=MF14Sn&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 14 November 2018].

¹⁴¹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III.2.251-2, ed. by David Daniell (Surrey: Arden, 1998) p. 267.

refuses to leave Demetrius alone and he threatens her by saying, ‘I shall do thee mischief in the wood’ (II.1.237), and ‘mischief’ in this sense potentially implies violence. These references to ‘mischief’ are the opposite of the definition of ‘mischief’ in a playful, high-spirited sense and are much more troubling than how one might use the word today. A discussion of the early modern sense of the term, ‘mischief’, will be featured in the fourth chapter, where Professor Dympna Callaghan (Syracuse University) presented a provocation on this subject at the *Radical Mischief* conference.¹⁴²

Given the broad range of connotations of the term, it is necessary to ask in what ways the RSC think about ‘mischief’. Whyman explained her definition:

When we hear it we think playful, naughty, childlike, and yet its roots (not everyone knows its roots) I think do ring out — perhaps we know at the very least [‘mischief’] can mean an act of criminality or something dangerous.¹⁴³

Whyman describes how ‘mischief’ in relation to the new TOP denotes something far more subversive or threatening than mere light-hearted mirth. Birch also expressed a similar sentiment:

To me, it is used really darkly. So it is ‘mischief’ because we are playing — we are playing with people’s thoughts and we are provoking, but it is also that dark side of mischief that we are not afraid to look at challenging themes and situations and to really make people think about their lives and the ways that things are being conducted around them.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² See pp. 212-213.

¹⁴³ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Birch, interview with author.

It is worth questioning the extent to which ‘mischief’ can be conveyed and with what specific intention. Does ‘mischief’ serve audiences who are eager to experience challenging new work, or does it make people feel threatened and deter people from fully engaging with the important questions or provocations that the work raises? Each *Mischief Festival* interrogates a different theme in relation to twenty-first century life, and the extent to which each show is ‘provoking’ and ‘playing’ with its audiences will be discussed in the next chapter.

While Whyman and Birch talk positively about ‘mischief’, others at the RSC were more sceptical at first. Doran confessed that he initially ‘balked’ at the word because he felt it sounded ‘Puck-ish’, and that it undermined the seriousness of the work at TOP. The term ‘mischief’ can be perceived in an infantilising way, and one can question, as Doran did, whether the word is contradicting the quest to make radical work. That said, Doran now feels that the phrase ‘is a nice conjunction’ and ‘has absolutely become a part of the fabric’.¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, the next step is to consider how the terms, ‘radical’ and ‘mischief’ can work together and to explore the reasons behind the pairing of these words.

‘Radical Mischief’

Whyman stated that the coining of ‘Radical Mischief’ represented ‘a deliberate cocktail; the two words or the ideas and feelings they might give you do not usually go together’.¹⁴⁶ If one thinks of the light-hearted connotations of ‘mischief’ then certainly, it may seem to be at odds with radicalism. While a ‘cocktail’ may suggest concepts blending together, Whyman implied something potentially more violent — ‘[i]t is about throwing them [‘radical’ and ‘mischief’]

¹⁴⁵ Doran, interview with author.

¹⁴⁶ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

together, whether it is a cocktail or an explosion — it is more than a juxtaposition’ of two words sitting ‘side by side’.¹⁴⁷ Whyman is right that the two words do not usually appear together, and one might wonder what a radicalised ‘mischief’ looks like. Depending on one’s perceptions of ‘mischief’, the phrase might mean a tamed version of hard-hitting radicalism or alternatively, a much more sinister form of ‘radical’. A ‘mischief’ that is radicalised sounds emboldened in some way, and if one considers ‘radical’ from the *OED* definition as ‘far-reaching’, perhaps this infers that the ‘mischief’ element has profound impact.¹⁴⁸ The idea that these two words are working together is significant, and one could question whether ‘Radical Mischief’ is the same as ‘mischievous radicalism’ or whether the latter sounds more pernicious.

Hill explained that ‘Radical Mischief’ enables the RSC ‘to present cutting-edge work and it also acknowledges that there is something joyful to it’.¹⁴⁹ What does Hill mean by ‘joyful’? Maybe that the work should feel playful in terms of form, contain humour, or possibly include audience participation, which will be demonstrated in certain examples in the following chapter. Ultimately, Hill infers that the new work at TOP should feel enjoyable and entertaining to watch. Whyman also confirms this sense of joyfulness by stating that the new TOP should not be ‘a place of dour deliberation and debate’ and instead should be ‘a place of entertainment, of enjoyment, of fun, of playfulness’.¹⁵⁰ These ideas may appear to be in contrast to the definitions of ‘mischief’ that Whyman and Birch described earlier and can create a sense of complexity around the aims for the new TOP. Does the RSC want to create

¹⁴⁷ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁴⁸ ‘radical’, *adj. and n.*, *OED Online*.

¹⁴⁹ Hill, interview with author.

¹⁵⁰ Whyman, ‘The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company’.

serious, challenging theatre that provokes audiences, or joyful and entertaining work? Practitioners at the RSC appear to want both ideas to be present in the new work, and subsequent chapters will analyse the ways in which this may be possible.

It is important to unpack the reasoning behind the coining of the phrase. Whyman confessed the following:

I have been making something that might have been called radical theatre for a really long time and I have moved away from wanting to say to people that it is serious, radical theatre, because I actually do not know anyone who wants to go out for the evening and see that apart from me. I really learnt a lesson that if you are serious about attracting new audiences you have to stress that it is also going to be enjoyable.¹⁵¹

Whyman highlights a sense of wariness about how to use the term 'radical' in relation to theatre. There may be a tension between being explicit and bold in promoting the new work and acknowledging the necessity of attracting new people into the building. The RSC are increasingly careful with how they use the word. In 2018, Louise Sinclair, former Senior Marketing Officer at the RSC, stated that 'provocation' is not an 'audience-friendly word at all' and shared her views on the term, 'radical', as follows:

[r]adical is a funny one and is probably a word I would avoid a little bit in marketing just because what is radical to one person would not be to everybody else. Not because I have a problem with it or I don't think it's accurate, but I don't know if it necessarily says a huge amount about an individual play.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁵² Louise Sinclair, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, October 2018.

Sinclair highlights some of the challenges to ‘radical’ in the sense that, as already mentioned, it is a subjective term and there are many perceptions of what the word means. The RSC are endeavouring to make work at TOP that will reflect the spirit of ‘Radical Mischief’ but will not advertise it as explicitly as they initially did at the launch of the new building. For example, in the latest leaflet advertising for *Crooked Dances*, the 2019 TOP play by Robin French, the words ‘radical’ and ‘mischief’ did not appear.¹⁵³

Another reason for the increased awareness around using these terms can be explained through an exploration of the connotations of ‘radical’ and its related terms ‘radicalism’ and ‘radicalized’ and what they might mean in a wider political and social context. David A. Snow and Remy Cross define ‘radical’ as ‘*a social movement activist who embraces direct action and high-risk options, often including violence against others, to achieve a stated goal*’.¹⁵⁴ The level of risk can vary depending on context, but acts of radicalism, according to Snow and Cross, are ‘assumed to include a degree of illegality’.¹⁵⁵ The UK Government have defined ‘radicalisation’ as ‘the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups’.¹⁵⁶ In contrast, Matthew Y. H. Wong, Paul Vinod Khiatani, and Wing Hong Chui argue that ‘it would be a mistake to conflate radicalism with acts of terrorism’ and that ‘radicalism is a unique, multi-dimensional concept that cannot simply be limited to extremist interpretations alone’.¹⁵⁷ What is clear in these

¹⁵³ Royal Shakespeare Company, *Crooked Dances* advertisement leaflet, 2019.

¹⁵⁴ David A. Snow and Remy Cross, ‘Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types’, *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4, 4 (Winter 2011) 115-130 (p. 118). Italics as presented in the original text.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁵⁶ UK Government, ‘Revised Prevent Duty Guidance: For England and Wales’, updated 10 April 2019 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

¹⁵⁷ Mathew Y. H. Wong, Paul Vinod Khiatani, and Wing Hong Chui, ‘Understanding Youth Activism and Radicalism: Chinese Values and Socialization’, *The Social Science Journal*, 56 (2019) 255-267 (p. 258); See also M. Sedgwick, ‘The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22

varying definitions is that an act of radicalism can be seen as a more direct form of political and/or social action that increases the level of risk in order to incite change or achieve a specific aim. Perceptions of risk are context dependent as ‘what counts as radical is often determined by the state, and how it responds to a situation’.¹⁵⁸ It is also implied that acts of radicalism transgress social and authoritative boundaries in order to achieve their mission.¹⁵⁹

What might these definitions mean in relation to new work at TOP? The above descriptions of radicalism demonstrate that ‘radical’ acts can consist of illegal or high-risk activity. In relation to these ideas, Whyman stated that ‘mischief’ can mean ‘an act of criminality’.¹⁶⁰ Whilst it is unlikely that the RSC would want to participate in illegal activity, perhaps the above definitions provide a reading of ‘Radical Mischief’ that seeks to create new work which feels more direct than productions on the RST or Swan stages and might involve increased risk. One could then question whether the level of risk is a commercial risk, or whether the new work staged in TOP is risky in terms of either its subversive content, audience participation, or the themes contained in the pieces which audience members may find distressing or upsetting. The level of risk in presenting radical work may include a risk to the artists. An example of this could be adapting Can Dündar’s book, *We Are Arrested* (2016), in Spring 2018, because, as will be explained in the second chapter, Dündar is currently living in exile and has survived an assassination attempt. Another possibility is that Whyman’s quote, ‘an act of criminality’, may be inferring that the new work presented in TOP is hoping to shock

(2010) 479-49; Asta Maskaliūnaitė, ‘Exploring the Theories of Radicalization’, *Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, 17, 1 (2015) 9-26 <DOI: 10.1515/ipcj-2015-0002>.

¹⁵⁸ Snow and Cross, pp. 116-117; Ruud Koopmans, ‘The Dynamics of Protest Waves: West Germany, 1965 to 1989’, *American Sociological Review*, 58 (1993) 637-658.

¹⁵⁹ Snow and Cross, p. 115.

¹⁶⁰ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

audiences and challenge any perceptions of what the RSC may be. A possible paraphrase could be, 'it's criminal that the RSC puts on work like this' in terms of possible audience outrage that an institution with a Royal Charter could stage new work that is dissident and controversial. Such views were held in relation to the 'Dirty Plays' scandal as mentioned in the Introduction, yet one could question what sort of themes or issues would cause those levels of controversy in the theatre today.

Whilst it appears that Whyman coined the phrase 'Radical Mischief' to soften the serious connotations of radicalism and to emphasise that the new work will be enjoyable, Whyman also contended that sometimes the work may not feel 'playful and child-like' and may be 'very serious' instead.¹⁶¹ An example of this could be the *Making Mischief Festival* in 2016, where both new plays interrogated urgent questions around systemic racism and terrorism.¹⁶² Whilst both plays featured moments of humour and 'child-like' behaviour with actors playing school children for certain scenes in *Always Orange* by Fraser Grace, the plays were 'very serious' in their direct address. While 'Radical Mischief' may seem like a contradiction, the examples outlined above highlight that this is not the case and that both words are actually taken very seriously by the RSC.

Whilst this chapter has so far focused on 'Radical Mischief' in relation to the RSC and to theatre criticism more broadly, it is also important to consider what this phrase means within academia and particularly to the University of Birmingham. As mentioned, the University is a founding partner of the new TOP and has consequentially endorsed this banner of 'Radical Mischief'. The collaboration is described as follows:

¹⁶¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁶² See Royal Shakespeare Company, *Making Mischief*.

Embodying the theme of ‘Radical Mischief’, the collaboration has developed a laboratory for theatre artists working with scholars and students in creative experiments that stimulate connections between the arts, the academy and society at large.¹⁶³

What does it mean to collaborate in a radical and mischievous way? Is there room for ‘Radical Mischief’ in a formally agreed contract that has specific goals and outcomes, and what happens if such outcomes are not achieved? Considering Kershaw’s doubts about institutional theatre’s potential for being radical, it is worth questioning whether higher education institutions in general can be sites for ‘Radical Mischief’. Pressures to deliver and adhere to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) make experiment and risk-taking difficult. One anonymous academic reported their experience of witnessing how original research was often compromised to offer ‘familiar findings’ for the purpose of getting published in ‘prestigious journals’.¹⁶⁴ Further, another recent article which summarised two new research reports on wellbeing in universities stated the following: ‘[o]ne qualitative study found that academics are often isolated and anxious, in a system they feel is driven by financial targets and what one called a “treadmill of justification”’.¹⁶⁵ The article highlights the pressures that academics face and the term ‘treadmill of justification’ is relatable to staff at universities who find

¹⁶³ University of Birmingham, ‘The Other Place — About’ <<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/edacs/departments/shakespeare/top/about.asp>> [Accessed 18 April 2019].

¹⁶⁴ Anonymous Academic, ‘Pressure to Publish in Journals Drives Too Much Cookie-Cutter Research’, *Guardian*, 30 June 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/jun/30/pressure-to-publish-in-journals-drives-too-much-cookie-cutter-research>> [accessed 7 September 2021]; See also Anna Fazackerley, ‘“Universities” League Table Obsession Triggers Mental Health Crisis Fears’, *Guardian*, 12 June 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jun/12/university-mental-health-league-table-obsession>> [accessed 10 June 2019].

¹⁶⁵ Anna Fazackerley, ‘“It’s Incredibly Cut-Throat” Half of Academics Stressed and 40% Thinking of Leaving’, *Guardian*, Tuesday 21 May 2019, p. 30.

themselves explaining and assessing the impact of their research in order to receive funding and permission to conduct their work in the first place. In relation to the collaboration between the RSC and the University, Katherine A. Craik and Ewan Fernie explain how ‘the overriding aim’ was to ‘bring academic criticism and scholarship together with creative experiment in the hope of making something new’.¹⁶⁶ This new partnership seeks to challenge and refresh what research means for the University and subsequent chapters explore specific projects and events that have emerged as a result of the collaboration in order to analyse the extent to which it is possible to be radically mischievous for academics and students in this context.

Shakespeare and ‘Radical Mischief’

With the announcement of the new TOP as a centre for new work, Hill explains that the Company, ‘explore work that is inspired by Shakespeare’s spirit, work that is radical and mischievous’.¹⁶⁷ The word ‘spirit’ is interesting as it is not necessarily his writing that is deemed inspiring but rather his values or his essence, which feels quite ethereal and mysterious. This section seeks to unpack what Hill and other members of staff involved in TOP consider as Shakespeare’s ‘spirit’, the ways in which Shakespeare is considered ‘radical and mischievous’, and what implications these perceptions of Shakespeare have on new work at the RSC.

¹⁶⁶ Katherine A. Craik and Ewan Fernie, ‘The *Marina* Project’, in *New Places: Shakespeare and Civic Creativity*, ed. by Paul Edmondson and Ewan Fernie (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) pp. 109-125 (p. 111).

¹⁶⁷ Hill, ‘Research and Development’, p. 6.

To Hill, Shakespeare is radical because his work ‘was able to speak to the whole of society by presenting the whole of society with such skewering accuracy’.¹⁶⁸ This comment is perhaps a generalisation of Shakespeare’s writing, and others may disagree with the ways in which Shakespeare represents different groups of people in his plays. This notion of Shakespeare’s radicalness relates to the following *OED* definition of ‘radical’ as ‘touching upon or affecting what is essential and fundamental; thorough, far-reaching’.¹⁶⁹ Hill may be suggesting that Shakespeare’s plays were ‘far-reaching’ not only in their capability to engage the attention of his society, regardless of class, but by the ways in which his works were able to reflect the lives of the people. One of the ways in which Shakespeare could have achieved this is by the way in which his works explore the human condition, and the ways in which he depicts certain feelings and emotions with which audiences may have been able to identify. There could be a number of different themes, emotions, and ways in which critics can proffer the exact way that Shakespeare apparently does this, but one suggestion could be found in Fernie’s book, *Shakespeare for Freedom* (2017), where he identifies freedom as a ‘supreme Shakespearean value’.¹⁷⁰ Fernie argues that freedom is richly varied and that all characters in Shakespeare have to fight for freedom at some point (be it individual freedom, on a collective or national level) and also points out ‘the human dignity which Shakespeare expressed and with which he is associated’ (p. 7). This could be one of the ways in which Shakespeare was able to speak to the ‘whole of society’ as suggested by Hill; his plays talk about struggle, identity, politics, and the desire for freedom.

¹⁶⁸ Hill, interview with author.

¹⁶⁹ ‘radical, *adj.* and *n.*’, *OED Online*.

¹⁷⁰ Ewan Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 2, p. 7, p. 22. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

Hill implied a sense of universality to Shakespeare's plays, something which other readers of Shakespeare have also identified in later centuries. Sonny Venkatrathnam, a political prisoner on Robben Island who was responsible for the Robben Island Bible (the works of Shakespeare signed by thirty-two prisoners and disguised as a Hindi religious text), states that 'Shakespeare has a very particular place in the hearts and minds of people' and he 'uniquely represents the universal man'; he 'captures that essence'.¹⁷¹ In relation to new work, perhaps Hill's claim is used to encourage playwrights commissioned by the RSC to delve into the roots of a political issue in order to highlight a universal theme or feeling that audiences can engage and identify with.

Of course, there are challenges that come with arguing that Shakespeare represents 'the whole of society' with 'accuracy'. Whilst I have briefly discussed the idea that audiences may identify with certain themes or emotions in Shakespeare, one could highlight important issues over the representation of people that seem to be at odds with a claim of accuracy or indeed universality. One could highlight groups of people absent from or overlooked in Shakespeare's plays. For example, in a 2019 panel at TOP titled 'Where's My Story?', theatre director Stephen Unwin stated that Shakespeare does not include anyone with a learning disability in his plays.¹⁷² Equally, other groups may find themselves represented but in largely negative or limited ways. Many critics have questioned the accuracy of the portrayal of women in Shakespeare's work. Lisa Jardine calls the Shakespeare canon the 'most patriarchal body of texts'; Kathleen McLuskie highlights the 'explicitly misogynist emphasis' in *King Lear* and Linda Bamber concludes that in *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*, it is 'Shakespeare himself who

¹⁷¹ Sonny Venkatrathnam, 'Background to *The Robben Island Shakespeare*', in Matthew Hahn, *The Robben Island Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 2017) pp. xxiii-xxiv (pp. xxiii).

¹⁷² Stephen Unwin, quoted in 'Where's My Story?' RSC Panel Event, The Other Place, May 2019.

projects aggression and cruelty onto the feminine'.¹⁷³ Further, the presentation of race is also debated within the plays. Actor Hugh Quarshie once stated that *Othello* was a 'racist' play, and in reading *Titus Andronicus*, Matthieu Chapman argues that the play 'presents the incorporation' of black people 'into civil society as the impetus for its collapse'.¹⁷⁴ Farah Karim-Cooper explains two significant challenges that scholars of colour face when writing about the work of Shakespeare: 'the realisation that the poems and plays that were written in the early modern period were largely written for a white readership/audience' and so scholars might approach the plays 'with an imposed sense of alienation'. The second challenge Karim-Cooper mentions is the 'grief and hurt caused when reading racist language about people of colour' in plays such as *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹⁷⁵ Hence, questions arise over the claim that Shakespeare portrays everyone in society with accuracy when, as these scholars and artists point out, depictions of certain characters and the language in plays can be painful to read or watch.

Hill may have been inferring that Shakespeare was radical in his willingness to engage with then contemporary issues and urgent topics which were relevant to the 'whole of society'. Whyman felt that Shakespeare 'was consistently addressing the issues of his day' which portrays him as a dramatist who was eager to engage his audiences with topical

¹⁷³ Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983) p. 1; Kathleen McLuskie, 'The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*', in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. by Dollimore and Sinfield, pp. 88-108 (p. 98); Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982) p. 19.

¹⁷⁴ Hugh Quarshie, *Second Thoughts About Othello* (Chipping Camden: Clouds Hill Printers, 1999) p. 7; Matthieu Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other "Other"* (New York: Routledge, 2017) p. 162.

¹⁷⁵ Farah Karim-Cooper, 'Anti-Racist Shakespeare', *Shakespeare's Globe*, 26 May 2020 <<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2020/05/26/anti-racist-shakespeare/>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

themes.¹⁷⁶ The consideration of Shakespeare ‘as a new writer’ by Hill and his engagement with contemporaneous politics relates to the field of cultural materialism, and a reading of Jacobean tragedy according to Terry Eagleton as ‘critical rather than conformist, a challenging of authority rather than a confirmation of it’.¹⁷⁷ The practice of cultural materialism:

Repudiates the supposed transcendence of literature, seeking rather to understand it as a cultural intervention produced initially within a specific set of practices and tending to render persuasive a view of reality.¹⁷⁸

To cultural materialists, literature is read within the context in which it was written in order to better understand the work. They deny a sense of the universal in the work that they read and any idea that the text is the same throughout time. The description of a text as a ‘cultural intervention’ is precisely what makes the work radical. In this way, works are produced at a specific time and in a particular context for the purpose of intervention. The extent of intervention varies from text to text, but it symbolises the action that the writer takes in wanting to contribute to their time in a way that ruptures the common discourse. This reading of Shakespeare as a subversive writer serves the RSC’s claim for Shakespeare’s radicalness to inspire new work at TOP — work that is critical and brave enough to challenge certain perceptions and authorities in the twenty-first century.

¹⁷⁶ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Hill, interview with author; Terry Eagleton, ‘Foreword’ in Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004) pp. x-xiii (pp. xi-xii).

¹⁷⁸ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) p. 22.

Shakespeare is also considered a radical writer by various staff at the RSC because of the ways in which he experimented with form. Whyman stated that Shakespeare ‘is always surprising you’ and that he ‘consistently breaks all the rules of his time’ in the way that he subverts formal elements within his plays.¹⁷⁹ There are many arguments suggesting the ways in which Shakespeare was experimental. For example, George T. Wright comments on Shakespeare’s use of meter: ‘[t]he art that emerges is unique in the history of iambic pentameter’.¹⁸⁰ Ruth Nevo writes that Shakespeare’s early comedies ‘are a gallimaufry of experiments’.¹⁸¹ Robert S. Miola writes how ‘Shakespeare subverts the classical conflict between fathers and young lovers’ in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, ‘contradicts his source text to sharpen conflicts and move in new directions’ in *King Lear*, and ‘exploits and subverts Senecan revenge traditions’.¹⁸² What is key is that the RSC encourage contemporary writers to consider how Shakespeare was experimenting with form throughout his career in order to inspire these artists to think imaginatively and creatively about how they might want to push barriers with form in their work. The RSC has offered workshops to writers in the past to explore ‘writing for large stages and thinking on a more epic scale’ with specific exercises such as ‘looking at the construction of Shakespeare’s soliloquies’, to learn more about writing for the RST and Swan stages.¹⁸³

The extent to which Shakespeare ‘breaks all the rules’ is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is important to consider the context in which Shakespeare was writing as he

¹⁷⁹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁸⁰ George T. Wright, *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) p. 101.

¹⁸¹ Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1980; repr. Abingdon: Routledge 2005) p. 1.

¹⁸² Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare’s Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 90, 112, 121.

¹⁸³ Tom Morton-Smith, ‘Writing a Play for the RSC’, *Radical Mischief*, 2 (May 2014) p. 9.

‘was never entirely insulated from what other dramatists were doing’.¹⁸⁴ This point is not aiming to refute any assertions of Shakespeare’s radicalness but rather, to bring his achievements into context with other writers who were also experimenting with form, some of whom may have inspired Shakespeare and vice versa. For example, Martin Wiggins points out other works of radicalness by writers such as Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd and how they ‘reinvented’ tragedy (p. 44), and Leo Salingar praises the ‘originality’ and ‘novelty’ of Ben Jonson’s use of farcical scheme.¹⁸⁵ Pointing out the potential radicalness of other writers does not necessarily diminish Shakespeare’s innovations. Instead, this assertion opens up the possibility that this was a radical time for playwriting where writers worked collaboratively and used formal conventions in innovative ways.

Furthermore, there are other critical perspectives on the radicalness of Shakespeare. One can question to what extent Shakespeare was radical if he was receiving royal patronage. Richard Dutton argues that the court was actually more influential to Shakespeare’s writing and revisioning of his plays than we imagine. Dutton explains how plays performed at court by Shakespeare were longer, ‘which far exceed the norms of the public stage in his day’, and that it was an opportunity for Shakespeare to heighten his verse and ‘to try the range of his poetic, rhetorical, and dramatic skills’.¹⁸⁶ While Dutton does not discuss how the court influenced Shakespeare’s plays politically, a case could be made that Shakespeare fashioned his plays to please the ruling monarch. According to Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells, a play like *Macbeth* implies that Shakespeare was ‘deliberately catering to the tastes of his

¹⁸⁴ Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 72. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁸⁵ Leo Salingar, *Dramatic Form in Shakespeare and the Jacobean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 175.

¹⁸⁶ Richard Dutton, *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p. 1, p. 289.

company's patron King James'.¹⁸⁷ Alternatively, Fernie argues that 'Shakespeare in *Macbeth* seems to wonder if Duncan is a necessary sacrifice to the play's demonic vision of human possibility' and that reasons for killing the King are 'everywhere'.¹⁸⁸ A similar situation features in the criticisms of other Shakespeare plays. *Henry V* has been heralded as a patriotic text by some, but others see a different perspective.¹⁸⁹ Kay Stanton proffered that Act IV scene one suggests that Williams, 'a common man, has more morality than the King' and that the play demonstrates how King Henry uses 'stupid theatrical tricks to try to manipulate the very soldiers that he needs for his glorious enterprise'.¹⁹⁰ The role of patronage and its influence on Shakespeare's writing is therefore important to discuss along with the extent to which Shakespeare was subversive if readers miss these lines of dissidence.

For Whyman and Hill, Shakespeare is radical because he was successful in being subversive in a way that was able to get past the censor. Whyman explained that Shakespeare 'was consistently addressing the issues of his day, but doing it mischievously, doing it in such a way that he could not recall that or be censored, provoking us to think'.¹⁹¹ Hill also admired the way that Shakespeare found 'a way of landing those points that don't feel too alarmist or on the nose'.¹⁹² Hill and Whyman allude to a subtle radicalism, which can feel oppositional to the RSC's current aims of being bold as Whyman earlier described, 'not being afraid of being on the nose'.¹⁹³ That said, such subtle radicalism was necessary perhaps in order to continue

¹⁸⁷ Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells, eds, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, revised by Will Sharpe and Erin Sullivan, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 288.

¹⁸⁸ Ewan Fernie, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), p. 66, p. 56.

¹⁸⁹ Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks and Henry V' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 28, 3 (Summer 1977) 279-296 (p. 279); Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) pp. 62-64.

¹⁹⁰ Kay Stanton, interview with author via Zoom, July 2020.

¹⁹¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

¹⁹² Hill, interview with author.

¹⁹³ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

being favoured by the censor and to receive royal patronage. Shakespeare was clearly aware of the consequences of getting into trouble with the authorities. James Shapiro notes that the playwright had seen ‘Thomas Kyd broken by torture on the rack, Christopher Marlowe possibly assassinated, and Ben Jonson imprisoned’.¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Dollimore asserts that ‘[a] particular play might offer a radical critique of providentialist ideology while being inherently conservative in other respects’.¹⁹⁵ In this argument, a play can feel radical and conservative at the same time, demonstrating the complexity of assessing any performance as radical.

The importance of acknowledging the suppression of writing under censorship features in Richard Wilson’s 2016 monograph, *Free Will: Art and Power on Shakespeare’s Stage*. Wilson rebuffs the ‘myth’ that Shakespeare was ‘a devoted royalist’ and instead, suggests that the writer was ‘tongue-tied by authority’ (Sonnet 66).¹⁹⁶ *Free Will* perceives the plays as ‘systematically engaged in untying freedom from royalty by dismantling *sovereignty in all its forms*’ (p. 4, italics as printed in the original text). Shakespeare wrote from ‘an *abject position*’, Wilson argues, and it is ‘in this doubled and ironic act of *waiting* that his plays cheat determination’ and evade censorship.¹⁹⁷ Wilson proposes that Shakespeare’s ‘free drift’ was created ‘in a negative dialectic with the wealth and power that summoned it into being’ (p. 7), which allowed the plays to hold ‘the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image’ (*Hamlet*, III.2.22-23). In this reading, Shakespeare does not directly attack his patrons and was not ‘alarmist’ to use Hill’s earlier words.¹⁹⁸ Rather, this act of

¹⁹⁴ James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) p. 142.

¹⁹⁵ Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Wilson, *Free Will: Art and Power on Shakespeare’s Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) p. 3. Further citations from this volume are given after quotations in the text; Richard Wilson, interview with author via Zoom, July 2020.

¹⁹⁷ Wilson considers the writer’s position alongside his service as a player and the ‘attentiveness involved in waiting for a prompt’. Wilson, *Free Will*, p. 5. Italics as printed in the original text.

¹⁹⁸ Hill, interview with author.

mimesis demonstrated the greed and corruption of authority by reflecting the state and the court back to themselves. As opposed to being confrontational and 'on the nose', Wilson considers 'these works as experiments in [...] radical passivity' by presenting 'powerful powerlessness' (p. 11, p. 10).¹⁹⁹ From this perspective, Shakespeare was unable to say what he really thought, or as Cordelia says, 'I cannot heave / [m]y heart into my mouth' (*King Lear*, I.1.91-92), and thus, the playwright chooses a position of indifference or silencing of his own personal views. This argument echoes earlier questions about the extent to which one can be radical in an institutionalised setting, and also, the idea that perhaps Shakespeare could not have been overtly radical because of censorship. Yet, the ideas that emerge from Shakespeare's text (i.e., his capability of reflecting the corruption back to the state) features subversive and dissident thought, thus supporting Hill and Whyman's ideas of Shakespeare being subtly radical.

The numerous lines of argument mentioned within this section demonstrate the contrasting ways in which Shakespeare's radicalism has been critiqued by different scholars. Wells notes how over the course of the twentieth century, 'Shakespeare's plays have been claimed by conservative forces as part of a national heritage, as bulwarks of orthodoxy, and by radicals as a potent source of subversion'.²⁰⁰ Shakespeare has been heralded and exemplified from both sides of the political spectrum, making him a device for many different agendas. Stanton acknowledges the contrasting ways in which Shakespeare can be interpreted: '[e]ach play has its own integrity, yet its components arrange themselves into diverse patterns'. After judging a play from a certain angle, Stanton argues, 'we can rearrange

¹⁹⁹ 'on the nose' quoted in Hill, interview with author.

²⁰⁰ Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994) p. 2.

our perspectives and view a completely different and equally valid picture'.²⁰¹ Gregory Doran suggested that 'we like to form Shakespeare in our own image and that's what is so clever about Shakespeare'. To Doran, Shakespeare is 'a different writer at different times' and he is 'too big to be limited by any definition'.²⁰² Doran's views highlight a key challenge to Shakespeare studies, which is how to define Shakespeare. One is reminded of Hall's assertion in the 1960s: '[h]e has everything: he is domestic as well as tragic, lyrical *and* dirty; as tricky as a circus and as bawdy as a music hall. He is realistic *and* surrealistic'.²⁰³ Similarly, Doran explained his advice to directors: 'the trouble is that if you decide what the play is about and impose that upon the play, you will miss the flexible nuance that Shakespeare has written'.²⁰⁴ Doran seems to resist any categorisation of Shakespeare, and his advice implies that instead of imposing one opinion on any text, he enjoys the contradictions and the 'nuance' of the plays. Whether one agrees that Shakespeare is radically mischievous or not, the main point to highlight here is that the new work at TOP is influenced by and connected with a specific view of Shakespeare. The initial quote from Doran ('we like to form Shakespeare in our own image') is key here as it describes how certain staff at the RSC see Shakespeare as radically mischievous, and this view supports the programming of new work in TOP.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is worth exploring whether Shakespeare can be presented in radical ways today. There appear to be certain challenges to presenting a radical production of Shakespeare in the present day. Peter Brook warns that nowhere does 'Deadly

²⁰¹ Kay Stanton, 'Intersections of Politics, Culture, Class, and Gender in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merchant of Venice*', *Multicultural Shakespeare: Appropriation and Performance*, 12, 27 (2015), 41-54 <DOI: 10.1515/mstap-2015-0004> (p. 53).

²⁰² Doran, interview with author.

²⁰³ Hall, 'Avoiding a Method', p. 14. Italics as printed in the original text.

²⁰⁴ Doran, interview with author.

Theatre' sit more comfortably than with Shakespeare: 'the Deadly Theatre approaches the classics from the viewpoint that somewhere, someone has found out and defined how the play should be done'.²⁰⁵ Similarly, Susan Bennett, in *Performing Nostalgia* (1996), argues the following:

nostalgia at its most virulent has been the property of the Right in the Western world and, in a British context at least, it is conspicuous how often Shakespeare performs the role which links the psychic experience of nostalgia to the possibility of reviving an authentic, naturally better, and material past.²⁰⁶

Bennett describes how Shakespeare can be associated with a mythologised past that represents conservative ideas. Peter Kirwan notes that: 'Shakespeare, in order to maintain its cultural dominance, is under increasing pressure to adopt the radical chic of not-Shakespeare.'²⁰⁷ Kirwan states that contemporaries of Shakespeare are usually associated with radicalness in contradistinction to a homogenous, conservative Shakespeare and at present, certain companies are stepping away from ideals of 'Shakespeare' in order to present modern, transgressive work. From this, one can discern then that a radical production of Shakespeare would be something that challenges or subverts expectations. As mentioned above, a recent Shakespeare production that was described as 'radical' by certain critics was the Sherman Theatre's *The Taming of the Shrew*, which was 'startlingly relevant' and 'a darkly political piece'.²⁰⁸ The play featured a gender-swapped cast and, according to Gareth Llŷr

²⁰⁵ Brook, p. 17.

²⁰⁶ Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 7.

²⁰⁷ Peter Kirwan, 'Not-Shakespeare and the Shakespearean Ghost', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. by James C. Bulman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) pp. 87-103 (p. 100).

²⁰⁸ Nicholas Davies, 'The Taming of the Shrew Review: "Startlingly Relevant"', *Stage*, 6 March 2019 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2019/taming-shrew-review-sherman-theatre-cardiff/>> [accessed 18

Evans, this rewritten version reshaped the original text and expanded ‘the binaries and dualities of the drama’. The effect of this production was that it ‘gently’ poked ‘at the very conditionality of meaning’ and the results of the gender swap obtained ‘complexities’ that felt ‘new’.²⁰⁹ By overhauling the text and reattributing the gender of characters, the play subverted the original structures for a fresh reading of the text in performance.

Of course, one might argue that any claim for Shakespeare being radical is potentially undermined by the fact that so many productions tend to revise his works. Shakespeare’s plays are cut, edited, and adapted for a number of artistic and political reasons, but one suggestion appropriate to this thesis is that, for some critics and artists, Shakespeare’s plays can shed new light or provide topical readings that reflect the contemporary moment for twenty-first century audiences if they are revised in some way. How this is done will vary from production to production, but in the case of the Sherman Theatre’s adaptation, a gender-swapped version of the play seemed to have provided a new perspective which felt ‘relevant’ to audiences, as Davies’ review suggests.

This section has predominantly focused on the idea of Shakespeare as a ‘radical’ writer, mainly because of the significant amount of literature and ideas featured on this subject. There does not appear to be as much said about Shakespeare as a ‘mischievous’ writer. As mentioned, Whyman stated that Shakespeare was ‘mischievously’ communicating political points to his audience in a way that avoided censorship. Further, Whyman contended that Shakespeare was ‘mischievous in his ability to entertain’ and was ‘consistently playful

June 2019].

²⁰⁹ Gareth Llŷr Evans, ‘The Taming of the Shrew Review – Shakespeare in a Woman’s World’, *Guardian*, 6 March 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/mar/06/the-taming-of-the-shrew-review-shakespeare-in-a-womans-world>> [accessed 18 June 2019].

with the audience'.²¹⁰ Whyman felt that Shakespeare played 'with time, space, location, gender' and cited specific examples such as the character of Time telling audiences in *The Winter's Tale* that the play is going to skip forward sixteen years at the beginning of Act IV. This sense of playfulness can relate to the previous discussion on Shakespeare's experimentation with form, where Shakespeare 'breaks all the rules of his time' according to Whyman.²¹¹ The ways in which Shakespeare is perceived as being 'mischievous' with audiences is a source of inspiration in the context of new work at the RSC, as Whyman and the literary department encourage contemporary writers to have a playful relationship with spectators today.

Buzz Goodbody and 'Radical Mischief'

Shakespeare was not the only person to inspire the RSC's tagline of 'Radical Mischief' and this next section explores how Goodbody contributed a spirit of 'Radical Mischief' to the RSC in the early seventies. As mentioned in the Introduction, Goodbody was asked by Trevor Nunn to become the Artistic Director of TOP, and Goodbody drew up a manifesto for the proposed studio theatre. TOP was at the forefront of experimental work at the RSC when it first opened in the 1970s under Goodbody. Interestingly, however, the original building was remembered for being more radical with Shakespeare than with new work and Goodbody herself favoured Shakespeare over contemporary playwrights. Despite that, she is credited as a source of inspiration for the new TOP, which aims to be a creative hub for new work exclusively. Goodbody was described as radically mischievous by Whyman for the ways in which she

²¹⁰ Whyman, 'Welcome to the Second Edition of Radical Mischief', *Radical Mischief*, 2 (May 2014) p. 2; Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

²¹¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

engaged with the local community, particularly with schools and students, and for staging productions in a minimalist, stark manner. Whyman explained how Goodbody:

wanted to bring Shakespeare to a new audience, and she wanted to do it [...] by being both radical and mischievous. ‘Radical’ in the sense of having hardly any décor, hardly any set, having her audience sit on what are notoriously uncomfortable seats with no soundproofing — so radically raw as a theatre experience particularly then because it was so new.²¹²

Goodbody provided audiences in Stratford with a different experience to what they were used to when they saw Shakespeare productions by the RSC. Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall, who sits on the Board of Governors for the RSC and worked in various positions at the Company between 1970-1990, described Goodbody’s 1975 *Hamlet* and Nunn’s 1976 *Macbeth* as ‘radical in the best sense’, stating that these productions ‘did change the way people thought about Shakespeare’ by sharing the space with the actors.²¹³ Of course, the experiments in the original TOP coincided with the wider formal innovations and political experiments of fringe theatres that were also emerging during the late 1960s/early 1970s. McIntosh helpfully reminds us that these conditions felt radical during the early 1970s, but perhaps studio theatre, and being in close proximity to actors, no longer feels radical in the twenty-first century.²¹⁴ Accordingly, the RSC may not be taking the ‘stripped-back conditions’ and methods of working as direct sources of inspiration into the new TOP but rather Goodbody’s spirit of

²¹² Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

²¹³ Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall, interview with author, London, February 2020. McIntosh worked as a casting director, planning controller, senior administrator, and associate producer for the RSC.

²¹⁴ McIntosh, interview with author.

experimenting and trying new things, developing relationships with the audience, and a sense of political activism.

Chambers writes that Goodbody ‘bridged the radical, democratic challenge of the fringe and the classical achievements’ of the RSC.²¹⁵ Chambers equates fringe theatre with radicalism because of its counter-culture approach of staging work in new spaces — church halls, basements, etc., — and its aims to provide access to theatre for new audiences.²¹⁶ Where Shakespeare was so often associated with the bourgeoisie, audiences encountered Shakespeare in a new way at TOP that was intimate and compelling due to the close proximity of the action and the shared experience between actor and audience. To quote Brook on ‘Deadly Theatre’ and Shakespeare:

We see his plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way — they look lively and colourful, there is music and everyone is all dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best of classical theatres.²¹⁷

Brook interrogates ‘the proper way’ and highlights perceptions of what makes good theatre to the public — glossy spectacle and sound. By working against these perceptions, Goodbody and other theatre-makers in the original TOP were making theatre with limited budgets and with a focus on the actor and the text.

The ‘democratic’ in Chambers’ quote is also useful in understanding how Goodbody worked in a radical way at the RSC. Outlined in Goodbody’s manifesto, the aims for the

²¹⁵ Colin Chambers, ‘Theatre’s Revolutionary Buzz’, *Morning Star*, 11 April 1980, n. pg. Accessed in Shakespeare Birthplace Archives, Stratford-upon-Avon, January 2018.

²¹⁶ Chambers, *Other Spaces*, pp. 7-10.

²¹⁷ Brook, p. 12.

building were to provide opportunities for assistant directors and junior/under-parted actors to try new projects, to '[p]ut on new plays' by writers that the RSC was interested in and to '[b]e more experimental' than the main RST.²¹⁸ The 'democratic' nature that Chambers is talking about relates to Goodbody's way of working in rehearsals. Goodbody explains:

I am trying to set the actors free creatively in the way Peter Brook does so well, and one acquires their respect far more by allowing them to expand in a mutual process than by telling them the way something should be done. One is then able to say one sentence to an actor and watch his performance change completely because of a language having been developed between you.²¹⁹

The term 'mutual process' is key here and Goodbody can be related to more unconventional ways of working as a director in a similar manner to Brook. As opposed to simply telling actors what to do, both Brook and Goodbody aimed to create a collaborative process where actors felt freedom to explore and experiment. In its time, the ways of working in the original TOP were not entirely new to the RSC, but it followed in the footsteps of Michel Saint-Denis and Brook of training actors, enabling them to free their creativity and allowing that energy to filter into the theatre-making process. This idea of providing artists with freedom to explore their ideas was key to the original building and it is now an important aim for R&D at the new TOP.

According to Whyman, Goodbody ensured that TOP included 'new and radical thinking with a political consciousness'.²²⁰ Whyman may be referring to the original aims for TOP as a place for the local community and for school students in particular to encounter Shakespeare

²¹⁸ Goodbody, 'Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974', p. 1.

²¹⁹ Buzz Goodbody, quoted in Catherine Stott, 'Buzz Goodbody Talks to Catherine Stott', *Guardian*, 27 October 1971, n. pg. Accessed in Shakespeare Institute Library, Stratford-upon-Avon, April 2018.

²²⁰ Whyman, 'The Other Place', n. pg.

in new ways.²²¹ This in itself was not an entirely new idea, as Theatreground presented shows to new audiences almost a decade earlier, and a relationship between teachers and the RSC began in 1948 with the launch of the RSC Summer School, as Joe Winston notes.²²² Goodbody built on these aspects of the RSC's work and formed the first season of plays at TOP around the aims for attracting new audiences, selecting Shakespeare texts that schools were studying, and ensuring that the space felt 'welcoming and accessible'.²²³

It is interesting to consider what radical thinking constitutes in the twenty-first century, and what it might mean to the RSC: Introducing new provocations or perspectives to the theatres in Stratford? A political topic that directly responds in urgent and new ways to the contemporary moment? Or perhaps radical thinking describes ideas that may be potentially controversial or dissident in some way. Writing in 2014, Whyman asserts, '[I]ike Buzz and her contemporaries, we are living through complex times both politically and economically' so perhaps 'radical thinking' to Whyman is rooted in the contemporary and raises difficult yet necessary questions about society in Britain.²²⁴ Whyman describes TOP as 'the space we can explore contentious issues and maybe divide opinion' which insinuates that 'radical thinking' includes thoughts and ideas that are difficult to say or speak aloud.²²⁵ It is worth considering what Whyman means exactly when she states that the issues might 'divide opinion', and whether shows presented at the *Mischief Festivals* have achieved this. Whyman

²²¹ See Goodbody, 'The Other Place', p. 9.

²²² Joe Winston, *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015) p. 6. For Theatreground, see pp. 16-17.

²²³ Chambers, *Other Spaces*, pp. 35-36; Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare*, pp. 28-29; Smith-Howard, 'Knowing Her Place', p. 83.

²²⁴ Whyman, 'The Other Place', n. pg.

²²⁵ Erica Whyman, 'Update by Erica Whyman on The Other Place', *Radical Mischief*, 4 (June 2015), pp. 2-3 (p. 3).

is not referring to a divided opinion in terms of whether audiences enjoyed a performance, but she suggests that the content of the works might generate debate amongst audiences.

Two shows which may have divided opinion are Alice Birch's *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* and Somalia Seaton's *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.²²⁶ With other shows, it is possibly more difficult to discern whether the political issues presented on stage did divide audiences. One assumes that audiences watching *#WeAreArrested* agreed that freedom of speech is an important issue and that those watching *Myth* (Spring *Mischief Festival* 2017) recognised that the theme of climate change is urgent. Perhaps the level of debate lies within the challenge of responding to political issues represented on stage and the extent to which audience members feel moved to act following the performance event. The potential impact of dividing opinion will be explored in subsequent chapters, but what is important to highlight here is that such aims stem from the mission to honour Goodbody's legacy of creating work that serves the local community, not only in terms of programming relevant new work but through hosting complimentary panel events and debates for the general public to attend.

Returning to Whyman's idea of 'new and radical thinking with a political consciousness', one could also question what exactly is meant by 'a political consciousness'.²²⁷ Whyman may be implying that the thinking in TOP should interrogate the RSC's position in contemporary issues and consider the ways in which the Company can respond adequately and appropriately to social and political injustices. As mentioned above, for Goodbody, her 'political consciousness' stemmed from the aims that the theatre should be accessible for

²²⁶ See pp. 91-93.

²²⁷ Whyman, 'The Other Place', n. pg.

everyone and that TOP should serve the local community, as she once stated, '[u]nless the classical theatre becomes the property of the whole society, it will atrophy'.²²⁸ McIntosh also explained that Goodbody 'was a member of the Communist party and was also a feminist of a very engaged and explicit nature'.²²⁹ Goodbody once described working on a production 'as a political act', discussed her distaste for a large amount of Shakespearean criticism that had 'a very distinct bourgeois ideology behind it', and stated that she wanted to see 'good Shakespeare productions done by Marxists'.²³⁰ Having Goodbody as a direct inspiration for the new TOP reinforces the importance of a theatre that is accessible and serves the local community, in addition to demonstrating how an artist's own political values can influence and be integral to the operation of the theatre. Goodbody's politics informed the ways in which she directed plays at TOP as well as her overarching aims for being more democratic in terms of access for both audiences and junior members of the Company.

Like the previous section, a discussion on 'radical' has featured more prominently here. The main ideas around Goodbody embodying a spirit of 'Radical Mischief' — her political aims to make theatre more accessible, and her methods of conducting rehearsals — relate more towards a sense of radicalness than mischief. That said, there are ways in which Goodbody was also seen as 'mischievous'. McIntosh agreed that Goodbody embodied a sense of 'mischief' because of the director's sense of humour and wit, but that the more 'malign' sense of 'mischief' did not apply to her.²³¹ Whyman defined Goodbody as 'mischievous' as she reflected on the early days of TOP: 'there was a sense of everyone being in it together and

²²⁸ Goodbody, 'The Other Place', p. 9.

²²⁹ McIntosh, interview with author.

²³⁰ Goodbody, quoted in Stott, n. pg.

²³¹ McIntosh, interview with author.

that was clearly very enjoyable and risky, so maybe that is the definition of mischief — enjoyable and risky'.²³² Perhaps Whyman is referring to the egalitarian feel of the original TOP that provided opportunities for emerging actors, directors, and playwrights as previously mentioned. McIntosh also agreed that Goodbody was a 'risk taker' not only in relation to her work at TOP but 'in every aspect of her life'.²³³ Goodbody chose not to develop political plays in other fringe theatres but instead chose to invest her energy and ideas into working at the RSC. Goodbody is thus described as mischievous in the ways that she sought to shake up the organisation and to bring in ambitious new ideas. Of course, one can risk sounding patronising or infantilising by describing Goodbody's plans as 'mischief'. It is therefore important to highlight the seriousness of Goodbody's aims and that 'mischief' in this particular usage is aligned with a great sense of intelligence and craft. This usage of the term 'mischief' is not simply light-hearted folly, but it is underpinned with a mission to challenge and to incite change. Thus, Goodbody is described as having 'a spirit of daring, and playfulness' which Whyman uses as inspiration to be radically mischievous in the new TOP.²³⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted that 'Radical Mischief' is a particularly loaded phrase with multiple meanings. By investigating both words separately and interrogating the ways in which members of staff at the RSC define these terms, it has become clear that the RSC are conscious of the multiplicity of meanings created by the phrase. Both 'radical' and 'mischief' carry with them a degree of subjectivity, but ultimately staff are in agreement that 'radical' to

²³² Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

²³³ McIntosh, interview with author.

²³⁴ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

the RSC is something bold, progressive, formally experimental and politically challenging. 'Mischief' represents playfulness and joy but also the idea of presenting something troubling and transgressive. Ultimately, the phrase suggests a serious quest to make new work with a political consciousness that is both entertaining and thought-provoking. Whilst the phrase can conjure a number of ideas and connotations, the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of the phrase can lead to the possibilities of 'Radical Mischief' being manifest in many different ways.

'Radical Mischief' acts as a provocation to both the theatre and the academy. To return to Brook, the following quote from *The Empty Space* highlights a great dilemma prevalent to both institutions: '[t]he appalling difficulty of making theatre must be accepted: it is, or would be, if truly practiced, perhaps the hardest medium of all: it is merciless, there is no room for error, or for waste'.²³⁵ 'Radical Mischief' represents a spirit of endeavour to be bold and to experiment. At TOP, the RSC are seeking to take risks, which is essential to what radical work requires. The original TOP in its early days acted as a space for creativity and freedom to explore theatre in new ways, and the RSC hope that the new TOP will fulfil the Company's aims to continue that spirit of experimentation.

This chapter has frequently returned to the challenges of being truly radical in a subsidised institution. This issue connects with the idea that Shakespeare could not have been as radical or as free-thinking as he may have wished. Wilson notes that '[o]ne of the surprises of our era is how, after an age of self-service, we are reverting to a state of affairs like that in sixteenth-century Europe', in which Stephen Greenblatt suggests 'the hallmark of power and

²³⁵ Brook, p. 31.

wealth [...] was to be waited on'.²³⁶ The RSC similarly face the pressure of delivering work that fulfils specific criteria in order to receive funding and are inevitably bound to the capitalist practices of the British theatre industry in the twenty-first century. Whilst not dismissing the idea of radicalism in the RSC entirely, it is important to highlight Whyman's aims that 'Radical Mischief' should serve as a provocation to the Company to think and act differently. When asked her definition of the term 'Radical Mischief', Whyman explained the following:

I suppose what I do not mean is that it is a root and branch or a re-discovery of what theatre can be. I do not think that I am reinventing, so putting 'mischief' with the word 'radical' is about saying, 'let's enjoy being more radical than you expect us to be'.²³⁷

Whyman has ambitious aims for the new TOP as a space where artists can take risks and push boundaries in theatre-making and thought. She clearly emphasised that her aims for 'Radical Mischief' do not imply that the RSC are more radical and mischievous than other theatre organisations or that they will discover new and original methods of making theatre. What Whyman is suggesting is that the practitioners involved in the new TOP are seeking to explore the extent to which they can be radically mischievous and challenge any expectations that the RSC cannot be playful, innovative, or daring. Whether the RSC are truly reflecting radical and mischievous work will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Whilst this chapter has primarily focused on the semantics and theoretical ideas unearthed from the definitions provided by staff at the RSC, the next three chapters will analyse specific examples of new work and events at TOP in order to investigate whether one

²³⁶ Wilson, *Free Will*, p. 7; Greenblatt, pp. 29-30.

²³⁷ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

can see elements of 'Radical Mischief' being actualised. The following chapter will focus on the *Mischief Festivals* to analyse the ways in which certain examples of new work correspond to the aims for 'Radical Mischief'. By using the definitions of 'radical' and 'mischief' provided in this chapter, this thesis explores whether the RSC are achieving their aims for new work at TOP.

Chapter Two: Mischief Festivals

June 2014, Stratford-upon-Avon.

The RSC are in the middle of their 'Roaring Girls' season in the Swan Theatre. This season is comprised of four rarely performed early modern plays: *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, the anonymous *Arden of Faversham*, *The White Devil* by John Webster, and *The Witch of Edmonton* by Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley. What connects these four works are 'feisty' female parts at their centre.²³⁸ That said, Whyman, who is overseeing the season, comments that although these plays feature 'fantastic parts for women', 'they are about remarkable women in men's words'.²³⁹ While the Swan season includes more female actors in the company than usual for the RSC at this time, and the season almost entirely employs female directors (Jo Davies directs *The Roaring Girl*, Polly Findlay directs *Arden of Faversham*, and Maria Åberg directs *The White Devil*), there is a distinct lack of female playwrights.²⁴⁰ At the same time, *Henry IV Parts I and II* are playing in the RST, making the entire summer season comprised of male writers.

Two hundred yards down the road however, a counter-event is taking place in the abandoned Courtyard Theatre. Four female playwrights, reacting to the provocation 'well behaved women seldom make history', have written new plays that the Company describe as 'daring' and 'radical'.²⁴¹ They appear in a short season entitled *Midsummer Mischief*.

²³⁸ Nick Clark, 'Roaring Girls: The RSC to Stage Little-Known Plays with Feisty Female Roles', *Independent*, 10 September 2013 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/roaring-girls-rsc-stage-little-known-plays-feisty-female-roles-8807464.html>> [accessed 26 March 2021].

²³⁹ Whyman, quoted in Clark.

²⁴⁰ Peter Kirwan, 'The Roared-at Boys? Repertory Casting and Gender Politics in the RSC's 2014 Swan Season', *Shakespeare*, 11, 3 (2015) 247-261 <DOI: 10.1080/17450918.2015.1048277> (p. 252).

²⁴¹ Royal Shakespeare Company, Prefatory Material to *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays* (London: Oberon, 2014) n. pg.

Catherine Love describes the event as ‘the naughty cousin of the Roaring Girls season in the Swan Theatre, both speaking to and opposing the RSC’s main programme’.²⁴² While ‘naughty cousin’ sounds immature and infantilising, the quote highlights the fact that the new season of work is intended as a counterpoint to the productions on the main stages. Not only is the event a ‘contemporary response’ to the lack of female writers currently appearing at the RSC, but this *Festival* of original work also offers a future glimpse of the new TOP due to be opened on the same site as the Courtyard, and its ‘spirit of radical questioning’.²⁴³ The RSC are intending to annually produce provocative new work in short seasons entitled *Mischief Festivals*.

Introduction

This chapter investigates the ways in which a spirit of ‘Radical Mischief’ is embodied in the *Mischief Festivals*. The *Festivals* have, indeed, become a regular feature of the new TOP. Occurring either annually or biannually since 2016, the *Festivals* aim to showcase new work commissioned for TOP. The list of *Festivals* and works presented is shared below:

²⁴² Catherine Love, ‘RSC’s Erica Whyman: “We Could Be Much More Rebellious”’, *What’s on Stage*, 30 June 2014 <https://www.whatsonstage.com/stratford-upon-avon-theatre/news/erica-whyman-rsc-interview_34901.html> [accessed 8 September 2021].

²⁴³ Fiona Mountford, ‘RSC Midsummer Mischief Festival: The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon – Theatre Review’, *Evening Standard*, 23 June 2014 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/rsc-midsummer-mischief-festival-the-other-place-stratforduponavon-theatre-review-9555817.html>> [accessed 8 September 2021]; Love, n. pg. This *Midsummer Mischief Festival* was staged in what would become the new TOP. The new TOP has incorporated the same outer framework as The Courtyard, which previously was the second TOP building, and the stage for *Midsummer Mischief* was an early glimpse into what the stage currently looks like in the new TOP.

Table 1. List of *Mischief Festivals* and Productions at TOP 2014-2020

Date	Provocation	Title of Show	Creative Team
2014 <i>Midsummer Mischief Festival – Programme A</i>	‘Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History’	<i>The Ant and the Cicada</i>	Writer: Timberlake Wertebaker Director: Erica Whyman
2014 <i>Midsummer Mischief Festival – Programme A</i>	‘Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History’	<i>Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.</i>	Writer: Alice Birch Director: Erica Whyman
2014 <i>Midsummer Mischief Festival – Programme B</i>	‘Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History’	<i>I Can Hear You</i>	Writer: E.V. Crowe Director: Jo McInnes
2014 <i>Midsummer Mischief Festival – Programme B</i>	‘Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History’	<i>This is not an Exit</i>	Writer: Abi Zakarian Director: Jo McInnes
2016 <i>Making Mischief Festival</i>	‘What is Unsayable in the Twenty-First Century?’	<i>Always Orange</i>	Writer: Fraser Grace Director: Donnacadh O’Brian
2016 <i>Making Mischief Festival</i>	‘What is Unsayable in the Twenty-First Century?’	<i>Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier</i>	Writer: Somalia Seaton Director: Nadia Latif
2016 <i>Making Mischief Festival</i>	‘What is Unsayable in the Twenty-First Century?’	<i>Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.</i>	Writer: Alice Birch Director: Erica Whyman
2016 <i>Making Mischief Festival</i>	‘What is Unsayable in the Twenty-First Century?’	<i>Joanne</i>	Created by Deborah Bruce, Theresa Ikoko, Laura Lomas, Chino Odimba, Ursula Rani Sarma. Director: Róisín McBrinn Commissioned and produced by Clean Break.
2017 <i>Spring Mischief Festival</i>		<i>The Earthworks</i>	Writer: Tom Morton-Smith Director: Erica Whyman
2017 <i>Spring Mischief Festival</i>		<i>Myth</i>	Created by Matt Hartley and Kirsty Housely
2017 <i>Autumn Mischief Festival</i>		<i>Kingdom Come</i>	Created by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard
2018 <i>Spring Mischief Festival</i>		<i>#WeAreArrested</i>	Writer: Can Dündar Adaptation: Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts Director: Sophie Ivatts
2018 <i>Spring Mischief Festival</i>		<i>Day of the Living</i>	Director: Amy Draper Music and Lyrics: Daren Clark Writer: Juliet Gilkes Romero
2018 <i>Autumn Mischief Festival</i>		<i>Maydays</i>	Writer: David Edgar Director: Owen Horsley
2018 <i>Autumn Mischief Festival</i>		<i>Trying It On</i>	Writer: David Edgar Director: Christopher Haydon

			Presented by Warwick Arts Centre and China Plate
2019		<i>Crooked Dances</i>	Writer: Robin French Director: Elizabeth Freestone
2020 <i>Mischief Festival</i> (postponed)		<i>Ivy Tiller: Vicar's Daughter, Squirrel Killer</i>	Writer: Bea Roberts
2020 <i>Mischief Festival</i> (postponed)		<i>O, Island!</i>	Writer: Nina Segal

A mixture of events were organised alongside these theatre productions, such as creative team talks, panel debates and R&D showings. As demonstrated in the example of the *Midsummer Mischief Festival*, the RSC hoped that a studio theatre in Stratford could act as a third space that highlighted under-addressed contemporary themes or topics that were raised on the main stages but were not fully explored. Further, TOP could respond to issues of inclusivity as exemplified in its response to the lack of contemporary female writers during the 2014 summer season in the RST and Swan. Ultimately, Whyman explained that the *Festivals* provided audiences with an opportunity to see ‘lots of different kinds of work in the same space’ made by ‘a whole range of people’ and described the events as ‘festivals of “Radical Mischief” to showcase our most daring work’.²⁴⁴

The focus of this research is centred around the 2018 *Mischief Festivals*, for which I attended rehearsals and followed the creative process. The 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival* featured a double-bill of new work — *#WeAreArrested* by Can Dündar, adapted by Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts, and *Day of the Living*, created by Amy Draper, Darren Clark, and Juliet Gilkes Romero. In the autumn, *Maydays* by David Edgar, originally written for the RSC in 1983, was

²⁴⁴ Erica Whyman, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘Festivals at The Other Place’, Youtube, 26 March 2018 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TB4ZWWBsSaA>> [accessed 29 March 2021]; Whyman, ‘The Other Place’, n. pg.

revived and rewritten for the *Mischief Festival*, directed by Owen Horsley. The experience of being in the rehearsal room for each of these works has provided me with a first-hand glimpse of the creation of new work at TOP, which has enabled me to understand better the creative decisions that take place behind closed doors. I have also interviewed members of the creative teams and acting companies, in addition to examining publicity material and theatre reviews.

This chapter will begin by outlining the aims for the *Mischief Festivals*, followed by a brief discussion of the selection process and programming of new work at TOP. The ideas unearthed from this section will lead into an analysis of *#WeAreArrested* and *Day of the Living*. I aim to highlight the intentions behind these works to see whether a sense of 'Radical Mischief' emerges within these productions. This section will also explore the extent to which it is risky to produce work like *#WeAreArrested* and *Day of the Living* in Stratford, leading to a short reflection on the implications of programming political work in studio theatre spaces. These ideas will flow into an analysis of *Maydays* and the ways in which this production might relate to 'Radical Mischief'. This chapter will then discuss accompanying events of the 2018 *Festivals* — *Trying It On*, written and performed by David Edgar (Autumn *Mischief Festival*), *Three Letters*, written and performed by Nell Leyshon, and *Redefining Juliet*, created and directed by Storme Toolis and Alice Knight (both Spring *Mischief Festival*). The final section will explore *Crooked Dances* by Robin French, the only play to be presented in TOP in 2019, followed by concluding thoughts on the future of the *Mischief Festivals*.

Overall, this research seeks to connect the overarching ambitions of the new TOP with the work that is being produced within by the creative teams. As mentioned, TOP was intended to act as a provocation to the rest of the organisation, and the ways in which the activities in TOP can or have already achieved this will be reflected on. This chapter will

develop further the ideas explored in the previous chapter in terms of demonstrating how and whether 'Radical Mischief' can be created within the work of the new TOP.

Mischief Festivals: Aims and Programming

The RSC have a familiarity with festival events, as throughout its history, festivals have been organised and arranged by various members of the Company. Previous festivals, such as the RSC Fringe Festival, ran in various forms in Stratford, London and Newcastle from 1977 to 2005, and annually presented a variety of new shows and offered freedom to actors who wanted to create their own work during their time with the RSC.²⁴⁵ Whilst festivals have often been informal activity at the RSC (with certain exceptions such as the 2004 and 2005 New Works Festivals), it is significant that festivals are now the headline features of the new TOP.²⁴⁶ The economics and pragmatics of producing new work in TOP have to be considered. Birch stated that the Company was aware that they could not programme throughout the year at TOP, so they thought a 'festival would be a really good umbrella' and that they could schedule several events at the same time.²⁴⁷ Whyman also explained, '[w]e could genuinely experiment, find out, learn from it, regroup and do it again' as opposed to operating a year-long programme.²⁴⁸ At TOP, staff can programme differently in comparison to the RST or Swan

²⁴⁵ For further information on the fringe festivals at the RSC, see Lyn Darnley, 'Artist Development and Training in the Royal Shakespeare Company: *A Vision for Change in British Theatre Culture*' vol. I (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2013) pp. 111-117. The list of festivals can be found by visiting the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website (see Note 6).

²⁴⁶ New Work Festivals were organised in Stratford between September and October 2004, and October 2005, with some selected work also being revived in Newcastle and London venues. The Festivals were part of the RSC programme according to Darnley (p. 186 in the above reference) and 'provided a new platform' for the premieres 'of new plays, devised work, as well as experimental productions of Shakespeare's work'. See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Memorandum Submitted by the Royal Shakespeare Company', UK Parliament, 2005 <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmcomeds/254/5022217.htm>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

²⁴⁷ Birch, interview with author.

²⁴⁸ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

theatres as there is a much shorter time span from commissioning to production. Whereas works on the main stages take years of preparation, TOP programming can happen much faster and as a result the work can feel current and has increased ability to respond quickly to contemporary issues.

Birch explained one of the key aims for the *Mischief Festivals*:

[w]e wanted to create a buzz, get new audiences [...] the first year that we opened [2016] was the summer we were clashing into August festival time so we thought we would make it more festival-like for ourselves [...] and make it feel like the 'other' from there [RST/Swan].²⁴⁹

As mentioned, the RSC are hoping to 'bring people here, excited by contemporary theatre' and attract new audiences — people who may feel that the work of the Company holds little interest for them.²⁵⁰ In describing her views on how 'otherness' is manifested at TOP, Whyman explained that the most interesting meaning for her is 'other than what you expected at the RSC'. The work at TOP seeks to entice people who may feel that the RSC is a 'heritage organisation' and that there is a certain way of acting and directing plays at the Company.²⁵¹ The structuring and programming of a festival event may feel 'other' in relation to the RST and the Swan, but Birch and Whyman may also be alluding to a sense of 'otherness' in relation to the new work presented in TOP. A discussion on the commissioning and selection of new works not only in the new TOP, but also in the RST and Swan, is necessary in terms of

²⁴⁹ Birch, interview with author.

²⁵⁰ Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company'.

²⁵¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

understanding what kind of work the RSC are seeking to produce in the new studio space, and how it may contribute to a sense of ‘otherness’.

New work is programmed in all three RSC auditoriums in Stratford. Large-scale family shows are programmed in the RST, with recent examples such as *The Boy in the Dress* (2019), *A Christmas Carol* (2017 and 2018 winter seasons), and *Wendy and Peter Pan* (2013 and 2015 winter seasons). As mentioned briefly in the Introduction, the Swan Theatre also has its own new work programme. The RSC have previously staged adaptations of novels or classic texts in the Swan, with recent examples such as *Imperium* (2017) based on *The Cicero Trilogy* by Robert Harris, and Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* (2014) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2014), all adapted by Mike Poulton. Political new work has also been a feature of the programming in the Swan, such as *The Seven Acts of Mercy* by Anders Lustgarten (2017), and *Oppenheimer* by Tom Morton-Smith (2014).

Whilst there is a clear difference in the programming of new work between the RST and the Swan/TOP, one might wonder how the RSC differentiate between commissioning political new work for the Swan and TOP. An obvious difference between the Swan and TOP is the sense of scale. The Swan typically consists of a larger acting company and plays tend to be much longer in length. In terms of commissioning for the Swan, Hill explained that she looks for ‘writers who are interested in exploring a very theatrical language’: ‘The Swan works best when there is not much on that stage, so you need brilliant actors and words’.²⁵² Hill’s suggestions imply that new work in the Swan is primarily focused on spoken language and text-led commissions, although *Miss Littlewood* by Sam Kenyon, the first musical to be commissioned on the Swan stage, was produced in 2018. TOP offers more scope for

²⁵² Hill, interview with author.

experimental work that may not be text-led (devised pieces, for example), or works that include a focus on visual aspects. Another significant influence that may distinguish between a Swan and a TOP commission is a financial imperative; increased audience capacity in the Swan naturally means that the RSC need to sell more tickets with a Swan production. This very fact may imply that there is more freedom to experiment with TOP shows in comparison to a Swan commission.

Whilst TOP may be a versatile space for new work with more playful forms, it is not as easy to distinguish a play in terms of its subject matter between the Swan and TOP. As mentioned, the sense of scale is important, but in terms of content, it is worth being reminded of Whyman's words in the previous chapter where she states that TOP should be 'somewhere where we can tackle those big issues, big themes, big ideas'.²⁵³ Plays such as *Oppenheimer*, *The Whip*, *The Seven Acts of Mercy* and *Maydays* for instance could have been staged in either TOP or The Swan, making ideas around otherness in terms of the content of new work difficult to assess.

The RSC has a number of methods of finding new works or artists to commission. The first two *Festivals* (2014 and 2016) were inspired by provocation days led by the literary team and playwright Mark Ravenhill. Speakers were invited to talk to theatre-makers in attendance and Hill explained that '[e]ssentially, it is a discussion that is designed to provoke questions'.²⁵⁴ In 2014, the group discussed a quote selected by Whyman already mentioned: 'well behaved women seldom make history', and in 2016, the provocation was 'what is unsayable in the

²⁵³ Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company'.

²⁵⁴ Hill, interview with author.

twenty-first century?'.²⁵⁵ Such provocation days aim to fuel work that is 'daring' and 'urgent', although the RSC cannot anticipate the ways in which different artists will respond to the challenge.²⁵⁶ Equally, a very bold and daring response in conversation may lose its initial sense of daringness as the idea progresses through a production process, which is demonstrated in examples later on in the chapter.

The provocation days resulted in commissioned works in TOP which aimed to share connections with the programming on the main stages at the RSC. The introductory material to this chapter briefly discusses the relationship between the *Midsummer Mischief* and the 'Roaring Girls' season. The 2016 *Making Mischief Festival* explored the topic of race, a theme which was particularly relevant but was not explicitly discussed in the Shakespeare plays presented on the RST stage. In particular, Simon Godwin directed *Hamlet* set in West Africa and cast Paapa Essiedu as the first Black actor to play Hamlet for the RSC.²⁵⁷ Whyman explained that the cast for the RST repertoire (*Hamlet*, *Cymbeline* and *King Lear*) 'was largely comprised of actors of colour and it felt important therefore for TOP to create a platform to talk about race'.²⁵⁸ The two plays commissioned by the RSC for *Making Mischief* — *Fall of the Kingdom*, *Rise of the Foot Soldier* by Somalia Seaton, and *Always Orange* by Fraser Grace, explored issues around systemic racism and terrorism in the twenty-first century. *Fall of the*

²⁵⁵ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Making Mischief 2016' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/making-mischief-2016>> [accessed 1 April 2021].

²⁵⁶ Whyman, 'The Other Place', n. pg; Pippa Hill, 'Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History', *Radical Mischief*, 2 (May 2014) p. 3.

²⁵⁷ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Casting Announced for RSC's 2016 Production of Hamlet' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/press/releases/casting-announced-for-rsc-s-2016-production-of-hamlet>> [accessed 31 March 2021]; Nour El Gazzaz, 'Review of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Directed by Simon Godwin for the Royal Shakespeare Company) at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 8 June 2016. Shown as Part of "Culture in Quarantine" on BBC iPlayer, 23 April to 22 August 2020', *Shakespeare*, 17:1 (2021) 69-73 <DOI: 10.1080/17450918.2021.1887340> (p. 69).

²⁵⁸ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

Kingdom focuses on a young Black student who is involved in a violent attack and a teacher's responsibility to support this person whilst confronting their own complicity in systemic racism, against a backdrop of a growing rise in patriotic nationalism and racial tension. *Always Orange* deals with the aftermath of a terrorist attack where Grace links the disappearance of modern languages and the closures of libraries with the increasing tension and division in the city.²⁵⁹ Whilst the new work at TOP was seeking to address contemporary issues around race in the twenty-first century, perhaps a conversation was also needed to discuss the racial implications of the RST productions. Nour El Gazzaz writes, '[t]he RSC is developing a habit of transplanting productions to Africa to justify casting all-Black or almost all-Black ensembles, particularly for traditionally "non-Black" roles'.²⁶⁰

Provocation days are not the only way of finding new voices for the *Mischief Festivals*. Work has also been commissioned following R&D workshops at the RSC, such as *Kingdom Come* (2017 Autumn *Mischief Festival*), by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard, and *#WeAreArrested*. In other instances, playwrights have previously submitted work to Hill and the RSC have liked their plays, such as Fraser Grace (*Always Orange*) and Tom Morton-Smith (*The Earthworks*, 2017 Spring *Mischief Festival*).²⁶¹ Both Grace and Morton-Smith had previously been commissioned by the RSC and the literary team were familiar with their work. By commissioning through R&D workshops and reading new scripts from writers that have previously worked for the RSC, the Company can maintain a relationship with theatre-makers who are familiar to them. Further, inviting new artists to conduct R&D is a good way of

²⁵⁹ Lyn Gardner, 'Always Orange Review – Taut Terrorism Drama About Society on Edge of Sanity', *Guardian*, 3 August 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/aug/03/always-orange-review-the-other-place-stratford-upon-avon-fraser-grace>> [accessed 31 March 2021].

²⁶⁰ El Gazzaz, p. 69.

²⁶¹ Birch, interview with author.

establishing new relationships with other theatre-makers who have not previously worked with the RSC. In terms of pitching work for TOP, Hill explained her view of the selection process:

we are looking for people who want to explore big ideas, but I have not happily found any sort of formula that says it is a certain kind of play. Once you do that, you limit what you are doing. We have been trying to do something different each time, which I think we have achieved. There is a sense of what a [*Mischief*] *Festival* play is, but no sense of what you are going to get.²⁶²

Hill's comments suggest a flexibility in terms of the brief for new works at TOP. The lack of a specific 'formula' for new work at TOP ensures a particular freedom in selecting and programming plays. However, there is also an element of openness to the brief — what exactly is meant by 'big ideas'? And 'big ideas' according to whom? In order to explore these questions, it is worth returning to the aims for new work at the RSC and the definitions of 'radical' and 'mischief'.

The RSC want to present work in TOP that is radical in content; plays that speak to a contemporary audience in ways that are 'bold or courageous or honest [...] calling something out, saying it how it is, not being afraid of being on the nose'.²⁶³ Two previous plays that seem to fulfil this aim are Alice Birch's *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again* (*Midsummer Mischief Festival* 2014, *Making Mischief Festival* 2016), and *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier* by Somalia Seaton (*Making Mischief Festival* 2016). Alice Birch's play scrutinises language used around women and explores the many ways in which women are violated in the twenty-first

²⁶² Hill, interview with author.

²⁶³ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

century, and the play concludes with anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal ideas to ‘dismantle the monetary system’ and to ‘eradicate all men’.²⁶⁴ *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier* criticises white privilege and middle-class liberals who refuse to acknowledge their own ignorance around race, arguing that ‘[s]ilence is not an option. It is in fact complicitness.’²⁶⁵ In a summary of audience survey feedback, responses to Alice Birch’s play contained ‘[m]any comments’ about the play’s ‘originality’, and its ‘radical nature’.²⁶⁶ I argue that one of the reasons the play was received as such was because of the boldness of the language in depicting sex and womanhood on stage. In a summary of audience survey feedback of Seaton’s play, ‘[a] lot mentioned feeling challenged and provoked in a positive way’.²⁶⁷ *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier* invited audiences to interrogate themselves and their attitudes around race. Both works appear to have impacted and engaged with audiences in provocative ways. It is important to mention that not every audience member attending the new work will have completed the feedback survey, so it is impossible to gain a sense of how each member responded to the plays. Yet, the sample of feedback gathered suggests that there was at least a portion of audience members who felt that the plays were either ‘radical’ or challenging in these two specific examples.

Whether *Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier* or *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* would feel potentially radical elsewhere is another question. To date, there has not been a revival of *Fall of the Kingdom*, but *Revolt* transferred to the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

²⁶⁴ Alice Birch, ‘Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.’ in Royal Shakespeare Company, *Midsummer Mischief: Four Radical New Plays* (London: Oberon, 2014) pp. 43-101 (p. 100).

²⁶⁵ Somalia Seaton, ‘Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier’ in Royal Shakespeare Company, *Making Mischief*, pp. 1-69 (p. 3).

²⁶⁶ I am very grateful to Becky Loftus for sharing this sample of audience summary feedback with me via email correspondence, 27 March 2019.

²⁶⁷ Becky Loftus, ‘Making Mischief: Audience Overview’, September 2016, p. 13. I am grateful to Loftus for sharing this information with me via email correspondence, 24 March 2021.

(along with the other *Midsummer Mischief Festival* plays) for two performances in 2014 and a new production of the play was produced by the Soho Theatre Rep (New York) in their 2015/2016 season.²⁶⁸ *Revolt* was then revived in the 2016 *Making Mischief Festival* at TOP before transferring to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and then Shoreditch Town Hall that same year.²⁶⁹ Unfortunately, there is no accessible audience data for the performances in London or Edinburgh, but one can imagine that a show with explicit language, feminist themes, and playful form is perhaps not entirely radical in any of these urban venues. Indeed, at the Fringe, Sarah Crompton described the play as ‘a little too well behaved’ and Laura Kressly commented that there was ‘little seen as radical’.²⁷⁰ TOP presents a unique opportunity for the RSC in Stratford to be bolder and more explicit and direct than shows presented in either the RST or Swan Theatre. Whilst the success of shows in Stratford may result in touring opportunities, the example of *Revolt* demonstrates the complexities of assessing a production as ‘radical’, as understandably, there may be a difference in audience reception in different venues, and also a difference between audience and critics’ responses to the work.

The definition of ‘radical’ not only described content, but ‘radical’ also meant ‘changing form’ and ‘challenging form’ according to Birch and Whyman.²⁷¹ Two pieces of work that might be considered formally radical are *Myth* by Matt Hartley and Kirsty Housley (2017

²⁶⁸ Royal Court, ‘The Royal Shakespeare Company Presents’ <<https://royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/the-royal-shakespeare-company-presents/>> [accessed 30 March 2021]; Soho Rep, ‘Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again’ <<https://sohorep.org/revolt-she-said-revolt-again>> [accessed 30 March 2021].

²⁶⁹ Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again Goes to Edinburgh Fringe’ <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/archive/revolt-she-said-revolt-again-goes-to-edinburgh>> [accessed 17 September 2021].

²⁷⁰ Sarah Crompton, ‘Edinburgh Review: *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again*. (Traverse Theatre)’, *What’s on Stage*, 18 August 2016 <https://www.whatsonstage.com/edinburgh-theatre/reviews/revolt-she-said-again-traverse-festival-fringe_41568.html> [accessed 16 September 2021]; Laura Kressly, ‘Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again., Edinburgh Festival Fringe’, *The Play’s the Thing UK*, 20 August 2016 <<https://theplaysthethinguk.com/2016/08/20/revolt-she-said-revolt-again-edinburgh-festival-fringe/>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

²⁷¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018; Birch, interview with author.

Spring *Mischief Festival*), and *Kingdom Come*, by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard (2017 Autumn *Mischief Festival*). Set in a new house on the outskirts of London, *Myth* stages a dinner party that escalates out of control. The play re-sets itself back to the beginning three times, and each time the actors appear increasingly lost and frantic as the stage slowly fills with oil. *Myth* is, of course, not the first play to experiment with the temporal re-setting of the action of the play, a device that was central to Caryl Churchill's work, *Heart's Desire*, in 1997; however, it was formally playful and experimental and made use of different formal conventions from those that govern most plays seen at the RSC. *Kingdom Come* was also formally surprising in the way that it was structured, and in its disruption of theatrical space, asking audience members to abandon their seats and follow actors onto the stage and through the stage dock during the performance. The play was a devised, site-specific piece that was split into three parts to reflect the periods before, during and after the Interregnum. Part one consisted of a masque in the court of Charles I, part two demonstrated the closure of the theatres and the execution of the King, and the final part showed, in a series of tableaux, the impact of the Civil War. Of course, defining something as 'radical' in either form or content is subjective, and will depend on an audience member's previous theatrical experiences. Certainly, both plays can be seen as formally playful, and hence conforming to a definition of 'mischievous' if not entirely 'radical'.

Whilst the radical nature of a piece is more difficult to assess, in TOP there is a clear sense of mischief in the works being presented, both in terms of their willingness to be playful and to confront audiences with urgent ideas. There is, of course, a great difference between being playful and being confrontational, and the concept of mischief as capable of representing either or both of these terms will be relevant in later discussions in this chapter.

To support this claim, the chapter will proceed by analysing the 2018 *Mischief Festivals*, commencing with the Spring *Festival* and *#WeAreArrested*.

#WeAreArrested

#WeAreArrested is an adaptation by Sophie Ivatts and Pippa Hill of the autobiographical book, *We Are Arrested* (2016), written by Turkish journalist Can Dündar. In May 2015, days before a general election in Turkey, Dündar's newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, received video footage evidencing that the Turkish National Intelligence Agency was shipping arms to Syria, 'in all likelihood, for radical Islamist organisations'.²⁷² The play follows the true events of Dündar's decision to publish this information and his subsequent journey through imprisonment and exile. Ivatts directed the play, starring Peter Hamilton Dyer as Can, with Indra Ové, Jamie Cameron, and Alvaro Flores in the ensemble. Ingrid Mackinnon movement directed the play, and John Bulleid worked as a magic consultant on the show. Both productions (*#WeAreArrested* and *Day of the Living*) were designed by Charlie Cridlan. The play was performed in the round, and the set consisted of three metallic tables set on wheels so that they could be moved around during the performance. For the purposes of clarity, I will refer to the character of the play as 'Can' and will refer to the real-life person as Dündar.

On the first day of rehearsals, the company had a 'Meet and Greet' session, where Hill explained how the project came to fruition. Hill was emailed by a Turkish company manager who worked for the RSC, and he recommended that she read Dündar's book. Hill complied, and then contacted Ivatts to see if she would be interested in doing an R&D on the text in June 2017. Birch, who produced the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*, reflected on this particular R&D:

²⁷² Can Dündar, *We Are Arrested: A Journalist's Notes from a Turkish Prison* (London: Biteback, 2016) p. 5.

‘we just felt like we had to do it’.²⁷³ There was an immediate sense of interest in Dündar’s story that related to the aims for new work development at TOP; this was a story that was current, relevant and deeply political, as Birch explained, ‘[t]his is his real story, this is his life, and this is happening across the world’.²⁷⁴ Birch felt that doing an R&D for *We Are Arrested* in the first place was a ‘really brave’ decision by the RSC, and she further called it ‘radical programming’ when the Company agreed to commission the work.²⁷⁵ Whyman explained, ‘we are going to put our heads above the water [...] and say we think what the Turkish government are doing to journalists is wrong’.²⁷⁶ The ways in which the production may have done this will be discussed further, but it is important to highlight the RSC’s clear mission to share Dündar’s story in an act of solidarity towards him and other journalists and political activists around the world who face violent oppression.

Whilst Hill immediately saw a clear sense of theatrical potential in Dündar’s story, Ivatts confessed that she was initially ‘quite bemused’ by the interest: ‘it took me longer to see what was in it than it did for Pippa [Hill], partly because there was so much extraneous information’ on Turkish politics about which Ivatts did not feel informed. After a few reads of the text, however, Ivatts revealed that she was attracted by the way in which Dündar ‘wrote about coping in prison and using the imagination to do that’.²⁷⁷ Peter Hamilton Dyer, who has been involved in the project since the first R&D in June 2017, explained that his first impression of the book was its ‘poetry’ and the language that Dündar used. Following the adaptation process, Dyer explained that the first part of the script contained ‘a lot of factual

²⁷³ Birch, interview with author.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Birch, interview with author.

²⁷⁶ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

²⁷⁷ Sophie Ivatts, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

information’ which invited the audience into the context of the play. Then, when Can entered prison, ‘his imagination has to take over to enable him to cope with his surroundings and the conditions that he finds himself in’. As a result, Dündar’s ‘love of language and words takes off and suddenly the piece becomes much more poetic’.²⁷⁸ Jamie Cameron, an ensemble member of *#WeAreArrested*, also suggested the following:

I don’t think the book would have been suggested if it did not have such beautiful language in it. Maybe the story would have been suggested, but the fact that we have taken the book and live so close to it, is a thing of beauty.²⁷⁹

In editing the text, Ivatts explained how herself and Hill have created a ‘faithful adaptation’; the text has of course been edited and condensed into a seventy-minute performance, but no new writing has been included in the play text.²⁸⁰

In terms of radicalism, *#WeAreArrested* does not entirely relate to ‘challenging form’, ‘changing form’ or being ‘experimental’ with form.²⁸¹ Rather, Ivatts and Hill chose to highlight the power behind Dündar’s language and wanted to create a simple, direct way of communicating his text to an audience. The language in the play is certainly playful, particularly once Can is in prison, and his relationship with the audience reflected this. For example, during the scene ‘Spy’, Can humorously narrated his visit with a psychologist, and in response to the question of whether he was detained on terror or criminal charges, he joked: ‘I’m a spy’, followed by an aside to the audience, ‘I say it as if I’m James Bond. She is

²⁷⁸ Peter Hamilton Dyer, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

²⁷⁹ Jamie Cameron, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

²⁸⁰ Ivatts, interview with author.

²⁸¹ Original definitions of ‘radical’ from Birch, interview with author; Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

astonished.²⁸² Examples like this engaged the audience with Can's sense of humour and the way in which Dündar tried to jest about his situation, even from within prison.

As mentioned, Ivatts was attracted to the way in which Dündar used his imagination as a coping mechanism in prison. 'I felt that to do Can's story justice', she explained, 'we had to think about what we, the RSC, theatre-makers, could bring to it' and how to theatricalise this playful and imaginative language on stage.²⁸³ To emphasise 'the power of the imagination', Ivatts invited magic consultant John Bulleid to share visual tricks that could be incorporated into selected scenes.²⁸⁴ In particular, during the scene, 'Time', the audience experienced one of the most memorable visual scenes of the production, where Can tried to resist the monotony of prison life by enforcing his imagination upon his circumstances. Deciding to eat his breakfast at his own leisure, and concluding that the venue looked 'a bit dull', he opted for an 'al fresco' alternative by dragging his table and chair into the outside yard: 'I transform the tasteless food into a sumptuous feast'.²⁸⁵ During this scene, Can opened a hatch on the floor of the stage to bring out a trolley with flowers in a vase, a champagne flute, a coffee cup and a cloche, as if he were in a hotel instead of a prison. Can laid the table and opened the cloche to reveal a burnt piece of toast. He picked it up and looked unsatisfied, then put it down and covered it with the cloche again. When he re-opened the cloche, pastries appeared on the plate. He also poured water into the coffee cup and champagne flute, and coffee and orange juice appeared in each glass – 'bucks fizz', Can joked to the audience. To

²⁸² Can Dündar, '#WeAreArrested', adapted by Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts, Royal Shakespeare Company, *Mischief Festival Spring 2018* (London: Oberon, 2018) pp. 23-85 (p. 65).

²⁸³ Sophie Ivatts, '#WeAreArrested', *Radical Mischief*, 9 (February 2018) n. pg.

²⁸⁴ Ivatts, interview with author. For further information about the use of magic in the production, see Arcola Theatre, '#WeAreArrested: Magic', Youtube, 15 November 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Thc65y30cCM&t=110s>> [accessed 14 July 2021].

²⁸⁵ Dündar, '#WeAreArrested', p. 65.

complete the breakfast spectacle, Can turned on the radio and heard Adele's *Hello* for the first time and began to dance. The production used a stringed version of the song in the style of a tango. Ové as Dilek, the wife of Can, joined him in the space and the pair danced together, slowly and seriously at first, before descending into silly dance moves. Ivatts described the movement, which was choreographed by Ingrid MacKinnon, as blending 'a fantasy and real romance' by demonstrating a traditional tango with a 'combination of the dancing you do in your kitchen together and just really letting loose, uninhibited' movement.²⁸⁶ The stark, bare space was transformed into a flurry of tango moves, and the changes in the lighting (a string of glowing light bulbs hung around the frame of the balcony) added a sense of warmth. This section of the play certainly related to 'mischief' in terms of providing joy and entertainment to audiences, as Tom Wicker summarised, 'a delightful scene'.²⁸⁷

The tango provided a moving, humorous relief to the tense and dark story of Can's imprisonment, yet the scene turned bittersweet as Dilek slowly walked off at the end of the song and the breakfast props were taken away, leaving Can alone in his stark, bare cell. Audience members, who had been whisked away into the magic of Can's imagination, returned to the hard reality of his lonely imprisonment. While the production featured moments of playful mischief, *#WeAreArrested* was foregrounded by the darker sense of the term. The threatening side of mischief was made transparent in the role of the gunman, played by Alvaro Flores. An unnamed figure, this character provided the sense of a menacing observer watching Can throughout the play. In performance, the gunman prowled behind the

²⁸⁶ Ivatts, interview with author. For further insight into the movement element of the production, see Arcola Theatre, '#WeAreArrested: Movement', Youtube, 12 November 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lpbz8D0QINs&t=167s>> [accessed 14 July 2021].

²⁸⁷ Tom Wicker, 'We Are Arrested Review', *Time Out*, 19 November 2019 <<https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/wearearrested-review>> [accessed 26 March 2021].

audience in the balcony and even sat in empty seats. Then he made his way down towards the ground level and disappeared temporarily, only to emerge on the other side of the space where he sat in one of the front row chairs. This coincided with Can describing his release and his reunion with Dilek. Can began to make a speech when the gunman suddenly rose and attempted to shoot him, and then a blackout occurred. Ivatts and Hill wanted an 'external presence from the actual story which was a metaphor for a slow creep of antidemocratic aggression'.²⁸⁸ In rehearsals, the creative team experimented with the gunman's journey around the space and decided that he would announce the titles of the scenes. Ivatts explained that 'dramaturgically we quite liked the idea that actually the gunman is controlling the story and that all along Can has been the reluctant protagonist'.²⁸⁹ This choice made the play less about Can and more about the suppression of, and violence against, people who speak out against the state. Ivatts described how Dündar saw himself as a 'reluctant activist'; he did not want to get involved in a dangerous situation, but he saw it as his duty to publish the truth.²⁹⁰ While the play demonstrated this activism and the bravery of Dündar, the use of the gunman highlighted the powerful forces of intimidation and threat that emerged as a consequence. There was no interaction between Can and the gunman during the play until the assassination attempt. Can was unaware of the gunman's presence in the space, which made it increasingly unnerving for audiences who witnessed the movements of this figure around the studio. Whilst the play was hopeful and contained playful examples of mischief and resistance, the production was foregrounded by the ever-present threat to Can's life, on and off-stage.

²⁸⁸ Ivatts, interview with author.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ivatts, interview with author.

The role of the gunman was largely cut from the production when it was revived at the Arcola Theatre in London in November 2019. Instead, a supernumerary actor was planted in the front row as an audience member at the beginning of the show and was only used to enact the assassination attempt towards the end of the play. In this way, the attempt on Can's life was made more shocking and alarming to audiences as they were unaware of the gunman and their involvement in the show up until that point. Whilst a sense of 'mischief' in the form of a creeping, menacing threat was lost in the Arcola production, one could equally argue that a different, and more shocking form of 'mischief' was presented within this moment to audiences.

The content of Dündar's original text can be described as 'radical' by its depiction of heroism in publishing the truth about the Turkish state and Dündar's willingness to risk his own life. The decision to programme Dündar, a writer who is still living in exile and has recently been sentenced in absentia to twenty-seven years in prison, can be seen as a radical decision by the RSC.²⁹¹ The RSC is intentionally engaging in condemning the actions of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his government and has provided a platform for Dündar's story to be told. Yet, as will be explained, an initially radical text and idea first explored in R&D may lose a sense of its radicalism as it commences into production and creative decisions become concretised.

Overall, the production did feel riskier than many other shows presented at the RSC, reflected in the increased levels of security around TOP while Dündar was present. Dündar frequently attended rehearsals at TOP and was in the audience for certain performances. The heightened security around the building added a level of seriousness to the work and supports

²⁹¹ Bethan McKernan, 'Turkey Sentences Journalist Can Dündar to 27 Years in Jail', *Guardian*, 23 December 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/23/turkey-sentences-journalist-can-dundar-27-years-jail>> [accessed 22 March 2021].

the idea that it was a bold move by the RSC to commission Dündar's work. To add to this sense of boldness, the RSC staged a panel debate titled 'Truth at What Cost?' and hosted journalists living in exile including Dündar, Zaina Erhaim, and Anabel Hernández (Hernández appeared via Skype). The discussions that took place were urgent and necessary, and it was an opportunity for audiences to share a space with journalists who put their lives at risk to report news stories in places such as Turkey, Syria, and Mexico. That evening, audiences were asked not to tweet about the event until a few hours later to ensure Dündar's safety, but this request was undermined by Dündar himself who confessed he had already tweeted that he was in the building. This act demonstrated that while the RSC were taking risks by programming a writer who is under threat, the very fact that Dündar himself was unafraid to draw attention to his presence in the building made it clear that he felt relatively safe in Stratford.

There was perhaps a limitation on the extent to which *#WeAreArrested* felt bold, and hence, radical. The decision was made that the names of people, places and organisations would be removed from the script. Instead of naming Can or Erdoğan outright, Ivatts chose to emphasise the idea that this story could be happening anywhere in the world, and that the play could be 'an allegory for how quickly you can lose your rights and how quickly things can change politically'.²⁹² Ivatts stated that the more she read and edited the text, more things began 'to resonate about suicide attacks and coalition governments and a sense of increasing hostility and polarisation within the media which felt quite sinister and close to us' in the UK.²⁹³ The production sought to create a sense of apprehension about where this event could be taking place and, following the assassination attempt on Can, during the blackout voice

²⁹² Ivatts, interview with author.

²⁹³ Ibid.

clips about Jo Cox MP (who was murdered in the UK in 2016), other journalists and ‘fake news’ were played in an attempt to bring the play into a wider global context. Whilst reflecting on the changes made to the script, Dündar felt that the book was more political than the play. Though it is still a political story, the production highlighted the importance of ‘personal resistance and that people can survive any conditions by sticking to ideals and hope’.²⁹⁴ The decision to omit names of people and locations may have lessened the political stakes of the story, and in turn the radical nature of the work, by not directly challenging Erdoğan and the Turkish government.

The decision to remove names worked effectively for some critics, with Natalie Haynes arguing that the choice ‘is a simple, direct way of focusing our attention on the idea that what has occurred in Turkey could be happening elsewhere’.²⁹⁵ Jo Glanville also stated that ‘the message is clear: this could be any state, anywhere, that intimidates journalists and undermines the rule of law’.²⁹⁶ Other critics however found it ‘frustrating’, as Tom Wicker argued, ‘Dündar’s story doesn’t need to be somehow generalised to resonate’.²⁹⁷ Ben Kulvichit also explained, ‘we get little sense of who Dündar is or the context in which he works’, and Claire Allfree stated that the ‘blanching of historical context’ is ‘problematic’ and that ‘a story like this feels more universal the more it is grounded in specificity’.²⁹⁸ Allfree implies that the

²⁹⁴ Can Dündar, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, May 2018.

²⁹⁵ Natalie Haynes, ‘#WeAreArrested / Day of the Living Review – Voices from the Dungeon and of the Disappeared’, *Guardian*, 6 June 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jun/06/wearearrested-day-living-review-other-place-stratford-avon>> [accessed 26 September 2019].

²⁹⁶ Jo Glanville, ‘When Truth Becomes Treachery’, *Financial Times*, 26 November 2019, p. 6.

²⁹⁷ Wicker, ‘We Are Arrested Review’.

²⁹⁸ Ben Kulvichit, ‘#WeAreArrested/The Day of the Living Review at the Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon – “An Uneven Pairing of Plays”’, *Stage*, 6 June 2018 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2018/wearearrestedthe-day-of-the-living-review-at-the-other-place-stratford-upon-avon/>> [accessed 26 September 2019]; Claire Allfree, ‘#WeAreArrested Review’, *Metro*, 22 November 2019. Accessed online in ‘#WeAreArrested’, *Theatre Record*, XXXIX: 22 (2019), p. 35.

story could have shared stronger resonances with its audience had the production made the setting and context clear, because then, spectators might have compared the situation that Dündar found himself in with that of other events across the globe where freedom of the press is threatened. This creative choice was clearly a divisive subject amongst critics, with Allfree also questioning the ethical decisions around removing a sense of Turkish culture and identity from the narrative.

It is interesting to consider what this choice meant in the context of the work transferring to the Arcola Theatre, because the theatre itself is located ‘in the middle of east London’s vibrant Turkish community in Dalston’ and the Artistic Director, Mehmet Ergen, and Deputy Artistic Director and Executive Producer, Leyla Nazli, are Turkish.²⁹⁹ 13.8% of audiences that attended *#WeAreArrested* came from E8, N16 and N1 postcodes, all of which are local to the Arcola Theatre, and accounted for the highest representation of attendees.³⁰⁰ Ayse Tashkiran, an Associate Artist at the RSC who is part Turkish-Cypriot, felt that the Arcola was ‘the perfect setting’ for the play: ‘if I want to see work which has a Turkish or Cypriot perspective, that is where I would go’.³⁰¹ Susannah Clapp mentions the importance of location when she reviewed the play in London: ‘I think an edge is lost by not making the Turkish setting plain – particularly at the Arcola, which has a tradition of Turkish-influenced work’.³⁰² Whilst

²⁹⁹ Time Out, ‘Arcola Theatre’, *Time Out*, 12 August 2019 <<https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/arcola-theatre>> [accessed 9 September 2021]; Nick Curtis, ‘“We Feel Relaxed for the First Time”: Arcola Bosses Reflect on 20 Years of Building a Theatre Powerhouse’, *Evening Standard*, 10 March 2020 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/arcola-theatre-dalston-interview-20-mehmet-ergen-leyla-nazli-a4383261.html>> [accessed 9 September 2021].

³⁰⁰ Arcola Theatre Audience Statistic, November 2019. This data does not include audience members who booked using a third-party box-office provider. I am very grateful to Alex Turton, Communications and Marketing Manager, for sharing this information with me via email correspondence, 26 April 2021.

³⁰¹ Ayse Tashkiran, interview with author via Skype, January 2020.

³⁰² Susannah Clapp, ‘The Week in Theatre: Dear Evan Hansen; Touching the Void; #WeAreArrested – Review’, *Observer*, 24 November 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/nov/24/dear-evan-hansen-review-sam-tutty-touching-the-void-david-greig-wearearrested-arcola-can-dundar>> [accessed 26 March 2021].

the script remained largely unaltered from the TOP production, perhaps audiences at the Arcola may have been more familiar with Dündar's case and the play may have had a different resonance there, despite the removal of names. In the performance I attended, Dyer as Can ad-libbed 'Turkish coffee' as he took a sip of his drink in the breakfast scene.³⁰³ Whilst of course this was an improvised line and Dyer may not have repeated this in other performances, this ad-lib may have signified a nudge to the audience that everyone knew what this performance was really referencing.

Overall, *#WeAreArrested* contained clear elements of mischief as the work presented moments of joy but was ultimately foregrounded in the menacing threat to Dündar's life and to freedom of the press more widely. In terms of radicalism, the play may have felt less radical than the original book due to the decision to remove the names of people and locations. The play became less of a direct challenge to Erdoğan's government as the creative team wanted to emphasise that freedom of the press was being challenged in locations all over the world. In terms of the other important aims for new work mentioned in the previous chapter, *#WeAreArrested* may not have wanted to 'divide opinion'.³⁰⁴ Ivatts explained how Dündar wanted the play to 'generate a sense of international solidarity'.³⁰⁵ Some may have felt this, as Clair Chapwell stated, '[i]n the current world of fake news where nothing is real and nothing is worth believing in, I left the Arcola for the first time in many years remembering the power of collective action'.³⁰⁶ For other critics, however, there was disagreement in the sense of

³⁰³ Quoted in performance, '*#WeAreArrested*' by Can Dündar, adapted by Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts (dir.), Royal Shakespeare Company, Arcola Theatre, Saturday 16th November 2019, matinee performance.

³⁰⁴ Whyman, 'Update by Erica Whyman on The Other Place'.

³⁰⁵ Ivatts, interview with author.

³⁰⁶ Clair Chapwell, 'Review: *#We Are Arrested*, at Arcola Theatre', *Camden New Journal*, 28 November 2019 <<http://camdennewjournal.com/article/review-we-are-arrested-at-arcola-theatre>> [accessed 26 March 2021].

relation between Dündar's case and the UK. Lloyd Evans stated that 'one false note' to the production was the usage of taped speeches which featured Owen Jones and Jess Phillips MP which were 'played to the departing crowd as if to suggest that Britain is a Turkey-in-waiting and that left-wingers here might soon face jail time for speaking their minds'.³⁰⁷ Evans implied that he did not find the play ultimately challenging (overall he called the play 'riveting and beautifully staged'), yet his comments suggest that the play may have divided opinion in terms of the comparisons inferred between the UK and Turkey.

A spirit of protecting truth at all cost, and the fight for freedom against corruption, was shared between the two productions at the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*. This next section will unpack *Day of the Living*, and the ways in which this second show of the evening related to the spirit of 'Radical Mischief'.

Day of the Living

On 26th September 2014, students from a rural teaching college in Ayotzinapa set out to attend an annual commemoration for the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre of students in Mexico City. They never arrived. On the way to the event, the students were attacked, leaving six people dead, dozens injured, and forty-three disappeared.³⁰⁸ The case remains unresolved to this day about what exactly happened that night. *Day of the Living* was a show that responded to this event and was a collaborative, devised piece that was programmed in TOP alongside

³⁰⁷ Lloyd Evans, 'Riveting and Beautifully Staged Analysis of Totalitarianism: Arcola's #WeAreArrested Reviewed', *Spectator*, 23 November 2019 <<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/riveting-and-beautifully-staged-analysis-of-totalitarianism-arcola-s-wearearrested-reviewed>> [accessed 26 March 2021].

³⁰⁸ See Ann Deslandes, 'It Could Happen Anywhere: Anabel Hernández Reflects on Mexico's 43 Missing Students', *Guardian*, 1 May 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/02/it-could-happen-anywhere-anabel-hernandez-reflects-on-mexicos-43-missing-students>> [accessed 15 October 2019].

#WeAreArrested for the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*. The piece was co-created by director Amy Draper, Darren Clark (music and lyrics), and writer Juliet Gilkes Romero. The show was movement directed by Andrea Peláez, and Rachael Savage worked as mask director. The acting company included Cameron and Flores (also *#WeAreArrested*), Jimena Larraguivel, Tania Mathurin, Eilon Morris, and Anne-Marie Piazza.

The story of *Day of the Living* centred around a fictional family (Manolo, the grandfather, Graziela, the mother, and Chavela, the daughter) who were still searching for Graziela's son, one of the disappeared. Interwoven with the family story were verbatim accounts from students who were present on the night of the event, which were taken from John Gibler's book, *I Couldn't Even Imagine that they Would Kill us: An Oral History of the Attacks Against the Students of Ayotzinapa* (2017).³⁰⁹ Aside from the verbatim sections, the story was largely told through song, mask work and physical sequences that depicted the journey of the family in the search for their son. All music was performed live by the actors. Full masks were used to represent the three family members and allegorical figures such as Mother Earth and Death also wore masks.

³⁰⁹ See John Gibler, *I Couldn't Even Imagine that they Would Kill us: An Oral History of the Attacks Against the Students of Ayotzinapa* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2017).



Figure 1: Jamie Cameron as Mother Earth (centre) in *Day of the Living* rehearsal, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2018. Photo by Ellie Merridale © RSC.

The full masked characters were voiceless, so Gilkes Romero wrote narration which was spoken by the ensemble during these scenes. Other characters either wore half masks, or the ensemble had their faces covered (either by wearing lucha libre masks, balaclavas, or sunglasses) as the only time the ensemble were not wearing anything on their faces was during the verbatim or narrative sections.³¹⁰ This decision was intended to make it clear to the audiences that during these sections, the actors were not playing a character and that their role was either to deliver the text or to be a mouthpiece for the voices of the students.

Similar to *#WeAreArrested*, *Day of the Living* featured both playful and menacing connotations of the term ‘mischief’, in order to highlight the seriousness of the real-life issues that the show dealt with, but also to produce joy and hope in the overall performance event. At the end of the interval following *#WeAreArrested*, the audience was ushered back into the

³¹⁰ Lucha libre is a Mexican form of professional wrestling, where wrestlers famously wear masks. For further information, see Heather Levi, *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) <DOI: <https://doi-org.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/10.1215/9780822391470>>.

space with a lively carnivalesque number, 'Street of Bones'. This pre-show number acted as a spirited transition between the two shows, signalling the change in form and tone between *#WeAreArrested* and *Day of the Living*. The cast came into the foyer to entertain and invite audiences back into the space to join them in this lively storytelling, which provided a fun and inclusive feel to the evening. Once audiences were seated, informal chatter and interaction with the cast members ensued which resulted in the audience partaking in a giant Mexican wave around the space. Some audience members may have felt dismayed at the prospect of participation, but overall, the function of these pre-show informal activities was to ease the spectators into the world of the show and to create a sense of mirth. From the outset, the show sought to fully immerse spectators in the events depicted, ensuring that audiences were not passive but were implicit in the action of the work, and creating a sense of responsibility to act after witnessing these events. This engagement of spectators is reminiscent of Brecht's epic theatre, which Laura Bradley describes as seeking 'to activate the audience: to encourage spectators to watch performances critically and alertly [...] and to consider its political and social relevance'.³¹¹ Overall, the cheerful tone at the beginning of the production served as a springboard into the more serious nature of the work, but the tongue-in-cheek opening numbers and participation signalled that audiences had permission to enjoy themselves.

Mischief was intertwined with the form of *Day of the Living*, as the work was playful tonally, shifting from humorous and light-hearted numbers to dark and troubling scenes that depicted violence and oppression. Dramaturgically, the show grew increasingly dark as the prospect of finding the missing son waned. One of the darkest scenes of the show was the

³¹¹ Laura Bradley, 'Training the Audience: Brecht and the Art of Spectatorship', *The Modern Language Review*, 111, 4 (October 2016) 1029-1048 (p. 1029).

'Stewmaker' scene, where the 'Stewmaker' taunted the mother figure in a disturbing rap about her missing son. The character of the 'Stewmaker' was based on the true story of Santiago Meza López, who, in 2009, confessed to dissolving hundreds of bodies in acid while working for a prolific drug trafficker.³¹² The song was a nightmare scene which displayed Graziela, the mother, confronting her worst fear of what had potentially happened to her missing son. Within this scene, Anne-Marie Piazza played Graziela, and the Stewmaker was performed by Jimena Larraguivel. Larraguivel wore a half-mask as she performed this number for the practical reason of allowing her to rap, and the design of the mask featured specific details such as a gold tooth sticking out of the mouth to emphasise the crudeness of this character.



Figure 2: Jimena Larraguivel as the 'Stewmaker' in *Day of the Living* (2018), The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photo by Ellie Merridale © RSC.

³¹² See Marc Lacey, 'Mexican Man Admits Using Acid on Bodies, Army Says', *New York Times*, 24 January 2009 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/world/americas/25mexico.html>> [accessed 26 September 2019].

Within this scene especially, *Day of the Living* demonstrated the evil side of mischief as threatening or pertaining to ‘an act of criminality’ in a shocking way.³¹³ Lyrics such as the following seem particularly insensitive and mocking towards Graziela, whose journey the audience have followed in the search for her missing son:

Who’s the loser in my beautiful brew?
 Who’s dissolving in the cartel stew?
 It’s the apple of your eye, it’s your pride and joy
 I’m boiling up your boy.³¹⁴

During the song, the son’s red jacket was revealed from the cooking pot on stage to signify that the Stewmaker had dissolved him, and the figure teased Graziela who desperately tried to grab the clothing. The Stewmaker wiped his crotch into the jacket and called to Graziela, with a crude double meaning, ‘Go on carina give me some head’ (p. 135), as a skull is picked out of the pot (Figure 2). The scene was deliberately horrifying and graphic in order to shock and disgust audiences. The purpose of portraying these disturbing scenes was to force audiences to recognise the full horror of the situation in Mexico, and to identify with the fears of the parents who are still searching for their children. While the scene was alarming and disturbing, it may also have been received farcically, and audiences may have found themselves unsure of how to react to numbers such as this. The rhythm of the piece was deliberately catchy and enticing, which may have led spectators to enjoy it, before they

³¹³ ‘Mischief’ description by Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

³¹⁴ Darren Clark, Amy Draper and Juliet Gilkes Romero, ‘Day of the Living’, in Royal Shakespeare Company, *Mischief Festival Spring 2018* (London: Oberon, 2018) pp. 87-144 (p. 135). Future references to this play text are given after quotations in the text.

realised the atrocity of what they were watching. *Day of the Living* effectively made audiences consider their own confused reactions and responses, and made people think about what they were witnessing and how different agents such as the music were manipulating or influencing their natural reactions.

Some critics were unconvinced by the tonal shifts in the show, raising questions about whether both a high-spirited sense of mischief and its more menacing examples can work effectively together in this instance. Haynes described the piece as ‘a script that never manages to resolve its tonal lurches, shifting uneasily between black humour, desperate sorrow and righteous anger’.³¹⁵ She continued by stating that the moments of revealing victims felt ‘horribly cheap’ in her opinion, and that ‘the elegiac Song of the Turtles might have been unbearably moving in a less frantic staging’.³¹⁶ Haynes is referring to a scene which interspersed a moving solo song called ‘Ayotzinapa’ with verbatim accounts depicting the discovery of a body of a student who had had his face skinned. The song used the journey of the mother and baby turtles in their struggle for survival as a metaphor for the missing students, and the parents who are looking for them (‘Ayotzinapa’ translates to ‘Place of Turtles’ in a local indigenous language).

In some ways, ‘mischief’, with its playful and infantilising connotations, can be perceived as an inappropriate term in shows that feature real stories. Haynes took issue with the fact that ‘we get almost no sense of them as individuals’ in terms of the victims referenced in the show. Her criticism implies that she wanted a drama with more ‘cohesion’ and perhaps

³¹⁵ Haynes, n. pg.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

fewer narrative devices or forms, in order to better understand the situation.³¹⁷ For other critics like Sam Marlowe, the shifting tempo and style of the piece was '[f]iercely effective':

[B]oth stories [*#WeAreArrested* and *Day of the Living*] are fascinating, but dramatically the second [*Day of the Living*] is much more adventurous, delivering events that sound almost too shocking and grotesque to be true with a theatrical flourish that drives them deep into the horrified imagination.³¹⁸

The varied critics' responses demonstrate how mischief and the ways of producing it may not be to everyone's pleasing and can cause a divide in terms of reception. However, in relation to the aims for the new TOP, it is clear that *Day of the Living* was formally creative and playful, and the team delivered work which corresponded with both light and menacing definitions of mischief.

Darren Clark, co-creator of the show, explained how the creative team wanted *Day of the Living* to resemble 'a tapestry' and that combining different strands of storytelling 'was essential' to the work.³¹⁹ Draper also described the show as '[b]oldly going between' the various strands of the story 'and not really explaining' the transitions to the audience in the hope that the work 'shows not tells' the nature of the piece.³²⁰ The work was formally exciting for this very reason. *Day of the Living* incorporated many types of storytelling devices, each with a specific purpose of engaging audiences for the aims of entertainment (a lucha libre wrestling scene, for instance), but significantly, to engage the 'head and heart response' as

³¹⁷ Haynes, n. pg.

³¹⁸ Sam Marlowe, 'Theatre Review: Mischief Festival at the Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon', *The Times*, 15 June 2018 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theatre-review-mischief-festival-at-the-other-place-stratford-upon-avon-zwf6grcq>> [accessed 26 March 2021].

³¹⁹ Darren Clark, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

³²⁰ Draper, interview with author.

Draper termed it.³²¹ Draper wanted audiences to be intellectually stimulated whilst watching the show, and in terms of the ‘heart response’, Draper stated that ‘[y]ou want people to laugh and cry and to have a full-on experience theatrically, because that’s theatre’.³²² Clark also stated, ‘[w]e want it to be a rollercoaster’.³²³ Gilkes Romero felt the show did not seek ‘to lecture people’, rather, the intention was ‘to draw people in emotionally’ in the hope that this would lead people into humanitarian action.³²⁴ Of course, one cannot truly judge the level of action directly caused by watching *Day of the Living*, but the creative team post-show talks felt positive, where Cameron reflected that members of the public asked the team what they could do following the event.³²⁵

In terms of the use of humour and satire in the show as a means of communicating this serious story, actor Alvaro Flores, who is native to Mexico, explained: ‘[i]n Mexico we do resort a lot to comedy. It has to happen. In any type of tragedy straight away you see the memes, we have great cartoonists, and that goes back to muralists as well.’³²⁶ Actor Jimena Larraguivel, also from Mexico, said that the use of satire felt ‘very Mexican, because that is how we cope with a lot of the dark stuff [...] [p]eople always come up with jokes’.³²⁷ Both Flores and Larraguivel highlight a key function of humour as a way of responding and living with tragic events. In relation to this idea, Kristin Congdon explains why mirth and merriment are essential to one of Mexico’s most important festivals, *El Día de los Muertos*, or the Day of

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Draper, interview with author.

³²³ Clark, interview with author.

³²⁴ Gilkes Romero, interview with author.

³²⁵ Cameron, interview with author.

³²⁶ Alvaro Flores, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

³²⁷ Jimena Larraguivel, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, June 2018.

the Dead.³²⁸ In a chapter titled, 'Making Merry With Death: Iconic Humor in Mexico's Day of the Dead' (2003), Congdon explains how this festival honours 'death while mocking it with great abandon'.³²⁹ While this thesis chapter does not have the scope to fully explore beliefs around death in Mexico, Congdon explains the following:

Humour is used to find a comfort zone in which to express a respect for death, by making it a part of living. Humour is also used to mock death, as it mocks the living, especially those from the upper economic classes who, like everyone else, cannot escape it (p. 202).

An acceptance of the inevitability of death and its closeness to life is significant. Also implied here is the idea that the dead deride societal structures and class systems, which conveys a subversive tone to the festivities.

Congdon discusses the role of humour and *calaveras* ('skulls'), an iconic feature of the Day of the Dead, for political motivations. *El Calavera*, for instance, a newspaper which was founded in 1847, used a skeleton 'in modern dress as a symbol of the moral, critical voice' (p. 212). This practice of using *calaveras* to critique was adopted by José Guadalupe Posada, who is famous for widely recognized prints used today. Within Posada's work, Congdon comments how 'rulers were often depicted as puppets' (p. 213), and this mockery of political leaders is relevant to *Day of the Living*, where former Mexican President Peña Nieto is criticised. Comedy is also used as a device in *Day of the Living* for political purposes, and the next section

³²⁸ The Day of the Dead is an annual festival internationally associated with Mexico which incorporates Latin American Indigenous practices and Roman Catholic spiritual traditions. The festival broadly consists of family-oriented, religious rituals which honour the deceased. See Regina M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009) pp. 1-2, p. 10.

³²⁹ Kristin Congdon, 'Making Merry with Death: Iconic Humor in Mexico's Day of the Dead', in *Of Corpse: Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture*, ed. by Peter Narváez (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2003) pp. 198-220 (p. 198). Future references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

will consider the specific ways in which satire is used in order to entertain but also to encourage audiences to think critically and respond to issues before them.

Day of the Living corresponded to the RSC's definition of radical by 'challenging' and 'changing' form because there were so many storytelling devices at play.³³⁰ In certain scenes, the show was reminiscent of the work of theatre directors Bertolt Brecht and Joan Littlewood in using popular performance as a tool for political satire. From the previous chapter, the definition of radical from Caridad Svich is useful:

theatre artists are pulling apart and/or resurrecting old forms of popular entertainment to tell stories anew in a provocative manner, and thus reawaken the radical impulse in performance (p. 8).

Musical numbers in *Day of the Living* used popular forms such as vaudeville and cabaret in a similar way to *Oh! What a Lovely War* created by Joan Littlewood in 1969. The actors parodied a Mariachi band during the song 'Esta es la Vida' and entered wearing colourful balaclavas with big grinning smiles as they cheerfully sang 'Mis amigos that's life' in support of the President's solo (p. 127). They rushed on stage with loud instruments in a carnivalesque number that both served as comedic entertainment and was disturbing to watch. Flores, playing the former President Peña Nieto, wore a goofy half mask, emphasised by the exaggerated, pointed nose, and played the ukulele in a satirical number that directly criticised the response of the former Mexican President in relation to the events. He entered charismatically, stating '[i]t is your greatest pleasure to see me here with you' and enticed audiences by showing them his ukulele, '[t]his is my instrument! [...] You want to touch it?' (p.

³³⁰ Definitions of 'radical' from Birch, interview with author; Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

125). He entertained the audience by giving them a solo, supported by the Mariachi band, and the number became increasingly farcical, culminating in a trumpet solo where Flores badly blew into the instrument and the scene descended into chaos.



Figure 3: Alvaro Flores (foreground) and the company of *Day of the Living*, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2018. Photo credit: Ellie Merridale © RSC.

The irreverential portrayal of the President and the satire used in this number demonstrated the condemnation of Nieto by the creative team. *Day of the Living* related to Whyman's definition of radical by 'being bold or courageous or honest about content, calling something out, saying it how it is, not being afraid of being on the nose'.³³¹ The use of satire and grotesque elements in the production amplified the sense of boldness, and lyrics were blatant and unapologetically critical of the Mexican authorities. For example, the song concluded with the following confession by the President:

I'll admit that the country
is stuck in a bad situation
If you will admit that

³³¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

there's little that one man can do
 Everyone knows that the narcos
 Have purchased the nation
 Well the narcos can go and...
 Just keep doing what they're doing
 Because they're doing
 A pretty good job (pp. 127-128).³³²

Such lyrics highlight a sense of corruption and scandal with the implication that the government are not only turning a blind eye to crime but are possibly colluding or even supporting illegal activity.

'Radical Mischief' is clearly evident in *Day of the Living* in the way in which it is bold and challenging in terms of content and form, and playful as well as darkly mischievous. The radical nature of the work emboldened and amplified the sense of mischief — both elements worked together in scenes such as 'the Stewmaker' where the work was equally disturbing and entertaining to watch. Some might find the mischief element inappropriate, but in assessing the aims of the creative team and their ideas, I argue that *Day of the Living* has achieved a sense of 'Radical Mischief' in visible ways. The varying reactions to the piece provide an opportunity for dialogue about how stories are told on stage and whether mischief is effective and appropriate. *Day of the Living* felt more divisive than *#WeAreArrested* and the contrasting opinions may be due to the form and content of the piece. Regardless of individual opinions, it is clear that *Day of the Living* was a provocative and challenging show that engaged with 'Radical Mischief'.

³³² 'narcos', a pluralised, shortened version of 'narcotraficante', is a reference to a member of a drug cartel, as the *OED* defines, 'a person who deals in or smuggles illicit drugs; a drug trafficker'. See 'narcotraficante, *n.*', *OED Online*, 2021 <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/247026?redirectedFrom=narcotraficante#eid>> [accessed 29 June 2021].

Similar to *#WeAreArrested*, questions can arise around the extent to which it is risky to condemn the Mexican government in Stratford, and particularly in the smallest of the three theatre spaces. It is likely that these shows would struggle for audience attendance in the larger theatres in Stratford, partly because of the lack of familiarity with these stories and partly due to the typical demographic of attendance in the Swan and RST theatres. Generally speaking, shows that are commercially successful in the main houses are popular Shakespeare productions and family shows such as David Edgar's adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (2017 winter season, revived in 2018 winter season), as they attract wider audiences and draw visitors to Stratford. It is evident that there is a clear thirst for political new works in Stratford given the audience attendance at TOP, but perhaps not on the same scale as the audience attendance in shows across the road. Therefore, it is beneficial for the works to be performed in the intimate studio space rather than to minimal audiences in the Swan Theatre for example. The *Mischief Festivals* serve the RSC repertoire by delivering important stories that are more playful with form and engage audiences in different ways to work on the main stages.

Of course, the fact of programming such plays in TOP suggests marginalisation of experimental new work in Stratford. Questions arise over the visibility of these new shows, and whether the productions should receive a higher profile. Whilst the work may not sell to larger audience numbers in Stratford, *Mischief Festival* plays have the potential to tour and receive an afterlife elsewhere. The RSC frequently transfer Shakespeare productions to the Barbican Theatre in London, and the productions at TOP previously transferred to the Pit, the

studio space at the Barbican, until 2002.³³³ A reasonable question to ask, then, is why the new TOP productions do not transfer to the Pit. The Barbican Centre focuses largely on working with international companies and often programmes dance and live art in its theatre spaces. Part of the vision of the Barbican is outlined as follows:

[w]e work [...] to create an innovative international programme that crosses art forms, collaborating with organisations from around the globe to give audiences opportunities to experience outstanding work by acclaimed international companies and artists.³³⁴

The RSC clearly has different aims for new work in comparison with the Barbican Centre. As mentioned, the Company aim to work with new audiences who may not necessarily be interested in the RSC but wants to appeal to those 'excited by contemporary theatre'.³³⁵ Therefore, places such as the Kiln Theatre and the Arcola Theatre are perhaps more appropriate venues for TOP transfers, as these theatres have ready audiences who are interested in new political work.³³⁶ For example, the Arcola Theatre was an especially suitable venue for the transfer of *#WeAreArrested*, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

The discussion of programming political plays in smaller studio spaces is certainly relevant to the 2018 Autumn *Mischief Festival* play, *Maydays*, by David Edgar, as this next section will explore the staging of this revival in the new TOP. I will outline certain aspects of

³³³ The list of RSC productions and venues can be found by visiting the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website (see Note 6).

³³⁴ Barbican, 'Our Programme' <<https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/our-programme/artistic-vision>> [accessed 13 November 2019].

³³⁵ Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company'.

³³⁶ *A Museum in Baghdad* (2019/2020 winter season) by Hannah Khalil was set to transfer from the Swan Theatre to the Kiln Theatre in April 2020. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this transfer was cancelled. See Kiln Theatre, 'A Museum in Baghdad' <<https://kilntheatre.com/whats-on/a-museum-in-baghdad/>> [accessed 31 March 2021].

Maydays in relation to ‘Radical Mischief’ as the discussion continues on the positioning and marginality of political new work.

Maydays

Maydays was first produced by the RSC in 1983 at the Barbican Theatre in London and was voted ‘Best New Play’ by London Theatre Critics that same year.³³⁷ Written as a response to the 1979 victory of the Thatcher government, *Maydays* explored the phenomenon that several influential neo-Conservatives in both the US and the UK were former left-wing radicals (Irving Kristol and Sir Alfred Sherman, for example). In an article from 2012 reminiscing about powerful plays, theatre critic Lyn Gardner wrote the following:

Maydays may not have been a great play or a lasting one, but perhaps it was the right play for the right time. Sometimes the success of a play — and of its revival — is all in the timing.³³⁸

Maydays astutely demonstrated, in Edgar’s view, how British politics in the 1980s arrived at Thatcherism from the perspective of the failures of socialism. Kenneth Hurren commented that Edgar criticised ‘with radical cheek’ and Gardner called it one of the ‘most courageous’ plays of the decade.³³⁹ The 1983 play could be described as ‘radical’ and ‘courageous’ for many reasons, one of which could be found in Janelle Reinelt and Gerald Hewitt’s analysis of the play, where they describe how Edgar’s ‘detractors on the Left’ criticised ‘the galling decision

³³⁷ Lyn Gardner, ‘Long Runners: Plays Staying with Power’, *Guardian*, 2 May 2012

<<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/may/02/plays-with-staying-power>> [accessed 30 September 2019].

³³⁸ Gardner, ‘Long Runners’.

³³⁹ Kenneth Hurren, Review of *Maydays*, *Mail on Sunday*, accessed in *London Theatre Record* Vol. III, 21 (8-21 October 1983) p. 907; Lyn Gardner, review of *Maydays*, *City Limits*, accessed in *London Theatre Record*, Vol. III, 21 (8-21 October 1983), p. 907.

[...] to wash the Left's dirty linen in public'.³⁴⁰ In some ways, *Maydays* relates to the RSC's definitions of radical by pointing out boldly the hypocrisy of the Left and highlighting various flaws in socialist movements of the period, and the next section will explore the ways in which *Maydays* may have felt relevant on its revival/reworking in 2018.

The 2018 production was directed by Owen Horsley, and Pippa Hill worked as dramaturg on the play. Hill asked Edgar to re-write the play substantially and to make it a history play accessible to audiences who may not have lived through the events of the work. She described Edgar's new version as 'a radical re-working of a fundamentally very important piece of work'.³⁴¹ While the plot remained very similar to the 1983 version, formally the play changed significantly. The structure of the play was re-ordered so that scenes did not follow chronologically. In the 1983 play, scenes shifted between events in England and the Soviet Union over the course of the first and second acts. Instead, in 2018 the first act of the play follows Martin Glass and his journey from the far Left up until his 'Kronstadt moment' where, in a party celebrating the victory of Vietnamese troops in 1975, he loses faith in socialism.³⁴² Act I finishes on the scene where prisoner Pavel Lermontov, a former Soviet army officer who was caught disseminating information to the West, is released to Western authorities and is reunited with an old friend, Miklos Paloczi. Act II relates Lermontov's story from 1956 in Budapest through to his imprisonment and release, and Act III takes place in England from late 1978 where Lermontov and Glass are being used to inform the policies of the new

³⁴⁰ Janelle Reinelt and Gerald Hewitt, *The Political Theatre of David Edgar: Negotiation and Retrieval* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 83.

³⁴¹ Hill, interview with author.

³⁴² The 'Kronstadt moment' is a reference in the play shared by Jeremy Crowther and Glass that denotes a sudden realisation or change of heart, or as Crowther states: 'the moment when you realise the revolution has eaten its own children'. See David Edgar, *Maydays & Trying It On* (London: Nick Hern, 2018) p. 53. Future references to this volume are given after quotations in the text.

Conservative government. The addition of a chorus was also a new feature of the 2018 version, and Horsley explained the role of the chorus as a ‘tool [...] to lead the audience through’ the various historic events of the play.³⁴³

Hill referred to the process of re-writing this large play and re-ordering the structure as ‘radical’.³⁴⁴ Interestingly, Edgar described the 2018 version of the play as ‘a classic Shakespearean structure: you start at home, you go away, and you bring the audience back into the contemporary world’.³⁴⁵ In some ways, the task of revising the play could relate to radicalism in the sense of ‘changing form’, yet, as Edgar explained, the overall structure pertains to something rather familiar for audiences who are engaged with Shakespeare.³⁴⁶ The formal revisions made to the 2018 version streamline the events of the play to clarify the two different worlds (England, and the Soviet Union) for the first two acts, and then Edgar brings these worlds together for the final act. This innovation may not directly correspond to the RSC’s definition of ‘radical’ (i.e. ‘challenging form’ or being ‘experimental’ with form), and such definitions are also different to the first *OED* description of ‘radical’ ([‘o]f, belonging to, or from a root or roots’).³⁴⁷ In this way, perhaps the form of the play is not inherently radical if one focuses on the RSC’s definition of the term, yet the production certainly engaged with a playful sense of mischief which I will discuss further.

Hill may consider the work to be fundamental to audiences because the play demonstrates in a three-hour production how landmark events (1968 student protests, the 1956 invasion of Hungary by Soviet troops, for example) shaped the political lives of activists

³⁴³ Owen Horsley, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, October 2018.

³⁴⁴ Hill, interview with author.

³⁴⁵ Edgar, interview with author.

³⁴⁶ ‘radical’ definition provided by Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

³⁴⁷ Birch, interview with author; Whyman, interview with author, 2018; ‘radical’, *adj.* and *n.*,’ *OED Online*.

from the second World War through to the 1980s. The play can feel significant in 2018 as audiences witness the loss of faith in left-wing politics by certain characters, and the sense of underestimating the rise and power of right-wing parties strikes parallels with contemporary politics. Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski explain that ‘the rise of right-wing populist parties (RWPs) in Europe and the USA has dominated the news and caused an election scare among mainstream institutions’.³⁴⁸ Specifically, ‘[e]lections in France, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic were all characterized by an increase in the support’ of right-wing populist parties.³⁴⁹ The ‘unpredictable’ election of Donald Trump in the USA in 2016, and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in 2018, highlights the rise of right-wing parties not just in Europe but elsewhere across the globe too, in recent years.³⁵⁰ The rise of right-wing parties is not a new phenomenon, and *Maydays* provided a reminder to 2018 audiences of how right-wing parties gained support during the seventies and early eighties.

For Horsley, *Maydays* represented ‘a history of division’ which he felt was happening at present.³⁵¹ Not simply division between left or right-wing politics, but the fragmentation of certain political parties is another reason why the play felt timely in 2018. Gillian Bevan, a member of the acting company, opined that *Maydays* demonstrated ‘the dangers of a [...] rigorous adherence to either left-wing or right-wing politics’ which felt ‘very relevant’, and she further reflected on a sense of division within both the Conservative and Labour parties in the UK.³⁵² Edgar also wanted to highlight ‘a resurgence of activism’ which echoed ‘the late 1960s

³⁴⁸ Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski, ‘Right-Wing Populism in Europe & USA: Contesting Politics & Discourse Beyond “Orbanism” and “Trumpism”’, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16:4 (2017) 471-484 <DOI: 10.1075/jlp.17042.krz> (p. 471).

³⁴⁹ Daphne Halikiopoulou, ‘A Right-Wing Populist Momentum? A Review of 2017 Elections Across Europe’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56 (2018) 63-73 <DOI: 10.1111/jcms.12769> (p. 63).

³⁵⁰ Wodak and Krzyżanowski, p. 471.

³⁵¹ Horsley, interview with author.

³⁵² Gillian Bevan, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, October 2018.

and early 1970s in quite dramatic ways' and cited examples, from 'Black Power to Black Lives Matter, from the women's liberation to #MeToo'.³⁵³ The production provided an opportunity to witness key historical events and the activities of previous social movements in order to draw parallels with the rise of different activist groups in contemporary Britain.

While *Maydays* does not feel radical in terms of its form, the play certainly contributes to the following aim for TOP: '[s]omewhere where we can tackle those big themes, big ideas'.³⁵⁴ In a review for the 1983 production, Michael Billington commented: '*Maydays* is exactly what the Barbican is for: a big public play on a big public theme'.³⁵⁵ *Maydays* was originally written for a large auditorium, and it is striking that this play was revived for TOP. At the same time, a post-apocalyptic themed *Troilus and Cressida* production played on the RST stage followed by a revival of Edgar's adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, which first premiered in the RST a year previously.

The theme of marginalisation returns to the discussion at this point, and whether there is a sense that politics has become peripheral at the RSC. Of course, the main difference in programming between the 1983 and 2018 productions is the lack of a permanent London base for the Company in the twenty-first century. From the 1960s to the early 1980s, the RSC frequently programmed new plays on stages like the Aldwych Theatre, and this continued when the Barbican was opened in 1982.³⁵⁶ At this time, the RSC predominantly focused on creating and presenting their new work in London. In Stratford, political new writing was a

³⁵³ Edgar, interview with author.

³⁵⁴ Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company'.

³⁵⁵ Michael Billington, review of *Maydays*, *Guardian*, accessed in *London Theatre Record* (October 8-21, 1983) p. 908.

³⁵⁶ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 78, pp. 193-207. New work was also staged in smaller venues, a significant venue being The Warehouse theatre which staged RSC productions from 1977-1982.

feature of the programming in TOP while the main RST auditorium focused predominantly on Shakespeare productions. Naturally, political new work has become marginalised in the context of programming at the RSC, yet one could argue that this has always been the case in Stratford because of the prioritisation of presenting Shakespeare on the RST stage.

Of course, the Swan Theatre provides a significant venue for new work in Stratford in addition to the new TOP. As mentioned previously, perhaps *Maydays* may have worked in the Swan because of its scale (a larger acting company, and a three-hour long production) and by virtue of Edgar's successful record of plays with the RSC. At the same time *Maydays* was programmed, a critically acclaimed adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe* by Anil Gupta and Richard Pinto was being staged. Set in a Pakistani-Muslim community in Birmingham, this adaptation was political in the way that the production interrogated racial stereotypes, and critic Dominic Cavendish asked whether this production is 'the bravest play of the year'.³⁵⁷ *Maydays* and *Tartuffe* succeeded in delivering political new work that was both entertaining and challenging and is an example where programming between the Swan and TOP is not straightforwardly distinctive. Perhaps the fact that *Tartuffe* was an adaptation of a very popular comedy made the play feel more appealing to wider audiences, which inevitably made it more suited for the Swan.

One of the benefits to working in TOP is that it has the ability to provide an alternative experience for audiences in terms of staging. As mentioned, TOP is a more flexible and versatile space and Horsley maximised the usage of the auditorium. The configuration of the space was changed three times during the production: Act I was performed in the round, Act

³⁵⁷ Dominic Cavendish, 'Tartuffe Review, RSC Swan: Is this the Bravest Show of the Year?', *Telegraph*, 18 September 2018 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/tartuffe-reviewrsc-swan-bravest-show-year/>> [accessed 13 April 2021].

II in traverse, and Act III end on. Not only did the 2018 production transform the studio theatre space, but the takeover of the building extended into the foyer. A research wall was created that charted the historical events of the play and featured key news items and quotes. This could be read during the intervals or by visitors at TOP during the day. Specific music was also played over the speaker systems in the foyer before the show and during the intervals. For example, during the first interval between Acts I and II, pop music was played that then transitioned subtly into Soviet Union music. The pop music created a sense of nostalgia and placed audiences within the historical context of the play, and the subtle transition into the Soviet Union music was unnerving as the music hinted at the shift in tone towards the second act. Actors emerged and began shouting political rhetoric at the audience. Other actors forcibly removed them from the space as they tried to control the scene, and eventually the audience was shouted at to move into the space as quickly as possible. Cavendish in his review described the production as ‘ambushing the audience with radically different auditorium configurations twice and even springing guerrilla “happenings” in the foyer’.³⁵⁸ The use of these events and the surprising staging configurations contributed to the production being playful with form and with audiences, thus relating to ‘Radical Mischief’.

The 2018 production of *Maydays* embodied a sense of ‘Radical Mischief’ in its playfulness with staging, and the play related to the wider aims and intentions of the new TOP by exploring ‘big themes, big ideas’.³⁵⁹ Actor Mark Quartley, who played Martin Glass in the 2018 production, felt certain that *Maydays* had the ability to ‘provoke argument and debate’

³⁵⁸ Dominic Cavendish, ‘Maydays, RSC Review: Invaluable Historical Treatise with a Timely Resonance’, *Telegraph*, 3 October 2018 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/maydays-review-rsc-place-stratford-upon-avon-review-invaluable/>> [accessed 30 September 2019].

³⁵⁹ Whyman, ‘The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company’.

and stated that his 'ideal audience members' would be a family who 'voted different ways in the European referendum'.³⁶⁰ Quartley implied that the play had the potential to engage people with contrasting political views and significantly, that the play could enable a dialogue between different generations of voters, something which Bevan also reflected on. Bevan shared her experience of acting in the production:

[W]hat has been extraordinary [...] is seeing lots of young people sitting in an audience with lots of people my age, who like me, have lived through most of the events of the play, and yet, they seem equally engaged by it.³⁶¹

Maydays enabled a contemporary audience to reflect on the present political circumstances by witnessing (or re-living for certain audience members) the turbulent and revolutionary key events of the sixties and seventies and to connect such events with the current climate in the UK.

Maydays was accompanied by *Trying It On*, Edgar's new show which was commissioned by Warwick Arts Centre. *Trying It On* acted as an insightful companion piece to *Maydays* and was arguably bolder and more courageous than *Maydays* as Edgar pointed out his own previous mistakes and hesitancy at joining a revolutionary party. Edgar also drew a direct line between the 2016 EU Referendum result and his generation, and how socialist revolutionaries of the 1960s not only failed to prevent Thatcherism, neoliberalism, and subsequent austerity in the UK, but some may have actively supported such policies. This next

³⁶⁰ Mark Quartley, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, October 2018.

³⁶¹ Bevan, interview with author.

section will discuss the accompanying events of the 2018 *Festivals* to see in what ways ‘Radical Mischief’ was manifest.

Accompanying Events to the 2018 *Mischief Festivals*

Trying It On is a one-man/one-woman show written and performed by David Edgar, directed by Christopher Haydon, and commissioned by Warwick Arts Centre and China Plate. First performed at Warwick Arts Centre on 7 June 2018, the show then toured to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, TOP, and then the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London (p. 209).³⁶² *Trying It On* received three performances in TOP at the concluding weekend of the 2018 Autumn *Mischief Festival* (two matinee performances on the Thursday and Saturday, with an evening performance on the Friday). The show marked Edgar’s debut professional performance on stage in the same year that he turned seventy. It was also the fiftieth anniversary of the year 1968, a defining year in Edgar’s life as he reflected on the triumphs of the civil rights movement and the social revolutionaries of his generation. *Trying It On* wondered what twenty-year-old Edgar thought of his future self and the other activists of the sixties, as he asked:

what happened to the Sergeant Pepper generation? Why, fifty years on, does it seem [...] that the political gains of that generation are going to be reversed, and the people who’re reversing them are the people [...] those gains were for? (p. 116)³⁶³

³⁶² *Trying It On* was also staged at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and subsequently toured venues across the UK.

³⁶³ ‘Sergeant Pepper’ is a reference to the hit Beatles’ album, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* released in 1967 which set ‘to change rock & roll forever’ and Mikal Gilmore notes that ‘[w]hether the Beatles had intended it or not, *Sgt. Pepper* came to symbolize — immediately — the ambitions and longings and fears of a generation’. See Mikal Gilmore, ‘Inside the Making of “Sgt. Pepper”’, *Rolling Stone*, 1 June 2017 <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/inside-the-making-of-sgt-pepper-125417/>> [accessed 22 April 2021].

Promising 'elements of self-exposure' from the outset (p. 158), Edgar investigated what happened to activists such as himself and others, based on interviews and the playwright's own commentary. Edgar was accompanied by Danni, his Stage Manager, on stage (hence the one-man/one-woman show label).

Trying It On was certainly a bold move by Edgar to perform his own one-man/one-woman show after fifty years of writing. Edgar called out his own hypocrisy throughout, and at the climax of the performance Danni, the Stage Manager, walked out on him in disbelief at the playwright's self-indulgence. The interruption by Danni was surprising in performance, as she outright challenged Edgar during his own show, and this feature demonstrated the playwright's acknowledgement of his previous offensive choices of language ('little yellow people', p. 197) and his failure to do more in the fight against Thatcherism and austerity. In many ways, *Trying It On* was exactly the type of show one would expect in TOP — liberal, left-wing, political theatre — and Edgar playfully poked fun at this. Edgar at the beginning of the play asked for audience participation by raising hands in response to a series of questions, and the final two questions asked the audience if they had ever voted for the Conservative Party, and whether they voted for Brexit. On the Friday night performance at TOP which I attended, very few people in the full auditorium raised their hand for the latter two questions and Edgar sarcastically joked, '[w]ell, that's it. A truly representative sample of the general population. That's if you are telling the truth, which of course you are' (p. 160). As Edgar playfully pointed out, one cannot know for certain how audience members voted and whether they were indeed truthfully sharing their views, and so this picture revealed either that the room was largely full of liberals, or that the room included people who did vote either for the

Conservative Party or for Brexit but did not want to publicly acknowledge it in this setting. There was a sense of mischief in the performance as Edgar engaged audiences with questions throughout, in order to expose middle-class hypocrisy with political intent. In this vein, *Trying It On* reflected elements of 'Radical Mischief' through the ways in which Edgar boldly challenged himself and his audiences by questioning the commitment of the previous generation of liberals and socialists towards seeking and enacting revolutionary change. *Trying It On* served as a useful companion piece to *Maydays* by providing the context around how and why the play was originally written. Whilst *Trying It On* was inherently mischievous, the next show to be discussed, *Three Letters*, is more difficult to describe as such.

Three Letters was a one-woman show by Nell Leyshon that played in TOP for two matinee performances during the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*. Leyshon wrote and performed the piece, which depicted her journey of motherhood and overcoming breast cancer. *Three Letters* was not entirely relatable to 'Radical Mischief', except for the fact that the story felt relevant and brave, and probably impacted audience members who have either lived with cancer themselves or knew someone affected. With such a personal story, it is difficult and potentially inappropriate to assess whether the performance can be perceived as an act of 'Radical Mischief' from the perspective of a spectator. Similar to the discussion with *Day of the Living*, one can question how a piece that displays commitment and sincerity on such a sensitive topic can also be described as mischievous. The use of mischief depends entirely on the performer and the aims of the performance. *Three Letters* was an opportunity for Leyshon to share her own personal story with honesty and bravery in front of an audience. A different example of using mischief in sincere and personal ways was *Finding Joy*, which was performed at TOP for two nights in November 2018. *Finding Joy*, a show by Vamos Theatre

which focused on dementia, featured many moments of mischief and playfulness because the overall aim of the piece was to highlight the importance of finding light and joy in living with and supporting people with the illness.³⁶⁴ It is important to note that 'Radical Mischief' represents the overall spirit of the building, and that these artists working in TOP are encouraged to be bold and brave with their ideas and to be playful in whatever way feels right to them. *Three Letters* may not have directly reflected 'Radical Mischief', but rather, the phrase is there to support and encourage artists to be brave and bold in their own ways, which *Three Letters* certainly was.

Redefining Juliet also featured during the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival* and was presented as a work-in-progress on Friday, 22nd June 2018 at 2.30pm following a week of R&D at TOP. Directed by Storme Toolis and Alice Knight, the presentation related to radicalism in terms of being bold and brave, and the piece was political by the ways in which it raised questions over disability, transgender rights, and inclusivity. The R&D showing was performed by transfeminine actor Jenet Le Lacheur, Athena Stevens, who was born with athetoid cerebral palsy, and Deaf actress Lara Steward, as they explored their own personal encounters with *Romeo & Juliet*. The artists performed various monologues and scenes from the play, some in British Sign Language (BSL), and integrated their own reactions to Juliet. The presentation invited audiences to interrogate their own attitudes towards disability and gender identity, and to challenge their preconceptions of who can play Juliet.

Not only did the presentation have the potential to challenge audiences, but *Redefining Juliet* equally challenged the RSC at a time when the Company's own production

³⁶⁴ See Vamos Theatre, 'Finding Joy' <<https://www.vamostheatre.co.uk/shows/show/finding-joy>> [accessed 14 April 2021].

of *Romeo and Juliet* (2018) was playing at the RST. Over the past few years, the RSC have been trying to increase inclusivity on stage, with Deaf actress Charlotte Arrowsmith being made an Associate Artist in 2019 after playing Cassandra in *Troilus and Cressida* (RST 2018), Audrey in *As You Like It* and Curtis in *The Taming of the Shrew* (both 2019 RST Summer Season). The 2019 RST summer season, which also included *Measure for Measure*, saw Amy Trigg, a wheelchair user born with spina bifida, cast as Biondella (*The Taming of the Shrew*) and Juliet (*Measure for Measure*), and Karina Jones, a visually impaired actor, as Martext (*As You Like It*) and Sister Francisca (*Measure for Measure*).³⁶⁵ *Redefining Juliet* was a provocation to the RSC as the performers questioned whether they would ever be considered for Juliet. The presentation acted as a reminder to audiences of the artists who have not yet been cast for certain leading parts on main stages such as the RST.

Accompanying events such as *Trying It On*, *Three Letters*, and *Redefining Juliet* contribute to the overall mini season of the *Mischief Festivals*. While *Trying It On* had direct links with *Maydays*, *Three Letters* and *Redefining Juliet* offered different stories and perspectives on urgent, current topics. *Redefining Juliet* shared obvious links with the RST production of *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Three Letters* shared parallels with *#WeAreArrested* in terms of its form. Both were personal accounts primarily narrated by one person onstage in an intimate setting, and the prose was also quite poetic in parts. In previous years, R&D presentations and other plays accompanying the shows have played a significant role in the

³⁶⁵ See Arifa Akbar, 'Amy Trigg: A Born Performer with Sci-Fi Dreams and a Dizzying Range', *Guardian*, 17 February 2021 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/feb/17/amy-trigg-a-born-performer-with-sci-fi-dreams-and-a-dizzying-range>> [accessed 15 April 2021]; Karina Jones, 'Home' <<https://karinajones.co.uk/>> [accessed 15 April 2021]; Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Taming of the Shrew* theatre programme (Stratford-upon-Avon, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2019); Royal Shakespeare Company, *Measure for Measure* theatre programme (Stratford-upon-Avon, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2019); Royal Shakespeare Company, *As You Like It* theatre programme (Stratford-upon-Avon, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2019).

TOP season. Yet, even before the pandemic, such important events had declined over the past few years. This chapter will now consider the pressures on the new TOP in terms of space, resources, and finances, which determine how many events the RSC can programme around the *Festivals*.

Crooked Dances

In 2019, the only production programmed at TOP was *Crooked Dances* by Robin French, and at the time the play was not advertised as a '*Mischief Festival*'. During the run of *Crooked Dances*, there was one R&D sharing (*Strange News from Whitehall* by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard) which was attended by around six members of the public, and one performance of a show that was not affiliated with the RSC, entitled *Beware the Cat*.³⁶⁶ *Crooked Dances* required a significant amount of technical resources, so this may be the reason why it was not suitable to programme more plays and events around it. Birch explained that the challenges behind putting on a *Mischief Festival* were the lack of resources and space at TOP.³⁶⁷

There could be various reasons behind dropping the *Festival* event, one being the great attention and resources given towards the new RSC musical, *The Boy in the Dress*. Adapted from David Walliams' book under the same title, the new musical opened in the RST in November 2019. Mark Ravenhill wrote the script, and music was composed and written by Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers. The RSC Financial Statement for 2018/2019 stated the following:

³⁶⁶ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Beware the Cat' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/beware-the-cat>> [accessed 10 September 2021].

³⁶⁷ Birch, interview with author.

[w]e have felt the pinch of reduced budgets in The Other Place which means we cannot commission as much for that scale, which in turn reduces entry-level opportunities for writers and directors especially. We have invested, however, in a number of large-scale commissions for the family shows in the RST, including two new musicals, one being *The Boy in the Dress*. We are continuing to develop plans for future large-scale family work.³⁶⁸

This quote confirms that new work at TOP has been compromised at the expense of creating large-scale, family shows such as *The Boy in the Dress*. Not only does this explain the marginal imperative of creating provocative, political new work in TOP, but it solidifies the financial and commercial priorities of the organisation in programming work that attracts wider audiences and children into the building.

It may also be that the *Mischief Festival* label was dropped because the word 'mischief', and hence, 'Radical Mischief', did not feel relevant or applicable to this new production. *Crooked Dances* featured Katy, a London-based journalist, and Nick, a photographer, travelling to France in order to interview a world-famous pianist, Silvia de Zingaro. It is apparent that the two characters are over-reliant on technology and are shocked to arrive in Silvia's home where there is no internet. A sense of mystery increases over the course of the first act, as Katy and Nick begin to question the odd behaviour of Silvia and her obsession with composer Eric Satie. The climax of the play occurs in the second half as Silvia reveals to Katy her true fascination with Satie and the occult. The play contained an urgent thought about conversation and the lack of listening in the present day. However, the questioning of audiences on the amount of time people spend using technology is not

³⁶⁸ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Report and Consolidated Financial Statements', p. 12.

necessarily radical in the twenty-first century. Whilst the desire to listen and hold genuine conversation is an important topic, the thread of magic realism may have diluted or distracted audiences away from this urgent message. Critic Kate Wyver describes how characters ‘want to create the right atmosphere to capture someone’s focus long enough for it to feel like they matter’. She adds, ‘[i]t’s what the performance is aiming for too and it’s a beautiful attempt, just a shame it runs away with itself’.³⁶⁹ The production may have felt playful by the ways in which audiences were lulled into a relatively realist piece of theatre, only to have their expectations subverted in the second half by the introduction of magic realism. Questions arise as to whether a play is radical, or simply strange and uncanny, as Wyver suggests, ‘the play starts to wallow in its weirdness’.³⁷⁰ It was certainly an alternative and entertaining piece of contemporary theatre, yet in some ways the structure felt conventional in the way that it began with an exposition, built to a climax and concluded with a new stasis.

Crooked Dances may confirm a couple of points around new work at TOP. Firstly, that the RSC may be moving away from the term ‘Radical Mischief’, as an influencing factor in the commissioning of new work. Equally, the production could serve as an example of an initial idea for a play that contained elements of mischief but through its development process, the resulting play took a different course. What this example does demonstrate is the challenges in creating visible or tangible aspects of ‘Radical Mischief’ with each production, and that, while the shows presented in TOP feature contemporary themes, they may not always be directly radical or mischievous.

³⁶⁹ Kate Wyver, ‘Crooked Dances Review – Piano Star Weaves a Weird Spell’, *Guardian*, 27 June 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jun/27/crooked-dances-review-rsc-stratford>> [accessed 1 October 2019].

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which a spirit of ‘Radical Mischief’ might be present within selected works from previous *Mischief Festivals*. The analysis makes clear the difficulties in assessing the claim that the RSC produce festivals of ‘Radical Mischief’ by demonstrating how ‘radical’ can feel particularly subjective. In spite of these challenges, this chapter has demonstrated instances of radicalism in TOP, through the examples of *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* (*Midsummer Mischief* 2014), *Fall of the Kingdom*, *Rise of the Foot Soldier* (*Making Mischief* 2016), and in *Day of the Living* (2018).

Whilst radicalism has been a tricky concept to evidence, ‘mischief’ is also a particularly elusive and loaded word, and its application may be off-putting for some. For instance, examples such as *Day of the Living* illustrate a sense of divided opinion in terms of whether devices such as satire and graphic scenes are appropriate in order to highlight the seriousness of the events described. Equally, ‘mischief’ at times has felt inapplicable, particularly in work that dealt with real-life stories and personal issues, thus making the analysis of ‘Radical Mischief’ quite complex. Despite these challenges, there has been a clear sense of mischief in most shows presented at the new TOP, either in terms of works being formally playful or through the ways in which shows may have challenged audiences with serious or urgent subjects. The RSC appear intent on delivering a programme which seeks to challenge and confront audiences whilst also maintaining a spirit of joy and entertainment, which arguably they achieved during the 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*.

Of course, by simply studying one year of *Mischief Festivals* (2018) in detail, one cannot draw generalised conclusions about whether the RSC have consistently created work that

reflects 'Radical Mischief'. 2018 was a particularly significant year for new work at TOP, where the Spring *Mischief Festival* especially felt urgent, brave, and playful. This does not mean that every *Festival* will feel the same, however. 'Radical Mischief' did not always appear visibly in certain *Festivals* depending on the works presented, and the challenges of living up to the name is clear and thus reflective of the nature of making theatre and commissioning new work. One cannot anticipate how the new work will be received by audiences, and how an initial idea may feel radical or mischievous, but such ideas may become diluted in the process of production for a number of different reasons.

It is important to acknowledge that artists working in TOP are not briefed to provide shows that are radically mischievous. Horsley admitted, 'I don't think of myself as particularly mischievous' and stated the following: '[e]ssentially [...] I feel like we've done the play [*Maydays*], and if people want to think of it as mischievous then that's great'. The director confirmed that he was not intentionally setting out to achieve the title of the *Festival*: 'it's not my mission and it's not what the play is, to be honest'.³⁷¹ Similarly, Ivatts also stated: 'I have to say that I do not particularly feel radical, I don't think it [*#WeAreArrested*] necessarily is that radical, but I guess it depends on your definition of radical'.³⁷² Whyman articulated that she could 'imagine a situation where "Radical Mischief"' would become 'the name of the thinking we do and not the name of the *Festivals*'.³⁷³ The RSC may step away from using 'Radical Mischief' as a branding for their new work, and it is noticeable that the phrase has become

³⁷¹ Horsley, interview with author.

³⁷² Ivatts, interview with author.

³⁷³ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

less visible from 2017 onwards.³⁷⁴ Yet, the thinking behind the phrase may still remain relevant to the programming and development of new work at TOP.

The limitations of the new TOP are made quite clear, as the Studio Theatre cannot programme work throughout the year and depending on the organisation's activities for the RST and Swan, a limited number of resources are available for new projects in TOP. This may be the reason for the decline in the number of events that are scheduled around the new productions. The prioritisation of RST and Swan productions may limit the extent to which TOP is able to act as a provocation to the RSC and to incite change from within the organisation. For instance, it was unfortunate that rehearsals were taking place for the RST and Swan repertoire whilst *Redefining Juliet* was performed in the Studio Theatre, meaning that a few key personnel at the RSC were unable to attend the presentation.

A further challenge to the new work at TOP has been presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the future of TOP remains uncertain. The 2020 *Mischief Festival*, which aimed to present new work by Bea Roberts and Nina Segal, was postponed. A further blow to new work at the RSC was the cancellation of Projekt Europa, an exciting season 'celebrating the best of European theatre making' led by Maria Åberg and Judith Gerstenberg, due to take place in the Swan in 2020.³⁷⁵ The season included *Europeana*, based on the book by Patrik Ouredník, adapted by Åberg and Gerstenberg, directed by Åberg, Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, from a translation by John Northam, adapted by Barbara Frey and Gerstenberg, directed by

³⁷⁴ For instance, the publications of the *Mischief Festival* plays between 2014-2017 feature the word 'radical' on their front matter, and subsequent publications do not. See Royal Shakespeare Company, *Midsummer Mischief*; Royal Shakespeare Company, *Making Mischief*; Royal Shakespeare Company, *Mischief Festival: Two Radical New Plays* (London: Oberon, 2017); Royal Shakespeare Company, *Mischief Festival Spring 2018*; Edgar, *Maydays & Trying It On*; Robin French, *Crooked Dances* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

³⁷⁵ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Projekt Europa' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/projekt-europa>> [accessed 16 April 2021].

Frey, and *Blindness and Seeing*, based on the novels by José Saramago, adapted and directed by Tiago Rodrigues, translated by Daniel Hahn.³⁷⁶ Inevitably, it seems that new work especially has suffered from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is uncertain when the RSC will be able to mount political new work in either TOP or the Swan.

Whilst this chapter may feel like it is ending on the pessimistic consequences of the pandemic, I want to reiterate why the work of the new TOP is significant. The work produced as part of these *Festivals* matter because the stories matter. As evidenced in the 2018 *Mischief Festivals*, the plays showcased to Stratford audiences contain important content and have the potential to fuel provocative and necessary debate in the twenty-first century. At its best, certain works at the new TOP have highlighted urgent issues which have not been addressed on the RST or the Swan stages, and the work has felt more direct, formally playful, and thought-provoking at times. TOP offers a unique opportunity in Stratford for the RSC to be more mischievous and bolder and the *Festivals* can provide playful new works that are equally entertaining and intellectually stimulating.

³⁷⁶ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Cast Announced for RSC Productions of *Europeana*, *Peer Gynt* and *Blindness and Seeing*, Part of *Projekt Europa*' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/press/releases/cast-announced-for-rsc-productions-of-europeana-peer-gynt-and-blindness-and-seeing-part-of-projekt-europa>> [accessed 16 April 2021].

Chapter Three: R&D

It [TOP] is a place of entertainment, of enjoyment, of fun, of playfulness. A place where artists can try things and potentially fail as well as succeed.³⁷⁷

[A] space where writers and theatre makers can fire their imaginations and provoke new thinking, including intimate new plays and surprising collaborations.³⁷⁸

As indicated in the quotations above, TOP is described as a utopian playground for artists, a building that provides space for theatre-makers to take risks unhindered by any form of justification or censorship. Whilst the previous chapter largely explored the ‘intimate new plays’ presented to audiences as part of the *Mischief Festivals*, this chapter takes a step behind closed doors into another aspect of ‘the engine room’.³⁷⁹ TOP is regularly used as a space for R&D projects throughout the year. Essentially, R&D offers artists space and access to RSC resources (i.e. costumes, props, rehearsal space, actors or practitioners) to explore new ideas. Depending on the needs of the project, R&D could consist of a writer being given a cottage in Stratford to work by themselves, or an artist could be given a rehearsal space in TOP and a group of actors or other professionals to work with.³⁸⁰ A project may benefit from the assistance of a dramaturg, a movement director or a designer, and the RSC sometimes bring experts into the room to give talks on particular subjects, such as nuclear physics, cricket, or eighteenth-century London.³⁸¹ This chapter seeks to explore why R&D projects are important

³⁷⁷ Whyman, ‘The Other Place’, n. pg.

³⁷⁸ Whyman, ‘Welcome to the First Edition of our Newspaper’, p. 3.

³⁷⁹ Whyman, quoted in ‘University of Birmingham Collaboration’.

³⁸⁰ Hill, interview with author.

³⁸¹ Collette McCarthy, ‘Research & Development: Workshop Diary’, *Radical Mischief*, 4 (June 2015), p. 8.

to the RSC, and whether 'Radical Mischief' is visible in the new TOP through the example of three main case-studies.

It is essential to begin this chapter by unpacking briefly the meanings of 'Research' and 'Development' before exploring a short history of R&D and studio work. This chapter then seeks to address the significance of conducting R&D for companies like the RSC, before explaining the challenges of arranging and commissioning such projects. I then expand on the types of R&D that the Company conduct before proceeding with an analysis of the case-study projects to determine whether 'Radical Mischief' can be actualised through R&D at TOP.

At the RSC, the projects selected for R&D broadly fall into two main strands — R&D that seeks to develop commissioned works, and R&D that enables experimental workshops to take place to give artists an opportunity to explore new ideas. While it's possible that R&D taking place for commissioned shows may demonstrate elements of 'Radical Mischief', this chapter concentrates on the early ideas generated at the beginning of a process, as opposed to an R&D workshop that is taking place as part of a commission. Depending on the stage of commission (i.e. whether the work is an early draft, or whether it has been programmed at the RSC), there is a level of expectation on the work to produce a certain result, whereas the experimental workshops have less pressure attached and are more open-ended in nature.

Experimental workshops can take a variety of unpredictable forms and will have a range of different results — some may develop into a commissioned work at the RSC, some may be commissioned elsewhere, and some may not be further developed but may have the potential to influence future work and policymaking at the RSC. Such workshops might take place with artists associated with the Company, with visiting artists or theatre companies, or through the collaboration with the University of Birmingham. For the purposes of this chapter,

I have selected one case study example demonstrating each of these scenarios, to see whether 'Radical Mischief' can be created in each of these different settings. The following examples were selected: *Strange News from Whitehall* by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard, Deafinitely Theatre's *Macbeth* R&D, and the *Democracy* Project led by Whyman. *Strange News from Whitehall* is an R&D project led by artists already associated with the RSC and demonstrates how 'Radical Mischief' may be present in the initial source material of a project. Deafinitely Theatre's *Macbeth* R&D is an example of a visiting company being given the space and resources to try out some work and to share their findings with senior members of the RSC. The *Democracy* Project is a staff-led research project as part of the collaboration with the University of Birmingham, and is an example of research conducted by Whyman and others that deeply questioned the practice of rehearsal room etiquette. I observed the *Strange News from Whitehall* R&D and participated in the *Democracy* Project. Despite not having been present in the Deafinitely R&D, this example has been selected because of the influence of this R&D on RSC policy. I have interviewed Paula Garfield, Artistic Director of Deafinitely Theatre, who led the R&D project, in order to gain a sense of the aims of the week. All three projects demonstrate how R&D is a chance to consolidate and explore exciting ideas which may develop into a production, but that the process of being commissioned or even programmed in this way is not necessarily straightforward. Whilst R&D can be used to form ideas around a pitch for a new show, at TOP there is an opportunity to explore early ideas that may never be presented anywhere, yet the experience may be valuable to the artist. R&D can serve artists by allowing them room to play and this experience gives them permission to potentially fail. Failure does not mean a wasted week of exploration and is not a comment on the quality of the work, but rather, in this context it is used to demonstrate acceptance that

some ideas may have reached their conclusion in unanticipated ways. One of the many benefits of certain types of R&D at the RSC is that ideas are allowed to come to a halt without the need to create a show or publish information about the work.

This chapter ultimately questions the extent to which aspects of ‘Radical Mischief’ found in R&D are able to influence the wider organisations (both the RSC and the University). R&D can be beneficial to both the theatre and the academy by allowing artists and scholars time and space to play and to explore meaningful questions about their practice. ‘Radical Mischief’ inspires artists and scholars to free themselves from any external pressures and limitations they may feel. The extent to which scholars in particular can free themselves during R&D projects will be questioned, as will how ‘Radical Mischief’ sits within the academy.

Further Insight into R&D

In a chapter dedicated to R&D, it is evidently helpful to unpick the terms ‘research’ and ‘development’. The *OED* defines ‘research’ as ‘[t]he act of searching carefully for or pursuing a specified thing or person’ and a ‘[s]ystematic investigation or inquiry aimed at contributing to knowledge of a theory, topic etc.’.³⁸² In relation to theatre-making, director John Caird writes quite simply that ‘[a]ll plays need researching, even ones that have only just been written’. He elaborates: ‘[y]ou need to know what the characters of the play are thinking about, why they do what they do, say what they say’. It is also necessary, according to Caird, for the director and the actors to understand the extent to which characters’ ‘thoughts and

³⁸² ‘research, *n.*’, *OED Online*, 2021 <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/163432?rskey=YgTxaq&result=1#eid>> [accessed 17 May 2021].

actions are conditioned by their social, political and religious background and beliefs'.³⁸³ In this description, 'research' to Caird is largely character focused, and requires a thorough examination of the play to investigate the motivations behind certain actions or thoughts, alongside possible wider research into the play's context.

For director Katie Mitchell, 'research' is also a significant part of her rehearsal and preparation process: '[r]esearch helps you know the play better, clarifies the world you will be building and makes you feel more secure as a director'. In her book, *The Director's Craft* (2009), Mitchell uses the example of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1895) and she explains her list of questions about the text in terms of its setting, time period etc., and she recommends using libraries to find answers, along with research trips to locations, if possible.³⁸⁴ Another director who conducts significant research in libraries before a production is Anne Bogart.³⁸⁵ She implies that the research is part of the initial phase of a rehearsal process, and suggests that eventually, 'the research [...] gets in your way' (p. 133). In her book, *A Director Prepares* (2001), Bogart explains how 'the research and table-work stage of rehearsal' intends for 'necessary dramaturgical discussions, analysis and readings' and then describes 'the dreaded moment [...] when it is time to put something on the stage' (p. 84). These three examples highlight the importance of conducting research on a play as part of a rehearsal process, and it is implied that whilst discussions take place within the early stages of rehearsal, the majority of the research takes place away from the rehearsal room, either at home, in libraries, or in Mitchell's case, attending trips to specific locations.

³⁸³ John Caird, *Theatre Craft: A Director's Practical Companion from A to Z* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) pp. 640-641.

³⁸⁴ Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009) pp. 15-16.

³⁸⁵ Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001) p. 122. Further citations from this volume are given after quotations in the text.

Of course, this is not the only way that practitioners think about and conduct research, and other artists may work differently to these directors. Indeed, research can be conducted in a practical workshop setting, which will be expanded on later as the work of famous practitioners such as Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Michel Saint Denis' practices are further discussed. In terms of academia, '[a] new spirit of research and pedagogic innovation in UK university drama, theatre and performance departments has emerged' over the past few decades, Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson write.³⁸⁶ Particularly, 'practice as research', 'practice-based research', or 'practice-led research' to name but a few various titles, has by the twenty-first century become 'a well-founded and sometimes controversial methodology' which has been 'added to research repertoires in university theatre and performance studies'.³⁸⁷ This chapter does not have the scope to fully address the various types of research conducted by both theatre practitioners and academic scholars, but it is important to highlight that within the twenty-first century 'research' is a varied and multi-dimensional activity that encompasses a wide range of methodologies and theoretical frameworks, and can be multi-disciplinary and collaborative. In certain contexts, the boundaries between academic scholarship and creative practice can feel increasingly blurred. The collaboration between the University of Birmingham and the RSC seeks to contribute to this sense of 'blurring boundaries' between university and theatre, artist and scholar, to create new forms of knowledge and ideas.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson (eds.), 'Introduction: Doing Methods Creatively', in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) pp. 1-15 (p. 1).

³⁸⁷ Baz Kershaw with Lee Miller/Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Rosemary Lee/Niki Pollard, 'Practice as Research: Transdisciplinary Innovation in Action', in *Research Methods*, ed. by Kershaw and Nicholson, pp. 63-85 (p. 63).

³⁸⁸ The phrase 'blurring boundaries' is used in different forms throughout a chapter which I wrote on the RSC/University of Birmingham collaboration for an edited collection. See Mary Davies, "'Radical Mischief": The Other Place Collaboration Between the Royal Shakespeare Company and the University of Birmingham', in

Development is defined as '[s]enses relating to growth or becoming more advanced or elaborate' and '[t]he action or process of bringing something to a fuller or more advanced condition'.³⁸⁹ The 'development' process feels more apparent in the theatre industry than 'research', which, as mentioned above, can sometimes feel less practical, particularly in the examples provided by Caird, Mitchell and Bogart. Both terms work together in the theatre, as the research informs and becomes integrated in the practice, thus leading into the development process of creating shows — it is rare to have a development process without any research being conducted. As will be discussed later, the National Theatre Studio in London is primarily used as 'a research and development facility for its own work, so that [productions] get properly researched and seen there' before they are staged in the Theatre's main house auditoriums (Olivier Theatre, Lyttleton Theatre, and the Dorfman Theatre).³⁹⁰ For example, productions such as *His Dark Materials* (Olivier Theatre, 2003), written by Nicholas Wright, adapted from the novel trilogy of the same title by Philip Pullman, received 'masses of time, over a long period, so that all the difficulties of putting an unwieldy book on stage get addressed long before it goes into rehearsal'.³⁹¹ R&D alleviates pressure from the rehearsal process as it provides theatres with additional, dedicated time and resources for consolidating ideas, developing the text for performance, and the factoring in of production elements such as staging and design can also become concretised.

Reimagining Shakespeare Education: Teaching and Learning Through Collaboration, ed. by Claire Hansen, Jackie Manuel, and Liam Semler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

³⁸⁹ 'development, n.', *OED Online*, 2021

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/51434?redirectedFrom=development#eid>> [accessed 17 May 2021].

³⁹⁰ Nicholas Wright, quoted in Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon, 2013) p. 744.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 744.

The discussion thus far has focused on the idea of R&D to support commissioned productions. Whilst R&D is largely conducted to develop shows in the theatre, a proportion of R&D projects in TOP are grounded in specific research enquiries that are not directly linked with creating new shows. Certain projects are given time and space to investigate a specific question and delve deeply in exploring possible answers. Artists are given the opportunity to interrogate their practice and to reflect on how their work relates to the outside world. This ambition to pursue difficult questions and the freedom to possibly fail, or discover different answers than the ones expected, demonstrates a rare opportunity for artists. The work of the artist is rewired to focus on process, and not necessarily on delivering a tangible, finalised product.

R&D is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it an exclusive practice conducted by the RSC alone. R&D is typically associated with experimental work conducted by theatre practitioners in studio spaces. The earliest instances of this can be found during the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Thomas Cornford, the term 'studio' was first coined by Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who described the word as 'not a proper theatre, certainly not a school, but [...] a laboratory for new ideas'.³⁹² Meyerhold was hired by actor and director Konstantin Stanislavsky, who increasingly became interested in studio experimentation throughout his career. In an article titled, 'The October Revolution and the Theatre' (1935), Stanislavsky stated, '[o]ur major task is to create a laboratory theatre [...] a theatre that is the model of the actor's technique'.³⁹³ The studio work conducted in

³⁹² Thomas Cornford, 'The English Theatre Studios of Michael Chekhov and Michel Saint-Denis, 1935-1965' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, May 2012) p. 17; Robert Leach, *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003) p. 51.

³⁹³ Konstantin Stanislavsky, quoted in Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 3rd edn (London: Methuen, 1999) p. 361.

association with Stanislavsky and Meyerhold inspired others, such as Michael Chekhov and Jacques Copeau, who also set up studios to continue investigations into actor training and technique. A key pupil of Copeau's was Michel Saint-Denis, who set up the London Theatre Studio (1936-1939) and subsequently went on to experiment and teach at the Old Vic Theatre School (1947-1953). Cornford notes that:

these studios were dedicated to combining training and experimentation in the development of ensemble companies and were therefore liminal spaces combining elements of a theatre and a theatre school.³⁹⁴

These figures mentioned in this section are not the only practitioners who invested time and effort into exploring theatrical forms and experimentation, but their influence was crucial in the narrative of understanding how R&D became a significant, but often overlooked, feature in the RSC.

From the outset of the Company in 1960, Hall was keen to dedicate time and effort into conducting short, experimental seasons at the RSC. In order to do this, he enlisted Brook and Saint-Denis to help him and to lead the way in conducting experiments into searching for new theatrical forms and methods of acting. The landmark experimental season was the 1964 Theatre of Cruelty season, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. While Brook's experiments have been frequently referenced, Saint-Denis' significant ideas for the Company are often overlooked. This is partly to do with the challenges the Company faced (lack of facilities and scheduling problems), which meant that much of Saint-Denis' plans were not fully realised, and also the fact that Saint-Denis' deteriorating health limited his work with the

³⁹⁴ Cornford, p. 9.

Company — his training in the RSC Studio finished in 1965, three years after it was first established.

Since the work of Saint-Denis and Brook, other directors have tried to maintain this spirit of R&D. Goodbody, in her manifesto for the original TOP, wanted a private studio for staff and members of the company to experiment, and another significant moment in RSC history was former Artistic Director Michael Boyd setting up the Actors Development Programme (ADP) in 2003 in order to continue training and developing members of the company.³⁹⁵ In an attempt to create a core ensemble, it was intended that actors would ‘spend dedicated “class” time studying voice, movement and Shakespeare’s language’ and Boyd also set up a New Work Festival, initially intended to occur annually at the end of each summer season. Boyd explained that the aim of this Festival was ‘to put the spirit of experimentation and enquiry back at the heart of the RSC’.³⁹⁶ The first New Work Festival in 2004 contained new plays by Zinnie Harris and Joanna Laurens ‘as well as devised and experimental work by the Company working with Michael Boyd’.³⁹⁷ The New Work Festival was an attempt by Boyd to revive the ‘flare ups’ of experimental seasons that occurred at the RSC during the early 1960s, but similarly, these festivals did not become a permanent fixture and only two New Work Festivals (2004 and 2005) were held.³⁹⁸

What is striking in the history of R&D (and this is not exclusive to the RSC), is that R&D has been largely associated with developing actor training and technique. Whilst there are

³⁹⁵ See Goodbody, ‘Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974’, p. 2. For Boyd’s plans on actor training and development, see Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘A Vision for the Future’, *RSC Update*, 2 (Winter 2004) n. pg.

³⁹⁶ Michael Boyd, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘A Vision for the Future’, n. pg.

³⁹⁷ Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘A Vision for the Future’, n. pg.

³⁹⁸ For further information on the so-called ‘flare up’ seasons at the RSC, see Cornford, p. 281; Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, pp. 148-149.

striking examples of experimental seasons leading into new shows (e.g. Theatre of Cruelty and Brook's 1966 production of *US*), it appears that the main focus of R&D at the RSC traditionally has been to provide actors with some space and technical support to develop their craft. This modified slightly when Boyd tried to resurrect the RSC Studio, appointing David Farr as its Artistic Director, which offered support for external artists to come and develop work at the RSC. Unlike the previous studios at the RSC, this model had three bases — London, Stratford, and Newcastle. Farr explained that he would work closely with the Literary Department 'on a new "RSC Studio", inspired by the original Michel St [*sic*] Denis conception, dedicated to the research and development of work, giving ideas air to breathe and room to fail safely'.³⁹⁹ Farr's Studio marked the beginning of official R&D work at the RSC. The ADP work focused on the artist, whereas 'the focus of the Studio was the product', although, as Farr acknowledged, R&D would also inevitably develop artists too in the process.⁴⁰⁰

A similar sense of the history of R&D emerges with the Royal National Theatre (NT). When Hall arrived at the NT as its second Artistic Director in 1973, he was once again keen to develop actors in a studio setting, but also, R&D began a process of trialling new work without the pressures of production. Hall stated that the NT 'should do genuine research and development [in] a studio where all [our] creative people... should function without the necessity of public performances'.⁴⁰¹ A studio became a 'top priority' in January 1984 and the result was the leasing of a premises converted from the Old Vic Annexe, located on the corner

³⁹⁹ David Farr, 'The RSC Studio', a paper for the Artistic Planning Group, 20 May 2009. Accessed in Darnley, vol. II, p. 343.

⁴⁰⁰ Farr, quoted in Darnley, Vol. I., pp. 293-294.

⁴⁰¹ Peter Hall, quoted in Hall and Elliott, 'The Future of the NT in the 1980s', National Theatre Board Minutes Doc. 81/7. Accessed in Rosenthal, p. 399.

of The Cut and Webber Street, 'rent-free, initially for five years'.⁴⁰² Hall appointed Peter Gill as Director of this new Studio, and Maddy Costa describes: '[w]hat interested Gill was that the project flew in the face of Thatcherism: there was to be no commercial impulse, no obvious product, no managerial involvement'.⁴⁰³ The Studio opened in April 1984 and the initial schedule included movement and voice classes for NT actors, fencing, yoga, 'laboratory work [on] things like expressionism, and ... play readings for writers... so they can find out what their work is like'.⁴⁰⁴ Gill explained that the Studio commissioned writers 'for [less] money than the NT', provided play readings, then paid a little more money for a workshop, before the NT would decide whether to offer a production.⁴⁰⁵ The advantages of the Studio was that the NT could 'develop a relationship with a writer' and 'take a good look at a play in controlled conditions'.⁴⁰⁶ The Studio continued to develop work in the 1980s, yet a perception of exclusivity grew around the building which was felt by people inside and outside of the NT. Richard Eyre, who took over as Artistic Director of the NT in 1988, stated that the Studio 'continued to do work which was "invisible" and therefore difficult to justify as far as the general public was concerned. It was, however, of great value'.⁴⁰⁷ Gill left in 1990 and Sue Higginson, formerly Studio Manager, took over Gill's position. Daniel Rosenthal notes that '[u]nder Sue Higginson, the Studio was increasingly connected to the main NT stages, and other theatres'.⁴⁰⁸ The Studio continues to operate and in 2015 it merged with the Literary

⁴⁰² National Theatre, 'The National Theatre Patronage Scheme', January 1984; National Theatre, Development Council Minutes, 24/5/1990. Both accessed in Rosenthal, p. 399.

⁴⁰³ Maddy Costa, 'The People's Playwright', *Guardian*, 5 April 2008
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/apr/05/theatre.stage>> [accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴⁰⁴ Peter Gill, 'Studio Summary', January 1986. Accessed in Rosenthal, p. 400.

⁴⁰⁵ Gill, quoted in Rosenthal, p. 401.

⁴⁰⁶ Nicholas Wright, quoted in Robert Hewison, 'No Title', *Observer*, September 1985. Accessed in Rosenthal, p. 401.

⁴⁰⁷ Richard Eyre, quoted in National Theatre Board Minutes, 11/10/1989:66/89. Accessed in Rosenthal, p. 484.

⁴⁰⁸ Rosenthal, p. 556.

Department to create the New Work Department, which is called ‘the engine room for the NT’s creative output, developing work and artists’ for their stages ‘and beyond’.⁴⁰⁹

One of the most important aspects of R&D at TOP is that it has the ability to remove frameworks of pressure and financial issues to an extent. R&D can model the best possible rehearsal room setting — a space where artists are free to play together and can explore ideas without needing to justify themselves. Ayse Tashkiran is a movement director who has worked on a range of RST and Swan productions over the past decade with the Company.⁴¹⁰ She described how the rehearsal room acts as a form of ‘utopia’ and suggested that the ‘community, ethos, ethics and the lived experience of utopias do in themselves feel radical’.⁴¹¹ Similar to rehearsal rooms, R&D has the potential to form these utopias as a new space where different rules can apply to those of the outside world. Further, certain types of R&D projects at TOP may feel more like a ‘utopia’ because they are not driven by specific goals and timelines that rehearsals are structured around, and there is no pressure to present anything at the end of the week’s exploration. R&D projects can be open-ended. Some may lead to a showing and even subsequent R&D weeks, thus finally leading to a show being created; some may typically be one week of exploration only. There is also more flexibility with creative ideas in R&D as certain decisions (i.e. casting, staging and set design) may not have been concretised.

While the image of R&D as a form of utopia is significant and exciting for theatre-makers, this chapter also makes clear the challenges that face theatre companies in

⁴⁰⁹ See National Theatre, ‘New Work Department’ <<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-the-national-theatre/new-work>> [accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴¹⁰ Most recent RSC productions which Tashkiran has movement directed are *The Provoked Wife* (Swan Theatre, 2019), *As You Like It* (RST and Tour, 2019), and *Romeo and Juliet* (RST and Tour, 2018). Tashkiran was made an RSC Associate Artist in 2017.

⁴¹¹ Tashkiran, interview with author.

conducting R&D. In the launch of their 2020-2030 strategy, Arts Council England explain the following:

Risk taking and innovation are critical to the success of the cultural sector. But funding pressures over the last decade have made it harder for many cultural organisations to experiment and undertake formal research and development.⁴¹²

Whilst the RSC are more fortunate in terms of wealth than other smaller theatre organisations in the UK, it is the internal choices of how funding is allocated which puts a pressure on specific types of R&D. The RSC could conduct much more R&D should they desire; however, the Company prioritise productions and rehearsals over R&D. Whilst a significant amount of funds are given towards Shakespeare productions and large-scale family shows, there is a small budget to conduct R&D projects, largely for new work commissions. It is less frequent that the RSC conduct R&D on Shakespeare or early modern texts, although one of the case studies in this chapter is an example of this. Whyman also ensures that a small allocation of funds are available for 'encounters' to happen i.e. R&D by a visiting company from which the RSC seek to learn from, and these projects are not directly linked with a potential production.⁴¹³ These types of R&D sessions, as will be explained later, offer resources and space for artists to 'encounter' the RSC and develop their ideas in a relaxed, informal setting. Such events enable a creative exchange of ideas to take place and these types of R&D have the potential to influence RSC policy or create a dialogue for future work and collaboration between the RSC and the artist/company.

⁴¹² Arts Council England, 'Outcomes' <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/outcomes-0>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁴¹³ Erica Whyman, interview with author via Zoom, May 2021.

As a result of how the RSC choose to distribute their funds, there are limits to how much R&D they can conduct, particularly R&D that allows artists to discover new ideas. R&D projects are deliberated upon in monthly meetings between Whyman, Birch and the literary team. Even if artists are granted permission to conduct R&D at the RSC, space and resources are finite; there may be other rehearsals or R&D projects taking place simultaneously, which puts a pressure on what props, costumes, practitioners etc. are available. Equally, the space offered (whether it be a rehearsal room or a cottage in Stratford) is only available for a certain amount of time. There is also the inevitable question regarding the prestige of the RSC as a cultural icon, and one questions whether artists can indeed free themselves from any responsibility to uphold any perceived standards whilst working for the Company. With the potential prospect of a showing at the end of the week in front of staff at the Company, there is always that factor of pressure no matter how much artistic freedom is offered. R&D cannot therefore easily be considered a utopia without also realising the external factors that govern who receives access to these resources and why, and the impending outcome facing artists once that week of exploration comes to an end.

R&D is essential for the RSC both in terms of commissioned work and in terms of finding new artists to work with. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, the RSC have two main strands of R&D, and while I am primarily focusing on the strand that deals with enabling experimental workshops (i.e. ideas in a very early stage that are not directly linked with production), it is also worth explaining the strand that develops commissioned shows. This strand in itself has two main aims: firstly, to develop technical and practical ideas, and to offer more dramaturgical freedom to the work itself. In terms of developing technical ideas, some brief examples could be previous R&D workshops on how to make elephants disappear

on stage (*The Magician's Elephant*, planned for 2021) or understanding how characters would fly in Ella Hickson's *Wendy and Peter Pan* (2013 and 2015). While of course these R&D workshops are still dramaturgical, these examples of R&D are seeking to concretise practical elements of staging, which is vital in larger commissioned works. Other examples of R&D focus more on dramaturgical choices within the shows themselves, such as exploring whether Sam Kenyon's *Miss Littlewood* (Swan Theatre, 2018) could be staged entirely with a cast of women. Another recent example was R&D on Hannah Khalil's *A Museum in Baghdad* (Swan Theatre, 2019) which investigated whether three different languages (English, Arabic, and Aramaic) would work on stage and how the chorus functioned in the play. A further form of R&D for commissioned plays is to do a rehearsed reading, where a playwright works with a director and a group of actors so that the writer can hear the play aloud and receive feedback from other creatives.⁴¹⁴ These examples of R&D offer further freedom to the writers and creatives to explore dramaturgical possibilities within their shows, which is genuinely helpful to creative teams ahead of the rehearsal process. Such decisions can influence the casting choices behind the shows and can help the writer or creative team form a robust draft of their work before getting into rehearsals.

Around one to three per cent of the entire RSC budget is focused on R&D, and of that percentage, around one per cent is dedicated to 'encounter' projects as mentioned earlier. Whilst this sum seems quite small, Whyman explained that 'it must be seen in the context of the entire infrastructure costs' of the RSC. She explained that of course, the team responsible for organising R&D would always desire the budget to be much higher, 'but we are a classical

⁴¹⁴ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

theatre company'.⁴¹⁵ As mentioned, priority is given to mounting Shakespeare productions and also the large-scale family shows. The majority of the budget for R&D is dedicated to work under commission at the RSC. The University also contributes to the payment of staff-led research projects, which have a different selection criteria. Due to the smaller proportion of the budget, the RSC has to be selective when inviting artists to conduct R&D. As such, the RSC have specific criteria for who and what they want to dedicate their time, space, and finances on.

As mentioned earlier, the RSC budget for certain types of R&D projects that provide them with new 'encounters'. Essentially, the RSC want to engage in peer-to-peer learning through these projects and want to be potentially changed by the experience. A key example of this type of R&D is the work of the RSC with Deafinitely Theatre, the first deaf launched and deaf led professional theatre company in the UK, which will be discussed later.⁴¹⁶ Another significant 'encounter' for the RSC was a project with Third Angel, a producing theatre company based in Sheffield. Third Angel make 'exciting and original contemporary performance that speaks directly, honestly, and engagingly to its audience', and their work encompasses live art, installation, film, documentary, photography, and design.⁴¹⁷ During the R&D week, Third Angel explored a French text titled *The Raise* (English translation) by Georges Perec. The text related to the RSC's definitions of 'radical' and 'mischief' in terms of its playful experimentation with form, as '[t]he structure of the play is derived from that of a fictional

⁴¹⁵ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴¹⁶ See Deafinitely Theatre, 'About Us' <<https://www.deafinitelytheatre.co.uk/about-us>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁴¹⁷ Third Angel Theatre Company, 'About Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/about-third-angel>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

management decision flowchart'.⁴¹⁸ Christopher Hall explains how the play maps 'the vicissitudes of an unnamed individual's attempts to secure a pay rise from their Head of Department' and 'exhausts every decision, action, option, choice and consequence dictated by Perec's satirical management flowchart'.⁴¹⁹ For Third Angel, the week was radically mischievous because it was the first time they were working with 'a prewritten text', which Rachael Walton, co-Artistic Director, explained, 'was a big thing for us as a company'.⁴²⁰

For Whyman, the project displayed 'a meticulous attention to the physical and visual as a way of unpacking or deconstructing a text' and she felt that Third Angel have a 'distinctive voice that is actually [...] very English'. She elaborated:

[t]here is always that level of precision, and that is what they brought to *The Raise*, which was all about exactly when someone was typing, or moving an object on their desk, or standing up [...] [t]he precision of that feels to me, in a central European tradition.⁴²¹

This sense of an 'English' voice, combined with the use of theatrical forms which felt 'European', made *The Raise* feel like a potential 'counterpoint' to the Europa season curated by Maria Åberg for the Swan in 2020, mentioned in the previous chapter.⁴²² However, *The Raise* coincided with the completion of a different project by Third Angel — *The Department of Distractions*, which premiered at Northern Stage in 2018.⁴²³ Alexander Kelly, co-Artistic

⁴¹⁸ Christopher Hall, 'Textual, Audio and Physical Space: Adapting Perec's Radio Plays for Theatre', in *Georges Perec's Geographies*, ed. by Charles Forsdick, Andrew Leek, Richard Phillips (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 111-124 (p. 120).

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

⁴²⁰ Rachael Walton, interview with author via Zoom, July 2021.

⁴²¹ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴²² Ibid. For Projekt Europa, see pp. 139-140.

⁴²³ See Third Angel Theatre Company, 'The Department of Distractions' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/the-department-of-distractions>> [accessed 8 July 2021].

Director of Third Angel, explained how *The Raise* ‘was going to be bigger’ in terms of set, and the company ‘were going to have to raise more money’ than ever before, ‘to make something that was similar’ to their work on *The Department*. As a result, *The Raise* has not been explored further, but Kelly acknowledged that the work on Perec’s text ‘did influence *The Department*’, in terms of the ‘movement sequences’ in the show.⁴²⁴

Not only do the RSC want to work with new people in R&D, but Birch explained, ‘we are very keen to develop company members, working with them so they become RSC artists, and we have special priority for our alumni assistant directors as well’.⁴²⁵ The RSC try to accommodate all requests from company members, although space and time are key challenges in this respect. A significant example of R&D from a company member was Danusia Samal, an actor in John Fletcher and Shakespeare’s *Two Noble Kinsmen* and Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (both Swan Theatre, 2016). Samal spent a week devising a new show called *Busking It*. This show was created out of Samal’s own experience of busking in the London Underground and the people she encountered. The week of R&D allowed Samal some space to explore and create her new show and she was able to utilise musical support from the RSC Music Department and she worked with an RSC director, Guy Jones.⁴²⁶ They were able to present the work as a showing to audiences as part of the 2016 *Making Mischief Festival* and following the R&D, this play was then commissioned by Shoreditch Town Hall and was co-produced by High Tide.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Alexander Kelly, interview with author via Zoom, July 2021.

⁴²⁵ Birch, interview with author.

⁴²⁶ Guy Jones worked as an assistant director at the RSC in 2016, working on *Cymbeline* (Royal Shakespeare Theatre) and *Always Orange* (*Making Mischief Festival*, TOP). Jones stayed with the project (*Busking It*) and directed the show in 2018. See Guy Jones, ‘Guy Jones’ <<https://guymeirionjones.com/>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁴²⁷ Samal previewed the play in the Soho Theatre, London, in August 2018, before taking the show to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that summer, and then presented it in the High Tide Festival and the Shoreditch

Samal's example of R&D reflects another key criterion — the RSC have to be 'uniquely placed to help' the artists or companies who are seeking to conduct R&D at TOP.⁴²⁸ The project has to be in a very early stage, and they will not accept shows that simply need rehearsal space.⁴²⁹ The Company encourage artists to think about how access to RSC resources and personnel is going to benefit their ideas. Samal was able to develop her ideas for a show and receive musical support while she was working for the RSC as an actor. The previous Third Angel example also matches these criteria in terms of being uniquely useful. Working with the RSC enabled the Sheffield-based company to work with a larger ensemble, and 'to get away from home and be in a new space'.⁴³⁰ Third Angel also worked with a choreographer for the first time on this project.⁴³¹ Whyman contended that this criteria of being 'uniquely placed to help' can be 'a grey area' because of course, there may be several other projects that would benefit from the same support.⁴³² It is clear that a number of factors such as budget, timing, and space dictate the extent to which the RSC can support various projects, but perhaps the incentive of what feels exciting to the RSC, and what could potentially lead into a future commissioned work, may help them to select which particular projects they would want to support.

Ultimately, the RSC will only offer space for R&D if there is a significant chance of this early idea being commissioned. In other words, the RSC has to be interested in the artist/s and/or that they have an interesting provocation or idea that might either influence the

Town Hall in September and October that same year. See *Busking It*, 'Home' <<https://buskingit.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁴²⁸ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴²⁹ Birch, interview with author.

⁴³⁰ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴³¹ Walton, interview with author.

⁴³² Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

policies of the Company or could potentially lead into a new commission. In terms of what ideas the RSC will take, Birch urges artists to look at the programming for TOP and the main houses to see what shows the RSC are making and the themes that are emerging, for example, big themes such as power and corruption.⁴³³ Hill's answer to what ideas the RSC are interested in exploring in R&D is as follows: 'if we know it, we are already behind the curve'. She explained that the ideas usually come from the artists that the RSC speak to, '[o]ften, it is an idea that I have not thought of, which is why having a constant contact with writers and theatre-makers is what makes the work radical'.⁴³⁴ Both Hill and Birch avoid being prescriptive as they want to invite an open dialogue between artists and the RSC. The RSC want to learn from people who do not operate in the same way as them, and in order to maintain relevance, they want artists to bring original ideas to the Company. That said, the RSC are clear about the general themes surrounding the work they want to make for their stages, implied in Birch's response. In terms of the Swan and TOP commissioning for new work, the RSC are interested in political plays that are bold and daring that tell audiences something about the world today. They are seeking writers that can write for large casts and are interested in being playful with form.

The first case study example of R&D certainly demonstrates some of the larger themes that the RSC are interested in exploring. *Strange News from Whitehall* by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard was set during the Interregnum period and focused on the writing and visions of Anna Trapnel, and this next section explores the way in which this project reflected 'Radical Mischief'.

⁴³³ Birch, interview with author.

⁴³⁴ Hill, interview with author.

Strange News from Whitehall

In July 2019, theatre-makers Brockis and Hubbard spent five days in TOP focusing on the seventeenth century ‘Fifth Monarchist visionary’ and ‘rabble rouser’ Anna Trapnel.⁴³⁵ Brockis and Hubbard have worked together since 2004 and had previously created *Kingdom Come* (Autumn *Mischief Festival* 2017) at TOP — a devised, site-specific piece centred around the Interregnum period. They had previously encountered Trapnel during their research for *Kingdom Come*, but Brockis and Hubbard decided not to include this woman in the show because *Kingdom Come* focused on other significant themes and ideas such as the execution of Charles I, and the impact on theatres before and after this significant moment in history. Instead, the voice of Trapnel could potentially be the basis for its own independent work. The week of R&D helped Brockis and Hubbard to re-calibrate their thoughts on Trapnel and to focus on her provocative text, *The Cry of a Stone* (1654).⁴³⁶ Within this text, Trapnel ‘defiantly predicted the end of Cromwellian rule in a printed text that sought a reading audience for these radical ideas’.⁴³⁷ Trapnel’s prophecies can be seen as ‘radical’ in the sense of being bold, courageous, and explicit in their anti-establishment views, which will be discussed later.

Initially, Brockis and Hubbard discussed making direct links between the text and the contemporary moment but decided to conduct a close reading of the text instead. They identified that the main challenge was the illegibility of this text to contemporary audiences.

⁴³⁵ Maria Magro, ‘Spiritual Autobiography and Radical Sectarian Women’s Discourse: Anna Trapnel and the Bad Girls of the English Revolution’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34, 2 (Spring 2004) 405-437 (p. 405).

⁴³⁶ Anna Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone*, ed. and introduced by Hilary Hinds (Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000).

⁴³⁷ Catie Gill, ‘“All the Monarchies of this World are Going Down the Hill” the Anti-Monarchism of Anna Trapnel’s *The Cry of a Stone* (1654)’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34, 2 (Spring 2004) 405-437 (p. 405).

Trapnel's visions are grounded in complex political narrative and the writing is difficult to navigate in terms of understanding who she is speaking to and referencing. Her work is also dense in terms of its multifarious theological ideas and iconographic imagery. Brockis and Hubbard aimed to work through the writing to create a clear story of Trapnel's visions. The majority of the time spent during the week was dedicated to reading, editing and cutting various fragments of text, and Hubbard then directed Brockis, who performed Trapnel for their work-in-progress to a small audience on the Friday afternoon.

This R&D project related to 'Radical Mischief' because Trapnel can indeed be considered a radical female voice in the seventeenth century. Catie Gill describes *The Cry of a Stone* as a 'timely, provocative and risky contribution to current affairs, presenting a critique of commonwealth politics in a clinical unmasking of Oliver Cromwell's rule'.⁴³⁸ Further, Trapnel's *Report and Plea* (also published in 1654) has been described as 'treasonous literature' and 'politically incendiary' because of its portrayal of Cromwell 'as a figure of political tyranny and injustice'.⁴³⁹ Her growing celebrity status as a radical figure of the time is highlighted by the fact that she was arrested in Cornwall in 1654, where she was due to speak, and she was taken back to London and imprisoned for up to fifteen weeks.⁴⁴⁰

As Trapnel's life and work relate both to radicalness and otherness, this text feels suited to the aims for TOP and new work. In terms of otherness, Trapnel was an unmarried woman of low social status, yet she claimed, 'direct divine communication'.⁴⁴¹ The idea that a woman of lower social status could communicate God's word threatened the very nature and

⁴³⁸ Gill, p. 30.

⁴³⁹ Magro, pp. 418-419.

⁴⁴⁰ Magro, p. 422.

⁴⁴¹ Whitney G. Gamble, 'The Significance of English Antinomianism for Anna Trapnel', *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, 17, 2 (July 2015) 155-166 (p. 163).

authority of Parliament. The main challenge of the week of R&D was finding out how to voice this subversive female and provide a suitable platform from which Trapnel's words could resonate, whilst also presenting the language in a clear, accessible narrative that still maintained its power and provocation. Brockis and Hubbard would discuss which thematic content and political references they liked within the text and at this early stage in the work, they largely focused on the introductory fifteen pages in order to set up the expositional material of this complicated world.

As part of the editing process, Brockis performed extracts of the text as the pair continued to work on creating a clear version for performance. Hearing Brockis read the text aloud enabled them to consolidate the material by understanding which aspects of the work felt interesting to them and conveyed a clear narrative. Each day, Brockis and Hubbard set a basic scene (a table and chair, or a blue throw on the floor) and Brockis read aloud different sections of text in either environment. These different settings enabled them to signal that Brockis (as Trapnel) was in a new time and place for each of the different extracts of text they were exploring. The stillness of Brockis as she recited the text, either by being sat at the table or by lying motionless on the floor, focused the attention of the viewer on the utterances of this woman. At times, Brockis would speak at a very slow and measured pace, her words becoming a tranquil lull. As the visions became increasingly erratic, Brockis spoke quicker and became more impassioned in tone. The relentless pace at which Brockis narrated the text during these visions may be seen as a radical way of bringing the text to life, as these fragmentary incantations dispensed with a logical form and regular speech patterns. Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972) was mentioned, creating the parallels of a displaced voice that never ceased proclaiming and the repetition of key utterances in Trapnel's text: 'Satan is strong [...]

temptations, they are strong.'⁴⁴² The experience of hearing Brockis narrate these scenes was challenging and intense at times, making for a radical performance in terms of the demands made on the audience.

Watching Brockis perform Trapnel's speeches, created shared resonances with how audiences in 1654 would gather to see the woman during her trances. There is a performative nature to her trances and interestingly, Trapnel never received visions when she was alone. She famously fell into a trance at Whitehall in front of large crowds and she was also accused of leaving her bedroom door and window open so that audiences could gather for her prophecies.⁴⁴³ Gill writes that, '[b]ecause she is fasting, and in a trance, her bodily identity reinforces her political message' and Maria Magro states that 'people pay attention to Trapnel [...] precisely because she makes a spectacle out of her body'.⁴⁴⁴ The stillness of Brockis as she performed Trapnel lying in a trance created both a sense of vulnerability, as she was physically overwhelmed and submissive to a higher power, and at the same time a powerful image of a woman who remained rooted and defiant in communicating her urgent message. Magro asserts that 'Trapnel's spiritual raptures function as subversive performances that invert the social hierarchy for a brief moment'.⁴⁴⁵ Though she is a woman of a lower social background, and although she is lying down motionless, Trapnel still holds power through these visions.

Trapnel has also been described as mischievous. Marchamont Needham (or Nedham), a journalist, pamphleteer, and government supporter, wrote to Cromwell on 7 February 1654

⁴⁴² Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone*, p. 17.

⁴⁴³ Magro, p. 420.

⁴⁴⁴ Gill, p. 28; Magro, p. 414.

⁴⁴⁵ Magro, p. 420.

and stated that Trapnel ‘does a world of mischief in London, and would do in the country’.⁴⁴⁶ Trapnel is related to ‘mischief’ in a threatening way, and the quote implies a concern that she had the capacity to disrupt and damage Cromwell’s reputation. More generally, the act of prophesying in the seventeenth century was received with suspicion and terror, thus pertaining to a sense of mischief in its more malign sense for those who disbelieved that Trapnel was communicating God’s word. Hilary Hinds describes the following:

[t]he signs that marked out a prophet — visions, trances, the hearing of voices, the capacity to desist from food and drink and yet remain healthy — were uncomfortably close to those that suggested witchcraft, the work of the devil, illness, or madness.⁴⁴⁷

This explanation contributes to the idea that Trapnel was mischievous as the work of prophesying was a transgressive and controversial activity. When Trapnel was imprisoned at Bridewell, she reported an encounter with the Matron who likened her to a ‘company of ranting Sluts’ and Magro explains that ‘*Ranter* was a byword for sexual promiscuity, gross immorality, bad manners, and, in particular, sexual determination for women’.⁴⁴⁸ Not only was Trapnel perceived as mischievous for her threat to Cromwell’s government, but the act of female prophesying led people to accusing Trapnel of sexual immorality. Within the text itself, lines such as ‘[T]he enemies are strong, Satan is strong, instruments are strong, temptations, they are strong, what strengths are against thy flock!’ and the phrase ‘all the

⁴⁴⁶ Marchamont Needham, quoted in ‘Volume 66: February 1654’, in *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic: Interregnum, 1653-4*, ed. by Mary Anne Everett Green (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1879) pp. 381-426 (p. 393). Accessed in *British History Online* <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/interregnum/1653-4/pp381-426>> [accessed 13 September 2021]. See also Hilary Hinds, ‘Introduction’, in Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone*, ed. by Hinds, p. xiii- p. xlvii (p. xviii).

⁴⁴⁷ Hinds, pp. xix-xx.

⁴⁴⁸ Anna Trapnel, *Anna Trapnel’s Report and Plea, or, A Narrative of her Journey from London into Cornwall* (London: 1654) p. 38. Accessed via Early English Books Online, May 2021; Magro, p. 405. Italics as presented in the original essay.

monarchies of this world are going down the hill' are potential examples of mischief as Trapnel alludes to destruction, sin, and the fight against temptation, which may have felt unnerving for her audience in 1654.⁴⁴⁹

The week challenged my own expectations of what artists may do in R&D when they are given their own space to be creative. Brockis and Hubbard surprised me in the sense of how static this week of R&D was. Brockis was a founding member of collaborative theatre company Shunt who are renowned for their 'radical use of space and audience' in their work.⁴⁵⁰ Shunt's work has been described as 'radical' because of their willingness to experiment with form and audience participation. *Dance Bear Dance* (2002, and revived in 2003), for example, took place in an underground tunnel in Bethnal Green and audience members were allocated different countries to represent upon arrival for a mock UN conference table setting. Critic Lyn Gardner explains, 'you find yourself part of an unfolding plot to blow up a nameless common enemy'.⁴⁵¹ As the plot goes wrong and Plan B is unleashed, the audience are ushered back into different spaces and confronted with another audience, thus leading the initial audience into trying to cover up their plot before the final reveal, where they return to the original conference room which is now 'gutted by an explosion'.⁴⁵² *Kingdom Come* was described by Ben Kulvichit as having 'all of the excessive theatricality of Shunt's work and amounts to an almost orgiastic visual experience'.⁴⁵³ Both acknowledged how invaluable it was to spend a week actually doing the work and being able

⁴⁴⁹ Trapnel, *The Cry of a Stone*, p. 17, p. 22.

⁴⁵⁰ See Shunt, 'About Shunt' <<https://www.shunt.co.uk/about>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁴⁵¹ Lyn Gardner, "'Dance Bear Dance" Review', *Guardian*, 11 March 2003 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/mar/11/theatre.artsfeatures1>> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁴⁵² Shunt, 'Dance Bear Dance' <<https://www.shunt.co.uk/dance-bear-dance>> [accessed 26 May 2011].

⁴⁵³ Ben Kulvichit, 'Kingdom Come Review', *Stage*, 14 September 2017, n. pg. Accessed in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XXXVII, Issue 18, p. 1005.

to sit down together and edit the text. Apart from myself, Brockis and Hubbard were largely left alone to conduct their work. Occasionally, Jake Bartle, a former producer at the RSC, would come into the room to see if Brockis and Hubbard were alright, and Whyman, who was unavailable for the presentation on the Friday afternoon, also called into the rehearsal room on the Thursday lunchtime.⁴⁵⁴ Whilst this activity does not initially feel mischievous, there may be a sense of mischief by actually pushing back against preconceptions of R&D — that one would step into a rehearsal room and expect theatre-makers to be constantly on their feet, playing and experimenting. Actually, Brockis and Hubbard were able to spend the week doing whatever they wanted. They did at times consult the rail of costume and props requested from the RSC, but for them, the week in TOP helped them to think seriously about their ideas around Trapnel. They identified the key challenge of this text and poured over the pages for crucial information that would create a provocative narrative grounded in political context.

The showing on the Friday afternoon was attended by twelve people: a mixture of RSC staff, and members of the public. Hubbard introduced the project and emphasised that the presentation was a work-in-progress and that they were still experimenting and playing with tones and textures. She added that the performance text was taken entirely from Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone* — no new words were added. The presentation was well received, and audience members raised several questions following the showing. Audience members desired to know more about Trapnel herself (her profession and her location, for example), and one audience member commented that the work would make for a great radio play. Other audience members reflected on the historical context and drew parallels between the Interregnum period and the present moment.

⁴⁵⁴ Bartle left the RSC in 2021 and is now the Delegate Manager for Coventry City of Culture.

This R&D week allowed Brockis and Hubbard to explore radical material which could lead into a potential future *Mischief Festival* play. Brockis and Hubbard benefitted from spending a week in Stratford away from other commitments and were simply able to consolidate their ideas. Whilst this case-study provided an example of the RSC maintaining a relationship with artists already associated with the Company, the next example demonstrates a new encounter for the RSC from a visiting theatre company.

Deafinitely Theatre's *Macbeth* R&D

In February 2017, Paula Garfield, Artistic Director of Deafinitely Theatre, worked with a group of Deaf actors in TOP for a week exploring *Macbeth*. Having recently directed two Shakespeare productions for short runs at Shakespeare's Globe (*Love's Labour's Lost* in 2012 as part of the World Shakespeare Festival, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2014), Garfield felt that it was time she contacted Whyman about directing a production in BSL at the RSC.⁴⁵⁵ Garfield and Whyman knew each other previously, as Garfield worked as a Deaf consultant with Whyman on a show, and Garfield also curated 'Silent Night', a storytelling event at the Gate Theatre in London, while Whyman was its Artistic Director.⁴⁵⁶ Whyman was interested in BSL and the use of sign language on stage, and she invited Garfield to come and do an R&D week at TOP.⁴⁵⁷

Deafinitely Theatre are based in London and work bilingually in BSL and English. Their primary language will always be BSL, but they strive to ensure that their work is accessible for both Deaf and hearing audiences. Garfield selected *Macbeth* for the R&D week and she was

⁴⁵⁵ Paula Garfield, interview with author via Zoom, April 2020.

⁴⁵⁶ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴⁵⁷ Garfield, interview with author.

particularly eager to explore the role of the witches in the play. She explained in an interview how historically, witches were outcasts in society, and she felt that this was a similar treatment felt by Deaf people in the community. In the context of war, Garfield felt that the witches may have seen mistreatment of women by male soldiers, which could be an incentive to take revenge on Macbeth. Gender therefore became an underlying theme of the R&D exploration, as Garfield wanted to explore the play through the perspective of the witches and their experience of living as outcasts in a male-dominated world.⁴⁵⁸

Garfield and her team of actors used a range of visual techniques to communicate and serve the storytelling of the play in an effective way, but also to ensure that both Deaf and hearing audiences were able to access the work. She explained, '[w]e wanted to get rid of the spoken dialogue and use sign language, body language and mime combined to explain what was actually happening on stage'.⁴⁵⁹ The first task of the R&D was to gain a greater sense of the meaning and the context of the selected scenes by translating the lines from the text into BSL as literally as possible. Garfield then encouraged the actors playing the witches to create scenes from the play using more 'iconic' signs. 'Iconic' or natural signs are clear to a non-signer. Whilst some signs such as 'eat' or 'drink' already have a high level of iconicity, it cannot be assumed that all signs are as straightforwardly iconic, for example, the sign for 'dog' (Figure 4) does not denote someone miming a dog.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Garfield, interview with author.

⁴⁵⁹ Garfield, interview with author.

⁴⁶⁰ City Lit Faculty of Deaf Education and Support, *British Sign Language for Dummies* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2008) p. 18.



Figure 4: BSL Sign for 'dog'. Image taken from British Sign Language Dictionary website <<https://www.british-sign.co.uk/british-sign-language/how-to-sign/dog/>> [accessed 8 June 2020]

Hence, a group of actors incorporating BSL and 'iconic' signs may have someone miming a dog (i.e. using hands as paws and pretending to pant) as opposed to using the BSL sign for the term to make the reference more accessible to hearing audiences. The group could then compare which version of the scene worked best i.e. presenting a scene in BSL, or enacting a scene through 'iconic' sign language. Whilst enacting a scene through 'iconic' language incorporates some elements of Visual Vernacular (VV), both are very different practices. VV is a form of theatrical sign language for solo storytelling that is owned by the Deaf community and is a distinctive art form in its own right. It contains nine different characteristics (such as placement, zoom effect, visual metaphor) and is an evolving discipline that incorporates filmic, 3D and comic effects to narrate a story.⁴⁶¹

There is a common misconception that gesture and mime are akin to BSL. BSL was first officially recognised as a minority language in the UK in 2003. BSL has its own syntactical structure and is owned by the Deaf community. Having actors miming a scene from *Macbeth* is not the same as translating scenes into BSL, and equally, having actors demonstrate visual

⁴⁶¹ VV-Visual Vernacular dir. by Pauline Stroesser (Point du Jour 2015) accessed via BSL Zone <<https://www.bslzone.co.uk/watch/vv-visual-vernacular/>> [accessed 27 March 2020].

or 'iconic' signs is also not classified as mime. BSL is not simply a series of hand gestures but incorporates non-manual features as part of its communication — facial expression and body language is vitally important when signing. Two different words may have the same sign (such as 'please' and 'thank you'), but facial expression, body language or lip patterns will help to differentiate signs in order to convey different intentions.

The company explored Act I scene three and Act IV scene one which involves the witches encountering Macbeth, and Macbeth returning to the witches to find out more from their prophecy. The group also explored the exchange between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth in Act II scene two following the murder of King Duncan, and Act V scene one where a Doctor and Gentlewoman discuss Lady Macbeth's odd behaviour, leading into Lady Macbeth's speech, 'Yet here's a spot...' (V.1.30-65). The scenes with the witches were enacted through 'iconic' sign language, which was particularly accessible to both Deaf and hearing audience members. A specific example was during Act IV scene one, where the line 'liver of blaspheming Jew' (IV.1.26), was enacted by 'the witches visually outlining a figure then grabbing and pulling him down to the floor, stabbing and cutting him open and then pulling his organs out'.⁴⁶² The enactment of this action highlights the violence and grotesqueness of the references that the witches are chanting about not only to Deaf audiences, but visually serves hearing audiences by explicitly showing them the implications of the witches' speech.

In contrast to the witches' scenes being performed in 'iconic' sign language, the scenes involving Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were performed in BSL. This different delivery of the text reflects the different uses of meter in the play (the witches speak, for the most part, in catalectic trochaic tetrameter, while Lady Macbeth and Macbeth speak in iambic

⁴⁶² Garfield, interview with author.

pentameter). BSL does not have a meter, so the different forms of sign language effectively communicated a sense of difference between the witches and Macbeth/Lady Macbeth. The scenes between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth required the audiences at the R&D (most of whom were hearing) to work a little harder to understand them, in comparison with the witches' scenes, but the highly expressive nature of BSL meant that many audience members found the work accessible and could follow the bulk of the scenes. The non-manual features of sign-language (i.e. body language and facial expression) are effective in conveying the emotions and relationships between the characters. It is also worth acknowledging that the audience in attendance (mostly staff at the RSC) were familiar with the story of *Macbeth*, so whether audiences who were not familiar with the play would have understood as much is another question.

The week of R&D was, in some senses, radical and mischievous, by the way in which the project had the potential to challenge and impact the ways in which the RSC operate. Over recent years, the RSC have endeavoured to increase the accessibility of their work for Deaf audiences, with semi-integrated signed performances of certain shows since 2014, and BSL tours of the RSC taking place. Most shows feature at least one captioned performance, and audio enhancement loops or headsets are available.⁴⁶³ However, whilst these measures were improving accessibility for Deaf audiences, there had never been a Deaf actor on the main stage of the RSC. By inviting Garfield to TOP, Whyman wanted to shake up the organisation and for staff at the RSC to consider the inclusion of prominent Deaf artists working on their

⁴⁶³ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Royal Shakespeare Company Extends its Commitment to Semi-Integrated British Sign Language Performances', 8 March 2017 <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/press/releases/royal-shakespeare-company-extends-its-commitment-to-semi-integrated-british-sign-language-performances>> [accessed 27 May 2021]; Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Access Needs' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/your-visit/access/access-needs>> [accessed 27 May 2021].

stages. Deafinitely has only worked on one co-production with another theatre company (a 2018 production of Mike Bartlett's *Contractions*, with New Diorama Theatre).⁴⁶⁴ Including Deafinitely in the RSC repertoire would be a great future milestone for the RSC, as the Company have yet to stage a Shakespeare production, or any production, entirely in BSL.

In some ways, the practice of this week's work was entirely conventional. Garfield and the group of actors were exploring a play and how to communicate the story most effectively on stage. However, the people involved and the politics surrounding the decision to enable this R&D to happen at the RSC is what makes this week feel radical. Essentially, a Shakespearean workshop was taking place at the RSC but not in spoken English. This week of R&D enabled Garfield to explore her own choice of play with her own choice of actors. By providing this support, the team were able to conduct their own research and take direct ownership of the play. There was a sense of radicalness in the room because the team were determined to change people's minds about BSL productions — the work would still be accessible and hearing audiences would not miss out. The work was not about Deaf actors presenting *Macbeth*; the actors inhabited the roles and presented the play as if Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were Deaf themselves. The work of Deafinitely 'has represented the richness and diversity of deaf culture, and reinterpreted "mainstream" works from a deaf perspective'.⁴⁶⁵ It is hugely valuable for Deaf audiences to see characters that they can identify

⁴⁶⁴ See Deafinitely Theatre, 'Contractions' <<https://www.deafinitelytheatre.co.uk/Event/contractions>> [accessed 27 May 2021].

⁴⁶⁵ Paula Garfield, 'How a Deaf Actor Launched the First Deaf-Led Theatre Company in the UK', *Independent*, 21 November 2017 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/paula-garfield-deafinitely-theatre-mike-bartlett-contractions-british-sign-language-a8065721.html>> [accessed 28 May 2021].

with on stage. Not only this, but, as Garfield explained, a Deaf or disabled actor will add a rich new perspective to the play, which can be ‘amazing’.⁴⁶⁶

The radicalness of this project is evident in the sense of creating something new and different that week at TOP. The showing was well attended as people were interested to see the results of the week, and key personnel such as Doran and Jacqui O’Hanlon (RSC Director of Learning and National Partnerships) were in attendance. The R&D conducted by Deafinitely in TOP did not result in a new show at the RSC, however, the influence of this week on the policy of the Company is visible. This week of R&D contributed to a significant aim for ‘Radical Mischief’ in terms of witnessing an osmosis effect — that being, the activity taking place in the new TOP having an impact on the work of the main stages and the wider organisation. Deafinitely’s work at TOP enabled staff at the RSC at the highest level to consider its approach to collaborating with Deaf practitioners and actors on their stages. Doran confessed that it was seeing the results of this R&D week at their showing that led him to consider casting a Deaf actor in his 2018 production of *Troilus and Cressida*.⁴⁶⁷ Charlotte Arrowsmith, who played the prophetess Cassandra, explains the great significance of this role to Deaf people:

[a]s a group we often experience ignorance, a lack of understanding of our communications, a failure to recognise that the message may be delivered differently but has equal value in terms of truth.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Garfield, interview with author.

⁴⁶⁷ Doran, interview with author.

⁴⁶⁸ Charlotte Arrowsmith, in Rebecca-Anne Withey, ‘Interview with Charlotte Arrowsmith, First Deaf BSL Actor in a Mainstream RSC Production’, *The Limping Chicken*, 23 November 2018 <<https://limpingchicken.com/2018/11/23/interview-with-charlotte-arrowsmith-first-deaf-bsl-actor-in-a-mainstream-rsc-production/>> [accessed 2 April 2020].

Arrowsmith became the first Deaf actor to appear on the RSC stage, and following Doran's production of *Troilus and Cressida*, she was subsequently cast in the 2019 summer season, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Further, Arrowsmith made RSC history as she became the first Deaf actor to perform as an understudy for a hearing principal actor when she played Vincentia during a performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*.⁴⁶⁹ Following this news, two Deaf actors, William Grint and Bea Webster, were cast as Young Shepherd (Grint) and Emilia (Webster) in the 2020 RSC production of *The Winter's Tale*, directed by Whyman, which was filmed and streamed to television audiences in April 2021.

While the casting of Arrowsmith in these productions is 'a brilliant start', Garfield reflected that there is still 'a very long way to go' for theatre companies wanting to increase inclusivity for Deaf audiences on their stages. By including one Deaf actor in the company, Garfield stated that 'this is a very similar repetition' which has been occurring in theatres for the past forty years. 'This is not a new thing that the RSC are doing' Garfield explained, '[i]t might be new to the RSC, but it is not new across the country'.⁴⁷⁰ Garfield helpfully reminds us of the specific contextual nature of radicalness. For the RSC, the casting of a Deaf actor in a Shakespeare production may be radical in 2018, yet this decision would not be considered radical when taking a wider theatrical context into account.

Casting one Deaf actor in a company of hearing actors can also lead to various challenges. By only having one Deaf actor in a company of hearing actors who cannot sign, Garfield stated that 'there is a huge mental health problem' as the Deaf artist cannot

⁴⁶⁹ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Deaf Actor Makes History' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/archive/deaf-actor-makes-history>> [accessed 28 May 2021].

⁴⁷⁰ Garfield, interview with author.

communicate with others.⁴⁷¹ Not only in terms of communicating in the rehearsal room, but Deaf artists may also miss out on social aspects of the process such as joining in with other actors during tea breaks. In terms of the acting process itself, there is a problem during scenes where a Deaf artist is communicating to another actor on stage in BSL, and the hearing actor is then replying to the Deaf actor with gestures or basic sign language skills. Garfield explained that ‘the language quality is jarringly different’ and that the Deaf audience ‘are suddenly missing the richness of the language’. Garfield acknowledged that this is a widespread problem across several theatres that incorporate a single Deaf actor into a company of actors who are hearing and cannot sign. She suggested that performances that aim to integrate Deaf actors need to have at least half the company consisting of Deaf actors and the hearing actors should be fluent in sign.⁴⁷²

Another significant achievement from this R&D week was that the experience was highly influential to the *Signing Shakespeare* project, the third staff-led research project led by Dr Abigail Rokison-Woodall, Senior Lecturer in Shakespeare and Theatre and Deputy Director for Education at the Shakespeare Institute. In late July/early August 2018, Rokison-Woodall collaborated with members of the RSC Department of Learning and Partnerships at TOP to explore workshop exercises that could be used to teach Shakespeare to Deaf children. Inspired by the Deafinitely R&D week, in which Rokison-Woodall participated, the decision was made to explore *Macbeth* in these new workshops. Actor Stephen Collins, who was part of the Deafinitely R&D week, also participated in the *Signing Shakespeare* R&D along with actor and BSL interpreter Becky Barry. The week of R&D was radical in the sense that it was

⁴⁷¹ Garfield, interview with author.

⁴⁷² Garfield, interview with author.

the first of its kind — that being, to develop exercises specifically for Deaf children in relation to Shakespearean pedagogy. However, the project was not necessarily radically mischievous on the whole, because this week of R&D was very different to other R&D projects at TOP. *Signing Shakespeare* was a collaborative research project between the RSC and the University of Birmingham. As such, the week of R&D was tightly structured with very clear outcomes. *Signing Shakespeare* was a playful week, but it was driven by specific goals that it had to deliver. The project intended to produce a series of practical exercises on Act I scenes one to three of *Macbeth* for two two-hour long workshops. Rokison-Woodall wanted to ensure that this particular project contributed to the REF Impact Case Study for the Shakespeare Institute, and she also secured additional funding from the University Impact Fund.⁴⁷³ As a result, slightly more pressure was added to this particular R&D week in order to achieve tangible results that could feed back to the University.

The *Signing Shakespeare* R&D was hugely successful, leading to the creation of a full set of workshop resources for the play, which have been trialled at three different schools for the Deaf. The workshops are based around films of key scenes, performed by Deaf actors in BSL/Sign Supported English and a performative, iconic sign, based on Visual Vernacular, which the team have dubbed 'Visual Shakespeare'.⁴⁷⁴ The idea to create these films emerged from the week of R&D. Arrowsmith has been included into the project as a director for these films.

The *Signing Shakespeare* Project was one of three staff-led research projects which stemmed from the collaboration between the RSC and the University of Birmingham. In 2016

⁴⁷³ For further information on the REF Impact Case Study, please see Research England, 'REF Impact' <<https://re.ukri.org/research/ref-impact/>> [accessed 30 April 2020].

⁴⁷⁴ Sign Supported English (SSE) incorporates elements of BSL to support spoken English, using the grammar and syntax of the English language.

the *Marina* Project, led by Professor Ewan Fernie (Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham) and Dr Katherine Craik (Oxford Brookes University) was the first staff-led research project, followed by the *Democracy* Project in 2017 led by Whyman, and the *Signing Shakespeare* Project in 2018. The *Marina* Project took inspiration from Shakespeare's *Pericles* to create a new play around the character of Marina and updated the narrative to respond to the 2015 Refugee Crisis, and explored ideas around the theme of 'Radical Chastity'.⁴⁷⁵ Each example was given some rehearsal space at TOP for R&D to take place, and staff, students and practitioners from both the University and the RSC engaged in different ways to create new knowledge and ideas. The significance of including these R&D projects as part of the collaboration demonstrates a desire from both institutions to learn more about and be influenced by each other's practices in conducting research and creating new ideas. This next section will explore the ways in which the *Democracy* Project was radically mischievous.

The *Democracy* Project

'Essentially, it was inspired by me feeling furious', Whyman explained. Particularly around the 2016 Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, Whyman felt frustrated at the 'quality of dialogue' between people: '[a]ll this energy went into persuading each other, but none of it felt intelligent or likely to succeed and instead what it did was entrench both positions, leaving us bitter and furious'.⁴⁷⁶ Whyman reflected on rehearsal rooms as a space where artists inevitably disagree with one another, and the way in which drama includes the use of tactics in order to listen and to change minds. She then considered Lucy Ellinson and

⁴⁷⁵ For further information, see Craik and Fernie, pp. 109-125.

⁴⁷⁶ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

Chris Thorpe, artists who shared Whyman's frustrations about democracy but used different tactics in persuading people through their own activism and writing.⁴⁷⁷ Following a meeting between the three, Whyman led a three-day R&D project at TOP which also included director Nicky Cox, myself as an observer, and Dr Daisy Murray (former Higher Education Programme Co-ordinator at the RSC) as a scribe.

The aim of the R&D project was to reflect on the outside world and to ask what could be done about it theatrically. Whyman was keen to have the group up on their feet making something which might have resulted in a performance. Drawing on rehearsal room etiquette, Whyman wished to explore whether the team could model a format of facilitating deep conversation with one another on a divisive topic and really understand each other's perspectives. Time was spent developing this new format into an exercise, which was then trialled with twenty University of Birmingham students in a two-day workshop at TOP in February 2018, and then also at the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference at one of the breakout sessions.

Essentially, the exercise required a participant to stand in the middle of the room and share a belief they held. The belief had to be true about themselves and was related to the global and political world i.e. 'I believe that the UK government should persuade people to eat less meat', as opposed to an opinion i.e. 'I believe that *Othello* is a rubbish play'. During the three-day R&D session, participants were encouraged to present beliefs to one another that others in the room were likely to disagree with. This felt quite challenging in a room of artists who generally shared similar political views, but the group arrived at different contrasting

⁴⁷⁷ Lucy Ellinson is a performer and activist who also played Puck in Whyman's 2016 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Play for the Nation* at the RSC. Chris Thorpe is a writer, performer and political activist and is an Associate Artist at the Royal Exchange, Manchester.

beliefs on subjects such as Tony Blair's 1997 Labour Government, the 2016 US Presidential Election, and the police force in the UK. The reason for trying to think of a belief that others in the room would potentially disagree with was to try and model a significant aim of the exercise — that being, how to have a conversation with someone who thinks very differently to you, how to hold the heat of that conversation, and how to really listen to one another respectfully.

The other participants were then required to thank the person in the middle and position themselves in the room in relation to the belief. The space was split into two axes — one wall represented 'strongly agree' and the opposite wall, 'strongly disagree'. On the other axis, one wall represented 'I don't understand' and the opposite wall, 'I do understand'. The person in the middle of the room remained in the same spot throughout the exercise, and others placed themselves in accordance with their perspective on the belief shared. The participants then had the opportunity to question the person in the middle in response to the belief they shared, asking questions beginning with 'why' only. Such questions were aimed to zoom in on that person's particular belief in order to understand the reasoning behind their views. The other rule was that participants could only ask questions based on the wording of the person voicing the belief — all questions had to relate to what that person had said and their choice of words, either from the original statement or in subsequent responses. Questions were not designed to catch the person out or to destroy their belief in any way, but to stimulate their thinking and to understand why they believed what they shared. The only other question that could be raised was a question of clarification i.e. asking the person to clarify what they meant by the certain use of a word or phrase. Participants (i.e. people other than the person in the middle, who remained still throughout) were allowed to shift their

positions in the room following the questions, as further explanation of the belief in some instances caused people to change their minds about their original stance. The person in the middle then had the option to ask individuals about why they had positioned themselves in certain places in the room.

The exercise related to Whyman's definition of radical, 'being bold or courageous or honest about content, calling something out, saying it how it is, not being afraid of being on the nose'.⁴⁷⁸ Participants were encouraged to be bold by sharing a belief that they were then questioned about. Even amongst a group of artists, this exercise felt exposing and the experience of being the person in the middle felt intense, especially after answering a series of 'why' questions. Participants were required to reveal a belief which others in the room could strongly disagree with, so for the exercise to work, participants had to step out and say something potentially revealing or unpopular.

The exercise was exposing for everyone in the room and not just for the person in the middle. Participants were unable to control or anticipate what the person in the middle said, and participants may have found themselves in a position where they were having to reveal to the room their thoughts on a potentially controversial topic. In the R&D session, the artists acknowledged that there was a great level of respect for one another, but perhaps if this exercise was taken elsewhere participants would not necessarily receive the same treatment and people might feel more vulnerable. It was discussed how this exercise, if trialled in a school setting, might lead to bullying or shaming in some way, and that the exercise required careful facilitation.

⁴⁷⁸ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

A sense of discomfort was felt when trialling the exercise with students from the University of Birmingham. There was a mixture of undergraduates and postgraduates in the room from various liberal arts courses and students were largely unfamiliar with one another. One of the suggestions mentioned to improve the exercise was that there should be a neutral space in the room for anyone who did not want to respond to a certain belief that was put forward, or if the participants felt indifferent about the subject matter. This suggestion implies that the exercise did not feel safe for certain students, and they did not appreciate the forced participation elements, whereby they suddenly had to position themselves in relation to someone else's belief. It is, of course, important to recognise the sensitivity of students who might not wish to engage with certain beliefs, particularly if statements were triggering for them, yet, it is also the case that the creation of a neutral space may be destructive for the person in the middle. Participants taking themselves away from another's belief could make the person in the middle feel that they had caused offence. Equally, a participant placing themselves neutrally could undermine the person in the middle's belief, making it feel trivial. When discussing the word 'belief' during the R&D session in 2017, participants felt that generally there was a level of respect around beliefs and that challenging them felt different — beliefs are not necessarily logical, and not straightforwardly right or wrong. This exercise demonstrated the care one has to take around people's beliefs, but also the bravery required to voice beliefs and to speak about them in an honest and open way.

The exercise felt formally radical as the format abandoned all regular forms of verbal discourse. During the R&D session, participants felt challenged by the set rules of only asking 'why' questions, and only being able to use the words of the person in the middle. These challenges were also felt by the students in the February workshops, and a new frustration

was also shared amongst the group over semantics. Following a practice run of the exercise, the first belief from a student was, 'I believe all women should be feminists'. While a number of students rushed forward to position themselves in the top right corner of the room ('strongly agree' and 'I understand'), there was a mixture of uncertainty from others who placed themselves in the 'disagree' area of the space. Students were unsure whether they shared a similar definition of feminism to the person in the middle, and there was a sense of personal frustration reflected in some participants. The urge to explain the term 'feminism' was apparent and the exercise demonstrated that students did not feel represented by the simple axis. Students felt limited in the voicing of their opinions, and one of the main aims of the exercise was thus lost. The focus of the exercise was intended to create better listening to someone else's belief. Better listening enables people to understand others' points of view, and the function of the questioning part of the exercise was to find out why the person in the middle held this particular belief. By continuing to ask questions, it was hoped that participants would find the underlying reasons behind a person's belief, as opposed to diverting from the topic or adding other perspectives to the dialogue. However, the frustration felt by students in positioning themselves in relation to the belief made it clear that their focus was more on themselves and how others viewed their perspective, as opposed to genuinely listening and finding more about the person in the middle.

When the exercise was then modelled in one of the curated sessions at the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference at TOP, it was led by Ellinson and Thorpe, alongside Dr Cristina Delgado-Garcia and Dr Aneta Mancewicz, both formerly of the Drama Department at the

University of Birmingham.⁴⁷⁹ Delgado-Garcia and Mancewicz led opening provocations which invited participants to explore their own relationships with democracy, and the roles of social media and technology in representing democracy. Ellinson and Thorpe then explained their process and invited everyone to participate in the exercise. On the second day in particular, participants felt frustrated by the axis as it did not feel adequate in terms of expressing agreement or disagreement. As a result, the number of potential axes were explored in a three-dimensional entity, which demonstrated elements of the democratic process such as qualification (i.e. how qualified a person feels to proffer agreement to an opinion), comfortability, and how much a person cared about that topic. The results of the day did not reach a definitive conclusion, but discussions were held about ‘democracies’ being a far richer topic of exploration as opposed to a definitive ‘democracy’. Questions were also raised about how this closed environment of a rehearsal room which felt democratic could be actualised in the outside world.⁴⁸⁰

Reflecting on the discoveries of both the workshops with the students and with participants in *Radical Mischief*, Whyman stated that the team ‘learnt a lot about the potential and the power’ of the exercise, ‘but also the risks’ too. The exercise worked best ‘when everyone participating brought a genuine openness to the process’, and when this did not happen, ‘a strong power dynamic’ was felt where certain participants may have tried to ‘win’. A significant outcome was the realisation that Whyman, Thorpe and Ellinson by themselves, ‘three white practitioners of a certain age range’, could not succeed with the aims for their

⁴⁷⁹ Dr Cristina Delgado-Garcia is a Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at the University of Glasgow since 2018, and Dr Aneta Mancewicz is now a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London.

⁴⁸⁰ David Norris, Scribe Report on ‘Democracy’ in Royal Shakespeare Company website, ‘Radical Mischief’ <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/education/higher-education/radical-mischief>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

project and so they invited ‘someone who had a different lived experience’ to join them ‘in the thinking and building’ of the project. The team met for a two-day session and Whyman reflected that ‘personally, it all fell apart’ and she felt ‘challenged that the RSC had no right to be in this space’.⁴⁸¹ The conversation enabled the team to reflect on the role of the RSC as a cultural institution and whether they could indeed facilitate an open and democratic discussion. The team had to realise the weight of the organisation upon the project, and how the identities of the people involved impacted the aims for the work. Whyman had previously felt ‘a luxury of operating in that project’ with Thorpe and Ellinson without thinking about her role as Deputy Artistic Director of a major organisation. Whyman stated the following:

At that point when we brought someone in to look hard at whether we were seeing everything, one thing that was thrown up very firmly was that this just looks like white privilege trying to claim some sort of superiority in this space and you cannot do that.⁴⁸²

Whyman concluded that the conversation was very ‘sophisticated and interesting’ as the team discussed ‘how violent white privilege can be, even when a group of people are setting out to do something inclusive’. The project has come to a standstill, with Whyman not wishing to pursue the work any longer.⁴⁸³ Despite not having achieved a future life for the project beyond these initial workshop trials and discussions, in no way does this project constitute as a failure just because it didn’t get commissioned. The R&D was a significant learning experience for the team as they explored how to facilitate democratic discussion, and the implication of their

⁴⁸¹ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴⁸² Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

own identities and relationship with the RSC which affected their goals for creating open dialogue.

The three main case-studies for this chapter have received different outcomes, which highlights the open-ended nature of R&D projects at TOP. There may be some projects that reflect ‘Radical Mischief’, but the RSC might still decide not to commission them. An example of this is Simon Startin’s R&D in 2017 which explored Jean Genet’s *The Balcony* (1956) as ‘a piece of work exploring perceptions about disabled bodies’, Whyman explained. Whyman may have felt that the work reflected radicalism by being bold and challenging its audience as the work ‘was explicitly about smashing’ any ‘perceptions and preconceptions’ with regards to disability and sex. Whyman reflected, ‘[w]as it too radical? Absolutely not [...] it was exactly what he [Startin] wanted it to be’.⁴⁸⁴ There may be a number of reasons why the RSC decided not to commission this work, involving their own programming, and whether they felt that the piece could thrive elsewhere.

Another example of an R&D that felt radical but did not result in a commissioned work at the RSC was a project led by theatre practitioner Terry O’Connor, also in 2017, which explored questions around what it really means to act. Taking Hamlet’s response to the emotion portrayed by the First Player in Act II scene one as a starting point, O’Connor experimented with two actors on the delivery of text and different emotions. O’Connor recognised a sense of mischief in the project, ‘a revelation of the sous-texte or underside which I hope might be comical and risky at times’.⁴⁸⁵ The R&D week aimed to unearth the

⁴⁸⁴ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴⁸⁵ Terry O’Connor, ‘Creative Fellow in Residence at The Other Place: What’s the Project?’ <<https://uobattop.tumblr.com/post/157815915460/creative-fellow-in-residence-at-the-other-place>> [accessed 29 May 2021].

internal process of an actor's experience with text, a revealing process which would be unique to each performer and text. Aspects of this work may indeed be mischievous, but the work can also be seen as radical by going to the roots of what it means to perform to each individual and relates to the RSC's aim for radicalness by being brave and honest.

These two examples highlight radical and mischievous activity that takes place through R&D projects at TOP, and they also demonstrate the reality that not every artist or idea that works with the RSC will receive a commission. It may be that the work is suited to another venue, or that the idea has reached its finality and there is nowhere else to take the work amongst other reasons. Whilst the above examples reflect projects that relate to the aims for 'Radical Mischief', Whyman contended that there are also a number of R&D showings that are not radically mischievous enough. When asked for certain examples of these, Whyman confessed, '[i]n an awful sort of way, I cannot remember them because they slightly disappear from trace' while in contrast, she remembered 'every moment of Simon [Startin]'s piece'.⁴⁸⁶

Whyman reflected the following:

You hit a point where you realise that what you're seeing is its best self and [the project] would do very nicely somewhere else. Sometimes we would read a play and feel that us doing it in the context of the TOP Studio isn't going to be radical or mischievous.⁴⁸⁷

Another situation the RSC may find themselves in, as demonstrated with the Third Angel example, is that the visiting company may decide to pause the work and focus their energies on a different project. The RSC cannot anticipate the direction in which various partnerships

⁴⁸⁶ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

⁴⁸⁷ Whyman, interview with author via Zoom.

or R&D projects will go. What matters is the time and energy that is committed into exploring important ideas and working with a range of different artists to try things and to 'fail as well as succeed' as outlined by Whyman in the introductory quotes to this chapter. Perhaps it is time for both the theatre and the academy to reconsider its definition of 'success'. The RSC is an arts organisation that, while subsidised, relies on making money from its shows in order to survive. Whilst of course it is important for companies like the RSC to focus on rehearsal and production, this chapter demonstrates how crucial it is to serve artists by allowing them space and time to reflect on their practice and to develop new ideas away from commercial pressures.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the importance of conducting R&D at the RSC. A certain number of R&D projects at TOP enable artists to work with the RSC for the first time, which is crucial in order to generate new ideas and to refute any perceptions of elitism and exclusivity. R&D is a valuable opportunity to alleviate pressure from artists to enable them to re-focus on process and not product. Whilst opportunities for R&D at the RSC can sound utopian in terms of the amount of support and wide-ranging resources available, there are limitations. The RSC dedicates only a finite amount of money and resources towards conducting R&D, and as a result, they are selective about the projects that they are interested in developing. The Company want to support potential ideas for new work that are rooted in the contemporary moment in urgent or exciting ways: ideas that deeply reflect, provoke, or challenge the RSC in terms of their practice and thinking. This could take the form of an R&D project that deeply questions theatrical practice, or it could mean working with a story that reflects 'Radical

Mischief' in terms of its courageous and bold engagement in politics, and/or by the ways in which it seeks to be formally playful. Through R&D projects, the RSC want to invest in new ideas and voices and experiment with theatrical forms in order to maintain this spirit of 'Radical Mischief' which they seek to create at TOP.

Whilst writing this chapter, it has become apparent that the 'radical' side of 'Radical Mischief' has felt more discursive in relation to the R&D projects explored. This contrasts with the previous chapter, where 'mischief' was easily identified in the *Mischief Festivals*, and it was harder to denote a show as 'radical' in terms of either its form or content. R&D in its essence feels mischievous as it provides artists with freedom to be playful. That said, the purchase of this chapter has rested on 'radical' because the serious pursuit to find answers to difficult or complex questions is worth highlighting. This does not undermine 'mischief' as an important phrase in relation to theatre-making, but in the context of the case-study examples I have focused on the boldness of the ideas and the underlying politics of the R&D projects, and their potential impact on the RSC.

This chapter has illuminated the often over-looked 'research' aspect of 'R&D'. This is because not enough focus or value is placed on research in theatre practice by arts organisations, and the collaboration between the University and the RSC provides an opportunity for both parties to engage in new ways of thinking and working for both the theatre and the academy. What connects all case-study R&D projects, in addition to *Signing Shakespeare*, is the desire to think deeply and critically about a subject that may have impact for a contemporary audience or the outside world. A reflection on the present moment was underlying *Strange News from Whitehall* and Deafinitely's R&D; *Strange News from Whitehall* focused on bringing a seventeenth-century text to life for contemporary spectatorship, and

Deafinitely's *Macbeth* explored how to translate and perform the text in ways that would be accessible for both Deaf and hearing audiences. *Democracy* and *Signing Shakespeare* hoped to find new ways of doing things — *Democracy* sought to model better ways of listening and *Signing Shakespeare* hoped to improve accessibility for Deaf children in the way that Shakespeare was taught in schools. Each case-study desired to create a new contribution, something that could speak to a twenty-first century audience or be applied to a contemporary classroom, and R&D at TOP offered a rare setting for these artists and scholars to collaborate.

I question whether R&D can remove external pressures entirely and allow full artistic freedom for practitioners. On the one hand, artists such as Brockis and Hubbard were able to do whatever they wanted for a week without the interference of producing partners or external voices. Yet, if the presentation held weight and the RSC were interested in them, their ideas could lead to another commission. By this recognition, there is much at stake in an R&D presentation which could potentially lead to future work at the RSC or elsewhere. R&D generally offers artists working at TOP the freedom and time to explore a new idea, but these opportunities are subject to a number of different factors and criteria. If artists are fortunate to receive support from the RSC, then there is a space for them to potentially create their own temporary utopias for acts of 'Radical Mischief' to take fruition.

Whilst this chapter has demonstrated that R&D offers a temporal setting for artists to be as radical or as mischievous as they wish, one could question, in spite of the collaboration between the University of Birmingham and the RSC including University-led staff research projects, the extent to which academics in university institutions are allowed to be radically mischievous. As mentioned, Rokison-Woodall's R&D was structured and tailored around very

clear objectives, and her position and responsibilities as senior lecturer ensured that she had to deliver her goals. The question of how 'Radical Mischief' sits in the academy is continued into the following chapter, which documents the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference at TOP.

Chapter Four:

Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics

On the 20th and 21st July 2018, theatre-makers and academics spent two days at TOP and the Shakespeare Institute in the first conference organised by the University of Birmingham and the RSC. Hosted by Whyman and Professor Ewan Fernie (Shakespeare Institute), the *Radical Mischief* conference was a major event as part of the five-year collaboration between the two parties, which Whyman describes as, '[b]ringing together the minds of theatre and scholarship for "a conference like no other"'. *Radical Mischief* intended to 'move away from the traditional conference format' by using provocations and open space technology 'to inspire open and enquiring debate'.⁴⁸⁸ The conference aimed to break down hierarchical structures that seem to govern conferences in order to provide a space where all participants could speak freely and openly to one another. The following question was raised in the event brief: '[i]n unstable times, can such inter-disciplinary discourse reinvigorate the spirit of democracy itself?'.⁴⁸⁹ The conference wanted to model more efficient ways of having conversations between artists and scholars that responded to the ever-changing political and social crises occurring around the world at the time of the event. Inspired by the spirit of 'Radical Mischief',

⁴⁸⁸ Erica Whyman, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Radical Mischief with the University of Birmingham' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/radical-mischief-with-the-university-of-birmingham>> [accessed 5 September 2018].

⁴⁸⁹ University of Birmingham, 'Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics' <<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/edacs/departments/shakespeare/top/events/2018/radicalmischief/index.aspx#:~:text=Born%20of%20the%20pioneering%20collaboration,RSC's%20centre%20for%20research%20and>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

the conference sought to 'challenge ideas about everything from gender to democracy' and to 'explore and discuss pressing questions in our world with imagination and fresh eyes'.⁴⁹⁰

This chapter explores the ways in which the above conference fulfilled its title by being radical and/or mischievous. I use the definition provided by Whyman of 'radical in the intent of being experimental, playful, changing form' to demonstrate how the conference playfully disrupted the typical academic conference format.⁴⁹¹ This playfulness in subverting usual conference aspects (keynote speeches, Q&A sessions, seminars etc.) led to a shift in terms of who was given permission to speak and be heard. Notably, artists were given the same intellectual status as academics, and early-career researchers were provided with opportunities to speak alongside mid-career and highly established scholars. This chapter will unpack what happened as a result of these altered forms by outlining the ideas discussed and the conversations that emerged from these new settings.

My own attendance and documentation of the conference informs this research, along with interviews from various conference participants. I interviewed a range of academics and artists involved in the conference, some of whom acted as co-facilitators and scribes for the curated conversations, and others who attended as delegates. I also sought to interview participants from various institutions at differing stages of their career, ranging from PhD students to professors. This interview material has informed my understanding of the ways in which the conference impacted those participants and their experience of the event. In addition, I have also consulted with anonymous feedback from the conference survey which was sent to all participants following the event to gain as much scope as possible in terms of

⁴⁹⁰ Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Radical Mischief with the University of Birmingham'.

⁴⁹¹ Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

how the conference was received. This chapter will proceed by outlining the aims of the conference before considering how the event subverted the ‘traditional’ academic conference experience.⁴⁹² Following this, the morning provocation sessions will be explored, along with the curated conversations, before analysing the aims and outcomes of the open space sessions. This chapter will then conclude by assessing the overall impact of *Radical Mischief*, and the challenges that ‘Radical Mischief’ brings to both the theatre and the academy. For the purposes of clarity, I use inverted commas (‘Radical Mischief’) as demonstrated thus far in the thesis to refer to the slogan itself, and *Radical Mischief* in italics to refer to the conference event.

Radical Mischief Conference: Aims and Origins

Academic conferences, at their best, can enable valuable conversations and the sharing of ideas between delegates. But conferences are not without their challenges. Depending on the scheduling of events and the number of delegates present, it can be difficult to find adequate time and space during conferences to reflect with others. Inevitably, hierarchies will exist in terms of social groups being formed — professors who already know each other, colleagues from the same institution, for instance — and opportunities to meet and engage with new people can be scarce depending on the context. Early-career scholars are particularly disadvantaged as they step into an unfamiliar space to promote their own research and make connections with potential future colleagues.

⁴⁹² Ewan Fernie in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube, 26 October 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrFylbmaAkQ>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

Conferences are vital in terms of networking within and across disciplines. They enable academics to disseminate research, receive feedback, and establish ‘reputation and thus the opening of career opportunities’ as well as ‘maintaining established positions’.⁴⁹³ However, the general format of conferencing may feel wearisome and conventionalised. Emily F. Henderson depicts the conference experience as ‘long days of papers which may or may not speak to their titles or the conference theme’.⁴⁹⁴ Angelo Benozzo, Neil Carey, Michela Cozza and others describe checking one’s presentation until the ‘last minute’ and not listening ‘to other participants’ presentations’.⁴⁹⁵ The structuring of a conference is further denounced as ‘all too predictable’, consisting ‘of abstract after abstract, presentation after presentation, paper after paper, old/known/familiar knowledge being replaced by another set of old/known/familiar’.⁴⁹⁶ Not only does conferencing seem intense and laborious, but the rigidity of the structure risks both concentration overload and a lack of time to reflect on new ideas being shared.

The above quotes further imply that conferences can be restrictive towards the emergence of new types of knowledge. The conference event is described ‘as a space which, in its current format and approach, tends towards practices that discipline and police bodies, objects and ways of knowing-doing’, rather than opening space for new possibilities for research and ways of disseminating ideas.⁴⁹⁷ The conference itself is, therefore, a space that

⁴⁹³ Philipp Aufenvenne, Christian Haase, Franziska Meixner, and others, ‘Participation and Communication Behaviour at Academic Conferences – An Empirical Gender Study at the German Congress of Geography 2019’, *Geoforum*, 126 (2021) 192-204 (p. 192).

⁴⁹⁴ Emily F. Henderson, ‘Academic Conferences: Representative and Resistant Sites for Higher Education Research’, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 34, 5 (2015) 914-925 <DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2015.1011093> (p. 914).

⁴⁹⁵ Angelo Benozzo, Neil Carey, Michela Cozza and others, ‘Disturbing the AcademicConferenceMachine [*sic*]: Post-qualitative Re-turnings’, *Gender Work Organ*, 26 (2019) 87-106 <DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12260> (p. 93).

⁴⁹⁶ Benozzo, Carey, Cozza and others, p. 88.

⁴⁹⁷ Benozzo, Carey, Cozza and others, p. 89.

regulates and controls bodies of knowledge, and can limit the ways in which academics are able to collaborate and build new ideas together.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theorisation of the carnivalesque can frame an understanding of *Radical Mischief's* aims, as the event sought to create a new, temporary space which played with the format of the academic conference experience. Writing about medieval festivities that took place across Europe, Bakhtin suggests that 'carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, norms and prohibitions'.⁴⁹⁸ Likewise, in the context of higher education, *Radical Mischief* aimed to provide a space that offered more freedom for its participants and challenged assumptions about how academics and practitioners should behave in conferences.

This perceived conference etiquette can be related to Bakhtin's writings on the carnivalesque, as Bakhtin outlines the rigidity of the social structures and the expected patterns of behaviour within the official feasts during the medieval period before he explains how the carnivalesque subverted these expectations. Bakhtin writes that '[r]ank was especially important [...] everyone was expected to appear in full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position'. These feasts are further described as 'a consecration of inequality'.⁴⁹⁹ In the academic conference space, 'unspoken conventions' exist in terms of the delegates'/speakers' seating arrangements, the sense of dress code, and the standard procedure of events whereby attendees observe and take notes in silence until the floor is opened to questions.⁵⁰⁰ *Radical Mischief* played with these rules.

⁴⁹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T Press, 1968) p. 10.

⁴⁹⁹ Bakhtin, p. 10.

⁵⁰⁰ Henderson, p. 915.

The following chapter investigates how *Radical Mischief* attempted to disrupt the format of the academic conference experience in order both to challenge the sense of hierarchy often felt in conferences, and to create a space where participants could lead their own discussions. This chapter also reflects that some of the most productive conversations tend to take place during breaks and at the conference dinner, as opposed to during seminars, presentations, and speeches. Bakhtin outlines how ‘a special type of communication impossible in everyday life’ occurred during carnival time because rank and social order was suspended. Speech and gesture became liberated from social etiquette, and ‘frank and free’ interactions emerged between people of all classes.⁵⁰¹ *Radical Mischief*, as will be outlined, engaged with Bakhtin’s idea of ‘frank and free’ discussions by capturing the rich and invigorating interactions that can occur at conferences as a central theme that flowed through the entire event. This will now be discussed in further detail.

The initial aims of the conference related to the term ‘radical’ by the way in which Fernie stated that the event was seeking to go to the ‘roots’ of what theatre is and what it can do and these same questions were asked about the role of universities.⁵⁰² During a promotional video for *Radical Mischief*, Fernie raised the question of what a conference actually is and what a conference could be. *Radical Mischief* aimed to provide a time for space and reflection on the practices of academia and theatre-making, with an emphasis towards future action. The event was an opportunity to re-invent the ‘traditional’ concept of a conference by focusing on capturing the most fruitful discussions that happen during

⁵⁰¹ Bakhtin, p. 10.

⁵⁰² Fernie in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube.

conferences, which according to Fernie, often occur at the conference dinner.⁵⁰³ Whilst Fernie and Whyman did invite key speakers from both the theatre and the academy to provide plenary sessions and to lead breakout sessions, they sought to create a space for discussions to happen throughout the two days through the curated conversations and open space format. Thus, Fernie described the *Radical Mischief* conference as re-discovering ‘the conferring, the conversation’.⁵⁰⁴

In the same video, Fernie acknowledged that conferences had become ‘institutionalised’ and ‘could do with a bit of refreshment’ and referred to the model of conferring that takes place in a rehearsal room.⁵⁰⁵ Whyman added that not enough status is given to the quality of conversations that artists are able to curate in the rehearsal room, where sometimes a diverse group of people can gather around an idea and differences of view can be heard.⁵⁰⁶ Of course, this may not happen in every rehearsal room depending on the production and the group of people involved, but what Whyman is perhaps referring to is the ability of a rehearsal room, in its best possible setting, to enable a sharing of ideas in a free and open environment where listening can really take place. It is the unique qualities of a rehearsal room that Fernie and Whyman wished to draw upon for this conference to bring people from various disciplines together and to engage in open and honest conversation. How this was achieved will be discussed later.

⁵⁰³ Fernie in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube.

⁵⁰⁴ Fernie in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube.

⁵⁰⁵ Fernie in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube.

⁵⁰⁶ Erica Whyman in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube.

The conference began, on each of the two days, with a provocation and conversation. On the Friday, Professor Jonathan Dollimore and theatre director Emma Rice each shared a provocation, and Saturday's provocations were provided by Professor Dympna Callaghan (Syracuse University), actor and writer Charlie Josephine, playwright and journalist Juliet Gilkes Romero, and the late Professor Sir Roger Scruton, who passed away in January 2020. Gilkes Romero stepped in for RSC director Iqbal Kahn who was originally intending to provide a provocation, but unfortunately was unable to attend the event. Following this ninety-minute session, participants were invited to attend curated conversations led by various academics and artists. Participants chose from a range of topics such as gender, institutions, race, democracy, art, form, difficulty and the public sphere, violence, and religion. Over the course of the two days, participants attended two different curated conversations of their choice. The afternoon was then dedicated to the open space format, which will be discussed later.

On the Friday lunchtime, RSC actor Niamh Cusack and Dr Katherine Craik (Oxford Brookes University) shared the stage for 'Writing to Effect Change', where Cusack explained her involvement in *Refugee Tales* and Craik in the *Marina* Project with Fernie and the RSC. *Refugee Tales* was a series of readings by actors from the RSC summer season on the Friday evening of the conference, and the tales were based on the true stories of refugees and their experiences of immigration detention centres in the UK.⁵⁰⁷ *Marina*, as briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, is a new play written by Craik and Fernie as a result of the 2016/2017

⁵⁰⁷ Since 2015, the organisation Refugee Tales have led large-scale walks every summer in solidarity with asylum seekers, refugees and people who have been held in immigration detention centres. Inspired by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, professional writers and people with lived experience of detention share their tales in evening events. For more information on Refugee Tales see the organisation website: Refugee Tales, 'About Refugee Tales' <<https://www.refugeetales.org/about>> [accessed 9 June 2020].

staff-led research project from the collaboration.⁵⁰⁸ During the Saturday lunch break, a Q&A session was held with theatre-maker Terry O'Connor, artist Tom de Freston and Professor Simon Palfrey (Oxford University), whose work (O'Connor's *Walking On*, de Freston's *Poor Tom* and de Freston and Palfrey's *Demons Land*) was shared throughout the conference in the foyer of TOP as a film screening.

"We Don't Quite Know How This Conference is Going to Take Shape"

In some ways, this opening statement by Fernie sounded unprepared.⁵⁰⁹ Fernie and Whyman welcomed a room of academics and practitioners in TOP Studio Theatre on the Friday morning of the conference, and this particular remark was greeted with warm applause. Whilst the logistics and structuring of the conference were planned months in advance, Fernie's comment referred to the content and the potential discoveries of the event. He outlined that the conference aimed to 'speak across disciplinary boundaries to each other which involved risk taking in order "to find a common language"'.⁵¹⁰ What does 'risk taking' look like in an academic conference setting? Robert Boost Rom writes that 'learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in favour of a new way of seeing things'.⁵¹¹ This statement by Boost Rom relates to Fernie's encouragement of taking risks in *Radical Mischief* as participants were invited to learn from their artistic or academic compatriots and to be challenged by considering different perspectives. Of course, the *Radical Mischief* conference is not unique in this respect, as any good conference or lecture should

⁵⁰⁸ For further information on the *Marina* Project, please see Craik and Fernie, pp. 109 - 125.

⁵⁰⁹ Ewan Fernie, 'Welcome', *Radical Mischief* Conference, 20 July 2018, The Other Place Studio Theatre.

⁵¹⁰ Fernie, 'Welcome'.

⁵¹¹ Robert Boost Rom, "'Safe Spaces": Reflections on an Educational Metaphor', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 30:4 (1998) 397-408 <DOI: 10.1080/002202798183549> (p. 399).

challenge students' or delegates' ways of thinking. Fernie and Whyman encouraged artists and scholars to have 'bolder' and 'braver' conversations with one another and thus invited participants to share views that they may not normally feel comfortable discussing in a professional setting.⁵¹² Whether participants felt confident in doing so is another matter, and in relation to Fernie's opening remark above, the outcomes of these conversations, and thus the content of the event, could not have been predicted at the beginning of the conference.

Fernie and Whyman's rhetoric in the welcoming address relates to Boost Rom and others' work in social justice and education studies by advocating for a 'brave space' in a critique of the commonly used 'safe space'.⁵¹³ Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens echo Boost Rom by sharing their experience of students conflating 'safety with comfort' (p. 135), which may in some circumstances lead to 'an entrenchment in privilege' (p. 140) — students opting out of conversations that challenge them in some way. Equally, students can 'react with incredulity to the very notion of safety, for history and experience has demonstrated clearly to them that to name their oppression [...] is a profoundly unsafe activity' (p. 140).⁵¹⁴ Arao and Clemens encourage moving 'from the concept of safety and emphasizing the importance of bravery instead, to help students better understand — and rise to — the challenges of genuine dialogue on diversity' (p. 136). It is important to note that Arao and Clemens 'see great value in many of the tenets of safe space' (p. 139), such as enabling students to speak freely and

⁵¹² Erica Whyman, 'Welcome', *Radical Mischief* Conference, 20 July 2018, The Other Place Studio Theatre.

⁵¹³ See Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, 'From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice', in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, ed. by Lisa M. Landreman (Virginia: Stylus, 2013) pp. 135-150. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text. See also John Palfrey, *Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free Expression in Education* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

⁵¹⁴ See also Zeus Leonardo and Ronald K. Porter, 'Pedagogy of Fear: Toward a Fanonian Theory of "Safety" in Race Dialogue', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13:2 (2010) 139-157 <DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2010.482898>.

honestly about controversial issues. Hence, they use important aspects of students' notions of safety (e.g. respect for one another) and further these important ground rules in order to encourage productive and honest conversation. Fernie and Whyman encouraged bravery and 'risk taking' in order to inspire participants to embrace the challenges of tackling difficult issues at the conference and to model better ways of conversing with one another.

The conference felt different in relation to other academic conferences in the sense that participants (except for the plenary speakers and those leading a curated conversation) did not need to prepare anything. An advertisement for the conference explained the following:

There will be no uninterrupted, pre-written papers; instead there will be two provocative plenary conversations, between high-profile figures with challenging views, intended to inspire open debates. The conference will then curate a series of focused conversations in different formats, including active participation and open space technology, led by artists, scholars and conference participants.⁵¹⁵

This description of the conference provided prospective delegates with a brief suggestion of the form of the conference but did not reveal much information on the content of the event, other than the 'challenging views' expected. Prospective delegates may have been questioning the extent of their 'active' involvement, and what 'different formats' these 'focused conversations' would take. The decision not to have a call for papers, along with the ambiguity of not knowing what to expect meant that delegates could not prepare in advance what they were going to share with one another. The conference provided an opportunity for

⁵¹⁵ Royal Shakespeare Company and University of Birmingham, 'Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics' promotional advertisement, n. pg.

participants to put aside their own interests, which can sometimes be used as a defence mechanism in conversations, a retreat to what the practitioner or researcher knows and hence feels comfortable discussing. Dr Abigail Rokison-Woodall shared her views on the conference: '[t]he idea that people could get together in the same space and have conversations rather than share their pre-prepared expertise felt crucial'.⁵¹⁶ The event aimed to democratise discourse and put people in a room together to see what happened — what relationships would forge, what new ideas could be developed, and significantly, what theatre scholars and practitioners could learn from one another. In order to spark the conversation, each day began with a plenary session, which this chapter will now address.

Plenary Provocations and Discussion

Academic conferences often involve prominent academics imparting new, ground-breaking research to a group of their peers. The *Radical Mischief* conference followed this idea by inviting notable speakers from both the theatre and the academy, but not for the purposes of publicising a new, influential theory or an upcoming theatre production. Speakers were strictly not allowed to present a paper, although notes were permissible. Instead, plenary speakers were asked to provide a provocation and were briefed with the following information: '[w]e would like you to say what you think is needed/would be radical now, in relation to art, thought or society'.⁵¹⁷ It is interesting that the speakers were asked to consider the term 'radical' specifically, and not 'Radical Mischief' or 'mischief' itself. Perhaps this implies a greater weight and currency on the word 'radical' for the purposes of sparking controversial

⁵¹⁶ Abigail Rokison-Woodall, quoted in Mary Davies (forthcoming).

⁵¹⁷ I am grateful to Sally Delbeke, Partnership Manager for the University of Birmingham, for providing this information, which was sent in private correspondence between Fernie, Whyman and the plenary speakers.

or provocative debate. Rather than prescribing to the speakers the sense of what 'Radical Mischief' means to the RSC, speakers were invited to think about their own interpretations of 'radical', and their views on how artists and scholars can think, act, and work together in new ways.

Shortly after Whyman and Fernie welcomed everyone on the Friday morning, Dollimore and Rice kickstarted the conference proceedings by delivering their provocations. Rice and Dollimore are a significant pairing as both have departed from a Shakespeare institution or academic establishment and have been previously associated with radicalism. Dollimore is famous for his 1984 ground-breaking monograph *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, and for being a prominent figure in establishing the field of cultural materialism with Alan Sinfield at Sussex University in the 1980s. Dollimore and Sinfield notably edited the collection *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1985) together. The pair received much criticism for their work; Dollimore explained that 'there were those who actively tried to suppress' *Political Shakespeare* from being published, 'considering it an outrage to the then prevailing Shakespearean establishment'.⁵¹⁸ Not only in terms of their work on cultural materialism, but Dollimore has also revealed the criticisms they had for their studies into sexual dissidence: 'One Tory MP said that the University should be shut down, disinfected AND subjected to the financial equivalent of carpet bombing.'⁵¹⁹ Further, '[t]he University vice chancellor at the time [...] let it be known that he wished Sinfield and I would leave'.⁵²⁰ Dollimore eventually left institutional academia, his reasons for which were explained in his provocation.

⁵¹⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, 'Then and Now', *Critical Survey*, 26, 3 (2014) 61-82 (p. 68).

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Capitalisation from the original.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Rice came to the conference having recently left Shakespeare's Globe in April 2018, just two years after she became its third Artistic Director in 2016. Before her appointment at the Globe, Rice was the former co-Artistic Director of Kneehigh Theatre, an international touring company based in Cornwall. A notable aspect of Rice's directorial work is the way in which she conducts her rehearsal rooms — all collaborators have an equal voice and her actors are viewed as 'story servants'.⁵²¹ Some may have felt Rice's appointment as Artistic Director of the Globe rather surprising — she had only directed one Shakespeare production (a 'radically altered *Cymbeline* for the RSC'), and her theatre-making approach favouring devising and playfulness may have raised initial concerns over her approach to Shakespeare.⁵²² Despite complementary key links between her work at Kneehigh and her work at the Globe (a focus on storytelling and creating a lively dynamic between the actors and audiences), critics commented that 'her radical approach has received mixed reviews'.⁵²³ Citing her 2016 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an example of her 'radical approach', writers Rashid Razaq and Will Moore explain how Rice included 'modern costumes, changing the sex of characters, Bollywood dancing and snippets of Beyoncé and David Bowie, as well as a live electric band'.⁵²⁴ During her time at the Globe, Rice also spoke openly and

⁵²¹ Rice, 'On Directing'.

⁵²² Nick Curtis, 'Emma Rice on the Wonder Season, Being the New Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe and Why Folk Tales Are her Heart and Soul', *Evening Standard*, 5 January 2016 <<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/emma-rice-on-her-wonder-season-being-the-artistic-director-of-shakespeare-s-globe-and-folk-tales-a3148711.html>> [accessed 10 August 2020].

⁵²³ Rashid Razaq and Will Moore, 'Globe's Artistic Director to Leave Theatre After Summer of Discontent', *Evening Standard*, 25 October 2016, p. 3.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

honestly about her relationship with Shakespeare's plays (the press capitalised on her comments that she gets 'very sleepy' when she tries to read his work).⁵²⁵

In October 2016, when Rice announced that she would be leaving the Globe in 2018, there was significant speculation over the reasons for her exit, namely a dispute about her excessive use of lighting and sound equipment.⁵²⁶ However, Rice made very clear, a few months later, that the decision to leave had more to do with artistic freedom than technological equipment. In an open letter published on the Globe's blog, Rice wrote that 'as important and beloved as the Globe was to me, the Board did not love and respect me back', stating that she was 'excluded from the rooms where decisions are made'. In the same letter, Rice wrote that she had learnt 'not to say that I sometimes find Shakespeare hard to understand' and her resignation came because the board 'began to talk of a new set of rules that I did not sign up to and could not stand by'.⁵²⁷ Despite receiving notable box office success with her opening season (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* achieved 98% audience capacity), Rice demonstrates her feelings that her views and work were not welcomed nor respected by the board, and that she could not align her practice with what was expected of her.⁵²⁸

On the Saturday morning, Fernie and Whyman had invited more voices from different political backgrounds and perspectives. Scruton was renowned for his controversial thinking,

⁵²⁵ Lyn Gardner, 'The Globe's Emma Rice: "If Anybody Bended Gender it was Shakespeare"', *Guardian*, 5 January 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jan/05/shakespeares-globe-emma-rice-if-anybody-bended-gender>> [accessed 10 August 2020].

⁵²⁶ See BBC News, 'Emma Rice: Shakespeare's Globe Boss to Leave Over Lighting Row', 25 October 2016 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37761530>> [accessed 14 September 2021]; Hannah Furness, 'Emma Rice Leaves Shakespeare's Globe After Row Over Modern Lighting', *Telegraph*, 25 October 2016, n. pg.

⁵²⁷ Emma Rice, 'A Letter from Artistic Director, Emma Rice', Shakespeare's Globe <<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2017/04/19/a-letter-from-artistic-director-emma-rice/>> [accessed 20 August 2020].

⁵²⁸ Audience Statistic from Shakespeare's Globe, Shakespeare's Globe Annual Review 2016, published March 2017, p. 6.

‘a conservative who enjoyed antagonising the liberal establishment’.⁵²⁹ He ‘rejected multiculturalism and defended the rooted realities of family and faith, nation and tradition’, stated that ‘although homosexuality has been normalised, it is not normal’, and has presented Islamophobic views mentioned later.⁵³⁰ Inviting Scruton to speak at the *Radical Mischief* conference was a deliberate act of provocation to the audience of academics and theatre practitioners to hear someone with conservative, reactionary views.

Khan is a British theatre director from Birmingham with Pakistani heritage, whose previous work at the RSC includes an all-South Asian cast in the 2012 production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the 2015 *Othello* starring Hugh Quarshie, which featured the first Black actor to play Iago for the RSC, Lucian Msamati.⁵³¹ At the time of the conference, Khan was preparing for the 2018 RSC production of Molière’s *Tartuffe*, adapted by Anil Gupta and Richard Pinto. This new version was set in a Pakistani-Muslim community in Sparkhill, Birmingham, which, as mentioned in Chapter Two, was posited as ‘the bravest show of the year’ by critic Dominic Cavendish.⁵³² Khan has spoken in several interviews about his desire for Shakespeare to speak ‘urgently in a 21st century context’ and he has also raised concerns about representation and tokenism in the British theatre.⁵³³ Khan called for ‘the building of strategic relationships with artists’ throughout companies and repertoires, and his advocacy

⁵²⁹ Maurice Glasman, ‘Roger Scruton and the Longing for Home: A Liberal Bohemian and a Conservative’, *New Statesman*, 17 January 2020, p. 18.

⁵³⁰ Dominic Green, ‘Roger Scruton: A Conservative for Modern Times’, *Wall Street Journal*, 14 January 2020, p. 15; Roger Scruton, ‘This “Right” For Gays is an Injustice to Children’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 January 2007, p. 24.

⁵³¹ Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘Iqbal Khan 2015 Production’ <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/othello/past-productions/iqbal-khan-2015-production>> [accessed 16 September 2020].

⁵³² Cavendish, ‘Tartuffe Review, RSC Swan’.

⁵³³ Iqbal Khan, quoted in Tom Wicker, ‘Iqbal Khan: ‘I want Shakespeare to Speak Urgently in a 21st-Century Context’, *Stage*, 28 June 2016 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/iqbal-khan-i-want-shakespeare-to-speak-urgently-in-a-21st-century-context>> [accessed 14 September 2021].

for having ‘complicated conversations’ on matters such as race in order ‘to learn’ chimes with the aims of the conference for enabling better discussion.⁵³⁴

As previously mentioned, Khan was replaced by Gilkes Romero, who was already attending the conference to co-facilitate the curated conversation on difficulty and the public sphere. Gilkes Romero was the writer for *Day of the Living* as discussed in the second chapter, and in 2020 *The Whip* opened in the Swan Theatre, a play which tackled the 1833 British government’s decision to abolish slavery and compensate slaveowners, mentioned in Chapter One.⁵³⁵ Her ‘largely political’ work is inspired by her experience as a broadcast journalist, reporting from countries such as Ethiopia and Haiti, where she encountered ‘the most courageous people living in extraordinary situations, refugees, migrants and political activists fighting for their human rights and dignity’.⁵³⁶ Her activism and advocacy of ‘asking difficult questions’ made Gilkes Romero an ideal speaker at the conference.⁵³⁷

Callaghan is a prominent Shakespearean academic who was President of the Shakespeare Association of America in 2012-2013. Callaghan has written extensively on issues such as feminism and Shakespeare, and scholarship that addresses Shakespeare’s life, his language, and his writing. In particular, her 2000 monograph *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* is described as ‘a controversial study of female impersonation and the connections between dramatic and political representation

⁵³⁴ Iqbal Khan, quoted in FIPA Arts, ‘Iqbal Khan (British South Asian Theatre Memories)’, Youtube, 25 March 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvZxCJ2l-6s>> [accessed 14 September 2021]; Iqbal Khan interviewed by Barbara Bogaev in Folger Shakespeare Library, ‘Iqbal Khan’, in *Shakespeare Unlimited: Episode 128*, 17 September 2019 <<https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/iqbal-khan>> [accessed 14 September 2021].

⁵³⁵ For *Day of the Living*, see pp. 106-121. For *The Whip*, see p. 37.

⁵³⁶ Gilkes Romero, *The Whip*, p. 132.

⁵³⁷ Gilkes Romero, interview with author.

in Shakespeare's plays'.⁵³⁸ The pairing of Callaghan and Scruton as academic thinkers on the panel brought a divergence of voice on issues such as feminism (as will be discussed later) from two established names in the academic world. Further, Callaghan's engagement in pedagogy and her desire to equip students to 'generate new ideas', to 'move away from the sometimes rigid patterns of writing and thinking' associated with 'formal papers and exams' was another reason why she was a suited choice to provide a provocation to a room of educators and practitioners.⁵³⁹

Josephine is an actor and a playwright whose play, *Bitch Boxer*, won several awards including the Soho Theatre Young Writers Award in 2012. In 2018 Josephine played Mercutio in Whyman's production of *Romeo and Juliet* and Bardolph in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (dir. by Fiona Laird). Josephine is 'passionate about making art that's honest, visceral, sweaty' and particularly enjoys 'stories that put working class women and queer people centre stage'.⁵⁴⁰ Their provocation about theatre being 'braver' in a 2018 *Stage* article made Josephine an appropriate and potentially inspiring candidate for the plenary conversations.⁵⁴¹

The plenary provocations were broad in range and opinion, but centred around key ideas such as identity, truth, honesty, and fear. Dollimore accused universities of implementing policies that made teaching 'dishonest' and stated that 'the very language in which these policies were cashed was itself a corrupt language'.⁵⁴² His views on identity

⁵³⁸ Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. i.

⁵³⁹ Dympna Callaghan, *Hamlet: Language and Writing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) p. xvi.

⁵⁴⁰ Charlie Josephine, 'Charlie Josephine' <<https://charliejosephine.com/>> [accessed 17 September 2021].

⁵⁴¹ Charlie Josephine, quoted in Natasha Tripney, 'Actor and Writer Charlie Josephine: "UK Theatre Could Do with Being Braver – it Should Be Visceral"', *Stage*, 30 April 2018 <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/actor-and-writer-charlotte-josephine-uk-theatre-could-do-with-being-braver--it-should-be-visceral>> [accessed 23 June 2021].

⁵⁴² Jonathan Dollimore, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice', *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place Studio Theatre, 20 July 2018.

politics became the focus of his provocation. Instead of modelling how participants can acknowledge and discuss identity in constructive ways, Dollimore focused on discourse that seeks to police identity politics, in his opinion. Dollimore read a list of shaming terms (i.e. ‘mansplaining’, ‘gammon’ etc.), arguing that, ‘[t]he point is the issue with the terms themselves which have a certain inbuilt imprecision which is weaponised to police and intimidate in a hinterland of prejudice’. Such terms are used in Dollimore’s opinion to shut down conversations and belittle people, and the ‘imprecision’ which Dollimore refers to relates to his belief that identity politics has become detached from philosophy and ethics.⁵⁴³ Dollimore’s comments were challenging as he seemed dismissive of political correctness, an issue that was present and debated throughout the conference.

The following day, Gilkes Romero also spoke on political correctness by asserting that, ‘we have to create the kind of space that is safe’ for people to speak their minds. During the discussion following the provocations she added that it was a shame that political correctness felt like a ‘dirty word’.⁵⁴⁴ A question of clarification by an audience member on what was meant by the panellists’ references to ‘political correctness’ enabled Gilkes Romero to explain her definition of the term. Gilkes Romero pointed out that to her, political correctness ensured that people who have been marginalised are heard by others, a statement that was greeted with applause by the audience.⁵⁴⁵ Whilst Dollimore raised an important concern about the use of shaming terms to weaponize and therefore shut down conversation, Gilkes Romero’s points

⁵⁴³ Dollimore, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice’.

⁵⁴⁴ Juliet Gilkes Romero, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’, *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place Studio Theatre, 21 July 2018.

⁵⁴⁵ Gilkes Romero, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

were equally significant in terms of creating a space where participants can feel safe to voice their opinions. The conference appeared to be centred around identity politics as a major point of contention, with some in the room arguing against this topic and others reasserting its importance in order to move forward in discussions.

Gilkes Romero's own provocation was focused on her concerns about the denial of facts threatening the very concept of democracy. Gilkes Romero referred to Brecht's political activism in his play, *Life of Galileo* (1943), and she also included the example of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), which presented a satirical critique of the Soviet Union regime. *Animal Farm* was initially rejected by many publishers, including Faber & Faber, which was headed by T.S. Eliot at the time. Eliot wrote to Orwell saying that they had 'no conviction [...] that this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time'.⁵⁴⁶ Gilkes Romero challenged the audience, asking, 'are we George Orwells or T.S. Elliots?'. Her provocation made the audience consider their own complicity in the denial and suppression of facts, and she encouraged people to 'speak our minds' in order to facilitate 'Radical Mischief'.⁵⁴⁷

Gilkes Romero's provocation offered an encouragement of bravery, which can also be identified in Callaghan's provocation. Callaghan spoke contrastingly to Dollimore, when she proposed that universities 'are institutions of promise and possibility'.⁵⁴⁸ By focusing on 'mischief' in *Hamlet*, Callaghan began by outlining that the usage of the term in Shakespeare

⁵⁴⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to George Orwell from Faber & Faber Limited', 13 July 1944, accessed via British Library website <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/letter-from-t-s-eliot-faber-to-george-orwell-rejecting-animal-farm-13-july-1944>> [accessed 20 August 2020].

⁵⁴⁷ Gilkes Romero, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton'.

⁵⁴⁸ Dympna Callaghan, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton', *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place Studio Theatre, 21 July 2018.

is very different to the light-hearted, playful meaning it is given today. Rather, 'mischief' is closely related to 'mischance' which connotes disaster and evil and 'a concatenation of unpredictable events'. Callaghan linked the sense of mischief in the play that creates suspense to 'all teaching and all acting' that involves 'sight integrated performance' and that both professions have to 'respond to what's on the ground'.⁵⁴⁹ In summary, Callaghan was advocating a thoroughness and detailed enquiry into language and literature in order to arrive at difficult and uncomfortable points which are relevant today. She reflected that she 'mischievously' presented a 'rather conventional paper' but finished by encouraging mischief in education with the popular quote, 'mischief, thou art afoot, take what course thou wilt' (*Julius Caesar*, III.2.253-254).⁵⁵⁰

Another speaker who centred on the word 'mischief' was Rice, who raised the following questions: '[c]an you force mischief to happen? Can you decide to be mischievous, or decide to be experimental?'.⁵⁵¹ Rice explored how one can create the 'conditions for mischief' and 'experimentation', and spoke about her need to be 'playful', which is her preferred term as opposed to 'experimental'. Her provocation challenged the notion that 'playfulness is knocked out of us from the moment we're born', something which, she claimed, the 'women in the room, know [...] more than the men'.⁵⁵² Rice's work is centred on playfulness in order to remove any sense of hierarchy in rehearsal rooms, and for her actors

⁵⁴⁹ Callaghan, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton'.

⁵⁵⁰ Callaghan, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton'.

⁵⁵¹ Emma Rice, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice', *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place Studio Theatre, 20 July 2018.

⁵⁵² Rice, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice'.

and collaborators to feel safe so that they can push at any boundaries to produce exciting work.

Rice did not talk about her experience at the Globe during her provocation. However, her assertions about the need to be playful, particularly in terms of referencing her rehearsal rooms where the company play with lighting, sounds and costumes, felt pertinent. Her practice in the rehearsal room is continually asking 'what if?' questions and she creates an environment in which there is no 'wrong' answer or suggestion.⁵⁵³ Underlying her practice is this political sense of having permission to take up space, and having the freedom and time to explore an idea and to get things 'wrong'. Rice's provocation provided a significant challenge to academia. By relating her politics to higher education, one wonders how much room there is in universities to be playful and to facilitate an environment free from critical judgement and pressure to behave and act in a certain way.

This sense of having permission to take up space was also reflected in Josephine's provocation the following day. In referencing their role in *Romeo and Juliet*, Josephine shared that, 'I pinch myself every day of rehearsals and hold my breath, waiting for them to very politely ask me to leave'.⁵⁵⁴ Reflecting on their own identity and experience of acting, Josephine's provocation challenged assumptions about Shakespeare and performance in terms of who is allowed to play certain roles. Josephine questioned, '[w]hy is it radical to have a female Mercutio?'.⁵⁵⁵ Specifically in relation to Mercutio, Josephine explained how the

⁵⁵³ Rice, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice'; Rice, quoted in Duska Radosavljević, *Theatre-making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2013) p. 75.

⁵⁵⁴ Charlie Josephine, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton', *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place Studio Theatre, 21 July 2018.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

character contrasts with how women are supposed to behave: ‘women are taught to be pretty and passive and polite. And this job requires me to be the exact opposite, in public [...] She [Mercutio] demands being looked at, being seen’.⁵⁵⁶ Josephine’s rhetoric here echoed Rice’s provocation: ‘[w]e are rewarded for being good, for being quiet, polite, kind, for not causing trouble’.⁵⁵⁷ Like Rice, Josephine also spoke their truth about criticism and women being told to be prettier, neater, and more violently, to stop.⁵⁵⁸

Josephine shared their views of radicalism by speaking about ‘the need’ to do something, which echoed Rice’s description of a similar sense of urgency: ‘I have that powerful itch which is about something deeply personal’.⁵⁵⁹ Both artists reflected their views on how they tackle and respond to injustice in their own world and offered an encouragement of risk taking. Josephine questioned, ‘[w]hat if actually, the most radical acts are born out of uncertainty, out of curiosity, out of vulnerability?’.⁵⁶⁰ Josephine and Rice articulated ‘deeply personal’ views and their need to create change and spoke clearly about criticism and fear which stunts creativity.⁵⁶¹ Josephine reflected that ‘[w]hen I’m caught up in my head, worrying about what I think you think about me I can’t hear my gut instinct, when I’m trying to be clever I can’t be creative’. They added that in order to be creative, ‘I have to allow myself to be honest, like right now, and it’s scary.’⁵⁶² Both Rice and Josephine modelled honesty and

⁵⁵⁶ Josephine, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

⁵⁵⁷ Rice, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice’.

⁵⁵⁸ Josephine, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

⁵⁵⁹ Josephine, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’; Rice, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice’.

⁵⁶⁰ Josephine, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

⁵⁶¹ Rice, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice’.

⁵⁶² Josephine, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

vulnerability in sharing their views, thus relating to the RSC's definition of 'Radical Mischief' being about boldness and bravery and not being afraid to call out injustice.⁵⁶³ Jacqui O'Hanlon, Director of Learning and National Partnerships at the RSC, reflected the following in response to Josephine's provocation and the voices of the artistic community that were present in the conference: 'you realise how much those voices are needed to cut through and challenge in bold, daring and mischievous ways'.⁵⁶⁴ O'Hanlon observed that certain artists like Josephine were able to contribute to this sense of disrupting the typical conference format by sharing their honest experiences in playful yet powerful ways. Josephine's provocation was playful in the sense of experimenting with the form of conference delivery — their provocation resembled a spoken word piece.

Out of the range of plenary speakers, Scruton can easily be identified as an outsider in this environment due to his conservative politics. A recent report on 'Academic Freedom in the UK' suggested that UK-based academics 'are more left-leaning today than ever before', and theatres have also been described recently as 'left-wing', as discussed briefly in Chapter One.⁵⁶⁵ It is uncomfortable to acknowledge that Scruton can, in some ways, relate to 'Radical Mischief' by representing a menacing and threatening kind of 'mischief' in his controversial writing; his homophobic comments earlier, for example, are troubling. That said, the potential 'mischief' evoked by Scruton's provocation at the conference was not of a pernicious kind. Given Scruton's reputation, he spoke rather tamely and emphasised the irony at being asked

⁵⁶³ Definition of 'radical' provided by Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

⁵⁶⁴ Jacqui O'Hanlon, interview with author via Zoom, August 2020.

⁵⁶⁵ Remi Adekoya, Eric Kaufmann, and Thomas Simpson, 'Academic Freedom in the UK: Protecting Viewpoint Diversity', *Policy Exchange*, 3 August 2020 <<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Academic-freedom-in-the-UK.pdf>> [accessed 15 September 2021]; Patrick West, 'British Theatre Needs to Re-examine its Politics', *Spectator*, 30 June 2020 <<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/british-theatre-needs-to-re-examine-its-politics>> [accessed 18 September 2020].

to speak at the conference. He admitted, 'I'm not mischievous at all' and explained 'how it is I've spent my life combatting "Radical Mischief"'. Scruton described his 'ordinary' childhood life and his introduction to literature, before explaining his reaction to the 1968 protests in Paris, where he realised that he was 'a rebel against rebellion' as he opposed the tearing down of institutions and instead, wanted to preserve 'order and simplicity'.⁵⁶⁶ Scruton's speech offered a different reaction to radicalism. He questioned, 'maybe I am the real radical because I don't fit in'.⁵⁶⁷ Scruton is referring to the fact that he was clearly the only conservative thinker on the panel and perhaps this comment implied that he disagreed with others' views or did not feel like he belonged in this setting.

Whyman observed that Dollimore and Scruton 'were slightly destabilised by their artistic compatriots, and that [...] felt exciting. They modified how they spoke and what they were saying.'⁵⁶⁸ Perhaps Dollimore and Scruton were not used to sharing an intellectual platform with artists, and in Scruton's case, a space with people whose interests he has previously discredited. Scruton has been outspoken in terms of anti-feminist discourse, writing in 2018 that '[t]here are now experts in the art of taking offence, indeed whole academic subjects, such as "gender studies", devoted to it'.⁵⁶⁹ Placing him on a panel next to Callaghan, a professor whose edited works include *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*

⁵⁶⁶ Roger Scruton, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlotte Josephine and Roger Scruton', *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place Studio Theatre, 21 July 2018.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Erica Whyman, interview with author, Stratford-upon-Avon, November 2019.

⁵⁶⁹ Roger Scruton, 'The Art of Taking Offence', *Spectator*, 10 August 2018 <[spectator.co.uk/article/the-art-of-taking-offence](https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-art-of-taking-offence)> [accessed 14 August 2020].

(2000, 2016) and *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (2007), and hearing Josephine's experiences, it was surprising that Scruton kept silent on such matters.⁵⁷⁰

Scruton remained a controversial figure at the time of the conference. A couple of weeks following the event, he published an article where he opined that the Prime Minister's comparison of Muslim women to 'letterboxes' was 'humorous' and that Boris Johnson was 'right' in his comment.⁵⁷¹ It is striking that Scruton chose not to speak freely and openly at the conference as he does in this article, perhaps because he felt that he would come under heavy scrutiny if he did. Kenan Malik, in an article titled, 'The Uncomfortable Truths About Roger Scruton', reflected that Scruton 'could wield an elegant argument, but his views were often ugly' and that 'there was another Roger Scruton, not the philosopher but the polemicist'.⁵⁷² At the conference, Scruton attended as the 'philosopher' but not as the 'polemicist' as he appears in the writing of articles demonstrated above. Perhaps there was a sense of 'mischief' in the way that Scruton did not rise to the occasion of delivering a reactionary provocation. Aware that he was clearly the only conservative thinker invited to engage on the panel, he may have resisted doing what people expected of him.

Wilson argued that the conference was neither radical nor mischievous, but was 'tame, cautious and circumspect'. He stated that Dollimore and Scruton 'would have been perceived in the 1980s as being polar extremes' and that '[o]ne of the most surprising but inevitable developments in the conference was the extraordinary and coercive degree of consensus'.

⁵⁷⁰ See Dympna Callaghan, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, 2nd edn (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2016); Dympna Callaghan, ed., *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007).

⁵⁷¹ Scruton, 'The Art of Taking Offence'.

⁵⁷² Kenan Malik, 'The Uncomfortable Truths About Roger Scruton', *Guardian*, 18 January 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/18/the-uncomfortable-truths-about-roger-scruton-conservatism>> [accessed 14 August 2020].

According to Wilson, the conference felt ‘benevolent, consensual and there was a strong sense of mourning, loss, grief for radicalism and mischievousness that was no longer possible’.⁵⁷³ Wilson raises an important question about the context of the conference, and whether one can express truly radical or mischievous sentiment within an institution. The notion of what is radical or mischievous thought is subjective, depending on the context and the political standpoints of those involved. Wilson’s own thinking of ‘Radical Mischief’ extends to the critic F.R. Leavis. Wilson explained how Leavis’ ‘Radical Mischief’ was largely due to him being particularly ‘politically incorrect’.⁵⁷⁴ Reflecting on his experiences of being taught by Leavis at York University, Wilson states that ‘what shocked was the casual, habitual and coarse homophobia with which he laced his literary discrimination’.⁵⁷⁵ The ‘Radical Mischief’ that Wilson attributes to Leavis is radicalism that is bold and unafraid to say what it thinks (although Wilson himself noted a difference between remarks Leavis made in seminars, and those of public lectures), and a ‘mischief’ that was in the form of jibes ‘delivered with a demonic glee intended to scandalise’, yet was ‘serious’ in its troubling and harmful nature.⁵⁷⁶ Whilst some of the conditions for radicalism described here chime with the RSC’s definition of radical (‘being bold’ and ‘saying it how it is’), the RSC and the University would not condone any homophobic rhetoric.⁵⁷⁷ What is reflected here is the troubling nature that radicalism and mischievousness can be associated with acts that are politically incorrect and are nowadays inappropriate in both the theatre and the academy.

⁵⁷³ Wilson, interview with author.

⁵⁷⁴ Wilson, interview with author.

⁵⁷⁵ Richard Wilson, ‘Distaste for Leavis’, *London Review of Books*, 12, 23 (1990) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v12/n23/letters>> [accessed 28 September 2020].

⁵⁷⁶ Wilson, ‘Distaste for Leavis’.

⁵⁷⁷ RSC definition of ‘radical’ provided by Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

What felt different in comparison with other academic conferences was that the majority of the plenary speakers spoke very personally about themselves. Dollimore opened his provocation by sharing sections of his memoir, in which he caught a family friend attempting sexual intercourse with his mother (that same friend was also in a sexual relationship with Dollimore at the time).⁵⁷⁸ Rice shared her first experience of directing a Shakespeare production for the RSC in 2006 (*Cymbeline*, Swan Theatre, with Kneehigh) where her company felt ‘incredibly bruised’ at the criticism and hostility that they received for their interpretation of the play.⁵⁷⁹ Gilkes Romero, inspired by the way in which other panellists ‘brought their own personal perspectives’ left her notes momentarily by explaining how her parents came to the UK as citizens from the British colonies, and Josephine also reflected on their experience as an ‘actor’ or ‘actress’.⁵⁸⁰ On the Saturday, Callaghan reflected how the other three speakers of the day (Gilkes Romero, Scruton and Josephine) ‘spoke about themselves in a way that I did not’:

Maybe that kind of honest and courage and revelation of the self [...] is a way forward now [...] I’m a great believer of the intellectual component that does not involve self-revelation as well, but I think that we cannot compartmentalise ourselves if we want to have an open discussion.⁵⁸¹

The plenary speakers provided an example of the expectations on people attending the conference to be open and honest about personal experience and to talk about real, urgent

⁵⁷⁸ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Desire: A Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷⁹ Rice, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Jonathan Dollimore and Emma Rice’.

⁵⁸⁰ Gilkes Romero, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’; Josephine, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

⁵⁸¹ Callaghan, quoted in ‘Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton’.

issues. Callaghan's revelation is what the conference was hopefully aiming towards — coming together, listening, and learning from one another.

The plenary speakers modelled Fernie and Whyman's aims for the conference. People were invited to speak boldly about challenging topics and to accept that conversations should allow space for people to question and disagree with one another. Speaking about the range of speakers during the opening provocation sessions, Dr Amy Borsuk, a former PhD student at Queen Mary, University of London, explained, 'in curating the plenary that way, they were meant to be demonstrating how this conference is opening up to multiple perspectives and is meant to be challenging to your beliefs.'⁵⁸² O'Hanlon also commented on the morning provocation sessions, 'I thought it was a rather wonderful exemplar of what the whole event was trying to do, to be a smorgasbord of different experiences [...] and to enable them to collide'.⁵⁸³ The opening 'Provocation and Conversation' sessions aimed to motivate participants into getting ready to have challenging conversations of their own, which firstly occurred in the curated conversations.

Curated Conversations

The curated conversations sought to delve deeper into more urgent questions that occupy artists and political academics which are often suppressed by the pressures of demonstrating impact in both fields. For example, the sessions on race provided an opportunity to question why institutions, both theatrical and educational, have not tackled racism effectively. Equally, the curated conversation on gender provided a chance to examine what has actually been

⁵⁸² Amy Borsuk, interview with author via Zoom, June 2020.

⁵⁸³ O'Hanlon, interview with author.

done to resolve gender inequality and whether such resolutions are working. The curated conversations were co-facilitated by at least one academic and one artist, and the responsibility of tackling these issues was matched to both facilitators. Artists and scholars, like the opening provocations, were given equal intellectual status and the conversations were an opportunity to discover what skills both artists and academics had in the room and how they could be utilised effectively in relation to these issues. Each session was given a provocation, and the co-facilitators were asked to respond with their own suggestions or thoughts as a way of inciting debate. Some conversations began with the co-facilitators sharing their own responses and provocations to the initial set question/s, and others decided to experiment with the form of their conversations.

One conversation that seemed to fulfil the aims of the conference for engaged discussion was the curated conversation on race. Dr Elizabeth Moroney, the scribe for the race conversation, felt that both sessions were ‘productive’ and that ‘the session leaders [Floriana Dezou, Dr Islam Issa, and Dr Karen Salt] brought really provocative points to the discussion that were talked about in quite an open way’.⁵⁸⁴ The provocations for the race conversation were provided by writer and director Nadia Latif:

[h]ow can artists and scholars move beyond a ‘poverty of conversation’ about race? What would fully acknowledging white privilege mean or look like in thought or practice?⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ Elizabeth Moroney, interview with author via Skype, June 2020.

⁵⁸⁵ Nadia Latif, Race Curated Conversation Provocation, available from Royal Shakespeare Company website, ‘Radical Mischief’.

Key ideas discussed during these sessions were decentring the curriculum, reframing of perspective and a redistribution of power, and creating space from within for more substantial diversity.⁵⁸⁶ Moroney reflected that, ‘everyone came to the sessions with a willingness to listen, learn and discuss. I don’t think that anyone came with a certain answer, it was quite an open discussion that flowed’ and that ‘the conversation never dried out’.⁵⁸⁷ Moroney’s feelings on these sessions reflect the intention of artists and scholars not bringing pre-prepared knowledge into the room to disseminate it to others, but to learn and listen to one another and to share ideas as a group.

This chapter investigates whether the framing of the *Radical Mischief* conference event and its experimentation with form enabled bold and brave conversations, and whether such conversations were able to initiate change of any kind. O’Hanlon believed that ‘better conversations’ were enabled at the conference and mentioned aspects of the conference that have stayed with her.⁵⁸⁸ Moroney, whilst stating that the conversations felt ‘productive’ above, did question the impact of the conversations and shared that, ‘[t]he conversations about racial and gender equality were already happening’.⁵⁸⁹ Of course, inviting a group of scholars and practitioners to talk about race is not a radical new idea. Indeed, over the past few years especially, institutions such as Shakespeare’s Globe have conducted a series of Shakespeare and Race Festivals which began in 2018, and Shakespeare’s Globe and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama recently conducted a symposium in 2019 addressing race

⁵⁸⁶ Elizabeth Moroney, Race Curated Conversation Scribe Report, available from Royal Shakespeare Company website, ‘Radical Mischief’.

⁵⁸⁷ Moroney, interview with author.

⁵⁸⁸ O’Hanlon, interview with author.

⁵⁸⁹ Moroney, interview with author.

and inclusive practice.⁵⁹⁰ With regards to the *Radical Mischief* conference, the significance of the discussions are clear, yet Moroney's reflections lead to a questioning of whether any further action was realised beyond this particular event.

The discussions on race reflected the *OED*'s definition of 'radical' by exploring the 'roots' of major issues with regards to holding institutions to account and calling for a reshaping of such places from within and increasing representation on every level.⁵⁹¹ This sense of looking at the 'roots' of central issues and calling for a redistribution of wealth and power was not exclusive to the race conversation but was felt and shared in other rooms. During her opening provocation for the curated conversation on institutions, Lyn Gardner stated that institutions were taking up all the funding, and Gardner questioned what would happen if the money was given back to the community. At a different point in the conversation, Gardner also raised her opinion that it's the people that define the institution, and in order for institutions to change, certain people in power need to step aside. Gardner's comments relate to radicalism by going to the 'roots' of the issue in her opinion — where the wealth is distributed, and what people are in positions of power in institutions, and whether those people are truly reflective of the societies and communities they represent.

⁵⁹⁰ Warwick University, 'Shakespeare and Race at the Globe August 2018' <<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/currentprojects/multiculturalshakespeare/news/shakespeareandraceglobe/>> [accessed 25 August 2020]; Shakespeare's Globe, 'Shakespeare and Race 2020' <<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/seasons/shakespeare-and-race-2020/>> [accessed 25 August 2020]; Shakespeare's Globe, 'Globe Central Symposium' <<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/whats-on/globe-central-symposium/>> [accessed 25 August 2020].

⁵⁹¹ 'radical, *adj.* and *n.*', *OED Online*; Moroney, Race Curated Conversation Scribe Report, available from Royal Shakespeare Company website, 'Radical Mischief'.

Gardner's comments may have felt uncomfortable for some, particularly those working in institutions. Borsuk, a former PhD student, felt that the conversation on institutions was particularly 'divisive'.⁵⁹² Borsuk noted that:

[g]enerally speaking, those who were on the side of protecting the institutions were more senior scholars and practitioners, and those who were saying that we need something different were talking about their own experiences of precarity and how the system was not working for them.⁵⁹³

This acknowledgement of two sides of the conversation — those interested in protecting the institutions and those who were not benefitting from the current status quo — is reflective of the divisive split that existed in the entire conference. The conversation on institutions is perhaps an example where people could not 'find a common language' as Fernie earlier described and as a result, the conversation 'ended abruptly which felt very disorienting and unstructured', according to Borsuk, despite having had a 'good debate'.⁵⁹⁴

This sense of not being able to 'find a common language' is confirmed by Wilson, who co-facilitated the conversation with Gardner. For his opening provocation, Wilson questioned 'the extent to which academic criticism [...] can be radically mischievous', and he felt that 'I did not really sense that there was much interest in what I had to say'.⁵⁹⁵ Wilson was concerned about the loss of radicalism in English as a discipline at universities, but perhaps because of the mixture of people in the room (artists, early-career academics) there were other pressing issues such as funding and the role of institutions in the community that gained

⁵⁹² Borsuk, interview with author.

⁵⁹³ Borsuk, interview with author.

⁵⁹⁴ Fernie, 'Welcome'; Borsuk, interview with author.

⁵⁹⁵ Wilson, interview with author.

more interest. Wilson felt that Gardner and himself ‘were on different planets’ and that ‘there wasn’t a great deal of overlap’.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, a consequence of having multiple co-facilitators with different agendas may have been one provocation being given more attention than the other, or perhaps in some instances the conversation being taken over by ideas from delegates instead. Having a conversation in this way makes the format feel less rigid and more democratic as participants were not constrained to talking about one specific idea. Rather, participants were encouraged to see where the conversation would lead and to debate topics that could carry ‘heat’ in Whyman’s words.⁵⁹⁷ Such conversations tried to navigate difficult ideas where people could disagree with one another, but with a sense of openness and respect. The responsibility of the co-facilitators would then be to facilitate the discussion by ensuring that everyone who wanted to speak was heard and that the conversation remained focused and productive.

A conversation which did experience ‘heat’ was the first curated session on violence, which was co-facilitated by Ayse Tashkiran and Professor Kiernan Ryan (Royal Holloway, University of London). Tashkiran explained that ‘it felt as if a group of academics hadn’t had a voice for a long time about how the work that they loved was being represented on stage’.⁵⁹⁸ Academics in the room disagreed with certain aspects of the RSC’s 2018 production of John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, specifically the blood-filled stage at the end of the play.⁵⁹⁹ Tashkiran worked on the production as its movement director, and was the only person in the room directly involved in the creative process. As such, this conversation presented a

⁵⁹⁶ Wilson, interview with author.

⁵⁹⁷ Erica Whyman, ‘Setting Up Open Space’ session, *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place, 20 July 2018.

⁵⁹⁸ Tashkiran, interview with author.

⁵⁹⁹ Caroline Curtis, Violence Curated Conversation Scribe Report, available via Royal Shakespeare Company website, ‘Radical Mischief’.

challenge to Tashkiran in having to represent a collaborative process. She reflected on the first conversation:

I went in as an artist [...] On reflection, I think it did tease out the freedoms and responsibilities that both academics have to their subject matter, and the freedoms and responsibilities that artists have [...] and how distinctive they are.⁶⁰⁰

Tashkiran's comments on the difference in 'freedoms and responsibilities' between artists and scholars is profound. As a movement director, Tashkiran is responsible for creating a process that develops techniques to ensure the physical action on stage is sustainable and safe for the company. The creative team (which includes the movement director) and the producing house take collective responsibility for how the work will be presented to the audience, and particular consideration is taken when presenting themes such as violence on stage. This conversation highlighted the differences between an artist working inside a creative process and their responsibilities towards a specific production, and that of an audience member, someone who is outside of the process and is therefore not privy to the techniques involved in maintaining actors' safety.⁶⁰¹ An acknowledgement of the differences of experiences could have led to a fruitful debate and engaged discussion, however, certain members of the group may have displayed a lack of willingness to listen to others, as the scribe report notes that 'several incidents of silencing' were felt.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ Tashkiran, interview with author.

⁶⁰¹ Tashkiran highlighted that the input of movement directors is matrixed on productions. Health and safety considerations include anticipatory dialogues with an extensive team of fight director, designer, production team, health and safety officer from Equity (i.e. an actor in the company), stage managers, director, and costume team.

⁶⁰² Curtis, n. pg.

As a result of the first conversation, Tashkiran and Ryan were able to reflect and recalibrate. Tashkiran commented that the conversation on the following day:

allowed us to look at the variety of definitions that were being used to understand the word, 'violence', that went from acts and representations of violence through to statehood, kingship, and institutional frameworks which were inherently violent against certain groups of people.⁶⁰³

Instead of beginning the first part of the session with their provocations, Tashkiran and Ryan involved the group from the offset by inviting them to consider their own meanings of the word. In this way, Tashkiran and Ryan could understand and 'give voice to different perspectives and definitions that, during the second conversation, were largely theoretical' and academic. The group had a great knowledge of the plays discussed and approached them from the standpoint of an 'audience member when considering the performance score of *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*'. Everyone was heard within the space, and this second conversation is an example where the group could find a sense of commonality between participants, which led to a 'beautifully productive' conversation.⁶⁰⁴

The format of the curated conversations was criticised by participants in the conference feedback. As Wilson and Gardner modelled, and Tashkiran and Ryan also demonstrated on the Friday, co-facilitators were asked to 'kick off the discussion with up to 10 minutes of your own thoughts on this topic' before opening up the conversation to participants.⁶⁰⁵ Feedback comments stated that 'the Institutions group were given a 20 minute

⁶⁰³ Tashkiran, interview with author.

⁶⁰⁴ Tashkiran, interview with author.

⁶⁰⁵ I am grateful to Sally Delbeke for providing me with this information.

presentation before any of us were asked to talk and even then the “provocation” seemed remarkably limiting and self-serving’.⁶⁰⁶ Other comments shared that they wanted ‘[l]ess curating in the curated conversations. People were itching [to] get started, and the two presentations made it all seem stilted’ and that ‘there was not really a need for facilitators, or at least for facilitators to speak (for extended periods of time) before opening up the discussion’ (p. 8). The initial aim for the co-facilitators was to provide their own views in order to ignite the conversation, but it seemed that this format of hearing from the co-facilitators first was not necessary and in some cases it may have dropped the energy fuelled from the plenary provocations. Many participants wanted to get straight into conversation, and a couple of other comments from the feedback survey suggest that participants desired ‘more participatory workshops/spaces’ and ‘more opportunity to do’ (p. 7). The curated conversation on form received particularly positive feedback in terms of its format and facilitation, and this may be because the co-facilitators did not spend ten minutes each sharing their views but rather, the group jumped straight into an exercise.

The curated conversation on form, which was led by Rokison-Woodall and theatre-maker Terry O’Connor, was split into two exercises. The first exercise contained large pieces of paper in three stations on the floor: theatre, politics, and academia/criticism. Participants had to travel around each station and write down their ideas about ‘what might be done to change the status quo’ in relation to each of these aspects.⁶⁰⁷ During the second exercise, the group were given an extract from Act II scene one of *The Comedy of Errors* and were asked to

⁶⁰⁶ Anonymous Feedback, ‘Radical Mischief Conference 2018: Feedback Report’, College of Arts and Law, University of Birmingham, 2018, pp. 7-8. Future references to this report are given after quotations in the text.

⁶⁰⁷ Ella Hawkins, Form Curated Conversation Scribe Report, available via Royal Shakespeare Company website, ‘Radical Mischief’.

provide a personal and a critical response to the text. This led into an improvisational exercise where 'group members took turns to share their responses aloud, and in doing so created a performative, collective reading of the extract'.⁶⁰⁸ At the end of the conversation on form, a participant reflected that 'there was a sense of permission to share ideas that would normally be dismissed'.⁶⁰⁹ As the scribe notes suggest, participants felt a lack of judgement with regards to their own personal opinions. In rehearsal rooms it is common to share personal responses to text, yet personal feeling is not deemed as relevant in academia. This conversation provides an example of bringing different discourses together in a playfully mischievous way as it demonstrated how important it is to value both personal and critical observations. On an individual level, this exercise could be radical for some and not others, depending on how comfortable participants were with sharing their views.

Other examples of discussions involving different forms of exercises included the sessions on gender, which was co-curated by the late Dr Catherine Silverstone (Queen Mary, University of London), and RSC director Kimberley Sykes.⁶¹⁰ Aware of the fear and uncomfortableness of some delegates, Sykes conducted an exercise at the beginning of her session to get people talking and to identify some common ground. Sykes placed a line that split the room into two halves. The room, like that during the exercise modelled in the *Democracy* Project, became a scale, and participants were asked to stand in certain places in the room to represent their opinion. One end of the room would represent 'strongly agree'

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Hawkins, Form Curated Conversation Scribe Report.

⁶¹⁰ Dr Catherine Silverstone passed away in October 2020. Tributes to her can be found on the Queen Mary University of London website, 'Queen Mary Students Organise Tribute to Catherine Silverstone', 2020 <<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/news/2020/hss/queen-mary-students-organise-tribute-to-catherine-silverstone.html>> [accessed 9 August 2021].

and the other 'strongly disagree', and the line would represent the middle. The exercise allowed for listening and questioning of practice, in order to identify common ground or differences in thought. Sykes explained, 'getting up on your feet and moving around the space [...] breaks down so many barriers [...] and then we were able to sit down and have those conversations'.⁶¹¹

Not everyone appreciated the practical exercise, however. In response to the provocation, 'can the theatre and the academy radically rewrite our gender expectations?', Professor Kay Stanton (California State University, Fullerton) explained how for both separate questions (theatre, then academia), she stood in the middle because she felt that, 'you cannot make a sweeping generalisation like that'.⁶¹² Stanton understood what the facilitators were trying to achieve, but the exercise did not appeal to her and in fact, it felt 'silly'. That said, Stanton was encouraged by the overall conversation that was achieved following the exercise.⁶¹³

For Stanton, a highlight of the curated conversation on gender was realising that she was in the presence of RSC actors, particularly Niamh Cusack. Stanton had enjoyed Cusack's performance of *Lady Macbeth* the evening prior to the conference, and following the curated conversation, Stanton and Cusack got talking to one another and had valuable, 'in-depth' discussions over the course of the two days.⁶¹⁴ The opportunity to meet and engage with professionals from different disciplines and to exchange ideas with one another was a strength

⁶¹¹ Kimberley Sykes, interview with author via Skype, March 2020.

⁶¹² Stanton, interview with author.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Stanton, interview with author.

of the conference, and the next section depicts several more conversations that occurred during the afternoons of the conference days — the open space session.

Open Space

The open space began on the Friday afternoon with an initial set up session led by Whyman. Delegates were gathered around the rehearsal space whilst Whyman stood in the centre of the room with a microphone. Whyman stated that the open space sessions intended to ‘shift expectations of who leads’ a conversation and that this set up was an opportunity for delegates to announce what they wanted to talk about.⁶¹⁵ Those who wished to lead a conversation were invited to stand in the middle of the room and use the microphone to announce what their topic or question would be. A number of different delegates from both the academic and the theatre industry stood up to propose a range of conversations. Selected titles of conversations include the following: ‘what can opera contribute to how we think and act?’, ‘can theatre save the NHS?’, ‘what does “Radical Mischief” mean when “Radical Mischief” makers are in power?’ and ‘unexpected audience response’. Following the announcement of their proposed conversation, participants were then led to the corner of the room where they had to write their title down on a sheet of paper and stick it on the wall in correspondence to the time that they wanted to start this conversation (at some point during the Friday or Saturday afternoon).

⁶¹⁵ Whyman, ‘Setting Up Open Space’.



Figures 5 and 6 – Open Space Wall. Images taken by author during the *Radical Mischief* conference, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, July 2018.

On the other walls of the rehearsal room were the following rules: ‘whenever it starts is the right time’, ‘when it’s over, it is over’, ‘whoever comes are the right people’, ‘wherever it happens is the right place’, ‘whatever happens is the only thing that could have’ and ‘it’s important that we listen well and have the best conversation we can have’. Whyman also introduced a ‘Law of Mobility’ which meant that participants were free to move around and join different conversations as they wished; they did not have wait until a conversation finished.⁶¹⁶

Open space technology has been used by theatre company Improbable for their *Devoted & Disgruntled* series since 2006. *Devoted & Disgruntled* ‘is a nationwide conversation’ about theatre, and open space is used ‘to facilitate these gatherings where everyone’s voice can be heard and no topic is censored’.⁶¹⁷ It is the participants that determine

⁶¹⁶ Whyman, ‘Setting Up Open Space’.

⁶¹⁷ *Devoted and Disgruntled*, ‘About Devoted and Disgruntled’ <<https://www.devotedanddisgruntled.com/about-devoted-disgruntled>> [accessed 21 June 2019].

the agenda of the discussions, and the technology works on the premise that, '[i]f we're going to change the world for the better, we all need time and space to collaborate on an equal footing'.⁶¹⁸ Whyman adopted the open space approach for the conference in TOP in order to disrupt the typical academic conference experience by experimenting with who gets permission to take up space and have their voice heard. Rokison-Woodall stated that she was 'struck by the fact that the first three or four people' to propose a topic 'on which they wanted to lead a discussion were young female PhD students'.⁶¹⁹ Dr Ella Hawkins, a former PhD student at the Shakespeare Institute, proposed her own topic during the open space and stated that, 'I did feel like it was really empowering and equalising, everyone was given a platform to speak'.⁶²⁰

The open space setting provided a platform for research students and artists especially to propose topics on which they wanted to lead a conversation. Borsuk led a discussion on 'the realities and the experiences of funding for the arts and for higher education in the UK', and she explained her surprise when Whyman and another artistic director sat down to join her discussion. Borsuk described her experiences of facilitating that conversation: 'that was challenging for me because that was not the audience that I was expecting to show up at all, and in hindsight that was a really good outcome'.⁶²¹ In this example, the open space allowed conversations to be spearheaded by early career professionals and demonstrated the mixture of people at varying levels of their careers that took part. Rarely, if ever at all, are postgraduate students allowed opportunities to lead conversations with artistic directors involved. Hawkins,

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Rokison Woodall, quoted in Mary Davies (forthcoming).

⁶²⁰ Ella Hawkins, interview with author via Skype, June 2020.

⁶²¹ Borsuk, interview with author.

who also attended that same discussion, explained that the group ‘arrived at some really nitty-gritty points about funding, and the issues around BP being a major sponsor of the RSC’ and Whyman’s role with sponsors. It was a small group discussion, and Hawkins reflected, ‘I have thought a lot about that conversation since, that stuck with me’.⁶²² This example also modelled the ability of a group of people to really delve into important issues and for postgraduate students to have the opportunity to question those in positions of power.

Another productive discussion was led by Professor Diana Henderson (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) titled, ‘What Do Early Career Folks Want “Older People” to Know, and What You Think “We” Should Do?’. The conversation contained a mixture of artists, early-career academics and senior academics, and Henderson wrote down suggested ideas onto a large sheet of paper, ideas which included more funding, mentorship, and opportunities for emerging scholars. Hawkins felt like ‘tangible outcomes’ had been discussed and that the conversation felt ‘really productive’.⁶²³ Henderson reflected:

I was most aware of the differences among their experiences, and the benefits of their sharing with each other, which was perhaps more important than what I could offer as the convenor.⁶²⁴

This important conversation demonstrates inter-generational learning and listening and further provided a platform for artists and early-career scholars to share their views and experiences with established professionals in the field. Senior academics then tried to offer advice or suggestions — for example, Henderson shared that a number of the actors were

⁶²² Hawkins, interview with author.

⁶²³ Hawkins, interview with author.

⁶²⁴ Diana E. Henderson, correspondence with author via email, 26 September 2020.

unaware of 'online job lists' and professional organisations that could help them.⁶²⁵ New knowledge and tips were shared for individuals and contact details were exchanged amongst participants.⁶²⁶ The conference felt like a progressive start for future collaboration and dialogue amongst academics and practitioners, and the next step with such events might be to consider the ways in which one can trace the afterlife of the event. At present, it is unknown whether individuals took the spirit of this conversation as inspiration for action, and perhaps in future, further networking or processes of connection would be beneficial to enable continued dialogue between the organisers of the event and the delegates themselves.

Early-career academics were not the only participants who seemed to benefit from the discussions that took place in the open space sessions. Theatre director Sykes attended a discussion curated by Paula Garfield titled 'Is Sign Language Being Used as a Tokenistic Tick-Box Exercise in Mainstream Theatre?'. Sykes joined the conversation because she was considering how to work with Deaf actors for her upcoming production of *As You Like It* (RST and Tour, 2019). Reflecting on the discussion, Sykes shared that, '[w]e ended up spending the whole afternoon in this conversation' and the group was 'able to ask [...] some of those really awkward questions that you may not normally want to ask'.⁶²⁷ Borsuk also mentioned this conversation as an example of one of the goals of the conference being met — that people with varying degrees of experience in Deaf culture could come together and have an open conversation. Further, Borsuk explained that 'Paula was proposing the question of what we could do' and 'she framed it by calling on individuals in order to contribute to a community'

⁶²⁵ Henderson, correspondence with author via email.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Sykes, interview with author.

which was 'excellent'.⁶²⁸ From this discussion, a list of suggested actions were compiled such as further opportunities for involvement (training, R&D, co-productions) rather than accessibility, holding sign language courses at the RSC, and more dialogue with Deaf practitioners in the future.⁶²⁹ At present, these suggested actions have not been implemented by either the RSC or the University. Whilst productive conversations emerged at the conference, a challenge for both institutions lies in the response to new ideas being shared.

An example of a discussion held during the open space session that exemplified 'Radical Mischief' was 'A Conversation Without Words'. The group initially sat down together and discussed what such a 'conversation without words' would entail when Devon Geary, a former master's student at the Institute, spontaneously jumped up and ran around the room. When she returned to the group, another person imitated Geary by also running around the room. Geary described her initial action as 'disruptive' as it surprised the other members of the group, and it interrupted the conversation. Other conversations in the room also took notice; Rokison-Woodall left another discussion to join the group, and Geary reflected that the group began 'playing like kids'.⁶³⁰ The group held hands, went into the foyer and began communicating with others in the space without using words. At one point, the group tried to ask for a ball from the front desk (again, without using words), and tape was given to them. The group began throwing tape around, inviting new members who happened to pass by into the group. Geary stated that the activity lasted at least fifteen minutes and was ended by a person who approached the group and verbally asked them questions. The person had unknowingly broken the rules and conventions of the game, and Geary explained that 'we had

⁶²⁸ Borsuk, interview with author.

⁶²⁹ I am grateful to Dr Abigail Rokison-Woodall for sharing her notes on this discussion with me.

⁶³⁰ Devon Geary, interview with author via Zoom, September 2020.

created our own space' within the conference event in a moment of spontaneity and creativity.⁶³¹ The ultimate 'disruption' caused by this particular team occurred when they arrived outside the Gatsby Breakout Room where Fernie and Whyman were being interviewed on film. One by one, participants entered the room, stood behind the conference organisers (one member bowed, and Geary dropped the tape into Fernie's lap), and exited the space.⁶³² This group activity is an example of 'Radical Mischief' by playfully re-imagining and subverting one of the aims of the conference itself (having better conversations with one another) and creating something new.

Overall, the open space sessions received encouraging feedback and was a way of facilitating important conversations. Hawkins reflected that, 'I was surprised by how well it worked and by how many people wanted to do that and contribute to it'.⁶³³ Tashkiran also referenced the open space session as '[o]ne of the really potent moments' of the conference:

I found the conversations I joined were very productive. I happened to find myself really implicated in feminist discourses around practices of ownership and representation [...] it felt really good because those groups were incredibly intergenerational, and the conversation was very open.⁶³⁴

The open space technology allowed for people in the room to propose topics that may not have been raised otherwise, and the freedom for people to move around and join the conversations that they wanted to join led to impassioned debate and meaningful conversations to take place. Tashkiran's observation about the open space groups being

⁶³¹ Geary, interview with author.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Hawkins, interview with author.

⁶³⁴ Tashkiran, interview with author.

‘incredibly intergenerational’ is also important. It may not have been true for every conversation that took place in the open space, but this factor also highlights one of the aims of the conference being achieved — that people of different identities, ages and disciplines, could come together and learn and listen to one another in a creative exchange of ideas.

The form and the rules of the open space were also mentioned as being ‘radical’ during the closing session of the conference on the Saturday.⁶³⁵ During this session, an audience member stated that one of the most ‘radical’ and ‘revolutionary’ aspects that they were taking from the conference was the ability ‘to shift our moral view of time’.⁶³⁶ With reference to the open space rules, ‘whenever it starts is the right time’ and ‘when it’s over, it’s over’, this framework provided a sense of freedom for participants to simply enjoy conversing and not to worry about time constraints. Practitioners especially valued the opportunity to simply talk and reflect with one another. For example, freelance artists who work between various companies and organisations may not have time to de-brief after a given project. Tashkiran mentioned that ‘as a practitioner, literally all you do is practice, and there is no space for reflection’.⁶³⁷ One of the most important findings of the conference therefore is the acknowledgement that the day-to-day management of the theatre and the academic industry doesn’t structure time as efficiently as it could, and not enough space is given for discussion and reflection. The conference sought to ameliorate this issue by providing both artist and scholar with the space and time to talk about pressing concerns and to have the conversations that participants themselves wanted to have, which the open space catered for.

⁶³⁵ Anonymous, quoted in Round Up session, *Radical Mischief* Conference, The Other Place, 21 July 2018.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Tashkiran, interview with author.

Conference Impact

A number of aspects can be celebrated from the conference. Academics and scholars from across the world came together in this new setting and as a result of the framing and the spirit of the conference, important discussions were had amongst different inter-generational, inter-disciplinary groups of people. The final scheduled event of the conference on the Saturday afternoon was a Round up session, where Whyman encouraged the audience to share key revelations or pledges that they would take forward. The first comment came from a person that had been a 'Shakespearian' for many years but had never worked with theatre practitioners before. They reflected, 'what I've learned in the two days is just amazing and mind blowing'.⁶³⁸ Hawkins also reflected, 'I was really pleasantly surprised by the spirit of it, the way that it was run, the warmth, the freedom and the unpredictability.'⁶³⁹ Agreeing with Hawkins, Moroney also stated that the conference:

facilitated an environment in which Erica and Ewan both said on the first day that they didn't know how this conference was going to go and to see what happened. That could have been a tense moment [...] but actually, people took that invitation and ran with it and let it flourish.⁶⁴⁰

Harriet Affleck, former Publishing Manager at Digital Theatre, explained that, 'the best work I get done at conferences happens during the coffee breaks' adding that the conference 'felt like one big coffee break, the whole atmosphere was like that. It felt like you could say what

⁶³⁸ Anonymous, quoted in Round Up session.

⁶³⁹ Hawkins, interview with author.

⁶⁴⁰ Moroney, interview with author.

you wanted.’⁶⁴¹ Affleck’s comment chimes with Fernie’s earlier reflection that the most fruitful conversations at conferences often take place during the conference dinner. Indeed, an audience member during the closing remarks reflected similar sentiments, stating that the conference was ‘like having dessert for dinner’.⁶⁴²

While the open space seemed to be an overall success, Borsuk explained that the next step is to acknowledge that not everyone will speak and not everyone will be heard. Borsuk argued that, ‘it’s not enough to say it’s an open space — there has to be a way to look at that space as well so that those who don’t normally speak up can and that biases can be directly approached’. Borsuk explained that during the conversation she facilitated, ‘I was definitely making choices about how to conduct myself because I want to work in [the theatre] industry and I cannot cause fights or start fires really’.⁶⁴³ This reflection raises significant questions around the extent to which early-career academics like Borsuk can freely speak their mind in these settings by wanting to avoid conflict that could hinder career progression. Not only in terms of early-career artists and scholars, but during the Round up session, an audience member shared a quote from the race curated conversation, ‘if you invite somebody into your home, it’s still your home’.⁶⁴⁴ The concept of ‘white space’ is summarised in an important article by Elijah Anderson, which explains the experiences of black people in social spaces that are ‘overwhelmingly white’. In such settings (schools, universities, workplaces for example), ‘black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present’ and black

⁶⁴¹ Harriet Affleck, interview with author, London, March 2019. Affleck is now the Head of Licensing & Digitisation at UCL.

⁶⁴² Anonymous, quoted in Round Up Session.

⁶⁴³ Borsuk, interview with author.

⁶⁴⁴ Anonymous, quoted in Round Up Session.

people 'typically approach that space with care'.⁶⁴⁵ Borsuk's initial comment on open space is poignant and it is important to acknowledge how the space can be read and navigated by different participants at the conference.

Garfield, reflecting on the conference, felt that there were 'not enough disabled or Deaf people there' and that 'there were too many white people'.⁶⁴⁶ The attendance of disabled people at conferences and the challenges that they encounter is summarised in an article by Marisa De Picker, who outlines many barriers such as funding and inclusion.⁶⁴⁷ While Garfield acknowledged that 'it was wonderful to see so many women' at the conference, she confessed, 'I felt like I was out of place. I didn't get a full understanding of what that conference was even about really'.⁶⁴⁸ Gilkes Romero also reflected Garfield's concern by stating that 'I felt it could have been more radical in the diversity of people invited to attend' and that '[w]hen you want to be radical and encourage all kinds of views, you really have to think about who you are inviting, and why you are doing it'.⁶⁴⁹ These concerns were also acknowledged during the open space session, when a participant proposed to lead a conversation on why there were so many white people at the conference, and what could be done about it. This was indeed a significant shortcoming of the conference, and the event would have benefitted from a wider range of voices and experiences.

Whilst it seemed that the race conversation felt productive and that it moved toward concrete goals, both Moroney and Borsuk acknowledged the difficulties in measuring whether

⁶⁴⁵ Elijah Anderson, 'The White Space', *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1, 1 (2015) 10-21 (p. 10).

⁶⁴⁶ Garfield, interview with author.

⁶⁴⁷ See Marisa De Picker, 'Rethinking Inclusion and Disability Activism at Academic Conferences: Strategies Proposed by a PhD Student with a Physical Disability', *Disability & Society*, 35, 1 (2020) 163-167.

⁶⁴⁸ Garfield, interview with author.

⁶⁴⁹ Gilkes Romero, interview with author.

anything truly changed following the curated conversations. Moroney questioned the efficacy of a group of scholars talking in a room for two hours and referenced the fact that these conversations were already happening, regardless of the conference.⁶⁵⁰ Borsuk reflected that she has not stayed in touch with or heard anything since the discussion.⁶⁵¹ O'Hanlon also commented on the curated conversation on race that she attended, 'it set a tone that has stayed with me ever since', and acknowledged that 'the things that were said in that conference [...] have not been resolved'.⁶⁵² The responsibility to keep the conversations going is both individual and collective. Also, the 'lack of a coherent theme' that Tashkiran mentions later in this chapter may have been a hindrance to the conference in some ways.⁶⁵³ The conference contained so many important and varied discussions amongst participants and was not focused on resolving a specific issue. Whilst there was an encouraged emphasis on how one might think and act differently, the multiplicity of conversations and events may have resulted in an overspill of different thoughts and ideas that did not get continued into further action groups or collaborations.

A crucial shortcoming of the conference was the follow-up of the event. Moroney acknowledged a sense of disappointment that the 'momentum hasn't seemed to have gone anywhere' and Hawkins suggested that 'an annual conversation' would have been beneficial.⁶⁵⁴ Hawkins further reflected that '[i]t felt like they'd really made a space for something, they carved out a niche for something that did not exist'.⁶⁵⁵ Tashkiran also

⁶⁵⁰ Moroney, interview with author.

⁶⁵¹ Borsuk, interview with author.

⁶⁵² O'Hanlon, interview with author.

⁶⁵³ Tashkiran, interview with author.

⁶⁵⁴ Moroney, interview with author; Hawkins, interview with author.

⁶⁵⁵ Hawkins, interview with author.

commented, ‘I’ve never really known what the outcomes of the conference were’ and ‘it still feels like lots of lovely bubbling moments but not a coherent theme’.⁶⁵⁶ The difficulty of hosting such an ambitious event which brought people together from various disciplines and locations is how to maintain that connection, that spirit of ‘Radical Mischief’, once everyone returned home. It seems that the conference was an exciting intervention that stimulated a lot of thinking, yet the tangible outcomes following the event are difficult to define.

O’Hanlon acknowledged this significant shortcoming to *Radical Mischief* also, by stating that ‘we didn’t realise what it was going to be, and therefore we didn’t put the necessary processes in place to be able to deal with the challenges’ that the conference presented. In future, O’Hanlon recognised that ‘the next radical thing’ which must ‘happen with conferences [...] is that they have to have a root into systemic change’ and ‘it is not enough to just host’ an event like *Radical Mischief*.⁶⁵⁷ In order for ‘Radical Mischief’ to be fully made manifest, the work needs to continue following the conference event.

Whilst this chapter has questioned the outcomes of the conference, there are a few examples of individual impact stemming directly from discussions that took place in *Radical Mischief*. Reflecting on the discussion led by Garfield in the open space session, Sykes stated that the conversation ‘gave me the confidence to pursue working with a Deaf actor in a traditionally hearing role’.⁶⁵⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Two, Sykes cast actor Charlotte Arrowsmith in the role of Audrey in the RSC 2019 production of *As You Like It*.⁶⁵⁹ In survey feedback following the conference, a number of anonymous responses stated that their

⁶⁵⁶ Tashkiran, interview with author.

⁶⁵⁷ O’Hanlon, interview with author.

⁶⁵⁸ Sykes, interview with author.

⁶⁵⁹ See p. 133.

confidence had increased following the event. One response stated, 'I found at the conference that my ideas and experience have more value than I realized' (p. 1). A number of other participants reflected that they felt more encouraged to pursue future collaboration between academics and artists, and a few participants stated that they wanted to incorporate practical tools that they learnt at the conference (e.g. open space) into their teaching (pp. 1-3). Inspired by the open space sessions, Geary incorporated elements of open space technology into an event she organised at Birmingham Tech Week in October 2019.⁶⁶⁰ Whilst there are also responses that demonstrated how little impact the conference had for them, there are a number of individual responses that state the influence of the event on various participants' personal and professional thinking and activity (pp. 1-4).

Gilkes Romero questioned, 'has that conference made it easier and more possible to discuss these matters? I would like to think so'. The playwright explained that she will be talking to Whyman and others at the RSC about the Black Lives Matter movement and racial justice:

the fact that they've invited me to discuss this, and in their words, 'how can we do better?' That could be seen as a success of the conference in many ways. You have to start somewhere and have these conversations and I think that the conference did that.⁶⁶¹

The conference can indeed be seen as a starting point and demonstrates the commitment from the RSC to talk about these important issues that are present in the world. That said, it is also worth noting that with the exception of O'Hanlon and Whyman, a crucial factor to the

⁶⁶⁰ Geary, interview with author.

⁶⁶¹ Gilkes Romero, interview with author.

conference's ability to evoke change was the absence of top-level decision-makers. Whilst Doran spoke at the Friday evening reception, himself and RSC Executive Director Catherine Mallyon were not involved in the conversations that occurred during both days, and neither were there representatives at a higher level from the University in attendance. As previously stated, neither organisation predicted the deep level of thinking and ideas generated at the conference, and the lack of procedures in place has made it more difficult for both parties to respond to the ideas and challenges presented at *Radical Mischief*.

While this chapter has focused solely on *Radical Mischief*, it is now helpful to contemplate how this conference may be brought into a wider conversation alongside other significant events within Shakespeare and early modern studies. Further examples of groundbreaking interventions can provide a stimulus for contemplating the future of events like *Radical Mischief*, and how these activities can bring forth much-needed change in the theatre and the academy.

RaceB4Race is 'an ongoing conference series and professional network community' created by and for scholars of colour 'working on issues of race in premodern literature, history and culture'.⁶⁶² This series emerged from the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, where Professor Ayanna Thompson serves as Director. RaceB4Race seeks to understand how society has arrived at a point of extreme polarisation in terms of racial and political injustice by investigating 'the larger arc of this history' through premodern literature and race scholarship.⁶⁶³ Thompson planned for a 'unique, one of a kind, research symposium' which brought together academics, theatre artists and interested members of

⁶⁶² Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 'Race B4 Race' <<https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race>> [accessed 2 December 2021].

⁶⁶³ Ayanna Thompson, quoted in Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 'RaceB4Race'.

the community in January 2019 in Arizona State University, but this event soon became a large-scale, biannual occurrence.⁶⁶⁴

RaceB4Race also strives to address prevalent issues that scholars of colour face within these fields. Ruben Espinosa, a member of the Executive Board of RaceB4Race, explained how many academics recognised ‘active gatekeeping’ in premodern studies.⁶⁶⁵ The *OED* defines ‘gatekeeping’ as ‘the action or process of controlling access to something or monitoring and selecting information’, and such actions are experienced within academic practice.⁶⁶⁶ Vanessa I. Corredera describes ‘grudging or tepid attempts’ of engagement with scholars of colour which result in ‘a speaker here, a special issue there’, yet ultimately, certain academics ‘refuse to allow’ Premodern Critical Race Studies and scholars working within this field ‘to take up space in the proverbial centre’ of medieval or early modern studies.⁶⁶⁷ Corredera’s writing describes gate-keeping practices as academics of colour may experience being given temporary opportunities to share their scholarship, but such experiences are not given significant focus in the mainstream of medieval and early modern scholarship.

In relation to the concerns shared above, RaceB4Race develops, pilots, and disseminates ‘a useful range of higher education curricula and pedagogy for educators at all stages of their careers’ and offers ‘semester-long interdisciplinary and cross-institutional reading and research groups’. These initiatives seek to ‘address many inflection points in a

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid; Emma Greguska, ‘Symposium Considers how Classical Texts Address Contemporary Social Issues’, Arizona State University website, 16 January 2019 <<https://news.asu.edu/20190116-solutions-symposium-considers-how-classical-texts-address-contemporary-social-issues>> [accessed 3 January 2022].

⁶⁶⁵ Ruben Espinosa, quoted in Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ‘RaceB4Race’.

⁶⁶⁶ ‘gatekeeping, *n.*’, *OED Online*, 2021

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/260177?rskey=DJBmJv&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 31 December 2021].

⁶⁶⁷ Vanessa I. Corredera, ‘Where Are We in the Melody of the New Scholarly Song? A Reflection on the Present and Future of Shakespeare and Race’, *Exemplaria*, 33:2 (2021) 184-196 <DOI: 10.1080/10412573.2021.1915011> (p. 185).

scholar's career' such as 'isolation in their field or institution', advice on turning 'research into a book, and navigating the institutional demands of the tenure track'.⁶⁶⁸ RaceB4Race offers not only a supportive community to scholars of colour, but also provides practical tools and support to further academics in their career path.

Similar interventions have emerged from Shakespeare's Globe in London with their recent Shakespeare and Race Festivals mentioned earlier. The Shakespeare and Race Festivals were first launched as a week-long series of events in 2018 'to highlight the importance of race in the consideration of Shakespeare — not only in his time, but more urgently in our own' and to provide 'a platform to scholars, actors, writers, theatre-makers and educators of colour'.⁶⁶⁹ The influence of the Shakespeare and Race Festivals spilled beyond the initial week of activities and has become an annual feature within the Globe's programming. Shakespeare and Race has also developed online pedagogical sessions for school children to engage in anti-racist workshops on *The Tempest* and *Othello*, and workshops for teachers.⁶⁷⁰ The conversations amongst researchers and artists have also continued into online content (blog posts and podcast episodes) widely available to audiences beyond the initial event.

An overarching theme of this chapter is the extent to which *Radical Mischief* can evoke change in the wider academic and theatre industries. Initiatives such as RaceB4Race and the Shakespeare and Race Festivals are important because they emphasise sustained and continued commitment to supporting and inspiring academics, artists, and the community.

⁶⁶⁸ Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 'RaceB4Race: Sustaining, Building, Innovating' <<https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race/Sustaining-Building-Innovating>> [accessed 2 December 2021].

⁶⁶⁹ Shakespeare's Globe, 'Announcing our Third Shakespeare and Race Festival', 12 August 2020 <<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2020/08/12/announcing-our-third-shakespeare-and-race-festival/>> [accessed 2 December 2021].

⁶⁷⁰ Shakespeare's Globe, 'Announcing our Third Shakespeare and Race Festival'.

Returning to the idea of the carnivalesque, this chapter has emphasised the importance of having ‘temporary liberation’ from the ‘established order’ of higher education, because such ‘liberation’ can inspire new forms of thinking and ideas that can then potentially impact the academic or theatrical workplace.⁶⁷¹ While this chapter has also questioned the ability of unique, stand-alone events to enact wider change, it has been helpful to explore other ground-breaking initiatives and to connect these events in a wider web of activity that seeks to address the pressing concerns in contemporary academia and theatre-making.

Conclusion

Overall, *Radical Mischief* fulfilled its title by experimenting with the ‘traditional’ conference format.⁶⁷² There was a noticeable difference between the Friday and the Saturday sessions during the conference. Whyman, in the closing session, remarked that Saturday ‘felt freer’, ‘because yesterday really loosened everybody up’ and ‘we brought ourselves in a really different way’.⁶⁷³ This observation was supported by a comment offered by an audience member, who stated that suspicion ‘went out of the room’ on the Saturday.⁶⁷⁴ These observations confirm a sense of adjustment and unease at what this conference was and what it sought to do on the first day, but that a significant number of participants embraced this new format. For some — perhaps certain theatre-makers in the room — the new forms such as open space may not have felt radical, as demonstrated by a couple of responses in the survey feedback (p. 1, p. 5). However, in the context of an academic conference, these forms

⁶⁷¹ Bakhtin, p. 10.

⁶⁷² Fernie in University of Birmingham, ‘Radical Mischief: A Conference Inviting Experiment in Theatre, Thought and Politics’, Youtube.

⁶⁷³ Whyman, quoted in Round Up Session.

⁶⁷⁴ Anonymous, quoted in Round Up Session.

can be considered new and potentially radical in the way that the process shifted hierarchies and led to inter-disciplinary, inter-generational conversations.

Whilst the conference was a first step in this radically mischievous intervention between how artists and scholars can communicate better with each other, the conference clearly impacted certain individuals in contrasting ways. O'Hanlon reflected: '[t]he fact that the conversations I had in the conference have stayed with me in a way that others have not — that feels significant'.⁶⁷⁵ O'Hanlon's comment is reflective of other remarks featured in this chapter where delegates felt that certain discussions have remained significant since the event. For Wilson, the conference solidified his belief that 'Radical Mischief' cannot happen in an institution so well established.⁶⁷⁶ As demonstrated in other chapters, the phrase 'Radical Mischief' provides many contrasting connotations for different people. Wilson associated 'Radical Mischief' with Leavis and political incorrectness.⁶⁷⁷ In contradistinction to this view, Gilkes Romero inferred that to her, radicalism involves taking risks, being brave but also being politically correct and respectful.⁶⁷⁸ Both these views represent differences in terms of the relationship between 'Radical Mischief' and political correctness, a theme which divided many delegates over the course of the two days.

For other delegates such as Borsuk, the conference 'was far more centred around the word "radical" than "mischief"':

⁶⁷⁵ O'Hanlon, interview with author.

⁶⁷⁶ Wilson, interview with author.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Gilkes Romero, interview with author; Gilkes Romero, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dympna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton'.

I think the conference was taken very seriously: the idea of coming together as practitioners and scholars to talk about radical change, but I don't think I really felt or experienced the element of play.⁶⁷⁹

The framing of the conference, with its focus on having better discussions with one another and thinking deeply and seriously about important issues, may have resulted in a spirit of play not being felt in some conversations. Playwright Anders Lustgarten, who co-curated the discussion on art with Harriet Affleck and Dr Richard House (University of Birmingham), also felt that the 'mischievous' side of the conference was perhaps neglected. Lustgarten explained that within their curated conversations, participants discussed their own definitions of 'radical' which were 'quite different' from one another, and Affleck agreed, stating 'we were much more on the "radical" side, certainly in our sessions'.⁶⁸⁰ Lustgarten further explained that 'whenever people talk about mischief, I don't know what they are talking about', highlighting the ambiguity of the term, which, as discussed in Chapter One, has a range of different meanings.⁶⁸¹ These reflections shared by Borsuk, Lustgarten and Affleck may reveal that within the conference setting, people felt more comfortable or drawn towards discussing radicalism rather than thinking about 'mischief' or being playful, despite certain examples such as 'A Conversation Without Words' and the exercises performed in the form curated conversation.

The conference can be celebrated in some respects and provided important lessons for both the RSC and the University. O'Hanlon referred to 'Radical Mischief' as 'daring to do difficult things but with a lightness of spirit' and she felt that the conference achieved this in

⁶⁷⁹ Borsuk, interview with author.

⁶⁸⁰ Lustgarten, interview with author; Affleck, interview with author.

⁶⁸¹ Lustgarten, interview with author.

the way that it 'dared to have conversations that feel so pertinent to the world'.⁶⁸² There are opinions on contrasting sides as to whether the conference was radically mischievous which are shaped by individual thoughts on the phrase and what it could potentially mean in an institutionalised setting. O'Hanlon further reflected that the conference sought to create 'a space in which it was possible to bring people together with divergent views from divergent backgrounds [...] to be able to tackle really hard things that we haven't got answers for'.⁶⁸³ In the context of the aims of the conference, I conclude that the event was a significant first step in shifting the idea of what a conference can be, and who gets the right to be seen and heard in a conference. As outlined in the previous section, the conference needed to be more inclusive in terms of representation which needs serious consideration for future events. Further, the unanswerable nature of some of the issues debated is precisely why the conference is so difficult to measure in terms of impact. I argue that the results of the conference are perhaps visible on an individual level, and it is difficult to precisely outline larger, collective, tangible outcomes. As discussed in the previous section, a significant lesson learned was that procedures needed to be arranged to incite change following these important conversations. Hence, the afterlife of the conference was not considered enough in terms of continuing the conversations and implementing change following the event.

The second *Radical Mischief* event was due to take place in August 2020 but was unfortunately cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Titled 'Radical Mischief: Speaking the Future', the event was inspired by the 2018 conference and would have served as a response

⁶⁸² O'Hanlon, interview with author.

⁶⁸³ O'Hanlon, interview with author.

to the themes of 'Projekt Europa' in the Swan theatre summer season.⁶⁸⁴ The event aimed to bring together practitioners 'from European making traditions as well as UK artists' with a 'sense of exploring what language we share around how we make theatre and what kind of theatre is prevalent in our different worlds and societies and why'.⁶⁸⁵ Gilkes Romero felt that the 2018 conference sessions were 'prophetic' and that the event would feel completely different and perhaps more emotionally rigorous if it had taken place in 2020.⁶⁸⁶ O'Hanlon recognised within the artistic community a sense of 'urgency' that she has never encountered before in her professional experience.⁶⁸⁷ The word 'prophetic' is entirely accurate as the issues that were discussed in 2018 (racial, political and democratic injustice, and environmental concerns especially) have amplified in 2020.

It is hard to detect whether people left the conference feeling more or less radical and/or mischievous. The important question to address is whether there is indeed room for 'Radical Mischief' in the theatre and the academy outside of the walls of the conference. The conference in some ways brought various disciplines together, but it equally demonstrated great differences between academia and theatre practice. Tashkiran, for example, reflected on the conference: 'what it did do is enable me to look at the difference between my artist self and my academic self, and to actually tease those further apart on this occasion'.⁶⁸⁸

I return to Rice's insistence on the importance of play, and whether that can be a reality for academics especially. In many ways, with the increasing pressure on both academics

⁶⁸⁴ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Radical Mischief: Speaking the Future' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/education/higher-education/radical-mischief-speaking-the-future>> [accessed 4 September 2020].

⁶⁸⁵ O'Hanlon, interview with author.

⁶⁸⁶ Gilkes Romero, interview with author.

⁶⁸⁷ O'Hanlon, interview with author.

⁶⁸⁸ Tashkiran, interview with author.

and students to fulfil assessment criteria and demands, there doesn't seem to be any freedom to simply play and take risks. That said, one instance of 'Radical Mischief' offered by Borsuk was the recent 2019 and 2020 University and College Union (UCU) strike action where there was a sense of collective organisation. In Queen Mary University in London, a morality play was performed on the picket lines which felt 'mischievous' to Borsuk.⁶⁸⁹ Whilst many are in disagreement that universities and theatres can be spaces for 'Radical Mischief', the assertions behind this phrase — calling out injustice, being bold, 'on-the-nose', taking risks — are vitally important.⁶⁹⁰ The devastation on theatres especially during the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably will mean cuts and restrictions to theatres, and experimental, provocative, challenging new work will be particularly vulnerable. Equally, universities are also under pressure to reduce costs whilst retaining significant intakes of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Where is the room for 'Radical Mischief' to take place following a global pandemic?

⁶⁸⁹ Borsuk, interview with author.

⁶⁹⁰ Definitions of 'radical' provided by Whyman, interview with author, 2018.

Conclusion

TOP officially re-opened in 2016 and was temporarily closed in March 2020 (until at least late 2022) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this time, the RSC produced five *Mischief Festivals* (not including *Midsummer Mischief* 2014) and the play *Crooked Dances*, premiering nine new shows, accompanying performances and R&D showings.⁶⁹¹ Several creative team discussions and panel events have been hosted in the venue, and TOP has been a home to rehearsals for the Company, and a place for artists to conduct R&D projects. The building has played a key role in the collaboration between the RSC and the University of Birmingham by providing the main location for the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference, the venue for the culminating performance for the Shakespeare Ensemble module (presented by students on the MA Shakespeare and Creativity course) and the site for many other student workshops and events.⁶⁹² TOP has also been a social hub not just for students and RSC artists, but for members of the public who frequented Susie's Café in the day or on selected evenings for jazz nights or spoken word events. In its relatively short existence, the new TOP has hosted a wide range of activities which have served RSC artists, scholars, and the wider community in Stratford.

This thesis has investigated the principal aims behind the re-opening of the new TOP, and its significance for the RSC from 2016 onwards. At the announcement of the re-opening of the building, two key changes from its previous incarnations were highlighted: TOP would be a home for new work exclusively, and the RSC would not programme productions in the

⁶⁹¹ For a full list of shows at the new TOP, please see pp. 82-83.

⁶⁹² The Shakespeare Institute was also used as a venue during the curated conversation sessions in the *Radical Mischief* conference.

Studio Theatre throughout the year. From the outset, it was apparent that TOP was intended to be more than simply a producing venue. Rather, the building was described as a home for experimentation. An emphasis was being placed on the new TOP as a space where artists could explore original ideas, rehearse, and conduct R&D behind closed doors.

Significantly, TOP was branded with the phrase, 'Radical Mischief', which Whyman felt summarised the overarching aims for the work that took place within the building. In a promotional video, Whyman explained the following: 'I think it's very important that the work of The Other Place is radical and is prepared to say what it thinks', but also, 'it's got to be mischievous here, it's got to be possible to do something naughty' whilst tackling 'big issues, big themes, big ideas'.⁶⁹³ The new RSC newspaper was given the title *Radical Mischief*, and prominent events at the new TOP were also named after this slogan: the 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference, and the *Mischief Festivals*, which Whyman described as 'festivals of "Radical Mischief" to showcase our most daring work'.⁶⁹⁴ Given the centrality of this slogan in the work of the new TOP, it felt crucial to investigate what 'Radical Mischief' meant to the RSC, and whether one could witness a sense of 'Radical Mischief' in the activities of the new TOP. This thesis has aimed to explore the phrase 'Radical Mischief', to examine closely the RSC's aims for original work and to discover what new ideas and forms the Company were interested in experimenting with. Ultimately, this research has questioned whether it was possible for the RSC to be radically mischievous in the new TOP and has analysed the activities in the building in relation to the initial aims described above.

⁶⁹³ Whyman, 'The Other Place, Royal Shakespeare Company'.

⁶⁹⁴ Whyman, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Festivals at The Other Place'.

The phrase, 'Radical Mischief' is particularly loaded and covers a wide range of meaning and interpretation. The focus of this thesis has centred around the interpretations given by key personnel at the RSC who were directly involved in programming and commissioning for TOP to discern whether their aims were being achieved. Through an analysis of these definitions, it became clear that the main ideas around 'Radical Mischief' for the RSC was new work that was bold, daring, and unafraid to say what it thinks, yet was also playful with form. This thesis has made clear the subjectivity of these definitions, which rely on personal feeling and response to theatre and lived experience. Equally, radicalism is specific to a particular context — what might be radical in one location at one moment in time may not feel radical elsewhere or at another point in history. Despite the levels of subjectivity, I have utilised these definitions to investigate whether a spirit of 'Radical Mischief' was made possible within each of the case-study chapters. This concluding chapter will now summarise the key findings of this research and whether the RSC have accomplished their aims for the new TOP, before discussing the future of the building.

Key Discoveries

The overall finding of this research is that 'Radical Mischief' has been witnessed in certain key examples, but it has not always been visible in every production or project at TOP. Certain events such as the *Midsummer Mischief* (2014), *Making Mischief* (2016), and 2018 Spring *Mischief Festivals* have felt radically mischievous, but the energy and sense of urgency surrounding these specific examples did not feel present at other occasions within the last five years. The 2018 Spring *Mischief Festival* was particularly bold and urgent in its programming of real-life stories, yet it was also the dramaturgical choices which heightened its sense of

radicalism and mischief. For instance, *Day of the Living* felt increasingly bold because of its use of form and popular performance intended to scandalise and satirize the Mexican government. The show was formally radical by the way in which it incorporated many different theatrical devices, 'resurrecting old forms of popular entertainment to tell stories anew in a provocative manner', in Caridad Svich's words (p. 8).

The 2014 *Midsummer Mischief Festival* may have felt radically mischievous because of the newness of the event in the abandoned Courtyard Theatre, and by virtue of it being a provocative response to the Swan Theatre's 'Roaring Girls' season. Similarly, the 2016 *Making Mischief Festival* was the first official RSC showcase of the new TOP, and the ways in which the content boldly responded to urgent issues corresponded to the RSC's definitions of 'Radical Mischief'. *Fall of the Kingdom*, *Rise of the Foot Soldier* by Somalia Seaton highlighted the inability of middle-class liberals to tackle racism effectively and related to radicalism in the sense of being brave and calling out injustice. Fraser Grace's *Always Orange* featured a scene where a terrorist attacked a prominent building in a city centre, the topicality of which felt relevant and unnerving in 2016 following the number of terrorist-related incidents in 2015-2016, notably in France.⁶⁹⁵ The staging of this scene felt bold, and a threatening sense of 'mischief' became explicit as audiences comprehended the violent and traumatic nature of this act.

⁶⁹⁵ France experienced several terrorist attacks in recent years, notably the January 2015 attack on the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, the November 2015 Paris attacks, and the June 2016 Nice attack. See Kim Willsher, 'France Marks Five Years Since Paris Attacks with Silent Ceremonies', *Guardian*, 13 November 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/13/france-marks-five-years-since-paris-terrorist-attacks-bataclan>> [accessed 13 August 2021]; BBC News, 'Nice Attack: What we Know About the Bastille Day Killings', 19 August 2016 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36801671>> [accessed 13 August 2021].

Kingdom Come by Gemma Brockis and Wendy Hubbard (Autumn *Mischief Festival* 2017) was an intriguing and captivating show which related to radicalism in a different way to other *Mischief Festival* shows. The show presented the turbulent times of the Interregnum years, as described in Chapter Two.⁶⁹⁶ *Kingdom Come* may have felt radical because of its presentation of regicide on stage. This scene felt especially arresting and provocative, heightened by the fact that audiences were suddenly asked to leave their seats and follow the actors through to the stage dock, where they assembled as a large group. Before the execution took place, the actor playing Charles I (Tom Lyall) stripped naked, emphasising the monarch's vulnerability in front of a crowd that gathered to see his death. One can question generally whether audiences feel a sense of desensitisation to the witnessing of a ruler being executed on stage, particularly audiences who may regularly attend Shakespeare productions such as *Julius Caesar*. Yet, the bold staging of this scene felt radical by the way in which the form of the piece was disrupted, and the engagement of the audience as 'a silent mob' in Lyn Gardner's words, made spectators somewhat implicit in the act of regicide and in the overturning of authority.⁶⁹⁷

While 'mischief' has featured prominently in the various *Festivals*, the 'radical' element of the work has sometimes felt less apparent. Overall, the *Festivals* and plays succeeded in presenting contemporary topics, but perhaps a lack of urgency or provocation to the audience may have been the reasons why shows such as *Myth* (2017 Spring *Mischief Festival*) or *Crooked Dances* (2019) did not feel radical. *Myth* was an engaging and entertaining

⁶⁹⁶ See p. 94.

⁶⁹⁷ Lyn Gardner, 'Kingdom Come Review – RSC's Playful Glimpse at England's Theatre of Power', *Guardian*, 14 September 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/sep/14/kingdom-come-review-rsc>> [accessed 1 December 2021].

play which conveyed the disastrous environmental damage that middle-class liberals were causing for the planet. While this in itself is a very serious issue, perhaps the humour and ludicrousness of the inventive staging (described below) may have lessened the severity of the message itself. *Crooked Dances* was humorous in its depiction of people who were addicted to technology. The messages of both plays were clear, yet they were perhaps not radical or controversial things to say to a twenty-first century audience, despite the importance and relevance of both concerns.

It has also been difficult to evidence radical form in the new works presented at TOP. The idea of being 'experimental' with form is dependent upon the previous theatrical experiences of the spectator.⁶⁹⁸ Certain shows at TOP succeeded in being playful, if not radical, with form, thus supporting the idea that 'mischief' has been felt across the *Festivals*. For example, audiences were required to leave their seats and follow the actors backstage during *Kingdom Come*. *Myth* can also be described as mischievous, in the way that the play re-set itself three times as the stage slowly filled with oil.⁶⁹⁹ A more sinister form of 'mischief' was also displayed in some productions, for example, the role of the gunman who prowled around the audience space in *#WeAreArrested* by Can Dündar, adapted by Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts (2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*).

While the 'mischief' aspect of the *Festivals* felt particularly visible in Chapter Two, the third chapter focused more intently on the radical potential that existed within specific R&D projects. Interestingly, the first two case-study examples (*Strange News from Whitehall*, and Deafinitely Theatre's *Macbeth* R&D) felt quite conventional in terms of their practice, yet the

⁶⁹⁸ This is further discussed in pp. 29-31, and pp. 93-94.

⁶⁹⁹ For discussions on *Kingdom Come* and *Myth*, see pp. 93-94.

ideas and content of the former, and the impact of the latter, made these examples relate to radicalism. *Strange News from Whitehall* showcased a sixteenth century radical prophetess. Deafinitely Theatre's *Macbeth* R&D was radical in the way in which the presentation impacted RSC staff at the highest level, and *Democracy* created a new exercise which abandoned regular forms of verbal discourse and was particularly bold and exposing for the participants involved. The radical side of R&D was worth highlighting because R&D projects in their essence feel mischievous — a temporary space is created where artists can be playful and experiment with new ideas. What this chapter sought to emphasise was that, despite R&D projects sometimes only lasting one week, the ideas and discoveries generated can have significant impact, emphasised in the case-study examples. Certain types of project at TOP have the capacity to create a utopian environment where new rules and methods of creativity can be explored and developed. Ideas can be fleshed out without any form of censorship or justification. A thrilling sense of freedom, creativity and experiment can exist within these types of R&D which can feel radically mischievous in itself. While the three main case-studies reflected the RSC's aims for radicalism, this is not always the case, however, and the RSC have experienced R&D projects which have not felt radically mischievous, as demonstrated in Whyman's response at the end of the third chapter.⁷⁰⁰

The 2018 *Radical Mischief* conference also maintained a focus on radicalism. The conference had serious aims to disrupt the traditional academic conference experience by giving artists an equal platform alongside academics and by shifting hierarchies in terms of who gets to speak and take up space. The act of equalising platforms at academic conferences should not feel radical, but the main reasons for the conference taking place demonstrated

⁷⁰⁰ See p. 188.

the acknowledgement that such events are usually hierarchical and need to be democratised. The extent to which the conference felt brave and bold varied depending on people's conversations each day, but it is clear that several open, generous, and productive discussions were held about important issues ranging from gender, to democracy, to religion. There was also a clear element of mischief in the conference in terms of playing with people's expectations of what the event would be and by playing with the form of the conference, and certain instances of delegates subverting the aims of the conference themselves. For example, the 'Conversation Without Words' group found new ways of communicating effectively with one another and they sought to disrupt the open space by creating their own language and group ethic, and the ultimate playful act was interrupting the conference hosts in their own private interview.

A key question which has emerged over the course of the thesis is the extent to which the new TOP and its spirit of 'Radical Mischief' has been able to influence the wider RSC, the University, and beyond. Two significant examples of impact were demonstrated in the third chapter, where the R&D presentation of Deafinitely's *Macbeth* inspired the RSC's Artistic Director Gregory Doran to work with a Deaf actor for the first time.⁷⁰¹ This R&D week also inspired Dr Abigail Rokison-Woodall's *Signing Shakespeare* Project, one of the staff-led research projects at TOP as part of the collaboration with the University of Birmingham. Rokison-Woodall collaborated with practitioners at the RSC for a week of R&D in late July/August 2018 with the aim of developing workshop materials to enhance the teaching of Shakespeare for Deaf children. As a result of the discoveries of the R&D week, the *Signing Shakespeare* team successfully created educational resources, including films directed by RSC

⁷⁰¹ See p. 175.

Associate Artist Charlotte Arrowsmith, which have been trialled at various schools for Deaf children across the UK. Such achievements demonstrate the profound impact that R&D can have, and how invaluable it is for both theatre practitioners and academics to have time and space to explore new work and ideas.

Whilst this thesis has highlighted various moments of 'Radical Mischief', what has also been made clear are the limitations and the extent to which such acts have been able to continue to challenge and provoke change. Even before the pandemic, it was clear that the *Mischief Festivals* were declining in their 'Festival' feeling, as fewer R&D presentations and accompanying shows were being showcased. Audiences visiting Stratford for the *Festivals* since 2017 have been offered less of a range of new work, and there were fewer opportunities for practitioners to develop new ideas and have the chance to present works-in-progress to audiences. The RSC has had to balance their creative practice at TOP alongside other important factors, such as rehearsals for RST and Swan shows, and so space and resources have become a significant issue in determining the output of TOP activity. It is arguable that the showcasing of original work in TOP has become increasingly peripheral in the context of the wider Company. This suggestion is highlighted by the fact that the RSC only presented one play (*Crooked Dances*) in TOP in 2019, as great attention and funds were dedicated towards the premiere of *The Boy in the Dress* by David Walliams, the new RSC musical mentioned in Chapter Two.⁷⁰² The pressures on budget and limited resources have also made experimental R&D scarcer, which, consequentially, has affected the number of visiting artists and companies encountering the RSC each year.

⁷⁰² See pp. 134-135.

A key lesson learned from the 2018 conference was the significance of creating a follow-up process that could manage, arrange, and trace the impact and discoveries of the event. *Radical Mischief* felt like an important first step for inciting progressive changes in both the academic and theatrical industries, and it is of course unreasonable to demand more from the conference organisers after undertaking such a large event. However, the next step for future organisers of conferences and events like *Radical Mischief* would be to consider the ways in which the ideas discussed in the conference can be carried into further action, and how people can stay connected after the event. At *Radical Mischief*, an emphasis was placed on individual delegates to form partnerships with others and to continue the conversation after the two-day conference. In some ways, this can make future collaboration feel more organic and less pressured; however, it is difficult to trace the afterlife of the event. What was also made clear in the various interviews and follow-up materials was the challenge of implementing change whilst returning to full-time academia or theatre rehearsals, as well as the difficulty for freelancers who are not working in institutions to incite change. Also of important consideration for future events is the presence of key decision-makers from both the RSC and the University. As mentioned in Chapter Four, with the exception of Whyman and Jacqui O'Hanlon (Director of Learning and National Partnerships), others in positions of power from both institutions were not present for those vital and stimulating discussions that took place across the two days. Perhaps the conference would have been able to influence and achieve greater impact had more people in senior positions attended.

The absence of key decision-makers has also influenced the ability of R&D projects to impact the RSC. The fact that Doran attended the R&D showing for Deafinitely's *Macbeth* allowed him to witness the week's results and to be influenced by their work. It was

unfortunate that rehearsals for the RST and Swan repertoire were taking place while *Redefining Juliet* was presented in the Studio Theatre in June 2018, because it meant that several key personnel were unable to attend.⁷⁰³ *Redefining Juliet* had an implied audience of casting directors and theatre directors, as the R&D presentation questioned whether the performers would ever be considered for the part of Juliet. While it was encouraging that actors from the company of *Romeo and Juliet* supported the presentation, the R&D might have achieved greater impact if those responsible for casting at the RSC were present. With the exception of Arrowsmith, who played Audrey in the 2019 production of *As You Like It*, the RSC have continued to cast Deaf and disabled artists in smaller roles.⁷⁰⁴

‘Radical Mischief’ requires a deep enquiry into the way that the RSC and the University operate. O’Hanlon stated the following: ‘[t]he questions that “Radical Mischief” asks of us are so big, that the challenge is about being able to move in a significant enough way in response’.⁷⁰⁵ In order to be truly radical and mischievous, both institutions need to consider how the ideas behind ‘Radical Mischief’ can percolate and influence the structures of the organisations. While Whyman and staff working in TOP were invested in ‘Radical Mischief’, and staff at the Shakespeare Institute directly involved in the collaboration were also happy to explore new ideas and work under this banner, it is questionable whether the wider RSC and University want to subscribe fully to this phrase. The challenges of responding to ‘Radical Mischief’ seem particularly seismic, yet there have been significant glimmers of ‘Radical Mischief’ beyond TOP. Possibly, one of the most radical things that the RSC has done over the

⁷⁰³ For *Redefining Juliet*, see pp. 132-133.

⁷⁰⁴ This is mentioned on p. 133 and p. 176.

⁷⁰⁵ O’Hanlon, quoted in Mary Davies (forthcoming).

past five years is the decision to step away from BP being a sponsor for their work.⁷⁰⁶ This came due to the mounting pressure of the climate crisis and young people's protests and threats to boycott the RSC, and the result is an example of the RSC listening and responding to the voices of their supporters, placing environmental concerns over economic incentives.⁷⁰⁷

In terms of radical change at the University, it is questionable whether 'Radical Mischief' is possible in higher education today. Rokison-Woodall admitted the following:

[i]t can be quite difficult to be radically mischievous in the academy. For example, it wouldn't be very easy to introduce a new course and say that you were uncertain whether it would work, but that everyone would have enormous fun and we would experiment with new ways of teaching.⁷⁰⁸

Rokison-Woodall's views suggest a lack of freedom and creativity in higher education pedagogy. Liam Semler describes how systems of learning 'are seeking institutional, national and international parities: semestrial, modularized, benchmarked, standardized, commoditized, mono-jargonized, exchangeable'. Semler acknowledges that these measures have improved education in some respects, 'but it is perhaps truer to say the avalanche of invasive policies and procedures is causing specific types of teaching and learning and specific

⁷⁰⁶ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'We are to Conclude our Partnership with BP', 2019 <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/we-are-to-conclude-our-partnership-with-bp>> [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁷⁰⁷ UK Student Climate Network, 'Youth Letter to the Royal Shakespeare Company', <<https://ukscn.org/blog/2019/09/25/youth-letter-to-the-royal-shakespeare-company/>> [accessed 2 August 2020]. This letter was not started or co-ordinated by the UK Student Climate Network but is signed 'The Youth' and a list of signatories is provided. This is not the first criticism of the RSC's partnership with BP, as previous protests have also been staged by the Reclaim Shakespeare Company, and notably, actor Mark Rylance resigned from his position as Associate Artist at the RSC in 2019 over BP sponsorship. See BP or not BP website, 'Performances and Films', 2021 <<https://bp-or-not-bp.org/performances-and-films/>> [accessed 2 August 2021]; Mark Rylance, 'With its Links to BP, I Can't Stay in the Royal Shakespeare Company', *Guardian*, 21 June 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/21/royal-shakespeare-company-rsc-bp-sponsorship-climate-crisis>> [accessed 2 August 2021].

⁷⁰⁸ Rokison-Woodall, quoted in Mary Davies (forthcoming).

types of educators and students'.⁷⁰⁹ The systems in place in higher education teaching today are restrictive to new types of learning, and experiment is becoming much harder due to the accountability of academics and the target-driven objectives of universities. Rokison-Woodall described the value of R&D at TOP, 'one can spend a week or two experimenting, and conclude by saying that interesting, unexpected discoveries were made and whilst there is nothing to perform it has informed our thinking'.⁷¹⁰ This affordance seems rare for academics working within higher education institutions today, particularly in the current climate where the UK government has recently confirmed that they will be cutting funding for arts and humanities in universities.⁷¹¹

It is not just academics who may find it difficult to be radically mischievous. One could question the extent to which students feel like they can be playful when they are pressured with assessments. Semler notes how even before attending university, students 'figure quite rightly that they cannot afford the risk of too much solo thought or novelty because the stakes are too high' and that 'students within exam-dominated pedagogical systems' are 'fearful of taking interpretive risks and thus becoming inhabited to [...] surface-learning procedures to achieve clearly defined goals'.⁷¹² Instead of discovering innovative ways to respond to texts in subjects like English, for instance, students and teachers according to Semler adopt strategic and safer methods for achieving top grades. One is reminded of Josephine's important assertions at the *Radical Mischief* conference: '[w]hen I'm caught up in my head, worrying

⁷⁰⁹ Liam E. Semler, *Teaching Shakespeare and Marlowe: Teaching Verses the System* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p. 14.

⁷¹⁰ Rokison-Woodall, quoted in Mary Davies (forthcoming).

⁷¹¹ Sally Weale, 'Funding Cuts to go Ahead for University Arts Courses in England Despite Opposition', *Guardian*, 20 July 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jul/20/funding-cuts-to-go-ahead-for-university-arts-courses-in-england-despite-opposition>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

⁷¹² Semler, p. 25.

about what I think you think about me I can't hear my gut instinct, when I'm trying to be clever I can't be creative'.⁷¹³ Josephine's reflections feel relevant in the context of higher education, where students face the choice of pursuing their own creative responses to the texts or what they think will score them higher marks and successful grades.

Semler endorses the concept of 'Ardenspace': 'a space of pedagogical exploration beyond the formal systems that promotes complex responsive interactivity in anticipation of emergence'. 'Ardenspace' seeks to provide a new environment for learning which has the potential for 'Radical Mischief' as participants query the governing systems of education and contemplate the ways in which literary texts can 'speak back to the system', as opposed to the text serving the pre-defined requirements of the syllabus.⁷¹⁴ Other possible areas of 'Radical Mischief' can be seen with the annual Stratford Residential trip led by the English Department at the University of Birmingham. Second-year English students are offered the opportunity to spend three days in Stratford and participate in a range of creative workshops led by RSC practitioners and academics from the Shakespeare Institute and the University. This residential provides an opportunity for students to engage with creative material outside of their modules and assessments, and the workshops are an opportunity for staff to trial new teaching material or conduct a workshop on a subject of their choice without having to create a full module or assessment criteria. The examples of 'Ardenspace' and the Stratford Residential demonstrate pedagogies that can be creative and resist the formal systems of learning, yet inevitably, students and staff must return and adhere to the syllabus and specific requirements of their courses once these brief opportunities finish.

⁷¹³ Josephine, quoted in 'Provocation and Conversation: Dymphna Callaghan, Juliet Gilkes Romero, Charlie Josephine and Roger Scruton'.

⁷¹⁴ Semler, p. 36, pp. 32-33.

TOP: 'Engine Room' of the RSC?

The ability of the new TOP to impact either organisation relates back to the original claims about it being the 'engine room' of the RSC. Hill stated the following: 'The Other Place is more than a space. It is the creative engine at the heart of the Royal Shakespeare Company.'⁷¹⁵ Whyman also expressed a similar sentiment about the new TOP: '[i]t is an exemplary home for theatre artists, and a space where students, our artists, visiting theatre-makers and our audiences can really feel part of the "engine room" of the RSC'.⁷¹⁶ TOP has at times felt like a 'creative engine' when a wide range of people all used the building for various purposes at the same time. The new TOP became a focal point for artists rehearsing for the RST and Swan repertoire, for students and academics participating in workshops or presenting work in the Studio Theatre, for visiting practitioners conducting R&D in a rehearsal room, while also being a lively social space for members of the public who visited the building. Of course, R&D and rehearsals also take place in the RSC rehearsal rooms in Clapham, yet TOP could arguably be seen more visibly as an 'engine room' because of the way that so many different groups of people came together in this building. That said, the idea that TOP was the 'engine' of the RSC, with the implication that it directly generated the activities of the overall organisation, can be questioned.

It is quite a profound claim that the 'engine room' of a classical Shakespeare organisation was a building which was home to new work exclusively. The implications of these assertions would surely mean that new work and experiment were at the heart of the

⁷¹⁵ Hill, 'Research and Development', p. 6.

⁷¹⁶ Whyman, quoted in Royal Shakespeare Company, 'University of Birmingham'.

organisation, not Shakespeare. One questions whether the new TOP could ever be the 'engine room' because of the main priority of the RSC to present Shakespeare productions to audiences. A central aim for the new TOP was that its activities and experiments could directly feed into the RST and Swan repertoire, with the hope that these two stages would become more radical and mischievous. This thesis has briefly explored whether this has happened, and while there were some instances of the activities in the new TOP directly influencing the Swan and RST repertoire, TOP was limited in its ability to impact the overall organisation. A challenge to this aim is that the new TOP has had a relatively short existence, and the differences in programming (a commission for the RST or Swan stage may take years to develop) have made it difficult to witness immediate, direct links between the discoveries of the new TOP and the other stages. The decrease in creative activities at the new TOP, such as fewer productions and R&D projects, has inevitably made it feel less like an 'engine room'.

From the outset, the new TOP was publicised with seemingly paradoxical descriptions. On the one hand, the RSC claimed that the new TOP was the 'engine room' of the organisation, and yet, the name of the building is 'other'. The terms 'other' and 'otherness' are very loaded and deserve more attention. This thesis kept references to 'otherness' to a minimum in order to focus directly on 'Radical Mischief', but it would be beneficial to explore how these two concepts relate to one another. I reflected briefly in the Introduction how 'other' connected to the wider theatrical context of fringe and alternative theatres of the sixties and seventies, and the fact that this seemed to be less of a relevant concept to the new TOP.⁷¹⁷ Indeed, through an observation of shows programmed on all stages, there did not seem to be a clear distinction in terms of the content of political new work commissioned for the Swan and TOP,

⁷¹⁷ See p. 5.

for instance. What this thesis has not addressed are the deeper implications of marginalisation and the connections with race, gender, and class, that the terms ‘otherness’ and ‘othered’ can carry.⁷¹⁸ Further explorations would need to interrogate the implications of the RSC, a Warwickshire arts organisation with a Royal Charter, using terms like ‘other’ for their studio work.

If the new TOP really was the ‘engine room’ at the ‘heart’ of a major arts organisation, its aims to be radical would need to be questioned. Considering Baz Kershaw’s theory of radical performance which takes place outside of the institution, one could question whether the supposed centre of the organisation could possibly be the site of subversion.⁷¹⁹ In the history of TOP, the building felt oppositional to the RST because of its ability to sell cheaper tickets, and because the space appeared to be more democratic — audiences watched the shows in close proximity to the actors and a sense of shared space existed. The rawness of the theatre experience — audiences sat on hard wooden benches and the venue clearly lacked pretence — was arguably felt when the RSC staged the 2014 *Midsummer Mischief Festival*. Audiences gathered in the makeshift studio space while the building was transitioning from the Courtyard Theatre into the new TOP, and the shows employed minimal props and scenery like the original TOP in the seventies. Perhaps as the new TOP became a regular feature of the RSC repertoire, and there became less of a distinguishment between the content of new work in the Swan and TOP, a sense of radicalism may have been lost. This raises questions as to whether radicalism can be sustained and whether it can be a long-term endeavour, or whether there is a limited time frame in which a building can feel innovative and radical. It is difficult

⁷¹⁸ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

⁷¹⁹ For Kershaw, see pp. 39-40.

to say whether the 2020 *Festival* would have reignited this initial oppositional spirit, as it was commissioned and organised with a view to counterpoint Projekt Europa in the Swan, or, like previous incarnations of the building, whether the new TOP had reached its life cycle in terms of its sense of radicalism.⁷²⁰

Writing in 2021, the question of whether TOP really was the ‘engine’ of the RSC has potentially been answered. The building has been closed over the past year and future plans have not been announced in terms of its re-opening. With rehearsal space in Clapham and in the RST, one can question whether TOP is essential to the RSC, and whether the financial cost of staffing and maintaining the building is feasible for the Company post-pandemic. This thesis has made the case for the importance of the new TOP in the overall RSC repertoire, yet others may have different views on what the Company should prioritise at this moment in time. Questions around the overall significance of TOP are discussed further within the next section, as the future of TOP and ‘Radical Mischief’ is contemplated.

The Future of TOP

As mentioned, TOP closed its doors in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and at present (July 2021), there is no clear indication as to when, or indeed whether, the RSC will re-open this building.⁷²¹ Since January 2021, the new TOP has been used as an asymptomatic testing site for COVID-19, but it has otherwise remained shut. As discussed at the end of Chapter Two, the consequences of the pandemic have particularly hit new work at the RSC,

⁷²⁰ For Projekt Europa, see pp. 139-140.

⁷²¹ See Royal Shakespeare Company, ‘The Other Place’ <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/your-visit/the-other-place>> [accessed 24 August 2021].

highlighted by the cancellation of Projekt Europa and the postponed 2020 *Mischief Festival*.⁷²² As the RSC navigates its post-pandemic future, there is a prioritisation of large-scale family shows — *The Magician's Elephant*, an adaptation of Kate DiCamillo's novel by Nancy Harris, is planned to go ahead for the winter season in 2021.⁷²³ The RSC has also prioritised its commitment to Shakespeare productions by building a new, open-air theatre in the Lydia & Manfred Gorvy Garden (adjacent to the Stage Door and Swan Theatre entrance) for the postponed 2020 production of *The Comedy of Errors*.⁷²⁴ These decisions are understandable, as the RSC must adhere to its commitment to mounting Shakespeare productions, and large-scale family shows such as *The Magician's Elephant* have the capacity to sell to wider audiences and families for the Christmas period. Further, the R&D presentation of *Dream*, a new work based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which was presented online to audiences in March 2021, may indicate a future path for the RSC as they continue to collaborate with digital technology partners.⁷²⁵ Whilst this may produce new forms of theatre that might be radically mischievous for the RSC, a loss felt during this year particularly is that of new voices and urgent, political stories.

The lack of new, political plays is heightened by the fact that *Matilda the Musical* is set to re-open, and it has recently been announced that the RSC and Playful Productions are

⁷²² Projekt Europa has since found a UK residency at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury, with three shows (*Peer Gynt*, *Blindness and Seeing*, and *Europeana*) planned for 2023. See Arifa Akbar, "'Solidarity in Europe': Maria Aberg's International Theatre Company Looks Ahead", *Guardian*, 15 March 2021 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/mar/15/projekt-europa-director-maria-aberg-post-pandemic-theatre>> [accessed 19 July 2021].

⁷²³ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'The Magician's Elephant', 2021 <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-magicians-elephant>> [accessed 29 July 2021].

⁷²⁴ For further information, see Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Garden Theatre' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/your-visit/our-theatres/garden-theatre>> [accessed 30 July 2021].

⁷²⁵ For further insight on *Dream*, see Benjamin Broadribb, 'Review of Pippa Hill's *Dream* (Directed by Robin McNicholas for the Royal Shakespeare Company) at Portsmouth Guildhall. Performed and Streamed Online, 12-20 March 2021', *Shakespeare* (2021) <DOI: 10.1080/17450918.2021.1950204>.

completing Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy by presenting the final chapter, *The Mirror and the Light* in the West End, in September 2021.⁷²⁶ The stage play has been adapted by Hilary Mantel and Ben Miles. Both *Matilda* and the previous productions of the Mantel trilogy (*Wolf Hall*, and *Bring up the Bodies*, both 2014) were commercially successful, so it is not surprising that these productions have been announced. It is interesting that *The Mirror and the Light* is playing exclusively on the West End, and this may be because the Swan Theatre remains closed for the foreseeable future, which would have been a potentially suitable venue for this new production in Stratford. These announcements are exciting for fans of the popular musical, and for those who enjoy adaptations of classic novels, and it is encouraging to see the RSC presenting multiple shows for live audiences in London and in Stratford. Yet, these decisions highlight the reality of the importance of commercial benefit and economic recovery over mounting political new work by contemporary writers and theatre-makers.⁷²⁷ This reality throws into question Hill's earlier claim that '[p]olitics and the urgent cares of the world' are part of the 'DNA' of the RSC, as mentioned in Chapter One.⁷²⁸ While Hill's quote could also relate to the presentation of Shakespeare as political and reflective of contemporary issues, the context of the quote emphasised the importance of staging and experimenting with political new plays. As a result of this loss in revenue, it may take years before the RSC begin to programme new work by creatives that are not musicals or popular adaptations.

⁷²⁶ See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'What's on & Book Tickets' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/>> [accessed 29 July 2021].

⁷²⁷ The RSC announced an expected loss of 86% of their income outside of their Arts Council grant for the 2020 financial year. See Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Royal Shakespeare Company to Receive Government Culture Recovery Fund Repayable Finance' <<https://www.rsc.org.uk/press/releases/royal-shakespeare-company-to-receive-government-culture-recovery-fund-repayable-finance>> [accessed 29 July 2021].

⁷²⁸ Hill, 'Defining Moments'.

Despite this pessimistic realisation, it is encouraging to learn that the RSC are still hoping to commission new writers and artists during this time. In a Q&A session at the Shakespeare Institute over Zoom in May 2021, Whyman revealed that the RSC are planning to continue conducting R&D on new work.⁷²⁹ This decision demonstrates a commitment to creative practitioners at present even if political new work will not be programmed for some time. It may be possible then for a spirit of ‘Radical Mischief’ to live within these rehearsal rooms while the Swan and TOP stages remain closed to the public.

With the closure of the new TOP and its uncertain future, one could question whether ‘Radical Mischief’ is still a relevant idea for the RSC. The intentions behind commissioning and programming may have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before then, ‘Radical Mischief’ featured less prominently as a phrase. The first three *Festivals* (2014, 2016, and Spring 2017) advertised the shows as ‘radical new plays’, yet the words ‘radical’ and ‘mischief’ were dropped from subsequent publications of texts and did not appear on publicity material, except for the title ‘*Mischief Festival*’.⁷³⁰ One reason for this is provided by Louise Sinclair, who marketed the new work for TOP from 2016-2020, where in Chapter One, she explained that she sought to avoid the term ‘radical’ because of its potential ambiguity.⁷³¹ While ‘Radical Mischief’ may feel like an enticing phrase for some, it might be off-putting for others, and the RSC has had to balance their creative aims with being accessible and audience-friendly.

One might have thought the phrase would be important in the selection and commissioning of new work yet interviews with various artists who were under commission

⁷²⁹ Erica Whyman, quoted in Q&A session with Erica Whyman, Shakespeare Institute event on Zoom, May 2021.

⁷³⁰ See Note 374.

⁷³¹ See p. 51.

for TOP revealed their different ideas and attitudes towards the phrase. It does not appear that artists were briefed to create works of 'Radical Mischief' when working at the new TOP. Directors Sophie Ivatts and Owen Horsley expressed their relationships to the term at the end of Chapter Two, and it was clear that while 'Radical Mischief' was a key aim for the RSC, artists who had previously worked in the building held different ideas and objectives.⁷³²

While the flexibility of commissioning new work described in Chapter Two made it clear that the process was not prescriptive in any way, the sense of openness makes one question how the RSC deliberate on which artist/s to commission and whether the phrase is discussed as part of the selection process.⁷³³ Further, the quotations from Whyman and Birch about the aims behind the *Mischief Festivals* in the second chapter imply the sense of a learning process, where the ideas and structuring of the *Festivals* were subject to change and could be adapted and developed over time.⁷³⁴ In an interview in September 2018, Whyman also implied that there could be a time when 'Radical Mischief' no longer stood as the name of the *Festivals* as stated at the end of Chapter Two, which suggests a questioning of whether the phrase felt accurate or appropriate for the branding of new work.⁷³⁵ This was demonstrated in 2019 when *Crooked Dances* was publicised without the *Mischief Festival* brand. These discoveries revealed that 'Radical Mischief' was a prominent phrase at the announcement of the re-opening of TOP, yet its pre-eminence has declined over the years and there may be a detachment between the earlier ideas used for marketing and branding the building, and the selection, commissioning, and briefing of artists.

⁷³² See p. 138.

⁷³³ For the discussion on commissioning of new work, see pp. 87-91.

⁷³⁴ See p. 85.

⁷³⁵ See p. 138.

Of main significance to the RSC, I argue, is the engagement of new writers and artists and the showcasing of their original work to audiences in Stratford: work that introduces a new idea or perspective, a story that feels particularly topical and relevant but is not necessarily obvious. The RSC are interested in commissioning work that is political, in that it critiques a particular aspect of contemporary society but is perhaps clever or original in its delivery of said critique — whether it implicates the audience in a questioning way, or whether the work is disruptive in terms of form, for instance. Essentially, it is the stories that matter to the RSC, and the ways in which the Company are serving Stratford audiences with new perspectives and voices that are urgent and perhaps inventive with theatrical devices. In theory, this might produce radically mischievous work, but first and foremost, the RSC want to collaborate with contemporary artists and to encourage them to be bold and brave with their ideas. It is true that the RSC cannot anticipate the overall direction or the resulting production of an initial commission, as artists may wish to develop ideas that feel exciting to them which may not align with the RSC's aims for 'Radical Mischief'. Yet, the responsibility to deliver 'Radical Mischief' rested on the RSC and not the commissioned artists, and it could be argued that the slogan has not always been at the forefront when commissioning and programming new work.

It may be too early to predict whether supporters of TOP will see a return of the 'Radical Mischief' label, but I suggest that the RSC have learnt the challenges of marketing the work as such. The phrase may be off-putting for some, and equally, theatre critics especially may wish to challenge this label when reviewing the shows.⁷³⁶ That said, I argue that Whyman

⁷³⁶ For instance, see Dominic Cavendish, 'Midsummer Mischief, The Other Place at the Courtyard Theatre, Review', *Telegraph*, 22 June 2014 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/10917888/Midsummer-Mischief-The-Other-Place-at-the-Courtyard-Theatre-Stratford-upon-Avon->

and the literary team would still want to subscribe to the aims of ‘Radical Mischief’ — work that is courageous and daring in terms of content, and shows that seek to be inventive and imaginative with form. It may be that the label disappears from public view and from publicity of the shows, but the intentions behind the phrase may continue to hold significance for artists and practitioners at the RSC.

This thesis has captured a short but significant moment in the history of new work at the RSC, and in the history of its much-loved studio theatre in Stratford. At their best, the productions, talks and events within this studio theatre have been successful in raising important, urgent topics for audiences and participants. The *Festivals* at TOP have presented a wide range of new work that have tackled contemporary issues from climate change to freedom of the press, and the shows have, on the whole, been more playful with form and with audience interaction than the shows one would normally see at the RST or Swan Theatre. ‘Radical Mischief’ was an important incentive and provocation for the RSC to be less reverential and more inquisitive, and to be braver and bolder as an organisation. Such incentives are vitally important to maintain relevance, to attract newcomers and visiting artists to encounter the RSC, and to keep responding to the pressing issues taking place in society today. Time will tell within the next five or ten years as to whether the RSC continue to build on the discoveries and achievements of the new TOP, or whether they choose to take a different direction with their work in a post-pandemic world.

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Appendix 1: Cast and Creative Team for #WeAreArrested

By Can Dündar, Adapted by Pippa Hill and Sophie Ivatts

2018 Spring Mischief Festival, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Cast

Son	Jamie Cameron
Gunman	Alvaro Flores
Can	Peter Hamilton Dyer
Wife	Indra Ové

Creative Team

Director	Sophie Ivatts
Designer	Charlie Cridlan
Lighting Designer	Claire Gerrens
Sound Designer	Oliver Soames
Movement Director	Ingrid Mackinnon
Magic Consultant	John Bulleid
Company Voice and Text Work	Kate Godfrey
Assistant Director	Caroline Wilkes
Casting Director	Matthew Dewsbury
Dramaturg	Pippa Hill
Production Manager	Julian Cree
Costume Supervisor	Zarah Meherali

Props Supervisor	Jess Buckley
Company Stage Manager	Julia Wade
Assistant Stage Managers	Ruth Blakey
	PK Thummukgool
Producer	Claire Birch

Appendix 2: Cast and Creative Team for *Day of the Living*

Created by Darren Clark, Amy Draper and Juliet Gilkes Romero

2018 Spring *Mischief Festival*, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Cast

Jamie Cameron

Alvaro Flores

Jimena Larraguivel

Eilon Morris

Anne-Marie Piazza

Tania Mathurin

Creative Team

Director	Amy Draper
Designer	Charlie Cridlan
Lighting Designer	Matt Peel
Music & Lyrics	Darren Clark
Sound Designer	Jon Lawrence
Movement Director	Andrea Peláez
Mask Director	Rachael Savage
Company Voice and Text Work	Kate Godfrey
Assistant Director	Nyasha Gudo
Casting Director	Matthew Dewsbury

Dramaturg	Nic Wass
Production Manager	Julian Cree
Costume Supervisor	Zarah Meherali
Props Supervisor	Jess Buckley
Company Stage Manager	Julia Wade
Assistant Stage Managers	Ruth Blakey
	PK Thummukgool
Producer	Claire Birch

Appendix 3: Cast and Creative Team for *Maydays* by David Edgar

2018 Autumn *Mischief Festival*, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Cast

Jeremy Crowther, Skuratov	Richard Cant
Martin Glass	Mark Quartley
James Grain, Miklos Paloczi	Christopher Simpson
Amanda, Erica	Lily Nichol
Phil, Korolenko	Chris Nayak
Bryony, Molly, Tanya	Liyah Summers
Judy, Clara Ivanovna	Sophie Khan Levy
Phyllis Weiner, Mrs Glass, Woman	Gillian Bevan
Pavel Lermontov	Jay Taylor
Pugachev, Sir Hugh Trelawney	Geoffrey Beevers

Creative Team

Director	Owen Horsley
Designer	Simon Wells
Lighting Designer	Claire Gerrens
Sound Designer	Steven Atkinson
Movement Director	Polly Bennett
Company Voice and Text Work	Kate Godfrey
Assistant Director	Rosa Crompton

Casting Director	Matthew Dewsbury
Dramaturg	Pippa Hill
Production Manager	Julian Cree
Costume Supervisor	Samantha Pickering
Props Supervisor	Charlotte King
Company Stage Manager	Julia Wade
Assistant Stage Manager	PK Thummukgool
Producer	Claire Birch

Appendix 4: *Strange News from Whitehall* R&D

July 2019, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Creative Team

Gemma Brockis

Wendy Hubbard

Appendix 5: Deafinitely Theatre's *Macbeth* R&D

February 2017, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Director Paula Garfield

BSL Interpretation Alim Jayda

Textual Advisor Dr Abigail Rokison-Woodall

Acting Company

Fifi Garfield

Caroline Parker

Jean St Clair

Danielle Melvin

Stephen Collins

Appendix 6: Democracy Project

December 2017, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

Participants

Nicky Cox

Mary Davies (observer)

Lucy Ellinson

Dr Daisy Murray (scribe)

Chris Thorpe

Erica Whyman