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Knowing Her Place: Buzz Goodbody and The Other Place

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Yes, of course our theatre is moribund – like our cinema. But only two courses are honourable: shut up – or do something. - Lindsay Anderson, 1957

—
Polonius. "The actors have come hither, my lord."

Hamlet. "Buzz, buzz."

(II.ii., 255-256)

The Other Place, the Royal Shakespeare Company's studio venue in Stratford-upon-Avon (opened in 1974, closed and demolished in 1989) best represented the RSC's pioneering mission to "conserve, advance and disseminate the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare."¹ From its humble beginnings as a makeshift rehearsal room and storage hut, The Other Place, became the most productive tin shed in theater history and the site of some of the RSC's most adventurous, experimental and controversial work on Shakespeare. The Other Place combined the excitement and social challenge of alternative theater with the brilliance and



artistry of classical theater tradition.

The Other Place was the brainchild of Mary Ann “Buzz” Goodbody (1947-75). A beautiful, Roedean-educated, middle-class girl from Surrey who became a feminist and a Communist at the tender age of 15, Buzz Goodbody became the RSC’s first woman director when she was only 20 years old.² Her studio, The Other Place, was no meteor suddenly appearing in theatrical skies, it instead rose slowly through a series of experiments within the RSC such as *Actors Commando* and *Theatergoround*. These various experiments rose from the ashes of post-World War II, whose stages are said to have been dominated by “sofas, fireplaces and ashtrays filled with water.”³ The Second World War dealt a devastating blow to British theater. Following the war, many theaters faced bankruptcy, were sold, and were subsequently converted into cinemas. To survive, other theaters, including the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, established a style of production that relied heavily upon the force of undeniably talented and well recognized star actors, exquisite and sumptuous costuming, elaborate decor and superbly designed settings. The yearly Shakespeare seasons under the direction of Anthony Quayle and Glen Byam Shaw operated largely on the premise of a star system. This meant that the productions centered on the presence of such performers as Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, John Gielgud, Michael Redgrave, Edith Evans, Charles Laughton, Ralph Richardson, and Peggy Ashcroft. Critics of the time bemoaned the fact that, more often than not, audiences flocked to see the star players as opposed to the plays themselves.

The Other Place was also a product of extraordinary political, social and aesthetic changes that occurred in post-war Britain and radically and permanently altered the face of British theater, including Shakespeare production in Stratford-upon-Avon. The angry revolution begun by British dramatist John Osborne in 1956 certainly scattered the musty air, but it was more the European influence of Beckett and Brecht, of theater of the absurd and epic theater, that shaped the RSC’s aesthetic course in the 1960s and ‘70s. The 1960s proved a path-finding decade for the staging of Shakespearean drama. The need to create an illusion of uncomplicated enchantment was no longer seen as the director’s primary goal, as it largely was in the 1950s. Instead, directors searched for and focused on the social and political currents running through Shakespeare’s texts. During this time of social and political upheaval, directors not only emphasized the social and political tensions already embedded in Shakespeare’s texts but also placed alongside these contemporary social issues, giving voice to them through Shakespeare.

In 1960, fourteen years before The Other Place opened, Peter Hall was appointed Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. His main objective was to “express Shakespeare’s intentions in terms that modern audiences could understand.”⁴ Hall believed this could only be achieved by cross-fertilizing the company’s work on Shakespeare with work on modern texts. He stressed that actors needed the edge of modern ideas to cut through all that lies between Shakespeare and a modern audience. Simultaneously, he hoped that the

experience of handling Shakespeare would bring vitality into the staging of new works. Hall was joined in his mission by modern masters Peter Brook and Michel St. Denis, who brought with them the vitality and vibrancy of cutting-edge, European theater aesthetics espoused by Artaud and Kott. A sworn enemy of what he has termed "Deadly Theatre," Peter Brook joined the RSC directorate to rejuvenate the Company's production style and ethos. While Brook focused his attention on directorial style, St. Denis's primary objective was actor training. His actor's studio was housed in a tent in the theater's gardens before a tin hut was erected in Southern Lane.

About this time, yet another major shift in emphasis within certain sectors of the arts began to be felt. The rejection of conventions gave way to an assertion of the principles and ethics of social justice. Issues such as equal rights and political disenfranchisement became the center of alternative culture. The object of concern was "the group" as opposed to the individual. Many alternative and experimental theaters of the time sought to create performances which expressed collective concerns and effected social change such as The Free Southern Theater and El Teatro Campesino in the United States, and the Pip Simmons Theatre Group and CAST (Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre) in Great Britain.

Companies were also formed to raise social consciousness and to present the perspectives of various marginalized groups such as women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities. Among those established in Britain in the later 1960s were the Women's Theater Group, Gay Sweatshop, and Monstrous Regiment. One such group, the socialist AgitProp Theater Co. (later known as Red Ladder), was formed in 1968 with the sole objective of organizing government housing tenants in London against rent increases. They took action against this and other issues by presenting short plays at meetings, strikes, and demonstrations. The plays were followed by group discussions of the issues presented. These performances encouraged the formation of community and collective effort.

Inspired by this new interactive and socio-political dimension, in 1965 some younger RSC actors formed a group called "Actors Commando" with the goal of creating a stronger and broadened sense of community between the Company and its audience. The group toured church halls, canteens and factories around east London with the aim of introducing non-traditional theater audiences to the world of theater. Actors Commando carried with them a series of mobile performances with minimal pieces of set, props and costuming. Performances consisted of a wide variety of material including excerpts from different styles and periods of drama and demonstrations such as "The Actor at Work," and "The Actor and the Director" which illustrated the processes of theater. The programs were kept concise and brief under the assumption that thirty minutes of actual performance was worth thirty hours of explanation, exhortation, or recommendation about the theater. Performances were followed by open discussion sessions with the actors and audience members.

The success of "Actors Commando" led to the project being restructured and given serious

consideration within the RSC framework. The project was renamed "Theatregoround." Initially, Theatregoround continued to be guided by a collective sense of social commitment. Michael Kustow declared:

Behind Theatregoround lies a vision which many people in the theatre cherish: a vision of the theatre addressing itself to the community as a whole, as it did perhaps in fifth century Athens, or in Shakespeare's time. It is probably utopian to think that such a coming-together could ever be recovered in our fragmented, divided, industrialised, [and] mass-media assaulted society.⁵

In Stratford-upon-Avon Theatregoround became involved with the West Midlands educational community and visited various schools presenting historical dramatizations. Eventually, Theatregoround was tied more closely to the main repertoire of the Company. Theatregoround's work, such as "When Thou art King" (a performance piece devised by John Barton adapted from *Henry the Fourth*, parts I and II, and *Henry the Fifth*) was integrated into the Stratford-upon-Avon repertoire. Casting for Theatregoround was then borne in mind as plans for an entire season were being formulated, and more importantly, Theatregoround's own output was now largely determined by the Company's overall policy and planning.

Under this new concept Theatregoround productions originated from the Company's principal repertoire produced in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Although no longer autonomous, its style and mission did not change. Theatregoround productions remained smaller in scale than main productions, with minimal casts, props and settings. However, it is clear from production records and commentary, that many feared Theatregoround was in danger of losing its way as its radical essence as a "commando unit" eroded. Those involved in Theatregoround were adamant that it should retain its stylistic and philosophical identity, and

not merely become the touring arm of the RSC. One person determined to give the principles of Theatregoround permanent footing within the RSC was Mary Ann "Buzz" Goodbody.



Like many of her colleagues working in British theater during the 1970s, Goodbody dreamt of creating democratic, accessible and popular theater for the masses. However, her focus contrasted sharply from her counterparts, who viewed classical theater, and Shakespeare in particular, as antithetical to their ideals. Goodbody disagreed with this view:

Shakespeare's own theatre was a popular art form. Its strength and its richness derived from the social range of its audience as much as from the participants themselves. No one wants to reproduce the conditions of 1599, even if it were possible, but the challenge of closing the gap between the serious theatre and the bulk of society has to be faced.⁶

The RSC's "young and militant lady director," as she was then hailed in the press, accepted the challenge wholeheartedly. Goodbody was inspired by what she saw happening around her within the alternative theater movement: shifts in the methods and means of making drama, numbers and types of venues, expansion in public subsidy, quests for new audiences, and new work from playwrights free from the shackles of censorship.

All over Britain, hundreds of small theaters and theater groups mushroomed in the early 1970s. These groups saw themselves in an appropriate position to "[argue] about what theatre was for, whom it was for and who it should be by, to whom it should be played, where it should be played, what it should be about and whether its forms should be preserved or challenged."⁷ Alternative theaters flourished in pubs, clubs, basements, church halls and community centers throughout the country. By 1978, there were roughly 200 new small-scale venues in London alone. This "new force to be reckoned with in British theatre," not only viewed itself as a more accessible alternative to mainstream theater but felt itself fundamentally better equipped to encourage broader audiences, to develop new artistic forms and to redefine the concept of theater and dramatic art altogether.⁸

Goodbody believed this revolutionary spirit need not limit itself to the fringe or alternative theater world. She saw the continuing need for exploration and rejuvenation in the staging and presentation of classical drama. Goodbody maintained that it was the responsibility of politically committed artists not to retreat from or turn their backs on mainstream theater, but rather to take an active stand and affect change by revitalizing classical theater from within:

To me working on a production is a political act. One of the sad things about much [work] on Shakespeare is that it springs from a mildly left, incredible [*sic*] hegemonic order over the arts which has a very distinct bourgeois ideology behind it. That is unfair. I would like to see good Shakespearean productions done by Marxists.⁹

In light of then-current production practices and values at the RSC and other major theatrical institutions, Goodbody feared that the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were in danger of becoming cultural relics, and that the RSC in particular, would itself become little more than a theatrical museum:

The Royal Shakespeare Company is financed by the whole of society. We know

why we play to an audience largely drawn from the upper and middle classes. We have to broaden that audience for artistic as well as social reasons. We know it'll take years. Unless we make the attempt classical theatre will atrophy.¹⁰

Goodbody's strategy was one of taking alternative cultural intervention, infusing the "techniques of marginality"¹¹ from within the mainstream. For her, The Other Place provided just the sacred yet open space she needed.

In 1973 Goodbody drafted a proposal for creating an alternative auditorium for the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon. Guided by her political sensibilities, and inspired by the ideas and ideals she had gleaned from such masters as Peter Brook, Joan Littlewood, John Barton, and Michel St. Denis, Goodbody's goals and objectives for The Other Place were clear and focused on four key areas: artistic innovation, social responsibility, new audience development (particularly students and young people) and community engagement. Goodbody asserted that

The Other Place is a first step towards ending the economic and social barrier between the RSC and the society that partly finances it. Its first aim is to offer good theatre cheaply. Its second aim is to work as members of a classical company in a small theatre where we can challenge our own traditions of proscenium theatre. Its third aim is to put on shows with a specifically local character, hopefully building an audience who [*sic*] hitherto thought the RSC were out of touch. Its fourth aim is to do specific educational projects for local schools, thus reaching out to a new, younger audience. Its fifth aim is to create a forum where the audience can come into closer contact with the Company.¹²

Goodbody created a theater dedicated to minimalist and hard-hitting classical productions of Shakespeare that challenged then-current trends in the staging of his plays and fostered a production ethos that was driven by a collaborative process of theater-making. Within this dynamic working environment, actors and directors were released from the pressures of commercial success and set at liberty to re-discover their crafts. More than a mere "small theater," The Other Place was a crucible, a politicized laboratory for social and artistic experimentation. Ron Daniels (most recently the Associate Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater, in Boston) remembered: "There was an entirely new generation of directors and actors, and The Other Place gave us a real pioneering feel, we were part of something bold, brave and new. It all happened at such a crucial time, the right time, in our development."¹³

Much of The Other Place's uniqueness originated in the space itself. It was an intimate space that rejected gimmickry or spectacle, and required a production style that was equally as simple, rough and uncluttered. Audiences were enamored of the makeshift nature of The Other Place. It lacked the features of a well-equipped theater such as a bar and bookstalls. It

was not a convenient space for the performers or the spectators by any stretch of the imagination. Actors had to walk around the outside of the building to reach the other side of the acting area or wait out in the cold to make entrances. Audience members were not tucked away comfortably in plush velour seats, but rather sat on hard wooden benches and were forced to brave the elements to obtain a cup of coffee during the intermission. Due to a poor heating and cooling system, audiences and actors suffered the extremes of heat and cold in summer and winter. Simon Russell Beale fondly remembered “It was almost like camping out—a shared experience under fairly primitive conditions.”¹⁴

For audiences, particularly the young, The Other Place provided an opportunity to experience classical works in fresh and non-threatening surroundings. Without sacrificing classical form, Goodbody created theater that was welcoming and accessible. The essence of The Other Place was that it lacked pretence. At the center of it lay a production ethic fostered by Goodbody that favored a personal and more socialized approach to the production of classical texts over any more generalized or abstracted treatment. She advocated a socio-realist philosophy focusing on the familial and personal issues within the texts, and promoted a communal view of theater in which “performance” gave way to “participation” – the ensemble of players and spectators forming a community of shared experience.

Thirteen Shakespeare plays were produced at The Other Place between 1974-89: *King Lear* (dir. Goodbody, 1974), *The Tempest* (dir. Hack, 1974), *Hamlet* (dir. Goodbody, 1975), *Richard III* (dir. Kyle, 1975), *Macbeth* (dir. Nunn, 1976), *The Merchant of Venice* (dir. Barton, 1978), *Pericles* (dir. Daniels, 1979), *Timon of Athens* (dir. Daniels, 1980), *Antony and Cleopatra* (dir. Noble, 1982), *Cymbeline* (dir. Alexander, 1987), *King John* (dir. Warner, 1988), *King Lear* (dir. Berry, 1988) and *Othello* (dir. Nunn, 1989). At first glance, the disproportionate number of tragedies in this list is quite noticeable, as is the fact that the only comedy in The Other Place’s Shakespeare repertoire is an undeniably problematic one. While some have suggested that The Other Place “chillingly lack[ed]” an atmosphere appropriate or conducive to comedy, it is worth noting that there was no pre-determined policy regarding play selection at The Other Place.¹⁵ As production decisions were left to each individual director, the large number of tragedies seems entirely coincidental. However, it does seem that Shakespeare’s tragedies did lend themselves more fully and freely to the style and surroundings of The Other Place. Regardless of genre, each of these productions was characterized by a heightened sense of engagement, anchored by a collaborative and interactive process in a nearly claustrophobic atmosphere, wherein objective voyeurism gave way to active participation, organic involvement and an experience of what J. L. Styan has termed: “total theatre.”¹⁶

Each director who came to produce a Shakespeare play at The Other Place was given the freedom to experiment with his or her own approach; therefore, an “in-house style” was never established at the venue. However, Goodbody’s work set the standard, and laid the foundation for the theater’s future successes.

King Lear, 1974

In 1974, Goodbody opened The Other Place with a version of *King Lear*. She approached the play with younger audiences in mind. The text was heavily cut. In addition to the usual cutting of over-elaborate or particularly obscure lines, the text was freed of some 1,340 whole lines and 183 part lines. The cast was also trimmed to ten players in total, with a string of secondary characters (such as Albany, Cornwall, Oswald, and the Gentleman) being omitted. Following the lead of her mentor, John Barton, Goodbody enhanced the text of the play with a prologue of 54 lines highlighting its themes. These practical choices energized the production with incredible brevity: the first half lasted approximately 1 hour and 33 minutes, and the second half approximately 50 minutes, no small feat for a rendering of one Shakespeare's longest plays. Each performance was also followed by a short discussion between the cast and the audience, a rather routine practice today, though quite revolutionary for its time.

Although the student focus had informed her work on the play, Goodbody did not view this as a separate activity from her other directing tasks. The production met all the standards and requirements of an RSC production, and had an overwhelming impact on audiences. Seasoned theater critic John Peter was moved deeply by Goodbody's ability to capture the sense of Lear's "ruined greatness," and he noted the production's success with younger audiences. He wrote, "During the scene of Lear's reunion with Cordelia, three teenagers sitting near me, [*sic*] wept openly and unashamedly."¹⁷

Goodbody had successfully removed the tragedy from its epic context and replaced it and all its savage horror into a more intimate and personal framework. The hallmark of Goodbody's directorial style in this and all other her other work was her focus on the emotive center of the narrative and full examination of it in great personal detail. Guided by her politic beliefs, her productions underscored what she perceived to be the proto-Marxist qualities in Shakespeare's works, particularly the structures and strictures of the familial unit as a political system. This was true of her work on *King Lear* in 1974 and her swansong and masterpiece, *Hamlet*, starring Ben Kingsley in 1975.

Hamlet, 1975

Goodbody's use of the unique space of The Other Place was key to this particular production. The closeness of the actors and audience provided opportunities for both to explore and enjoy special details that would not have been viable in a more conventional space. The greater sense of intimacy forced audiences to acknowledge and re-consider their own roles as both spectators and participants in the action: The door through which the Ghost vanished, that Laertes battered, and through which Fortinbras made his final portentous entrance, was the same one used by the audience. They shared the actors' neutral space. As one commentator recalled:

With Hamlet's command that the doors be locked (5.2.311), the doors of the theater itself slammed shut on the actors and audience alike. The chilling silence that followed was later shattered by the crashing arrival of a cynical Fortinbras.¹⁸

Goodbody felt that the audience's close proximity to the action would enliven their perceptions of the drama; as she stated, "However good the acting or the production may be, the experience can often be remote simply because of distance."¹⁹ She also believed the audience's closeness would invigorate the actors, which it did.

Ben Kingsley recalled moments of heightened theatricality that "reminded audiences where they were and what they're doing there and what they were participating in."²⁰ Such moments developed from the incredible freedom Goodbody gave her actors to bring their own ideas to the fore. The most thrilling example of such a moment was during Hamlet's third soliloquy, "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" when Kingsley left the theater altogether:

"That's right, I ran all the way out. How simple it was for me to exit, as if to say, 'I could leave the theater. There's a car park out there.' Once you're out the rear doors in this tiny foyer, you are literally out of the building. If I'd just run off into the wings, the audience wouldn't have thought, 'Oh, he's left the play.' But if suddenly you went out the back door and got into your car, they realise, 'Shit – we're left on our own!'"²¹

This defiant gesture also gave encouragement and strength to Kingsley and his character,

Once outside, he said, "I used to feel exhilarated because I'd think, 'This is my play. I could walk around the car park for ten minutes if I wished. But I won't. I'll go crashing straight back in there.'"²²

Kingsley added that this action made him feel as if he were pulling back on a piece of elastic and then catapulting himself back into the play. In moments such as this, Goodbody was rewarded by the performance space itself. Her use of this space prompted a general shift in emphasis. The intimacy of the space encouraged the players to concentrate on a softer, quieter, and more restrained style of acting. It also challenged spectators, who were not allowed the security of distanced objectivity. Their role as a collective "voyeur" was often usurped, as they were frequently made immediately aware of their own and each other's presence. In theory, such moments of recognition are thought to propel the spectators into the story, while simultaneously galvanizing their sense of their own realities outside the story and the commonalities that co-exist between the two.

However keen Goodbody and her cast were to “break the wall” between actors and audience and draw the spectators into the production’s collective consciousness, the ensemble were also conscious of the need not to exploit the spectators’ close emotional or physical proximity. The goal was not one of agitation or assault, but rather, according to Cicely Berry, that of “putting the audience into a slightly different relationship with the action; to try and get them to listen with a slightly different attention.”²³

Placing the audience in close proximity to the dramatic action, however, was only a fraction of Goodbody’s equation of breaking down the barrier between the on-stage and off-stage worlds. The other major factor was the “delicate and truthful” acting that developed out of the freedom and discipline endorsed by Goodbody’s direction.²⁴ Goodbody’s rehearsals were always democratic, and there was a real sense of a collective artistic and intellectual journey, with Shakespeare as the starting point and the destination. Goodbody’s ideals shaped the direction of *The Other Place*. Her work inspired other directors in their treatments of Shakespeare produced there.



King Lear, 1988

In her treatment of *King Lear* at The Other Place in 1988, Cicely Berry followed Goodbody’s lead and challenged existing RSC production methods, ones that Berry felt excluded the actors’ creative input essentially. Berry overturned the normal course of the rehearsal process by relinquishing her directorial control in favor of a process that explored the possibilities of language in more depth than what would be allowed typically. She guided her actors without a leading concept and focused their attention on the rhythm, movement and texture of the language. Improvisation and freedom were at the heart of this process, and remained so, much to the great dismay of the production’s stage manager, who lamented in her notes the impossibility she faced of ever pinning down the actors’ booking in her promptbook. The only definitive element of the production was the set, designed by Chris Dyer who developed the idea of a map of Britain on the stage floor, rendered as a massive concrete platform that simultaneously represented both Lear’s map and the open landscape. Dyer chose concrete as it best re-created what he saw as a harsh and exposed land. Dyer’s choice was most effective during the storm scene (3.2), where following a flash of lightning and a huge blast of thunder, the platform began to crash. The floor then cracked into three huge sections immediately

before the Fool and Lear entered the space. Around and within this utterly unforgiving landscape Berry's production was wonderfully fresh and vigorous with every performance. This chaotically beautiful production successfully retained the flexibility and spontaneity of the rehearsal room while simultaneously garnering much critical acclaim. The same may be said of all of The Other Place Shakespeare productions, most notably Trevor Nunn's iconic production of *Macbeth* in 1976.

Macbeth, 1976

Featuring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench, this production is considered by many to be the greatest Shakespeare production in living memory. Trevor Nunn decided to produce *Macbeth* in the confined and volatile space of The Other Place after being inspired by Goodbody's extraordinary *Hamlet* - which he noted as his favorite treatment of that play.²⁵ For Nunn, this was a deliberate attempt, following Goodbody's lead, to expose the nature of *Macbeth* as a personal and familial drama.



In this space that did not give way to the spectacle or the illusion of director's theater, Nunn was compelled to "hand [*Macbeth*] back to the actors and [the audience]." ²⁶ Nunn noted Goodbody's theories about theatricality and created a dynamic actor-audience relationship. He took them one step further by having his actors permanently on stage for the duration of the performance. The actors were seated along the boundaries of a wide, black circle outlined on floor of the acting area.

Nunn's "black magic circle" grew out of rehearsals. He had drawn a circle on the floor to serve as the principle acting area. Actors moved in and out of the circle as the play progressed, and Nunn encouraged them to remain "dramatically present," watching the action of the other scenes from just outside the circular area. This idea was carried through and became the hallmark of this production. The performers seated on the edges of this threshold of being formed an extension of the audience itself. In Nunn's view this precipitated an increased level of

concentration throughout the auditorium and created a disturbed and disturbing atmosphere. Performed in this bare circle, unframed, and tangibly close, the production had the feeling of a dark ritual, with its audience as unwitting communicants.

The sense of claustrophobia was heightened by the lack of an interval during the performance. Just as the audience had been locked in quite literally with the Danish court during Goodbody's *Hamlet*, here, too, the spectators were trapped alongside the Scottish thanes in "an unbroken parabola of sin."²⁷ Nunn believed that this intense concentration on the personalization of the tragedy, highlighting issues of meta-theatricality and the intimate and immediate communication between actor and spectator combined with the vulnerability of space itself, created a direct and shared experience that he had rarely accomplished in the theater. Nunn's *Macbeth*, and indeed many of the RSC's successes since the late 1970s owe much to Goodbody and her belief in small-scale Shakespeare. Goodbody's commitment to Shakespeare, classical form, and immediacy, and her ability to both motivate and free her players enabled her to produce work that was engaging and inspiring for actors and spectators alike.

Ben Kingsley's sentiments about his experience in Goodbody's *Hamlet* are typical of those who worked at The Other Place between 1974-1989. Working at The Other Place, he said, prompted him towards the kind of exploration of himself that led him to dare to take risks. Through the performance of *Hamlet*, Kingsley developed an artistic philosophy centered on the craft of the storyteller: as a result, for him "the need to tell the story became more important than the applause."²⁸

These efforts toward a real human dimension were thoroughly appreciated by The Other Place's audiences. The delicate bond that was established created a strong "tribal feeling" between the players and spectators, who were more akin to collaborators and participants than to watchers and viewers.²⁹ In 1984 Richard Pearson undertook a census of the Royal Shakespeare Company's local audience, surveying what he believed to be a broad cross section of the Stratford-upon-Avon community. Some 250 students and young people ranging in age from under 17 to 25 responded to Pearson's questionnaires about the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. On the whole the group was largely dissatisfied with the company's work at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and felt that particular space did "practically nothing for them."³⁰ A number of teachers and lecturers were also interviewed. They expressed dismay at being compelled to acquire a month's worth of pocket money from their students for a theater ticket and coach fare, only to then have their students arrive at the theater to be shuffled up the back stairs to the balcony where "sight-lines mar otherwise commendable productions," and where students were forced to view performances presented by "invisible actors" who literally became "legs moving to disembodied voices."³¹

The students' sentiments and reactions to The Other Place were another story entirely and contrasted sharply with their experience of the "hallowed temple" of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.³² Overwhelmingly the young people—and their teachers—rated The Other Place "the best of what the Royal Shakespeare Company does."³³ They responded positively to its intimate, non-threatening, casual atmosphere and its rough-and-ready ambience. Many of the students and their teachers went so far as to claim enthusiastically that The Other Place

actually helped to foster and “broaden their knowledge and experience of drama.”³⁴

It is also clear from Pearson’s research that this group’s older counterparts held similar views of The Other Place and to a great extent did indeed view it as their “local theatre,” where the “magic of the actors and their performances count a great deal more than the facilities.”³⁵ The extreme lack of creature comforts in The Other Place galvanized the local audience, who felt they were an active part of something simple, raw and pioneering. While the luxurious and formalized Royal Shakespeare Theatre was perceived as a venue for “tourists and day-trippers,”³⁶ The Other Place was theirs.

The sharing of the same space, facilities and conditions by spectators and players was enhanced by the performances taking place at such close proximity. Performance therefore became communion. One audience member recalled a shared moment during a performance of *Pericles*. During the storm scene the actor playing Lychordia staggered into the acting area with a bundle, representing the baby Marina. With her free arm she grabbed hold of a rope that swayed from the pole placed center stage. The actor subsequently lost her balance and accidentally fell forward into the spectator’s lap. Without hesitation the spectator immediately assisted the actor-Lychordia by gathering her up, assisting her with the baby, and helping her back into the scene.³⁷ This touching moment occurred without causing a break in the flow of the action of the performance and aptly illustrates the delicate, tangible, and communicative bond forged between actor and spectator. This sort of intimate involvement was nothing like the awkward, and often wearying, attempts at audience participation which spectators are frequently subjected to in the theater. The relationship between actor and audience at The Other Place was such that:

It discovers and rejects the fake, and therefore actors are required to find the truth in every living, breathing moment of the play. On other stages, in the sweep of it all, it doesn’t matter that the heart of the text hasn’t been digested or not really been understood or not made personal. In The Other Place it does matter...The Other Place acts as a microscope...thoughts are included under the microscope. The failure to discover truths is as magnified as the discoveries.³⁸

The Other Place’s microscopic intimacy, which exposed the roots of dramatic creation, combined with directorial methodologies aimed at emphasizing the personal and emotive center of the texts to enable “direct revelations” of Shakespeare.³⁹ The subsequent transfers of Nunn’s *Macbeth* and Bill Alexander’s *Cymbeline* (1987) from The Other Place to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre proved wholly unsuccessful and were a clear indication that Shakespeare productions at The Other Place were not merely diminutive versions of main stage Shakespeare that could be magnified at will. Productions in this space were endowed with unique qualities that could only thrive in their particular and exact conditions, the most fundamental being intimacy and close contact with its audience. Work at The Other Place during this period was of vital importance to the evolution and progression of the Company as

a whole. The Other Place was in essence the “conscience” and “artistic barometer” of the Royal Shakespeare Company.⁴⁰ The Other Place also nurtured and preserved the Company’s guiding principles: the constant exploration of new and invigorating ways to produce Shakespeare, the development of new skills, the primacy of the play, and the importance of the actors and ensemble playing.

Unfortunately, by the end of its fifteen-year history, The Other Place had slowly slipped from its position as “the life-blood” of the Royal Shakespeare Company.⁴¹ Some have suggested that in the years following Goodbody’s death The Other Place became a victim of its own success. Lucy Bennell uses the term “respectable” to describe production work at The Other Place during the theater’s post-Goodbody period. She contends that with the loss of Goodbody, The Other Place lost its central *raison d’être* and that the “risks that were possible [and] the experimentation that went on” under Goodbody’s artistic direction were “necessarily suppressed.”⁴² While it is true that Goodbody’s absence prompted numerous changes within the theater’s leadership, there was (and still is, in many regards) what has been called a tribal feeling within RSC culture about Goodbody, her vision, and her theater. Many directors such as Cicely Berry, Trevor Nunn, Ron Daniels, Keith Hack, Bill Alexander, John Barton and Deborah Warner were very committed to maintaining Goodbody’s objectives for The Other Place in their work, and many of these directors directly credit Goodbody and her directorial style as a central inspiration for their own methods and practice. A more plausible explanation for the shift in The Other Place’s position within the Company’s framework is that times and attitudes had inevitably changed. The Company evolved and opened new theaters elsewhere such as The Warehouse and The Pit in London and, most significantly, The Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Fundamentally, it is a difference in personality that made each of the RSC’s Stratford-upon-Avon spaces unique. While the elegant Swan Theatre has a strong presence as a performance space and is in effect itself an agent in performance, The Other Place was perceived as a personality-neutral performance space. The real hallmark of The Other Place was that it was a true actor’s space and held the actor as its focal point:

The Other Place was not simply any old “black box studio space”...it had a life all its own. Actors loved working there because it offered a great deal of freedom and fun. It was refreshing and liberating because of the compact energy and focus with the audience close enough to touch.⁴³

Regrettably this space was forced into closure due to fire and safety regulations in 1989, and a new building was erected in its place in 1991.

For the new building, architect Michael Reardon was asked to reproduce where possible the character and dimensions of the original, while at the same time providing more adequate and improved public and backstage facilities. Reardon attempted to retain the essence of The Other

Place's intimacy and simplicity and made a considerable effort not to make the new building too opulent or overly comfortable. Unveiled in 1991, the new building was functional, frill-less, and well designed. While it retained many of the very informal elements the original space possessed, the fundamental essence of the original could never be captured in bricks and mortar. Notably, the new space was devoid of a clear mission statement or artistic manifesto. The administration did not reinstate its original artistic policy statement (drafted by Goodbody in 1973), nor was a new one devised for the theater. Without a clear artistic mission statement, the new building lacked the political or cultural identity of the original space. In addition, the original Other Place began its life as a "found space" that grew out of socio-cultural needs from within the RSC. The new space, which was conceptualized, designed and engineered as a studio performance space, was in many ways woefully deficient of the vitality, edge and vigor of its predecessor. This new building was also eventually closed, and it became the lobby of The Courtyard Theatre. The Courtyard, opened in 2006, was a temporary thrust stage theater used to host RSC performances while the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and The Swan were being redeveloped as part of a £112.8 million transformation project between 2007 and 2010. Plans for the third incarnation of The Other Place are currently being discussed.

Throughout its history, The Other Place was the Royal Shakespeare Company's most consistently successful theater. It served as 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. Goodbody's dream space was a shining example of the strengths of what has been termed the "Shakespearean Ideal": simple staging, truthful acting, freedom from theatrical illusion, and actor-audience rapport.⁴⁴

Artistic truth, emotional honesty, engaging audiences in acts of direct discovery, unencumbered by the proscenium or superfluous scenic detail – these are the lessons of The Other Place, lessons which are poignant and important for artists today, particularly given our current theatrical preoccupations with kitsch, gimmickry, and well-meaning gestures toward making Shakespeare more accessible. The Royal Shakespeare Company would be wise to cherish and remember the ideals of Buzz Goodbody and the ethos of The Other Place as they move forward into the next era of their history.

Devoid of artifice or sham, and resisting epic-sized performances, The Other Place encouraged a more intimate and engaging re-examination of Shakespeare's texts. As Buzz Goodbody's greatest achievement, The Other Place was a venue that symbolized – and continues to symbolize – a "pure and uncorrupted" way of staging Shakespeare: a living vision of a theatrical utopia.⁴⁵

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- ¹ Arts Council of Great Britain, *Report of the Cork Enquiry into the state of British Theatre*. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986), 15.
- ² Roedean is an elite girls' school in the village of Roedean, on the outskirts of Brighton in southern England. The school, which overlooks the sea, is the most prestigious and affluent girls' school in England, and is one of the most expensive schools in the United Kingdom.
- ³ Lindsay Anderson, "Vital Theatre?" *New Voices of Fifties & Sixties: Selections from Encore Magazine 1956-63*, eds. Milne and Hale Marowitz, (London, 1965), 41-42.
- ⁴ John Goodwin, "Shakespeare and the Modern Director," *Royal Shakespeare Company: 1960-63*, ed. John Goodwin, (London, Methuen, 1964), 41.
- ⁵ Michael Kustow, "Fragments of a Journal," *Flourish*, Royal Shakespeare Company Newsletter, Summer 1965, no.4. (no page numbers).
- ⁶ Buzz Goodbody, "The Other Place," *Royal Shakespeare Company Membership Magazine*, (no volume number or dates).
- ⁷ Michelene Wandour, *Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama 1970-1990* (London: Longman Press, 1993), xi.
- ⁸ Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), xvi.
- ⁹ Catherine Stott, "Woman Director: Buzz Goodbody Talks to Catherine Stott," *The Guardian*, 27 October 1971.
- ¹⁰ Buzz Goodbody, "Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974" (unpublished proposal, 15 December 1973) no pages numbers.
- ¹¹ Dymphna Callaghan, "Buzz Goodbody: Directing for Change," *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and Myth*, ed. Jean Marsden (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 164.
- ¹² Goodbody, "Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974".
- ¹³ Ron Daniels, interview by author, 20 July 1995.
- ¹⁴ Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shrewing, *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre since 1958* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Mulryne and Shewring, Ltd., 1995), 107.
- ¹⁵ Robert Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare: England, History and the Royal Shakespeare Company* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 167.
- ¹⁶ J. L. Styan, *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 201.
- ¹⁷ John Peter, *The Sunday Times*, 21 July 1974.
- ¹⁸ Antony Dawson, *Watching Shakespeare: A Playgoers' Guide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 152-167.
- ¹⁹ Buzz Goodbody, "Lear" (Production programme, The Other Place, 1974) (no page numbers).
- ²⁰ Mary Zenet Maher, *Modern Hamlets and Their Soliloquies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 80.
- ²¹ Maher, 80.
- ²² Maher, 80.
- ²³ Cicely Berry, "Direction," *The King Lear Project* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Royal Shakespeare Company, 1988), 5-6.
- ²⁴ Irving Wardle, "Hamlet," *The Times*, 17 May 1975.
- ²⁵ See Fiammetta Rocco, "My Favourite Hamlet," *The Independent*, 30 August 1992.
- ²⁶ Ellen Goodman, "Macbeth by Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company in collaboration with Thames Television" (Program broadsheet, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1979)(no page numbers).
- ²⁷ Michael Billington, "Macbeth," *The Guardian*, 14 September 1977.
- ²⁸ Peter Roberts, "Actor as Storyteller," *Plays International*, vol 1, no 2, September 1985, 10-12.
- ²⁹ Sir Ben Kingsley, personal interview, 17 October 1993.
- ³⁰ Richard Pearson, "The First Part of a Research into the Local Audience of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre: Perceptions and Opinions" (Unpublished audience surveys,

Stratford-upon-Avon, 1984), 8.

³¹ Pearson, "Royal Shakespeare Theatre," 12.

³² Pearson, "Royal Shakespeare Theatre," 16.

³³ Richard Pearson. "The Other Place: Overview of a quantitative research, November 1984-January 1985" (Unpublished audience survey results, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1985) (no page numbers).

³⁴ Pearson, "Royal Shakespeare Theatre," 11.

³⁵ Pearson, "Royal Shakespeare Theatre," 11.

³⁶ Pearson, "Royal Shakespeare Theatre," 11.

³⁷ Sylvia Morris, interviewed by author, 15 June 1995.

³⁸ Paul Lapworth, "The Other Place: Conscience of the RSC," *The Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 13 September 1991.

³⁹ Michel Saint-Denis, *Training for the Theater: Premises and Promises* (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1982), 76.

⁴⁰ Lapworth, "The Other Place: Conscience of the RSC," 13 September 1991.

⁴¹ Ron Daniels, interviewed by author, 20 July 1995.

⁴² Lucy Bennell, "Buzz Goodbody: A Lasting Influence on the Royal Shakespeare Company?" (M.A. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1987), 34-35.

⁴³ Ron Daniels, interview.

⁴⁴ Lennart Nyberg, *The Shakespearean Ideal: Shakespeare Production and the Modern Theatre in Britain* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis; 1988), 127.

⁴⁵ David Edgar, "Seeking Ourselves in The Other Place," *Royal Shakespeare Company Magazine*, No 2, Autumn 1990, 20.